



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: 2022.09.18  
Hite, White, and Natural Bridges



Great sleep spot!  
What a view to wake up  
to (both pics). Gonna be  
a **good** day, Ray!

And what fantastic  
roads to spend the first  
half of the day on: UT-24,  
which blended into UT-  
95 at the crossroads  
called Hanksville. I've  
done these roads a few  
times. They do not get  
old.



UT-95 just might be #3 on the Rick's Favorite Roads List, behind the Pacific Coast Highway and the Natchez Trace Parkway. Maybe Colorado Riverway too.



It starts with a vast desert plain, then you find yourself sinking through 400-foot tall red rock cliffs and buttes, complete with sheered faces and desert varnish. Then it gets even better: Hite Overlook.





*Hite Overlook, facing northeast, towards UT-95 and beyond*



*Hite Overlook, facing east, along the Colorado River*

The first time I was here, a week into Roadrage 2000 (below), Hite Overlook actually overlooked a huge, blue, beautiful expanse of Lake Powell, in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area (GCNRA). I returned in 2003 to find all that blue gone, and looking very much like the photo taken today (above).

A prolonged and massive drought ravaged the lake. Two roadside spots, where I had pulled over and jumped into water well over my head, were dry as bone and over-grown with thirsty weeds. A cinder block rest room had already been built on a spot I had swum well above. It's a great vista now, but it's sad to think of what it once was.



I love the road from the Hite Overlook down to the river level. The builders probably would have preferred another solution, though.



The road swings way north around a desert plain, then curves back to the bridge over the river. It's hard to believe this is the same river that carved the Grand Canyon. It looks fairly tame here (and brown), though it did carve a good canyon here too.





The Colorado River bridge leads you past the side road to what remains of Hite, and up and out of the valley. Then - *blammo!* - the desert bursts open before you.





Just beyond its vanishing point (above), UT-95 bends south. The predominantly red landscape gives way to lighter hues: beige, tan, cream, sand – or, as the running shoe industry might call them – Conch Shell, Sand Dune, Impala’s Forehead, Coyote Scruff, Lamb’s Wool, Cow’s Udder, or Snail Snot.



Whatever the shade, it is whiter than everything you've just been in. And since the whole region follows a gorge carved through the whitish rock, it earned the name White Canyon. (Ok, that is pure speculation, but it makes sense. I'll be so disillusioned if I find out it was named after Wilhemena White, whoever she was.)



From the Hite sideroad, the ride on UT-95 through White Canyon covers about 45 miles, and at the end of that is quite a treat indeed: Natural Bridges National Monument.



*Sipapu Bridge, viewed from partway down the trail*

I did NBNM back in 2000, I think it was, and I basically ran through it to see all three bridges before sunset. This time there was no running. A lot of cautious steps on the downbound and a couple of pauses to suck wind on the ups.

Bridge View Drive is a nine-mile, one-way, loop road that you drive on to view the bridges (duh). There are three bridges: Sipapu, Kachina, and Owachomo. There are hiking trails that converge at some midpoint, as well as an “unmaintained” outer perimeter trail loop that connects all three.

For me, today, driving to each parking area and doing the short-to-medium hike to each bridge was just fine.

The first one, Sipapu, can be seen from a distant overlook – if you know where to look. From this vantage point, you think you are just looking at rocks because the bridge just blends in with the landscape around and behind it. Once you see it, though, you can't unsee it. The large photo on the previous page is a zoomed view from the trail.



*Sipapu Bridge, from the Bridge View overlook*

Sipapu has the most arduous of the three hikes. It includes some steep steel ladders that need to be descended cautiously. On a hot summer day, be prepared for a little extra heat; not much breeze gets down in these canyons.



*Sipapu Bridge, viewed from the west*



*Sipapu Bridge, from directly underneath*



*Sipapu Bridge, viewed from the back side – I love all those stripes!*



*Kachina Bridge, from partway down the trail*



*The muddy lower trail to Kachina Bridge*



*Kachina is a beefy bridge!*



*Kachina Bridge, back side*



*Tiny paw prints in the mud*

The hike to Kachina was not especially difficult. A good portion of it was wide-open, downward-sloping slickrock. The official NBMN brochure lists this as a “1-2 hour” hike, same as the Sipapu hike. I was Leisurely Leo at both -- walking without hurry and taking gobs of time snapping pics – and I was back up and out in under an hour each time. It’s always like that, though.

The easiest hike of all was the final one, to Owachomo Bridge, the oldest, longest and most photographed (so says the brochure) in NBMN. Listed as “20-60 minutes,” it is only a half-mile round-trip to get under the span and back.



This one did take the stated time, though, because I sat my weary butt down in the shade of the arch and just chilled ... for a long time. Being wowed by Utah scenery just zaps me, I guess. Ha.

To be fair, though, it was really hot out, and the cool shade felt so good. There was nobody else at this bridge, so I was digging the solitude and pondering the eons. I wondered how much longer this bridge would hold. That narrow neck of rock must be damn heavy, and this was almost a straight plank, rather than an arch that would give itself more support. I hoped it would last at least a few more minutes.



*Owachomo Bridge, the oldest of the three at NBNM*

There was enough daylight left to see some more Utah rocks, so I rallied myself and headed back to UT-95. For the next 45 minutes, the road itself continued to be a more-than-capable entertainer. For quite a while, the southern half of the monocline – that “wrinkle in the earth” that had spawned Capitol Reef NP – loomed ahead, trailing off out of sight to my right.



When you drive this road the first time, it eventually occurs to you, “Heyyyyy, how am I gonna get up and over *that?*” Then UT-95 swerves to the right and you start to climb up the side slope towards this curious gap in the enormous wall.





Not far after that, UT-95 ended at US-191. I turned left to head north to Moab.

US-191 is on my list of Favorite Roads as well, though I only seem to remember that when I am driving on it. My mind must be on Moab, or Arches, or Canyonlands, or the Riverway, or

Fisher Towers, or any combination of those wonders, and I forget about the road that brings me to them. Then I always find myself being surprised by the tremendous scenery that this hour-plus ride provides.



Church Rock, above, a roadside curiosity, is one such sight ... and one of the few I would get to see on this day, as the sun was setting fast.

An hour later, I was sitting at the bar in the Moab Brewery, having a delicious IPA and some fine chicken tenders, plipping the rough draft for this post...

