



THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RUBBER TRAMP

A year's adventure living out of a vintage camper in the mountains of northern Colorado and New Mexico

Sapped of laboring to benefit uncaring enterprises, I chose to unburden my life from its needless trappings and hit the road in a vintage camper. I came to discover rejuvenation as a Baby Boomer in the shadow of the Digital Age. This is the tale of a Rubber Tramp, a dog named Rambeaux, and a camper called Cochise.

Kurt Buss

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“The Decision” Episode 1 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



When I was 56 years old, I realized that things were not quite working out as I had hoped they would, as a child growing up in a small farm town in central Wisconsin. This was 2016.

The country was finally coming out of the “Great Recession” that had dominated and decimated the economy the previous decade. I was coming out of the recession

too; I just didn’t seem to be any better off than when I went in. If anything, it was worse.

I was working in the same industry that I’d been working in for over 25 years here in Colorado, but I was being paid less than two-thirds of what I’d been making a decade earlier, and the price of gas, groceries, rent and almost everything else necessary for survival had more than doubled. My standard of living was quickly diminishing. Industry wasn’t screaming for aging Baby Boomers who lacked mac daddy computer skills. Artificial Intelligence (AI) was infiltrating the workforce, assimilating the tasks that were binary in nature, doing the “if not this, then that” algorithm at Mach-plenty.

Suddenly, I was on the outside of the bubble looking in through the backside of a one-way mirror. It was then that I realized that something had to change – drastically. At that moment. *Ahora mismo!*

Working a dead-end job that paid subsistence wages so I could maintain my existence holding onto a run-down apartment in a deteriorating neighborhood just didn't make sense. Hell, it was straight-up depressing. Thinking about it made it more depressing. But try *not* to think about it. You can't. What you can do is take action. So, I did. Faced with the universal decision that was an anthem of The Clash (one of the early punk rock bands) in the 80s, I asked myself, "*Should I stay or should I go?*" I favored the latter.



So I bought a cheap piece of dirt in the mountains near the most beautiful lake I'd ever seen, nested in a magical valley created by the Cache la Poudre River as it divides the Never Summer and Medicine Bow mountain ranges in the Colorado Rockies, about 12

miles south of the Wyoming border – at a little over 9,000' feet in elevation.

Dowdy Lake is one of many that comprise the Red Feather Lakes Village non-metropolitan area. The Village, as it's called, is home to a little more than 500 souls year-round, but in the summertime it swells well beyond the thousands as folks from the flats come up to their summer homes and cabins, camp in the

developed campgrounds, or boondock it on public land. The mountains have their allure. A siren call to some - a summons.

I began shopping for an affordable camper trailer that I could put on my property for the summer months, and haul south when the weather started to turn. I'd heard great things about New Mexico's state park system and how cheap it was to camp there. I found an inexpensive, "vintage" camper made in 1978 called the *Free Spirit* by Holiday Rambler, out of an area in Indiana that was the camper manufacturing capital of the US after WWII. It was an instant fit. I had graduated high school in 1978. And, as far as a Free Spirit? Well, hell...

Through an experienced contractor who provided mobile service I brought it up to the 21st century with a new furnace, gas lines, fittings and tanks. I changed the lights from incandescent to LED, cutting the kilowatt draw to one-sixth of what it was and bringing better, cooler light. New tires, fresh grease and seals in the wheel bearings, a top-shelf marine grade battery and some cosmetic details, and I was no longer dependent upon a landlord or mortgage to live. I felt like Lewis and Clarke when they first saw the ocean, knowing their journey was coming to fruition. *Oh! The joy.*



Now, I just had to get rid of anything that wasn't absolutely essential and – somehow – would fit in the limited storage of a 19' camper. No sweat. I posted things on

Craigslist with lots of pictures. I tried some other sites too, but I've always liked Craigslist. Just have. What I couldn't sell I gave away, and what I couldn't donate or recycle I tossed. It was cathartic. I felt unburdened, and sore. Too many CRT TVs, furniture pieces, tools, boxes of kitchenware, books, knick-knacks and bric-a-brac. My lower lumbar was sending me messages. I ignored them out of necessity. I'd given notice to my landlord, and I needed to get out.

I ended up having to rent a small storage space just to vacate the apartment on time, or pretty close to it. I knew I could put a 10'x12' shed on the property without requiring a building permit, so I figured I'd build that once I got settled, and everything would be Jake. I'd built several sheds over the years, and had a buddy in Cheyenne who was willing to help. He had a compressor and nail gun, too. Seemed eminently doable. I was soon to discover just how wrong I was.

Quick came a lesson: In the mountains, the weather rules. My plan had been to put the camper on the property May 1st, and I didn't need to be out of my apartment until the end of May. I had a buffer. My apartment in Loveland was a little more than an hour from the property, so I thought I could shuttle back and forth with my 4'x8' utility trailer once the camper was settled. Then came a late snow.

My son and I had been ice fishing at Dowdy and West Lakes for the past couple of years, and this winter had been a short season because of warm weather in December and January. We finally got on the hard water in February and March, but one Saturday in late March we showed up to open ice – soft water. Fortunately, as property owners we were allowed to fish the private lakes

and ponds in our area because it was developed as a subdivision when it opened in 1969, and given the idyllic name of Crystal Lakes.

The man who built the community had the vision – and the financial ability – to develop nearly 5,000 acres into 1,600 lots (about half of which have permanent structures while the others are for sale or used for RV camping during the summer season – not allowed in winter). He dammed Panhandle Creek to create small ponds and one large lake (Panhandle Reservoir aka Crystal Lake, but known locally as The Big Lake). He cleared paths through the forest to build nearly 90 miles of dirt roads leading to all the properties. He constructed a communal center, called Basecamp, with office hours, community meeting rooms, bathrooms/showers, laundry machines, and a pay phone for emergency calls. There's mail service, road maintenance, hiking trails, an all-weather water-fill spigot, RV dump stations, trash compactor and a very capable volunteer fire department. All funded, of course, by HOA fees. Gotta love those Home Owner Associations (or not). But, I digress...

We left the open ice and sunshine at Dowdy and drove up to Crystal Lakes, 600 feet higher, going into a different world. Clouds blocked the sun here, and the wind was funneled through the mountains, gaining velocity as it gets squeezed. Ice covered the Big Lake but the wind was intimidating. Hard to set up the tent shanty when gusts are over 30 mph. Bad idea. You could end up chasing your tempest blown shelter over thin ice covering 60 feet of cold water. Not good. But we found 20" of ice on a small pond sheltered by trees, and we had a blast. But again, I digress...

The snow was above my knees when I visited the property in late April. Solar exposure was limited by daylight, a soft angle from the sun and seventy-foot lodgepole pines pulled the curtain early. I waited for the weather. It didn't seem to care.

I was anxious to get my camper out of the back alley at my apartment complex. Loveland has a meth (and opioid) problem – like the rest of our country – and the local tweakers (meth heads) rather like to break into vehicles, garages, campers and anything else that might provide pawn fodder for the next high. Gotta love those tweakers.



Time to take action, again. Dowdy Lake campground is one of the busiest in Colorado during the season (Memorial Day to Labor Day, basically) and you can only make reservations online (it books up very quickly). During the off-season it's different. The water stations are shut off

because of freezing, but the electricity is left on and the pit toilets get maintained. It's self-pay, and not cheap at \$24/day; but if there isn't a host on site nobody checks on you. These moments are gifts from the camping gods. Be grateful, and hushed.

So, I pulled my camper up to Dowdy and found a dandy spot in early May. Now, I had two homes: a vintage camper in the tranquil mountains, and a ghetto apartment in Tweakerland. The ultimate binary domicile option.

But, that's another story...

“First Night” Episode 2 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



“Well, here we go...I’m at the beginning of the greatest adventure of all. I have gone Into the Woods (not necessarily Into the Wild). As I look out my kitchen/work table window I see the stone cairn islands of Dowdy Lake, which have gripped me since CJ and I discovered them while

ice-fishing up here a couple years ago. Nice!”

-Journal entry: Tuesday; May 8th, 2018; 10:10 am. In my camper, *Cochise*.

For some reason, I’ve kept notebooks and journals most of my adult life. I’m glad I did, because my memory isn’t what it used to be. I write this now, months after events, but the journal takes me back. I was able to put the trailer on the property when the snow finally allowed, later than I had planned. *Note to self: Don’t get hung up on plans. Just do.*

First night on the property, sitting with my dog, ten miles from the Village, no neighbors within ear-shot, nightfall comes with a gentle wind through tall trees. The trees disappear in the dark. Quiet comes. Quiet stays. Then the stars. *Oh, the stars!* I had forgotten what they looked like. How big they are. How close. I feel as though I’m in heaven. Damn close. Now the quiet brings a settling grip. I

am in heaven. And not even dead. What comes to mind in these unique situations first discovered but often wondered about? At that moment...wild animals.

Yeah. I've heard all the stories of bears and moose and mountain lions. The Big Three of the high timber. The Rocky Mountain Trifecta. Call me Dorothy. I'm with my Toto. Getting on the yellow brick road... Going to the Emerald City... Off to see the Wizard... *Lions and mooses and bears! Oh my!!* Gotta love those Munchkins.

The bear up here are black, not grizzly. Big hairy pigs that just want to eat. I'm not worried about them. So long as my dog doesn't want to chase one, which dogs will do. But if you don't attract them, they won't come. Don't leave animal food, human food or trash outside. Ursus Major has a bloodhound's sense of smell. They also have a nasty odor. They don't know how to clean themselves after they evacuate their bowels. Probably don't care. They're wild animals. Only on television commercials do they use toilet paper. Bears have an acute olfactory sense and no regard for hygiene. So, they smell good, but they stink.



Moose are different. They don't eat what bears do. They won't bother me here. They'll bother me if I go into their territory and get between a cow and her calves. Or a bull in rut. They'll stomp my dog – any canine – because they regard them as wolves.

Moose don't like wolves, coyotes or dogs. They can't tell the difference. Dumb mooses. I heard the stories when I lived in Alaska, where the bulls are huge.

Moose here are a smaller strain (Shiras) compared to their northern cousins. But they'll still stomp you. *And your little dog too!* They hang in and around water. That's where they get their food. Gotta be careful when you fish the creeks meandering through willow brush. Look for sign, make some noise, and leave the damn dog in the truck. I'll let you know how that works out...

No, the apex predator here is the one you seldom see. I've lived in Colorado and frolicked in her foothills and mountains, fished her streams and rivers for most of my life. I've never seen a mountain lion in the wild. I'm not complaining. But everyone up here has their big cat stories. Most involve dogs let out at night that don't come back. (This seems to be a tough place for Fido). Felines of all sizes have superb night vision, and they can get from their perch to your neck without a sound, over major ground. Imagine your kitty when it was small and not fattened from canned food and domesticity. Multiply by 100. *Note to self: Go inside when the sun sets. Take the damn dog.*

But first night fears are soon overcome. I would continue to hear the stories: bears stepping on tent campers who foolishly took food to bed, sows prying locked restaurant dumpster lids open and dropping their cubs inside to snack. Even a local living in a trailer who had a bear that often flopped off of a branch and onto his camper-top to sleep in the middle of the night, taking advantage of the warm roof when the weather got cold.

Moose stories are just big deer stories, mostly involving accidentally hitting them with your vehicle. The vehicles usually lose that battle. Or people being charged for getting too close, trying to get the perfect photograph, or letting their dog run too far off, only to have it highballing back hard and barking right to their

master with Bullwinkle in full pursuit. The best thing to do then is find the biggest tree available and keep it between you and the animal, start thinking about your next dog, maybe keeping that one closer at hand, with a loud metal bell tied tight to its collar.

And the mountain lion stories...*oh, the mountain lion stories!* Mostly just about seeing tracks, inside your own footprints when you come full circle on a hunt or hike, seldom seeing the actual animal, sometimes seeing their claw marks on tree trunks, or the hind quarter of a mule deer twenty feet up, wedged in the crotch of a branch and tendering while the cougar is who knows where.



First night turns to second, third...first week. Fears melt as experience brings courage. Courage to overcome. Overcome your fears. Face them down and chase them away. *Boo! Be gone!* But... they never go away. Not completely. Probably a good thing. No need to feel as though you're ever

really safe. But I feel safer here than I did in Tweakerland. And I realize that it's time to go to work. Lots to do to make a home in the woods. I need to clear the trees, branches and deadfall that surround my camper pad and take away the cover where a big cat could hide. Just in case they get curious, as cats are known to do, and I forget not to go out at night.



I have the gear to deal with timber: chainsaw and axe, hatchet and pruning shears, and a utility trailer to haul it all to the slash depot on the way to the Village. I love chainsaws, having bought my first one in Alaska 30 some years ago to make

firewood for our cabin wood stove, the only source of heat where temperatures hit 40 below. I love wood heat, too. The way it smells. The sounds of kindling crackling and the bigger logs taking flame. Getting the fire in that Earth stove banked and setting the intake air vents and damper tuned to make that hotbox hum. There's nothing like the heat radiating off a throbbing wood stove when it's caught its wind. My wife and I could strip down to our underwear in the middle of winter, with me beating a conga drum and her dancing like Isadora Duncan. Curious moose watching from a distance. Listening for wolves...

Work also meant digging a hole big enough for a septic tank that could handle the waste water from my camper, so I wouldn't have to pull the trailer to the dumping station, and back it down my driveway when I returned. I needed help doing that the first time I parked the camper on the property, and I don't want to imagine what would have happened if my son hadn't been guiding me then, talking to me on a two-way radio so I wouldn't drop it into the trees.

Digging a hole in the mountains is not an easy thing. It's hard work, because it's hard rock. The dirt goes just so far on the surface; the decomposed remains of vegetation are only the mantle of the granite underneath. You have to break it up and scoop it out. I have that gear too: pickaxe and rock bar, and all kinds of shovels. I don't like this work. It's hard on my back, which is now sending

messages at 5G speed. I have to keep ignoring those messages as my trailer tanks fill. No romantic notions about sewage tanks, just the harsh actuality that their space is finite. But that's life in a camper...the reality of the Rubber Tramp.

My most important chore is also the one I look forward to most: building a storage/work shed. I can put up a 120 square foot structure without having to pull a building permit from the county. No inspection necessary. No government yahoo coming onto my property telling me I've used the wrong dimension lumber for rafters, an insufficient roof pitch, improper fasteners on the hurricane clips, unsatisfactory headers over doors and windows. *Not code compliant!* *Gonna have to red tag it!* Everything is wrong to them. That's what makes them right. I don't need government inspectors here. Who does? That's one of the reasons we live in the woods.



I have the gear to build a shed (you gotta love gear): the saws, sawhorses, hammers, slammers and measuring tools. The Ace store in the Village has the fasteners, roof edging and other hardware I'd need. I also have a buddy in

Cheyenne with a nail gun, bigger trailer and stronger back. But my back is beginning to fail, just thinking about that project, as I finish the septic tank - in the nick of time. I've built plenty of sheds. Even framed a few houses, including my own. But I was younger then, and that was before I tore up my lower lumbar (L4) on a construction job when I was in my late 20s. *Note to self: Tall, skinny*

guys are not built for heavy construction labor. The orthopedic surgeon informed me of that when I was flat on my back in the emergency room. He was right.

I had to hire a local handyman to build my shed. I had to pay someone else to do a thing I used to get paid to do. A thing I truly enjoyed doing, too. Something you could look at when the day's work was finished, and see what wasn't there when you started. But those days are gone. *The times, they are a changing.* I guess Dylan was right, too.

“Ditches, Dams and Master Plans: The Village is Born” Episode 3 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



“The days are rolling by pretty quickly. Been here a week and I think it’s going to work. I screwed up my back a bit cutting brush and making a couple trips to the slash depot, but it’s nice to clear the perimeter so I can see any approachment. Rambeaux loves it up here, too. Very peaceful

when the wind blows through the tree tops.

Getting ready to head into the Village so I can get on a computer and use my phone at the library. 24/7 Wi-Fi there. No cell phone service up here. Damn.”

-Journal entry: Tuesday; June 12, 2018; 9:25 am. In my camper, *Cochise*.

The Village of Red Feather Lakes (as it’s officially titled) is like no other town I’ve known. Technically, it isn’t a town, because of its size and lack of services. In legalese, villages are “larger than a hamlet but smaller than a town,” which is generally regarded as having at least 1,000 residents. According to the last census, the Village of Red Feather Lakes had 525 inhabitants, and is described as a CDP (census-designated place, aka unincorporated). Those must have been some persistent census enumerators (that’s what they’re called. I know,

because I was one in 1980 when I spent the summer in Colorado Springs, living out of a tent in a KOA campground with a couple of college buddies and some other tribal nomads). I've never seen more than a dozen Red Feather residents at one time, and that was at The Basil – my favorite watering hole, recently deceased. *RIP Basil. And thanks for the memories...*

Wikipedia describes Red Feather this way: “Located in the Rocky Mountains northwest of Fort Collins, this is a rustic mountain village surrounded by the Roosevelt National Forest.” Rustic it is, but not to be confused with the unincorporated community called Rustic, which is 11 miles from the Village, down a treacherous, unforgiving hairpin switchback gravel pathway called Manhattan Road. That Rustic is on the bank of the Cache la Poudre River (aka “The Pooder”. Translated from French for “hide the powder” because early French-Canadian trappers caught in a snowstorm in 1820 had to cache their gunpowder in caves and recesses along the riverbank cliffs to keep it from getting wet).



The Poudre is one of the most beautiful rivers in Colorado, coming out of its headwaters in Rocky Mountain National Park and carving a gorgeous canyon through sandstone and granite to Fort Collins before making its way to the South Platte, then braiding its way east through the Sandhill crane's spring migration rendezvous in the middle of Nebraska and dumping into The

Missouri River (aka “Mighty Mo,” the longest river in North America at 2,341 miles – 21 miles longer than The Mississippi, aka “Big Muddy”) between Omaha and Council Bluffs, Iowa, separating the rich, fertile fields of the Midwest farmlands from the impoverished, arid grasslands of the Western Plains. Roll on Mighty Mo, into Big Muddy and down to the delta in the Gulf of Mexico. But, sorry, I digress...

Back to the Village, and its humble beginnings. Native Americans, primarily the Ute, had lived in the area for centuries (that’s what made them native). Plains Indians, predominantly the Shoshone, Cheyenne and Arapahoe, would come into the mountains for the abundance of tall, straight lodgepole pines, which they coveted as structure for their buffalo hide tipis – their lodge poles. The first whites were trappers and hunters collectively known as Mountain Men, of the *Jeremiah Johnson* persuasion.

When settlers came to the country and started building homesteads (that’s what made them settlers), they were initially drawn to the verdant expanses of relatively level soil in the big valleys of the numerous creeks and plentiful natural springs. They raised cattle, fattening them on open range grazing and selling the beef to the growing population below, in Denver, Fort Collins and Greeley. They also cut timber and hauled it down to the growing cities, expanding trails to roads, with difficulty. “Tie hacks” did much of the dirty work, providing timber for the ties of the Transcontinental Railroad and its many spurs and iron-horse tributaries. Brutal work (that’s what made them brutes).

By the 1870s enough settlers had populated the area for the government to conduct an official survey, in 1879, which showed only one lake, now known as Creedmore Lake. In 1886 gold was discovered and the camp of Manhattan (the

wicked road's namesake) formed, but the strike played out and in a few years the mining town that peaked with a population of about 300 became a ghost town, its simple reminders now being overtaken by nature. What was then, and is now, most precious and plentiful is water - fresh, clear snowmelt-fed streams and ancient springs popping out of the ground and ubiquitous rock formations. Liquid gold to a dry frontier, and the greatest expenditure of manufactured capital and human labor went into ditch digging and dam building, filling the valley lowlands with this vital natural resource, and giving the community its initial name of Westlake. What would eventually become the Village of Red Feather Lakes was now on the map.



Water continued to be the driving force behind development in the area, and ditches were dug and lakes were made, with various Fort Collins and Denver area businessmen looking to strike it rich. The locals discovered that native cutthroat trout (Colorado's state fish) and stocked brookies, browns and bows (rainbows from

local hatcheries) loved all this expansion of water from creeks to reservoirs, and they got nice and fat in the process.

Soon there was a thrifty trade of selling fish to fancy seafood restaurants in Denver, which got a big boost when President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt (the champion of our National Forests and Parks, and often referred to as the "conservationist president") ordered a large quantity for visiting diplomats following the Russian-Japanese War.

(The designation of National Forest status was instrumental in preserving the area to appear as it does today. It kept the tall, straight timber of lodgepole and ponderosa pine from falling under the saws of greedy stump-grubbing hacks who would be more than happy to feed the pasty jowls of the Denver area developers, and line their pockets with pitch-pocked profits. But, again...I digress.)

The trout were harvested, cleaned and packed on ice, with a man accompanying the train all the way to Washington D.C. keeping them from spoiling. Teddy said, "Bully!", which means "Thanks for the fish!"

Not everyone was quite so enthusiastic about all the ditch digging, stream damming and profiting going on by rerouting mountain creeks to reservoirs and then into the river and down the mountain to Colorado's Front Range cities. Wyoming ranchers had long been relying on water from the north-flowing Laramie River to sustain their livelihood, and when a bunch of investors from St. Louis and beyond teamed up with local bankers and developers to form the Laramie-Poudre Reservoirs and Irrigation Company and started diverting water in earnest, well, they got a little pissed. The cowboys and stock men weren't going to cotton for a bunch of Colorado bankers and businessmen with Eastern profiteers commandeer water they considered theirs. They simply weren't amused. Wyoming ranchers can be funny that way - just not amused. Best not to mess with them, I've found. But, yet again, I digress...

Colorado became a state in 1876, one hundred years after our country became a nation, which is why our state motto is "The Centennial State." Isn't that clever? Yeah...whatever. The relevance of that trivial silliness is that the issue eventually wound its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled on the side of the Wyoming ranchers in 1921 citing the doctrine of "prior appropriation",

which means “first come, first served” in a “possession is nine-tenths of the law” kind of way. It didn’t hurt that the USSC Justice who wrote the opinion had been a Wyoming politician and attorney general, but it’s still just not a good idea to piss off Wyoming cowboys and stockmen. I don’t think that’ll ever change.

So, with water-stealing off the table, some industrious Denver businessmen and bankers came up with a new plan. The area was just too alluring to not try to make a profit, somehow. Laissez-faire capitalism was roaring in the 1920s. With dozens of reservoirs brimming with trout already established, and automobiles making easier access to the region’s natural beauty and mild summer climate, the Red Feather Mountain Lakes Association was formed in 1923 and authorized to “acquire, lease, exchange, subdivide, manage land and build a resort.” *Cha-ching!*

Redfeather Mountain Lakes
Colorado's Finest Playground

HOMESITES in the mountain playgrounds of America are growing scarce. Prices are steadily advancing. Desirable locations are becoming less available as demand increases. The history of all famous resorts of Colorado proves this. In the past few years prices for Colorado mountain homesites in the vicinity of Colorado Springs, Manitou, Evergreen, Lookout Mountain, Grand Lake, Estes Park, etc., have increased manifold.

Never before has Redfeather Lakes been open to the public. Never before has anyone had the opportunity to buy a homesite therein. But now, under the plans of the Redfeather Mountain Lakes Association,

you and yours can have a place of your own to enjoy the rare pleasure of outdoor camping in God's wonderland. This is the first time, to our knowledge, that mountain homesites are being offered and SOLD to the public under a Written Guarantee (copy of same on request), in a scenic environment of such enchantment, possessing the many additional features of Nature's most healthful recreations—fishing, hunting, boating, bathing, golfing, horseback riding, etc. This is the first time, to our knowledge, that a mountain homesite, with so many desirable features can be bought and OWNED OUT-RIGHT for as low a price as we offer. Is it any wonder these homesites are selling so rapidly?

FACILITIES

- Hotel
- Dance Pavilion
- Filling Station
- Groceries
- Meat Market
- Bakery
- Cafe
- Row Boats
- Saddle Horses
- Golf Equipment
- Fishing Tackle
- Lumber Yard
- Building Material
- Contractors and Carpenters
- Post Office
- Electric Lights

IMPROVEMENTS

- Administration Building
- Gate Office
- Silver Fox Farm
- Highways
- Lake Development
- Fish Hatchery
- Golf Course
- Many Cottages
- Spring Houses
- Telephone
- Public Toilets
- Stables
- Tourist Camp
- Boat House

ROAD MAP

Redfeather Lakes is located but four hours' motor ride from Denver, over paved roads to Fort Collins, and hard-surfaced gravel roads beyond. A scenic drive all the way.

The Redfeather Silver Fox Farm is among the interesting attractions at Redfeather.

A Few Hours Hunt at Redfeather Resulted in These Ten Mallards

PRICES, TERMS AND FURTHER INFORMATION ON APPLICATION

The Redfeather Mountain Lakes Association
Cor. Seventeenth and Stout Sts. Denver, Colorado

Aside from dividing thousands of acres of cheaply acquired land into nearly two thousand mostly one-eighth acre lots and building cabins on over 100 of them, the master plan included an 18-hole golf course, tennis courts, rodeo grounds, a

ranch school, rifle range, hotels and other recreational facilities. Even a fox farm, that initially brought in twenty pairs of silver fox (with the intent of growing to one hundred pair and beyond) and a manager from New York, who lived in a log cabin structure called the Fox House which had a cupola with windows on top so he and tourists could look at the animals in their pens.

The foxes flourished in their mountain surrounds. I've seen early film of the farm in its heyday. Hundreds of these beautiful creatures packed *en masse* in the fenced enclosure, appearing to be one huge undulating river of rich, soft fur. Of course, the film stopped before the foxes were slaughtered and had their hides ripped off for the adornment of the fashion trends and the lifestyles of the rich and famous during the Jazz Age. As stated in the previous episode, this area is tough on canines.

But, as the saying goes, the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry, and the grand plan of the association fell well short of its mark. The 18-hole golf course became 9-holes, with its most infamous tee shot coming off one of the many castellated rock formations. The several hotels planned became just one being built. Most of the other attractions withered when the 20s roared into the stock market crash and consequent Great Depression. Zipping up to a mountain resort was no longer in fashion, and the cabins became empty – although many have been resuscitated and still exist today, testaments to ambitious intentions and the resiliency of a good log structure. I want one.

Well, dear reader, I should bring this episode to a close. The human attention span grows shorter in these modern times, and I am a part of the mix. This damn digital technology has clipped our willingness to listen for much longer than a snippet or two. More's the pity.

One question that I had, and perhaps you do to, is: *Where did the Village's name come from, and what the heck is Red Feather?* Well, after consulting said digital technology, I feel enabled to answer that. Stay with me, I beseech you; we're almost there:

"The name 'Red Feather' made its first appearance when the Red Feather Mountain Lakes Association was formed with the objective of developing recreational homes (cabins) on 4,320 acres. The name was stimulated by Princess Tsianina Redfeather, a native American girl who was touring in concert with the composer Charles Wakefield Cadman. Purportedly, the namesake was Princes Redfeather's grandfather, Chief Redfeather, whose grave was supposed to be in the area." (Wikipedia)



This is her promotional picture. She's beautiful, I think. I would have liked to have met her, and heard her sing. She had a good heart, too. You can find out more about her and the Village at the Red Feather Historical Society's website; or you can go online, book a camping spot at Dowdy Lake or West Lake campgrounds, rent a cabin, Airbnb/Vrbo or boondock at the many primitive camp spots dotting the public lands and do a little exploring for yourself. You won't want to leave, believe me...until winter.

“Fires, Floods and the Community Library”

Episode 4 of

The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp



“Ready to head into the Village and hit the library again – this is becoming a good routine. I did laundry yesterday at Basecamp and fished while my clothes were in the machines. I also figured out how to get Wi-Fi with my laptop (the antennae switch was turned off), so it was a good

day. Hopefully, I’ll finish the lofts, workbench, desk and shelving in the shed today so I can start loading it with my material goods.”

-Journal entry: Wednesday; June 20, 2018; 9:18 am. In my camper, *Cochise*.

Public libraries have long served as an oasis of comfort for the dispossessed, a shelter in the storm for those without homes. The Red Feather Lakes Community Library serves that purpose to the campers, trampers and other transient vagabonds, as well as the hearty residents of this magical mountain village.

For me, it’s where I can get the internet (24/7 Wi-Fi that includes the parking lot), cell phone service (4G!) and enjoy the modern amenities of a clean, well-lighted place – and plumbing fixtures.

It's also the hub of the community, being open 7 days a week (except major holidays) year-round. It caters to all ages, especially kids. It has a large children's area inside (behind double glass doors, so they can be seen and not heard) and an educational playground outside that has hoof and paw prints in the sidewalk depicting the sign left by moose, bear, mountain lions and other indigenous critters so local youngsters begin to realize how to recognize their unseen neighbors. Not a bad idea for the preservation of the herd – as in ours, the humans.

But even in magical mountain communities, bad things can happen. And sometimes they do. At 6 am on Saturday, June 9, 2012, a call came to a Rist Canyon volunteer firefighter regarding smoke sighted near an area known as Paradise Park, not far from Red Feather on the other side of the Poudre River. He found a small, smoldering fire most likely started by lightning. Colorado was experiencing a bad drought season and there were already several wildfires that had burned in the region, so the firefighter called for a full crew to respond and try to extinguish any problem before it got out of hand.

Nearly two decades of pine beetle infestation and destruction left a lot of dead standing timber, and the dry vegetation quickly traveled into the trees. By the time the crew arrived the fire had engaged the landscape and was heading through the canyon with lightning-borne speed – estimated at 20-40 feet per minute. By mid-morning dozens of firefighters, several helicopters and two air tankers were on the scene and into battle, trying to defend structures and cut fire lines – but the flames would not be deterred. Winds picked up and by noon a thick gray plume of smoke was towering into the sky, filling the western horizon and blocking out the sun. It appeared Armageddon was underway.



The smoldering fire had become an exploding conflagration, and Larimer County Sheriff's deputies raced flames to evacuate residents in the winding mountain roads as power lines fell, communication relays failed and a local radio station went off the air. Evacuation orders went out, roads were closed and larger firefighting agencies brought in. Again, the flames were undeterred and escalated ferociously over the weekend. On Monday the fire was upgraded to Type 1 and management was turned over to federal authorities. More aircraft and hotshot crews were immediately called

in, along with other regional resources; but the fire, dubbed the High Park Fire, engulfed 37,000 acres and was totally uncontained.

Red Feather residents were eating the smoke but watched from what was then a safe distance. They gathered at the library, across the dirt street from their own volunteer fire station, and waited for the latest reports. The reports were not good. Structures were being lost despite heroic attempts by firefighters to defend them. Just too much dead timber, dry grass and relentless wind sending walls of flames running up and down canyons and over mountains. It got worse, and worse, for days on end. By Wednesday there were a thousand firefighters

and 22 aircraft battling the blaze that were able to keep the edge heading toward Fort Collins contained.

It looked and sounded like a battlefield as the heavy tankers rumbled overhead. Chinook and Blackhawk helicopters pulled water out of Horsetooth and other reservoirs with flexible “Bambi Buckets” hanging from long cables, their heavy rotors chop-chop-chopping through the acrid, brown air. Small, fixed wing aircraft dodged through the airspace, relaying vital information on the fire face’s movements to the incident commander below.

The community gathered at the library, eager for news of the fire’s strength and direction. The news wasn’t encouraging.

The Mishawaka Amphitheater (aka “The Mish”) is located on the Poudre and known to CSU students, locals and visiting explorers as an amazing musical venue to catch an indoor/outdoor show, as well as a legendary eatery for grabbing a beer and burger during the day and watching the rafters and kayakers run the rapids from the back patio – which extends over the water. Its large timber structure would go quickly in the flames.



Fortunately, or perhaps intentionally, firefighters used it as a base of operations and positioned engines and other equipment in its parking lots and surrounding flat areas, drawing water from the Poudre and keeping the flames at bay. We can all be grateful to wildland fire-

fighters, and those of us who live in the mountains are with all we hold dear –

because that's what they risk their lives to protect, bivouacking in spike camps and working to exhaustion in unimaginable conditions.

When the fire was finally 100 per-cent contained on June 30th, three weeks after it started, it had burned over 87,000 acres (more than 136 square miles), destroying at least 259 homes and killing a 62-year-old woman who was not able to escape quickly enough. At the time it was the most destructive fire in Colorado's history based on structures lost, and the second largest in terms of area burned.

Back to the Village, which had been spared the flames by a matter of miles. The roads re-opened, power and communication lines were re-strung, and things finished out in 2012 without further incident. A sense of normalcy returned. But danger came with it.

As is all too often the case in the West, flash floods follow wildfires. Mountainsides and canyonlands are denuded of soil-holding trees and vegetation. Fire burns moisture and nutrients out of the earth's surface, turning it to nasty ash which can quickly become devastating mudslides in the event of heavy rainfall. The residents of the area and Larimer County officials knew this and prepared aggressively by upgrading culverts to larger, concrete structures designed to not clog up with debris. Other flood mitigation precautions were implemented and everyone kept their fingers crossed that we wouldn't end the drought too severely. But Mother Nature can have a wicked sense of humor. In September of the following year, 2013, she let loose with 15" of rain in a matter of days all along the Front Range of the Rockies, which is equal to the average annual precipitation for the state (including snow). The areas west of Colorado Springs suffered most of all,

following two monster wildfires the previous summers. Cars were literally floating away in rivers of ash and mud on the streets of Manitou Springs and throughout the canyons.

Larimer County fared better, largely due to the preparations that had been undertaken, but power and communication lines again were wiped out, and Buckhorn Canyon Road, one of the primary roads used by firefighters assaulting the High Park Fire, was in many places completely washed away. I've fished the Buckhorn Creek for over thirty years, and normally in September there isn't enough water to hold the little brookies who thrive there in the springtime flow of the snowmelt runoff. Most often the creek is narrow enough to jump across without splashing water and spooking the fish – unless your dog decides it's a good spot to take a soak.



So, Mother Nature reminded us all who's boss, and once more the Village was largely cut-off from the rest of the world. Living in the mountains can be often insecure. The rest of the time, which is by far most of the time, it's like no other place imaginable. Almost a different world. The risk of nature's wrath is a matter of

choice. But as for me, dear reader, I wouldn't have it any other way.

“Settling In, and Blowing Out” Episode 5 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



“Yowza, what a past couple of weeks this has been. In the course of packing, hauling, storing, hauling, digging a septic tank, clearing a couple loads of brush and building lofts and benches in the shed, my back had had enough. I pinched my sciatic nerve and suddenly the world changed: I couldn’t sit, sleep, stand or walk without shooting pain. I went to the chiro (Stupid!)

six times, and that just ended up making it worse. I didn’t sleep for three nights before I finally decided it was time to see a medical doctor.”

--Journal entry: Thursday; July, 12th, 2018; 6:20 pm. In my camper, *Cochise*.

I’m afraid we’re going to have to take a trip to the woodshed. There’s a lot of work to be done! Those were the words that woke me each morning as the month of June was drawing to a close. Unless I wanted to incur the additional cost of another month’s storage rent, at \$130 and some change, I had to put some lofts, work tables, a closet and as many shelves as would fit into the shed – which a contractor had built because my back wasn’t up to standing walls,



hanging siding and putting up rafters and metal roofing panels. But it was just a shell. I reckoned I could flesh out the guts and finish the interior. That turned out to be not one of my better decisions, however. And, as a wiser, old boss would often tell me: *Life is about the decisions we make.* He was right.

With the 20/20 vision of hindsight, I *should* have realized it would have been wiser to take the financial hit rather than a physical one.

But with the blurred vision of too much Teutonic ancestry, I just put my head down and bolted forward like a rushing Hun. It often worked in the past, so why not? What I should have realized was that if it pained me as much as it did loading several 4'x8' sheets of plywood and a dozen pieces of 2"x4" lumber into my utility trailer, how would it feel humping these sheets up into the rafters and bending and lifting and squatting and kneeling and grunting and cursing to finish the shed and fill it with boxes of books, scads of camping gear, wardrobes of clothing, crates of tools, and all the other flotsam and jetsam of my life's wanton voyage that I was unable to separate myself from when I "dematerialized" in preparation for living in a camper? But I never gave it a thought... *Silly me, eh?*

I was able to set up the shed and empty the storage space, however, through brutish determination and a continuous crescendo of grunts and blasphemy bathed in cheap barley pop and legal botanicals – and much to the chagrin of my dog Rambeaux, who seemed to think I was doing this all for her, for some reason. I'm not sure why I thought that. Must have been the cheap barley pop and legal botanicals, but I digress...



Proud as I was of pushing through and punching out the job, I nevertheless felt the need for a little bit of R&R. I was inclined to recline. I scampered into the camper and went horizontal. I got stuck. When my lower back muscles finally got some rest they decided to get a little recuperative respite as well. So, they did what overtaxed muscles do on overaged bodies. They went into contraction. Damn lower back muscles. Damn contraction. *Damn, damn, damndamn.*

Nightfall cast its darkness upon the land, and I felt the gripping omnipresence of being completely alone. In the woods. On a mountain. Ten miles from the Village, with no cell phone service. I tried not to worry. I failed. Quite miserably. If only Rambeaux was Lassie I could have sent her off to get help from Timmy, but she didn't understand my urgent requests: "*Get help, Rambeaux. Get help!*" She just looked at me with that goofy expression on her face, ears up like a bat's and wagging her tail as if it was the backside baton of a maestro leading Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Crazy mutt. Gotta love dogs. I certainly do. Most, anyway...

Back to the Darkside, dear reader. I bid you welcome. Never in my life had I experienced that depth of fear. I didn't necessarily think I was going to die, but I realized the cold, stark reality that *that* shit could happen. I wouldn't be able to help myself, and I was the only self that was there, except for the dog, but...

I settled in. Lying on the mattress complex that came with the camper: an over-sized, worn-out futon and a piece of memory foam. Not what you want for a bad lower lumbar. No sleep. Ditto the next two nights.

Fortunately, I had electricity; and with electricity I had a working laptop that allowed me to lie in the weeds and try to seek comfort through watching movies. So, I did that. Westerns, war flicks, historical documentaries on William and Clarke's Corps of Discovery – all that stuff. Slowly, the nasty little muscles of the lower lumbar decided it was time to lighten up. I f'ing agreed. It took a little more time than I had budgeted for such unforeseen events. But, more's the pity.



My mind drifted. I miss that. Occasionally, however, it would drift bad. I had fears. We all do. *Deal with it.* I tried. Lost. Imagined myself passed. Alone. In a camper on a mountainside. Way up, near Wyoming. No one knows. The dog wonders who will fetch food and water. By the time

the neighbors alert the sheriff's department – which will be in spring, when the neighbors return – my body will be a decomposing corpse in a dried puddle of my own waste. And what of Rambeaux (my dog)? What will she do? Actually, I don't really want to know. Hopefully survive.

But, that didn't happen. (As Mark Twain said, "*Worrying is like paying a debt you don't owe.*" He was right.) I was flat on my back looking up in my camper, wondering WTF was going on. Several days passed...

When I felt able, I clambered into BroBo (the "Bronze Bomber" – my Nissan Pathfinder) and headed down the mountain. The good doctor checked me out, confirmed the sciatica and (most importantly) gave me some muscle relaxers. I didn't want any opioid pain blockers, so I got something milder. I really just wanted the muscle relaxers. They mellow the spasms. Damn spasms. They're the worst. I can deal with pain. Just not in electrical spurts.

I return to the camper, but little comfort. The bedding is too soft, even with the medication. I don't sleep. That sucks. After a few days more, I'm able to get up and head down into Fort Collins to buy a cheap twin-size mattress and buck it up into the camper before dark. Jolly good! I get rest.

Then, I get stupid. As soon as I feel straight, I do what I feel needs to be done, and maybe a little bit more. I take the trash to the compactor at Basecamp, get water at the community spigot, check my mail and my favorite fishing hole – catching the same stupid rainbow that I eventually named Phil (or Filthy Phil, when I couldn't catch him) and generally acted normal. Again, not one of my better decisions.

A few days later I was back in spasm-land, and had to measure my steps. I made an appointment with the Doc in hopes of getting better medication. He started me on the weak, but I was ready for something a little stronger – especially for the spasms, which were not getting better. I struggled into BroBo and busted down the mountain. I made the 10 miles to Red Feather before pulling over at West Lake prior to heading down the hill. F'ing spasms were getting a little out of

hand. I had to get out of the truck. Then I got stuck. Again. This time vertical. But no better. Quite worse.

I bothered around walking in the parking lot, looking to find the key to loosening my lower back. No luck with that. Damn. I tried getting into the vehicle but couldn't find comfort from the spasms. *Damndamn*. I milled about and the situation felt as though it was deteriorating, and time was not on my side.

A sheriff's truck was perched across the road, letting visitors know that there is law in this town. The Village. I whistled and hailed them, and they responded. The County guys called the Village guys, and soon there was the big-box ambulance from the local fire department. These dudes were cool. But, they couldn't really help me. I needed some drugs. I ended up with more than I wanted. That happens.

A different colored big-box ambulance was soon rambling up the highway from Fort Collins. Oh well, glad I have insurance. I got gurneyed and loaded into the back of the box. Then I got loaded some more. The ride down the mountain was bumpy at best, especially laid up on my back with spasms. After some unholy screams one of the EMTs asked if I wanted something for the pain. *Why not*, I figured? He started to stick a needle into my arm when I asked him what it was. He said it was fentanyl. I thought, *Great! Now I'll be a junkie*. But, that didn't happen.

I was looked at and x-rayed in the ER, and the good doctor told me that in addition to sciatica I had a little rheumatoid arthritis in my lower back. He gave me a shot of steroids, wrote a scrip for heavy duty muscle relaxers and non-opioid pain relievers, then sent me on my merry way. I straggled out after paying what I could, and it was at that moment I realized I was a long way from home.

Fortune blew kind winds. I knew a Native-American princess in Fort Collins and she consented to take me back up to Red Feather and BroBo (one of the local EMTs had taken Rambeaux back to my property). I waddled back to Cochise (this camper) and lay upon the mattress after knocking down some Flexeril (muscle relaxers). Again, I got stuck. This time, in a good way. Or so it felt. A dazed and confused moment of concern and happiness all rolled into one. I could feel my lower lumbar unburdening itself, as I had done with my possessions in order to live this way: In a camper. In the woods. Way up near Wyoming. Nine thousand feet. No phone. All alone. *Yaboy!*



And when you are alone – truly alone– you close your eyes and quiet yourself, and seek the greater presence about you, the presence you feel come down upon you like a warm,

liquid blanket. Then you hold tight. *Breathe*. In through your nose. *Slowly*. Out through your mouth. Clear your lungs. Now, you open your eyes and speak. You speak to the presence. The only thing there. And, as Mark Twain said: “*You cannot pray a lie.*”

Quite frankly, dear reader, I put my faith in a greater power that I can only imagine, more than anything I have ever seen. But, I ain’t done lookin’ yet...

“Why I Became a Rubber Tramp” Episode 6 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



“Finally, I’m able to sit down and get back into writing, beginning with this journal. I’m writing, for the first time, from the studio desk in my snug little shed. It will also serve as a shop, so therefore will be referred to as “The Shtudiop”. I’m on a bare desktop of beetle-kill pine boards layered with several coats of water-based, clear Polycrylic finish. I cut in a window over the desk the

other day, and I might install the matching window on the other side today, as well as some gable vents and a few more coats of finish on this desk. Oh! the joy. It will be great!”

-Journal entry: Friday; August 10, 2018; 11:47 am. In my *Shtudiop*.

After screwing up my lower lumbar it was nice to get back to normal – whatever that may be. For me, getting back meant doing what I had in mind when I

decided it was time to sell everything but my soul and go on the road – as a rubber tramp. That realization occurred over a few years' time before it became crystal clear. I think most things just work that way.

Let me explain first, if I may, what a rubber tramp means to me, because I'm still not completely certain. As with most things important to me that I can recall without difficulty, I came across this information from a movie or book. In this case, it was both. The book/movie is *Into the Wild*, with the original tale written by John Krakauer, one of my favorite living writers. Not giving away the story, I'll just say "Rubber Tramp" is distinguished from "Leather Tramp" for reasons worth reading the book or watching the movie – preferably both.



Suffice it to say rubber tramps roll on rubber (tires) and leathers are on foot (hopefully with shoes). As with everything, there are variations. With rubber tramps, you might drive an all-in-one Recreational Vehicle (RV) that can be anything from a big

van to a small semi in size and luxury. They are the King Coaches of the rubber tramper byways, but definitely not for the starter set, such as myself. I chose the other option, binary world that it is, and decided to get a camper-trailer. I wanted to have separation between my vehicle and my home, so I wouldn't have to pilot my house around strange towns to get groceries. People drive rude sometimes. Big vehicles brake slowly. Accidents occur. Not good. Not even close to good, so I try to avoid that, by reducing the opportunity. And stay small. Quick.

I've mentioned in previous blogs my reasons for living the way I do, which is the same way many people seem to do in my recently-discovered, mobile neighborhoods – and not just at my age. I really don't care why that is. I'm more concerned with how to do it. And, surely, why not? It *can* help you change your mental state of being, if that's what you want. It did for me.

What I really wanted to do was live the life I'd talked and dreamed about for decades. I just had to get comfortable with living a different way than what might be considered "normal", although that's ever-changing. And, I had to be comfortable trying new things, at a not-so-new age. A lot of people do that when they hit their mid-50s, and they stop simply tossing the AARP mail but give it a look. Again, why not? We've earned it.

I wanted to live in the wilderness of nature, having had my fill of the craziness of urbania. Or, as Edward Abbey describes it in his wonderful book *Desert Solitaire* (1968): "*That miscegenated mésalliance of human and rodent called the rat race (Rattus Urbanus)*". Too many people, not enough love there. Traffic sucks. Drivers can be rude - makes life less fun. Then, there are the tweakers trying to steal all your shyte. Freakin tweakers. *Buh -bye!*



I thought of other things, such as what I wanted to do now that I was living in the Red Feather/Crystal Lake non-metropolitan area. I envisioned fish. Troutses (sic). Big ones: Browns, Rainbows, Brookies, Palominos, and the "elusive" Greenback Cutthroat – Colorado's state fish

and solitary native trout. The headwaters for the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River were nearby (our only river designated Wild and Scenic by federal standards), and that clear, meandering creek had thick flanks of willow brush where the moose liked to bed, leaving fresh sign if you arrive too early – which could be anytime. Damn moose. An adult bull was often seen in the area. My son and I called him Bullwinkle. What else?

The beaver dams created some beautiful reflective ponds where feisty little brookies would attack the right dry fly. You gotta match the hatch with whatever bugs are popping, but there are always a few stand-by fly patterns that get slurped or slammed by those crazy little speckled trout, kicking and flailing until you release them, then shooting off like a bullet. Bigger fish play longer, run more, and don't go into crazy mode right away. They're more fun to catch, but bigger fish are in bigger water, and that would be Crystal Lake (technically Panhandle Reservoir, because it's filled by Panhandle Creek). Most locals just call it the Big Lake, to distinguish it from the several smaller bodies of captured creek water nearby. My son and I would take our 10' fishing kayaks out on non-windy days and drop jigs with spinning rods or pull streamers on fly rods, trying to get the monster fish below. We'll keep trying. I'll let you know how it goes. So far, not so good...



What was equally enjoyable to creek and lake fishing was just bombing out an elk hair caddis or parachute Adams from the banks of the smaller ponds that had calmer water and more moose. Maybe tie a midge, nymph or San Juan Worm on as a dropper. And, yes, watch out for moose. When I returned to one such pond after

running into the Village for more supplies, my son CJ, who was the only one there, motioned at the water's edge and mouthed not to let the dog out. I parked and got out quietly. A large, bull moose was casually eating away at the water vegetation, grass and willow branches on the other side of the inlet cove. He was cool. Big. Bigger than Bullwinkle. *Nice moose...*

Fishing isn't really taxing, but it's nice to relax afterward nonetheless. In French, it would be *après-fish*. Being in the forest, high above people and listening to the wind blow its chorus through the canopy of tall trees, smelling evergreen and feeling ever young, a sensation of calmness washes over you that you don't recognize at first, but then comes back like an old friend from the days before digital. I like that.

Life in a camper is best enhanced with outdoor activities, right out the door. Looking through the thinned timber into a primordial forest and imagining what lies in there, or walks, stalks, leaps or rushes within that jungle can be a bit intimidating. *So, don't go there!* Not alone with a dog, anyway.

There are always home chores, no matter where and how you live. The simpler you live, the simpler the chores. As a human, I require food, water and shelter – aside from air, and up here it's a bit thin. As a rubber tramp, I additionally need a place to empty my septic tanks – and I really like 30 amps of 120V AC electricity running through the appropriate gauge wire, properly insulated. I also look at the trees and brush around my camp pad and imagine I'm Edward Scissorhands and should turn it all into art, and create a beautiful, defensible space against the intruders of the mountain wilds – fire and beast. No thieving tweekers here. (Well, there was, but he got busted in Fort Collins).



It's hard to be calm in a storm. Yoga didn't work for me among the pit bulls and felons at my old digs, but up here I hear my daughter's words saying, *"Hey! Hey Pops! Can you hear me? Do yoga, okay? Yoga! Start easy. It's stretching and breathing. It'll be good for your back. Yoga!"*

She'd always given me good advice in the past, about how to dress and what to eat and that I

should climb a 14er (mountain). I climbed one (an easy one) with her and my son and his girlfriend. They had fun. I did too. Except when I thought I was going to die on the side of a stony mountain in front of a bunch of young happy people and their dogs. Didn't happen, though. I won. *Thank you, daughta!* You taught me to conquer my fears, and you didn't leave me when everyone else needed to keep moving to fight off cramps and beat the impending storm to the summit. Much appreciated.

Conquering fears. That's not something I used to think about - when I was young(er), and fearless. Now, I find the need for it, on occasion. I would imagine we all do, somehow. We should. We should conquer them. Every time they appear, mostly in our minds. For me, I'm becoming more comfortable in the wild. Never fearless, though. Just trying to find the courage. I like Mark Twain. He said, *"Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear."* I believe that he's right.

“Living in High Timber” Episode 7 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



“Summer is slipping by much too fast, what once was imagined is already past...”

-Journal entry: Wednesday; August 15, 2018; 10:23 am. In my camper, *Cochise*.

Three months of living on a mountainside, 9,000’ above sea level, in the woods, just south of the Wyoming border, no neighbors within earshot and no cell phone service. It’s been an eye-opener, that’s for sure. *Fo Sho!* I think I might make it though; we’ll see...

I’ve lived in the woods of the Alaskan interior, through winter, no running water, using an outhouse, wood stove heat (it was a great stove, too – an Earth Stove) all long before cell phones. It was no problem. One of the best times of my life, as I recall.

I’ve also lived in the foothills outside of Loveland, Colorado, for a dozen years, living in a vintage 1959 16’ camper that was just like the one we had when I was

growing up, until the “cabin” we bought was habitable. It had been abandoned and open for a year after the State Troopers evicted a previous tenant for defaulting on his VA loan. He was a Vietnam vet, but the Troopers fired tear gas canisters through the windows to get him out. One of the tear gas canisters was still lodged in the siding beside the window. Oddly, the exact same thing happened at our cabin in Alaska, including the tear gas canister being lodged in the siding beside a window. I think we have to take better care of our vets, and maybe get our Troopers a little more range time firing tear gas canisters. Just sayin.



But...back to the mountain, eh? No State Troopers shooting tear gas canisters here. Let's keep it that way, shall we? I much prefer the quietude of tall trees sifting the wind through their upper reaches. Gray Jays squawking, looking for food. And that pine squirrel that keeps barking because it ventures too close to the hummingbird's home and gets attacked. I've

witnessed it. Damn squirrels. They drive Rambeaux crazy. They always have. Me too, sometimes. They'll eat all the wild bird food and suet, you know. But

enough of rodentia. Let the lemmings go to the sea, and let us be off to the forest, in the mountains.

Close your eyes now, and draw a few measured breaths. When you open them, you will have transcended your temporal bounds and we will stand together amongst the tall timber...



I am the steward of this small slice of forest, having paid tens of thousands of dollars for a piece of paper granting me legal title by a local governmental agency with proper, recognized jurisdiction from larger governmental agencies.

Yes, I am a landowner in America; but I know I can't take it with me when I go. As Native People say, *"We do not inherit the land from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children."* So, I put my childrens' names on the legal title too; and I hope they do the same – someday.

But now I must tend to my small slice of forest, for it's choking itself with too many restricting trees. It's overgrown, densely thick, a stunted jungle of lodgepole and ponderosa pine that hasn't seen the thinning, rejuvenating force of fire since long before my arrival. I must be Caesar of the Timberland and select who shall live, and who must die.

I march into the spiny thickets of adolescent growth, shoots of trunk twice as tall as me and branches blocking my way, to find the Alpha Tree – the lone pine who rises above the others, if only by a few inches. The tree whose bark is darker and roots run deeper, having established themselves in the granite below. I fall all others around it, giving it sufficient room to spread its branches and



climb toward the sun, which now can reach the forest floor, fostering growths of fern and underbrush.

Ah, the rarified, pine-infused mountain air! It's a tonic requiring no gin, and to pull it in is to drink Mother Nature's finest essence – forever free.

I close my eyes and breath deep, listening to screaming silence. This is my garden, planted by the Maker and bestowed upon me for a few more changes of the seasons. This is my reason to be for the rest of my years, and I will not shirk my task. I'll resist the forbidden fruit and not be cast from this Eden in the Sky. I pass back the apple, and chase the damn serpent back to Hell.

“Getting Ready to Roll South” Episode 8 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



“Labor Day weekend. Lots of ATVs and OHVs cruising around the roads up here, and too many fishermen at the lakes and ponds when I checked yesterday, so today I’ll focus on getting a load of slash to the depot.”

Cleaning up this property is therapeutic for me. I hope to have the cell phone booster and electricity by the end of the week. Time is passing quickly now. Leaves that don’t face the sun have begun to turn, and there is a crispness in the air when I first step out from the camper.”

--Journal entry: Sunday; September 2nd, 2018; 8:15 am. In my camper, Co-chise.

The summer is drawing down, like water in a bucket left out in the sun, evaporating to mist – and there’s nothing I can do but watch. I am that mist. I’m evapo-

rating from this place, and will blow south soon to condense and precipitate in a

warmer environment, before the cold, shuttering snowfall locks this property in - tight as a tick. I'll roll down to New Mexico, the Land of Enchantment, a place I've only visited and never really took the time to look beyond the tourist destinations of Taos and Santa Fe; but I'll give it its due this time.

Their state park system covers the corridor from the San Juan and Sangre de Cristo mountains in the north down to the Chihuahuan desert, running from the high plateaus of southern New Mexico to the belly of the boiler in old Mexico. I'll stay north of the border, though. Keep my gringo ass out of the killing zones of the drug cartels, furiously fighting to meet our country's insatiable demand for their poison pills and powders. Some things are best kept at a distance. A safe distance.

But first I must wrap things up here, in the high timber of the Colorado Rockies. Gotta grab what I need from the shed and shed what I don't need from Cochise. Find that balance between travelling light and having the right things for a winter's stay away. I'll let you know how that goes...



One last swing in the hammock, staring into the treetops and blowing in the wind, gather up the garden tools and outdoor furniture, kayaks, camping gear, gas jugs, buckets, birdfeeders and whatnot. Secure the shed doors and windows to

discourage bears and tweaker thieves, haul off the garbage and give it all my blessing. Then it's, *Adios, Shtudiop!* (shed/studio/shop).



Rambeaux (my eleven-year-old, gentle canine companion) senses a change coming and doesn't leave my side. She looks at me with bat ears, awaiting an explanation. I don't give one. There are still chipmunks and pine squirrels to chase while she can.

Who knows what critters we'll find on this road trip? Hopefully friendlies.

I close my eyes and breath deep the ponderosa and lodgepole pine smell, feeling a bit dizzy from the altitude. The locals say it takes a year at this elevation of 9,000' for your body to build up enough red blood cells to handle the rarefied air. The locals are right. Gotta love the locals, wherever they are. I'm hoping it's that way when I get to New Mexico. Again, I'll let you know...

I think of the quiet pleasance of being at this place, in this moment, each moment, passing from one to the next, connecting the dots to make a line – a life line. That's what it is, isn't it? Just a bunch of moments making a life? I'd like to think so. I've been reading a book on basic Zen Buddhism, and that seems to be

the way they approach life. I rather like that. I'm going to talk about seeking enlightenment, searching for nirvana, shaking my shakras to shed samsara and see if I can't get someone to ask me if I'm Zen Buddhist, to which I will meditatively reply, "Yes...*but only for the moment...*" (Sorry, *lo siento!*)



I think of the creatures who've accepted my presence here and show themselves unafraid: the hummingbirds and Steller's Jays, the mule deer – young does eating the wildflowers and velvet-antlered bucks coming out of the dark forest swamp below my prop-

erty...where I fear to go alone with my dog, always seeing moose sign near the springs bubbling up out of the forest floor, eyes always searching, turning in circles in case I'm cat-tracked by a mountain lion, waiting for that lethal pounce.

But, I'm not that anxious to see if there's a heaven or if it's reincarnation. Not yet. If there is a heaven, I would certainly hope to go there. I've tried to live my life accordingly, with only a handful of transgressions. And if it's reincarnation, I would hope to come back as a dog, and have someone like me as the owner/guardian. That would be really nice. Not sure if I can let you know how that goes, though...

So, I stay out of the swamp, the boreal forest of my mind's eye, as the good hobbits tried to do with the Forest of Fangorn in *The Lord of the Rings*, until

given no other choice by those warg-riding Orcs and Uruk-hais, fortunate to find shelter with Treebeard and the Ents. You gotta love those Ents. I sure do. But, I digress...



Yes, the summer is drawing down, and I must prepare to move out. I'll hook BroBo, the "Bronze Bomber" Nissan Pathfinder, up to Cochise, a 1978 Holiday Rambler "Free Spirit" model, and see if that V-6 SUV can handle a 19' tandem-axel travel trailer over hill and dale – and a

mountain pass – to get to my destination, wherever that may be.

To be truthful, I have my concerns. To be blunt, I'm scared witless. "*What ifs?*" keep popping up in my mind, and I try to knock them back down, only to see them pop up somewhere else in my thoughts like some uncontrollable game of cerebral Whac-A-Mole. I need a cerebral shotgun.

*What if...*some car, truck or animal jumps in front of me at 65 mph and I have to lock up the brakes? I have trailer brakes, but I don't want to have to jam on them under those circumstances. If I go off the road, I lose my home. Trailers don't handle accidents very well. They're funny that way.

I'm definitely not going to take the interstate through Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo pulling a camper. I don't like doing that even without lugging something behind a vehicle. I'll have to go east out onto the plains before heading

south and take my chances on the two-lane highways, facing potential danger head-on every time a vehicle comes the other way. There are also deer, antelope and coyotes out there that don't look both ways before crossing a road. I'd have to splat them, and hope they don't take out my radiator. I'd eat the meat and tan their hides, to honor their spirits. But I'd still have to get towed to a shop if they take out my radiator.

What if... I have to park in a deserted campground or wayside stop or maybe even a Walmart parking lot and some amped up tweakers decide at 3 am that I might be an easy mark for some cash or pawnables. I sleep with a pistol under my pillow, but I don't keep a round in the chamber. What if I don't rack it and squeeze off a shot in time? What if I do? Somebody might get killed, and I couldn't live with that – especially if I'm the one who gets killed. *Dat ain't good.*

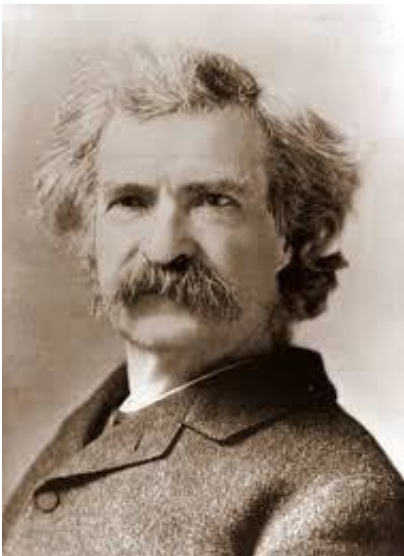
What if... I do make it down to New Mexico and find out it's not as enchanting as I'd hoped. Do New Mexicans like Coloradoans? Are my green license plates going to make me a target? I've noticed, in my considerable lifetime, that border states don't always cotton to each other too well. Having grown up in Wisconsin, we talked trash about "FIBs" (F'ing Illinois Bastards); in Wyoming they don't always seem overly friendly to us "Greenies" from Colorado (referring to the color in our license plates); and anyone not from California or Texas might have their prejudices against drivers from California and Texas. I don't (honestly), but some people seem to. Stupid stuff, however real.

But I don't care - and I have no choice. I can't stay here. The HOA doesn't allow it (you don't gotta love those HOAs – I sure don't), and neither will the weather. Yes, I live in the woods in the mountains, and I have a Home Owners

Association (actually, two of them) telling me what I can and can't do. Welcome to America in the 21st Century. Don't get me going...

So, I cowboy up and face my fears. It's all about the adventure. And getting away from frigid weather. Surviving my first quarter century in Wisconsin and then living in Alaska before moving to northern Colorado, I've never spent a year without snow, cold and icy roads in the winter – except when I was one year old and my dad was stationed at Fort Huachuca just north of the border in Arizona. But, I don't remember that.

This is the reason I sold everything I didn't need, donated or tossed everything I couldn't sell, and bought a vintage trailer to live the life of a rubber tramp. It sounded romantic and carefree, and for the most part it has been. But now it's time for the rubber to hit the road, and it's frightening. I don't even want to consider what could happen to Rambeaux if something happened to me. She's grown rather dependent upon me, and I upon her. I try not to contemplate any of these things, but just *try* to control your thoughts. Let me know how that works out...



I like to quote Mark Twain when I can. I just like the way that guy thought, and wrote. America's greatest storyteller was pretty witty with words. He said, "*Worrying is like paying a debt you don't owe,*" and I'll take his word on that. If I want to be a writer, I've got to have things to write about; and you've got to write about what you know (unless you're a fiction writer, which I'm not).

So, I'll prepare my ride and get my mind right. Lewis and Clarke went from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean rowing, poling and pulling a fifty-five-foot wooden keelboat as far up the Missouri River as they could, and hoofed it over more mountain passes than they had imagined before building dugout canoes and shooting down raging rivers to the mouth of the Columbia. This *should* be easier than that. I sure hope so, anyway. I'll channel their explorer grit and say "*New Mexico in view! Oh! the joy,*" when I crest Raton Pass and look down into New Mexico, in the spirit of what Meriwether Lewis exclaimed when the ocean came into view. And, dear reader, I'll certainly let you know how *that* goes.

“Getting Off This Damn Mountain, Before It Is Too Late” Episode 9 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



Let’s zip through some of these journal entries, dear reader, and get away from the approaching storm...

“Alright, I’m sitting in the shed – still hasn’t been wired for electricity – but I’ve got the cell phone signal-booster going, so I have 4G and a connection to the net with my

tablet and phone, although I still haven’t gotten the mobile hotspot to bring it to my laptop and desktop.

I watched the Monday Night Football game on the tablet the other night – it was great! I’m finally CONNECTED! It feels fantastic. It was quite the digital drought, though, I must say...

I also received the next assignment from On Common Ground, so I have work and time to do it. The article is due the same day I have to be off the property by orders of the damn HOA – October 12th. Yeeehaw!

Then, I'll pull the camper off this property and set up at Dowdy Lake Camp-ground down near the Village for a few days to collect myself and prepare for the journey south. Now that I have a net connection, I can entertain myself. It gets way too dark way too early these days. Winter is coming fast, though this has been the best fall foliage I've seen in a long, long time."

--Journal entry: Thursday; September 20th, 2018; 11:59 am. In the *Shtudiop* (shed/studio/shop).

"Huge! I went out to the shed to work at the desk this morning and it was 38 degrees inside. When I came back into the camper and turned on the computer to play a CD it connected to the internet! The jetpack hotspot reaches from the shed! I can work out of the camper, as I do now. NO EXCUSES!"

--Journal entry: Tuesday; September 25th, 2018; 11:28 am. In my camper, *Co-chise*.



"The weather has been changing up here in the High and Lonesome, as it's becoming more of the latter. More snow is predicted for the next few days and it rained and howled from about 3 am 'til sunup – when it continued to just howl and buffet the trailer until just now. Peace.

I need to focus on this article and little else but keeping the wolves at bay. I had to go down to the flats yesterday to breath thick air, as I have found myself wanting lately for full, deep breaths. Even in Red Feather, 1,000' feet lower, I find the air more substantial.”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; October 3rd, 2018; 11:58 am. In my camper, Cochise.

“What a glorious morning greets me through my work-nook window, the shadows of invisible branches made visible by the sun! Warm. No snow.

I was afraid last night that the wind – at times ferocious – was going to topple Gus, the 80' tall, lone sentinel lodgepole pine tree elder who leans downhill from the top of my driveway embankment. At times the wind pushed him toward the camper. A few seconds later he would be hurled back the opposite way with equal fury. Smaller trees simply bowed, their crowns bending down the descending slope. But always they sprang back, waving defiantly at the firmament above, shouting ‘Is that all you’ve got!?’ , like Lt. Dan on top of the mast, shrimp fishing with Gump. Forrest Gump.

Now, I must ready myself for a day of writing – the article for the only outfit that pays me so far, which is due in less than a week, and the weather is supposed to turn sour, cold and snow. Please, no... I should be rolling south...”

--Journal entry: Friday; October 5th, 2018; 9:08 am. In my camper, Cochise.



“Winter is here, but hopefully not for long. The last three days have had snow – several inches – and it’s been damn cold! Highs in the upper 20s and lows in the low teens. My little camper is living up to the task, though. The furnace

is running about as much as it rests, and a small, electric ceramic heater (oscillating, even) sits at my feet and keeps it warm under the worktable. Rambeaux huddles there now. These wind and water-resistant insulated summit pants are supreme. Gotta love having the right gear.

I have to finish my article for OCG and submit it. I think I’ll go down to the library in the Village to work on it. I’ll be pulling out of here soon. Hard to believe. This summer has gone by faster than any other I can recall. It’s the beginning of something big, like this mountain I live on, in what has become the High and Lonesome. Next year I hope to be out by this time. We’ll see how that goes...”

--Journal entry: Tuesday; October 9th, 2018; 9:36 am. In my cozy camper, Co-chise.

“Damn! More snow. More cold. Supposed to be like this for the next few days, getting down to single digits at night. Our beautiful Indian Summer is gone, lost forever to memory.

I need to finish the feature article today and knock out the sidebar update for a previous article. The camper is warm and tight, since I covered the windows (except for the work-table portal I stare through now) and vents with a thick, insulating cover called Reflectix. Dark, quiet – but warm. I worry about my water system freezing up, since we’ve been well below freezing for days now. I run the water pump to keep things moving in the storage tank and lines. I have plenty of propane and the electricity is solid. Hell, I even have the internet, so I’m in good shape. It’s just that this is the weather I’m trying to avoid. I must admit - it’s quite pretty, though. I’ll think back to this when I’m kicking it in a hot spring in New Mexico. I hope to tote my trailer down to Dowdy [Lake Campground] next Tuesday, when it warms up a bit and gets sunny. Still don’t have all of my next steps figured out, but I’ll have time to do that when I get off the mountain. I’ll shuttle back up here to close everything up.

I wonder what of ice-fishing this winter, but I can’t think of that now...”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; October 10th, 2018; 11:15 am. In my little-bitty camper, Cochise.

“Here I am at the library, trying to finish my article for On Common Ground. My editor gave me extra time to get more interviews. They really like quotes from industry experts. I just wish these experts were more expert at returning my calls. I’m having difficulty focusing and being productive this time around. I’ve been feeling a lot of anxiety lately regarding my upcoming move and going on the road, lugging a camper over unknown ground – and living at this altitude, always short of breath. I had my wellness exam, and everything is fine with my health.

That's good. I just need to punch through. I've got the rest of the week, so it shouldn't be a problem. We'll see...



The weather finally broke out of record cold temperatures and snow, which is nice. It dropped down to single digit temps and snowed all week. Several days never got out of the 20s. Not what I had hoped would happen, but it did. I'm surprised how com-

fortable the camper is, after insulating the windows and getting a space heater, but it's still not ideal. I should have gone down to Dowdy Lake [campground] today, but I decided to tough it out.

Now, the weather is warming, so I'll take the trailer down later this week when it's supposed to get up into the 60s and 70s. Then, I go south..."

--Journal entry: Tuesday; October 16th, 2018; 12:35 pm. At the Red Feather Lakes Village library.

"Well...been a couple days since I've logged in this journal. Apprehensive of putting the truth on paper, I guess. I've yanked the camper down from the prop-

erty and have been here at Dowdy for the last two nights. Hopped off the mountain before the cold and snow would have made it more treacherous than necessary.”

--Journal entry: Thursday; October 18th, 2018; 8:23 am. Finally, at Dowdy Lake Campground, on the edge of the Village of Red Feather Lakes.

*“Hard to believe, but I’m still at Dowdy. I’ve spent the last four or five nights at ****’s, which has been a great comfort after being cooped up in the camper. Showers, fireplace, fun. She’s a good person, and I’ll worry about her this winter, being back on her isolated property in the boonies.*



I’m getting ready to hook-up and haul down the hill. It’s feeling secluded and foreboding up here. I came back to the camper yesterday and the propane had run out. It was 20 degrees inside, and the water system froze up, but I thawed it out with the little electric heater. Luckily, the

water pump didn’t pop. I’ll shoot for Pawnee National Grasslands down on lower elevation. They have a campground at Crow Valley that’s a good place to view birds. I wonder if any will be there. It would be nice to see some feathered friends. I’ve always liked observing birds. It runs in our family.”

--Journal entry: Friday; November 9th, 2018; 10:59 am. At Dowdy Lake Campground, and off the damn mountain.



“SHAZAAM! I’m out of the elevation and back on the flats! Crow Valley Campground (run by the USDA) is in the Pawnee National Grassland just outside of Briggsdale in unincorporated Weld County. Big oil country. Big-ass freaking sky! More stars than I’ve

seen in a long time! Quiet. No wind. A few other campers are here, so I’m not alone. Met the host when I tried to camp at their spot. Hey, it was dark!

I almost ran out of gas on the barren prairie roads built up off the plain - in the dark. One last dose of hyper-anxiety before the unspeakable relief of this great unletting of the moment. Thank you, Lord!”

--Journal entry: Friday; November 9th, 2018; 8:26 pm. Somewhere in the dark at Crow Valley Campground, on flat land at last.

“It’s six minutes past the official moment that World War I ended, in 1918 – one hundred years ago today. I don’t know how I noticed that, but I can’t help but take a few minutes to imagine what that war was like, in those muddy, bloody

God-forsaken trenches. Sometimes you just have to put things in historical perspective, lest we forget...



Here I am at a real campsite in Crow Valley Campground. The first night I squatted in a parking lot, and left the trailer hooked up to BroBo so I could just crawl inside Cochise and decompress on the bed, Rambeaux at my side, both of us happy as flatland clams can be.

This spot's a beauty! Two picnic tables, a grill and firepit, all next to the trash dumpster (not even bear-proof!) and pit [vault] toilet. A veritable paradise – except the water and electricity have been shut off for the season. Life as a rubber tramp has its interesting turns. Deal with it!

I need to go for a drive to charge my phone and tablet so I can communicate and watch some football. I hope I can get the Packer game on the internet, if I can figure out how to do that. That damn trey-dub still consternates all heck out of me. That's life as a Baby Boomer, I guess.

Yesterday was beautiful – temperatures in the low 60s! I haven't pulled air that warm and thick and welcome for a long, long time. I feel as though I could run a marathon, or at least get started. Rambeaux and I hiked around this place, which has lots of birding trails and educational exhibits with antique farm equipment that you're not supposed to climb on. I'll bet a lot of people do, though, especially kids. I almost did, but didn't.

But today, I woke to snow. More freaking snow! I thought I was going to avoid this stuff, but NNNOOO!!! At least I'm on the flats..."

--Journal entry: Sunday; November 11th, 2018; 11:17 am. At an official campsite in Crow Valley Campground, Pawnee National Grasslands on the Colorado prairie. In my camper, *Cochise*.

"Strange. I haven't had AC electricity for the last few days and my furnace kicked out when the 12 volt, marine-grade battery died in the middle of last night. That was interesting. It was less than 40 degrees when I crawled out of bed. I plugged in BroBo, let the engine run and recharged the battery - put everything back on an even keel. Then, I drove the forty-some miles into Fort Collins and soaked in a jacuzzi hot tub at a rec-center for as long as I could, before heading to the library in Old Town (love that place!) to recharge all my batteries and walk among the mass of humanity. Yes! Civilization!

Now, I'm watching Monday Night Football by LED light from a headlamp. Life is good!"

--Journal entry: Monday; November 12th, 2018; 8:05 pm. Crow Valley Campground. As always - in my camper, *Cochise*.

"Woke this morning to – hopefully – the end of sub-freezing temperatures. It's warming up now, and is supposed to get up to 50 and above for the next few days.

I'm heading to St. Vrain State Park just outside of Longmont tomorrow to see CJ [my son], say good-bye for the winter and tie up some loose ends. This'll be the longest period of time I've ever spent away from him, and I don't look forward to it any more than when my daughter moved to Southern California. But, that's parenthood, I guess. The kids fly the nest – or you do.

Gotta hook up now, and haul Cochise into the little farm town of Ault to get the tail-lights fixed. I thought I had done that before leaving Dowdy, but I guess not. Lucky there wasn't much traffic coming off the mountain, but there will be from here on. Getting damn close to heading south...gotta get outta this cold weather... My thoughts turn to New Mexico at this moment, and what things will come, in the self-proclaimed Land of Enchantment, over Raton Pass and into new country (but not a new country, because it is part of the United States. I guess some people don't realize that, according to the innernets, anyway).

New Mexico, here we come! But first a long tumble down wicked prairie roads and far-between, tiny farm towns unknown to me. May we Vaya con Dios! And I will let you know how that goes..."

--Journal entry: Tuesday; November 13th, 2018; 11:11 am. Crow Valley Campground. Safe, sound and wondering what the next few days will be – snug in my camper, *Cochise*.

But now, dear reader, I must bid you *adios!* At 2,478 words this is a longer blog posts than most people's attention span can handle, and I apologize for my verbosity. I simply could not stop. I guess I was drawn into my own reminiscence, and it was *déjà vu* all over again. So far, so good. I wonder how it ends...

But first, I need to eat something. I'm getting a bit dizzy, and feeling a little giddy. Hell, I'm just glad to finally be off that damn mountain!

I'll get right on to the next episode after posting this one on that web thingy, because I'm interested to see how it all turns out. I hope you are too! Until then, I want to thank you sincerely for indulging me so. I positively wouldn't do it without you!

“Slip-Sliding Down to New Mexico, Before Blasting Off to California” Episode 10 of
The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp



Let's stick with some more of these journal entries, dear reader, and *Roll, Baby, Roll!* We covered some time in the last post, did we not? But now, we must cover some distance. Hold on, if you will, and not loosely!

“Getting ready to FINALLY head south toward New Mexico. One last night at Crow Valley Campground (which was last night) in the Pawnee National Grasslands, out on the hustling, bustling oil country prairie of northern Colorado, was great. Bonfire/campfire/cookfire made from gathered wood...but now I gotta go. I am ready to roll. Bring it!”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; November 14th, 2018; 11:26 am. Anxious in this camper, which I like to call *Cochise*.

“This is so SWEET! I’m at St. Vrain State Park, Eagle Loop campsite #52, and I have COMPLETE UTILITY HOOKUPS! WTF is up with that? The “city water service” shyte is the Bomb.com, as some youngsters used to say. I’m parked on

a concrete pad just off I-25 and Hwy 119 – known as the Del Camino exit on the interface with Longmont – where CJ [my son] lives. How about that?

It's such a 180-degree flip from how I've been living lately – which at times was total seclusion – to seeing the candy-colored neon lights of the gas station, truck stop, McDonalds village, and hearing the interstate HUM, with the big, red sunset and growing night sky and WARM, WARM, WARM! I think this will work out just fine, I do. Oh yes, I think this will work just fine!"

--Journal entry: Same day but later; 8:31 pm. Relaxing in my home on wheels, back in civilization.



"Wow, I had the electric heater going all night so I wouldn't have to use propane, and when I woke it was 80 degrees in here. Amazing! The water hook-up is a treat – enough pressure to actually flush the toilet. And having a septic connection means I can really clean this place and

empty the tanks. Quite the unknown luxury, I must say.

Now, I'm off to see CJ, and tie up some loose ends. Then we'll go have some breakfast – at a restaurant, with other people milling about. Silly, the things that give one pleasure when stepping out of solitude. Silly indeed, and nice."

--Journal entry: Thursday; November 15th, 2018; 10:33 am. Content and warm in my camper, Cochise.

“Alright, this is it. Last day at St. Vrain State Park, and last day in Colorado. I’m about ready to hook-up and head to Raton, NM, and Sugarite State Park, on the other side of the pass. It’s 32 degrees and overcast here in Longmont, so I’m waiting for it to warm up a bit – and then I’m gone. Shooting for Last Chance, CO, where I’ll head south on Hwy 71 to La Junta, and on to Raton. I put new lights on the trailer so I’m ready for the trip. NO MORE APPREHENSION!”

--Journal entry: Saturday; November 17th, 2018; 9:10 am. Feeling ready as ever in this mini mobile home.

“FOCK THAT! You should have been more apprehensive. It turned to freezing rain for a bit, so I didn’t leave until 11 am and then I noticed my new lights didn’t work. Long story short...I didn’t get out of Longmont until 2:30 and made it to Strasburg after the roads turned to ice. DON’T EVER DO THAT AGAIN!!!”

--Journal entry: Later that day; 5:54 pm. Witless in the dark.

“Well, the sun has melted the ice off the roads, and I’ve finished breakfast at Rookies in Strasburg – where I camped last night in the parking lot. Ready to hit the asphalt and see if I can’t actually get out of Colorado and into the Land of Enchantment.”

--Journal entry: Sunday; November 18th, 2018; 11:58 am. In the same little camper, *Cochise*.

“Yeah, that was a nice thought. These prairie highways (CO 71) are rough surfaced and perched atop a berm of road base with no shoulder. No one lives out there, it seems, and you might see another vehicle every 10-15 minutes. There are no places to pull off if you would need to. Very unnerving.

But I made it to Rocky Ford around 4:30 and decided to stay here because the highway I get on now goes west, and the sun sets early these days. It was the smart move. I'll see how far I get tomorrow with an earlier start. Deming is over 8 hours away (at my speed). I'll have to shoot for somewhere between there and Las Vegas, driving on I-25 most of the day. Right now, I'm still about an hour north of the border.

This is an interesting town. Trains pass through loudly. It's got great architecture, much of which has seen better days. Lots of NM license plates.”

--Journal entry: Same day; 5:36 pm. Back in the camper, and up against a curb.

“About to get back on the road from my street side sleep spot in Rocky Ford, home of the best dadgum cantaloupe you'll ever eat. Sunny and warm outside, short drive to Raton, NM, and then down to Las Vegas where I'll hopefully be able to store the camper at the campground. Deming is too much of a long shot at this point. I should be there early this afternoon. Then tomorrow it's off to SoCal and Thanksgiving with family. Whew! I'm getting ragged.”

--Journal entry: Monday; November 19th, 2018; 9:05 am. Still in this camper that I like to call *Cochise*.



“So far, so good! I made it here to Storrie Lake State Park in Las Vegas, NM, but got in later than I thought I would. I guess I’m not set up for going very fast. My top speed was 60 mph on the interstate. Anything more and the whole rig would start to pitch like a ship in a tempest. No bueno!”

“I stayed in the right lane and let the traffic blow by at 70 plus, but when I had to hop into the left lane and allow cars to enter from a ramp, I realized that I couldn’t see safely far enough behind me with these cheap, plastic side view mirror extensions. I’d hit my blinker and just ease into the fast lane, listening for the blast of a truck horn and praying like a dirty sinner.”

There were times I’d pull off at a rest stop, wobble out of BroBo on what felt like sea legs and dry heave behind Cochise. Scariest driving I’ve ever done. No way I’d ever try to go through Santa Fe and Albuquerque with this set-up. That could be the end of it all. No gracias!

I still need to secure storage for this trailer. There are a couple options...

Watched a great Monday Night Football game on the tablet, because I have AC electricity and a 4G cell signal. Ate some chicken that needed to be eaten before I leave for Thanksgiving at Amanda’s [my daughter] in Encinitas. Tomorrow. Damn...”

--Journal entry: Later that night; 11:15 pm. In the camper at Storrie Lake Campground, Las Vegas, NM. Finally, in the Land of Enchantment!!!



“The first night in NM State Parks is a success! I like this place, even though it’s in winter mode (no water) and the [septic] dump station is closed (and has been for 3-4 years, I hear). But I did find storage for the trailer just 2.2 miles away at the Vegas RV Park, since I can’t leave it

here longer than 24 hours. It’s more than I would have paid in Deming, but I’m not in Deming. I’ll be glad just not having to pull that damn trailer.

Then, it’s off to SoCal...This has been quite the adventure, and it tends to make me nervous – which is putting it mildly. But I’m facing my fears and trying to punch them down. That’s how you gotta roll, Boy!”

--Journal entry: Tuesday; November 20th, 2018; 8:48 am. I believe you know where we are.

And here, dear reader, is where my journal takes a 6-day jump. The journey to visit my daughter and her fiancée in Encinitas (actually, it’s the beachside, uber-funky, surfer neighborhood of Leucadia) twenty some miles north of San Diego is told in retrospect at the end of the return trip. My son, CJ, will meet us there, in that Pacific paradise, and we’ll celebrate Thanksgiving as a family, with me

being the eldest generational member, since my folks passed away several years ago.

I'm glad you have stayed with me this far, and I hope you hold steady to the course. I need to take a break and once again eat. Sometimes I get going with this story, drinking coffee and tea until my thoughts start to falter.

Pulling words from this journal is easier than finding them in my mind, but I'll continue to do so with your consent. I want us all to be there, in the moment, as these rubber tires roll through this rubber tramp existence I've chosen to adopt, hoping it lights a spark in your imagination as it did mine several years ago, when the vagabond lifestyle became more appealing to me, more alluring – an elixir to what was fast becoming a sedentary life – in the post Great Recession depression for those of us Baby Boomers who went into it smelling like a rose, only to come out wiping dog doo off our shoes. But no tears here, my friends.

No lagrimas aqui, mi amigos!

So, I'm off to prepare a healthy meal and better enable myself to take the next step of this seemingly unending tale. I hope you return, to further accompany me on this trek. It's much more enjoyable if I'm not going it alone, with my faithful dog Rambeaux, piloting BroBo and lugging Cochise – into that vast unknown...

“The Frazzled, Interstate Roadtrip to Thanksgiving in Paradise” Episode 11 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



Again, let's stay with these journal entries, shall we, dear reader...? We have much ground to cover once again, and I'd like us to do it in the moment, as best we can. So let's rejoin our journey, reflecting from the future of what was then, or had been up to that point – as the following is taken

from a journal entry looking back upon the past...

“Now, I look back and think of those days in Leucadia (Encinitas) and all the anxiety I had on the trip heading out. Most unnecessary, in retrospect.

*Because I delayed so long in getting off the property, “camping” at Dowdy Lake – which meant staying at ****’ place, in the comfort of a home – lingering at Pawnee National Grasslands, detouring to Longmont and leaving in an ice-storm (STUPID! NEVER AGAIN!) I was weeks behind schedule and frazzled to the bone.*



I-25 from Trinidad, CO, to Las Vegas, NM, (over Raton Pass during construction) was unnerving, and I got into Storrie Lake Campground not long before it closed at 5:00 pm. I couldn't find a place to store the camper, except to park it at an RV campground just a couple

miles away (at \$125/week). Then off to SoCal on I-25 through Santa Fe and Albuquerque traffic and hills – NO FUN!

Hopping on I-40 was crazy with big truck traffic and even bigger accidents, stacking up a parking lot for miles. Terrible anxiety here. I would pull into truck stops to shake and get sick. I had to confront my fears, telling me to turn back. Started smoking little cigars and drinking coffee all day...

I finally got out of New Mexico and into Arizona, entering the Navajo Nation Reservation, the largest in the United States (and the world – according to the welcome sign) on the old Route 66. It was getting dark, and the topography started to flatten and disappear. Lots of billboards for authentic jewelry, crafts, blankets and flatbread. More trash on the roadside than elsewhere, and the service stops were in disrepair. Poverty has a firm grip here. Third World in America.

I pulled off in Chambers and was lucky to get a room at a motel. The thermostat was broken and the TV didn't work, so I got a different room. I felt ghosts. Seriously. I tried to relax. I wanted a beer, but the nearest liquor store was over 40 miles away, off the reservation. I guess they don't sell alcohol on the Rez. Probably a good thing...

*The best thing about this stay was that I could take a warm/hot shower for the first time since being at ****'s, which was a couple weeks prior. The temp was 16 degrees ("feels like" 9 degrees, according to my phone) and there was frost on BroBo [the "Bronze Bomber" Nissan Pathfinder] when I woke early and got on the road, after sharing my complimentary breakfast of eggs, sausage and hash browns with Rambeaux [my dog], who has shadowed me with tail tucked and ears down the entire time we've been here. It is a spooky place. I guess she feels the ghosts as well.*



I was glad to get on the road, with the sun at my back. Soon, we were rolling through the Petrified Forest National Park, which reminded me of the slides [camera pictures projected on a screen] of our family returning from

Ft. Huachuca, AZ, where my dad was stationed with the Ready Reserves in 1961-62, following JFK's call-up in response to the Berlin Wall Crisis. I was only one and two years old, but the slides are my lifelong reminder.

I finally got off the I-40 (Thank God!) and angled SW through beautiful mountain timberlands: Apache-Sitgreaves and Tonto National Forests, and down to Fountain Hills. Then I hit Phoenix and gridlock traffic, the day before Thanksgiving. Definitely the most stressful part of the trip – so far.

But I got through, and tumbled further down to the I-8 at Gila Bend. I was really frazzled now, but there was no turning back. I'd been skirting the edge of the Sonoran Desert National Monument and saw saguaro (sa-wa-ro) cacti for the first time I can remember. Lots of them. Huge ones, with many arms. Very old, I'm told. There were also prickly-pear cacti the size of large juniper bushes exploding from the desert sand, and barrel cacti as tall as me.

I wish I didn't have to pay attention to the road, but it was all mountain driving for a couple of hours before dropping down to the hot, dry desert. Pine trees turned to palm trees, and I felt as though I was already in Southern California.

The I-8 has less tractor-trailer traffic than I-40 (which branches into Los Angeles), but we did pass a convoy of about 30 military vehicles with big, desert tires going 45 mph. Troop transports, fuel trucks and some other utility vehicles with graffiti on the doors and the rear truck missing a tail light – all on the busiest travel day of the year. I guess the National Guard (or whoever they were) was making a public pitch for better equipment.

Then I passed all the head lettuce fields and the trucks (double trailer) that were hauling cases away. All that water to grow head lettuce in Arizona deserts for the fast-food burger chains of America's Southwest. Great. Golf courses, too.

I got a bad rub from Arizona when one of the first billboards I saw, after getting off the Rez, was an old poster of Obama with teeth blacked out and big ears

drawn on. It was old – and looked it – but no one took it down, here in the only state that doesn't celebrate Martin Luther King Day. Enough said.

I drove through Maricopa County, where the Good Ol' Boy sheriff had made inmates wear pink and white striped uniforms. I think he ran for higher office, and lost. Justice served.



I finally made it into California (Yeehaw!), and got off the interstate in El Centro, a little over two hours shy of Encinitas. It was a great stay, with beautiful bougainvilleas overtaking fences. I've always loved being in California – except for all the

people. I refreshed at the attached restaurant/bar – which had a Denny's menu and karaoke in the back. Kind of strange... Great night's sleep and another shower, then back on the I-8 heading west.

Soon we're out of ag land and into the Imperial Valley and sand dunes. Then, we ran into huge piles of rocks which quickly became mountains as we climbed out of Ocotillo to Jacumba Hot Springs, where I stopped to get fuel for BroBo and a sandwich for me. Gas was \$4.59/gallon, so I just took on enough to get to Encinitas. It was tough, stressful driving through fog, rain, wind gusts and curves. Seemed to take forever to get out of these mountains... On the way back I measured the distance from sea level on the ocean side to the flats on the other side of the mountains – it was over 65 miles (from Alpine to Ocotillo). Went through scrub country with an inspection point for border patrol, making

sure you weren't bringing in prohibited vegetation as part of their "pest exclusion" program – the itty-bitty illegal aliens you didn't know you're carrying. Then barreling down through reservations of tribes I'd never heard of, on what was called the Kumeyaay Highway. Very interesting stretch...

Then, BAM! Down to the flats from 4,500' and onto the 805, and then playing automobile roulette on the dreaded I-5 right up to the doorstep of A&Z's [my daughter and her beau] just before noon on Thanksgiving Day. Hallelujah! No more driving for several more days! Hoka Hey!



Amanda [my beautiful daughter] was jamming with the food preparations in the kitchen, so we boys – Zach [her amazing fiancée], CJ [my wonderful son] and me [a very proud and thankful old man] – took the dogs [Rambeaux and Ember] for a walk/run/tear at the sand-pit

overlooking the beach, where we would later have a post-feast bonfire. It was paradise on the ocean's edge. Sunny with a breeze, and that big, blue piece of endlessness stretching to places I can only imagine.

The meal was excellent, their fantastic friends brought side dishes and dessert, and then we waddled down to the beach for a sunset blaze and drone photo coverage. Coolers of cold drinks and music from cell phone speakers rounded out the firepit flame-dance. The full moon rose as the orange sun set, in what is

known as the Golden Hour. It takes that long for the solar orb to sink below the horizon, somewhere far out over the Pacific. It was my first ocean sunset, and I don't have the words to describe how beautiful and magical it was. Locals gather for it every night they can. No wonder there are so many people in Southern California. It really is a paradise (again, except for all the people. I am a small-town boy, at heart. That John Cougar Mellencamp song hits home hard).

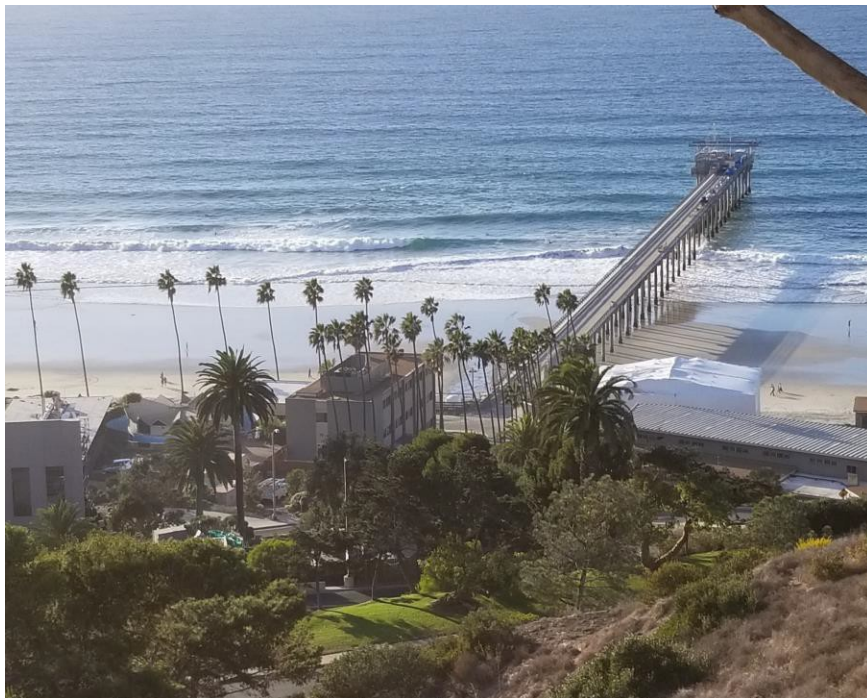


I'm there now...as clouds frame the lunar orb, and life-guard stations are eerily illuminated. Cans of Pacifico and slices of lime from a Ziplock bag can't keep all the sand at bay. But that's life at the beach, I guess. I'll take it...

Overall, it truly was an enchanted night, everyone chillin' in their own way, staring into the fire and diggin' their world. Southern California seems to have its own, unique culture. Everyone was so friendly – and beautiful. I love it, even though I don't really fit the groove. But, that's alright. I'm just there visiting my family for the holiday. I made the trek, sketchy though it was, and I just didn't want to embarrass myself – not too much, anyway. That isn't always easy...but nobody noticed, or if they did they didn't say anything. Which is nice.

Friday and Saturday fly by quickly. After a big Zach-made breakfast of eggs, bacon, avocado, Odwalla fruit smoothies and gourmet (to me, anyway) coffee, we tool down the 101 [part of California 1, or the Pacific Coast Highway] to UC-

San Diego (in La Jolla), where Amanda works. She took us to the Birch Aquarium to view some amazing sea creatures interact on the other side of tall glass panels. I love that stuff – we all did.



Then we tour the Scripps Seaside Forum area, where they will be married at the brink of the surf. Time passes fast...children grow so quickly...all in the seeming blink of an eye...don't sleep! Then we blast back to A&Z's for the sunset, chillaxing and leftovers.

The dogs are getting along quite well. That's always a good thing.

Saturday is Small Business Day in Leucadia, so we stroll the 101 (fantastic, funky streetscapes with boutiques, galleries and restaurants). The aroma from the Leucadia Donut Shoppe is incredible and familiar from last year's visit - déjà vu, all over again.

We eat fantastic, fresh seafood at the Encinitas Fish Shop (just as good as last year's meal at Fish 101), then bop into a few bodegas as well as some art and craft galleries. We had blood-orange sangrias at the quaint, petite jewelry store where Zach bought the wedding ring. It's a beauty. Ohio State (Zach's alma ma-

ter) stomped Michigan earlier, and everyone was wearing their Buckeye wardrobe. It was wonderful fun, and good for me to do some walking. All that driving had made my knee stiff.

Then, back to the crib for maximum relaxing and a movie. Soft furniture too. Enveloping...

*On Sunday we drive up the coast to Carlsbad, where Zach first lived, and have lunch at Grubby's for their major-league burritos. Next, off to Merrells at the Outlet Mall for affordable adventure clothing (Christmas gifts) before returning to the apartment to watch the NFL. The f**king Packers got beat by the Viqueens 24-17. FOCK!*



One last night of sleep in the guest room and early the next morning is saying goodbye to the kids – never easy. Zach and I have breakfast and exchange fare-wells... and just like that I'm back on the road.

I leave at 9:30, when Google says that rush hour has flushed, then hop back on the I-5 to the 805 to I-8 and back into those scrubby, stony, twisting and pitching mountains, which isn't near so bad after days of

non-driving and sunshine and rest. I have the best day on the road and make it to Eloy, AZ, where this journal rejoins..."

--Journal Entry Reflection: Friday; November 30th, 2018; 10:53 am. Once again at Storrie Lake Campground; Las Vegas, New Mexico; back in my camper, *Cochise*.

Alright then, dear reader, let's stop here. I'm getting a bit tired from all that activity, good food, and fun – Southern California style. We'll pick it up where this left off, with the next episode of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*. I hope you choose to join us then, and thanks for coming along on the ride! We've made it this far...let's see where we go next. *Orale!*

“Las Vegas, N M: The Formative Years” Episode 12

The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp



Welcome back, dear reader, it's nice to have you there – wherever that may be. I'm sorry for the delay since the last post of frazzled travel to Thanksgiving in the paradise of Southern California. That was quite

a road trip, wasn't it? I needed a bit of a break after reliving all of that.

As you may recall, after slipping off the mountain in northern Colorado, out of cold and snow and over roads of ice, then rolling down the barren plains, we came cresting and unrested into New Mexico, pulling a vintage 19' camper, *Cochise*, behind a not-quite big enough Nissan Pathfinder, *BroBo* – The "Bronze Bomber."

Following the frenzied trip on treacherous interstates we returned to the peace and quietude of Storrie Lake State Park in Las Vegas, New Mexico, for the winter phase of life as a rubber tramp. From there our journey continues, but I feel the need to do a little back story for this enchanting place, and I don't know where to start...

Please bear with me as this might be a little more history than journaling, but I hope it will be helpful in understanding a state so frequently misunderstood and often overlooked. Plus, it'll help explain the pictures, which tell their own story. I'll put together a reference index in case you want to dig a little deeper. I hope you do. So... let's go. *Vamonos!*



New Mexico's history is deep and rich in so many ways, from the geological ages of dinosaurs and Neanderthals through the Cro-Magnon and Paleo-Indian periods to ancient and modern tribes of indigenous peoples. Then came the damn European conquerors and settlers, gold-robbers, land-grabbers and overall exploiters, along with myriad other bandits, outlaws, rene-

gades and vigilantes, right up to 20th Century movie stars and aliens – “illegal” as well as terrestrial – to the present. No other state is quite so unique, with the possible exceptions of Texas and California notwithstanding.

Northern New Mexico is part of the ancestral home to the Pueblo people, along with the Four Corners region where they lived in cliff dwellings that are still evident today. Mesa Verde, Colorado, is well known and amazing, but equally amazing is Chaco Canyon, Bandelier and the Gila Cliff Dwellings in New Mexico. Just don't call the people who lived there Anasazi, because it's a Navajo word meaning “Ancient People/Enemy/Outsiders.” The politically correct name is Ancient or Ancestral Puebloans. That'll show that you're hip, or whatever the politically correct word for hip is. Hard to keep up...

Pueblo means “town” or “village” in Spanish, and since they conquered most of the Southwestern US, they named many things. To the victor go the spoils, as the saying goes.

But they weren't just on a naming mission. The Spaniards were primarily concerned with conquering the natives via their horse-riding, metal-armored, sword

and Bible-wielding conquistadors whose principal objective was ferreting out the gold and silver of the Inca, Aztec and Mayan civilizations before hacking their way north in search of the fabled Seven Cities of Gold and stealing their plunder back to Spain – for the Empire established by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella and given self-righteous holiness by the Inquisition.



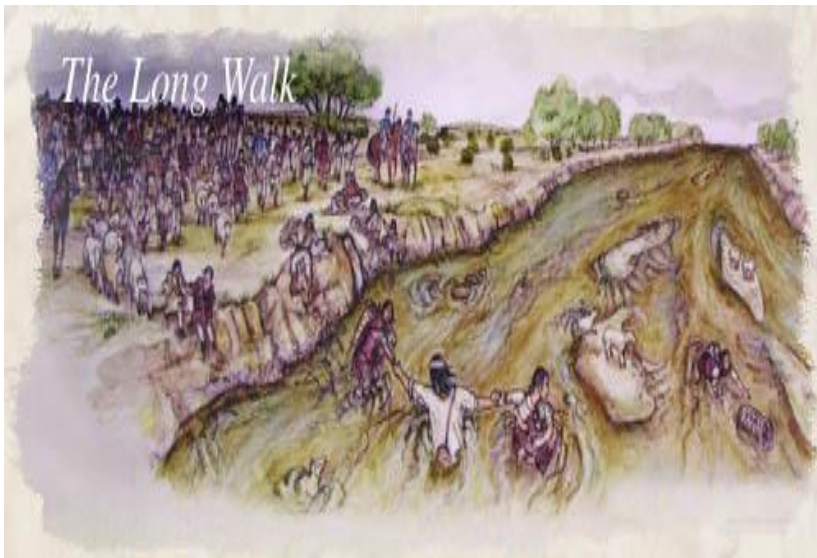
Their secondary mission was converting the “pagans” to Roman Catholicism and – if that didn’t work – annihilate them without discretion. Mostly, though, it was about absconding with the riches and hustling it back to throttle the Empire’s global expansion and adorn the

royal palaces and churches with yet more gilded opulence.

Let’s face it, though, Ferdie and Lizzy and their ilk needed more gold and silver like Al Pacino’s character (Tony Montana) needed more *l'ello* (cocaine) at the end of the movie *Scarface*. But, I digress...

The word pueblo also refers to the adobe buildings prevalent then and now, with the biggest existing example being the Taos Pueblo. That area is a great place to start exploring this amazing part of our planet. Definitely should be on your bucket list if you’re interested in visiting the Southwest.

The next group of indigenous peeps were the Athabascans who came over the land bridge from Siberia during the Ice Age and kept going south – the original Snowbirds. They’re now known as the Navajo and Apache and have been



forced onto reservations after considerable confrontation with the US Cavalry following the Civil War, but that victor/spoils thing comes into play again. The Long Walk of the Navajo (and Apache) to Bosque Redondo in New Mexico was the southwest

equivalent of the Trail of Tears (of the Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, etc.) from the southeast to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. The US government just called it Manifest Destiny. Very few white citizens really gave a damn. They wanted the land, too. But again, I digress...

So, let's focus on Las Vegas, as it is called now. Its history is equally rich, and equally violent. They're outlaw and proud of it – *Badass to the bone, bro*. You got a problem with that? *Ni modo!*

It was originally a Spanish, then Mexican, land grant named *Las Vegas Grandes en el Rio de las Gallinas* (The Great Meadows at the Gallinas River) in 1835, and became *Nuestra Senora de los Dolores de Las Vegas Grandes* (Our Lady of Sorrows of the Big Meadows) once the missionaries and priests became abundant. The locals just call it Vegas, and if you're not local – which makes you a "random" – you probably don't know there is "another" Las Vegas, until you get there. But it wasn't always that way.

Following the Mexican War of Independence (with Spain: 1810-1821), when New Spain became the Republic of Mexico, the United States was already



bursting westward. The new republic was much more interested in trading with the gringos than the old empire had been, and the Santa Fe Trail became the great avenue of commerce for southwestern expansion, opening up trade with goods hitherto unseen on either end, from Mexico to Missouri.

Las Vegas became the wealthiest and most popular settlement in the area, because the verdant meadows were great ranch and farmland for sheep, cattle and produce. Furs, Navajo rugs and food goods, as well as Mexican silver crafts, were exchanged for manufactured goods from the east as the US entered the Industrial Revolution. The Western Boom Town was born. *Orale!*

The settlement prospered and grew around a central plaza built in the Spanish Colonial style, combined with what was to become known as New Mexican Vernacular architecture, as *acequias* (irrigation canals) brought the surrounding land to life. Sheep herds flourished. Beans, squash, onions, potatoes and leafy vegetables all grew well in the abundant sunlight and snowmelt from the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. As soon as buildings surrounded the plaza there was even fortification from the raiding Apache - which was nice. Las Vegas experienced its brief utopia. And, then came the gringos...

In 1846 US General Stephen Kearny marched into Las Vegas with 2,500 cavalry troops of the Army of the West, and announced that the Territory was now

part of the United States. He was a career army officer just promoted to Brigadier General and tasked with taking the Southwest in the recently orchestrated war on Mexico.



President Polk was a workaholic champion of the Manifest Destiny myth and was hell-bent on laying the groundwork for increasing US territory. He certainly did just that. Using a minor border skirmish as an excuse for invading Mexican land north

of the Rio Grande, the US went on to take control of New Mexico, California and Texas, as well as other swaths of land in the area. Polk acquired the land of Oregon Territory through more diplomatic means, and western expansion went into full-tilt boogie mode.

The hordes of northern European immigrants overwhelming New York harbor from ocean liners which now made trans-Atlantic travel affordable, even for the poor, sure didn't want to stay in the slums of eastern cities, and weren't afraid of a little hardship. So they went from tramp steamer immigrants to wagon train pioneers and took the overland trails west. Many never made it, but the army was deployed to provide what protection it could.

To most of the residents of what was referred to as the New Mexico Territory, America's war with Mexico was news – and not necessarily welcome news. After the oppressive and harsh rule of the Spaniards they were relatively happy with their relationship with the Republic of Mexico, even though it was directed by Mexico City, which might as well have been on a different planet in terms of 19th century connectivity.

But who were these gringos and what did they want? This squeaky voiced little military man told the crowd in the plaza of Las Vegas, through an interpreter, that anyone who stood against his rule would be hanged. Then he and the troops went back to their camp on the edge of town, having scared off the smaller force of Mexican soldiers guarding the settlement.

And there it was, after more than 200 years of repressive and often crushing Spanish Colonial rule, and a mere 25 years of being part of the Republic of Mexico, the weary residents of The Big Meadow were just informed that they are now citizens of the United States of America. Washington DC was more foreign to them than Mexico City ever could be. But here's that victor/spoils reality, rearing its thorny brow once again.

The gringos took New Mexico by force, unannounced and uninvited. New Mexicans don't seem to have forgotten that. I can't say that I blame them.

So, let's end this part of the story here, dear reader, as it's been quite a bit of history that we've covered, and we haven't even gotten to the badass years yet. I hope you have enough interest left to check out the reference index. It might be a bit more objective than I've been at times, but I must maintain my membership in the Crotchety Old Phart Club – I've earned it.

I'll hurry on to the next phase of our journey in *Nuestra Senora de los Dolores de Las Vegas Grandes*. There's a big change coming, a storm a-whooping up. Methinks I hear the whistle of the Iron Horse, rolling down the tracks...

Adios, amigos! Hasta pronto!

“Fear and Learning in Las Vegas, New Mexico” Episode 13

The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp



“Looking out the camper window at sunshine bouncing off of snow. I’m here again at Storrie Lake State Park in Las Vegas, NM. Nice! Overcast and blizzard-ing all day yesterday. Very blustery. Southern

California seems like it was a long time ago, and far, far away...

But today it’s time to jump back into a writing regimen and get some things posted. Then I’m gonna try my hand at making posole for the first time. Warm this camper up with some good smells, I hope...”

--Journal entry: Monday; December 3rd, 2018; 9:09 am. Back in this cozy, little camper-trailer, which I like to call Cochise.

“Sunshine this morning was very welcoming. Gets damn cold at night but warms quickly with the sun. I’ll take it. Lots to do today – out and about: shower, haircut, library, and try to find out how to stiffen up BroBo, so pulling the camper doesn’t always make me sick. Maybe I’ll drive out to Montezuma and check out the hot spring baths.

I'm beginning to like this grimy old town. I feel strangely at home here..."

--Journal entry: Next morning, same place.

"Another glorious morning of sunshine and the hope for warm weather. Supposed to get up into the mid-50s. Like me – sort of.



I'm gonna go back to the Carnegie Library (I love that place!) and then knock around Old Town a bit – The Plaza and Bridge Street – where the Gallinas River separates West from East Las Vegas, Old from New.

I'm getting quotes on having BroBo tightened up – it's proving to be more difficult than I'd thought: air bags are expensive because the mounting brackets would have to be custom made; overload springs aren't available because they're coil and not leaf, nor are overload shocks because there's no extra room in the wheel well; putting a higher performance chip on the engine isn't going to give me any more towing power...not very encouraging news. Everyone says to just get a pickup truck with a V-8 and leaf springs. Sure, I'll get right on it..."

--Journal entry: Next morning, still same place.

Yes, yes, yes. I guess I'm just getting settled as a rubber tramp, trying to figure it all out. Certainly not as easy as I had imagined in my romantic notions of living on the road as a carefree, stumble-bumbling storytelling vagabond; but, it's certainly been more rewarding than continuing to spin in the slimy ol' mud as a twisted, broken cog stuck in an uncaring wheel rocking roughshod over others for another man's fortune, just a fingerhole in a bowling ball rolling down the endless lane of life.

Forty-some years of busting arse for "Da Man" and little more than a bad back to show for it. I gather that's what happens when you party your way through college and, finally, end up with a Liberal Arts degree in English. More's the pity; but no tears here, dear reader. *No lagrimas, amigos y amigas! No llorar aqui!* At least I can work on my Spanglish...



So, I hunker down at this semi-abandoned campground on the edge of town, where the Sangre de Cristo mountains come down to kiss the wind-blistered prairie of northeastern New Mexico, stretching toward the Panhandle region of Texas in what was once the Land of the Comanche, now

the Land of Enchantment - and enchanting it is as I discover the layers of history here, everywhere present in architecture of times better seen but preserved nonetheless, because Las Vegas didn't have the money to tear it all down and rebuild with ugly, "modern" boxy commercial buildings in the 1970s as so many other Western boom towns did during the heyday of the oil and gas bonanza.

Good thing, too. This place feels poised to pop with a revitalizing resurrection as old buildings get renovated and restored to their original majesty, and the shine comes back to luster on the dust of history's richness. Las Vegas, NM, has more architectural treasure than any other place in the country (according to local lore), with more structures - at over 900 - on the National Register of Historic Places than any other municipality per capita (with Las Vegas having a diminishing population of about 13,000 souls). I believe it, and I'll bet you would as well.



It's got every building type from the old Spanish Colonial Mission style in Old Town to the more modern adobe pueblo design with canales, vigas, Talavera tiles, placitas, entradas, nichos for Santos and latillas for coyote fences – collectively known as New Mexico Vernacu-

lar and Territorial Revival architecture. It's like Santa Fe on acid with a time-tripping ticket, blasting through the past to bygone times of pre-European invasion. Yeah, it's just like that...

But it can seem a bit scary here, too. Las Vegas is somewhat rustic in terms of how it appears to embrace out of towners – or, in my case, out of staters - and it isn't overly hospitable. Not that I'm expecting the Welcome Wagon to roll up and throw me the keys to the city or anything like that. This is America in the 21st Century, after all.

I'd been warned by people who'd been here not to assume any such nonsense, and having grown up in an even smaller town I know from experience that outsiders are often viewed with suspicion and even contempt, thinking that these strangers might look down upon the local denizens and do a silly little superior dance in their minds.

Well, I certainly don't feel that way. Not at all. If anything, I'm in awe of my surroundings, having never experienced this sense of culture tied so deeply to its history. This place *feels* outlaw. You can sense it in the way big dudes look at you when you climb out of your sporty little SUV with Colorado tags and go into the grocery store, neck tattoos and exposed arms the size of howitzers clocking you from bodies that could easily crush yours.

And when you finally utter something you get that confused stare that often begs the question, "Where you from?" to an unwitting audience around you; so you smile and wonder whether you should say "Colorado", since that's where you actually came from before migrating here and have lived there for most of your life; or do you say "Wisconsin", which is where you were born and raised and therefore "from", and knowing that most people west of the Mississippi don't know diddly-squat about places East – and vice versa.

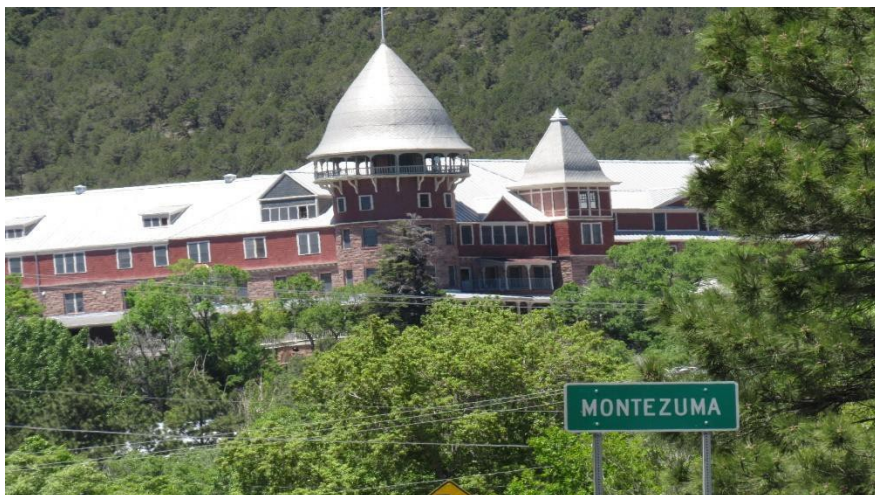
It doesn't really matter which, though. If you were actually from Vegas, they would know who you are already... Small towns seem to work that way.

So, I just don my scariest badass facade and don't smile or eyeball anyone, and try to act like I just got out of prison for something heinous - except I don't know what prison life is like except from what I've seen in movies such as *Shawshank Redemption* and *Cool Hand Luke*. That doesn't really help.

But I feel relatively safe in my camper, at this mostly deserted campground five miles out of town, with an armed Parks Ranger named Manny there during the day and a locked gate after 5 pm during winter hours (9 pm during the summer). I have a dog that barks and a pistol that bites, if I can ever summon the nerve to really use it. It does give me a little peace of mind - which is nice.

After a few weeks, though, I feel much more “at home.” My plan was, at that time, to live as a rubber tramp for five years, and New Mexico was my intended winter getaway. I was committed to making it work. It was all about the adventure. And not getting beat up, killed, or thrown in jail. Praying often seems to help.

I started attending a church and met some welcoming folks, although the membership was pretty small and one of the “officers” kept recruiting me to come to Bible Study groups and other things that didn’t interest me at all. I kept quiet and smiled during the “greeting” part of the service. It was advent season and brought back a lot of distant, fond holiday memories. I always left feeling refreshed and better prepared for whatever was to come, but I certainly never felt “blessed”. For some reason that sensation has never honestly stuck to me.



I also felt at ease at the Montezuma Hot Springs, looking up at the old turreted hotel known as the Castle, now a campus for the United World College. The mineral-rich, lithium-laced water bubbled out

of the hillside at flesh-scalding temperatures to us soft skinned gringos and other non-natives. Fortunately, there were enough bath spot options to find your comfort zone, and if you were feeling particularly gnarly you could take a quick dip in the chilling waters of the nearby Gallinas River. I almost did, once...

Here flocked not only locals but other vagabonds passing through, as evidenced by the various rigs and license plates lining the road. It soon became apparent that I was one small part of a much larger tribe of rubber tramps who shared my age or were older, but had the same motivation for unburdening themselves of unnecessary residential trappings and came to embrace the nomadic drifting of the wanderer on wheels.

We talked of various camping hamlets throughout the West, discussing hook-up fees, shower/laundry availability, and the natural wonders which drew us there. Suddenly, the world around me grew a bit less scary, as the therapeutic waters washed anxiety downstream, and my pink, wrinkled skin started to tingle just a little. I began to realize that "home" became less of a static place marked on a map and remembered accordingly, but more an abstract realization of where you are in the moment, and the trippy, trekking comfort you take from that. (Must have been something more than minerals in those searing, healing waters I guess...)

But aside from the grocery store and library, church and the hot springs, I sought a little social interaction in more familiar venues, and soon found myself settled on a stool at the local watering hole, called Dick's Pub and Restaurant. I didn't linger long because at first it wasn't friendly, hard eyes and hushed tones greeted me when I meekly opened the door, as though I'd wandered through a broken fence into a salvage yard full of junkyard dogs. *Grrr...*



Besides, I didn't want to take any chances smelling like beer if I got pulled over by the law dogs, and there was plenty of law enforcement – and plenty of law breakers – in Las Vegas, New Mexico: three different types of police cars (never enough in the annual budget

to replace the whole fleet at once) and unknown numbers of undercover cops, hella bunch of sheriff's deputies (it was the county seat) and more State Troopers than I'd ever seen before, because they had a local headquarters in town since I-25 ran through it. And word around the campfire was that Colorado plates meant real money to law enforcement coffers, because we actually paid our fines. *Bueno, no!*

Let's stop right here, dear reader, and grab a well-earned break. I still feel the need to give a bit more history of this place, particularly after the railroad rolled in, but I thought it better if we knocked around a little first - stepped into the boots of the visiting inquisitor, so to speak.

We can take a trip back to the gunslinging heyday and the lynching vigilantes of The Wild, Wild West with the next episode, so cock your hat forward, hold tight to those reins and stay in the saddle – we're about to take this tale to its final stages, and see where the next one begins...

“Las Vegas, New Mexico: The Outlaw Years”

Episode 14 of

The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp



“Today, I’m going to knock around in town. It’s been a while. I had to vacate Storrie Lake Campground because I’d been there 14 days straight (more, actually) and Manny, the Park Ranger, wouldn’t give me a waiver to stay longer – even though I was the only

one there most of the time. But I understand. Rules are rules...blah, blah, blah...

So, I tooled down the road to the Vegas RV Park (my other homestead here in Las Vegas). Nice. Full hook-ups and a shower facility. I even have pressurized “city water” – as soon as I get a new hose, because mine started leaking like a sieve.”

--Journal entry: Thursday; December 20th, 2018; 9:28 am. Content in my camper, *Cochise*.

This is a luxury. I'll make the best of it and definitely get my money's worth. The rules for state parks in New Mexico require you to leave the campground after 14 days (used to be 21) and not return for a week. It's a good thing for the summer, when campgrounds all over the West fill up with vacationers and RV warriors waiting to escape their urban environs and breathe a little Mother Nature - lest we rubber tramp vagabonds become year-round squatters.

It would be nice if the system could be flexible in the off-season, though, when plenty of space is available. Why chase off paying customers when there's an abundance of empty spots? Government "policies" often seem so silly to me. But it is what it is...even when it's stupid. *Dang gummint.*

So, instead of paying just \$4 per night to have electricity and a frost-free water spigot at a state park campground (saving \$10 per night because I have an annual pass), I pay \$125 a week to have all the amenities of city services, here on the not-so-quiet edge of town.

Being able to walk to the shower each morning was something I hadn't experienced since becoming a rubber tramp the previous May - over half a year earlier. The only truck stop shower in town was \$13, but the Romero Rec Center would let you use their showers for a buck. Heck of a deal, if you're not hung up on privacy, or seeing a lot of tattoos on flabby, old wrinkled skin, and fathers bringing their young daughters in. That's kind of weird.

I tried to shower once a week when I was tramping, whether I needed to or not. Fortunately, I didn't interact closely with other human beings unless I was grocery shopping or at the library. Otherwise it was just Rambeaux and me, and dogs don't seem to mind smelly things. They rather like them, which is one of

the reasons I've always loved dogs - except for those little yip-yapping ankle-biters that would better be used for muskie bait. Just sayin...

Staying at the RV park also means that I have to deal with neighbors, as many spots are filled by folks who don't appear to be going anywhere. Deeply discounted monthly and annual rates make this an affordable place to live if you're comfortable in your RV. I'd be more comfortable in mine if I could just stand up inside. I guess I was a little too anxious to get a trailer - and the price was right - when I bought Cochise, and didn't notice that the only places I could stand my 6'3" frame were in the roof-vent wells of the cabin and bathroom. Oh well, it'll work much better when I shrink a few inches. That'll be nice.



"Happy NYE! Looking forward to 2019. I gotta good feeling..."

It's been freaking cold here this past week. 12" of snow and temperatures that haven't been above freezing until today. My water system froze up and I'm attempting to thaw it now. Dang.

Yesterday the Packers finished a terrible season with a horrible loss. 31-0 to the Lions. At LAMBEAU FIELD! Glad this season's over... I think tomorrow I'll take BroBo down to the lakeside open space and see how it powers through powder. Let 'er rip!"

--Journal entry: Monday; December 31st, 2018; 9:28 am. Living large in my cold, dry camper. Back at the campground in Cochise.

Time passes peacefully at Storrie Lake State Park. The holidays end, and a new year begins. Boldly, in a new land. *Feliz ano nuevo!*

“A’ight den...after my second 2-week stint at the campground I’m back here at the Vegas RV Park and full hook-ups. It’s a treat, but kind of pricey for my lifestyle. I’m going to look into being a caretaker at a property downtown that needs watching until it’s ready to go on the market. It has a beautiful old three-story residence with a carriage house that used to be a Bed and Breakfast, but has turned into a shooting gallery for junkies since being vacant for over a year.



It was recently bought by a wealthy fellow from California who owns the Plaza Hotel in Old Town (as well as La Posada Hotel in Winslow, Arizona) and who purchased the Castaneda Hotel a few years ago in East Las Vegas [New Town], right next door to the train depot – both built in the

1880s, after the arrival of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway.

He’s been renovating the classic old Harvey House hotel and wants to either live at the property I’d be watching or make it available to Castaneda staff once the business is up and running. Everyone seems to be pretty stoked to see the “Casty” coming back to life, after being dormant for many decades.

I met the GC of the renovation at Dick’s, which his company also renovated. Turns out he was born in Shawano [the same small town in Wisconsin where I

*was born]. His mother was a year behind me in high school. She was a hottie, and her family owned ****'s [the only place that served food after the bars closed, and had the best french fries around - served with tartar sauce that supposedly had a classified recipe]. He went to college at Naropa [a Buddhist university in Boulder, Colorado] and was taking classes there when I was working a few blocks away for a program called ReSource. STRANGE WORLD THIS!"*

--Journal entry: Wednesday; January 9th, 2019; 7:57 am. Back at the Vegas RV Park, living the life of luxury in *Cochise*.



Strange world indeed. Having that connection with the GC got me in with his crew, most of whom came to Dick's after work for happy hour, since the Casty was only a few blocks away. They almost all had animal names: Bear, Moose, Goat and Horse (and Nich and Toby, who were just Nich and Toby).

I'd done my time in the building trades and worked on restorations of old houses and other structures, so I could understand what they were saying when they talked about the day's work. They took pride in being part of renovating what everyone knew would be the gem of East Las Vegas, as was the Plaza Hotel in West Vegas. The fact that they were both owned by the same fellow (and his world-famous, artist wife), who had money and a vision, made it all the more believable.

I felt the work-buzz bouncing off them, and when they invited me over “any-time” to see what they were doing I took them up and visited the jobsite often. They had a huge challenge in front of them, as the place had fallen into serious disrepair since it closed as a hotel in 1948 - seventy years prior.

But its history spurred its intrigue. This place had its share of stories, and probably more than a few ghosts – as all the old hotels from the Wild West Days seem to have. The evidence of apparitions appeared overwhelming at times, and the subject was spoken of mostly in whispers and quickly dismissed, so as not to invite paranormal misfortune from lingering spirits. Enough said...

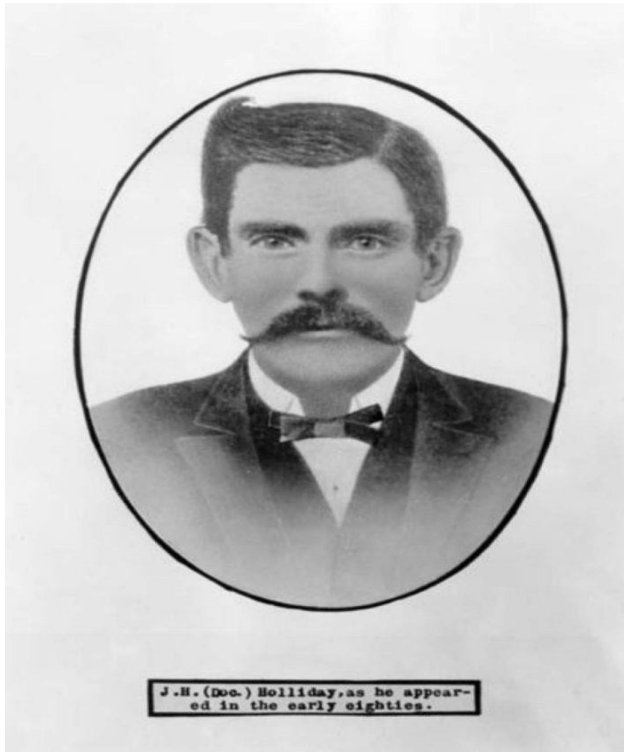
The whole town was rife with rough history, and the unending stories of badass activity. Old Town harbored the original Hispanos who had to ward off marauding Apache and Comanche raiders, as well as highwaymen and banditos preying on the commerce of the Santa Fe Trail. Then came the damn gringos who proclaimed the whole territory to be part of the United States and not Mexico anymore, which ticked off enough locals to kick off the Taos Revolt of 1847, in the midst of the Mexican-American War.



But that all paled in comparison to the riff-raff rail-trash that came on the trains in 1879 and conceived New Town, about a mile east of the Old Town Plaza. What was to become known as East Las Vegas, until the official consolidation of the two separate Las Vegases in 1970, also became

known as the roughest, toughest most criminally wicked settlement on the south-

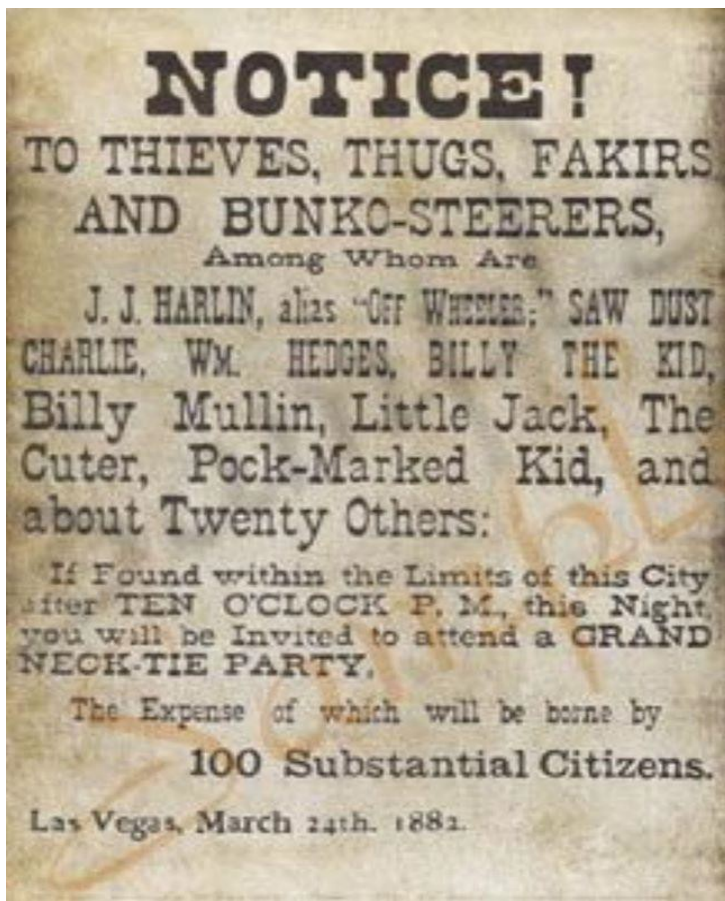
western frontier, with more killings than Dodge City, Kansas, or Tombstone, Arizona, during its heyday of hellraising.



The most notable outlaw was Doc Holliday, who had a saloon and dentist shop a few blocks from the Casty, but had to bug out after shooting a loudmouthed patron and leave town before being lynched. He returned a year or so later, with his companion Big Nose Kate, to settle a beef with a bartender working on the Old Town Plaza, but only grazed the fellow with a bullet before hustling back to the train depot and beating it out of the territory.

His cohort Wyatt Earp also graced the multitude of saloons, brothels and dancehalls, as did Jesse James, Mysterious Dave Mather, HooDoo Brown and a host of other colorfully nicknamed ne're do wells. Billy the Kid was brought through town on his way to trial in Lincoln, NM, after being arrested by Pat Garrett for killing a sheriff during the Lincoln County War, a running battle between established landowners and newbie ranchers not far to the south. A mob of townsfolk gathered to string him up, but Garrett and his men got The Kid onto the train with guns drawn and hustled him away.

In *Wildest of The Wild West*, author Howard Bryan (who wrote about local history for *The Albuquerque Tribune* from 1948-1985, and went on to write several books about the area's unique, outlaw past) quotes an earlier chronicler of the



Southwest frontier, New Mexico historian Ralph Emerson Twitchell, who, in his monumental, five-volume *The Leading Facts of New Mexican History*, wrote:

“Without exception, in the days of the construction of the Santa Fe railway into the Southwest, there was no town which harbored a more disreputable gang of gamblers, desperadoes, and outlaws than did Las Vegas. They controlled, for a while, the local peace officers, and the dancehalls and

public resorts were the scenes of many shooting affrays and robberies.

In the new town, in the immediate vicinity of the present Castaneda hotel, were located some of the most disreputable saloons, dance-halls, and resorts ever seen in frontier days. The gambling houses never closed and the gambling fraternity did about as they pleased. It finally became necessary to organize a committee of one hundred for the safety of the better classes and visitors to the place.

Several desperadoes were summarily dealt with, taken from the jail or from their resorts and hung. Notice was served upon every ‘undesirable’ to leave forthwith and in this manner the town was rid of as desperate a gang of cut-throats and ‘bad men’ as ever congregated in one place in the Southwest.”

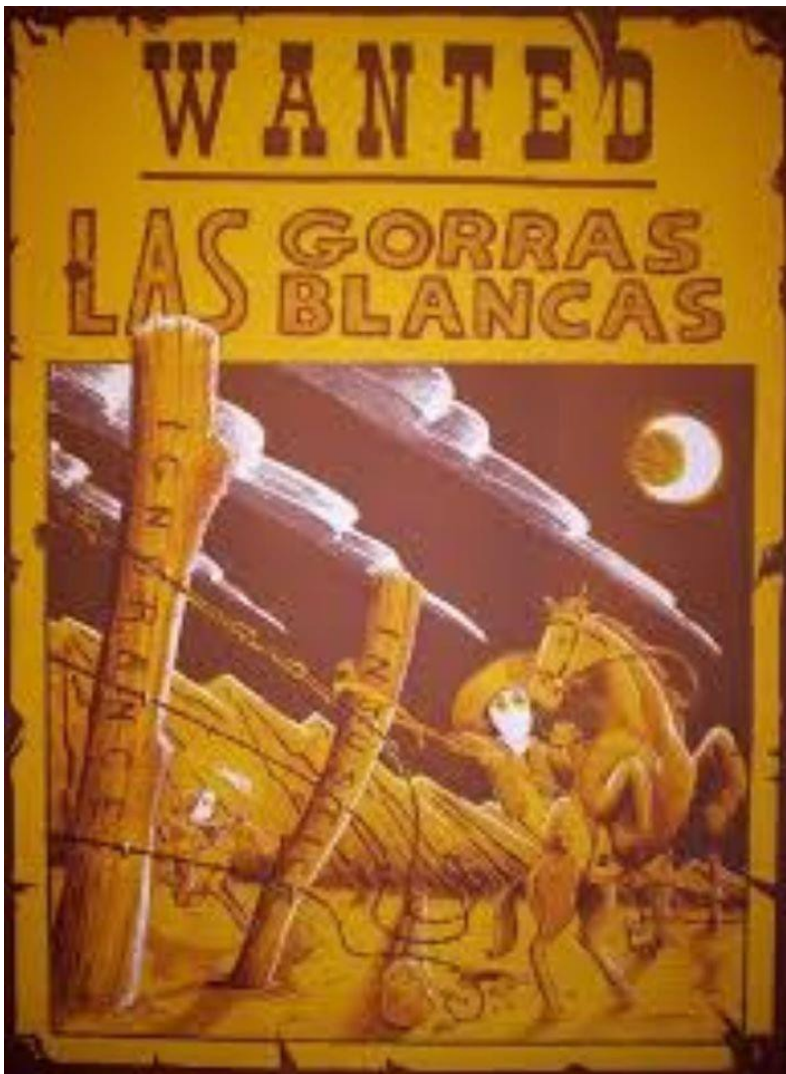
Miguel A. Otero (governor of New Mexico from 1897-1906, and an early resident of Las Vegas) wrote in his book, *My Life on the Frontier, 1864-1882*:

“For more than a year after the entry of the railroad, it can be stated without fear of contradiction that Las Vegas was the ‘hottest’ town in the country. Such a statement would be substantiated by the record, for one month, which the old files of the (Las Vegas) Daily Optic establish. They show that twenty-nine men were killed in and around Las Vegas, either murdered outright or shot in self-defense or hung by the well-regulated Vigilance Committee. Such a record, I am certain, would be hard to parallel in the history of any of the wild towns of the West.”

The deeper you dig into the history of Las Vegas, the more muck and bones you quickly uncover, for murder seemed to be a practice that was practiced by all, and not just a product brought in on the train. The Hispanos had centuries of hardship under Spanish Colonial rule, and suffered the oppression of the Church as well as the harshness of the land. Skin grows thick under these conditions, and the outlaw life becomes a release. When the gringos arrived and announced they were taking over, the release became unleashed.

Vicente Silva was a respected Las Vegan who ran a not-so-respected saloon and gambling hall on the Old Town Plaza called The Imperial, several years before the train arrived. Greed led him to form and lead a secret crime organization known as *La Sociedad de Banditos de Nuevo Mexico* (The Society of Bandits of New Mexico), which consisted of about forty men described by Otero in the aforementioned book as “a tough a bunch of bad men as ever gathered outside a penal institution.” They would later be referred to as *Vicente Silva and the 40 Thieves*.

But violence and fear-mongering weren't always used simply for personal gain. It found itself manifest in a community-minded vigilance force when an unscrupulous bunch of land-grabbing lawyers, hustlers and developers occupying the statehouse, known as the Santa Fe Ring, began stealing traditional Land Grant property used to raise sheep and produce for the Santa Fe Trail commerce. Howard Bryan describes their appearance in the opening paragraph of a chapter titled Night Riders in *Wildest of the Wild West*:



“It was nearly midnight on March 11, 1890, when more than 200 armed horseback riders, wearing white hoods pulled down over their faces to conceal their identities, suddenly appeared on the streets of East Las Vegas in a demonstration of strength and determination. Las Gorras Blancas, they were called, The White Caps, a secret and militant organization of rural Hispanic settlers united to protect the common lands of the Las Vegas Grant from interlopers.”

To alleviate any misconceptions about their intentions, they penned a Declaration and promulgated it upon

posters nailed to doors and places throughout the community, as was the method of communication before the digital world of social media. It read, in part:

“Not wishing to be misunderstood, we hereby make this our declaration.

Our purpose is to protect the rights and interests of the people in general: especially those of the helpless classes.

We want the Las Vegas Grant settled to the benefit of all concerned, and this we hold is the entire community within the grant.

We want no 'land grabbers' or obstructionists of any sort to interfere. We will watch them.

We are not down on lawyers as a class, but the usual knavery and unfair treatment of the people must be stopped...

We are down on race issues, and will watch race agitators. We are all human brethren, under the same glorious flag.

We do not care how much you get so long as you do it fairly and honestly.

The People are suffering from the effects of partisan 'bossism' and these bosses had better quietly hold their peace. The people have been persecuted and hacked about in every which way to satisfy their caprice. If they persist in their usual methods retribution will be their reward.

We are watching 'political informers...'

Intimidation and the 'indictment' plan have no further fear for us. If the old system should continue, death would be a relief to our sufferings. And for our rights our lives are the least we can pledge.

If the fact that we are law abiding citizens is questioned, come out to our houses and see the hunger and desolation we are suffering; and 'this' is the result of the deceitful and corrupt methods of 'bossism.'

Be fair and just and we are with you, do otherwise and take the consequences.

The White Caps

1,500 Strong and Growing Daily.”

They wore what looked like flower sacks with cutouts for the eyes, giving them more the visage of homemade Halloween ghost costumes than the tailored hoods of Klansmen.

The illegal ranchers got fat and rich raising cheap beef for the burgeoning population of Anglo immigration, and also government buyers who distributed the meat, often spoiled, to the growing number of Indian reservations.

Their land-grabbing actions contributed to the Lincoln County War of Billy the Kid fame, where rogue cattle ranchers fenced out the traditional sheepherders on acreage granted them by the Republic of Mexico before the Mexican-American War.

So, the Night Riders did their work, tearing down fences, burning barns and haystacks, and scattering cattle. They threatened worse, and were often blamed for murders they didn't commit. They even torched a pile of thousands of railroad ties in response to the AT&SF Railway refusing to pay its workers a livable wage. But they got their message out, and eventually hostilities ceased.

In town, however, the desperadoes still ruled, so the locals banded together and sent a message of their own. Here is how they presented themselves, in a proclamation published in the *Las Vegas Optic* newspaper on April 8, 1880:

“To Murderers, Confidence Men, Thieves:

The citizens of Las Vegas have tired of robbery, murder, and other crimes, that have made this town a byword in every civilized community. They have resolved to put a stop to crime, if in attaining that end they have to forget the law, and resort to a speedier justice than it will afford. All such characters are therefore, hereby notified, that they must either leave this town or conform themselves to the requirements of law, or they will be summarily dealt with. The flow of blood must and shall be stopped in this community, and the good citizens of both the old and new towns have determined to stop it, if they have to HANG by the strong arm of FORCE every violator of the law in this country.

VIGILANTES”

The Vigilance Committee performed its duty in the absence of legitimate law, stringing up dozens of bad men (and one bad woman) at a windmill on the Plaza, and the riff-raff gunslingers moved on down the rail – but the outlaw culture never completely left. It is there still, existing as the Dark Side of the Land of Enchantment.

It has its allure, dear reader, and I feel it calling this vagabond back. Solemnly.

I shall return - someday. And I hope you will stick around to join me on this seemingly unending adventure. So, until the next episode... *Orale!*

“From Campground to New Town: A Rubber Tramp Transition in Las Vegas, New Mexico” Episode 15 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



Welcome back, dear reader, here we are again, seemingly stuck in Las Vegas, and not the one where “What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas,” unless we are what’s happening, because *here* we seem to stay. Tough place to break free from...but let’s give it a try.

Vamonos!

“I’m here at Storrie Lake [Campground] for quite possibly the last time this season. I’ll be hooking up and pulling the camper into town and putting it on the property I’ll be watching – someplace. It’ll be nice to not have to move it for a while after that. There’s ridiculous blowing out here and I really don’t like towing the trailer with BroBo anymore, now that I know it’s insufficient in power and handling capability, just not a big enough horse for the cart. I’m looking at used pickup trucks. I really like used pickup trucks. Always have.”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; February 6th, 2019; 10:33 am. Anxious in my camper, Cochise.

“Well, here I am in the new digs, at 6th and Washington in windy AF Las Vegas, NM. This is going to work out just fine. It’s nice to be in town among humans and wind-blocking buildings. Storrie Lake was getting lonely and the wind gusts were obnoxious. I thought I was going to be blown to Munchkinland - Rambeaux too! I hear Las Vegas is one of the windiest places in New Mexico, where the mountains meet the plains, and the airstream screeches through the gaps of the Sangre de Christo’s foothill teeth.

But now I’m getting ready to depart on my first road trip since coming to Vegas. I’m going to head down to Villanueva State Park, which is 36 miles south off of I-25 and back through some old territorial settlements to the Pecos River. It’ll be fun. You’ll see.”

--Journal entry: Friday; February 8th, 2019; 11:46 am. Caretaking property in East Las Vegas, living like a boss in my little vintage camper.



“It’s winter again. Ya-f’ing-hoo! I thought New Mexico would be a warm place to go for the off-season, but I hit the harshest winter in decades - according to the locals. I should have gone farther south; I just didn’t have the right mule to pull the wagon. More’s the pity, but... No llores!

I ran out of propane (Stupid!) two nights ago and couldn't get any until today, so I was heating this place with steam from a boiling pot while I was awake. Woke in the middle of the night when the inside temp dropped down to the 40s. I haven't had good sleep. Now it's toasty and I feel like taking a nap. Maybe I will. What are you going to do about that, huh? And who the hell am I talking to any- way? Burr-haw!"

--Journal entry: Monday; February 18th, 2019; 11:19 am. Snug again in the camper, feeling a little silly.

"Well...been nearly a month since you've scribbled in here. What's the matter? Afraid to write your thoughts?"

Or, were you just on a bit of an extended bender and were too ashamed to face a blank page? Try not to be honest...well, that doesn't work, does it? Suck it up, Princess!

During this hiatus you did manage to upgrade your tow vehicle. Got rid of the pony and got you a horse. Viva caballo!

She's a BEAST, but you'll miss BroBo [the "Bronze Bomber" Nissan Pathfinder.] But it is what it is, as you so like to say...

You also spent a LOT of time and \$\$\$ trying to find your next ex-girlfriend. How did that work out?

You know, I really don't remember..."

--Journal entry: Sunday; March 17th, 2019 (St. Patty's Day); 11:19 am. Settled in on a side yard in New Town, Las Vegas.



That brings us a bit up to speed, dear reader, and I'd like to take a pause from the journal entries to introduce the newest character to our story: *The Beast* – a 2002 Ford Super Duty F-250 4x4 SuperCab with the

Triton 5.4 L V-8 gas engine developing 260 HP on a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton frame with a robust cluster of leaf springs that'll hold the road when you're towing a load, bro. *Boo-Yaa!!* I took it to a mechanic I knew to look it over before I bought it, and he just nodded his head and said, "*Yeah. This is what you need.*" He was right.

The Triton engine is known for lasting forever – over 500,000 miles if you maintain it properly – and the only rap I've heard against it is that it'll start spitting out spark plugs if you don't get them retightened on a regular basis, which would be before they start getting spat out, I guess. No big deal. It's a Ford. *Built Ford Tough.* Who needs all those spark plugs anyway?

The mechanic also told me that the (automatic) transmission was 'bulletproof', so I won't have to worry about smoking it as I did (worry) with that weak link in BroBo's drive train. And the rear suspension on a pickup truck is hella more stable than those puny little coil springs on SUVs. No more sea-legs after a day of pulling Cochise on the interstate. No more dry-heaving at rest stops. No more heart palpitations and prayers going over Raton Pass between Colorado and New Mexico. *No mas!*

To be honest, and I wouldn't lie to you dear reader, I thought I was a Chevy man, because my first pickup was a 1976 Scottsdale $\frac{1}{2}$ ton 2WD that my newlywed wife and I bought for \$2,500 in 1985 using all the money we received for

our wedding. And we asked for only money so we could buy a used pickup truck (with an insulated topper shell) and head up to Alaska with our Doberman, Hector. He was a great dog, and that was a good truck – except the 305 cubic inch V-8 was a little wimpy when we decided to pull a 1959 16' camper-trailer (which I don't believe we named) back down the Alcan highway, because it was cheaper than renting a 4'x 8' U-Haul trailer.

We'd top some of the big hills at 15 mph and loosing speed with the pedal to the floor, but we always made it down the other side and up and over the next one. We called the truck *Sweetness* in honor of Walter Payton (the Chicago Bears running back who never gave up on a run by going out of bounds, but rather took on tacklers and made them pay), because it was a black truck with a white topper, which matched the colors of the Bears uniforms. As a Packer fan it pains me to speak well of Da Bears, but the '85 Bears were one of the best all-around teams to ever take the field, and Payton was my favorite player, among the many memorable standouts.

I remember waking early to watch the Super Bowl they won when they beat the Patriots the year we were in Alaska. It came on at 8 am because of the time-zone difference, and I watched it on a little black and white tv in an unheated back room of our cabin (so as not to disturb my wife), huddled under multiple blankets, drinking beer and watching the mice scamper around. But I digress... let's get back to the story, shall we?



“Alright, it’s dark. At least I’m home in the camper and everything is good in the neighborhood, but it gets rowdy out there at night when the loud, muscular trucks and cars wrap up the RPMs as they throttle through three gears in a block on a street posted at 20 mph.

*What da f*uck are they thinking - or not, no? They must be the ones I read about in the newspaper. Under ‘Jail Log’.”*

--Journal entry: Friday; March 22nd, 2019; 11:08 pm. Safe at home from a walk-about to the watering hole – Dick’s Pub and Restaurant. In search of a little social interaction in the Land of Enchantment.

One of the first things I noticed after moving into town was that in Vegas it seemed as though badass status was measured by the sound of your exhaust – on your big-ass truck with 21” rims, or your ape-handled Harley, or your chain-saw-sounding, wanna-be race car with the BS spoiler and window tints belching bass-boost gangsta rap. Wrap up the RPMs, wrap up the sonic bump, bounce your head and look through people. Don’t smile. *You’re Bad Ass, Homeboy!* Bad. Ass. I got to liking it a little more each day...

“APRIL FOOLS DAY! Be careful. I will...

I had to run up to Loveland [Colorado] last week to get the Beast VIN inspected for the title transfer and registration. It had to be done visually and in Colorado,

so Rambeaux and I took a road trip – about 375 miles one way. The truck ran like a champ and I made it to the County Clerk’s office just in time (driving through Denver took over 2 freaking hours – crazy). I booked a motel room at Johnson’s Corner [famous truck stop diner plaza] and had a great night’s sleep on a queen size bed with crisp, clean sheets, a shower (I took two!) and cable. I watched ‘The Perfect Storm’, ‘Swamp People’, and ‘Caddyshack.’ What a treat! Slept past sunup, choked down some bad coffee from the lobby and blasted back as soon as the night’s light snow began to melt off the roads. Denver was better on the return and I made it to the camper a little after dark. Long day, but a good trip. Nice to be home in the hood.”

--Journal entry: Monday; April 1st, 2019; 11:44 am. Back in East Vegas, settled at my nook in *Cochise*.

Home in the hood. Yeah. This is an area unlike anywhere I’ve ever lived before: more alive, raucous, loud, proud and socially outlawed compared to the politically correct parameters descending upon Colorado as the influx of craft beer drinking hipsters and legal weed aficionados have brought an *urban nouveau* chic to the bubble popping population on the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains.

Sometimes I'm not sure how much longer I'll stay in Colorado. It's not at all the same place as when I moved there in 1986. I feel as though I've grabbed a coat from a closet in the dark, and it doesn't belong to me. It just doesn't fit, no matter how hard I tug at the sleeves and collar. But, that's another matter...



Down here it's different. Old school. These mofos have been here for centuries, bro, and they don't give a chivato's ass about what's trending on social media, and why should they? They've got childhood friends, extended family and amazing food, with traditions going

back to the Spaniards and the "civilized" European culture they brought to the savage Athabaskan inhabitants, who tolerated the invasion with measured skepticism - but laid down the law when the time came - and what remains is a sun-baked, stone-ground mix of modern life over ancient: fused silica from melted sand on atomic test sites over Clovis points from Mammoth Hunters, Santa Fe Territorial Revival architectural building codes juxtaposed with ancestral adobe Pueblos that predate the Conquistadors by untold centuries, gangsta rap rollin off the Rez, lowrider Cholo whips wrapped in Chicano bling, every thing that sounds good, looks *bad* and tastes like your abuela's kitchen smells on Christmas Day. *Orale, bro! Or-a-le!*

It is the Land of Enchantment. Just don't act like you belong there if you're not from there. Give it time, a couple cervezas and you'll melt right in like cheese on a quesadilla...*manana...manana...*

I melted in, once I moved into town and started walking around, absorbing all the haunting ghost vibes from the historic buildings tying Wild West antiquity to the post-digital present, the Old Town with the New, wagon trains on the Santa

Fe Trail to the steam locomotives of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway, converging on the separate banks of the Gallinas River, where the mountains come down to ground, and vigilante justice often hung from the impartial end of a rope.



I melted in, when I fell back onto my roots and small town Midwest upbringing to know when to shut up and listen, and not act like a gringo missionary in the next round of random invaders and conquerors searching for the Lost Cities of Gold, or peyote-laced enlightenment seekers tripping balls in a cerebral sweat lodge, tipi, hogan or

wickiup based on “experiences” I had reading a book in college by someone with a Spanish or Native sounding last name.

I melted in, but began to melt away like suds settling to bubbles. The phantom ghosts summoned old demons out of the apocalyptic crypt, and I knew I would have to go north again, to the sanctuary of my secluded woodlot hideaway, nine-thousand feet above sea level and a dozen miles south of the Wyoming border, listening to the breeze blow through the canopy of ponderosa and lodgepole pine trees, in the belly of the jetstream... quiet, quiet, quiet that you can hear, below the din of screaming exhaust pipes and sirens and camper-rattling wind gusts wanting to lift you off your mount and send you out onto the barren, unforgiving plains...

But that'll have to happen in a subsequent post, dear reader, *cuz we ain't there yet*. This is a tough place to break free from and get the release to no longer be what happens in Vegas, and stays. So, I ask you to stay with me and we'll finish this trip one of these days...it's the ride and not the destination that matters. And I've got a fresh horse.

“Leaving Las Vegas: Saying Goodbye to the Land of Enchantment” Episode 16 of *The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp*



Alright, amigos, it's time to saddle the horse and prepare to head north. We've got to leave the allure of Las Vegas, New México, while we still can. This place is getting ahold of me, but I gotta go, get back to my mountain hideaway in the northern Rockies of Colorado, before it's too late...

“The weather is finally gorgeous – warm and sunny with little or no wind. I've been waiting months for this. Definitely going to take Rambeaux for a walk, do some photography of some historic buildings and maybe buy a license and go fishing, get back to an active lifestyle after these winter doldrums have made me lazy.

The construction crews are working overtime and trying to catch up on getting the main residence and carriage house ready for the tenants, who've been living in temporary digs, waiting to move in. It'll be housing for the owners and staff of the restaurant at the Casty [Castaneda Hotel] which is opening soon, after seventy years of vacancy and no small amount of decay, being resurrected by dreams, and vision, and money.”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; April 3rd, 2019; 10:48 am. Restless in my camper, *Cochise*.



Bitter weather has finally released its grip and green things begin to grow, and I'm ready to go, finish this first season as a rubber tramp, living out of my 19' vintage camper with my dog, Rambeaux, and head north to that little piece of dirt in the mountains of Colorado that I call

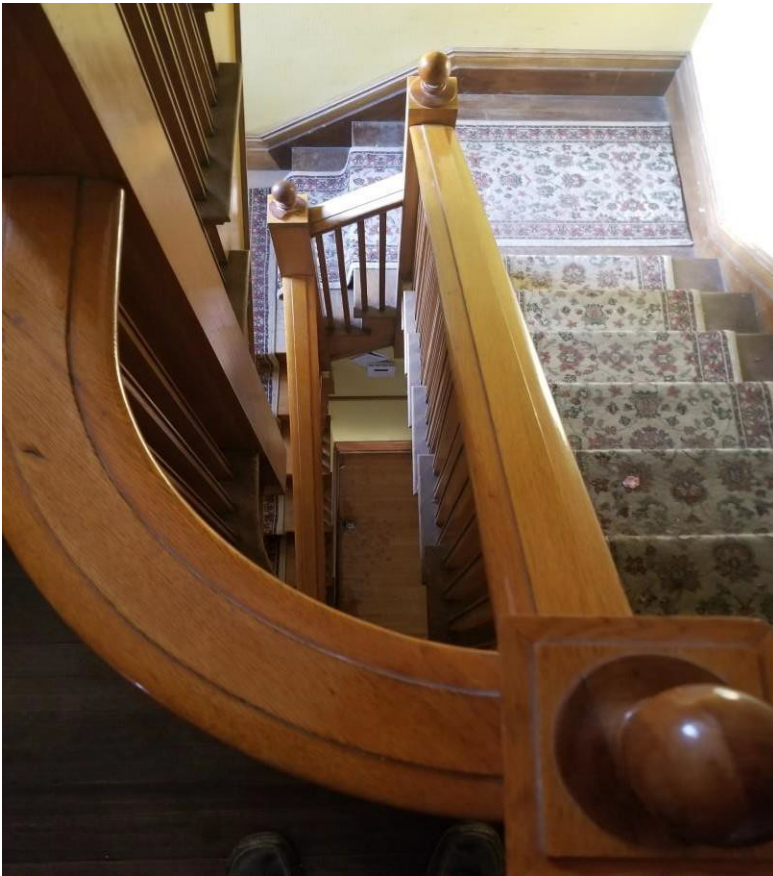
my own, just south of the Wyoming border. But the weather there won't let me return... not yet - still too much cold and blowing snow making the ground a horizontal barrier to passenger vehicles.

The word from my neighborhood newsletter there informs me a late season storm has dumped more than two feet of wet snow that gale force winds have formed into an impenetrable blockade, snapping the hydraulic cylinder mounts on the road grader and holding smaller vehicles with snowplows at a standstill. Locals have to rely on snowmobiles to get groceries and everyone is waiting for the weather to break, warm the air, melt the snow and allow the normalcy of summer to bring life back from the dormancy of winter. I wait from what should be safe distance, but often doesn't feel that way. We live by the choices we make, and mine are sometimes not the best. I think that's just part of being human. At least that's my excuse...

"Oh, the last month has slipped by quickly, slippery with wet memories and little to say in this journal...trekking through snow melting slowly and hot soaks at

Montezuma Hot Springs, often followed by a trip to the local watering hole, walking without caution and not watching out for the unseen crocodile waiting to dine on an unsuspecting visitor, like me.”

--Journal entry: Saturday; May 4th, 2019; 9:06 am. Waiting for the weather to break and open the way to my little slice of paradise in northern Colorado, nearly 500 miles north.



North...north...north I must go, back to the home I know and the sound comfort of familiar ground, as the sound on the ground of this place is disrupted by jackhammers breaking concrete and many busy feet hustling over the property as utilities are inspected and new conduit connected, sheet-rock, tile and finish trim are put in place as the new owners bring furniture and boxes to store in finished rooms, push-

ing the workers to let them in, and out of their temporary stay and storage spaces so they can accelerate in to the traffic of activity at the Casty, join the pace of frenzy there as the grand old hotel approaches its grand new opening – many decades in waiting.

I wait as well, for weather north to let me enter so I can go forth from here, where I no longer feel at home.

The worm turned when I woke to cold a few weeks ago and discovered that my freshly filled propane tanks had been stolen, the cover replaced but the space inside empty, fittings damaged as though undone in a hurry with tools instead of nice and easy by hand.

Who would steal my source of heat in the dead of winter? Why? Why, tweak-ers, of course, and their junky cousins, 'cause they gotta get that high – and nothing else matters. Punks and thugs...wasting space.

So I just left, and headed back to Storrie Lake to wait for the green light from the weather beyond to put the horse and cart on the road and go.

Summer hours are in effect which means the water is turned on and the doors are unlocked to the showers and bathroom facilities, so I find a spot as the campground begins to fill on Cinco de Mayo weekend. As the sounds of heavy engines shatter the atmosphere in town.



“This place is so peaceful, so contrary to the streets of Vegas, of pounding exhaust systems that drivers love to hear open up and get throaty, bouncing the sounds of dual pipes off buildings and people, beating the bellows of internal big-blocks with headers,

glasspack mufflers and 3” tailpipes aimed at you like the burping muzzles of anti-aircraft artillery guns.

And then there is the choir of sirens coming from cops, ambulances and fire-trucks – in that order. Not a quiet town, Las Vegas, NM, and when the property I was watching became a full-on construction site I knew it was time to leave. I should have left sooner.”

--Journal entry: Tuesday; May 7th, 2019; 2:26 pm. Back again at Storrie Lake Campground, waiting for clearance to go.



“It’s been one year since I’ve taken up the rubber tramp life. Hard to believe. It has been interesting, though. That’s Fo sho!

I’m in a much better place here at Storrie Lake than I was in town. I’m going to cook a big breakfast outside in this beautiful weather and maybe follow

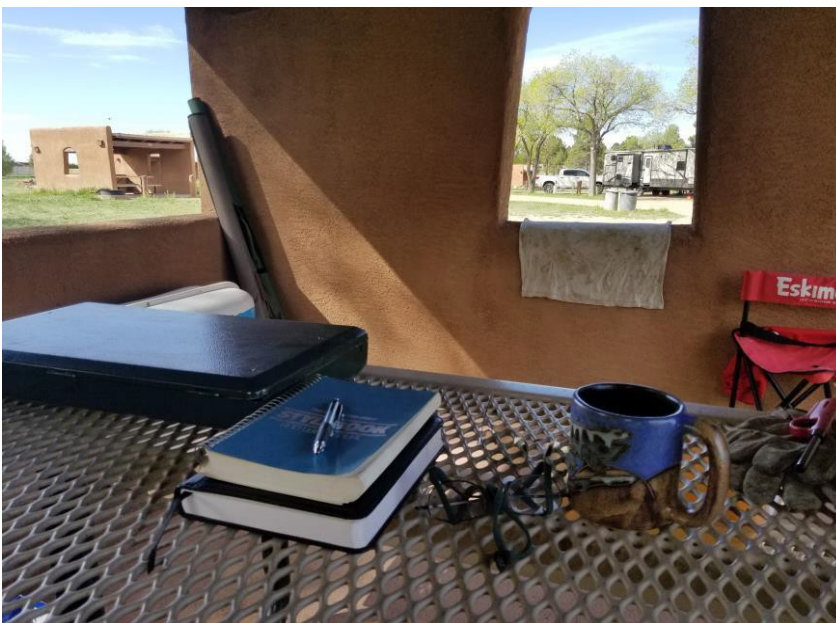
with a trip to the hot springs and a shower here at the campground.

I need to get caught up on some blog posts and other writing, but the weather is so nice right now that I want to get out, take some pics and fish. I won’t have this opportunity much longer...”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; May 8th, 2019; 9:21 am. Relaxed and reflecting on an extraordinary year gone by.

“The wind is portentous this morning, pushing north with force but slipping around me – for the moment. I think of Colorado, being where I feel that I belong, no longer the stranger among the tribe of descendants, the ancestral ghosts who spoke only Spanish and watched the harsh landscape exact its toll, separating the grain from the chaff. I feel as though I’m flapping in the wind, looking at the prairie, about to be cast out over the Llano Estacado into Comancheria – among and amid the Lords of the Plains. Hoka Hey!”

--Journal entry: Thursday; May 16th, 2019; 10:29 am. Stuck at Storrie Lake Campground waiting to go north, as my last two-week stint approaches its expiration.



“Last morning at the picnic table – I’m going to miss this place. It was my first home on the road and has been good to me. Good and gusty, most of the time. I remember the winter...oh, the horror! Snow, cold and blowing wind combining as a trident of elements bent

upon my distress, but failing miserably in its effort.

I checked the weather in Red Feather [Colorado] and it’s 34 degrees and raining right now. It’s going to be cold and wet all week, getting below freezing each night. Damn. I still can’t go.”

--Journal entry: Sunday; May 19th, 2019; 10:34 am. Preparing to head back to Vegas RV Park, waiting for the northern storm to clear.



“Now I’m at the RV Park after an easy jaunt the other day. The Beast pulled Cochise better than BroBo ever could. Finally got the right tow vehicle after more than a year of bucking the wrong horse. Still learning how this rubber tramp life works...”

Sunny and warm with cotton balls suspended in the historic sky blue of the American West – no other airspace is quite like it, no firmament so pure as this. Without bounds and enveloping the ground as far as is visible. It’s rather nice, I must say.

I’d like to get into town, snap some pics of buildings, soak in the hot baths at Montezuma and head to Villanueva [State Park] to wet a line in the Pecos. That would be a good day.”

--Journal entry: Wednesday; May 22nd, 2019; 9:04 am. Enjoying the last days in Las Vegas, New Mexico, before heading “home” to Red Feather Lakes, Colorado. Anxious about the return trip.

“Memorial Day. Been a boisterous weekend here at the RV park. Lots of Harleys and hot rods, lowriders and muscle cars ripping up 7th Street and out of

town. That's where I'm going. This Sunday I'm booking to Colorado. Yes sir! Got my reservations made at the necessary campground and holding no others – reservations that is. Hoka Hey, Colorado!"

--Journal entry: Monday; May 27th, 2019; 5:54 pm. Waiting still...



"Here it is...the last night in New Mexico for this season. It's June. I should have been up in Red Feather a month ago, but the weather wouldn't let me in. Now I'm just gonna go. Get back to where I belong. But I'll return here to this land, and tramp farther south next

time, beyond Vegas, down to T or C [Truth or Consequences] and Elephant Butte [State Park], maybe City of Rocks outside of Deming, closer to Mexico, peek over the border through a hole in the wall. Who knows? But I shall return, to this Land of Enchantment. It's got a hook in me. Orale!"

--Journal entry: Saturday; June 1st, 2019; 5:50 pm. Last night here...

And then it happens, dear reader, yes, yes, yes indeed. Indeed, and finally. I hook the horse to the wagon and say goodbye to the neighbors, my fellow rubber tramps and ne'er do wells, boondockers on society's fringe.

The Beast pulls Cochise onto I-25 and hauls ass past Watrous, Fort Union and Wagon Mound north toward Raton Pass when the sun gets shrouded and the

clouds pop their bellies as rain falls on the interstate, transforming into mist under tires turning on the warmed asphalt – but we barrel on...

We grab breakfast at Denny's in Raton, the first stop six months ago when we entered this enchanting state of New Mexico. I finish my huevos rancheros and let Rambeaux out to get one last stretch before we leave. She chases a pair of ravens from the dumpster and back onto their power-line perch running over the parking lot, just as she did when we stopped here last fall.

And... then we go.

“Hauling Back Home to My Mountain Hideaway” Episode 17 of

The Rocky Mountain Rubber Tramp

The Final Chapter



Getting out of New Mexico was tougher than I thought it would be. But I did it.

After spending six months bouncing between Storrie Lake State Park Campground, Vegas RV Park and the side lot of a 10-bedroom house being renovated in East Las Vegas I finally hook and haul my little, vintage camper behind my

recently acquired Ford F-250 pickup truck – *The Beast* – and throttle up over Raton Pass and into Colorado, dropping down to Trinidad and passing all the billboards for legal weed dispensaries before heading off onto the prairie, following the Old Santa Fe Trail toward La Junta, beside the Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site - nearly a quarter-million acre Army training ground for Fort Carson in Colorado Springs - along the Purgatoire River and across the Comanche National Grasslands, just balling that rig north by northeast through ghost towns and past prisons, the setting sun glistening off razor wire parapets

of the Arkansas Valley Correctional Facility near Ordway, then a restless streetside sleep before the final blast due north toward Wyoming – muscling the burly V-8 engine over roads that froze me cold in fear on the trip down a half year earlier. But now, behold: A new Lord of the Plains.



“Well, we made it here to Crow Valley Campground in the Pawnee National Grasslands outside of Briggsdale, CO. Beautiful, green and full of birdsong. Rambeaux is running amok. In an hour or so we’ll head to Red Feather [Lakes Village] where I have a site reserved for a day or

two at Dowdy [Lake Campground], so CJ and I can drop Gus [a tall tree on the verge of falling] before putting the camper on the property. FEELS GREAT!”

--Journal entry: Tuesday; June 4th, 2019; 9:56 am. Absorbing the quietude of cottonwood trees in tall green grass before heading up the mountain.

It’s so peaceful here that I want to find an angle of repose and recharge my body before climbing the final peak, to ponder the journey behind me, thankful that I made it over the barren plains on elevated roads with no shoulders, just as I hesitated here last year after making it down the mountain before going out to face the unknown dangers of the prairie, heading south. But the land was hold- ing brown then, and now it has the release of green - and green, dear reader, means go!

I can't help but wonder what it was like for the earlier pioneers in their ox-drawn Conestoga wagons navigating the Oregon Trail, whose ruts are still visible just a few miles north, the bleached bones of animals and humans who fell along the way scattered into the loamy soil, regenerating the prairie.

But the sun is shining and the wind is still. This is no moment for delay. There will be ample time to look back once I make it up the mountain to Red Feather Lakes. So, I lock and load Cochise for the last leg and head west, off the flat-land, through the foothills and up toward my homestead in the forest, over a mile and a half above sea level in the northern Colorado Rockies. *Bring it!*



“Beautiful morning at Dowdy Lake, as I drink my coffee at the picnic table looking out over the flat, mirrored surface of the water, kayaks and belly-boats dotting the view. CJ should be on his way up here. We’re going to drop Gus (the tree) and hopefully put the camper on the property.

It’s been – to me – a long couple days of travel to get here, but we’re almost home, Rambeaux and I. It feels somewhat surreal being back up here, everything so lush and beautiful. No wind. No mean, loud streets. I feel in my place here. At peace. It’s been a while...”

--Journal entry: Saturday; June 5th, 2019; 8:27 am. Back on the mountain at Dowdy Lake Campground, Red Feather Lakes Village, Colorado.



I lingered, longer than I planned. Snow still held its ground in the higher elevations, and my property was not spared. I was fortunate that a camping spot opened up when someone left their reservation early. The camp host told me I could have it if

I paid the remainder of fees, otherwise he would list it as available on the website that services national park campgrounds and it would be snapped up quickly. I knew he was probably right and paid \$24/day for a couple more nights, hoping that would allow enough time for the roads to dry out heading back to my land and giving me a few more mornings waking up to sunrises over this breathtaking lake.

National park campgrounds are not cheap during “the season”, and reservations are taken only online. New Mexico state parks were much less expensive (especially with an annual pass), but were switching to online reservations for the summer as well.

Supply struggles to meet demand for those wanting to spend time in the serenity of wild places, away from the madness of cities and the Rat Race - what Edward Abbey referred to as *Rattus Urbanus*. I can understand that. I just wish

there was more public getaway space for the average Joe(anne). Not everyone has the ability to build or buy their mountain retreat up here, which can easily cost several hundred thousand dollars – and more. Henry David Thoreau wouldn't be able to afford his spot on Walden Pond in the 21st Century. He'd probably be living under a bridge, and eating out of dumpsters.



I'm more fortunate. I have my secluded piece of dirt in the woods, a cozy, little camper to park on it, and a shed with a desk, workbench and storage lofts that's wired with electricity – a hack-shack with studio and shop: the *Shtudiop*. My hideaway retreat.

CJ, my son, comes up and we drop Gus, the leaning lodgepole pine overshadowing the flat spot on my property. I safely park Co-chise, levelling him up as best I can to grant a well-deserved rest. He's earned it.

I melt back quickly into a state of tranquility, wind flowing through the canopy of trees, an invisible river – a hum – as though the spirited force that sculpted this land now blew its mantra upon it, bearing the quiet for me alone, no neighbors within the reach of sound, and I find myself surrounded with nothing that doesn't grow wild. Silence is free.

I fall back into a regimen of sunrise walks with Rambeaux looking for moose tracks, coffee in a camp chair facing the wooded rise as grey jays and pine squirrels come squawking and barking to life, and reading and writing at my desk, still struggling to get a solid internet signal through my cell service signal booster and mobile WiFi hotspot - the dichotomy of getting away from it all but trying to take a connection with you in the Digital Age, looking for answers from algorithms, often ending empty handed.

When the head work is done, my body looks for labor, most often it will be cutting branches and brush, thinning the forest around me for better critter visibility and wildfire mitigation, trying to hold the threatening forces of nature at bay as best I can. Or I'll move dirt and rocks in 5-gallon buckets from upslope benches to downslope embankments as I endeavor to level a livable space on a mountainside. But if I'm just feeling particularly decadent, I'll go fishing. Water flowing of its own volition is one of the reasons I moved to this place.



The Panhandle Creek streams east out of the Laramie Mountain Range and fills the Crystal Lakes below my property, joining in confluence with the North Fork of the Cache la Poudre River as it wends its way north, then south through various draws to create Seaman Reservoir before branching into the Poudre and joining the trunk

of its larger namesake - given by French trappers for “Hide the Powder” when they found themselves stuck in a snowstorm in the 1820s and cached their gunpowder in a cave at the mouth of the canyon. History’s riches are everywhere.

“Well, I’m back on the property, and have been for over two weeks. I don’t want to leave. So, I won’t. Now I’m a mountain man, and my rubber tramp days are over for the moment. That’s fine with me. Hauling my home over prairie roads and mountain passes was not a relaxing undertaking – I must say. I love this part of Colorado, it’s scenery, and these wonderful mountain folk.

Soon, CJ will be here and we’ll fish. The rivers and creeks are running high, moose calves are out in abundance, and I sit here at my desk with a hardwired overhead light for the first time. This is where I now belong, where I believe I was meant to be. So many other things that needed to happen first, but now this – forever, I hope. I’m back in a routine I can’t imagine leaving. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep it. Whatever it takes...”

--Journal entry: Thursday; June 27th, 2019; 6:58 am. Sitting at my desk in the *Shtudiop*, envisioning the embrace of the River. Happy. Not yet wet.



We catch more fish than we’ve ever caught before. Bigger. More colorful. Fat, healthy Rainbows and Palomino Trout the color of the sun. We see moose along the water’s edge and step over coyote scat to get to the primo fishing spots – the honey holes.

New Mexico seems so distant now...The air smells different here. Not better necessarily, just different. Alpine forest as opposed to high desert, each with its uniqueness and reason. One to make the other stand out more, but both to be enjoyed, in equal measure.

The scents of the West, under pillowed blue skies as wide as can be imagined and beyond, going back unspoiled into time past and forward to times unknown - so grab it now, dear reader, and take nothing for granted. The adventure is in the moment. I truly believe that.

And...I believe this is the moment, my friends and fellow vagabonds, that I feel we must leave this rubber tramp adventure, here beside the mountain stream. And dream of what great things there are to come...

From the Land of Enchantment to the northern Colorado Rockies, and further in all directions at once...

Orale, Amigos! And Hoka Hey!

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Episode #1: 1st Photo, Boy (blogger as child) and Fish (northern pike). Photo taken by (Grandpa) Walt

Episode #3: 3rd Image, Rainbow trout illustration. From paintingvalley.com

4th Image, The Red Feather Mountain Lakes Association Advertisement. From

Redfeatherhistoricalsociety.org

5th Image, Princess Tsianina Redfeather. Photo from Los Angeles Herald Examiner

Photo Collection

Episode #4: 2nd Photo, Billowing smoke from wildfire. Associated Press (AP)

3rd Photo, Thank You sign for firefighters et. al. Associated Press (AP)

Episode #8: 6th Image, Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens). Photo taken by Napoleon Sarony, 1884

Episode #11: 2nd Photo, I-25 Sign for Raton and Trinidad. From pinterest.com

3rd Photo, Petrified National Forest Park Sign. From desertusa.com

Episode #12: 1st Image, City of Las Vegas, New Mexico Logo. From visitlasvegas.com

2nd Image, Neanderthal Man. Just a dude I know...

3rd Image, Conquistador and Aztecs Painting. *Hernan Cortes Fight with Two Indians*

by Antoni Gomez i Cross

4th Image, Native American Forced March Painting. *The Long Walk 1* by Shanto Begay

5th Image, Ox-drawn Wagon Painting. *View of Santa Fe Plaza* by Gerald Cassidy

6th Image, Mexican-American War Scene. *The Battle of Buena Vista* by James S. Baillie

Episode #14: 6th Image, John 'Doc' Holliday. Photo (allegedly) taken by Camillus Fly in Tombstone, AZ

7th Image, Notice! Poster. From Las Vegas Arts & Cultural District Pinterest Board

8th Image, Wanted Las Gorras Blancas Poster. Creative rendition. Prints by Eric J. Garcia

Episode #17: 1st Photo, New Mexico and Colorado Road Signs. Photo taken by Zachary Maillard

7th Photo, Man (blogger as adult) and Fish (palomino trout). Photo taken by (Sonny) CJ Buss

Bibliography

The following books and websites were utilized in the telling of this story.

Red Feather Lakes, Colorado:

-*Red Feather Lakes: The First Hundred Years 1871-1971* by Evadene Burris Swanson with assistance from Ted Dunning. Published by the Red Feather Historical Society, 1971

-The Red Feather Historical Society website at <https://redfeatherhistoricalsociety.org/>

With a great list of suggested readings under the Resources tab.

-If you're in the area you can find a great selection of books by local authors at the Trading Post and other businesses, as well as the Red Feather Lakes Community Library. Almost always open.

Las Vegas, New Mexico

-*Wildest of the Wild West: True Tales of a Frontier Town on the Santa Fe Trail* by Howard Bryan with a foreword by Max Evans. Published by Clear Light Publishers, 1988.

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<https://www.legendsofamerica.com/nm-lasvegas/>

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-*Las Vegas, NM: A Place with a Past (and Future)* at

https://www.nado.org/las-vegas_nm_vibrant_rural_communities/

-If you're in the area you can find a great selection of books by national and local authors at Tome on the Range bookstore on the Plaza in West Las Vegas, as well as the Carnegie Public Library in East Las Vegas - the only remaining, functioning Carnegie library in New Mexico.

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