

# ROAD ROMP 2004

Day 14: Wednesday, 23 June 2004

## FOCK 2: Go 'Topes!

AZ-191 was every bit as barren on the way south as it had been on the way north. I had to retrace my route back through Chinle and as far as Ganado on 191, then venture east on 264 into New Mexico.

Rand McNally green-dots 191. That's a hoot. If desolation is scenic, then dot away. It's that to-each-his-own thing again, I guess. The scenic element lay in the vastness of the open spaces. As big and wide as the Arizona desert seemed as I came down off the Kaibab Plateau from Grand Canyon to Marble Canyon, this was double. That desert was what you saw when you looked in one direction. As I zoomed south from Chinle, though, this featureless void seemed interminably empty in **all** directions.

Yet, in the midst of the wide void, there was a small house. WHO LIVES OUT HERE?? WHY??? Do they **hate people** that much??

Just outside of Ganado, which is the home of both the Ganado Mission and the Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site (no, I didn't stop to see if they were trading any Hubbell Space Telescope postcards), I thought about buying a bale of hay. I really had no need for one, and it certainly would've necessitated a reconfiguration of my sleeping quarters, but it was only \$7.50 and that seemed like a bargain that was too good to pass up. It wasn't until I was a few miles past the seller that I remembered that Moby has a roof rack. Damn. I probably could've lugged that thing home and gotten \$7.75 for it in Florida – that is, if there was anything left of it after 2500 miles of highway zooming. I should have bought it just to leave a trail of hay all across the south.

After passing through one final Arizona high-ground forest, at 4:24 pm, with 5761 RR04 miles done, Moby breached the border back into the Land Of Enchantment. The first town was called Yah-ta-Hey. I don't know what that translates into; probably something like "Cheap Bale Of Hay."

Things were going just dandy, Randy, until just before the exit off I-40 for the town of Continental Divide. Just a couple hundred yards shy of that ramp, Moby caught another hairball. He coughed and spat and stumbled. I wanted to slap him on the back or give him the Heimlich. We went from 75 to 25 in 3.3 seconds without braking. It was ugly.

The real WTF of it all, though, was that I was **not** low on gas. This type of paroxysm was somewhat justified when Moby was slurping the dregs and backwash, but this tank had a lot of good petrol still sloshing around in it.

Thankful that an exit was at hand, I pulled the Mobe off the highway and sought to drown his sorrows at the nearest gas pump. It was 5:15, so I had less than two hours to cover the remaining 115 or so miles and get to my scheduled gig in Albuquerque. It was weird having a time limit after nearly two weeks of freewheeling. Except for the botched rendezvous with Fats, there was really nothing else that pinned a specific time on this whole ramack. [And, *actually*, I was early for my version of the proposed rendezvous time – Nate and I just had different versions.] For most of the attractions, the only "closing time" was the onset of night. So, this was my one designated, clock-related event, and I did not want to be late. Damn it.

Moby chugged his sauce like an Irishman, but barely took 20 gallons. Ugh. Now I faced half-tank fill-ups the rest of the way home. This being Continental Divide, I opened up the side doors, and drained the water from the cooler; I wanted to see which way it would flow. It formed a big puddle and sat there. It didn't flow to either ocean. I wondered if I was dead-center on the Divide itself, and the delicate balance of the puddle was a phenomenon of pure chance ... or if it was just a level lot.

When I fired the Mobester back up, he roared with vim. I know you usually get vigor with vim, but we eschewed vigor, being quite satisfied with vim. Vim is good; I like big words like that.



Ninety minutes later, we were rolling down the big slope of I-40 towards downtown Albuquerque. A billboard made me chuckle: REEFER REPAIR. I'm not quite sure how one would repair one's reefer, but I bet he got a lot of late night calls: *Heyyy mannnnn, this reefer we got ain't worrrkin', mannnnn...*

The city, founded as a Catholic settlement in the 1600's by Spanish missionaries (who inadvertently killed off much of the local native population by introducing them to new and exciting diseases), is the largest city in New Mexico. Its 448,607 people comprise 24.2% of the state's population, which ties it with Phoenix for 4<sup>th</sup> highest in that category. [If you go to 100ths, Phoenix wins, 24.21 to 24.18 – I knew you wanted to know.]

I hoped Albuquerque's name would mean something colorful or fascinating, but it doesn't. When the settlement became a town, it was renamed after some Spanish duke (El Duque du Albuquerque) so the local officials could kiss his aristocratic butt and get some goodies and favors from him. Clever ploy. After all, the duke dude wouldn't want a city that was named after him to be a freaking dump, now, would he? Bad for the image.

My original plan – which didn't last three full days anyway -- was to tour Santa Fe, about 50 miles to the north, then take a little tour of Albuquerque. Santa Fe got bumped, though. The Jerome visit sealed its fate. Good trade, I think. I'm sure Santa Fe is a marvelous place, but The Jerome thing was a perfect ramackal fit.

Albuquerque straddles the Rio Grande at the foot of Marzano Peak (10,098'). Its bulk was reminiscent of Mount Humphries near Flagstaff. Marzano stands proud guard over the city; its presence helped shape the course of the river around which the city grew. As always, where there is water, there is life.

[There was little water in west Texas, for example – though the Night in West Pecos Cantaloupe Festival was only three nights – and just 312 miles -- away. So, clearly, there was life if you knew how to draw it out. More life than you could shake a stick at! I should've gone just to shake the Luckless Log at the talented people all night long.]

So, I missed the Santa Fe tour, and I missed the Albuquerque tour (and would, indeed, miss the Cantaloupe Fest). No worries, though: I would be on time for what I really wanted to see here. The Albuquerque Isotopes were taking on the Oklahoma City Redhawks at 7:05 pm at Isotopes Park. With a name like the Isotopes, this team had to be worth some cheers and huzzahs. The ballpark was right across the street from The Pit, that renowned basketball arena at UNM, so I knew it would be pretty easy to find. And, according to my Internet research, this was Birdzerk Night, whatever the hell that meant.

A southerly turn onto I-25 was needed to get to the game, and we crossed the Rio Grande on a network of overpasses that was artistically done in an almost-coral color, with big blue stripes, like earth and sky. Man, the eastern half of the country needs to get on this bandwagon. Those artsy arches look great. Good for the motorist's soul.

The traffic exiting the city was still a bit snarly, but I zoomed with Bostonian confidence through any opening I saw, and soon pulled in to a FREE parking lot about 100 yards from the baseball venue. The lot, which I think was for "employees only" of whatever building was behind me, was on Bradbury Street, which I took to be a very good omen, since Bradbury is Nate's last name. So Nate made it in spirit, at least.



Isotopes Park is a splendid stadium. Nicely windowed and curbed and landscaped, it just exudes fan-friendliness.

Most minor league parks are that way, though. This was the sixth minor league park that I've been to: Denver (Bears), Pawtucket (Red Sox), Durham (Bulls), Sacramento (River Cats), Rochester (Red Wings), and Sarasota (Somethings). That last one barely counts; Richie, Cliff, Colyer and I went there with Nooch on one of our southern sojourns from Beantown. We got there late, and had just had time to purchase a 32-ounce Miller Lite, when Nooch, the consummate non-sportsman decided, "enough baseball, let's go to a bar."

We chugged what we could, tossed the backwash, and moved. We weren't even there for an inning, but he was the host and The Host Calls The Moves.

It was 7:00 p.m. when I stepped up to the Isotopes' box office and procured a box seat for a modest \$8.00 and strolled on in to see the ball game. I could've sprung for a high-priced \$10 Lower Box Seat, but I knew I would be drifting away from home plate as the game went on anyway. The call of the Remotest Seat was already tickling my ears.

The first place I aimed was the souvenir shop. I knew I had to have some Isotopes finery to strut for my homeys back in Key West. The first beer stand that I saw waylaid me, though. Surprised? Didn't think so. They had BIG bottles of Fat Tire Amber Ale. Yummm. It was an ouchy \$8.50 a swaggle, but for 20 ounces, it could've been worse. And they had none of those surreptitious "domestic premium" sneak-attack prices either: I knew it was \$8.50, but I paid it anyway. Eagerly. Well worth it for a BIG quality brew. And, yes, the ticket did cost less than the beer. What are you implying? Minor league baseball; major league beer. Worked for me.



The game was just underway when I got to my seat. In the small stadium, a casual walk from souvenirs, to beers, to seats is only about two minutes. Many other people were just settling in, and didn't seem especially concerned about missing the first few pitches. This was an out-for-the-evening thing more than a baseball thing.

The woman who came and sat beside me was carrying the biggest damn chilidog I have ever seen. Easily a foot long, well over an inch thick, and smothered with chili and cheese, this was one daunting piece of food. She was a smaller-than-average woman, and she talked like she was

overwhelmed by this colossal culinary corpora. She began by delicately plucking away at the extremities and potential overflows, but when I looked back at her an inning later, she was licking her fingers after gulping the final bite. Nice job, lady, though I wouldn't want to be with you in a closed car on the long ride home.



By the third inning, I had gone walkabout. (No, not because of her.) The outer reaches of Isotopes Park needed exploring. Knowing that this would be the last time I would be this close to the infield, I circled back behind home plate. I strolled, sipped, and paused, watching each pitch and play from a slightly

different angle. I purchased a fresh beer for the walk, and ventured out from under the roof and into the picnic area behind left field.

Minor league parks have these areas, and they are great. At the average game, they realistically don't expect enough people to fill any outfield bleachers, so they have these sloping lawns and clusters of picnic tables instead. People can saunter out and relax for a while. Little kiddies romp and play and burn

off some of that little kid vim while their parents stretch out on the grass and chill to the unhurried pastime of baseball. Better than a movie theater, and about the same price.

In many ways, this was a better brand of sport as well. Names meant nothing. Nobody's autograph here was fetching a hundred dollars. Little kids still asked players for their signatures, but probably also had to ask them what their names were. I'm sure some people cared quite a bit whether the 'Topes won or lost, but I'm equally sure that those people were in the vast minority. In general, the crowd roots roots roots for the home team, but most will go home not even knowing for sure what the final score was.

You sit back with your bucket o' beer, and watch the ball fly through the warm summer air. Young men in their athletic prime chase after it, catch it, throw it, hit it, and run across grass and dirt. They dive, they slide, they exult, and they fuss. All in a night's work.

And they spy. A pair of Isotopes in the bullpen, right in front of the picnic area, were caught in the act of misplaced focus. Apparently feeling that they were invisible, two relief pitchers were taking turns surveying the crowd with a pair of binoculars. Now, it's most likely that their reconnaissance was totally innocent. Maybe one of them was trying to locate his Aunt Agnes who had driven down from Manitoba in the old family Chrysler just to see him play. But, then again, maybe they really were just looking for Les Grand Tetons in the crowd.



Part of the picnic area was a raised concrete patio with steel tables and an aluminum roof. There were about a dozen tables, maybe more, in a couple of rows, and there was a railing in the front, separating the patio from a lower walkway and the bullpen. Near the railing, there was a kid in a motorized wheelchair. He was about 16, I guess, and looked like he had been born with a bad, bad body. His spine was curled

forward dramatically, and his neck and arms weren't right. His legs seemed small and cramped up against his chair. And he wore glasses. For some reason, that really pissed me off. Come on, God, you give this kid a pretzel for a body, and bad eyesight too?? Overkill, doncha think?

The kid had a small mountain of candy and sodas that he kept working on. I had to drop my instinctive that's-bad-for-you reaction in mid-thought. It was hard not to feel pity for him, though he had a very sour look on his face. He seemed to be into the game – at least more than I was – but he was out there all by himself. That was strange. He was in nobody's company, and there was no one keeping an eye on him. I wondered if he was a younger brother of one of the players. I wondered a lot of things. There was a strong urge to go over and start chatting and watching the game with him. To me, it seemed like a nice thing to do, but I didn't do it. I had a doubt.

Maybe he was out there because he wanted to be away from people. Maybe his parents left him out there because he wanted to be left alone to watch baseball. Maybe he asked to be left out here so he could avoid stupid embarrassing questions and awkward conversations with annoyingly garrulous strangers. WTF, that's one of the reasons that I was out there. So I left him alone. I guess I said a little prayer for him, if you could call it that. I tried to send him some happy vibes that he could put in his pocket and use later when he needed them. No way to know if it worked or not, so I assume it did. :]

After an inning or two there, I moved on over to the big berm behind right field. Not only was this a comfortable looking lawn, but it also lent access to the two best candidates for Remotest Seat.

But there was time. The seats could wait: they were empty and uncoveted. The lawn was giving me this come-here-big-fella look that I could not resist. For fourteen days, there had been an awful lot of sand and dirt and sage and brown (as you have read). The respite from that had been a tremendous few days of majestic mountains, colossal trees, and rivers roaring through canyons and plummeting over cliffs. What there had not been, on any of this ramack, was grass. Pure, green, soft, lush, clean, unweedy, lie-on-the-lawn grass. Until now.

Ahhhhhhh. Grass is good. Doncha love grass? How could you not?

So I settled my road-worn carcass on the lush slope and unwound the rest of the way. The constraint of game time had been a bit too much for my poor mind to handle, and this lie-down eased the

rest of my urgencies out and into the cool, comforting ground. The sky had darkened and the stadium lights now prazzled and freened above the rooftops.

Grass like this has been a rare thing in my life for quite a while. Key West grass is thick-bladed, rough, and in constant struggle with dominating weeds. Grass in Rochester was too often wet or buried under snow. It was nice to stretch out and enjoy the feel.

The spot I chose was almost in center field. It was a good spot; I was surprised that people had not taken it already. I even had a fence to sit up against if I really wanted to watch the game. Of course, if watching the game had been priority one, I would have stayed in my box seat, or even crept closer to the field.



The best thing, though was the flag. Flying at half-mast from its pole just outside the fence, was the New Mexico state flag. As I've rambled on about before, state flags get a little too carried away for my liking. National flags tend to be more basic in design and color, and lend themselves much better to third-grade crayon projects. For many state flags, you need a goddamn graphic artist to recreate the foolish cartoon that these blowhard politicians plopped in the center.

Florida's flag is a perfect example. Like the Massachusetts flag, it seems fairly simple from afar. It is really just the stupidly simple Alabama white-field-and-red-X with the State Seal plunked in the middle. That Seal, though, is just jammed with a jumble of junk, Jack. Among garlands and tropical veggies, there is a blue-skirted Seminole woman, an old-fashioned steamboat, and a tall sabal palm. A garish sunset (or sunrise?) glows behind it all, and reflects off some body of

water. It's quite the eyeful. You'd need the whole Executive Crayola Set to do this one.

New Mexico's is my favorite state flag, for a few reasons. It is simple, it is distinctively colored, and it is true to history. The Land of Enchantment truly honors its heritage with this banner.

It is a golden-yellow field with a red design on it. The design represents a sun with rays stretching out from it. There are four groups of rays with four rays in each group -- an ancient sun symbol of a Native American people called the Zia, who believed that the Giver Of All Good gave them gifts in groups of four: the four directions (north, east, south and west), the four seasons (spring, summer, fall and winter), the day (sunrise, noon, evening and night), and Life itself (childhood, youth, middle years and old age). In this sun symbol, all of these are bound by a circle of life and love, without a beginning or end.

It is a very cool flag. And I lay there on the soft grass of the right field berm and watched it flap softly in the warm evening air. It was easy to reflect back on Canyon de Chelly, and the various reservation lands, and think about the noble and simpler culture of the Native Americans who got so totally fucked over by the pompous, self-absorbed white political and military leaders of this greedy, gimme-gimme country.

It is what it is, though, so I didn't get riled about it. I felt sorry for those people, though. Current civilization speaks too little of The Giver Of All Good.

In those times, I might have been a lot like Lieutenant John Dunbar (Kevin Costner's character in *Dances With Wolves*), I think. But we'll never know. Instead I'm this guy who drives around in a big van, blasting tunes, taking photos, and trying to experience all that remains before (a) it disappears, and (b) I can't anymore. It'll have to do.

After a couple of innings, I rallied myself up off the lawn and sought The Seat. The choice was muddled. The last seat of the last row of the stands that extended out behind the right field foul pole was



a clear candidate. There were no seats beside it, and it was even behind the back of the lawn. As far as a legitimate, buy-a-ticket, sold-out-game kind of thing, this was the winner, and I was content with that.

But it wasn't really the Remotest Seat of all. There were three individual seats way out on the centerfield mezzanine, in an area that appeared to be designated for handicapped spectators. These



seats were identical, as far as I could tell, to the regular grandstand seating, but they were isolated from one another, and from everyone else. I had to wonder why they were even there; wouldn't wheelchair-bound fans most likely stay in their chairs? Would they



really opt for that slap-hard plastic instead? So, maybe if somebody had a leg in a cast and was on crutches? Or maybe the chair-bound person's spouse, significant other, or mistress?

Which brings up another question: if a man has a mistress, does a woman have a mister? Research that and get back to me.

Anyway these seats were clearly the Remotest. But they were specialty seats, so I didn't think they should count. And there was not much chance of getting a home run ball here.

With the 'Topes leading, 7-6, in the bottom of the seventh, I got my cue to move on. The OKC pitcher was being pulled, and the pause in the action seemed like a good time to make the break. When the stadium P.A. began to play the song, I knew I was right. They were playing it rather tauntingly for the departing pitcher, but it clicked with me in a much more friendly tone:

*Hit the road, Jack.*

*Don't you come back*

*No more, no more, no more, no more.*

*Hit the road, Jack.*

*Don't you come back no more.*

*(What you SAY??)*

I did indeed hit the road, and no, I don't think I'll be comin' back no more, no more, though it is a nice place. [I would find out later, to my chagrin, that my beloved 'Topes blew the lead and went down to a 10-7 defeat. Once I left, they just fell apart...]

But hitting the road, Jack, would turn out to be a bad experience. I easily beat the traffic out of the ballpark, but the highway was jammed. To my horror, a construction project, had **closed** I-25 North, and EVERYONE was being funneled up the very next exit ramp through miles of city boulevards, and out onto I-40 East. Now, I-40E was my next course, so I would end up OK (I had to wonder about the poor schmucks who wanted I-40 West), but this detour was not on the menu! What a freaking nightmare!

This was ALL the traffic from a three-lane Interstate that we're talkin' about here! Thousands of cars and trucks being squeezed onto urban streets among urban buildings and urban busses and urban sidewalks, and urban crosswalks, and urban parked cars, and block after block of urban red lights. Oh, lordy.

This was MID-EVENING too, not 2:00 a.m.! The city was still very much alive and very much awake, and, now very much choked solid. Also, this was not just a one-night emergency thing; signs were posted for miles through the city, arrowing the traffic from turn to turn. I'm sure locals knew better and rode their precious in-the-know routes, but I, being a stranger in a strange land, and too proud and manly to pull over and ask someone for a viable alternative, had little choice but to stay the course.

I did NOT, however, have to be nice about it. This Boston-bred driver was not about to sit and sulk when there was some cutting and sniping that could be done.

When traffic took a 90° right onto a long, straight, divided boulevard, the scope of the delay smacked me in the face: a line of cars and 18-wheelers tiptoed bumper-to-bumper in the left lane for as far ahead as I could see. That was the lane that was designated for I-40 vehicles. The right lane was to be kept clear for local traffic. Well, designate my scrotum, please, because I'm outa here.

I got good and Boston-bold, and cut waaaaay ahead in the not-nice lane. I must have passed 200 trucks, and I'm sure I saved an hour of stop-and-stop driving. And there really was nothing sleazy about it; I was just not as stupid as all those sign-obeying sheep. It was Beantown experience, baby, pure and simple. I sailed unencumbered right down that Locals Only lane for nearly a mile, and when it came time to cut over for the next left turn, I assumed there would be two lanes to turn into on the intersecting street, which there were, and I didn't even cut anyone off or piss anyone off. Smooth move, Ex-Lax.

What a ridiculous project though! You DON'T close a whole INTERSTATE!! Close a half and fix it, then close the other half and fix it. And do it after midnight!!! WTF???

But reaching I-40E did not mean immediate freedom, either. No, no, no. Something had gone awry under the Wyoming Boulevard overpass, just a minute or so after escaping the detour. It looked like a couple of motorists had had an accident (might have been a deliberate, though, I don't know) – and all three lanes ahead of me were decked out with bright shiny brake lights. In other moods, it may have looked kinda pretty.

“SEEK ALTERNATE ROUTE!” screamed my brain, and I shot hard right to barely catch the ramp for Exit 140 before I got beyond it. I didn't really relish returning to unfamiliar urban thoroughfares, but I didn't like the thought of sitting on Inert-40 either.

It was a long straight exit ramp, and, as I climbed it, I could see that the clog was a good bit past the bridge, but still visible. That got me to hmmm-ing. As I reached the top of that exit ramp, Wyoming Avenue was more or less empty. It was a going-south-only kind of exit and the curbing guided traffic to the right, but I had other plans. I took a quick look in all directions – for peril and for police – and hurled my quickly-contrived plan into action.

As soon as that curb ended, I cut hard left into oncoming southbound traffic (which, fortuitously, was stopped at a red light), and then hard right through the gap in the median for southbounders who were turning left onto the Interstate. I'm sure it surprised some people. I'm also sure it was very illegal, but I'm also also sure that it saved me a shitload of time.

Moby rolled down the long ramp onto I-40E **just past the obstruction** and onto very open road. Distance-wise, I covered a bit more than a quarter-mile. Time-wise, who the hell knows? And I left about 500 cars behind. With my Albuquerque Isotopes hat planted proudly on my cranium, I rolled out of the city and into the dark New Mexico desert.

Road Romp '04 was essentially over. There was almost nothing left to see. The list of attractions that I had compiled in my pre-ramack planning – including the couple I had written in on the fly -- was just about exhausted: Bourbon Street, The Riverwalk, Carlsbad Caverns, Roswell, White Sands, Tombstone, Saguaro, The Diamondbacks, Joshua Tree, The Fabulous Fans, Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Yosemite, Death Valley, Las Freaking Vegas, Zion, Kanab, Grand Canyon North, Marble Canyon, Grand Canyon South, Jerome, Canyon de Chelley, and now the 'Topes. Quite a damn good list, I must say. And only one (maybe two, if the timing was good) attraction remained, but that was well east of here.

Moby and I felt like we were back in our element: 75 MPH on smooth highway, cruise control cruising, and the No Stress Allowed sign turned on. The live-by-the-sun edict was being violated, but I didn't feel too bad about it; whatever eastern New Mexico landscape I was missing surely looked an awful lot like all the sage prairie that I had already had my fill of.

There had been no real exploration of Albuquerque – the unexpected post-game tour doesn't count -- and no visit at all to Santa Fe. Next time? Possible, but not likely. Canyon de Chelley was better than some city would have been. Glad I took the hike instead, and I still made the 'Topes game on time. GO 'TOPES!

Not far outside Albuquerque (I'm glad to leave this city behind because that name is a pain in the ass to type), there was an exit sign with the word “Zuzax” on it. I could only assume that it's a town. Zuzax. Cool name, but it doesn't claim the bottom spot on the alphabetical place names list. That belongs to Zzyzx Springs, just south of Baker, CA. There is a long story about Zzyzx, but I didn't think it was especially interesting, so fuck it.

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaanyway, I was beginning to remember that eastering sucks. For one thing, you have to know how big the states are. If you're driving westward, the mile markers count down to the next border so you know how far you have left. When you're eastbound, they count up, and unless you know the highest number, you are outa luck. But Rand can help, of course, since the exits on the Interstates are numbered by mile markers.

Psychologically, a countdown is better than a countup. The decreasing numbers give a better feeling of progress: you are rallying towards a designated finish line. When the numbers increase, it's just a reminder of how damn many miles you have driven, with no posted terminus. I-10 in eastern Texas must be great: 785...786...787...

And, yes, you also lose hours heading east. You gotta give 'em back. Turns out they were only borrowed when you picked 'em up on the way west. Returning them sucks bad. It's like your life is being sliced away from you before your eyes. You can delay it by stopping at the time zone line, but then you're just wasting more time. You can't win this one unless you just never go back. I think that's why so many people moved to the west coast.

And the landscape gets less scenic (not that New Mexico was all that lovely). Once you leave Mountain Time Zone, the big scenic bonanzas are few and far between. Places like Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, and Acadia National Park in Maine are really nice, to be sure, but they can't hold a candle to the grand landscapes of the NP's in Utah and California.

Worst of all, heading east means that vacation time is waning. Work and routine await, drumming their fingers impatiently. Paying off the plasticized vacation expenses is another thing to look forward to.

Yup, eastering sucks. The next day-and-a-half would be a lonnnng grind.

There was a sign indicating that Carlsbad Caverns was 243 miles to the south. Was I really there just a week ago? Seemed more like a month.

At mile 295 on I-40E, I caught up with one of those bicycyle racers!! The race course was on an Interstate?? Whose dumb idea was that?? Safety issues aside, how goddamn SLOW do you feel on your bike, when traffic is zooming by, just six feet away, at 80 MPH?? It looked like the same woman I had seen near Jerome. I wondered how drunk her support team was by now.

My lofty goal had been to reach Texas before cashing it in for the night. Didn't happen. I made it past midnight, but called off the dogs at a rest area 40 miles shy of Tucumcari (#4 on the Little Feat tour), and 62 miles short of stupid Texas. There was no real deadline to meet anyway.

It had been a 600-mile day, with a canyon tour and a baseball game to spice it up. I hoped that Moby would be in a galloping mood tomorrow, because it was gonna be a Driving Day.