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: 2026.06.21
Snake River Waterfalls, Twin Falls, Idaho



From the *Peace, Love & Vans* festival, 90 or so miles south of Denver, my next target was Eugene, Oregon. GooGirl said it would be just over 1400 miles and almost 22 hours of driving. A couple of decades ago, that would've been less than a three-day ride. But here in the deep chill of RoadMode2026, I was going to take about 18 days.

I boondocked in a beautiful spot southwest of Denver, then sped through the urban buzz of the Mile High City with barely a glance. I angled west to Rock Springs, WY, and took another rest day there. The city has a Planet Fitness and an overnight-friendly Walmart, so I had everything I needed to stay for two or three days.

Yellowstone and Grand Teton were a couple hundred miles to the north, waving flirtingly at Maxx, but, ehh, summer crowds, ehh, maybe in September.

So, the route led right into southern Idaho, specifically to the Twin Falls area.

Last year, we passed through Idaho Falls, 150 miles up the Snake River, and admired the half-mile long, mid-river falls that they constructed there long ago.



The Snake has a very different personality ‘round these parts, running through a wide and deep chasm. Back in 1974, daredevil Evel Knievel famously tried to jump the canyon in a steam-powered “Skycycle-X-2” but his parachute deployed prematurely (i.e., right after launch), and he fell ingloriously into the riverbank hundreds of feet below, breaking a few bones and, I assume, his spirit.

I drove past a sign that tried to steer me to that launch point, but I had no interest; I wanted to see falling water. The city was named Twin *Falls,* after all, right? (Maybe Evel should have considered that?)

US-50, leading into US-30, forms a 67-mile stretch of road called the “Thousand Springs Scenic Byway” (TSSB). The photo above was taken from the Hanson Bridge Overlook, the first of 11 designated points of interest when coming from the east.

My initial impulse was to spend the rest of the day touring this road, but I only ended up seeing one other stop, which was the very next one, Shoshone Falls.

Sometimes referred to as “The Niagara of the West,” the main fall of Shoshone drops 212 feet, and the overall width of the rim is over 1000 feet.



When water is running high in spring, there are multiple roaring cataracts here, but today, on the first day of summer, amid a harsh drought, the flow is reduced to the one main falls and a horsetail of a tributary on the canyon wall to the south.

This is not all nature's doing; you can see in the photo that there is a hydro-electric component at work here, and the Department of Agriculture has the leeway to divert much of the river for dispersal to local farms and such.





At peak, the entire wall to the right of the primary falls would be overflowed by water, with multiple basins filled on the plateau, as the photo (left) that I just lifted from Wikipedia shows.

From the view that I saw, the "Niagara" comparison seemed like quite a stretch, but when I see it at full flow, I definitely get it. I was digging the south trickle, though.



A sunset shot of the 200-foot-tall horsetail tributary



A sunset close-up shot of the horsestail tributary



Looking downriver from Shoshone Falls at midday.



The much less famous Shoshone Arch

From Shoshone Falls, I searched west. Only about ten miles downriver, there was an interesting-looking place called Auger Falls. Online info told of a short (less than a mile) trail to get to it from the parking area, which was on the canyon floor. The Snake does not topple over Auger; Auger drops down from the north rim and into the Snake, albeit a bit indirectly.

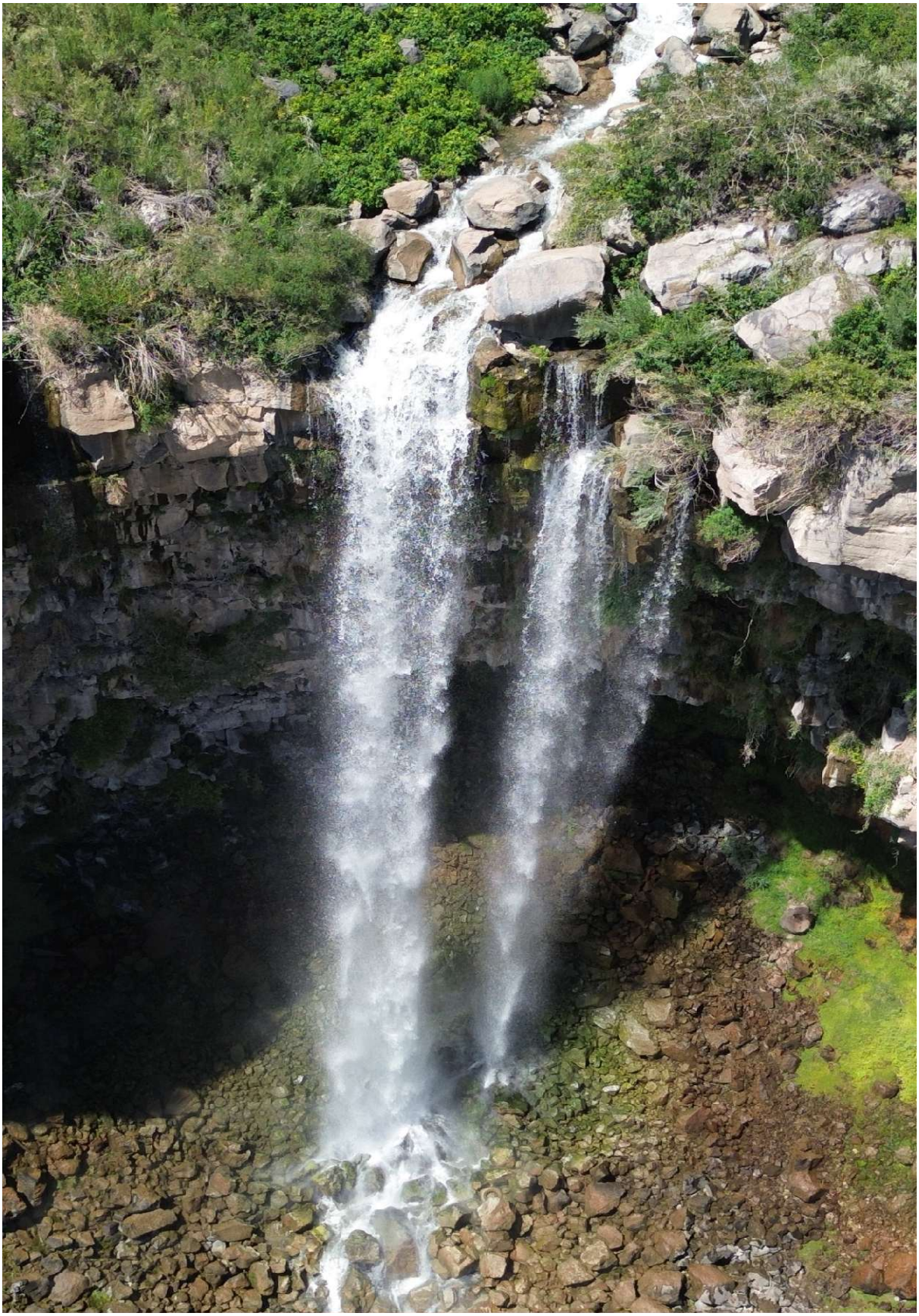


Well, the last few miles to the parking area were dirt, much of it washboard and all of it absurdly dusty. When I finally got there and looked across the canyon at Auger Falls, I was not impressed (see photo, 2 pages hence). Granted, I was nearly a mile away, but even at that distance I did not see any great photographs coming out of a 2-mile round trip, dusty, 93-degree hike.

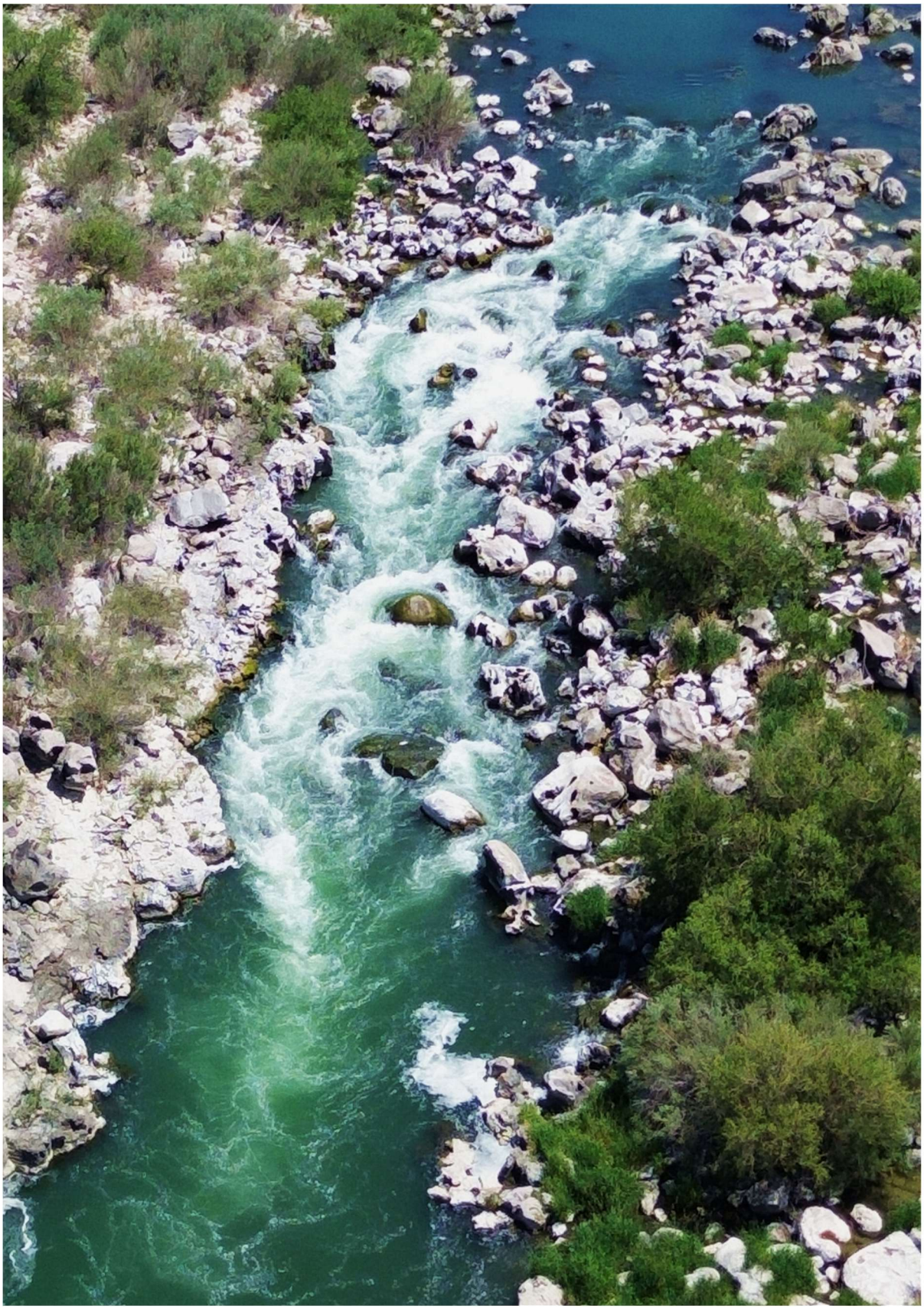
But, I *did* see some good shots coming from a drone flight! I unpacked Little Bird, set his speed to Sport Mode (i.e., maximum 35n MPH) and let him loose.

From overhead (photo on page 1, and also above), the name of the falls made more sense. I had been assuming that it was named after Albert Auger or Alice Auger or Aloysius Auger or some locally famous person with that last name. But, looking down at the shape of the cliff, it resembled a large circular hole that might have been dug out by a huge auger. That's just speculation, though. Apologies to Aloysius, if applicable.

So, I got my desired pics – and a *very* cool flyover video – and I still had plenty of battery time left, so I flew LB back upriver a short way and saw some rapids. I lowered him down and did a glide-over, slowly following the splashes through the rocks. The stills are OK, but the video was great (I thought).



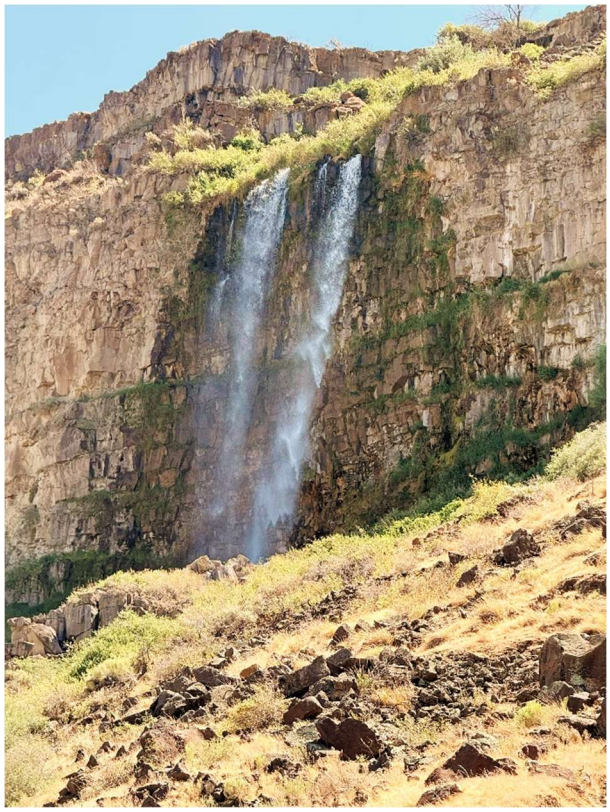


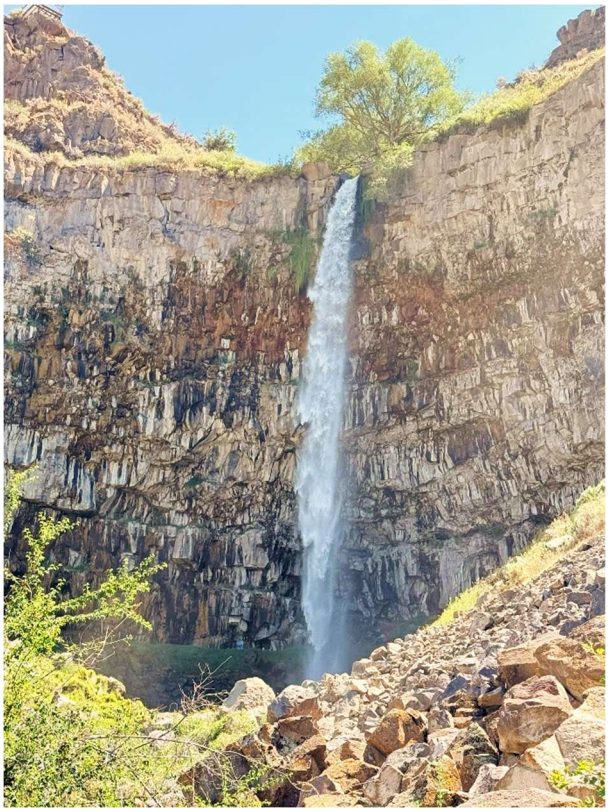


On the ride down into the canyon, my attention was held by the lush green of a riverside golf course. The verdant fairways and greens were in vivid contrast with the browns and tans of the otherwise arid landscape.

And a couple of holes ran closely parallel to the road I was on (paved, so far), so I had to be wary of errant shots. One ball sat right in the middle of the road. Then the road went dusty washboard, and that hijacked my focus.

So, I was very surprised on the ride out to see multiple waterfalls pouring down towards me from the south rim. How had I missed those??





Facing east now, I took a good look the Perrine Memorial Bridge, a huge, brown arch span bridge that carries US-93 across the gorge. Hmmm, I mused, I bet there are some cool views from up there.



Opened to traffic in 1976, the cantilever-style bridge is 1500 feet long and sits 486 feet above the river. And, I was right, the views from the northside overlooks are great – partly for the river, but mostly for the *other* golf course – the Blue Lakes–Jerome Golf Course – which occupies the north bank and climbs high up into the brown rocks.



Sometimes I find out odd things after the fact. In writing this post, I googled the bridge to find out when it was built and its stats. I had no idea it has its own website: https://perrinebridge.com/. It has a video window for a live webcam feed, with text that reads: *We're excited to bring you a 27/7 LIVE FEED of the Twin Falls, Perrine Bridge.*

27/7?? The feed is currently down. Maybe those extra three hours per day overloaded it?

The only other thing on the website is a subscribe box so you can "Join The Community" and *Get Notified When We Launch and Stay Up To Date With The Latest Events and Info.*

I tried to submit my email and name because, what the heck, right? The screen flashed a message back at me: *Subscription Error: An error occurred, please try later.*

So, the bridge was pretty cool, but that website leaves a lot to be desired…



The west side of the Perrine Memorial Bridge



The Snake River west of the Perrine Bridge



That pretty much wrapped up my tour of the Twin Falls area. I did hit up the local Planet Fitness for some exercise and a shower (mostly the shower), and then adjourned to my Boondockers Welcome host for the night (shoutout to Eastern Sky!).

Across the street from where I parked, a fertile, crop-filled field was being watered by one those silver aluminum caterpillar sprinklers, a Zimmatic. I have long admired these shrewd contraptions. From an airplane, just about every lush green circle you see on the ground is the result of a Zimmatic.



But I have also long wondered how the heck they work. Do they have motors, or are the wheels moved by water pressure? What propels and sweeps that long arm in its circular path? How long can they get? (I saw one 20 lengths lowa.) How much water pressure is required? How fast do they go? How much power is required?

So, I finally sought answers, and here's what I learned from a conversation with ChatGPT:

Q: *In fairly basic terms, how does the Zimmatic irrigation sprinkler system work?*

A: The **Zimmatic** irrigation system (made by Lindsay Corporation) is basically a very large, automated sprinkler that slowly drives itself around a field.
Here's how it works in simple terms:

1. **Water enters at the center.** A well, canal, or pipeline pumps water into a pivot point in the middle of the field.
2. **A long pipe carries the water outward.** The pipe may be a quarter-mile or more long and is supported by several towers with wheels.
3. **Sprinklers are spaced along the pipe.** Each sprinkler waters the crop beneath it, much like a lawn sprinkler—but on a much larger scale. The nozzles farther from the center are larger because they have to cover more ground as they travel.
4. **The whole machine slowly rotates.** Small electric motors on each wheeled tower move a little at a time. The outer towers travel farther than the inner ones, so a control system keeps every tower lined up, preventing the pipe from bending or buckling.



5. **After one full rotation, the field has been watered.** Depending on how much water is needed, one revolution may take anywhere from several hours to a few days.

One clever feature of modern Zimmatic systems is **precision irrigation**. Instead of every sprinkler being on all the time, the computer can control individual sprinklers or groups of sprinklers. For example, it can:

- apply more water to sandy soil,
- apply less to clay soil,
- skip roads, drainage ditches, or rocky patches,

- or vary watering based on crop type or GPS maps.

A good analogy is to imagine **the hand of a giant clock**:

- The center of the clock is connected to the water supply.
- The clock hand is actually a long water pipe with sprinklers on it.
- Instead of sweeping around once every 12 hours, it might take 24 to 72 hours to make one complete circle, watering everything beneath it as it goes.

It's a remarkably efficient design because one machine can automatically irrigate **well over 100 acres** with very little labor. Modern low-pressure sprinkler packages also reduce water lost to wind and evaporation compared with older high-pressure systems.

Q: *So there is no motor at the pivot point? All the power comes from the motors that drive the wheels, correct?*

A: That's exactly right.

The **pivot point itself does not have a motor that turns the entire machine**. Instead, it's essentially a **large bearing** that allows the long irrigation pipe to rotate freely while also serving as the connection for the incoming water (and usually electrical power).

Here's what happens:

- The **center pivot stays fixed to the ground**.
- The long pipe is attached to the pivot through a rotating joint, so it can swing around like the hand of a clock.
- Each tower out in the field has one or two **electric gear motors** that drive the wheels.

The interesting part is how the towers stay aligned.

The **outermost tower is the "leader."** It moves at the speed selected by the operator. The next tower inboard has an alignment switch or sensor. If the outer tower gets a little too far ahead, that sensor tells the next tower to move until it's back in line. The process repeats all the way to the center. As a result, the machine looks like it's rotating smoothly, but in reality each tower is constantly making small corrections—moving, stopping, and moving again.

So the wheels provide all the force needed to pull the machine around the pivot. The pivot simply provides:

- the water connection,
- the electrical connection (through slip rings that allow continuous rotation),
- and a heavy-duty bearing for the structure to rotate on.

The motors don't need to be very powerful because the system moves **very slowly**—typically only a few feet per minute. A complete revolution may take one to three days, so the force required to move the machine is surprisingly modest, typically only ½ to 1 horsepower per tower.

Now, when you drive past one of those gangly, far-reaching sprinklers, you can tell all your passengers how they work. Let’s face it, if you are in an area where those Zimmatics are common, there is probably not a whole lot else to talk about…