

ROAD ROMP 2004

Day 11: Sunday, 20 June 2004

FOCK 1: Leaving Las Vegas

There would be no early-up-early-out today. It was too foggy. I stayed in bed till much of the fog cleared, then got up and looked out the window. Of course, the sky was clear and blue, and there were waves of heat rising off the rooftops. As I suspected, the fog was cranial.

Since I had laid out the semi-big bucks for the hotel, I wanted to get more than just a room out of it. There was a very nice looking swimming pool out there, just shimmering in the bright sunshine. It would have been a really good idea to just go down and plop right in the shallow end and lounge there.

Note the use of the phrase "would have been" in that sentence. The monkey never learns.

On the ground level, right next to the pool – *so* right next to it, in fact, that you almost had to walk through it to reach the pool – was the hotel's Fitness Center. My body tried to say, "you have to be kidding," but my brain told it, "we're just going in to see what kind of stuff they have." My body knew better, but went along anyway.

The Fitness Center was really nice. Definitely one of the nicest I've ever seen in a hotel. The locker room was swank, and there was a sauna, a steam room, and a large indoor hot tub. Towels were all stacked in tight rolls, and every personal effect you could want was laid out ready on the counter by the sinks and mirrors. I'm sure there's a name for that, but the fog hadn't totally cleared yet, so I didn't push too hard to remember.

I'm not sure what prompted it, because it wasn't guilt, but I soon found myself in the weight room, sitting on one of the machines, and gripping the handles. The weight seemed extremely heavy, though the setting looked quite low. I didn't bother making up stupid excuses like the resistance was incorrectly calibrated; I knew it was all me. Maybe the second set would be better.

Nope. This was a total sham. There was no energy to be tapped. My body was still alkied up. I couldn't move much without starting to feel nauseated, so I didn't want to move anything. It didn't take very long, but it took longer than it should have: "I'm On Vacation" won out. It should have never come to trial.

I was outside in that cool pool in a Sacramento second. I did the whole shebang too: floating around the pool (the word "swim" would be misleading) under the midday sun for a leisurely half-hour, then sweating out some of the residual bad juices in the steam room, taking a plunge in the hot tub to massage my glued-up muscles in front of the jets, stretching out in the soothing sauna, and finishing with a cold shower to wake back up. That was a **much** better use of a Fitness Center! And, to think, I used to scoff at the handful of Mid-Town Athletic Club members who never seemed to use anything outside the locker room area. I understood now.

Then, with luxurious leisure accomplished, I returned to 17160 to gather my goodies. At least I got some high class perks out of my \$153.95 room rate. And I had had the whole Fitness Center to myself. At this hour, everyone else was either in the pool, or eating lunch, or losing money somewhere.

The line to check out of the hotel was short, but the line to check in was **unbelievable!** I guess a lot of people do the Sunday-through-Saturday vacations here, and check-in time must have been 1:00. There were hundreds of people in line. No exaggeration. There were eight check-in windows open and processing, and they were not even making a dent. I heard one

woman say to someone, "I've been waiting forty minutes already," and she was maybe halfway to the front of the line. Nobody in that line looked happy. Nobody behind the counter looked happy either, even though it was their job to look happy.

I got Moby rolling. Never have I started a ramack leg in such a melancholy funk. So close! I missed Nate by *so little*. If I had a decent cell phone, I would have gotten Nate's messages in time. Thanks, Cingular.

Ahhh, who knows? Maybe a higher power was at work, keeping us apart to avert some unknown catastrophe. Maybe it was just Las Fucking Vegas. The city hates me, and it knows that the feeling is mutual. Vegas must be a woman. And she's a real twat.

As it turns out, Nate was done in by the International Dateline. He had looked at his ticket, and saw that he was departing New Zealand on the afternoon of the 19th, and would be arriving in Los Angeles on the morning of the 19th, a few hours **before** he left New Zealand. Being a smart person, and knowing he hadn't booked a flight on a time machine (the ticket would have cost a **lot** more), he assumed that there was a misprint, and that he should be landing in LA on the morning of the 20th, not the 19th, as his ticket showed. That's why he had contacted me back in February with the date change.

It was a pretty logical assumption, I have to admit. I very likely would've done the same thing. I was having enough trouble with the time zones and Daylight Savings Time changes. But in crossing the International Dateline, way out there in the middle of the Pacific, he did, in effect, go back in time. I'm sure he would've looked younger.

The next goal of the trip was a significant one: the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Little motivation was needed to launch me in that direction, though my zeal was somewhat mitigated by the loss of my hiking companion.

I hadn't gone far at all – in fact, I was still on the Strip – when Vegas manifested yet another reason to hate her. A signcar! Shit. Labeled "Wheels Media," it was nothing more than a rolling billboard. This one was actually more like a four-sided billboard; the ones that Alf and I had seen in Dallas in '87 were flat, two-sided signs. I had hoped that these freaking things had been outlawed as a nuisance. Obviously not. Most cities just have the good taste to prohibit them from driving all around their downtown areas, shoving big obnoxious ads in your face.

I had to get the hell out of this accursed city. But the bitch wouldn't let me go. Delay, delay, delay: gas, food, ice, coolant, windshield washer fluid, phone calls... I must've pulled off I-15 four or five times before finally shaking free and zooming northwest. The momentum of the ramack had definitely lagged, but the road was again open and Gomorrah was behind me. [I think you can figure out why I picked that city and not the other one for that sentence – bad pun dodged.]

Fire On The Mountain! Big columns of black smoke and white smoke were rising from the foothills of the Muddy Mountains – yes, that's their real name -- several miles east of I-15, and were drifting high to the east. The mountain looked like a volcano:



with a ridge in front, the fire behind it looked to be within a caldera.

Shortly thereafter came Mesquite, displaying a billboard that hailed it as “America’s Fastest Growing Small City.” Nevada’s population had grown phenomenally in the 1990’s, increasing by over 80%, from 1.2 million to 2.2 million. Mesquite lives up to its proud boast. It grew by a staggering **441%** -- yes, more than quadrupling -- from 1,871 people in 1991 to 10,125 people in 1998. People are flocking out of cuntish, crime-ridden cities like Las Vegas and have no place else to go but the lame-ass little towns that lie an hour or so away. Like Pahrump. They move in and plump up the town, and pretty soon it will have a wonderful crime rate all its own.

What is cool about Mesquite, though, is that it is real close to Zion, Bryce, Cedar Breaks, Lake Mead, and the Grand Canyon. If I am ever forced to move to Nevada – **no**, I don’t know why I would be, but if it ever happens – then I’ll become a Mesquiter. Summers are hot in this town (classified as a “city” now), but winters average 40’s by day and 20’s by night. Not the desert scorch that I would have pictured.

I was not teary-eyed when I left Nevada and crossed back into Arizona. It never bothers me to leave Nevada. Whether I’m going into California or Arizona, it’s always a step in the right direction. This stretch of I-15 through the northwest corner of the Copper State is great. I’d have to cut through here and up into Utah before I could zag back south to get to the Big Hole. That didn’t bother me none: it would give me an excuse to revisit Zion.



It was a tough climb up those ragged beige AZ hills, then a great plunge down into the Virgin River Gorge, and then back up again. The Virgin River is meek now, but it must’ve been a real cranker in its day, judging by the steeply carved gorge here, and the formidable Narrows that I hiked twice in Zion N.P.

As I drove, though, I could taste smoke. The scenery was a bit muted by the light gray haze that drifted in from the burning slope of the Muddies. I hoped that this plume would not carry far enough to have any effect on the Grand Canyon views tomorrow morning.



Coming out of the gorge, the geology changed: some red in the rock now, with more mesa-ish formations. This got me psyched. Once again, the desert was done for a while.

It was closing in on 5:00 MDT when the Utah border was breached. This was State #10, and it took 4708 miles to get here. Utah is fantastic. The state has never been anything but good to me, in sharp contrast to its western neighbor.

A provision stop was in order, so I left the interstate at St. George, got onto UT-9 and headed into Washington City. Everything seemed very clean and open. Great air, some green in the landscape, and a sense of just good, uncrunched livin'. I chatted with the woman behind the counter at the convenience store. Clarification was needed about which road I was actually on, since signage was either missing or had escaped my vigilance (most likely the latter), plus I just wanted to get a little conversation in with someone who actually lived out here. She was predictably good-natured. There didn't seem to be a lot of stress going on in her life. Her half of the convo was unhurried, and she smiled genuinely with her eyes. She enjoyed the fact that I was happy to be here.

The most memorable thing about her, though, was one word. I knew I needed to be headed to and through the town of Hurricane, where I could fork either north to Zion, or south to Hildale (which do you think I chose??). She started referring to a town called Herkin, and I saw no sight of that on the map. I did the old, "which way was that again?" thing, before finally saying, "Is that before or after Hurricane?" She got a good laugh at that, and so did I. Dumbass Floridian.

Many an RV Park was passed by on this roadtrip, but none as accurately labeled as King's Row RV Park, between Washington and Herkin (Hurricane). The RV Park was exactly that: a place where you could simply **park** your RV. It was a big dirt lot with no hookups for water or electricity, no benches, no tables, no nothing. There were a dozen or so RV parked in an obedient row down the middle of the lot.

Moby was riding contentedly as we passed through the towns of Virgin – I'd like to arrange a football game between Virgin HS and Loving HS – and Rockville. I don't know how



apropos the former town name is, but the latter one sure was accurate: rocks, rocks, rocks. But they were good rocks. They were Utah rocks. And, as we all know, Utah Rocks!

My National Parks Pass came in handy again. Even though I was just doing a pass-through on UT-9, I still would have had to pay my fee to enter Zion National Park. The mesas and cliffs of the surrounding area

were nice, but you could see the more extreme peaks of Zion just looming above as you approached.

I love Zion. Can you tell?? It was great to see those spectacular colorful formations again. Some of them are almost coned, with their white summits almost glowing. Others are just hulking blocks of red-tinted rock, cut with crisply defined edges and corners. It all looks so nice, and it still elicits a "wow" from me every time.

Though the sun was sinking low, it still cast dazzling light on the mountaintops, which contrasted vividly with the cool shadows here along the trickling riverbed. I stopped at a crossroads to get out, take some photos, and just enjoy the Zion feel for a while. A left turn would have brought me up to the Narrows, and I was wishing I had yet another extra day. Time was mine to do with as I pleased, certainly, and without that Nate guy tagging along and keeping me on task, I could go wherever the heck I wanted.



But I wanted to go hike the Grand Canyon. And I wanted to do the other few things that were still on the clipboard. The Narrows may get another visit, but it would not be This Time.

As UT-9 proceeds towards the eastern gate of ZNP, there is a long tunnel. It's over a mile long, actually, and it was built in 1930. I told you about it in the SW03 treatise, so I won't redundacize myself. It's a coolo tunnel though, and every time I drive through it, I swear they add more windows. I know they don't, but it seems that way. I used to think that there was one good-sized opening that both allowed you to look out at the opposing cliff and allowed daylight and fresh air to get in. Then I realized there were two. This time, I counted: there are five of them. Sharp eyes there, Rammamma. I imagine they also let snow and ice in during the winter, but since this road shuts down for the winter months, it jus' don' matta.

Once clear of the tunnel, there is still a very nice, curvy road to escort you out of the park. The rock formations here are unique: they are an off-white hue, and compressed in layers of sweeping curves, almost like topographical maps. Clearly visible, regularly spaced lines cut across the pale rock faces as they bulge like flower pots, or sweep upwards like clay pottery. It's a very cool scene, Gene.

And as you reach the outer boundary of the park, there is a sign informing you of your departure, and saying "Please Proceed." It struck me as just a polite way of saying, "Yes, glad you came, now GET OUT."

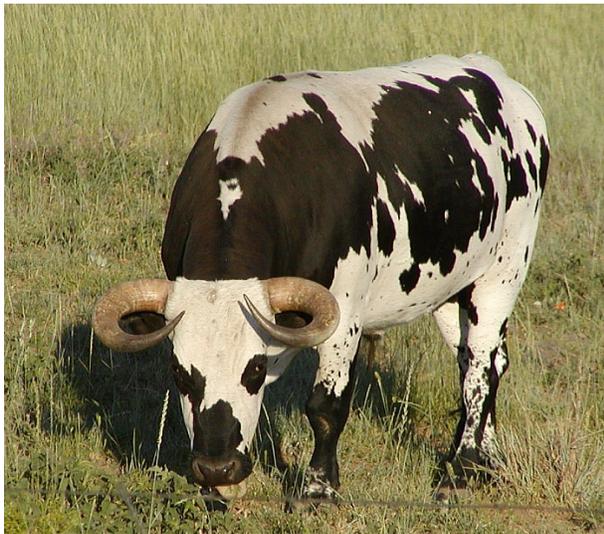
Time was again an amorphous concept. Utah and Nevada do Daylight Savings Time, but Arizona does not. Traveling from Nevada through the corner of Arizona into Utah, then back south again to Arizona would have required three resetttings of the clock. Screw that. I didn't care what the numbers said: I was living by the sun, and ol' Sol was still up there smiling at me.

In fact, my impression of waning daylight had been quite misguided. Sitting so low in Zion's shadows, it had seemed like the day was ending. Clear of those mountains now, the sun still blazed with plenty of vigor.

And the landscape really changed a lot. It was rolling terrain, but green grassy pastureland dominated. In the pasture on the south side of UT-9, there was a herd of buffalo grazing! Excellent! This, of course, warranted a few pics.



Among the brown furry buffs, though, grazed a bizarre looking creature. It looked like it was patched together from other animals. Its hide was white with black splotches, like a common cowhide might be, but its eyes looked funky, and its horns looked like they came from above some hunter's fireplace.



I believe it was a beefalo: a hybrid offspring of buffalo and cattle. Maybe this happened in the wild from time to time (maybe a lot?), but man is also guilty of deliberately mating these two species in an attempt to make a new kind of meat, I guess.

I had to lean towards that explanation since the pasture sat next to a ranch-style building called the Buffalo Grill, which had to intimidate the livestock more than a little bit.

As I stood near the fence, snapping photos of the scene, a buzzing sound caught my attention. I looked down to my left and saw, lying in the shin-high grass, a deer.

It didn't look good. It was very dead, and varmints and buzzing buggies had been having their way with it.

Its upper lip and eye sockets were pretty tattered, it had a gaping hole in its side, and the chest cavity had been gnawed to the bone. I didn't take any pictures of it. First of all, it was pretty gross, and I didn't foresee any desire to revisit this imagery. Secondly, it would have been disrespecting the animal's



spirit. The poor thing got whacked while crossing the highway, and had to lie here suffering while the scavengers of the world licked their chops. Oh well, Nature's way, I reckon.