



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

# RICK'S ROADS

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



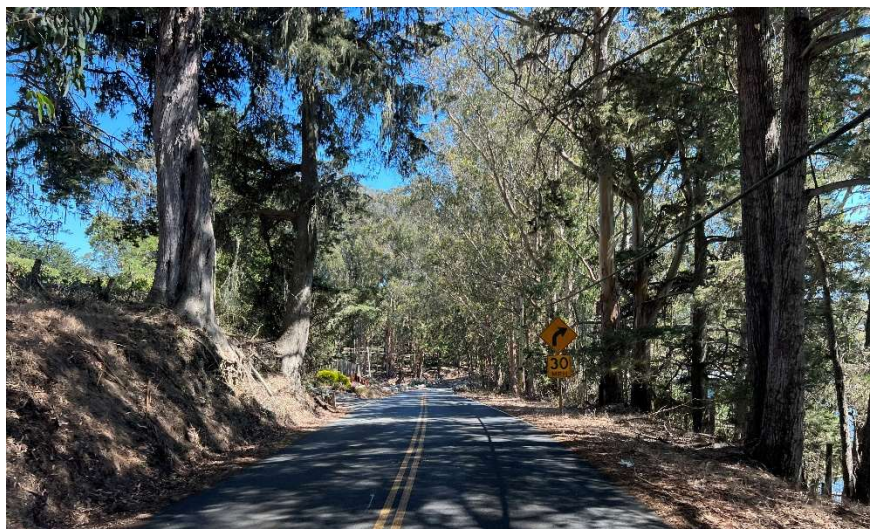
BLOG POST: 2022.09.04-06  
San Francisco, CA



When I left Lassen Volcanic National Park yesterday, my planned route went through Sacramento. After dropping from the warm highlands into the overheated valley, I quickly changed my plan. It was more than 100° in the State Capitol, and I did not need that.

I had spent a week in that city in 2000 (at the US Olympic Track & Field Trials), and I saw everything I needed to see. As a result, it was easy to question why I was going there now, and even easier to cross it off.

My SFTN (Site For The Night) was a



hotel in Santa Rosa, about 65 miles north of The City. It was not a bad parking lot, but not great. Certainly, it served its purpose. I was out by mid-morning.

The drive to here from there was enjoyable. The expeditious route would have taken about an hour, give or take. But I was not in a hurry, so I had GooGirl create an alternate route: heading west towards the coast, then riding CA-1 south past Point



Reyes National Seashore, right along the coast through Mount Tamalpais State Park, and around the perimeter of Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It took more than



two-and-a-half hours, but it was a million times more chill than US-101 would've been.

We popped out onto 101 a short way before the Golden Gate Bridge and met up with all that traffic that we had been so effectively dodging. It never really ground to a halt, though; it was just heavy. Friday evening on a holiday weekend, go figure.

It was closing in on 6:00. My target was The Presidio, which I knew from past visits, was just past the south end of the GGB. The last time I was here, I got some nice photos from the solitude of a deserted Baker Beach.

As soon as I took the exit, I knew things would be very different. The street was lined with parked cars as far as the eye could see. Down and down I drove, till I lucked out, seeing the tail lights illuminate as a car prepared to depart. It was a lengthy walk back to the head of the beach, but long at all to the tail end.



To my left, the cold Pacific water was crashing against the boulders where the sand beach ran out. To my right, there was a crowded beach.







I walked the length of the beach, clambered on the rocks for a while, and climbed up the tall “staircase” – two long, thick ropes with dozens and dozens of 6x6’s between them. I love cypress trees, and that grove atop the bluff was very cool indeed.

From that grove, I got some unique angles of the GGB.







I had no pre-arranged place to stay. Harvest Hosts are rarer than rare within the limits of a big city. Even inner-city hotels are tough; they tend to have parking garages rather than open lots, and even those few lots are almost always gated or guarded.

So, if I can do on-street parking, I will. When I road-tripped around Europe in 2017, I parked on-street almost every night. Even on the two nights I spent in a Rome hotel, I had to park my crazy-painted, rented campervan at the curb.

Galway, Glasgow, St. Andrew's (right next to the 18<sup>th</sup> green!), Dover, Amsterdam, Prague, Geneva, Innsbruck, Monaco, Versailles, and Calais – all just pulled over in a legal parking space and spent the night.

Signage is key, though. Anything that says "Overnight Parking

Prohibited" should not be ignored. If, however, the sign says that the meters must be fed between 8 AM and 9 PM, then what is unsaid is that those meters do not have to be fed overnight. Streets that people have homes on are good bets. Downtown business zones are not.

Here in San Fran, I had scouted out the map and decided that the blocks around the Drisco Hotel held promise. I never got there, though. The corner of Jackson and Cherry reeled me in.

I had driven by, had a look, thought, "Wait a tick, that dog will hunt", and turned about. This was a very nice neighborhood. Quite urban, but up in the hills near the Presidio. It was early – only about 10:00 -- but I wasn't clicking with SF tonight anyway, so I called off the jam and settled in for a quiet and undisturbed night.

The street got almost no traffic, and I was parked in a space that straddled the line between two homes, so if either resident saw me, they might logically assume I was a neighbor's guest. Nice.

Saturday, 2022.09.05  
San Francisco, CA – Day 2



If there was any of the famous San Francisco fog this morning, I slept right through it. My new neighborhood was quite peaceful indeed.

It was an unusual day in The City today, though. It was **hot**. Daytime temps were forecast to be in the upper 90's. This is insane for the city by the bay.

Mark Twain famously quipped, "The coldest winter I ever spent was the summer I spent in San Francisco." My own prior experiences tended to verify his assessment.

In 1984, on my very first coast-to-coast road trip, Richie





and I picked up Chico in Lodi, and headed west for San Francisco to visit Admiral Kevin, who was in the Navy and stationed in Oakland.

It was about 102° in Lodi and the valley that day, and we were dressed appropriately for travel in my non-AC van (i.e., shirtless and shorts). But as we drove up the east side of the mountains and headed for that tunnel that would pop us through into the Bay Area, Chico began to put on not just a shirt, but a light sweatshirt as well. To our protests and guffaws, he just replied, “You’ll see...It’s forty degrees colder on the other side of this tunnel.” He was right.

So, yeah, it was strangely hot, but it was also a clear day with high visibility. Perfect, I figured, for going to the top of Twin Peaks. I snapped a few photos of the city from up there but quickly ran out of stuff to do.

Then things got odd. I decided to drive to Monterey and beyond, maybe even do the full Pacific Coast Highway. The coast was veiled in thin fog, though, so it would not be a good photo day. Maybe tomorrow would be better. There was a little remote work I had to do on laptop, but I needed a not-hot place to pull over for some time and do it.

Finally, I found a small lot overlooking the ocean at Thornton Beach Vista, across from John Daly Boulevard. I got very lucky and claimed a spot just as someone pulled out. I ended up there till sundown. Not exactly how a day in SF would typically go.





There was a Safeway nearby, so I did a provision stop. I couldn't get much, though. My faithful reefer, Alpicool, was rapidly giving up the ghost, so I could not depend on having refrigeration.

Finding a replacement fridge was a breeze – both Amazon and Walmart had very similar units – but actually acquiring one was proving to be a nightmare. Amazon would take too long and there was nowhere I could pick it up. Walmart had none in any of its stores and would not ship it to a store for me to pick it up. Fuckers.

A Google search introduced me to Vevor.com. They had the exact same unit *for \$120 less!*

Ahhh, but how to get it? Fulfilling a plan that was a pretty solid in my head anyway, I booked a room in Monterrey, at the Sungazer Inn, and set up delivery of my new reefer there. Great. Or not.

Only after clicking “send” did I notice that spell-check had changed the address from “1046 Munras Avenue” to “1046. Unread Avenue.” WTF, spell check???

Multiple emailed messages proved to be of no avail, so after a lengthy online chat session, I would have to call FedEx as soon as I got the tracking number and try to reroute it or arrange for a pickup at their facility. Bah!!

Anyway, I drove back up to The City and back to Twin Peaks for the night view.

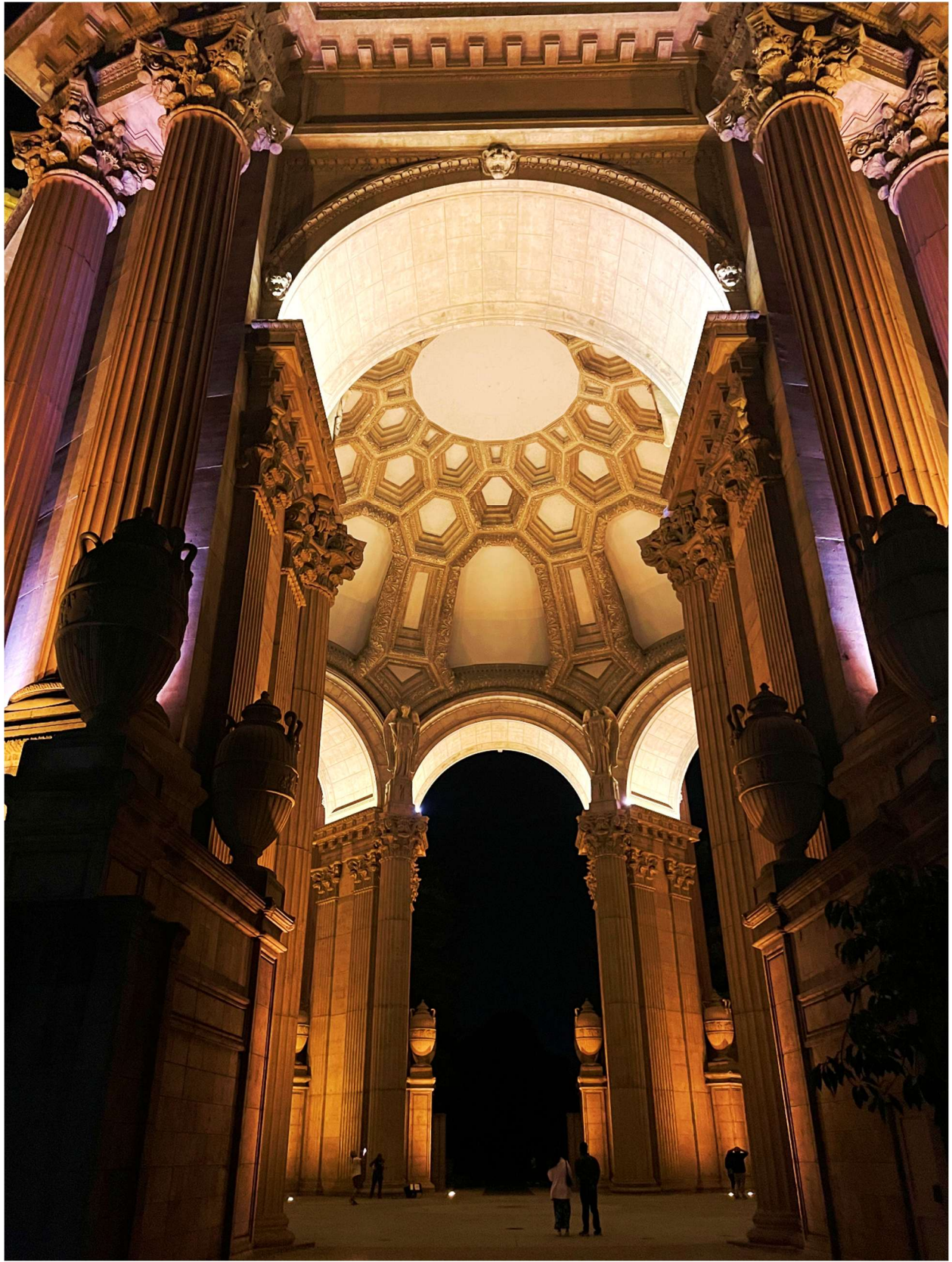


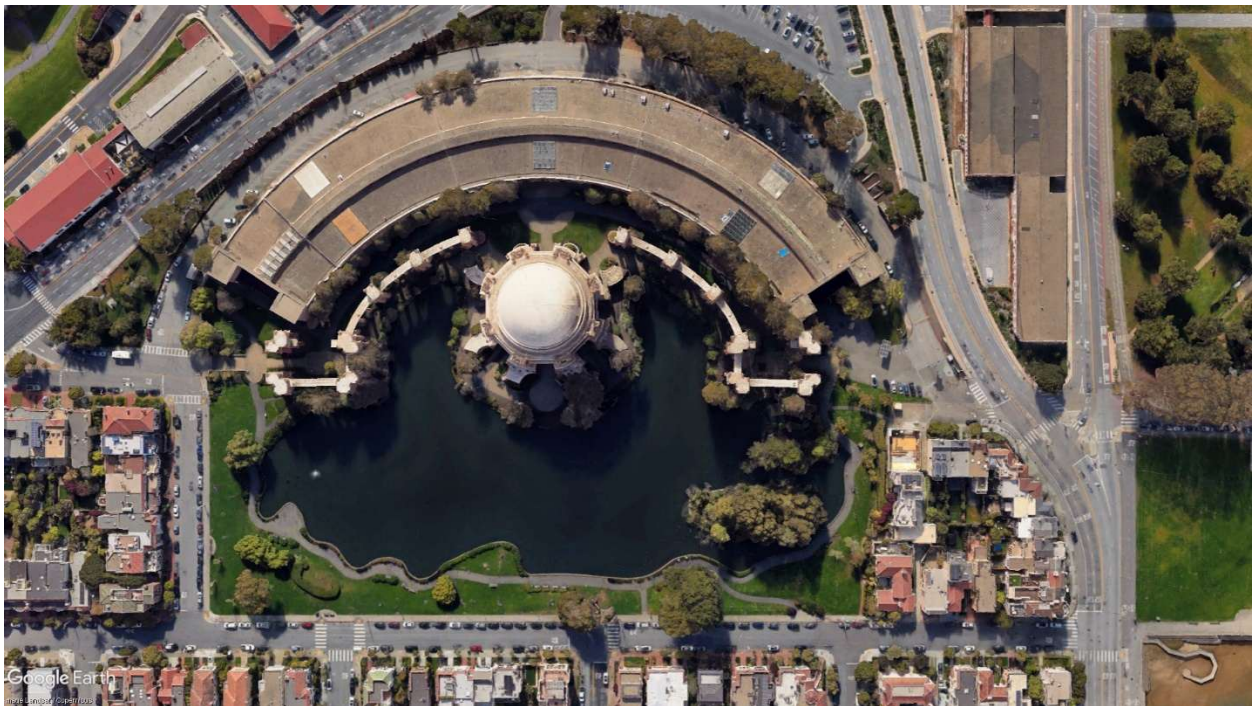
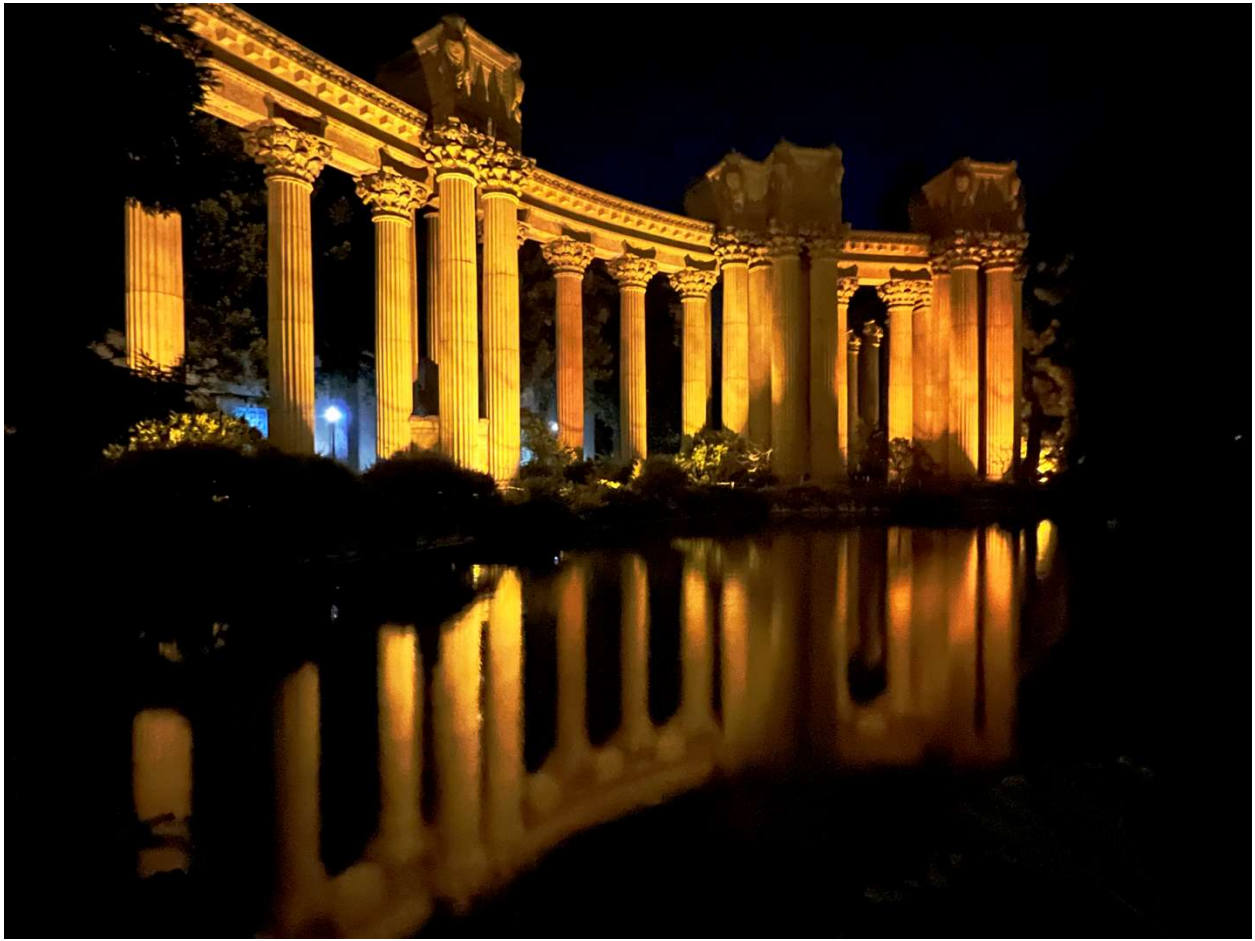
Since it was still warm and the breeze was great, I stayed up there for a good while. The parking lot was full, and there had to be about a hundred people there.

A Google page told me about some of the most photogenic places in San Fran. One, in particular, looked like it might be good for some nighttime photos. It was back up on the north side of the city, not far from where I slept last night.

The Palace of Fine Arts was its name. What a terrific place that is! Classical architecture like you read about.







It was after 11:00 when I parked at the street corner in the left corner of the Google Earth photo. That reflection across the lagoon was my first impression. And that is surrounded by lush lawns, which I walked around on. From whatever angle I aimed my camera, the photo was spectacular. This place blew me away! And the closer I walked to it, the more impressed I got.

The Palace of Fine Arts was built as one of ten palaces for the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exhibition – kind of like a World's Fair, but only for certain parts of the world, I guess. It was a temporary structure, made of wood and plaster, so it fell into ruin after a few dozen years (which is kind of ironic for architecture that was modeled after Greek and Roman ruins).

In 1964, the original palace was demolished, and a new concrete and steel-beam construction was finished in 1974. In 2010, the entire property was restored and seismically retrofitted.



The rotunda is 162 feet high, sitting atop eight wide columns. The colonnades that sweep out from it on either side are a total of 1100 feet long. The entire complex covers 17 acres.

Since it was quite late at night, there were very few people. It's well away from downtown and is flanked on two sides by residential neighborhoods, and on the other two sides by multi-lane, high-traffic roadways. Hence, it's not the kind of place that you walk by on the way to a restaurant or bar.

There were a few folks strolling about, though, and thoroughly digging it. There was a museum vibe in the air, with people speaking in hushed tones and walking slowly so they could soak in the sight of it all.



The best touch of all, however, was the violinist (lower left in the photo above). I doubt anyone had hired him to be here. I'd bet he is a local guy, possibly someone who makes at least part of his living as a musician, who came here to (a) practice, and (b) entertain. His violin case was left open and doubled as his tip jar. With this sparse crowd, I have to think that financial gain was not his prime goal for the night.

He stood on the far side of the rotunda, opposite the main entrance, at the base of a column, just left of center. Most of the lighting at ground level is from the glow of the illuminated dome. In-floor lights cast their beams upwards on the columns and colonnades. The ground level, then, is dimly lit, almost a firelight atmosphere.

And the violinist was standing there, just doing his thing, filling the place dome-to-floor with his music. Low, long, soulful tones. A slow melody that may have been from



a classical piece, or may be his own composition. A few people were sitting by the columns, just listening. The music was the only sound here. Very cool indeed.



I stayed for a good while, doing a slow saunter around the premises, seeking interesting photo angles and just exploring this incredible, mellow place.

It was after midnight when he stopped playing and packed up his things. That was my cue to move along also.

Once again, I was winging it for the night's accommodations. The neighborhood I slept in last night worked out well, and it was not far away.

Heading south tomorrow!

#### *Site for the Nite:*

Streetside on Jackson Street, in front of some swank piazza on the corner of Spruce Street. Flat enough, very quiet, even shaded in the morning. Only a block or so from last night's Jackson/Cherry, spot, but better for morning sun.