

# ROAD ROMP 2004

Day 5: Monday, 14 June 2004

## FOCK 2: Aliens Go Amber

Plan C, which tried to reconnect with the flow of the discarded Plan A, still had the route running from CCNP directly west to White Sands National Monument. Now, unless I wanted to go back into Texas, swing west to El Paso, and then northeast to WSNM (no thank you; enough Texas for now), the ride required a backtracking to Carlsbad, a 36-mile ride across the desert on Highway 285 to the town of Artesia, a left turn onto narrow Highway 82 for a 108-mile ride to the town of Alamogordo, with White Sands just beyond it.

That route seemed very reasonable to me. Time-wise, it made sense; I would get to WSNM in plenty of time to enjoy the last few hours of daylight.

But one thing tugged at me, and that was the town that sat a scant 40 miles north of Artesia: Roswell, the site of the alleged crash of the alleged alien spaceship back in the 1940's. I was ambivalent about that one, not knowing whether it would be fascinating, a totally bogus joke, or somewhere in between. It would mean more than an extra hour just in driving time, never mind and touron time I spent there, and I did **not** want to miss my shot at White Sands.

I had just about decided that, since I would probably never be in these here parts again, yes, I would do the extra 40 miles north (and the 40 extra miles back south that that would necessitate) to check it out, when I noticed on the Rand McNally that the highway that I would take west from Roswell (Highway 70), was green-dotted. Well, that sealed the deal. No green dots on that other highway, were there? No, sir, not a one.

Green Dots Rule The Ramack. Always have and always will.  
Roswell it would be!

So I set out from the CCNP visitor center, and made a quick stop in Whites City (below) to peek into a souvenir shop or two and look for a replacement for the stone I had lost. One of the two stones that I bought in Moab in '03 was missing and presumed lost. The Kokopelli stone was secure, but the stone with the engraved emblem of a hand with a spiral in the palm, indicating strength and healing, was gone. Don't really know why, but I was looking to replace it. Maybe there was some karma involved somehow.

Anyway, nothing even close was to be found in either store. But when I came out of the Apache Trading Post, I heard the sound of an engine running. I thought it was curious to leave your car running as you go in to browse; you have to be pretty damn attached to air conditioning if you won't even shut it off for a few minutes. I guess out here, in the middle of the desert, it wasn't very likely that some hoodlum would leap from the shadows, jump into the running car, and zoom off down the highway. Still, it seemed a tad bold to me.

I shook my head at the thought, as I stood there rummaging through my pockets for my keys. Then I noticed that the engine that was running was under Moby's hood, and my



keys were hanging neatly from his ignition. And, of course, / had been cautious enough to lock my doors.

Fortunately, I had two spare keys: one in my wallet, and one in my shoulder bag. This would be the perfect place to say "Unfortunately, both of those were in the van," but, fortunately, that was not the case. Whew.

I gave myself a little smack on the head for being so stupid, but countered it with a pat on the back for having had the spares on my person. It was a wash. Move on.

The bank thermometer in downtown Carlsbad read 109°, but it was a dry 109°.

The ride went quickly. I made sure of that. I didn't want any silly oh-hey-check-out-that-cactus stops to cost me a beautiful National Monument later on.

The town of Artesia was small, and clearly thrived on the large plant there: Wallace Buggy and Farm Machinery Parts. I surmised that Wallace had been around for quite some time, and I further surmised that the farm machinery parts made up the lion's share of the business of late. Didn't see any buggies bugging about.

Upon reaching the outer limits (pun very much intended) of Roswell, there was a billboard that struck me as odd. It read: *Cremation \$695, or Burial With Casket \$1395*. I don't know if I had ever seen an ad that quoted funeral prices. It made me wonder, too, if there were so many people dropping dead around here that the funeral homes had had to take their business promotion to another level. Hmm.

Another odd thing was that the billboard, like most of the others in the Roswell area, was beveled. Never seen that anywhere else that I can recall.

Right after that was a yellow, diamond-shaped road sign that stated plainly but puzzlingly, WATCH FOR WATER. It's a goddamn desert! There's no water 'round here, mate.



You can watch for it all you want. I'm not quite sure what I was being cautioned about. Were flash floods the concern? Or was I being told, if you see water, drink it!!

Anyway, Roswell was a kick. There was something amusement-parkish about it. There were no rides, but the air of an arcade pervaded that town: step right up and see some dumbass alien crap! Store facades and business signs – Not Of This World, Starchild, Crash Site Café, Earth Station, Alien Zone Cosmic Jukebox -- bore alien allusions, and even the streetlights had a certain extraterrestrial slant to them.

I didn't let myself get sucked into any of the stores; this was one place that I did not crave a meretricious souvenir of. Green alien dolls were everywhere, and T-shirts all bore that same kind of face and the same kind of spaceship.

Half of me wanted to view it as pathetic, but the other half had to give the town credit for capitalizing on the event. Without this UFO crash more than half a century ago, this town would be nothing. The UFO craze and the hype that the town has been careful to perpetuate have brought lots of money into the Roswell coffers.

I had to admit, if it were not for some curiosity



about the town that enthusiastically clung to the claim that it was a UFO crash site, there is no way in holy hell that I would have been here at all. I'm sure a million or more other travelers, facing a choice of which route to use through the void known as New Mexico, made the same choice for the exact same reason.



What else does Roswell have besides that Alien Appeal? Nada.

It's a cheap attraction, to be sure, but, actually, they do it pretty well. It's done on a wide scale, but it falls short of being overdone. It comes across as almost a parody of alien



fever. You have to ask yourself, are they serious with this shit? And you have to answer, *no, probably not*. So, I took it in the spirit it was given and did a quick on-foot tour.

It was a pleasant surprise that the official Roswell UFO Museum was free to the public. Can't lose that way, I figured, and ventured in. The event is presented pretty factually in most of the displays: who made what claim, actual or replica telegrams and police reports, marked maps,



sequence of event tables for 8 September 1947, and foonbag faha stuff.

There were plenty of other UFO/alien-related displays as well, showing everything from crop circles to Area 51 info to a giant Aztec carving of the god Quetzalcoatl, allegedly piloting a space vehicle of some kind.

I was told before I left that I "really should check out the mural in the library; it's striking." Wary of being struck, I stopped by anyway. It was not what I expected. Somehow, the word "mural" connotes something serious and revered. This looked more like the cover of a bad comic book. In fact, it made the whole library look like it was a Marvel Comics vault.





All in all, though, I was glad I did the Roswell detour. No Next Time on this one, though. Once was definitely enough. If I find myself in central New Mexico for some other reason, though, I'll probably stop in again for a grin.

I'm not laughing at the alleged incident. I would not be a bit surprised if it really



happened. Nor would I be surprised to find that the government was just hiding something else and let this silly UFO craze get out of hand. But the whole set-up makes me smirk. The people of Roswell must know that most passers-through (like me) arrive with raised-brow skepticism. They must know that there is a chuckle behind most gazes, and they, being almost six decades removed from the event themselves, have to be armed with a good-natured shrug and a wink that says, "hey, it brought you here, diddinit?"

My Roswell stay only lasted 35 minutes, because I had to make tracks to the southwest. It had been a worthwhile detour, but now there was need to be expeditious. Or so I thought. The next significant town, Ruidoso, was an hour-and-a-half away.

Scenic Highway 70 would eventually run up and through the Sacramento (!) Mountains, but it started out the same as 285 had been: sagebrush city, complete with dust devils dancing in the damn distance. After a few miles, though, the flatness gave way to a landscape of beehive-shaped hills. It was almost like someone had put a bunch of huge mannequin heads under an enormous blanket. But they offered no break from the sagebrush surface. Odd look.

The highway was undergoing an extensive facelift, and the 36 miles of its widening project – labeled a "safety corridor" on all the caution signs, whatever that means – was fascinating to watch. The project was working west to east, as I was. The very western end was just being completed: fresh asphalt, brand new lines, shiny new guardrails, the whole shebang. But as I proceeded east, it was like rewinding a construction video. Specialized teams worked their way along doing specialized jobs. The initial blasting, banging, and digging team had been working for months and was almost done with their 36-mile stint. The paving and painting crew had just begun and had a long way to go. In between, I was able to watch road construction, step-by-step, in reverse. It was as if a brand new four-lane highway was being dismantled and an old two-lane road was taking its place.

Moby's shifting problem had me nervous about the Sacramento (!) Mountains, but they turned out to be little more than tall, blunt hills.

The city of Ruidoso, which was perched high up in the hills and close to the tallest of the mountains – Sierra Blanca Mountain (12,003') -- was a **very** refreshing change. It is a center for hiking and biking vacations in summer, and skiing in winter.

As the elevation increased on the ride to Ruidoso, I could feel the



temperature change, and I watched the vegetation go from sagebrush to evergreen. The greenness of the town was quite pleasant after so many miles of desert. The town did not lie exactly on my route -- I had to turn off Highway 70 onto SR-48 to get to it -- but I deemed the short detour necessary for two reasons: gas, and Pub 48.

Along the ride through the "safety corridor" there had been two billboards advertising some "home made ales" and "micro-brewed beers" at Pub 48 in Ruidoso. That sounded really good. Really, really good. A nice, brewed-on-premises I.P.A. would hit the spot so hard that the spot would be able to do nothing but drop on the floor and wriggle. I craved that feeling. Mmmmm, I.P.Aaaaaaaa.

So, I pulled in the Chevron station on Route 48 to let Moby do some guzzling and went inside to use the restroom. The high school kid in the office pointed me the way to the head. I



did my business and exited into the face of another time machine experience: the kid had aged about 30 years! The hair, eyes, nose, posture, and body type were all the same, but he was a full-grown man. WTF is this shit? My stun lasted only a second, though, as the kid raised his head above the counter where he had been crouched. It was a father-son gas station, and this acorn did not fall far at all from the tree. It was uncanny.

When I asked how to get to Pub 48, the two of them did a tandem answer, with the kid

giving me the turns, and the dad recommending what to buy. It was a great show. I got a real boot out of it.

I followed the directions (basically, it was "stay on 48" -- duh, Pub 48) and arrived in short order. Pub 48 was a very cool place; I was immediately glad that I had come. It was more restaurant than bar, but there was plenty of room for me in the bar.

The ceiling was very high, and the interior was all wood. A chandelier made of antlers hung in the middle of the room. A half-dozen bar patrons -- all looking very regular -- filled up all the bar seats, so I cozied up to a tall table and chair, and perused the pub menu. I immediately began to chuckle at one item: Roswell Alien Amber Ale. Had to have it.



I ordered up some chicken tenders and an Alien Amber for supper (it was about 5:15 MDT), and did what I so often do: pull out the Notbook and start blinging. It was a comfortable place to eat, drink, and write, and I had a lot to write about. The Alien Amber arrived. I have to admit I was a tad wary, but it was yummy. So I had another. In fact, it was sooo yummy that I purchased a six-pack of Alien Amber and a half-gallon growler of Sierra Blanca Pale Ale to go. "Big Mountain, Bigger Beer" was the slogan printed on the growler.

The purchase had a further significance to it, since it was the first purchase of beer – other than in a bar – since I left Florida. The Publix back in Tallahassee happened to carry my two favorite brews from the good folks at Colorado's Flying Dog Brewery: Doggy Style Pale Ale and Tire Bite Golden Ale. I stocked up generously, fearing that I would face a grim beer scene across the south. My supply was beginning to dwindle, so the Sierra Blanca Brewery guaranteed prolonged enjoyment of quality, flavorful beer for, well, maybe an extra day.

There was still about an hour left in the ride to White Sands, so, with a tinge of regret, I tore myself away from the Pub 48 inertia and set off once again. It's very cool to find good pubs and such all over the country when I'm on my ramacks, but the down side of it is having to leave them so soon, and, in most cases, never return.