



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: 2022.09.14
Valley of Fire



Plan A for today had been: [a] get up early, [b] drive to Zion National Park, and [c] hike the Virgin River Narrows again. The last (and only) time that I did that last one was in Road Rage 2000.

But Plan A got shelved. I checked out Zion on NPS.gov and learned that The Narrows was closed due to flash flooding. Yeah, more of that. Less than a week before I got here, Nevada and Utah got soaked with rain, and the damage caused by the rushing water, torn up vegetation, and accumulated debris was taking a long time to fix.

So, I slept in. Nice consolation. Never been much of a morning person anyway.

It was about noon when I finally exited Las Vegas – after a short workout and long shower at one of the Planet Fitness locations there – aiming northeast on I-15. Southern Utah and Zion were still the goal, but the urgency had waned.

About 30 miles up the highway, an exit sign — a brown one, ooooh — caught my eye: Valley of Fire. Hmmmm.

Catchy name, yes? And it triggered some internet reference that I had filed away in the back of me brain for just such an occasion. I could not recall the images, but I did recall that I *liked* them. And with no reason to rush, VOF became the perfect diversion for the afternoon.

And quite the diversion it was! It's a State Park, not a part of the NPS system, so I had to fork over \$15 to gain entry, but it turned out to be so worth it! I mean, I dropped \$30 just to park at Mirage last night and what did I get out of that? (Well, a bunch of cool pics, and a secure, patrolled lot for sleeping in a city that I do not trust. So, that's not bad. I guess that was money well spent too.)

RoadLife has renewed my love of rocks. Florida has no rocks. Well, they do have some, of course, but the only cool ones are, like, jetty rocks. There are no climbing rocks. I guess that happens when the highest point in your state is 354 feet (on the Panhandle at the AL border). My love of evergreen forests has definitely been rekindled too, but that was not very relevant today.



The ride into VOF was a good preface: 12 miles through more of that NV Void. Then you plunge into a gray ravine, climb the other side, and - wham - get hit with the sight of vivid red rocks all around. Big ones, at that!

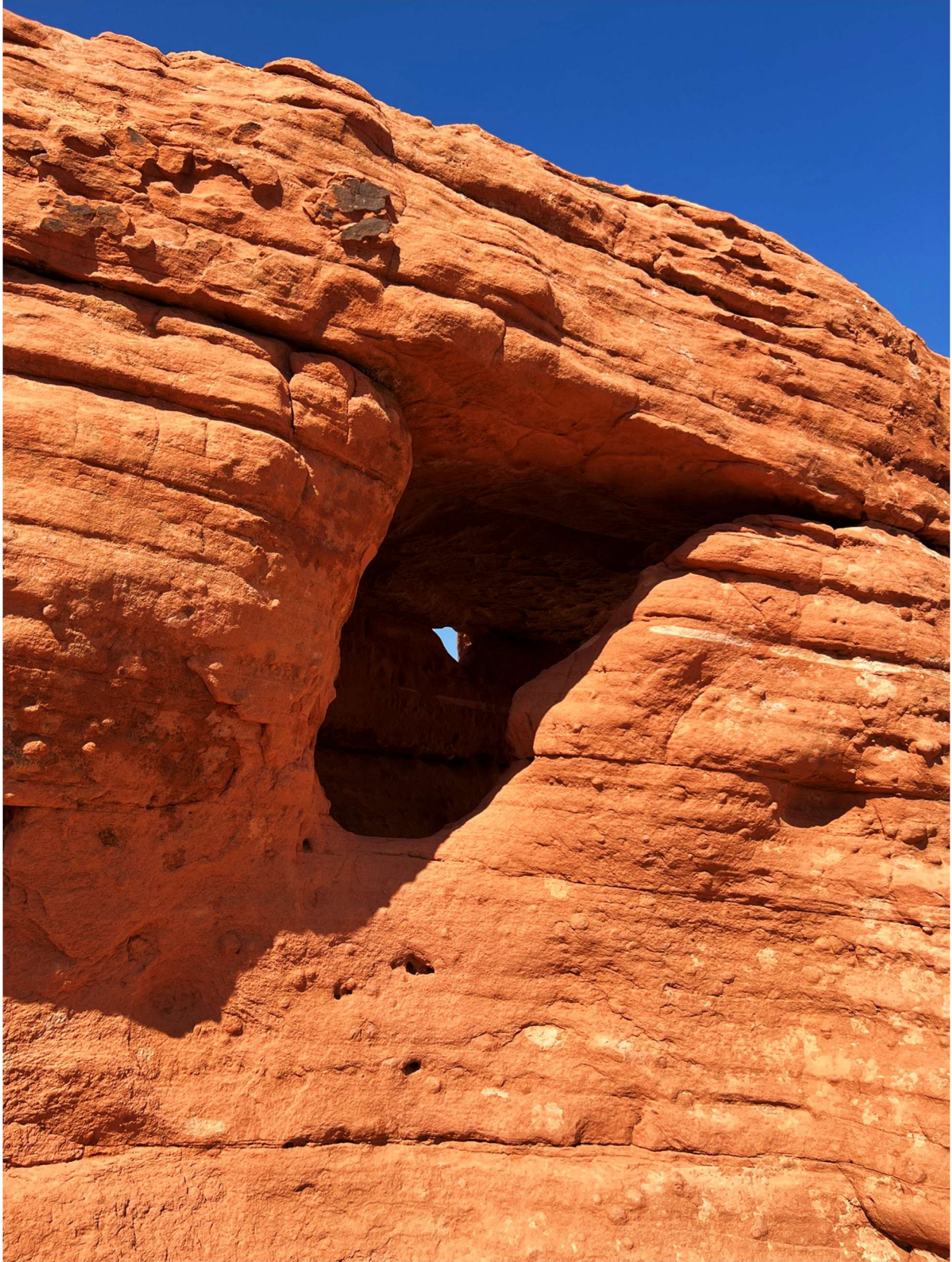
The very first turnout had me stoked, and I clicked and clambered for a good three hours as I did the Park from end to end. Sadly, the northern third of VOF was closed due to flood damage. Some very promising stuff up there too. I figure that just gives me a good reason to go back. =)









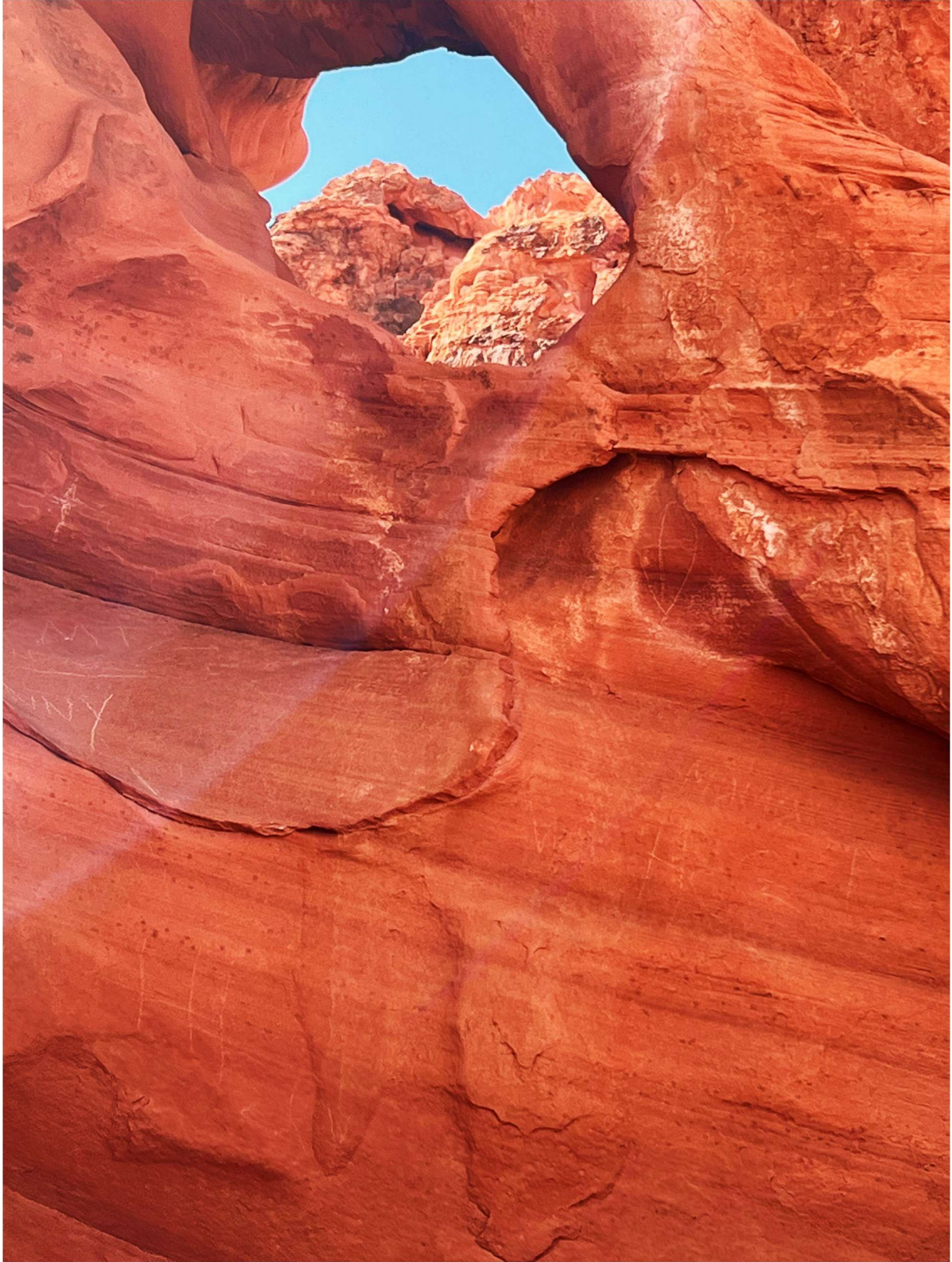




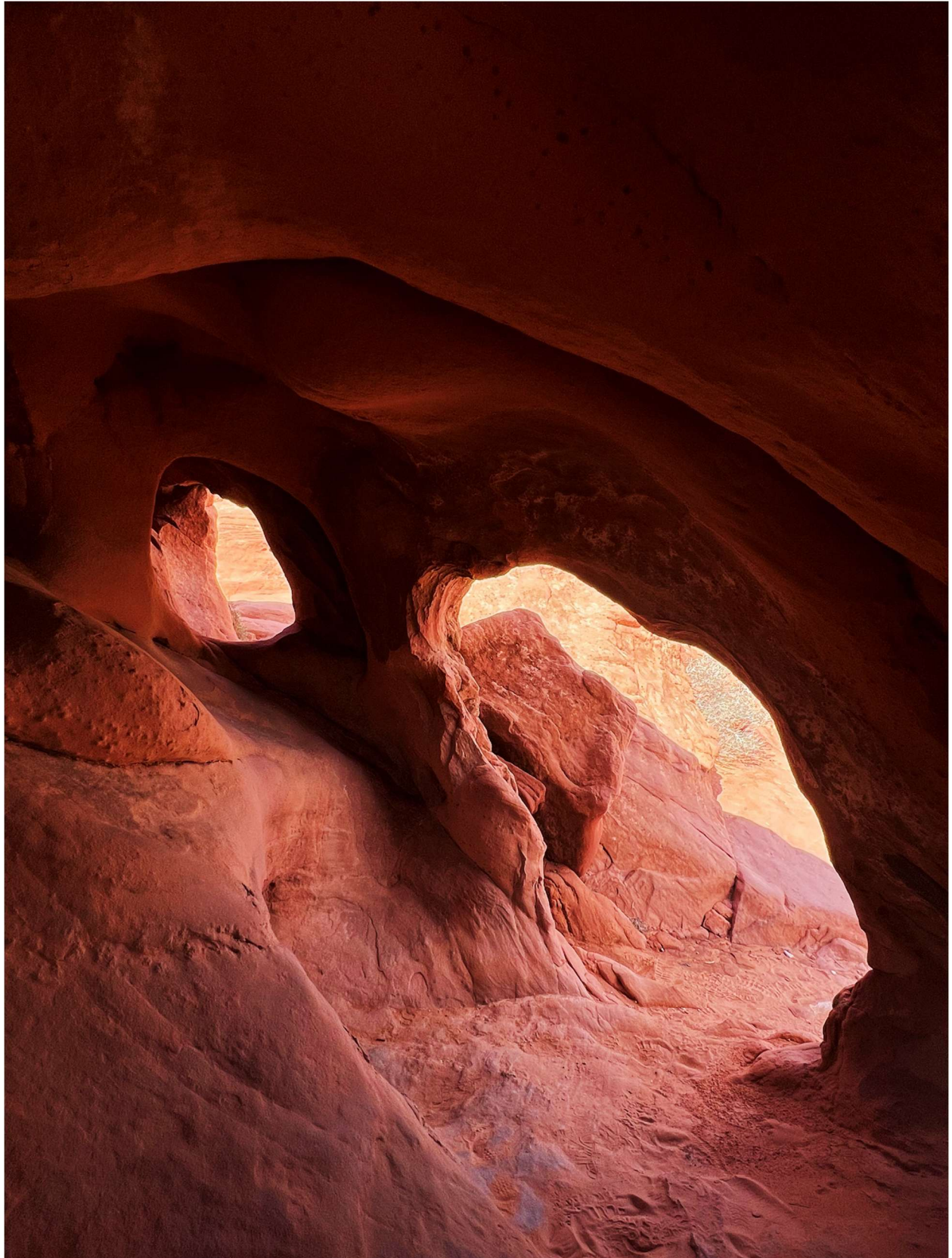
















What an unexpected bonus this place was! But it was **damn hot** here! The only shade was under an overhanging – and overheated – rock. But Valley of Fire Road, which is what they named the road that runs through Valley of Fire covers more than 20 miles, so driving is recommended (and AC is a good idea).

It was late afternoon when I departed VOF and resumed my eastering. I had a site reserved at the Watchman Campground in Zion NP, and I wanted to get there before darkness did.





From VOF to the eastern edge of Nevada, the ride was through wide open, flat, dry terrain. But when you get beyond Mesquite and finally nuzzle up to Arizona, things get fun.

Nominally designated *Veterans Memorial Highway*, I-15 immediately starts to climb up into dramatic, scraggly, tan mountains. The highway is carved through the Virgin River Gorge.

For 31 miles from the NV border to the UT border, this highway entertains! It winds, it climbs, it falls, it has bridges, the river, and when you go SW to NE, as I was doing, it just gets more and more scenically wowing.

The south section was built on top of old US-91 back in the mid-1960's, but it took almost another full decade to construct the northern half through previously roadless mountains. The Virgin River itself had to be rechanneled 12 times in what was the most expensive rural freeway in the country, at the price of approximately **\$10 million per mile in 1973**. [That would be about \$69 million **per mile** in 2022 dollars.].

It's easy to forget about it as you travel, but as soon as I get near it, my mind races in anticipation: *Oh yeahhh, I remember this road!!*





So, yes, another bonus!

And the scenery didn't exactly suck as we came into Utah. We passed through the town of St. George and angled for Zion. With brilliant late-day sun at my back, the landscape looked extra good.





The sky clouded over, though, muting the red hills and buttes. I easily found Watchman Campground – it is just inside the park gate, on the right – and quickly located Site A-14, just as the sun was setting.

There was a berm behind the site. I climbed it and saw the Virgin River gushing along. It was like white water rapids, except that it was brown. It was well above normal level. No wonder the NPS closed The Narrows. Things must have been pretty freaky in that skinny channel.

Within minutes, the clouds slipped away, and I got one final wink from the road gods before Sol called it a day.



