



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: 2022.09.20
Canyonlands Jeepin'



In 2006, when I first visited Island In The Sky (IITS), the northernmost of the three regions of Canyonlands National Park, I laid eyes on the thin beige line cutting across the floor of Shafer Canyon, waaaay down there, till it was out of sight waaayyy over there. From that moment on, I knew I **had** to drive that road.

After an amazing ride along the unpaved – and unrailed -- canyon rim, I found the upper access to the road. I stared down that tantalizing succession of switchbacks, trying to figure out if my vehicle could handle it. Then I saw a sign that basically said, “Don’t even think about it, Rick!” [The wording was different, but that was the gist.]

But Shafer Canyon Road, as that skinny dirt trace is called, had planted itself on my Bucket List. And when I got back home, I began to search for ways to do it.



CanyonlandsJeep.com caught my eye, and I was able to learn all about the area, the trails, the vehicles, and, most importantly, the price. Yikes! Not cheap. I wasn't *expecting* "cheap," but I also was not expecting to pay 10 days' worth of gas money for a single day rental.

Between 2006 and now, though, I had actually made a reservation *twice*. The first time, a job change nixed my planned road trip, but I was able to inform CJ in time to



avoid being charged. The second time, I resolved to do it and went and reserved it right after New Year's, only to have the pandemic lockdown cancel that trip. Bah.

But third time's a charm, even if it is 16 years later. Prices had not gone down. No, no, up a good bit, in fact. This joy ride was going to cost more than \$450 before the day was done – about equivalent to six fill-ups, good for close more than 2000 miles of ordinary driving on ordinary roads in my extraordinary Blue Maxx.

But that's a Bucket List item for ya. Hang the expense. Just get it crossed off.

I was assigned the Jeep named "Nacho" for its bright yellow color. It was big, and not very comfortable. The hood was huge – to the point where it interfered with my view of the road in front of me. Guess that's especially noticeable when you can't even see the hood on your daily vehicle.

Eager to get this underway, I saddled up Nacho and zoomed north out of Moab. I got to my turn, left pavement behind, and soon started curving and climbing.



I found out too late that Nacho's windows did not open. WTF is up with this!?! I could find no switch of any kind, nor any manual handle. Are you kidding me???



A last look back at US-191 towards Moab as I vanish into Canyonlands



Gooney Bird Rock (left) on the way to Gemini Bridges



I had AC and all, but this took away one of my prime photo techniques: holding my phone out the window and snapping on the move. Saves a ton of time, and I get lots of pix that I would miss otherwise. Bah.

The roads were pretty easy at first. But before I could scoff at the need for a Jeep, they changed. Parts were just across slickrock.

The roads were pretty easy at first. But

Within a few miles, though, I found what I was after, and there was a LOT of it!



What I did not fancy, though, were those clouds that were quickly striding my way.



The first designated attraction was Gemini Bridges, a pair of sub-surface arches carved side-by-side through the red sandstone under the thick, white, broken crust.



Then there was some fun zooming through soft sand roadbeds between high, grassy shoulders. If someone had been zooming the other direction, things would have gotten ugly, but I was very much alone out here.

It was Quest Time, though, so I turned onto the road that led into CNP-IITS and headed for Shafer Canyon Road. I wanted those switchbacks!



And they did not disappoint. I could not roar down them – not that it would have been a good idea anyway – because there were vehicles coming up. Most were Jeeps or offroad SUVs, but some jamoke was driving a Buick sedan, and it was looking like a miserable ordeal, especially for the overmatched car.

The road at that point was very broken and *deeply* rutted. Nacho was getting jostled pretty good. That dumbass Buick dude was gonna need serious alignment and suspension work when he got back to town. Probably a new muffler too. Dumbass.

Then, I reached the canyon floor and that thin dirt road stretched out in front of me. Sixteen years I had waited to do this. The clouds spread from horizon to horizon

now, and it looked like there were rain veils in distant places. Very little blue remained. But, hey, it was what it was. Enjoy it. Let's go, Nacho, take me to some cool sights!



Shafer Canyon Road, looking back up at the switchbacks



The Colorado River!



The Bar Stools (my name for them)





The three previous pictures are all from White Rim Road. This was the second part of the Bucket Listing. On my first visit out here, after seeing Shafer Canyon for the first time, I rallied westward as far as the park road would take me. That turned out to be the Green River Overlook. I was even more wowed by this view.



See how there's kind of a white rim around the collapsed part of the canyon floor? If you look closely, there is a thin trail that hugs the edge (not too closely) of it. That is White Rim Road (*aka* White Rim Trail). Nacho and I came in from the middle-left, bounced and jumbled and jounced around on that rumbly, rocky road, and then skedaddled off towards the upper right.

That was the second part of the Canyonlands-Roads-I-Gotta-Drive-On deal. And it was tremendous!

I knew I had to reverse course soon, though, if I wanted to bring Nacho back on time ... and avoid getting charged for a *second* day! My route looped back by the Colorado River, where I drove past Gooseneck Overlook and Thelma and Louise Point, where the two rebellious women drove off the cliff at the end of that movie (photo, next page) and trashed that awesome, iconic, turquoise T-Bird convertible.



Thelma and Louise Point, Colorado River



Gooseneck Overlook, Colorado River

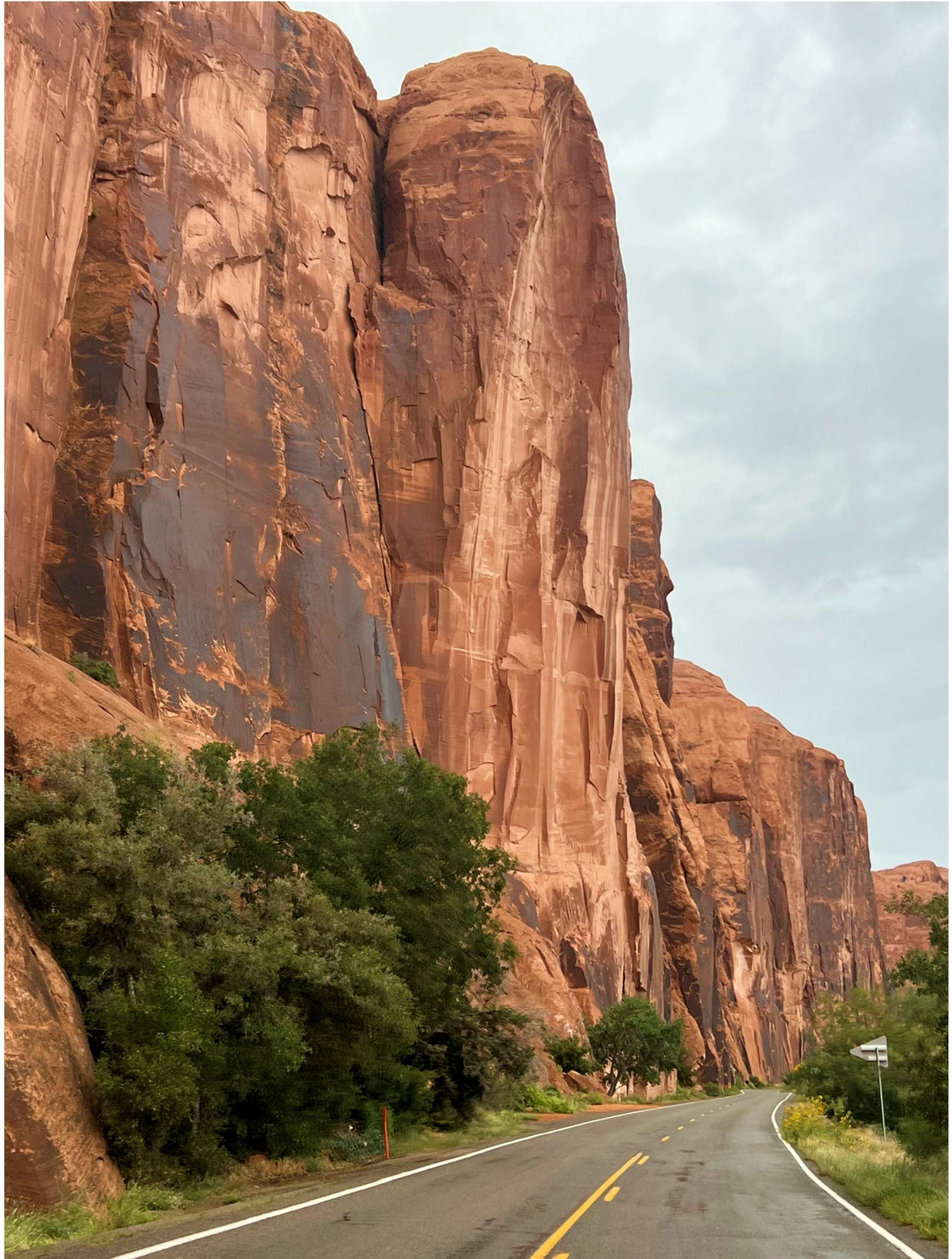




Long Canyon, narrow, soft road



Nacho fit through there, barely.



Several hours, and 130+ miles later, I was back on pavement and heading back to Moab. I was required to both fill up *and wash* Nacho before bringing him back home.

Not gonna lie, the rain sucked. It rains about three days a year in Moab, I think, so this was unlucky indeed. I still enjoyed the terrain, but the photos would have been so much more vivid and electrifying in sunlit splendor.

I'd love to give it another try, but, at those prices, there will be no Next Time.



Google Earth view of the White Rim Trail (green marker).

The Green River, which once filled that whole basin, is on the left.

The Green River Overlook, from where I snapped that photo in 2006, is in small print, by the purple marker in the upper right.