

Road Romp 2004

Day 3: Saturday, 12 June 2004

Fock 3: Zooming Off To San Antone

Not far from our day's goal, Moby and I reached the town of Seguin. This is a decent sized place, having about 22,000 residents, and serving as home to Texas Lutheran University. The downtown area lay just south of I-10, which meant that the outskirts of this burg, which was damn large compared to anything else along this road for the last two hours, spilled out to, and beyond, the Interstate.

Dozens of national chain businesses were on display for my choosing: Sam's Club, Babies 'R' Us, Outback, Golden Corral, Holiday Inn, etc. etc. Shopping plazas and malls stood on both sides of I-10, shouting over one another and brandishing signs to capture my patronage. And car dealerships were ubiquitous. This must have been the Texas version of Massachusetts' Auto Mile, where, in one mile-long stretch of US-1, dozens of voracious vehicle vendors vie for Vivian's vivid vasectomy.

Wait. The alliteration got out of control there. Scratch that part about Vivian and her surgical woes, and replace it with "the public's money." That's better. Those damn alliterations are awfully ardent about adding artistic and analogous ambience around any and all articulations, ain't ay?

Anyway, all alliteration aside (almost all, anyway), I assumed that the actual area of downtown Seguin, being 165 years old, must have considerable character, but the outskirts were all about the chains. Chains suck the local charm out of any place. Just ask Key West.

I was very thankful that the Interstate insulated me from this commercial gantlet. Also, the clutter and sprawl of this urbanized Texas town quickly made me yearn for those wide-open prairies again. There was a subtle clenching that went on inside me as we passed through that area. The whisper of the prairie had been drowned out by the clatter of cash registers, and a certain tension came with it. I found myself sitting a little straighter in my seat, and holding the wheel a little tighter.

Well, to be fair, just about anything would be more tense than what I had been doing: slouched and reclined in a posture of semi-repose, ankles crossed comfortably, with just the right index finger absent-mindedly hooked around the bottom of the steering wheel. And now, even without an especially noticeable increase in traffic, I felt compelled to sit up and pay attention. Damn cities.

Fortunately, Greater Seguin did not last long, and I was back to Open Road Mode in no time.

By the way, cars going slowly in the designated fast lanes, when the right-hand slow lanes are empty, suck. Several times on this ride, most often in Florida and Texas (maybe because they are by far the biggest states, duh), there would be a car or a pickup or a van putt-putting along, at the speed limit *or below*, in the left-hand lane (i.e., Zoom Lane), while the right-hand lane (i.e., Creep Lane) was as empty as G.W. Bush's head. Aggravating.

I mean, slow traffic in the Zoom Lane is just plain STUPID. Why do these people go into that lane and then go 55? Even 60 is dumb. Driving 65 can be acceptable, in areas where the speed limit is 55. Still, that would be a trifling inconvenience at best, and a get-the-fuck-outa-the-way nuisance when running late.

If you go 70 in a 75, it means your car can't handle 75, so pull over, Rover (I know this because Blue Man was getting like that when I retired him). When the posted limit is 75, and you're going 75 in the ZL, you better keep one eye in the rearview mirror, and slide right as soon as any of the 80, 84, and 88'ers come flyin' up on yer behind. It's their right as Zoomers to thumb their noses at authority, so who am I to stand in their way? I love having a few cars faster than me on the roads: they will flush out the radar-wielding Smokey's and allow me to sail on by.

That said, it **does** vex me when I'm in the Zoom Lane, and I'm clearly going faster than the traffic in the other lanes, and I'm steadily passing them, and there is no room to pull over without seriously hurting my own momentum, and a Zoomer tailgates me. That's a tad ignorant. If and when I find room to pull over and let you go *without ruining my own roadflow*, then I'll slide right. Until such time, said Zoomer should back off and lament the traffic to my right instead of focusing his ire on me. *I'm* not the one causing the lag, those Creepers are, and any savvy Zoomer would recognize that and give me due space.

But, of course, many Zoomers lack savvy. If I'm going 70 in a 55, with no place to go but forward, and some pinhead feels that sitting on my rear bumper is going to solve his problem, then he's just being an idiot. I know you're there, dumbass. I know you'd like to zoom a little faster, but sometimes in life you just have to wait. I'm zooming myself, you know, just not as zoomily as you want to zoom.

As the philosopher Brian Ashe has been known to say, "You can't rush lag because you just create more of it."

But 55 in the Zoom Lane?? That's just plain wrong. Where are these people from?? Do they really enjoy having car after car whoosh by on their right, flailing rigid digits out the window at them, while others jam grills and bumpers up their butts?

They do nobody any good out there, least of all themselves. Pulling over and letting us by would prevent a lot of problems, worries, anxieties, and accidents.

It's hard to believe that they can't figure that out. Are they totally stupid, or is inconsideration more the issue here? Actually, I'm sure they run the gamut:

- Assholes: "I know I'm in the way, but fuck you! You shouldn't be driving that fast anyway, so kiss my ass!"
- Shitheads: "I don't like those other lanes. I'm gonna drive out here."
- Morons: [blank mind; never check the mirror; just happy they aren't tailgating anyone]
- Douchebags: "I need to get around this guy going 55, but I don't like to go over 56."
- Wiseasses: "Watch this guy behind me get all pissed off."
- Dickheads: "I don't give a monkey's balls if they want to get by. Fuck them anyway."
- Losers: "Get off my ass, loser."
- Clueless: "Now where did I put my lighter? Which knob is volume? What does that map say?"
- Jerkoffs: "Hey, you wanna go faster? Go around me!"
- Old: "C'mon, pal, what's your hurry? Racin' to an early grave, you are. You'll lighten up someday. Besides, how can I pull over with all these assholes, shitheads, douchebags, dickheads, losers, and clueless wiseass moronic jerkoffs flying by on my right??"

Then, of course, there's me, just generally irked by all those Retards flashing their lights behind me.

Just before Exit 591 for the town of Shertz, there is a small bridge over a small, dried-up creek. The sign before it identifies it as Woman Hollering Creek. That's its actual name. What's the story behind that, I had to wonder??

Turns out to be urban legend, an oft-varied and loosely translated story about a woman who gets pregnant, whose man bolts with another bimbo just after this first woman has the baby, causing this woman to drown said baby in said creek out of spite or despair, then spend the rest of her days moaning, wailing, and weeping (loosely translated as "hollering") out her grief. There are some variations about her being headless, and the hollering coming from her separated head. Ohhhh kaaayyy. Nice creek name. Stupid Texas.

And then, finally, came the exits for San Antonio! It was time to leave my good friend I-10 for a while and delve into this mid-Texas metropolis.

I knew little of this city. I didn't know, for instance, that it was the 9th biggest city in the US of A, serving as home to more than 1.1 million San Antonionians. (Nor did I know that Houston is #4; I

guess that explains all that traffic, huh?) If you took every last goddamn person out of Vermont and Wyoming, you would have as many people as you will find living in San Antonio. Also, you would have a lot of empty space (most of it in Wyoming).

This city had a boom at the end of the 20th century. In fact, of the 25 biggest US cities, just two had more population growth in the 1990's than San Antonio's 22.3% increase. Only Phoenix (+34.3%), and Austin (+41%) attracted more residents in that decade. I wondered if that meant that people were flocking to Texas, or just flocking from the desolate prairie to the urban areas. Well, it turns out that the Lone Star State grew by 27% overall in the 1990's, ranking it 8th that category, just a teench behind Florida.

Anyway, like I said, I didn't know much about this city. I knew that the Alamo was there, was something known as the Riverwalk. Ban, who had been to San Antone fairly recently, advised me that the former was a letdown, but the latter was excellent. Since I trusted Ban's taste in music, I also trusted his travelogue hints and sought accordingly.

The city of San Antonio has done a nice job preserving and revering its past, though you don't necessarily get that impression right away. It's a good thing that the old adage about first impressions being best impressions does not hold true for cities. Many of them – and San Antonio qualifies here – have rather drab and depressing outskirts, with deserted old shops, and dilapidated old homes than almost seem to be leaning against each other to keep from just caving in. The westbound ride into SA along Commerce Avenue is like that, and you begin to wonder what you have gotten yourself into. You also begin to pat yourself on the back for blowing off Austin and getting here before dark.



But you eventually do arrive at the thriving heart of the city, and all that blight fades out of mind as you see the period architecture, and the well-kept streets. They manifest a prosperity and optimism that may once have pervaded Commerce Avenue as well, but that time is long gone into the dawn, Ron.

I strove to get the approximate lay of the approximate land, and hoped to snatch a glimpse at this Riverwalk before daylight fled, silently shrieking into the dark, daunting, snake-infested desert.

Following what seemed to be a stream of focused motorists, I parked in a popular-looking municipal lot, and set about on foot, eager to see whatever I could. This would, however, lead to some degree of disappointment, as the flow into the parking lot, which I had attributed to The Riverwalk, actually just for some lame redneck rock concert in outdoor pavilion at the old Sunset Route train station, which had been converted into a decent looking plaza.

The thought of actually attending this show never crossed my mind. Apparently it hadn't crossed



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minds of all that many other people yet, either, as the crowd can best be described as “sparse.”

My wandering did get me within spitting distance of the Alamodome, so, of course, I ... took a picture of it. You didn't really think I spit on it, did you? Tsk, tsk.

But daylight waned, as it often does, and I reminded myself that I had an errand to do before I could really unwind for my San Antonio evening: I had to write and email my monthly column to its magazine, and for that I needed a motel room.

This irked me greatly. Moby was proving to be such a marvelous boudoir that I lamented a night spent elsewhere, especially so early in the ramack.

There were certainly no worthwhile motels on Commerce Avenue, so I steered my steed south, down I-37, in search of lodging. A Motel 6 boasted low rates on its sign, and was very convenient to an exit, so whizzbang, hoofbah, and I was registered for the night.

I will never stay in a Motel 6 again. The only word I can come up with for room 315 is “stark.” It was clean enough, I guess, but it was, at best, Spartan accommodation. The pale gray walls were devoid of the usual bland hotel paintings. The floor was a darker shade of gray. The simple desk was bolted to the wall. It had no drawer, so obviously there was no souvenir pen or paper to steal. There was no dresser, though there was an aluminum suitcase stand in the corner. The curtains were dim and drab as well.

But the absolute worst part of room 315 was the lighting. Motel rooms usually have a few lamps, with their typical off-whitish, almost-beigish lampshades. Usually there is one on the night table on each side of the bed, and often another one on the desk or corner table.

Well, this room had no corner table. It had only one night table. And it had NO lamps! None! That's right, count 'em – – NONE. The light was provided by four six-inch round, fluorescently white domes that were attached to the walls in about the same places where you foolishly would have expected the lamps to be. They looked exactly like those battery-operated push-the-dome-to-turn-it-on lights that you stick in your closet or under your sink.

The glow they gave the room was ghastly. It was your basic prison cell ambiance. Everything was fastened in place except the straight-backed wooden chair, and I swear the lights gave off cold rays. I felt like I was on some sort of austere religious retreat.

I couldn't even prop the door open when I went out for a second to get ice; neither the bolts nor chains would stay. Worst of all, there was no bottle opener in the room! I had to use the damn strike plate on the damn doorjamb. Outside, below my window, nine little kids splashed around in the hottub-sized pool. And right across the street: Dory's Gun Shop. Oh yay. How convenient.

This motel didn't earn many penguins in my rating system: only about 4 out of 13.

But, WTF, sometimes in life you do get what you paid for. So, I sat at the simple desk, under that stark light, and dutifully plipped out my column on my laptop. I emailed the literary gem off into cyberia, and resolved that it was time to find that goll dang Riverwalk.

The Alamo may be the big name, big lure, big deal, big cheese, Point of Interest for tourists, but the true pearl in the SA oyster is definitely the Riverwalk. Many cities strive to have a cool hang-out, chill-out, spend-casual-cash areas – Faneuil Hall Marketplace in Boston, The Underground in Atlanta, Kansas City's Crown Center, The Gas Lamp District of San Diego, for instance – but none of them can hold a candle to the Riverwalk.

Originally constructed in the 1920's as a defense against the flash flooding that had crippled the city before, this open-air canal system funnels the San Antonio River twenty feet below street level, and it forks to create a rectangle around dozens of downtown blocks.

After tying Moby to the hitching post at a pay lot in the heart of the downtown district, I set about on foot and soon discovered a classic-styled wrought iron archway with the word “RIVERWALK” embossed in gold on it. I passed under it, and down a steep flight of stone stairs. What awaited at the bottom was a great sight.

Tall, mature trees hung over the gently flowing, brownish waterway. Wide, stone, rail-less sidewalks flanked the river, and they went off in both directions, on both sides, around the bend and out of sight.

I picked a direction and began to walk. Cafes, shops, bars, and hotels lay comfortably spaced along the route, offering the strolling public a wide variety of ways to spend a few very relaxing hours. Some of the buildings sat completely below the height of the walls and stairways, while others, like the hotels, towered high above, offered street-level entrances, and extended down to the more secret world of the river's level. The edifices were all styled and crafted to suit the region, but done in early 20th century charm, not some cheesy recreation of Wild West days. And not a yard of space was overlooked: even the support poles for a spiral staircase had been decorated in rows of spiraling brick.

The walkway went on and on. At regular intervals, diversely decorated footbridges spanned the river, allowing easy access to venues on either bank. After a while, the sidewalk attractions thinned, and then stopped altogether. Still, though, the walkway continued, curving out of distant view, as though it was all a long aquatic corridor with a foliated roof and floral baseboards.

I crossed and headed back. The night air was comfortable and, even in the more popular areas, the noise level seemed to be respectfully muted. The lighting was perfect: backlighting and carved wooden signs kept The Riverwalk mellow and pleasant. There were no harsh or gaudy neon lights to cheapen the atmosphere.

A few nighttime eatery/drinkery establishments let out enough music to attract the more festive and restive pedestrians. It was enough to shake me out of my pseudo-somnambulism, and steer my mind to more bibulous thoughts. Sitting on a patio, digging some tunes, sipping a cold adult beverage, scarfing down a nice juicy burger, and watching the people strolling on by, seemed like a grand idea.

The name Mad Dog's British Pub struck my fancy – I always enjoy having my fancy struck – and I made the move thither.

I was intercepted, however, by a cute Texas lass, who informed me that a five-dollar cover charge would be required for entry. I tried, in my best daddy-to-daughter sweet-talking tone, to get her to allow me in for freebies, since I was not here for the night, just for a brew and a bite. She must have hated her daddy because he basically said no-go, bo-zo. I gave her a shrug and a smile and took my ramacking money elsewhere. It wasn't like being peripatetic was a burden down here.

I easily walked a mile back and forth, bank to bank, and loved every minute of it. Small tour barges would occasionally chug by with rows of seated tourists following their guides guidance about this here and that there and what all.

My stroll took me in and out of a few lobbies and restaurants – just looking, thank you – and finally past a place that caught my ear just right. It didn't necessarily catch my eye, being bland in comparison to most of the

other places: it had a rather plain awning, and the upstairs windows had a parochial-grammar-school look to them.



The establishment was called Delores Del Rio, and it gave the appearance of a very small, intimate, expensive restaurant. But the tunes that emitted from within were compelling: jazz that was both mellow and lively. That pretty much paralleled my mood, so I ventured in.

The outside impression had been correct: it was a small, intimate, and expensive restaurant. The walls were rough stone, making you feel like you were in a grotto, and the lighting was low. The room would only hold thirty-five people, seated closely at small round tables that had nice linen coverings and small, glass, candle-lamps as centerpieces. I quickly surveyed the room, and immediately made my way to the service bar that was fit snugly into the back corner. There were no stools, so it was probably intended to be just for use by the servers.

"I'd like a beer," I said, affably.

"You've come to the right place then," the middle-aged barkeep smiled back.

Heineken in hand, I chose an unoccupied table near the door, and settled in to groove to the jazzy vibes, man.

I never did catch the band's name, which is a shame, because I would love to spread a good word for them. They were an eclectic five-piece ensemble, with horns, sax, guitar, various full-time and part-time percussion, and a tall, piano-playing front man who looked like Kevin McHale.

I only caught the last half of their last set, but enjoyed every note of it. They even let some people – friends, I assume – come up on stage and sing with them. Those people were not very good, but the fun they were having made it a positive thang.

The band wrapped up, and I moved on, resolving to plip them up some good props in my next blings (i.e., done).

By now, it was closing in on midnight, and last night's lack of sleep was beginning to tug at my constitution. My original game plan – and, of course, ramack game plans are always subject to whim and what-ho – had me departing early in the morning. That hound was not gonna hunt, however. But, it wasn't the early rise that failed to pass muster, as you might presume. The real reason was more noble: I needed photos. The Riverwalk was too nice to visit without getting some pix to pass on via the website, and to put in my writings (i.e., see the Galleries), and to keep just for my own memories. Such photos would be worth whatever rearrangement would be required. Besides, I wanted to tour it in the daylight. It was so nice at night, but the trees and flowers would have to look even better in sunlight.

So, on my walk back to Moby, I stopped at a very cool street-level bar called The Leapin' Lizard Pub and had a Sam Adams while I did a little mileage computation and such. After a few minutes, Plan B went into the trashcan (Plan A had included Austin and Houston, so that had long since been flushed out to sea), and Plan C was posted on the clipboard. The time was my own, after all, and I would treat it as such. Damn it.

For the moment, though, the best use of my time was going to be in that stark Motel 6 room, sawin' out some z's. And that is exactly how Day Three ended.