



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



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White Sands NP and western New Mexico



If you grew up in a northern state, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the photo above is a winter scene. Heaped banks line the roadway, the surface of the parking lot has been scraped down to a whitish base by plows, brilliant white hills are shining in the midday sunshine, and little kids happily sled down the small, hoary hills.

But you can stuff all that humbug up your runny nose, because it is all an illusion. This is White Sands National Park: 225 square miles of what was an ancient, land-locked sea, and is now an enormous dune field of bright white gypsum sand, warmed by the early-autumn sun.



Happily, with summer over, this was not a hot day. It was very breezy too, which is good, I guess. It was picking up steadily, though, and the gypsum was occasionally getting rowdy. This is, after all, why the roads need to be plowed regularly. The day was also kinda cloudy, which *can* be beneficial for photos, but they were not great



clouds. There were patches of scenic blue, but they were grudgingly giving way to the milky “white sky” look that is hated by photographers.



I parked Blue Maxx and took a walk for an hour out on the Alkali Flat Trail. It was so mellow out there out on those dunes and gypsum plains!

And, yes, these wide open, ever-shifting dunes have designated trails. Spots of paint, or even cairns, would be useless out here, so they use stakes. They stand about a meter tall and are just visible enough from decent distances, so you still feel like you're roaming aimlessly, without guide ropes.

I stayed out there for about an hour. In the distance, I could see a couple of other people walking about, but I think they were doing what I was doing: deliberately staying away from other people.



The walking as easy. Gypsum is neither very soft nor very firm. You don't sink way in to the point where climbing up is almost futile, but you do get the nice cushion underfoot as you walk. Across the tops of some dunes, where, I reckon, the wind has whisked away the fluffiest layer, my running shoes barely made an imprint.







As for the kiddies sledding, well, it didn't take much scrutiny to shatter the wintry illusion: they were in shorts, in t-shirts, and in slow motion. Gypsum does not have the same Slippery Quotient (I suppose "friction coefficient" is the better term) as snow, so the round, convex, plastic disks they were sitting on were, ummm, sluggish.



I moved Maxx to the Yucca Picnic Area for lunch. I pulled up as close as I could to one of those oddly-shaped metal shelters, thinking that I could somehow meld the ambience of the two into a unique lunchtime experience.

It didn't work. It was a tad warm in Maxx, but quite windy at the picnic table. And, here, that means wind-blown sand. So, I retreated back to Maxx, where I should have been all along.





With lunch consumed, and a full afternoon at my whim, I pondered the places I had previously visited in The Land of Enchantment (the state's official nickname).

And speaking of official state stuff, New Mexico has my favorite state flag, for a few reasons. It is simple, it is distinctively colored, and it is true to history. The Land of Enchantment truly honors its heritage with this banner.

It is a golden-yellow field with a red design on it. The design represents a sun with rays stretching out from it. That's not hard to figure, but it goes much deeper.

There are four groups of rays with four rays in each group -- an ancient sun symbol of a Native American people called the Zia, who believed that the Giver Of All Good gave them gifts in groups of four:

- the four directions (north, east, south and west),
- the four seasons (spring, summer, fall and winter),
- the day (sunrise, noon, evening and night), and
- Life itself (childhood, youth, middle years and old age).

In this sun symbol, all of these are bound by a circle of life and love, without a beginning or end.

Current civilization speaks far too little of The Giver Of All Good, doncha think?



So, I recalled prior visits. Ruidoso was a cool town up in the high hills of NW NM -- up near ski country, if you can believe it. And I really liked a bar called Pub 48 there. I even bought a to-go six-pack of Alien Amber Ale from that place almost two decades ago. The bar was whispering sweet nothings in my ear.

Roswell, though, not so much. One visit to that weird, alien-obsessed town was enough. I'm glad I went once, but, yeah, that was plenty.

Albuquerque, well, I had narrowly avoided traffic hell there twice, so I was not going to push my luck. If the city's Double-A baseball team, the Albuquerque Isotopes was in town, I might have considered it, though.

Ruidoso won, and I took the drive north into those lush green hills. Sadly, Pub 48 was no more. No real surprise, I guess; it had been 17 years. I knew exactly where to look; Pub 48 was right on NM-48, hence the name. But even the building it had been in was gone. An apartment building, I think, was there now.



But, just down the road, I found Downshift Hidden Tap, where I had a pizza and a Downshift Snowday New England Style IPA. \$18.88 including tip. Why not a nice round \$20.00? Service was eh-h. The IPA was tasty, but that name is way too long.

There was still another three hours of driving required to reach my next goal, Carlsbad, and about half of it would have to be in the dark.

So, OK, on the way out of town, I saw a dispensary, the St. Canato Dispensary, to be exact. It looked and acted like a classy place. I purchased a pack of ten 10mg

gummies (lemon-lime), and a 100mg, 10-segment candy bar (Key Lime flavor). The total, with taxes, was \$69.18. I figured I'd get 20 buzzes out of each of those, so I was paying barely more than a buck-and-a-half per buzz. *Damn* good deal!

But then I sampled. Since I was driving, I had no way to cut the gummy (just opening the packaging was a bitch), so I just bit the dang thang in half – gulp – and forgot about it.

Till about 40 minutes later, when I realized, *dayummm*, I am *s t o n e d*, I better adjust my focusing skills a bit. The drone of desert driving must have kept me content because as soon as I parked for the night and climbed in back, I realized how zonked I really was. Good stuff this Ruidoso candy! I was wasted, and I stayed that way right up till bedtime, a good six hours after my tiny snack.

So, moving forward, I figured that quartering (*maybe* thirding) each gummy or segment would be wise. That takes me down under a buck-a-buzz. How can you beat that? Kicks ass on needing five or more beers at \$7 per, right? Right.



