

Utah Rocks

Fock 7: The Universe Provides

So, with a flat, straight, paved, honest-to-Murgatroid highway now open before me, it was time to rev Chief up and make tracks for Lake Powell, which was still 70 miles away. It was good to zoom across the high plain again. The scenic wonders had receded behind me, and the landscape was simply pleasant, giving no reason to slow down. Ninety seemed slow on this road, in fact, with no great sights to pause and ponder.

Not sure what made me think of this along the way, but have you ever wondered about where the bullets go in TV shows and movies? I mean, all these wild shots are

taken, often in city streets, often by officers trained NOT to do exactly this, yet you never see people fall down on the sidewalk, or dogs' heads get blown off, or windows shatter.

And it's at its worst in car chases! How many times do you see the pursuer fire a shot at the front car, and from some dashboard view, you see the rear window get blown to smithereens while the two guys in the front seat duck their head about an inch. Where does that bullet go? It's like the glass just eats it up. It never hits the guys.

And the seats shouldn't stop it either. Maybe bulletproof vests should be made of glass, or of vinyl and foam.

I want to see that bullet whizz right out through the windshield. Or punch a gap in the steering wheel while hero dude is trying to drive. That'd be a nice wrinkle. Or maybe whack the stereo. Or pop the glove compartment open. Or blast the rearview mirror.

And, while we're at it, where/what exactly is/are "smithereens." Is it a place? Like being "blown to kingdom come?" Or is it more like "blasted to tiny bits?"

Rumor has it that word might come from some Irish origin ("smidirini") from the early 1800's, as a way of saying "fragments," but we may never know for sure.

So, anyway, I had time to ruminate on all that important shit as I tooled along Route 95 in beautiful southern Utah.

I reflected back on the previous 45 miles or so, and realized that there had not been a single sign of human life, except for those few workers, since Mexican Hat. So sweet. I did a little rambling into my voice recorder. Here's a somewhat significant passage:

"Totally unexpected was that Valley Of The Gods road. I expected to drive to Bluff, get gas, and maybe snap a monolith pic or two along the way. There was no way to know that that road even existed. It's not on the map. And 261 was such a bonus! God, what a ride! What a – OH SHIT!! GAS!!!"

The bright red needle was tickling the big white "E". Damn. This could be a setback. I knew I was close to the road that would take me to Hall's Crossing, where the ferry crossed Lake Powell. The map showed no towns whatsoever in any direction for at least 1000 miles. OK, maybe not that much, but it might as well have been.

Running out of gas here would SUCK. First, there were no houses or businesses of any kind. Second, there was no traffic at all. Third, there was no cell phone signal out here. Can you hear me now? NO!!!

One of Chief's cute little frills was a gasoline countdown meter on his console. You could get a readout of how many miles were left in your gas tank. It read "45 miles to empty." Just then, I reached the turn to the lake. The sign read "Lake Powell, 42 miles."

Hmmm, gonna be close.



But, hey, I was either gonna make it or I wasn't, and there was nothing I could really do about it, so I settled back, set cruiser at about 70 mph, turned the tunes back up, and reached for a cold beverage.

Another telling passage: *"The Coors are all gone, so it's time to try the Full Suspension Pale Ale. But I lack a bottle opener, and right now it's vexing me."* Yes, I had planned on getting one of those at Bluff also. Hmmm, again.

Nothing in the vehicle seemed capable of doing the deed, and the deed needed doing. Seat belts used to work perfectly, way back when, but the engineers shrunk the size of the hook hole and now they only save lives.

Well, if nothing *inside* will do it, let's look outside. But there was nuthin but a whole lotta nuthin outside.

Then a ridiculous idea struck me. Those thin, three-foot-tall posts that are on the shoulder of every highway -- the ones with little reflectors on them -- got me thinking. And, as we neared Mile Marker 78, I slowed for a better look. The marker post was a tad wider than the others, and it was one of those U-shaped ones with the holes up the back. The marker itself was firmly attached to the open side of the U.

Using my spatial relations -- which those standardized tests back in junior high had always rated as "excellent" -- I eyeballed the U-post, the sign, and the bottle cap, and proclaimed, "this dog will hunt."

I stopped Chief and carried the bottle across the road to the sign. I tilted the bottle and slipped the ridged edge of the cap into the U, just behind the sign. It was a good fit. With a downward flick of the chilled brown bottle, the cap popped happily off, and Rick was a happy man. I adorned the 78 Mile marker with a RAMruns sticker -- one of about 300 that I posted here and there in my vacation fortnight -- and continued on my way.

The universe had indeed provided. :]

I had 35 miles to go now, and I checked the readout to confirm that all was well. "28 miles to empty" it now read. Hey, wait a slurp! Just a minute ago, I was three miles to the good, now I'm gonna come up seven miles *short!?* Where did my 10 miles go?? Did I really lose those miles by stopping to open the beer?

A little less than half an hour later, I was saying: *"Seven miles to Lake Powell. Chief says, '0 miles to empty,' so I am on stoppage time; you don't know when it's gonna end."*

I asked a road worker, when I was three miles out, if Hall's Crossing had gas. There wasn't much point in asking, except that he might be able to radio AAA if I was SOL at HC. He assured me that there was, and must have guessed my plight because he added, "It's all downhill, so you could probably coast it if you had to."

My 20-gallon tank gulped 20.1 gallons of fuel. And I bought a bottle opener at the gas station.

Hall's Crossing is all about boat launching. The ramp down to the water is huge, and the parking lot -- with its 60-foot-long, 14-day limit, spaces -- is even huger. There was a ferry that made a few crossings a day over to Bullfrog Basin, maybe a mile away. I had missed the noon ferry and had about 90 minutes till the next one, which was fine because I was damn happy to have some swim time.



This had been one of the Quests of this compact roadtrip: to splash and frolic in the cold, clean waters of Lake Powell. Three years before, LP had tossed two totally unexpected swim stops in my RR2K path. Both were outstanding! So, I expected nothing less from the Glen Canyon Recreation Area -- the official park within which Lake Powell lies -- this time around.

There is no beach at this lake, at least not at Hall's Crossing. The lake laps affably at the solid rock that hems it in. The lower levels of rock are almost white, while the upper levels -- maybe 20-30 feet up -- are classic Utah red. Why is that? I don't freakin' know; I'm no geologist, despite my Grand Canyon theory, (which we'll get to in the next chapter). But it looks DAMN good!

And the rocks just slide under the water's friendly edge, gradually slipping out of view, leaving nothing but clear and inviting ripples, and the promise of cool escape from the scorching sun above and the sole-searing rocks underfoot.

I crossed the furlong or so of rolling rocks (an eighth of a mile of ice cold Rolling Rocks?? No, dumbass...) between the parking lot and a deep inlet in the shoreline. It was a great little swimspot: totally isolated, and completely out of view. I slipped out of my threads and clambered down the slick rocks into the invigorating water. Surprisingly chilled under the summer sun, it welcomed me with an adrenal rush, and I dove deep to see just how cold it would get.



The inlet was maybe 50-feet across at its widest, and shrunk a good 200-feet away from the main body of the lake. It went down too. I can't tell you how far down because, despite my best diving, I couldn't find bottom. The scene – the cloudless blue sky, the wind-smoothed rocks, the glistening water – was transcendent. Simply treading water and floating was ear-to-ear-smile pleasure enough. A younger Rick – even only three years younger -- would have been scrambling out of the water, scaling the rock face, taking a five-step sprint approach and repeatedly flinging himself either cannonball- or somersault-style down the 20-foot drop into the grinning water.

But the older, wizened, and very mellow (wink, wink) Rick saw no need. There was leisure time to pass, and this was a leisurely way to pass it.

Truth to tell, I had a little trouble climbing out. The rock face was easy enough to slide down, but sliding up proved to be a challenge. I guess it usually would be, huh?

But I made it out, stood with open arms in the dry summer breeze for a while and felt the water just disappear off me, then slipped back within my threads and sauntered back to Chief, who waited patiently on the ferry ramp.

The ferry ride itself was uneventful, except for the regrettable lack of restroom facilities. The Coors and the Full Suspensions were eager to move on, and, though I lined up The Perfect Place a few times, somebody always came a-walkin' on by and foiled my plans. Fortunately, it was not a long ride – not even a half-hour – so things never got ugly.

I had hopes that Bullfrog Basin would have some kind of cool tavern or saloon – someplace to get the classic RAM roadtrip

Burger'n'Beer – but the best I could manage was a very-pre-made chicken salad sandwich and a blue Gatorade. You would expect a place with a cool moniker like Bullfrog Basin to have something better to offer, wouldn't you? Maybe some small but thriving little sports bar called Freakin' Froggie's, or a saloon named Lakeside Lily's Libation Lodge.

But that happens on ramacks. You never know. Sometimes it's not there when you expect it, and sometimes it's right there to surprise you when you really need it. It's so great to explore.

