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

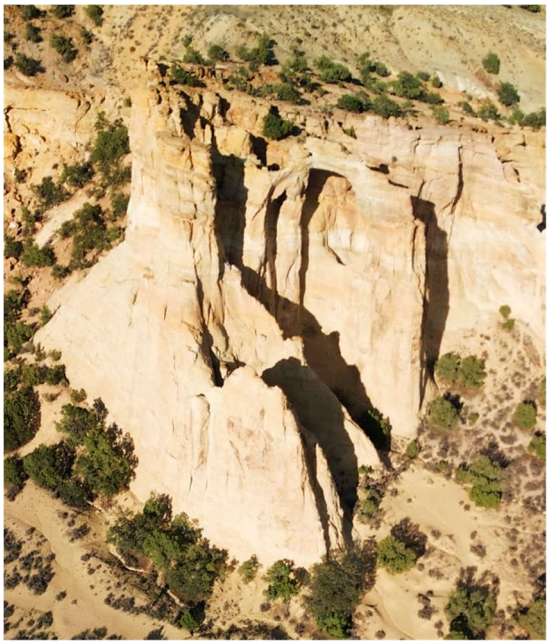
BLOG POST: 2025.09.18
Island In The Sky, Canyonlands National Park, Utah



After Zion, Blue Maxx and I meandered around southern Utah for a few days.

We did a morning drive-around in Bryce Canyon NP and took a ton of the same pictures I took last time, and the time before, and the time before…

Then we went a little east into Escalante and took some Little Bird stills and vids of Grosvenor Arch in a golden sunset (right), stayed overnight on the dirt road just outside the designated parking area (man, it was so quiet out there, I doubt there was anyone within ten miles), and took some early morning angle shots (next page) before moving on.





Grosvenor Arch, Escalante, in morning light

It was like our Utah Victory Tour. It was not enough that RM25 has already included Glacier, Yellowstone and Yosemite – plus Crater Lake, The Lost Coast, The McKenzie, Humboldt Redwoods, Channel Islands NP, Petrified Forest NP, and The Narrows. We needed to complete Utah's Big 5 to round out our modest little road trip.

So, that morning dose of Bryce had been #2 of the Big 5. We came out of Escalante and zoomed on over to Capitol Reef. It was kind of a cheating #3, though, just a quick stop at the VC to grab another fridge magnet (the 7th of the trip) before rolling onward, up UT-191 to Moab for an early night's sleep.



The alarm went off as the sun was clearing the horizon, and we skedaddled up into Canyonlands to get the morning angles in those amazing canyons (Buck Canyon Overlook, above). I did not strive for sunrise itself, though. I wanted the sun to be up high enough to illuminate the gorges, not just show me big bowls of shadow. [Plus, getting up at sunrise just wipes me out by mid-afternoon.]

At Orange Cliffs Overlook, the second last on the long southern arm of Island In The Sky, there was a sign informing me that Grand View Point Overlook -- the final one -- was closed off for some sort of construction, which was a disappointment.

I believed that the view I coveted beyond all others was out there. I even considered taking out my tiny e-bike and rolling out there, but it seemed as if even pedestrian traffic was not allowed, so I nixed that idea. Oh well, plenty of other overlooks to enjoy.

Orange Cliffs Overlook (OCO), was really nice. With the sun at my back, that wide sweep of classic Utah landscape, hemmed in by towering red mesas looked incredible.



So incredible, in fact, that I refused to let the designated overlook contain me. Stepping over a shin-high rock was all it took and I was off on a clambering adventure. To the south, there was a wide shelf that provided an even better vista (above).

But it was when I doubled back to the north, through gaps in the bushes, and down layers of rocks, that I found myself at the extreme east end of the narrower and more dramatic canyon (page 1).

This was definitely the path less traveled. There were indications in the dirt that other feet had stepped through here, but not many recently. Perhaps the big crack (see next page) had deterred the more sensible explorers.



The Big Crack

So, yeah, maybe the weight of 190-pound clamberer might've been enough to send this hunk of rim-rock tumbling down into the abyss to meet its many brothers, but I went with the more appealing "probably not" option.



The Big Crack (upper right) from another angle

That other angle does look like it could plummet any minute, doesn't it? It will fall eventually, no doubt about it. Several years ago, a similar crack permanently shut down an entire section — and Visitor Center -- of Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area on the CO/UT line. (Yeah, I skirted the blockade and stood on the edge of that one too.)

Finally, sated with my investigations of the odd piles of rocks and various photo angles of the cliffs and canyon, I returned to Maxx and headed back north. I had refrained from stopping at anything on the ride in, choosing to go all the way out and then leapfrog the overlooks on the ride back out.

That's when I discovered that Green River Overlook, on a fork off Upheaval Dome Road, was actually the view I most coveted. I had photo'ed this two decades ago, but the late afternoon sun angle did not do it justice. Still, it was one of my favorite photos that year, and made at least one of my annual calendars.

Today's view, though, was truly outstanding.



Green River Overlook (zoomed)



The Green River (can you see why it got its name?)



Iin September of 2022, late in RoadMode22, I rented a Jeep so I could go off-roading in these amazing canyons. They were amazing indeed, but would have been much more so if it hadn't ***rained all freaking day!*** It almost never rains in the Moab area, but I was lucky enough to catch the "almost" part.

Anyway, one of the coolest parts of that adventure was snaking my way down the many switchbacks of the 1500-foot drop of Shafer Trail Road into and through Shafer Canyon. I picked up a great angle of it today:



The morning was excellent. The weather could not have been better, and my camera was almost smoking from taking so many photos.

But this day was a two-parter, and the AM at Canyonlands NP was only Part One. I had to cross the street to get to Part Two.

But here are a few more shots of Canyonlands before we go…











