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: 2026.06.11-14
"Peace, Love & Vans", Rye, Colorado



Little Bird's overview of the PLV attendees. (Blue Maxx is circled.)

In the spring of 2025, Blue Maxx and I attended our first van festival. A month later, we attended our second. Both were in central Florida. The second of those was called *Peace, Love & Vans.* We had a great time and resolved to be back in 2026.

However, by the time I got the announcement e-mail, it was already sold out. I don't check my inbox every day, and I often delete in bulk – especially when I find myself carrying 300+ emails – so I could easily have missed an earlier one, and hence, missed my chance to return.

So, when a similar email arrived about PLV's branch-out to the Colorado mountains, I jumped on it. I had been in that lazy stage in mid-spring, with 10 days of travel under my belt (FL to MA, via a very convoluted route), and nothing on the calendar till 7/4. Inertia was taking hold.



That “tendency for an object at rest to stay at rest” might have kept me base-camped at my brother’s suburban-Boston curb for five or six weeks, but now there was a mid-June purpose to kick me westward.

It was an expeditious but unhurried route, allowing seven days to cover 2250 miles. Along the way, we stopped at the Columbus Zoo, but otherwise let the road be our entertainment.

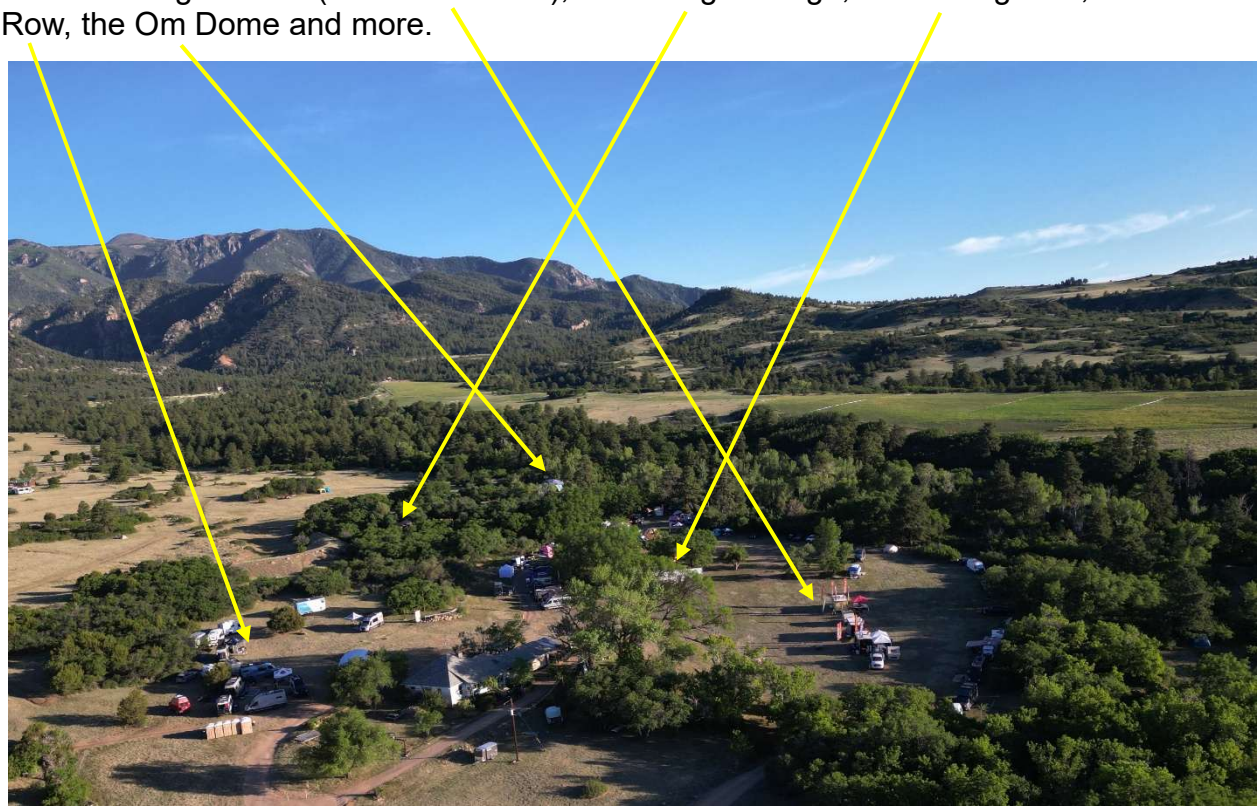
The Hummingbird Ranch was an excellent setting for this festival, with the vast plains to the south and east, and the San Isabel Mountains looming up in the west and north.

The event officially ran from Friday through Sunday, but I took them up on the offer to arrive on Thursday. There would be nothing going on, but it was an extra day to chill at the venue, *and* it got me a **primo** parking space. (see yellow circles).

When I got there, only the upper right area in the above photo was filled, and many of those were people who were volunteering for the weekend. The woman in the

tie-dyed PLV shirt who waved me in did so with an enthusiastic, “Man, do I have a special spot for **you**!”

You get a better view on page one, and if you look to Maxx’s east (left in the page 1 pic), you can see a brown block. Those are porta-potties. Handy, if needed. And just to left of that block, you can see a white-and-black object that almost looks like the back of a credit card. Actually, that was sign on an arch over a roadway that led down the hill into the Village Green (with food trucks), the Swingin’ Stage, the Talking Tent, Vendors’ Row, the Om Dome and more.



LB’s view at 6:26 AM, most folks still sound asleep

Tie-Dyed Dame gave me the closest spot to it! Some people had to walk 4/10 of a mile to get to that point. I had 30 yards. Sweet.

I’m always willing to talk about Blue Maxx, so I entered the DIY contest. This pretty much anchored me to my vehicle for the full afternoon on Saturday, and half the day on Sunday. As a full-timer, I wasn’t about displaying showy frills or snazzy options. I talked to the people who stopped by about what I was powering with my four 200W solar panels and my 3 EcoFlow solar genarators, and how much power you need to run a freezer 24/7 and reefer 24/7, and so on.

My pride in Maxx is real. I’ve never in my life created anything close. For what it all cost, for what is in it, and for the QOL (Quality of Life) I can live day-to-day, I don’t think I could’ve done any better. I gave everyone the poker chips that I had printed at work before I left; they bear the QR code to RicksRoads.com, and, by extension, to the flipbook *The Blue Maxx Project.* I hope I inspired the aspiring VanLifers to give it a go.

But, doing that meant that I missed out on the presentations and discussions at the Talking Tent, the afternoon live music at the Swingin' Stage, and the "community jam" at the Meadow Stage, all of which I would have enjoyed.

But the evenings made up for it! The PLV organizers did a great job booking bands for the after-supper sessions.



I did get to see the 4:00 PM show on Friday, a band called **Gray Rails**, who were described on the schedule as "genre bending soundscape." I have no idea what that phrase means, but the band was really good. I think the set was all originals (which can sometimes be a a tad offputting) and I enjoyed them all.

I need to give you the lay of the land here. The Swingin' Stage was a full-sized stage with a half-sized audience space. The size, the lighting, the sound, the coloring, were all professional quality, but, on first view, I was surprised at how small a space there was for the listening crowd.

But I got a chuckle about how the audience dealt with it; they sat in the woods! They brought their folding chairs, found a spot in the shade with a full view of the band and acted like a bunch of wood elves, lurking in the shadows. There were a couple of tight nets strung like trampolines among the trees. More on them later.



Sitting among the trees did make some sense, though. The afternoon sun was hot, and the bright sunshine poured right into the clearing, so shade-dwelling was not a bad idea. It must have seemed weird for the band, though, everyone hiding from them while they played. There were quite a few free-lance dancers in the clearing, though. I knew they'd be even more for the evening show.

The 7-9 PM show was *terrific:* **Sqwerv** was the band's name ("electrifying indie-jam band"), and they rocked. I brought my folding chair, and my ice-filled 40-ounce tumbler, with some Captain and Coke ingredients (for a refill or two) in my blue denim shoulder bag. There were *lots* of people up dancing in the clearing. There was no room for a seated audience out there; they were relegated to the woods.



For my chair, I chose a steeply-sloped spot, close to the front corner of the stage, with my back against a tree. I was up enough that the dancers did not block my view of the band, the slope allowed me to lean back and extend my legs, and I got a great look at the myriad styles of dance that were happening out there. As for myself, I let my feet do my dancing while I stayed lounged in my chair, cup-o-joy firmly in hand.

The song by Sqwerv that most sang to me was their cover of Supertramp's "Goodbye Stranger." I'm not sure if I've ever seen a live band do Supertramp – except, of course, Supertramp. They were just a bit off on the chorus vocals, but, to be fair, those are sung at very difficult (i.e., high) pitch, so I'll let 'em slide on that, especially since the second half of the song – the instrumental jam – *was outstanding!* It was a **great** show. I would go see them again in a heartbeat.

Saturday evening's band was called Shakedown Street ("a Grateful Dead Tribute Band" duhh) and they, too, were excellent.



The average age at van festivals seems to be about, well, close to mine. And with the free-spirit, tie-dyed soul of the van community, a Dead Set will never be wrong.

Of the four bands I saw, the Sunday evening band, Rapidgrass ("Colorado mountain bluegrass band") was my least favorite, but provided the most memorable moment.

They were good musicians and their show was entertaining, but that's just not my kind of music. But I was foot-tappin' along with them and enjoying the show when, with a loud click, the power kicked off. Sound equipment, stage lights, everything – boom, out.

Rapidgrass played on for a few bars, just in case it came back on after a glitch, but they soon abandoned the song altogther. They wasted no time executing Plan B, though. The bearded dude who was madonlin player and lead singer, bellowed out that they were moving down to ground level in front of stage to do “an acoustic tune or two.”

As they relocated, somebody – I have idea who – slid a small, propane-powered fire pit down there to light them up. It was genius.

The crowd, of course, closed down from the clearing and the woods. I did not have my chair this night and, when the power blew, I happened to be right up front. The fire pit almost hit me in the foot when the guy moved it down there.



What happened was a complete coming together of crowd and band. They could have stayed on stage, shrugging, but they immediately took the Show Must Go On mentality, and we appreciated it. In the tighter space, the energy soared.

I got most of it on video and it came out great. Halfway through, the stage lights came back on to create an overpowering backlighting, but the band never flinched; they were committed to this acoustic thing and were cranking. Bravo, Rapidgrass!



Now, I mentioned tightly-strung nets among the trees. On my way out after the show, I noticed that the larger of the two was packed. There were a dozen people lounging in it, with room for a few more. It looked damn comfortable.

Then, however, I spied the second one, a couple of trees over and *vacant.* Without delay, I strode to it and jumped on.

I was amazed at how tight it was. My body weight barely seemed to bend it. I did a little trampoline-style bouncing but feared killing myself, so I just dropped down and lounged on it. Damn, was it good!



And I could see the stage just fine, thank you please, and hear the music just as fine. By this time, though, it was a DJ called LA Riots, and it was clicking even less than bluegrass, so I did not linger long.

It was a fine festival. I hope I can get tickets to PLV Spring 2027 in Florida.

We had a very brief cold snap on Saturday night and Sunday morning where it felt cold enough to snow. Other than that, we had sunny days in the mid 70s.

The dreaded rain stayed away. A hard rain would have made the place a mudbath slip-n-slide.

About a week afterwards, though, a large wildfire threatened the Hummingbird Ranch. As of this writing, I've heard no word on how the placed fared.

