



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: 2024.06.03-05  
Southern Maine



Blue Maxx and I rolled southwest with a profound sense of relief. The more I had dwelt on the mechanical, meteorological, financial and legal aspects of the coming CMPT week, the more the screws of anxiety tightened. Now that it was all nixed, I faced the upcoming days with a delightful lack of urgency.

The weather in this direction was sunny and warm. My Canik 9mm was safely legally stored. However, the other two worrisome aspects were linked, and still loomed to some degree.

Spurning Canada would save me \$800 USD in gas expense, but I was likely facing a higher number than that at the repair shop. It's necessary, though. I gotta keep Maxx in good shape. When you lay out your budget for VanLife, you have to have



Vehicle Maintenance at the top of your priority list. All else is secondary. Pay for your van, then take care of everything else out of what is left.

So, I was OK with that. With luck, my \$800 gas savings might even cover the vibration eradication job. And, if my bro was fine with me hanging out at his abode for a week or two or three, my fuel expense for the month would be small indeed.

But I had a couple of days of easy driving first. I could easily make it in one day, but I could see more coolo stuff in two.

### **Penobscot Narrows Bridge (LBV)**

Yes, we have seen this bridge before, you are correct. And, somehow, it did not even occur to me that it was on today's route. But, boom, there it was.

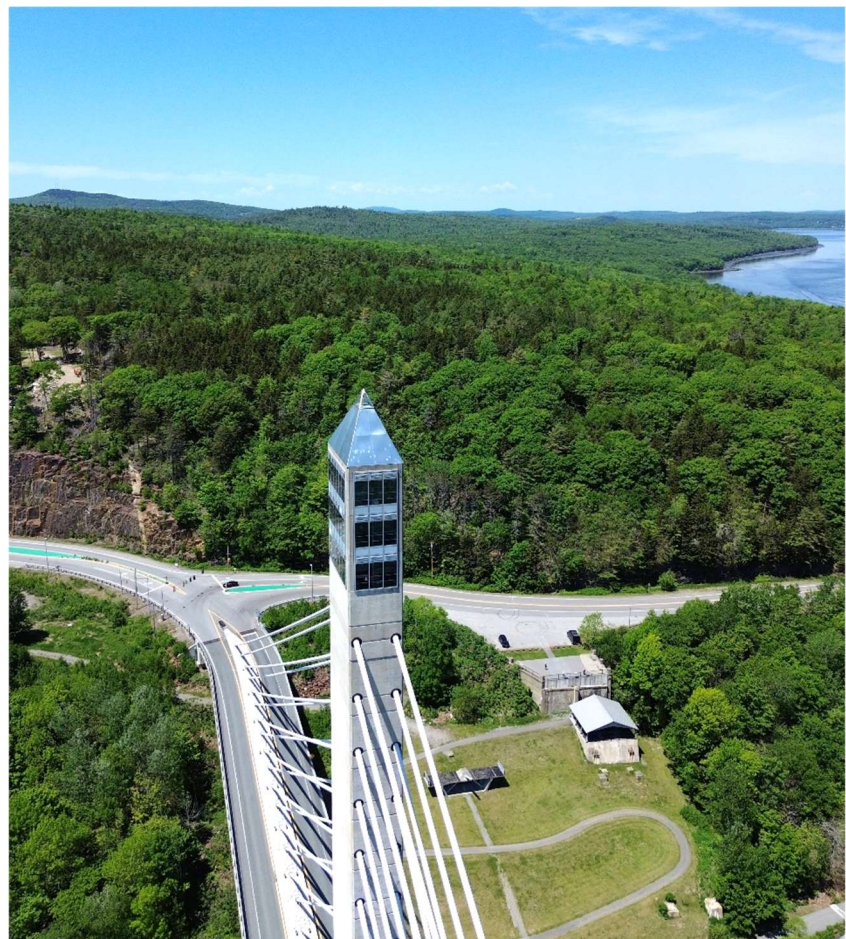
I was instantly psyched. Little Bird was involved in last week's crossing, and his still pics were great. But once I had moved on, I wondered why the hell I did not take a damn video?

Whaddyaknow, I got another chance and all the time in the world to fly high and make me a movie.

Once across the bridge I turned right and pulled into a convenient lot. (You can see Blue Maxx in the photo; he's the vehicle on the right.)

I was pretty sure I was in a legal take-off zone. The area just to my north (to the right of the photo) was Fort Knox

State Historic Park, which was likely a No Drone Zone. But, as you know from previous posts, it's all about where you operate the drone from. The small lot I was in may have been on State Park property, but the easement of the road almost certainly would be public. Thus, I stood on and launched from the shoulder of the road.



I did a slow rise straight up, gradually revealing the tall eastern tower. Great shot, with thick green forests flanking the Penobscot River as it flowed off southward towards the ocean. Niiiiice.



As I rotated Little Bird, I saw just how close – and how photogenic – the nearby fort looked. So, I cruised him down the river and did a discreet altitude aerial tour. With a cruising altitude of 400 feet, and being less than a square foot in area, Little Bird is all but invisible from the ground. If you are piloting him, and you know where he is, you can spot him, but if you don't know he's there, you won't know he's there.

To me, it is not about espionage. I ain't out to spy on anybody. The quest is photographic. I have always loved aerial views. I have to have a window seat on any airplane. I have to go to the observation decks of skyscrapers. When I finally found a drone of good enough quality, at a low enough price, I jumped at it. I have not once regretted the buy.

As with any demographic, the drone community has some bad apples with nefarious intent among us. But I am not one. I just want pretty pictures.





Fort Knox was built in 1844-69, and is made entirely of granite. It never saw any combat action in the Civil War, which should not be surprising, but it was a valuable training site for Union soldiers.

This is NOT the country's gold repository; that Fort Knox is in Kentucky. This Fort Knox is open for tours, with almost all areas available to visitors. It also serves as the access point for the observation tower.

I did not opt for the ground-level tour. Little Bird was being my tour guide.

After a few minutes of recording, I brought the bird back. There was a break in traffic, so I flew him high over the bridge and brought him back towards the tower.

No window washers were in sight today. ;]

Check out the video on Little Bird's site: <http://www.LittleBirdVideo.com>



## Norumbega Castle

OK, I never knew this place existed. I barely knew that the town of Camden, where it is located, existed.

Get a load of the self-description on their web site:

*A historic boutique hotel in Camden Maine, said to be the most beautiful place on earth. Come find us where the mountains meet the sea—where the striking beauty of the outdoors meet luxurious comfort of the indoors. Come stay at The Norumbega.*



“The most beautiful place on earth”?? I know beauty is totally subjective, but come on now. Camden is quite nice, don’t get me wrong. I was impressed by it on my drive-through. But it sits waaayyyy down my personal list of Beautiful Places (think: Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Tetons, Grand Canyon, Glacier, etc., etc.).

Whoever composed that blurb should have put that phrase in quotes because, apparently, it was a statement made by the man who had Norumbega built, one John Barker Stearns, making reference to Camden and Penobscot Bay.

The castle was built in 1887 and served as a private home for almost a century. It was turned into an inn in 1984, but very recently (2022) a NY architect bought it and did some key renovations to it, with a lot of top shelf amenities added, and now it is an ultra-swank guesthouse.

I knew nothing about any of that, of course. I didn’t learn most of it until right now, to be honest. I just saw this amazing big house on my left as I drove towards Camden and thought, I gotta go back and have a look at that place.





I thought it was a private home -- which was not far from wrong -- and decided against pulling into the driveway. I parked across the street, about 100 yards down where the curb widened out, and walked back.

Even when I was on the grounds, I was not sure what to make of it. There was no signage indicating guesthouse or hotel or whore house or whatever. The only sign that I could see said *Norumbega*, and I had no clue what that meant. To the native Algonquins, the word meant something like “quiet stretch of water,” but this fancy edifice did not look like one of those.

The name does appear on early maps – I mean, like, *really* early, like 1530 – marking a legendary place where “the houses had pillars of gold and the inhabitants carried quarts of pearls on their heads.” Ask Wikipedia what that-all means. I’m just passing it along.







I thought that Norumbega was some Central American military leader, or drug lord, or maybe both. That sign out front could have been a gaudy mailbox label.

No, wait. That was Noriega, that Panamanian dude with the hat. OK, so the mailbox idea was flawed. (The “No Vacancy” sign hanging under it should have tipped me off about that anyway.)

After walking around a bit, I approached what looked like the front door, but I did not go in. I still wasn’t sure if I’d be walking into someone’s home. The “No Vacancy” sign didn’t catch my eye till I was leaving the property and heading back to Maxx.

## **Portland**

In his 2010 New England Brew Pub Tour, my good buddy (some would say “alter ego”) Hops MacBarley explored quite a bit of Maine’s largest city (68,408). The thirsty vagabond hopped five bars within the limits of Portland and South Portland, and gave the city high marks for character and, of course, hospitality.

But I was not here, now, for a barhopping spree; it would have been fun, but it was *not* in the budget.

I was here for the Sea Dogs. Yup, the Portland Sea Dogs minor league baseball team, the AA affiliate of the Boston Red Sox. They were in town for a few days, and I was going to take in a game.

Minor league baseball is awesome. The atmosphere there is so different than at an MLB game. It all seems so, um, well, minor league. The park is smaller, the ticket prices are less, and the crowd does not live and die with the home team. It's just a night out, in the fresh air, often with your young kids, under sunset glow or stadium lights, with a bunch of yay's and ooh's and funny crap being done by the mascot or PA, and oodles of refreshments.

And the best of those refreshments was the Sea Dog Biscuit. I had been told of this beforehand. By my barber. Well, she wasn't *my* barber in the sense of being the one I always go to, but she was the one cutting things off my head today.

Her name was Shelby, and she's the owner of the Good Life Barbershop on Broadway in SoPo (South Portland). A young, fit, and attractive woman, she was alone in her shop when I walked in as a walk-in at 11:30. She greeted me, immediately warned me that she had an 11:30 scheduled, and invited me to have a seat and wait.



After about four minutes, she said, "C'mon up. He can wait. That's what he gets for being late." [He never did show up. The rat bastard.]

We were doing the usual small talk as she worked when I mentioned that I was going to the game tonight. She immediately lit up. "You *have* to get a dog biscuit!"

It seemed like a total *non sequitur*. You know, one of those responses that seems to have nothing to do with what preceded it. [The term comes from Latin, meaning "does not follow."] Why, oh why, would I want a freaking dog biscuit? I had no immediate response. Nor did I have a dog. In the mirror, she must have seen my puzzlement, and she laughingly clarified, "A Sea Dog Biscuit. It's an ice cream sandwich. They sell them at the park."

"Great! I love ice cream sandwiches."



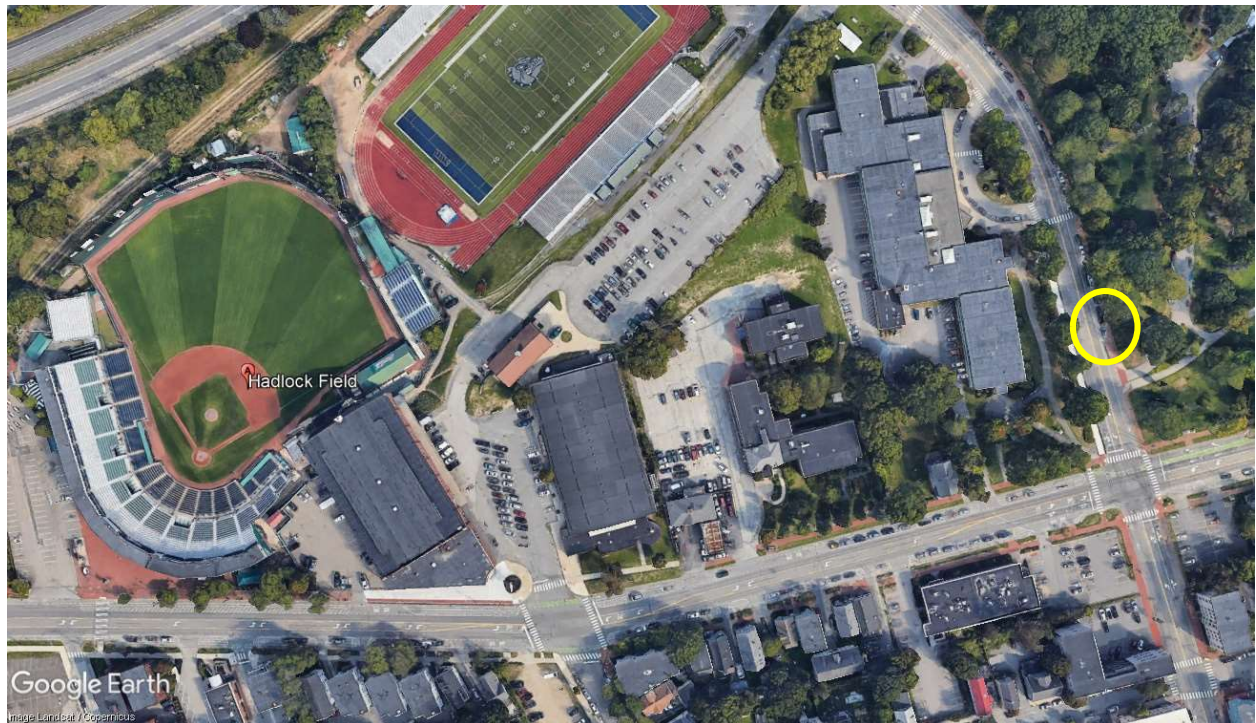
“Oh, these are so good,” she gushed on. “A thick layer of vanilla ice cream between two big, round, soft chocolate chip cookies. Mmmmm, best part of going to a game.”

I could tell her zeal was sincere, and I promised her I would indeed get one.

### The Game

I scouted out the parking for this in-city stadium. There were several options nearby for small money (\$5 or so). When I got in the area, I drove by and kept my eyes open for a prime spot.

And there one was! A free on-street space, only about a quarter-mile beyond the ball park, and next to a large, peaceful-looking, public park. Sweetness.



As always, I was early. Getting the Good Spot is a priority for me. I'll get to a game or a show or a track meet two hours before the start time if I think I'll get a choice parking space. For 7:30 AM tee times at the tournaments at Key West GC, I'll get there just after 6:00.



This is not for “warm-up time” (snicker at the thought). The KWGC parking lot wraps behind and left of the 11<sup>th</sup> green, and it’s not uncommon for wayward shots – anything from a hooked 5-wood to a skulled wedge – to come zooming in among the cars. So, I protect Blue Maxx and his expensive custom windows by arriving early enough to claim one of the two behind-the-bushes spots (circles) on the far left. Then, I chill out for an hour, have a good breakfast, do my usual grooming, and casually go through the way-too-complicated extrication of my golf gear from BM’s garage.



Protection from wayward golf shots was not an issue here in Portland. I just wanted to have a short walk and pay no money. With that accomplished, I settled into Maxx’s dining room and had a casual Steak Tips dinner.



The Sea Dogs play at Hadlock Field, as do two local high school baseball teams. The stadium was opened in 1994 with a capacity of 6,000. Over the years, seating was increased to its current 7,368.

The Sea Dogs became an affiliate of the Boston Red Sox in 2003. They had been a minor league team for the Miami Marlins prior to that.

Maine-and-Miami, a perfect partnership, right? How convenient is that when you get called up to big club? As it is now, you can hop in your car and be at Fenway for your MLB debut in time for the 7:05 first pitch.

Hadlock Field added some Boston touches when they hooked up with the Sox: the left field wall is tall and green (called the “Maine Monster”), and there is a miniature version of the iconic Citgo sign up on top of it.





Tonight's game would be a battle between the Eastern League's best. The Sea Dogs came in leading the Northeast Division with a 28-23 record (.549). Their opponents were the Akron (OH) Rubber Ducks, the AA affiliate of the Cleveland Guardians, who boasted a 30-21 slate, and were tied for the Southwest Division lead with the Harrisburg (PA) Senators, the farm club of the Washington Nationals.

Sea Dogs vs. Rubber Ducks. Love the names.

Senators? Ehhh, kinda plain, donchathink? Especially when you check out the rest of the league. Aside from the three mentioned above, here are the Eastern League nicknames and their MLB counterpart:

- Sea Wolves (Erie PA)(maybe should be *Lake Wolves??*), Detroit Tigers
- Baysox (Bowie MD), Baltimore Orioles
- Flying Squirrels (Richmond VA), San Francisco Giants
- Curve (Altoona PA), Pittsburgh Pirates
- Rumble Ponies (Binghamton NY), New York Mets
- Patriots (Somerset NJ), New York Yankees
- Fightin' Phils (Reading PA), Philadelphia Phillies
- Fisher Cats (Manchester NH), Toronto Blue Jays
- Yard Goats (Hartford CT), Colorado Rockies

Coming into tonight's showdown, not only did the Rubber Ducks have a better record, but also their pitcher, Tommy Mace, was the stud of the league with a 6-1 record and a stingy 1.79 ERA. (I didn't catch his WHIP, sorry.)

But the Sea Dogs had their rabid fans at their backs, and that had to be worth something.

Game on.



The pliable aquatic fowl scored three runs in the top of the first and things looked bleak for the hometown heroes. But in the second, the woofers of the sea slapped Mace around for three runs of their own and the contest was tied.

The Sea Dogs defense held firm and the offense lit up Mace for three more runs in the fourth to take a 6-3 lead. The Ducks' ace was pulled before he could even record a fourth-inning out. His ERA had swelled to a still-quite-good 2.12, but the saltwater bow-wows were too tenacious for him.

At that point, I left. Yup, I skeeedaddled. Why? Cuz I was cold. There was a chill wind off the Atlantic on this clear evening, and once that sun went down, so did the temperature. Hey, it's the coast of Maine, fer cryin' out loud. I had brought a thin windbreaker, so the breeze itself was not the issue, but I needed a good sweatshirt too. Sure, I lived the first half of my life in New England, but all that cold-air tolerance had long since worn off after 20+ mild winters in the Florida Keys.

I guess I would have been entertained if I had stayed. From the warmth of Blue Maxx, I heard pyrotechnics a couple of times (apparently for home team home runs). The final score ended up being 12-5. Go, Sea Dogs!!

So, I was facing another night of stealth camping. Last night had been the first one of those in a fortnight (Princeton WV). This did not daunt me; it is, after all, my standard approach. Being free, it is the most budget-friendly.

Campgrounds are nice when I need an electrical boost for my EcoFlow Delta's and Bluetti, but a night in a campsite that has 15A electrical feed can cost \$30 to \$40 -- or even more -- so that adds up quickly. Two nights in a campground can easily equal one fuel fill-up (\$75) which equals a full day of driving (375 miles). Unless my solar generators are gasping, or if I'm facing a grim weather forecast of multiple days without sunshine, I'll pick the economical option.

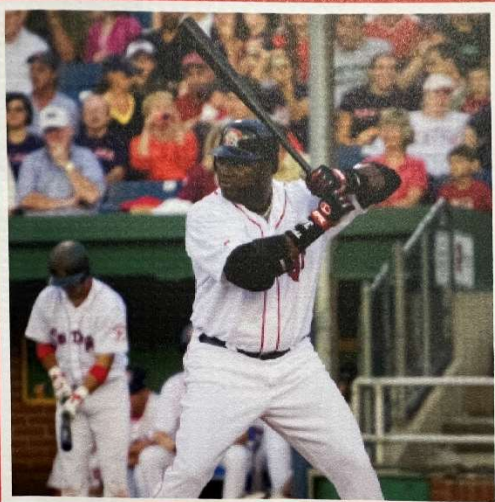
Another factor is all that is the extemporaneous aspect of VanLife. Not every day is planned, you know. This two-week stretch from Jacksonville is a dramatic exception where I slotted out each day and made reservations for each night: campgrounds, Harvest Host businesses (i.e., brewpubs), or Boondockers Welcome homes. There were specific destinations involved, on specific dates, in places where ★★ and ★★★ hotels not likely to be found, and the stealth approach just wasn't gonna fly.

And even *this* best-laid-plan went astray and all those Canadian reservations had to be cancelled.

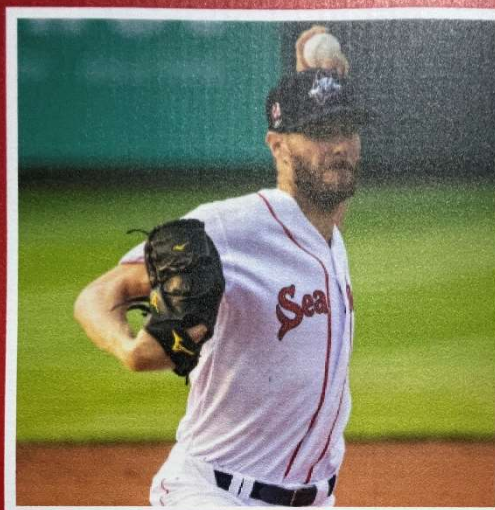
Anyway, last night's hotel was just fine, so I returned to scene of my crime and drifted off into a quiet night of furtive sleep.



*A wall inside Hadlock Stadium is dedicated to guys who played for the Sea Dogs who also played for the Boston Red Sox, either on their way to the bigs, or in rehab stints as they returned from injury.*



**DAVID  
ORTIZ**



**CHRIS  
SALE**



**DUSTIN  
PEDROIA**



**MOOKIE  
BETTS**