



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: 2023.08.19-27
Rock Springs, Wyoming



First of all, it's worth mentioning that this post has almost nothing to do with the city of Rock Springs. The only picture I took in a week in Rock Springs is that rainbow shot over Planet Fitness. But there is no place I stayed for a longer period of time in all of the 2023 summer than Rock Springs, Wyoming...

Traveling chews up money. Filling up the gas tank on a daily basis is not sustainable. Even if you have the financial means, driving 350-400 miles a day takes a toll. I've certainly done it. Most of the road-trips of my life were at that pace or more; they were always rushed to get to as many places as possible within a finite amount of vacation time. I could rest when I went back to work. Ha.

Road Mode '22 was well under that pace, thankfully, but the 24,000 miles in 150 days (a modest 160 per day, a fill-up about every two days) was well over budget. That was my “Release the Hounds” summer, though, where I eagerly returned to National Parks not visited in decades, and just as eagerly sought out fresh ones to add to my long-dormant list. Zeal fueled my tank as much as petrol did.

It was predetermined this year, however, that there would be a couple of “rest periods” — vacations from my vacation, if you will (and even if you won't). Once the first of the two Eugene track meets was done, and the weather forecast was way too red in the entire Pacific Time Zone, the time for such a break seemed at hand.

Seeking cooler climes at higher elevations, I headed for the mountains. Blue Maxx and I did Jackson Hole, Grand Tetons, and Yellowstone — which are detailed in other posts — and then rolled on south to the medium-sized city of Rock Springs.

I knew of this place because two of my cousins have lived here. I even visited them on one of my first cross-country treks, back in 1984. But I never explored it then, just arrived late-night, slept, took a morning shower and got the hell back onto I-70 towards Los Angeles.

And I did not explore it this time either. I hear that there is an historic downtown, which might well have proved interesting. But I never went anywhere near it.

I was here because there was a track meet in Hungary. Yup. That's really why. The World Championships of Track & Field were being held over a 6-day span in the beautiful city of Budapest (talk about a historic downtown!), it was being televised live each day, and I wanted to watch it, damn it.

Two problems with that. One, I don't have cable. Most VanLifers don't. And, two, while I do have streaming capabilities through my Verizon account, 2-3 hours of streaming video per day would eat up my data allowance really fast. I needed Wi-Fi, and lots of it.

To my rescue: Planet Fitness. The best thing I did before launching my retirement road life was to sign up for the Black Card Membership in this international company. For just \$25 a month, I get full use of any of the 2000+ locations, including fitness equipment (a full array of cable machines, free weights, and about 100 cardio machines at each gym), massage chairs, tanning beds, locker rooms, showers, member lounges ... *and Wi-Fi*. The company boasts a “No Judgment Zone” philosophy that extends over all of that. *“You're a Black Card Member? You want to hang out in the lounge for three hours a day for a full week and use our Wi-Fi? Have at it, my good man, and thank you for being here!”*

So that addressed that need. But I still had the other 21 hours to take care of. Well, a few of those each day were indeed taken up by the Planet's other resources -- i.e., gym, massage, shower – leaving not a real lot else to worry about. There was a

WalMart just a mile away that I could use to stock up on provisions, *and* to use as my campground. On my first day in town, I noticed a handful of campers on the outer edge of their lot, signaling that they did indeed allow overnight parking, so that neatly took care of my other remaining need.

By the second day, I had also figured out that, if I could get a close enough parking spot, I could tap into Wi-Fi from the parking lot. This rang true at both Planet Fitness *and* at WalMart. The PF signal was more erratic, though, so as the week wore on, I spent more online time in front of WM.

This PF location was open 24/7. A surprising number of them are. A true boon for the late-night workers. That has allowed me to park overnight in the lots of some of them, but the place has to have the right feel. If it seems as though the local law enforcement might loop their rounds through here, looking to roust vehicles that were “still here four hours later”, then I won’t stay. In some lots, it depends on how many trees there are. Blue Maxx looks damn near invisible given the right amount of dark shadows around, but he looks big and obvious sitting alone under a light pole.

PF-RS’ lot was the latter-- wide open with no cover -- so I never tried it (though I bet I would have been fine). With a legal WalMart just two minutes away, there was no need to risk the rousting.

Rock Springs sits at 6388’ above sea level. It was warm by day – mid-80’s mostly – and “blanket cool” at night (50s). Humidity was almost nil. But if it started to feel hot in BM, I went into Planet F and watched the track meet in there. Sometimes I brought the laptop in and edited and uploaded hundreds of photos, or I sat there in the big comfy couch plipping away at these blog posts. There were days when I went in for the meet from 11-2, went back in from 5-7 for my workout, and back in again for photo/writing tasks from 9-11 pm. I was totally at home.

I even brought in the solar generators a couple of times to top them off with PF’s shore power if they started getting low. Nobody minded. *Hey, he’s got a Black Card, damn it.*

So, that was my world. It was a stealth-camping, urban boondocker’s dream. In seven days, I logged a *total* of 14 miles. That’ll bring your trip average down in a big hurry.

I honestly felt a little sad when I pulled up anchor after the WC meet was fully over. Life had gotten really easy. I kind of had to shake myself back into Road Mode. That inertia stuff can be tough.

Funny thing is, I did pretty much the same thing a couple of weeks later in Klamath Falls, Oregon. They did not have a boondocker-friendly WalMart, but just a quarter-mile away from this Planet Fitness were a Holiday Inn Express and a Comfort Inn *that shared the same parking lot*. As a stealth-camper, you can’t beat that. Even if

either hotel works up the gumption to check the lot for non-guests – which is laughably unlikely – they can't do it because a vehicle might well belong to the neighboring hotel. So, it was perfect.

Plus, Klamath Falls has a golf course that is a Harvest Host member, so I had a free stay there one night as well.

I milked that life for five days and totaled 19 miles. And I spent almost no money at either of those cities. I never went out to eat or to any entertainment (other than a round of golf for just \$25). I bought some groceries (at WalMart, mostly) and had all my meals in Blue Maxx.

You can do the VanLife pretty cheaply if you put your mind to it....

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