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: 2026.08.04
Carhenge, northwestern Nebraska



Between brown and maroon hues shading the northwestern air quailty map -- showing the ubiquity of wild fire smoke – and the bright red swaths representing 100+ degrees covering both the southwest and midwest regions of the country, my personal road map was looking grim. I decided to seek friendlier climes and head back east.

More than 4,000,000 acres of forest were burning in OR, and that number was soon to double. Northern CA, ID and even NV had proliferating wild fires as well.

And the entire swath of the midwestern USA from Mexico all the way up into Canada -- eastern NM CO WY MT and western TX OK KS NE SD ND -- were all a week-deep into a broiling heat wave with no relief in sight. Freaking Billings MT hit 116˚.

There would be no driving around that scorch. At some point, along some route, Maxx and I would have to suck it up for a day and a night and plow on through the heat. The smoke, though, did have a limit. Haze was prominent in MT, SD and ND. It was spreading thickly and rapidly throughout NV, UT and now WY.

Far western NE was a bit hazed on the AQ map, but 2/3 of the Cornhusker State was in the clear. And it occurred to me that, in the four-plus summers since RoadMode

launched, Maxx and I had driven through 47 of the 48 contiguous states. Nebraska was the lone exception. That settled it, and I decided to do it full-width, west-to-east.

Not only that, I decided to flip the toggle on Google Maps to “Avoid Highways” and traverse the state’s 420 (or so) miles on backroads. Well, not all would be bumpy farm roads. There would be some skinny county roads, yes, but most would be decent-sized state routes (square black signs dominated by white trapezoids), and a few US highways (the old black-and-white shields). But no “I” highways.

So, as I filled up Maxx’s tank in Casper WY, I asked Google what things might be worth seeing along my route. The list was underwhelming, but one stood out: Carhenge – and it was close by! Let’s check it out, Maxximus!







On the Google Earth shot, above, this spot looks like it’s in the middle of nowhere. And it is. There is *nothing* out here but vast, open prairie and farmland. Roads are scarce, but there is no reason to go slow, certainly not traffic. And, then, amid the emptiness, I saw that sign, above. Then I went in and saw this next one.




Your first question upon encountering Carhenge might be Why? But creator Jim Reinders' answer would simply be Why not? After spending seven years of his career as a petroleum engineer in England, Reinders returned home inspired by a grand idea. He would create a Stonehenge replica, a "Stonehenge West," for his hometown of Alliance, Nebraska. With no giant slabs of stone present in the area, Reinders decided on a new medium for his sculpture - cars. Cars would be readily available, would be similar in shape and size to the stones of Stonehenge, and the wheels would simplify logistics immensely. The original 25 cars were erected during a Reinders family reunion in 6 days and dedicated on the Summer Solstice, June 21, 1987. "We were able to reduce the time of the original Stonehenge construction by 9,999 years and 51 weeks."

"Plane, Loqui, Deprehendi" -Jim Reinders









Judging by the old photos, I think the cars were originally set up in their actual colors. At some point they were all painted flat gray to mimic the sarsen slabs of Stonehenge.

The layout is a faithful replica, with 38 objects in a 96-foot-diameter circle, the same dimensions as the rocky configuration on Salisbury Plain.

In 2025, the first Carhenge Mural Festival was held. Not many of the cars got painted, but that just leaves plenty of room for the next wave of artists in future festivals. The ones that did get painted look spectacular.

I spent about an hour walking among the cars and snapping pics. Then I sent Little Bird up to get the overhead perspective.

It was free, though donations are cheerfully accepted, and there is a gift shop, of course, with t-shirts and souvenirs.


FATCAT
SPRAYS


PAUL MONSTERS




It took me a while to see that this mural depicts a woman holding a flower pot and sniffing the flowers.






A DREAM TO FOLLOW



Likewise, I did not catch the eyes and face on this monster right away.





Purists may have complained about the paint, fearing hack jobs and grafitti, but these artists took their work seriously, in a fun way. And it can all just be repainted gray someday anyway, right? There are a number of other pieces in this Car Art Exhibit, all created with car parts.














There is one white car designated as the “Autograph Car” so people can get those scribble urges out of their systems.




… or sticker urges.  =)






As things turned out, I enjoyed the Avoid Highways appraoch so much through NE, that I continued that approach through IA, IL, IN, OH, PA, NY, VT, NH and ME.

It took longer, but so what?  I was in no hurry.  My boondocking month had been nixed and I had become a true nomad.