

Road Romp 2004

Day 13: Tuesday, 22 June 2004

FOCK 3: Turning East

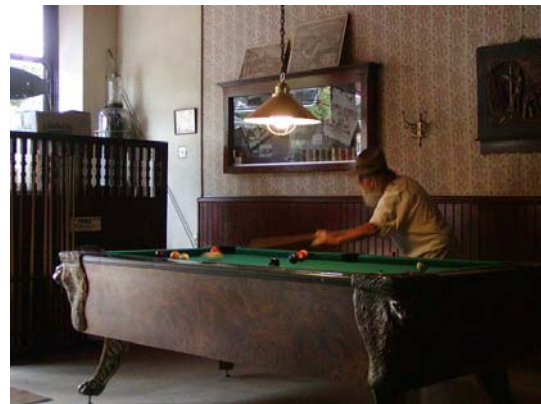
Having done my civic duty, I was off to find Jerome underbelly. It took about a Sacramento second. Right across Main Street from the ECV plaque is Paul & Jerry's Saloon. This place oozes character. I hope it was character, anyway. It certainly wasn't charm.



Paul & Jerry's is the oldest family owned saloon in the state. In the early 1900's, it was the largest gambling establishment in the southwest. Prohibition kinda killed that, though, as it was a billiards hall and "confectionary." You just don't gamble in a confectionary. At least I don't.

The local color inside was classic, but not just because of the old wooden bar, firm stools, and framed artwork and photographs hanging on the ancient wallpaper. The real local color was playing pool.

Slightly bent, with a bushy gray beard, wearing a style-less hat and a dingy T-shirt, one of Jerome's own was clacking around the pool balls. He looked like the type who would have been playing pool there since the dawn of time, but he didn't seem very good. I tried to figure out if he was just sandbagging to sucker in some passer-by for a quick hustle, or if he just sucked. I tended to believe the latter.



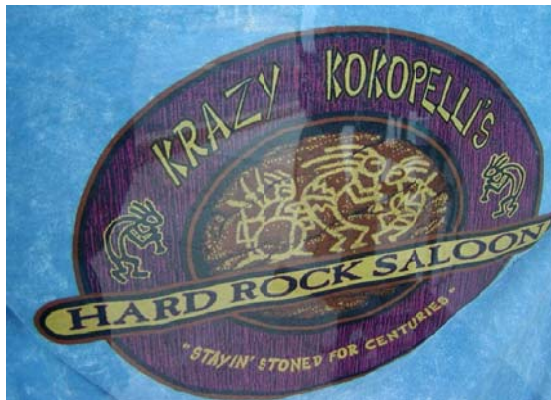
I only had one cup o' sauce there. I figured that hitting the road would be a good idea. BUT – you knew this was coming, right? – on the way back to the Mobe, while I was photographing a couple of signs on the buildings – like Nellie Bly, and Cleopatra Hill, and House of Joy – all of which had been brothels back in the good old days – my instincts homed in on The Jerome Brewery. Now **this** place was singing my song! I didn't need the pizza that they are supposedly "famous" for, but a mug o' mountain microbrew sounded too many shades of yum to count.

An hour-and-a-half later, I took my leave of the JB, having fully sampled their wares – at an alarming *\$2 per pint!* -- and having procured a souvenir hat for the Dad. In the Small World category, the barmaid had lived in the Florida Keys for several years before moving here. I was pretty amazed by that. She told me that the winters were not as harsh as I might expect; certainly a lot warmer and less snowy than Flagstaff. Her enthusiasm for life in this sloping hamlet was strong and genuine. She had followed her bliss and found her niche. Life in Jerome must be pretty simple, even more so than in the Keys. It's definitely on my PPTMT List (Possible Places To Move To).



Right next to JB was a shop called Cheers. It's not a bar or a TV show; it's a T-shirt shop. Their specialty is Dirt Shirts, dyed with real red dirt. I bought one. You wouldn't catch me dead in a Las Vegas shirt, but a Dirt Shirt suits me fine. "Winners wear dirt, losers eat it," is the tag line on the back. Sounds kinda attitudey, duddinit? [The pain in the ass part, though, was that the first washing had to be done in a bucket of vinegar and water, to set the color. Yeah, like I have vinegar just kickin' around the house. Oh well, you wanna wear the dirt, ya gotta heed the rules.]

On my return stroll, I saw a shirt in a window that I coveted. (I coveted the shirt, not the window.) Being a Kokopelli fan -- even before last year's purchase of a stone bearing his image – I got a good laugh from the blue stone-washed shirt bearing the emblem, "Krazy Kokopelli's Hard Rock Saloon: Stayin' Stoned For Centuries." I had to have it! But the store was closed. Damn.



Next Time. Againnn.

"It's 6:34 pm. I am leaving Jerome as a much better man," I told my Sony TCM-200DV. It had been a fine two hours: a perfectly chosen stop on the tour. The never-really-formulated-"plan" had a departure time of about 5:15, so I kind of screwed that up, but I had no regrets.

There was still enough daylight to get me through Sedona and Oak Creek Canyon, and then I'd see how far past Flagstaff I felt like going. I needed to punch out fairly decent mileage, though, if I was going to reach all of tomorrow's destinations – and there would actually be a time constraint involved!

Some of the signs around Jerome really leave you shaking your head. "Snake Sanctuary for the Surgeon's House" says one. Another is a yellow caution sign with the silhouette of a horse-drawn buggy on it. One that warned drivers of the narrow roadway, also admonished, "slow down, enjoy the view, *and don't hit anyone!*"

From here, it was east, east, east. Jerome



had become the impetus point to steer this ramack homeward. There were still some attractions to take in, but from here on, everything would be “on the way to Key West.”



When I first got to Jerome and drove right through the town to get the view, there were a few vans parked in a turnout. They bore day-glow yellow signs saying things like “Supoort Team” and “San Diego to Atlantic City Bike Race.” Just as I was entering the Jerome Palace, a bike racer pedaled on by. He was going pretty fast. I imagined that he had a lot of fun on those miles and miles of snaky roads between Prescott and Jerome, and wondered how much he would dig the zig-zag streets of this town and the BIG downhill that led out of it. I also wondered if his route would stay on 89A and take him up the cruelly steep switchback climb out of Oak Creek Canyon. I didn’t envy him that part.

Now, here it was, almost 7:00, on the way to Sedona, and I caught up to a woman who was also pedaling along powerfully. Those were the only two riders that I saw: no peloton, no drafting. This wasn’t exactly the Tour de Jerome.

Her team van followed a couple hundred feet behind, hugging the shoulder, with flashers flashing, just as the man’s had done in Jerome. The whole concept of the support team bemused me. The van carried a couple of spare bikes, and one or two helpers. It must have had room for the rider to snooze in from time to time. No one was doing this gig non-stop.

But what does the support person do? Hopefully, nothing, I guess. Just do a coast-to-coast drive at an average of 15 MPH. At that rate, three thousand miles would take 200 hours. Even if the rider pumps for 15 hours a day, that’s still a two-week trip. What goes on in that van while the rider is outside, pushing the envelope of human endurance? The support people don’t have to stay fit. I wondered if they had coolers full of cold brews and took turns getting sloshed, or if they smoked tumbleweeds to keep entertained.

I wouldn’t be a good support person. I would’ve looked at the race course, seen Jerome on the map, pulled up next to the rider and said, “You’re looking good. Jerome is only 50 miles ahead. We’ll see ya there!” Then I’d wave to him as he drove by the bar and say, “Keep it up, dude! We’ll meet ya in Sedona in about an hour!”

Speaking of Sedona, as I neared that town, there was one of those big blue highway signs. You know the kind; they usually have a half-dozen or so logos of local gas stations or campgrounds or restaurants on them, under a category heading. Well, this one particular sign was totally blank except for one word: “Food.” That’s all. No insignias, no names, nothing. Not even an exit number. Were there no food options in Sedona?

The sign gave no clue of what other glories Sedona might hold, but apparently they did have food. They just weren’t telling you where to find it.

Sedona High School had a red dirt track. I got a boot out of that. On first glance, it appeared to be your typical red rubber surface, then I saw the edges and the dug up lanes. Classic. A red *clay* track. Get out the $\frac{3}{4}$ " spikes and claw out a few laps.

A red-tinted row of tall and ragged rock teeth overlooks Sedona to the west. The whole town has that copper tint to it. It's in the architecture, in the scenic background, and in the roadside dirt. It looks really good though, almost as if the town just grew out of the landscape. Sedona blends peacefully with its surroundings, as if it is enhancing the terrain instead of encroaching on it.



And don't envision an old log cabin type of town. Sedona is very modern and very much tourist oriented. Hiking, biking, and water fun fuel this town, and it's not the poor who come here to play.

As I entered the Red Rocks Region, just beyond the town, a sign told me, "Watch For Rocks, next 15 miles." Hey, sign, I've been watching for cool rocks ever since I got to Sequoia National Park. I'm not going to limit myself to just 15 measly miles.

By 7:30, the sun had set in Sedona. No Daylight Savings Time here, damn it. I would lose an hour at the New Mexico border tomorrow, and another at Texas state line. My life was just getting shorter and shorter...

At 6000' elevation, Moby and I began the Oak Creek Canyon switchbacks. I kept him in low gear, and he was content. The rattling in the ceiling had calmed down quite a bit, though it spoke up occasionally just to remind me that it was there. The cooling system was kept cool by regular top-off's, and helped a lot by the cooler air of the high grounds of the last several days.

At 8:05 pm, we were on I-40, just beyond Flagstaff, and heading east. The fading sunset glow was now in my rearview mirror, no longer ahead nor to the side. And that's where it would be for the next several days.

We passed an exit for Two Guns. That's a town name? Well, why not? There was another town on the map called Happy Jack. I think I'd rather live in that one. I snickered at the thought of the Happy Jack Funeral Parlor, and even moreso about the Happy Jack Adult Bookstore.

At 10:10, I called a halt to the proceedings at the first rest area on I-40. I requested an adjournment, your honor, due to too much Jeroming. I felt like a wuss, but Nate wasn't here to bully me, so I gave in to my tiredness.

Only 269 miles had rolled under the Mobe, but it had been a full day. The big driving days were coming soon enough.

I parked near a sign that warned, "Unloading Livestock Prohibited." Reluctantly, I complied.