



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: 2022.09.15
Zion Chill Day



Zion was one of the first National Parks to institute a shuttle bus system. The narrow roads that led, especially, to The Narrows became woefully inadequate as the popularity of that attraction, and the park in general, grew.

Now, as a result, if you don't get a parking space at the Visitor Center early in the morning, you are likely going to be SOL. I know this because I did not and I was.

If I had a second night reserved, I could have left BM at my site, walked to the VC and



grabbed a shuttle bus up Zion Canyon Scenic Drive. I couldn't just walk over to the nearby shuttle stop, though, because I had to be out of Watchman Campground by 11 AM; I needed a place to park Blue Maxx.



I could've backtracked out of Zion, parked somewhere in Springdale, and got on a shuttle out there. But I guess I just wasn't feeling the whole shuttle vibe today. I was more in the mood to drive and be alone, than to be crowded onto a cattlecar and then to be jockeying for position on crowded hiking trails.

So, that's what I did. I gave a "next time" nod to ZCSD, and took a right turn onto Zion - Mount Carmel Highway.

This is quite a scenic road in its own right, switchbacking up the steep canyon slope to the Zion - Mount Carmel Tunnel.



I was seriously digging the views on the ride, and when I saw an empty turnout at a penultimate bend of the climb, I pulled in for an extended break.

The day was gorgeous and so was the view. Clear blue skies are great, but the right amount of clouds can add a lot to a landscape photo. And they are even better in a time lapse video. Check it out on the link below:

<https://rickmackenzie.smugmug.com/20220915-Zion-National-Park-UT/i-BNdLpB4/A>











The west end of the Zion – Mount Carmel Tunnel

The clouds, however, brought some shower activity, so I buttoned up BM the PM and moseyed on. It was time; I had been there for more than two hours, eating lunch, but mostly just gawking and gazing and pondering.



There are six 180° switchbacks during the 800-foot elevation gain from the canyon floor to the tunnel entrance. And the views upwards rivaled the vistas outward.

The ZMC Tunnel is a bit of a trip in itself. It was completed in 1930 after a three-year dig that cost close to \$2M. Cut right

through the rock of the canyon wall, it winds its narrow course for 1.1 miles from end to end.

There is no electric lighting, but there are a few wide windows cut into the tunnel wall to allow light and fresh air in, and to let exhaust air out.

In 1930, RV's and such were not really an issue, so the tunnel was not built with them in mind. The rounded ceiling does allow for tall vehicles to pass through, but they need both lanes to do so.



Hence, a Tunnel Permit must be purchased (\$15) for any vehicle over 11'4" in height or 7'10" in width. Rangers at each end coordinate the stoppage of all other traffic so the big beast can get through. It's a bit of an inconvenience for the rest of us – akin to a drawbridge delay – but the scenery is so nice that it's not as bad as it might be.

When you exit the tunnel, you have a few miles left in Zion NP. But UT-9 is a tremendous road too! Much of the same scenic design continues for miles and miles as you head east.









Eventually, UT-9 dropped out of the high ground and ran into US-89, a major road with Bryce Canyon NP to the north (left), and Grand Canyon NP to the south (right). Yes, there is a **lot** to love in this part of the country.

I went south. I'd be northering back through this intersection tomorrow, but I had someplace to go that was worthy of the 17-miles-each-way detour.

But even within that short ride, there was another worthwhile detour: Coral Pink Sands Dunes State Park.





Then, it was off to the town of Kanab for a highly-anticipated dinner at the Rocking V Café. I first discovered this place in 2004. The exterior décor led me to believe that I had found a cool, shabby bar where I could grab a quick burger and a cold beer or two. Upon entering, I immediately recognized that it was not the underbellyish establishment that I had sought. This was, as it says on the sign (which I did not see as I approached from the front), “Fine Dining” (cloth napkins and all).



But instead of being spooked by the higher propriety level, I was quickly drawn in by the friendly, casual, relaxing vibe of the full room. And the Three Cheese Lasagna that I ended up ordering was outstanding. So was the Fat Tire Full Suspension Ale.

Business was still good in 2022. I had a 30-minute wait for a table at 5:30 PM. Lasagna was not on the menu this time, so I ordered, "The Pub, a half-pound beef patty dusted with our garlic blend seasoning, char-grilled, then smothered in our house cheese sauce, topped with smoked bacon, crispy lettuce, tomato, and house burger



sauce on a toasted bun. Served with To Die for Potatoes or kettle chips. Don't forget the beer!" Just typing that makes me want to back for another one. It was goooooood.

And, yes, I finally got that burger-n-beer combo I was looking for 18 years earlier.

Upstairs is the Rafters Gallery, a roomful of local art: photos, paintings, rock art, small sculptures of eclectic design. Very cool.





16. Senneli: the flute playing fertility god





With dinner done, it was off to my chosen hotel. The lot looked a little iffy, so I killed the lights, shut the blackout curtains, played dead, and hoped I'd last there till morning.

Bryce Canyon NP and the vastness of Escalante National Monument tomorrow!