



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: 2022.09.24-25  
Eastering through Arizona



*“The Fifty-Mile View” looking east from Jerome, Arizona*

The big hike at the Big Hole was supposed to be the big finale to RoadMode22. There was only one thing planned for the long ride back Key West, and that was in North Carolina in two weeks. Yeah, NC is on the way to FL, right?

Anyway, it was all on the wing, and BM and I found some fun stuff on the way.

### **Oak Creek Canyon, 9/24**

Once south of I-10, I found AZ-89A, the road towards Sedona, the Gateway to Red Rocks Country. This popular tourist town was not my stated goal, but I had to drive right through it to get to my stated goal, so, with all this extra prime-time daylight to enjoy, I figured I'd explore it a little.

Wrong. Construction of the impressive switchback road that lowers you several hundred feet to the canyon floor had reduced the heavily-trafficked 89A down to one lane in many places. Normally about a five-minute ride, if that, it took about an hour to crawl-and-wait, crawl-and-wait all the way down. Cars were lined up as far as you could see.



At one point, aggravated with it all, I pulled into a large overlook and chilled out on the high views of the astoundingly green canyon. I never knew Arizona had this many trees. And this was Red Rocks Country??

There was a small field there, too, that was aglow with little yellow flowers. (Mighta been weeds, but they looked pretty.)

When I *finally* did get to Sedona, the town center was **choked** with traffic. I mean, like, the kind of choked where you sit through three changes of a traffic light because the douchebag in front of you can't make his left turn because that street is packed full of cars and nobody is moving there either.

My Mode quickly changed from Explore to Escape. It was like this, but not as extreme, last time I came through here. Cash registers were surely ringing everywhere. Maybe I'll come here sometime in their off season, if they have one.





I did get a look at some of the famous Sedona-area Red Rocks, but, really, after all that time in Utah, these were pretty tame.

As soon as a little gap opened in traffic, I zoomed through and made a bee line for...

### **Jerome AZ, 9/24**

A hugely successful copper mine in the 1800's created a boomtown up here in the high hills of Red Rock country. About a half-hour west of trendy Sedona, Jerome was all but dead before experiencing an unlikely revival as a sort of artist's mecca.

The town itself is a kick, with a dozen or so bars, at least that many art galleries, many of which are converted brothels and still display the same signage as in their heyday. It's a fun place. I had been here a couple of times before and had a good time each visit.

Jerome is known as "The Mile-High City with 50 Mile Views" (photo page 1). Sedona is down in that wide valley, with the Mogollon Plateau rising beyond it.

I was most eager to revisit the Jerome Palace. The view from their back porch is phenomenal, but I knew there would be no seats available. Still, the bar room had a good view through the large picture window, and I knew from experience that the burger would be grand.





I did not get the house special Haunted Hamburger; I knew from the last time that it had weird toppings. The Bacon Cheeseburger that I *did* get (medium, with fries) was outstanding. Well worth the ride and the traffic and all.

Daylight lingered and so did I, taking a stroll around the town, listening for the siren's call of "the right bar." I never did hear it, so I went back to Wicked City Saloon, which was right across from the Palace, and had a cold one there.

As I left there and headed back to Blue Maxx, it occurred to me for the first time that my heading would now be East. Course 090, Mr. Sulu, and make it snappy.

I'd lose two or three more hours of my life on the way – well,



giving back the ones I had gained by going west.

AZ and NM are big states. Of the 50, they rank 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, respectively. My next target was White Sands NP in the southwest corner of NM, and that looked to be almost seven hours away. I wasn't sure, though. I didn't know if that included the MST-to-MDT flip at the state line or not. I'd given up on southwestern time. I wouldn't be here that much longer anyway.

After leaving Jerome, I drove in the dark till I got to Tempe and found a suitable hotel there. I had tried to stay a few miles north, in Scottsdale, but that city was way too on guard against my ilk, flaunting guards or gates or other security measures at every hotel that I found. Way too nice for me, so I skedaddled down the road to Tempe.

The morning found me low on ambition, and in no hurry to jab my spurs into Blue Maxx's ribs. And I discovered that Tempe had a Planet Fitness! Two, actually, but one was good enough for me. It had been an official "while" since I'd last set foot in a gym: 11 days, in fact, with the only shower in that span happening in the hotel in Page. I was eager for another. And a nice HydroMassage. Ahhhhh...

Maxx and I didn't hit the road till 2-ish, so White Sands NP was wisely tabled till tomorrow. Thus it became another Driving Day.



There is not much to say about the ride. Eastern Arizona sure is empty. Another vast sage brush void that we graciously gave to the Native Americans.

And it was even emptier on the back roads. I took US-60 to US-70 all the way to New Mexico: more than 200 miles! I-10 was **closed!** WTF?? Must have had some bad damage from flash floods a couple weeks ago when the monsoons hit the area hard. Still, closing *that much* of an Interstate? Yikes.



It was closing in on sunset when I pulled Blue Maxx into our Site For The Nite: Hampton Inn & Suites, in Las Cruces, NM. It was 20 degrees cooler than last night, but going Full Stealth Mode means closing all the thick blackout curtains, and that keeps cool refreshing air out. Hence, it was another a blanketless night, under the gentle breezes of my quartet of USB-powered fans.