



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: 2022.09.19  
ANP in the AM



Ahhh, Arches. We native Bostonians kinda merge that into one word with a tiny pause in the first part: “Aaa-ahches.” Been here several times. The first visit was in 2000, when an Asian girl in a Georgetown bucket hat, whom I asked to take my photo standing under Delicate Arch, put her thumb over half the lens.

My camera was an early digital model with a flip-up screen and no view finder, so I could not review the images in bright sunlight if my life depended on it. I trusted that G-Girl and done it right, and I hiked back down to the parking lot. There, in Blue Man (my blue Chevy conversion van), I saw the blunder. This huge pink blob hovered over me like the sword of Damocles, and totally obscured the top half of DA. I was pissed. I had been wanting that pic for years. I had more places to get to, so re-hiking up there was not in the cards.

It took three years for me to find the time to return, and this time I asked a guy from Boston to snap it for me. He screwed it up (see pic, 2 pages hence). I had no tripod, and it was too far to dash down on a timer, so I did need a helper. I asked a woman who had just clicked the same shot of her daughter. The shot was all framed and zoomed. All she had to do was click it after I ran down and struck my pose.



*Delicate Arch, Utah, 2003*

Jackpot!

This is the one that the douchebag from Boston took. For some reason, unzoomed it, aimed low, got several people in it, and somehow thought this disaster was what I wanted. → → →

What a moron. Fortunately, this was a new DSLR camera with a better screen *and* the means to view your pics in the view finder, so I knew enough to seek more help. When I saw the woman snap what was basically a rehearsal for my shot, I knew I had a winner. She nailed it in one click.

This 2022 visit to Aaahches was not planned. Leaving Natural Bridges, I was leaning towards a visit to Canyonlands' Needles Area, the road to which was about halfway between NBNM and Moab.

That road – UT-211 – is also high on my Favorite Roads List (yeah, I do love cruising around Utah, howdyaknow?). To me, the road to get to the park outshines the park itself. But I was so eager to get back to Moab and out to Fisher Towers that I put C-NA on the “Later” List and bolted straight up here.

I was sitting at the bar at the Moab Brewery about 10:00, enjoying an IPA, when,



on a whim, I logged into Recreation.gov to see if any of those new Timed Entry Permits were available for today. To my surprise, there were, and *lots* of them. None could be had between 8 and noon but all other hours had dozens for the taking ... and \$2.

To my further surprise, I opted for the 7:00-8:00 AM time window. I will never be accused of being a





“morning person.” As much as I knew I would want to sleep in till 10:00 or so, the thought of a full park in the afternoon, with people crawling all over, under and around Delicate Arch terrified me. Getting up with the sun and bolting directly for that trailhead would be worth the early rise.



Delicate Arch looks better in the morning sun anyway, I reasoned. I could hit Double-O Arch trail after and then see what-was-what on the way out, probably around midday. From there, out to the Towers for some droning. Seemed like a sound plan.

I breached the gate before sunrise. The 13-mile ride through hills and flats, with huge rock formations on all sides was a tad spooky in civil dawn light (last three photos, above). As I hit the trail and began the 1.5-mile hike -- with a 538 feet gain in elevation - - the sun was coming on stage to begin another great Utah show.



I soon realized that my “looks better in the morning” reasoning was flawed. Come to think of it, I had never been here before noon. Oops.

Delicate Arch stands atop a ridge that drops dramatically (a cliff, basically) on one side, and slopes swiftly into a bowl on the other. But there is a ridge of less spectacular – though still very large – rocks that loom above the rim of that bowl. *And* they loom *between* the arch and the rising sun ... keeping the arch in shadow for quite a while.



It was still a cool place to hang for a while, but I certainly did not “beat the crowd” (flawed logic #2). The trail had been a steady stream of hikers, and the rim of the bowl had maybe 100 people spread around it. Many of them, I’m sure, were disappointed at the shaded arch’s lack of photo appeal, as I was.

I watched empathetically as one person after another walked to a position under the arch and posed while someone snapped a pic. Nothing frame-worthy was taking place. Background in bright sunlight, foreground in shade, you’re probably not much more than a silhouette.

In an hour or so, Delicate Arch would be awash in sunshine. But ANP was to be a morning activity, and there were other sights to see before departing at midday. And, you know, there was no way I was going to do better than that Third Try photo from bygone days on page 2, anyway, so I wasn’t all that miffed.

On the way out, though, I saw a couple of people in The Porthole. That’s what I call it, at least. Also in 2003, I had seen a woman standing in what looked to be a roundish hole in the rock wall. Then, I figured it was just a gap between two stumps.



But it is indeed a hole, and it takes a bit of a scramble up a steep, smooth rock face to get up into it. I waited till a couple slid down, got a couple of steps of a running start and bounded right up the face to the sill. Great view of Delicate Arch and the bowl!



The slope is real. DA does not sit on level ground. The horizon is true level in that photo.

Now, see that ridge beyond the one the arch sits on? The one with the sharp point just right of the photo's center? That's where I was headed next. That is the other Delicate Arch Viewpoint, and there is a Lower and an Upper. I would be going up beyond the Upper, though I did not know it yet.

After hiking back down, it was just about a mile drive to the viewpoint parking lot. The Lower Viewpoint is right there. You can park about 10 feet from the wall. The view you get is distant indeed, but it's also a pretty cool perspective. When you stand next to Delicate Arch it seems monstrous: heavy, solid, immovable. But from this far away, it does look kinda fragile.



*Delicate Arch, from the distant viewpoint*





*Delicate Arch, zoomed in, from the distant viewpoint*



*Delicate Arch, super-zoomed in, from the distant viewpoint*

Those 3 photos were all taken from the full distance with a Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ70. Professional photographers will scoff at that, if they even recognize it at all. It is intended to be an everyman's camera, but it has two extraordinary features.

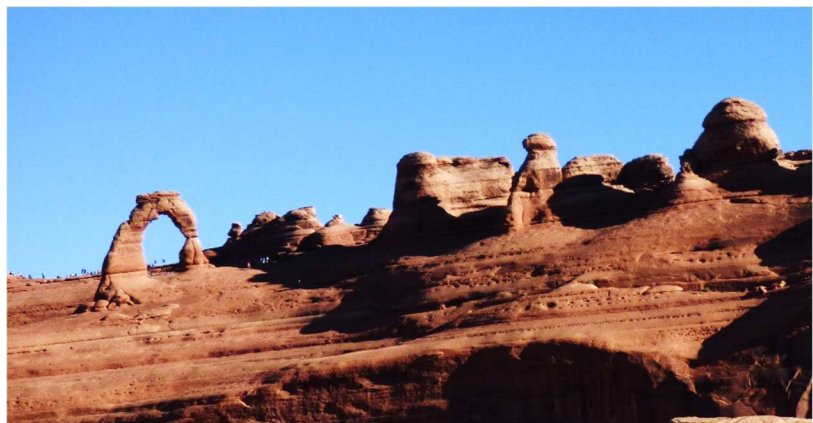
First, and of less importance, is battery life. One battery in my Lumix will last as long as 3, or maybe even 4 in my Sony a7. At an all-day track meet, I go through at least 3 Sony batteries, but my single Lumix battery still has 2 bars left out of 4.

Second – and this should embarrass the “elite brands” – it has a built-in (i.e., no extra lens attachment necessary) – **60X** zoom. Yes, SIXTY. The camera boasts a 20mm-1200mm range. And that is all *Optical* Zoom, actual glass-to-glass enlargement. But then the Digital Zoom kicks in, and it will zoom up to **100X**. Image quality is always compromised once you get into Digital Zoom, but if I can get pics like these, even at a somewhat lower quality, I'm all in:



There is no post-edit zooming going on there. Those are straight out of the Lumix. And keep in mind, the left-column images are already zoomed. I was standing more than **700 yards** (2100 feet, 0.4 *miles*) **away**. The zoomed-out shot looks like this → → → →

And these were hand-held shots, susceptible to any slight waverings my hands, wrists, arms or body would undergo. If you want TOP quality zooms, spend a



couple grand on one of those lenses as long as my arm. But if you want “good enough” shots like these, from a camera that fits in your bag, well, look into Lumix.

So, I was at the Upper Viewpoint when I took those pics, and I heard a woman say to her husband, “I think this is as far as we’re supposed to go. We don’t want to get in trouble.”

I was already in motion towards the short wall on the east end of the designated viewing area, and I felt like blurting out, “That depends on who is doing the supposing!” But I didn’t. Best to violate perceived limits discreetly, I have found, and, if necessary, feign ignorance later, if confronted.

That ridge to my right was just begging to be clambered upon. It was not even moderate clambering. I’ve been on sidewalks rougher than this stretch.

I walked a good 600 yards up the slope of that ridge, digging the shift in angles as I went.



Look how tiny Delicate Arch looks!

And the view in other direction was amazing as well. You can see part of the Lower Viewpoint Parking Lot in the photo at the top of the next page.



So, it was time to clamber down and move on to the next hike: Double-O Arch.

One surprise on the trail was Wheelchair Woman. She was about 25, I'd guess, slim body, medium-length blonde hair, and in a regulation wheelchair. Nothing tricked out like a racing chair or a special athletic chair of any kind. This was nursing-home-issue rolling furniture. And she was up on the trail that I was considering "moderate".

Now, I could see her being fooled by the flat, sidewalk-ish first 150 yards, but she was up several rises, and most were not easy, including quite a few stone steps! She had a very large man with her, who looked capable of carrying both her and her chair, though not "with ease" especially on steep uneven footing. He wasn't huge, but he was bigger than me. Now, like many physically-challenged people, she seemed to be taking the "if I CAN do it, then I WILL do it" approach, and he was all-in on it.

I passed by in the same downbound direction, at the top of a choppy decline, as they were sizing it up for descent. Her face was all about The Plan for how to take this on. He stood beside her, hands in his pockets, as if he intended to keep them there. Just as I was finishing the thought, "How the hell is she doing this??", he was saying to her, "Yeah, you can handle this one." His tone was factual, as if he wasn't even going to accompany her. I mean, shit, I was going to have to step carefully down that slope on my descent, and I have two working legs! WTF???

So, much respect to you, Wheel Woman. Much, *much*, **much** respect.

The ride to DOA was, of course, spectacular. Such bizarre rock formations! If you've never been here, you must have been somewhere else.





Even the rocks in the trailhead parking lot were impressive!

The lot was already 95% full, so I was lucky to get one of the final spaces. The hike would be two miles each way, with a good amount of chill-and-digg-it time at DOA itself, so a total of four hours seemed about right. In my memory, it seemed like it had been a pretty flat trail, so maybe closer to three.



Ya, good *job*, memory! This trail was a beast! Exposed, hot, dusty, and freaking precarious. There were three slickrock spines, barely three feet wide, across the humped tops of long boulders, with a sizable drop on either side. One of those was almost 100 yards long. Damn, I hated those. My fear of heights seems to be getting worse as my physical prowess wanes. Makes sense, yes?

DOA itself is pretty cool, but it's not a spectacle like DA is. For one thing, bushes and trees do their best to obscure your view of it, and for another, people are all over it, mugging for a camera, or doing some clambering, or resting under a shady overhang.

And, of course, since you're basically looking through a hole in the rock, you are seeing what is *behind* it. In DA's case, what is behind it is open air or very distant landscape. For DOA, it's more rocks, so the holes are not as pronounced or obvious.





*Double-O Arch*

Double-O Arch (DOA, in case you haven't figured that one out yet) is about 60-foot tall from ground level, spans a gap that is about 50 feet across, and is about 7-foot wide.

When I finally arrived there, during my first visit in 2000, a guy and two women, all in their early 20's, were up top at one end of that bridge. One woman boldly walked out and across it, the others did not follow. The first woman then calmly walked back.

I shrugged and walked between the half-dozen high school kids who were sitting and getting stoned in the smaller bottom hole – the lower O, as it were -- of DOA.

By the time I got through the arch and stretched out in the closest shade, the guy from up top had come down. We chatted briefly. I think he said his name was Brad, he was from Ohio, and it was his brand-new wife, Christine, still up on the top arch.

She seemed happy as a clam up there, and I commented on that to Brad. "She's a gymnast," he replied, "To her, it's just a big balance beam."

Taking the cue, I called up, "Christine, do a handstand!"

Brad was like, "Fuck you! Don't tell her that! She'll do it!"

Christine held out her index finger in that just-a-second signal, and Brad went, "Oh, nooooo, what's she going to do??"

She lifted one leg up, took hold of her ankle, and raised her straight leg up and behind her! She stood up there doing a that 1-leg whatever-you-call-it stand (might be called a "Needle"? → → → ), while her husband yelled "Christine, I'd like to stay married to you, will you please stop that."



I was too entertained to remember to snap her photo.

The other noteworthy part of that 2000 hike was the storm. That day was **hot**: mid-afternoon, easily 100° in this Utah desert, and dry as a rat's ass in a sawmill, maybe even drier.

As I started that 4.2-mile hike, there seemed to be no clouds in the sky. In all, I guess I was out there a few hours, including a couple of stop-sit-dig-scenery stops, and by the time I was halfway back, a dark cloud bank had rolled in from the southwest.

As I stood next to Navajo Arch, overlooking the Salt Valley, I could see the gray wall striding quickly my way. The view was striking, the wind was really blowing, and I was very psyched to get poured on.

Throughout the final mile, most people were scurrying to find cover as the first few drops fell. I had been shirtless all day, and a revoltingly slick coating of sweat, sunscreen, and sand covered me. I smelled bad. I scoffed at the cowardly shelter-seekers.



"Bring it on, clouds!" I bellowed as the downpour hit. I was like Lieutenant Dan on the mast of the Jenny, yelling at the hurricane. I stood on a large rock next to the main trail, stuck my arms straight out, and let the rain drench me. The drops were huge, and they splatted loudly as they slapped into me. I savored the chill sting of each one. In a minute, I was sopping wet and *chilled*. I felt crazy, but **so** refreshed. What a wake-up!!

The storm raged on, and I reveled in its powerful release. Then I remembered about... **hail**. Uh-ohhhhhh....

Fortunately, it didn't do that. *Hahahaha*. (I woulda been screwed.)



Fast forward back to 2022. On the hike back, I took the time to appreciate the longest arch in the park: Landscape Arch, the longest natural stone arch in the world. At 306-feet, it is twice as long as arches half its length,

In 1991, with only a few moments of cracking sounds as warning, a 60-foot-long, 180-ton slab of rock broke off the right end of the underside of the span. Some hikers had been resting in the shade under the arch, but they had the smarts to skedaddle as soon as those sounds began.

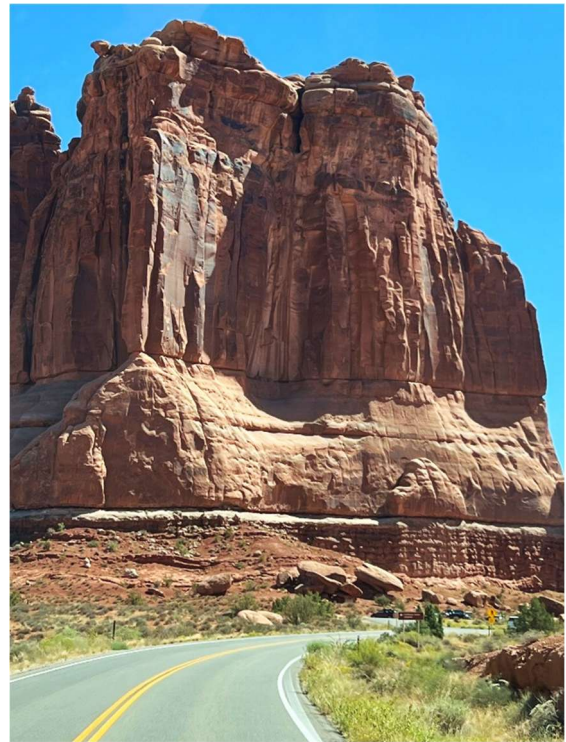
Landscape Arch has been off-limits to hikers ever since. Makes sense, yes?

Morning was now over, and it was time to head out. The ride out of the park was glorious in midday sunshine. As I neared the park's only gate, I stopped for one more attraction: Park Avenue. So named because the long, almost straight rows of rock shapes towering over a reasonably flat, avenue-wide trail area reminded early city-slicker visitors of their metropolitan boulevards.

I hiked this trail on one of my prior visits, but a stop-and-snap from the overlook was plenty for today.



*Park Avenue*





*Park Avenue*



On the way from there to the exit, I could see a long queue of vehicles waiting to wield their Timed Entry Permits and enter this magnificent park. US-191 is the darker stripe farther to the right, with the outskirts of Moab barely visible to the south (top of image).

I stopped at the Visitor Center to get the souvenir NPS map that I had neglected to get on the way in. There was a bronze ram outside. With my initials being RAM, and Blue Maxx being a RAM, it seemed like a good omen indeed. =)

