



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: 2023.06.13
Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada



Niagara Falls State Park in New York was the first tourist stop on the westering leg of Road Mode '22, but I stayed on the American side. In the 11-plus months since then, I found my passport, so I resolved to finish this quest by getting some pics of the Falls from the Canadian side, and for this, I needed to cross into Canada. This was the first time out of the USA since my 2017 Eurohopping adventure.

<https://rickmackenzie.smuqmug.com/Best-Of/>

This foray into the Great White North was to be very brief, though. The last of the day's sunshine was illuminating the top of American Falls as I crossed Rainbow Bridge on foot and left US soil behind. The bridge is 950 feet long and is 202 feet above the Niagara River. It opened in 1941. The water current under this bridge averages 26-30 miles per hour. The water depth is in excess of 175 feet (53m), which is pretty freaking deep for a river.



It is estimated that six billion (6,000,000,000) pounds of water cross under the Rainbow Bridge every minute.

The walkway is also quite wide – 20 feet at least – so it can accommodate a LOT of people. That must make for some long-ass lines at the Border Control desks sometimes, but tonight, I was the sole emigrant as I entered the glassed-walled room.

The thin, blonde, and uber-serious Customs Agent who (wo)manned the north side of the bridge took my passport, gave it a cursory glance, and asked me where I was going. I felt like saying with a sneer, “Cana-duhhh,” but figured that if joking with a TSA agent was a crime, then dumping on a government agent at an international border would probably get me deported from both countries.

So, instead, I responded factually, “Walking down to the far side of Horseshoe Falls, then back to the US.”

“Are you carrying any weapons?”

Again, wise ass responses raced across my mildly warped mind:

“Do my killer good looks count as weapons?”

“Just my rapier-like wit.”

“Deeply cutting sarcasm.”

“You’ll find out in, ohhh, about 20 minutes.”

“Carrying? Not technically ‘carrying’.”

“I could probably kill someone by bludgeoning him or her with my camera, or I could strangle someone with the strap of my shoulder bag.”

But, again, wary of repercussions and the delays they would surely cause, I chose the safe, “No.”



She pointed to the door and indicated I should go through it into Canada. That was it. Easy as pie. No need to provide my favorite color, the capital of Assyria, or the air speed velocity of laden or unladen swallows (neither African nor European).

It was a chilly June evening here in Ontario, just as it was across the river a few minutes before, but on this side, it was obvious that there would be another factor as I moved on down the walkway: spray.

What had looked like smoke from a raging fire as I drove up the scenic parkway to the state park was, in fact, the “mist” that the brave passengers on the Maid Of The Mist boatride

were immersing themselves in. But, whereas the wind had been from the north last year and simply dispersed a light cloud onto a small portion of the American side, tonight's wind was from just the right angle to swirl into the bowl of Horseshoe Falls and create almost a "mist tornado" that rose in a funnel up and out of the gorge, draping and drenching the walkway on its way onward.

The angle was such that the plume rose directly at – and surrounded – the Skylon Tower's observation deck. Anyone who ponied up \$16.50 to get the view from there most definitely did not get their money's worth.



The first half of the walk was nice. The view from this side gives a much better appreciation for the sentiment that led to the shutting off of the Falls in 1969 for removing some/most of the "rubble" from the most recent calving of the cliff. From this angle, you can see how dramatic that collapse actually was; the pile of boulders is nearly halfway up the waterfall itself.



Of course, it was decided that removing them would be a bad idea after all (which is why you can see them now, right?), so they just said, "never mind" and turned the water back on. And the American taxpayers footed the bill for it all.

But this visit was mostly about "the shoe": Horseshoe

Falls, the largest and most in-charge of the set. It is more than double the width of American Falls, but on a big curve, which concentrates it into a tighter area. AF is listed as 1060' wide. HF tapers in at 2600' if you measure along the rim. If you do a straight line from open ends of the arc, though, you get roughly 1000'.

You don't get much of a look at HF from New York; you have to come to this side to appreciate the full beauty of it.

Even that was difficult tonight, though, with the big mist plume. From either side, more than half the falls was obscured by the thick, rising spray. From head-on, though, forget it; you were just in a dense cloud of drizzle. Puddles a half-inch deep were common on the wide sidewalk, but, fortunately, there was room to walk around them.

I did underestimate the soaking coefficient of the spray, though. For some reason, I had anticipated a much finer mist that would touch down lightly on my sleeves and be whisked away

by the rush of wind. In retrospect, that was stupid. The mist touched down, settled in, and penetrated. By the time I reached the clear air on the south side of HF, I was officially Wet, right through my flimsy windbreaker, well into my long-sleeve polyester shirt, and onto my not-so-warm-anymore skin. Such a dumbass.

But the goal was to get some cool pics, and I was able to do that. They were still at quite an angle, but they showed the dramatic curve of HF and the steep plunge of the river. The short videos are even more compelling; they show the power of the flow and give the viewer the full roar of the water gushing and crashing downward.

I wanted nighttime photos as well, so I needed to wait out the dusky dusk and give the darkness time to roll on in. Fortunately, there is a Welcome Center right there, with the Table Rock Café, a gift/souvenir shop, rest rooms, and displays. Good place to idle away a half-hour or so. Also a good place to escape the cooling evening air. With the sun gone, the temperature had dropped to high-40's. Not frigid, for sure, but cold enough when wind-blown to make a wet dude right uncomfortable.

As the spotlights became more effective, I made my way back outside. I had seen photos of the falls lit up in white, so I was a bit surprised when they began to shift colors. AF and HF were illuminated in different tones and the rotated through the red-orange-yellow-green-blue-purple of the rainbow. Now, maybe they do this every night and I just never saw any mention of it, or maybe it was done for the month of June, which is Pride Month.



There was to be a fireworks display at 10:00, but by 9:20, my photo quest had been sated and my chilled factor had risen quite a bit. Forty more minutes, plus the length of the show itself, did not seem worth it. I pondered rushing back to Blue Maxx, changing and rushing back, but very easily talked myself out of that. It seemed like it would be a pretty cool sight, but, at this time, it just was singing loudly enough to me.

Now I have a reason to return, and I could be on the west side of Buffalo – and, hence, outside of any morning traffic crunch – and in bed by the time that hour played itself out.

But then I encountered a snag. There is a \$1 toll cross back over the Rainbow Bridge into the USA. [Of course, the US charges money; of course they do.] I knew this in advance and was not daunted by it. Bringing a handful of quarters was even something that I considered as I readied myself for the walk over here a couple hours before. Considering something and remembering to do that thing are not one in the same, sadly.

I was almost into Canada when the thought returned, but I shrugged it off, believing I had small denomination bills in my wallet anyway, and confident that there were change-making machine at the turnstiles. Believing something to be true and having that thing actually be true are not one in the same, sadly.

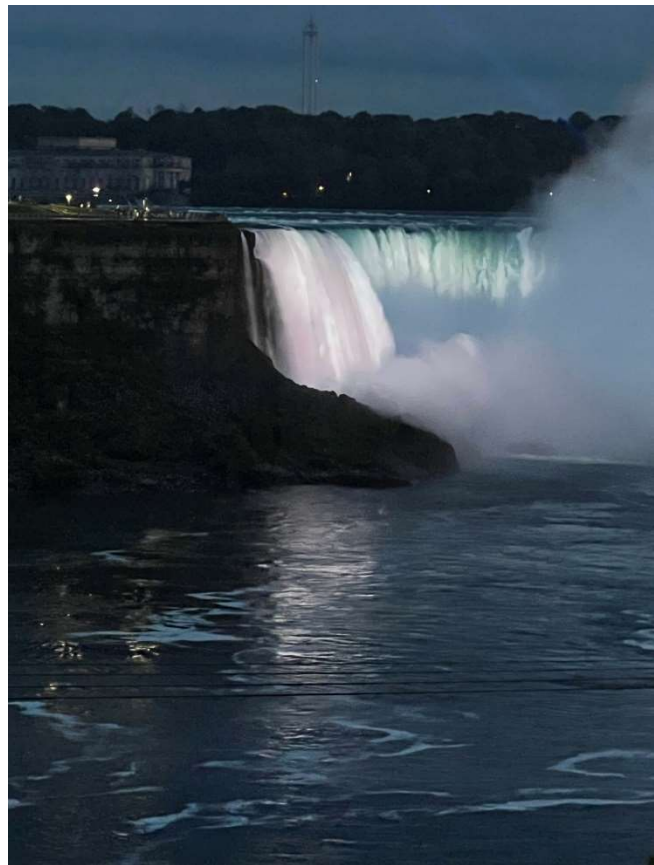
The change machines were there, but only took \$1 bills and \$5 bills. I had three crisp \$20's in my wallet, but those Alex's did me no good here. Stepping over the three-foot-high turnstile was an option, but I figured there was no way that would end well.

I was just about to trudge back down the stairs to try to find a store or café that would change a \$20 – into US currency, preferably (but doubtfully) – when an Asian family came into the room. The adults looked to be early-30s, the boy and girl seemed 8-ish.

Sheepishly, I asked if either of them had change for a \$20 bill. Both the dad and mom immediately pulled out wads of bills, both brightly-colored Canada currency and comparatively drab US notes. Dad started sifting through his stash to see if he could cover a change, but Mom right away plucked out an American single and gave it to me.

I was floored. I know it was only a buck, and, really, I might have done the same thing if the tables had been turned, but, still, I was blindsided by her gesture.

Thanking her profusely, I inserted the bill in the changer and got my coinage. At this point, I kind of paid here back, because I explained to them how it all worked. They were not going into the USA, as it turned out, only onto the bridge to watch the fireworks display. I told them that Uncle Sam still wanted their \$4, but they would not have to finish crossing the bridge; they could just come back into Canada, where they would have to show passports. I also suggested that they not tell the border agent that they had not fully crossed the bridge, as it might just cause confusion. I hope that was all correct.



I had a brief conversation with the border agent on the US side, who asked me what I was bringing back from Canada. I told him without humor, “Nothing that I hadn’t brought with me from here,” and hoped that would not sound flippant.

He seemed to like that reply, asked no further questions, and gestured towards the “Enter USA” door.



Check out the full photo gallery on Smugmug:
<https://rickmackenzie.smugmug.com/20230613-Niagara-Falls-Ontario/>