



Cross Country Exploder

Two people, two cats, a gecko, a festival, and a whole lot of fun.

Monday, August 28, 2006

12:00 p.m. Still packing.

Jesus. We're never going to be ready. I've been running errands all morning, the damned leftover box spring is still a problem, and there's still stuff we don't want in the apartment. The truck's not loaded yet. I think I might still have a hangover from Saturday night.

Luckily, Patrice has pre-packed everything on the living room floor, and all we've got to do is to take it all downstairs and arrange it in the Explorer. Her plan is to arrange our considerable baggage, the cats, and our necessary items (purse, camera bag) so that a tunnel is formed from the back seat (where the cat carriers face each other) to the homemade litter box just forward of the rear hatch - not unlike the gunner's tunnel in early B-52 bombers.

Furd Exploder. That's my nickname for Patrice's forest green (aren't they all?) 1999 Ford Explorer. I gave my 1996 Infiniti G20 (somewhere north of 253k miles and running just fine, thanks) to Brooke, my sister. She just moved to California with her fiancée Aaron, and they've promised to keep the state in good shape for us.

I've got packing to do. Since we have a few need-to-access extras, like camping equipment, it looks like a giant black nylon bag is going on the roof rack with colorful bungees. The Happy Bunny antenna topper is in place. Time to start the engine, set A/C to high, cool the cats. Look behind me;



the pets are all there; Charlie, Pud, and Jonesy, my ten-year-old Leopard Gecko. Check. Patrice is here. Check. She drives up to collect me at the leasing office where I've turned in the keys, and we're off.

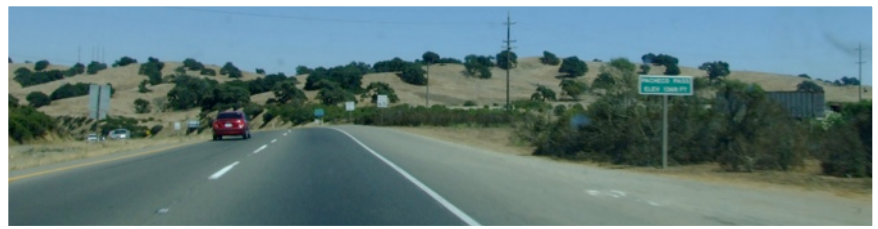
**2:00 p.m. On the road
and over Pacheco Pass.**

Patrice let Charlie and Pud out of their cat carriers once we got over Pacheco Pass, and after some initial trepidation, they both warmed up to

traveling, after a fashion. A little Valium dust on their noses didn't hurt their disposition either.

Pud mostly paced between front and back seats, and Charlie hunkered down in his box. Later, the black and white scaredy cat would find a home in the "tail gunner's tunnel", blocking what little rear vision I had initially. But I didn't mind seeing the cat looking back every time I checked six.

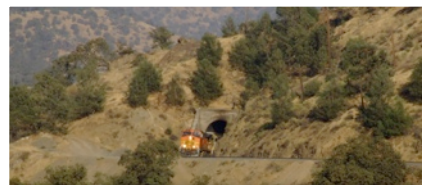
It strikes me that after eleven years, this is the first time I've taken I-5 south toward Los Angeles from the Bay Area for more than five miles. iPodding our way through the dusky, dusty California interior, we pick up some Taco Bell "lunch" before turning onto the road to Wasco.



Speaking of turning and the road to Wasco, we saw someone whose house turned over on the road to Wasco. In Patrice's words: **"Dude, your house fell off the truck. That sucks."**

**5:48 pm - Tehachapi Loop, Tehachapi Pass, CA
S.R. 58**

I was a train nerd as a kid. I read about and saw pictures of the famed Tehachapi Loop. I've visited there twice - this is the second time.



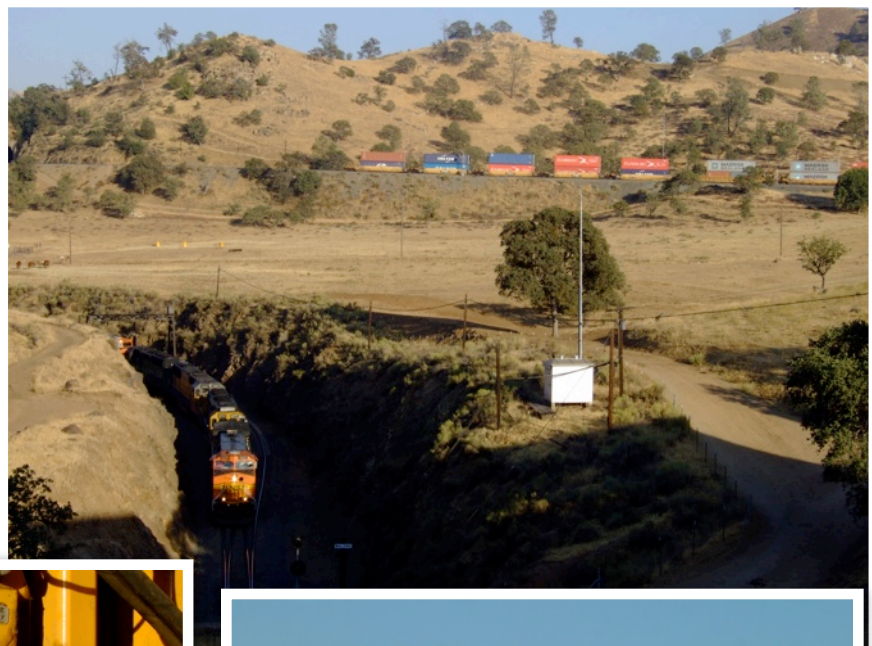
Most trains on the Tehachapi loop will cross over themselves. The steep ter-

rain makes the loop necessary, but the long freights make it breathtaking.

No sooner had we parked the truck with windows cracked slightly for the cats, we heard the giant GE diesels moaning.

The engineers use dynamic braking as they drop west toward Bakersfield, shooting quivers of hot air above the locomotives as the steel and diesel giants cut through the oaks and brush.

As I ran down the track from the makeshift parking area to the crossover section of the loop, I realized that two weeks of packing and running up and down steps had left me in decent shape - and a weekend of “going away” partying had left me out of breath. Patrice caught up a few moments later, and then the train was on us.



After the train passed, Patrice got to enjoy me going on about the grease injectors along the curved tracks, the smell of hot steel over the dry brush, the concrete ties, and snap-fit track connectors. She's a great wife.

Next song on the iPod: Los Lobos' "Everyone Loves a Train". And we gave the cats more Valium - because that train passing by 30 feet away scared the living crap out of them.

6:30 p.m. Mojave, near the airport.

Feeling out the boundaries of Patrice's patience for all things guy, I pulled over several times while driving by the Mojave spaceport to photograph broken and dismantled aircraft. Shit, it's not like I was wasting film.

8:30 p.m. Barstow - Intersection of Interstates 15 and 40.

"I'm gettin' hungry. Let's have real food."

"What's for dinner?"

"SIZZLER!"

"I don't know if they've got those along the highway anymore..."

"THERE'S ONE!"

And so it was that we pulled into Barstow, ate a classic (if heavy and salty) Interstate roadside meal straight out of 1979, with a dining room roughly big enough for 747 final assembly, and found an EconoLodge with free "Wireless Internet". (I had no idea the whole thing was wireless.)

It only took me twenty minutes of screwing around with our ThinkPad's 802.11 card to get the settings in shape to actually, you know, get online.

Day one. San Jose to Barstow. 398 miles. Tomorrow we'll do better.

9:30 a.m. Barstow - Starbucks Coffee Drive-Thru

"How long could it possibly take?"

Whish. "Here's your coffee. That'll be \$8.10." *SLAM.*

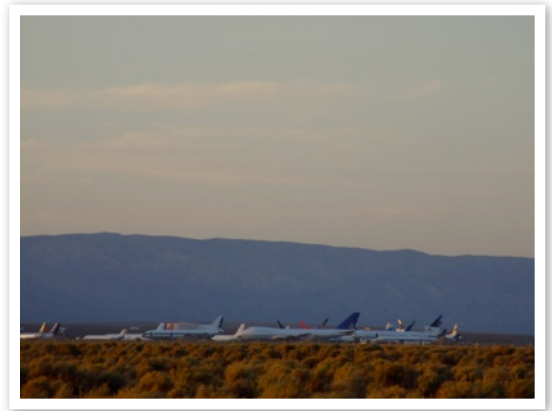
Me, Muttering: "Where the heck are the muffins?"

Whish. "Hi, I'm sorry. We don't have any bran...."

"That's OK. Just give me two of the banana things."

"OK!" *SLAM.*

Whish. "Hee hee. I found some bran muffins! Here you go. I'm new here. Here's your change."
SLAM.



If there's anything worse than late coffee in the morning after lifting up a vintage EconoLodge **LeadBed** to retrieve a cat, it's not being able to "get your bran on" after having Taco Bell and Sizzler the previous day.

The Starbucks girl (who was a dead ringer for the steakhouse girl from *Sideways*) came through in the clutch with a hidden stash of bran muffins from under the counter somewhere. And yes, the wallet scene did run through my head while she was getting my muffin for me - not a mood enhancer.

Luckily for me, Patrice was there to smooth my ruffled feathers. While I can't remember our exact post-coffee conversation, it was something along the lines of: "You don't have any reason to be in a bad mood. Stop it." So onto I-40 East we went. I cooled as the desert warmed.

There's pretty much nothing worth interrupting your trip for between Barstow and Flagstaff, but we stopped in Needles anyway, looking for Snoopy's brother Spike.

We didn't find Spike, but we did get "sammich makins" at a grocery chain I'd never heard of. We also stopped for gasoline at a Valero station that did not seem to be manned at 10:30 in the morning, despite the wide open mini-mart door. I can't for the life of me imagine where the mini mart clerk might have been, but I could have sworn I smelled burning rope as I passed the women's bathroom.



Of note as we crossed the western Mohave desert was a flight of four F-16s playfully dipping, rolling, and weaving between the nameless grey peaks, and the

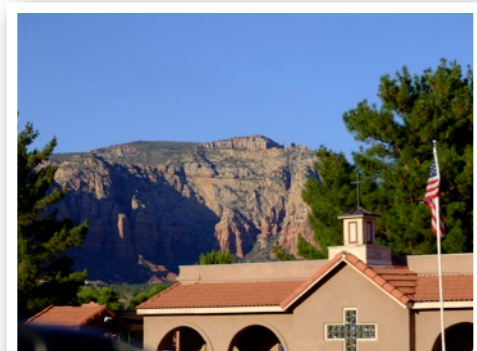
beautiful Juniper forests of western Arizona. The Juniper smells terrific - like aromatherapy at 75 miles per hour.

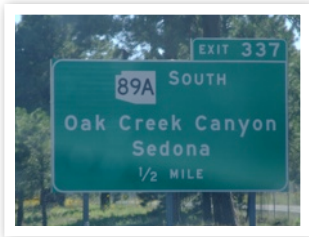
We had an in-truck picnic lunch in Kingman, on Route 66. After leaving the shady parking spot, we noticed the picnic tables across the street.

D'oh.

We turned south at Flagstaff for Sedona, someplace I'd wanted to visit since missing TT West 2002. Patrice was excited to see it too - in fact it was her idea to check the canyon-bound town out.

The red rock region is renown for it's beauty, and beautiful it was - until you drive into to Sedona proper.





Tourist trap deluxe! Maybe we were in the wrong mood for it, but seeing the long rows of upscale T-shirt shops and chintzy art boutiques framed by outdoor misters, pink jeeps, pink fifty-something shoppers and something called the Hummer Store (good God) made us long for simpler ways to enjoy the beautiful canyon. We headed

north on 89A again to pitch camp, but Pud picked that moment to seem intent on a yowling escape. Just after I pulled into a car camping spot, he stepped on the window lift button, dropping the window and making us both nervous about camping in the wilderness with house cats.



We decided to head south to Pa-hoe-nicks along with my mood, skipping Sedona. I think it might be fun if we had some money to

spend, but on this day, it was a shallow-feeling spot in a canyon full of beautiful things.



In the interest of hitting Austin by Thursday night, we decided to forego the back roads to the Very Large Array of radio telescopes in northwestern New Mexico for another trip.

On I-17, we passed a sign for Table Mesa road - which presumably overlooks the Big Rio Grande River.

Every couple has a disagreement on a long trip like this, and we agreed to get ours out of the way in the parking lot of the Southland motel near Phoenix Sky Harbor. We agreed that our tiff was a stepping stone on the way to growing old and happy together, made up, ate at Marie Callender's across the street, and tried to keep the cats from meowing us into the street - it seems the Southland Motel frowns upon feline guests.

Did I mention it was 100 degrees at 10:30 p.m. in Phoenix? Ugh.

Day Two. Barstow to Eastern Phoenix by Sedona. About 500 miles. Tomorrow will be fun - we just don't know it yet.

9:30 a.m. Parking lot of the Southland Motel.

I wrestled the Giant Black Bag (containing such varied and unique items as bicycle air pumps, a backpack full of camping equipment and an iMac keyboard) onto the roof and bungied it down, strapping the front down to the roof rail and tensioning the whole thing along its sides from there. For some reason, I worried about the bag flying off the roof during those daring 80 mph passing maneuvers, but at 70 lbs. and with another 50-70 lbs. of bungee tension holding the thing down at six points, I shouldn't have. It was stable the whole trip.



Unfortunately, due to strapping that burden up, I was sweating before I started the truck every morning.

11:00 a.m. Driving east of Phoenix on I-10.

Once again, Patrice's love and patience for my inner geek shone like a B-58 Hustler under the desert sun. We packed the cats in the carriers to avoid cooking them (101 degrees by 11:30!), set a 70-minute time limit for our visit, and headed into the visitor's center intent on a slapdash photo lap of the "boneyard".

I was not disappointed, but I almost missed it all.

After viewing my train photos in the Phoenix hotel room the night before, then downloading them to Patrice's laptop, I neglected to erase the camera's memory card.

Out in the boneyard, I shot these jets like an SA-7 never could, not noticing the small number of shots left on the card. What was worse - I'd renamed the folder of previous photos on the card with Microsoft's Explorer, leaving them invisible to the

camera's filesystem. So I couldn't erase them without formatting the

entire card - including files that weren't backed up yet.

I was stuck with only about 100MB of my 1GB card available - and my backup card was in the truck, a twenty minute round trip away.

I quickly erased some pictures one-by-one and picked out the tails of my favorite jets. After a bee-line to each, I returned to Patrice and the kitties.

Watching Patrice cool the cats with a spray bottle in the desert, under a thin aluminum shed in the midst of dimly sparkling old jets...well, it seemed perfectly normal at the time. Writing about it now, the scene seems incongruous for some reason. Must have been the Coke machine under the shed.





Patrice made a great picture (above) of me hanging from the wingtip of a B-52D in SEA camouflage - just like the 1/72 Monogram model hanging in my mom and dad's house. With fuel tanks full, the wing tips of this jet would drag the ground without the B-52's clumsy-looking outrigger gear. With a 175 lb. Doug hanging on it's tip, the empty wing deflected about two inches. Boingy.

Lockheed buffs will note that there are three Constellations on the lot; Eisenhower's *Columbine*, an EC-121 *Warning Star*, and one of TWA's Connies.

There are also three B-52s, quite an exciting array for a BUFF nerd like me - one of three B-52A jets ever made, outfitted as a drop ship and retired from NASA, a B-52D in SEA camouflage, and a B-52G from Barksdale AFB in Louisiana. Barksdale won't be asking for it back anytime soon, judging from the heat ticking I heard while checking out the wheel wells. That airframe is retired for a good reason.

Prototype aircraft dot the boneyard, including what looked to be a Rutan-designed Beech Starship, a B-50 jet-assist prototype, and Boeing's YC-14. Oddly, besides some old Soviet-bloc jets (MiG-17, 19, etc.), there aren't many fighters. Besides a nice F-100, F-105, and a very tired looking F-15, I didn't see many fast movers of note other than a very tired F-14A.

After an hour in the boneyard, we walked back to the truck and headed out. I'll definitely be back - but next time I'll leave the cats behind.

2-10:00 p.m. I-10.

Patrice slept until El Paso while I fiddled with the iPod and kept the truck moving through I-10's beautiful, but short stretch of New Mexico, which was curiously soaked from a marathon monsoon season. Charlie and Pud nested in the gunner's tunnel, eyeing me every time I "checked six" for traffic.

We stopped at the Motel 6 in Fort Stockton Texas after a long, steady day of driving.

Stay tuned for part two - featuring Bar BQ, Kerrville characters, and our arrival in Baton Rouge.



Day three. Phoenix to Fort Stockton. 669 Miles.

Tomorrow, Fort Stockton to Round Rock, via Junction, home of damn good Bar-BQ.

Part Two.



Fort Stockton to Baton Rouge by way of Round Rock and Kerrville

The Motel 6 in Fort Stockton has nearly had my business twice.

Both times, I chose to press on to El Paso while driving I-10 West to California. It isn't a bad hotel - I just like to drive. But I'm glad we stopped there for a good rest instead of pressing on to Junction

on day three. As a bonus, Motel 6 is pet-friendly, so we didn't have to cover the cat carriers with towels on the way up to the room.

There's not much between El Paso and San Antonio. A lonely road during the day is even quieter at night. This is the stretch of I-10 that earns its reputation as Texas' longest and toughest road.

At any rate, on the morning of day four, we were ready to get to Darron and Sue's house in Round Rock, north of Austin. It'd be a short day, so I guess I was ready to get it done after driving almost seven hundred miles the day before.



We rolled out of Fort Stockton at about 9:30 - but not before shooting a picture at the Shell station dad used to stop at on our trips to California. It's still there, and it's still the favored spot for the Fort Stockton police to hand out tickets.

Driving east through Ozona, where we stopped for gas, the Texas terrain changed from slowly-rolling desert to slightly more lush scrub brush and hills. Almost 200 miles later - about three hours - we stopped in Junction, where Darron suggested that the best Bar-BQ on our path awaited us.

Wow. No kidding. Cooper's Bar-BQ, just off of I-10 is a real treat. In joints like this, you order brisket, chicken, or sausage by the pound. Bread and pickles are available for makin' sandwiches. And Mr. Cooper runs the register himself, smiling a toothy west Texas how-do-you-do at each and every visitor. He pays attention, too - asking me if I was sure I'd gotten enough to eat on my second trip through the line. Patrice had brisket, sausage, and beans. I had the same meats, but stuck with cole slaw. I shouldn't have to spell out the reasons, but closed-up windows in the truck...you know.

I should probably mention that I have been mystified about the proper spelling of Bar-BQ since I was a little kid. Dad used to buy sandwiches at the Stop 'n' Shop on University Ave. in Lafayette...called "BarBeQue". I've seen ads for "Barbq". There are approximately fifty-nine thou-

sand explanations and ‘definitive’ opinions about the correct spelling of this type of cooking on the web.

I choose to go with the most logical of explanations, and I write it as if the formulation came from a mythical “Bar BQ” ranch - the brand of which is displayed here. Can you hear the hiss of the branding? Me neither.



The Bar-BQ Brand

How did Cooper’s Bar-BQ taste? A spicy, oaky bite, with sublime, tender texture and mesquite flavor. Goes great with an American lager. Good stuff. Don’t take my word for it, though - try some next time you’re in Llano, Junction, or Round Rock. There’s a Cooper’s in each town, and they’re all owned by the same family.

We picked up a half chicken for Darron on our way out of the door of Cooper’s. I’m surprised the chicken made it all the way to Round Rock. Cooper’s will “dip” your chicken for you - that is, dredge it in sauce - a process that approaches a tangy, smoky nirvana when it hits your tongue.



The Texas hill country isn’t foreign to me. I drove through twice with my folks as a teenager, and took a couple of tours from San Antonio to Austin with my grandparents when I was even younger. I have really good memories of the beauty and Germanic quirkiness of Fredricksburg, New Braunfels, and “Kill”een. It was Patrice’s first trip through though, so I drove and she watched as we snaked through the back roads, passing through Llano on our way northeast to Round Rock.

Deer hunting’s the thing here, and nearly every major intersection along the highway sprouts signs for so-and-so’s feeders, so-and-so’s feed corn, or directions to so-and-so’s hardware store, where you can stock up on rounds, jerky, and doe urine for your boots.

Now, I’m not saying deer hunting’s more trouble than it’s worth, but about the only time I end up with urine on my boots is when the wind blows wrong and strong - and I prefer to keep the whole urine-on-boots experience involuntary if it’s gonna happen at all.

At any rate, Round Rock. Hoo. Nice place, except for Dell. I heard they build crappy PCs.

Day four, afternoon: Round Rock, Texas.

Hey, Darron!

Patrice and I unloaded the truck, dodging Darron and Sue’s dogs here and there. A few minutes later, with some Negro Modelo safely procured, we caught up on music and happenings while Darron psyched us both for the Kerrville Folk Festival - our weekend destination. After dinner at a decent

Mexican restaurant, we locked the cats in a spare bedroom to avoid any canine altercations and started an evening of catching up.

To tell the Kerrville story properly, I should tell another story first.

Understand that I'd heard about Kerrville ever since I'd met Darron eleven years ago, and the legend had a lot to live up to. While you can buy Kerrville "Best Of" releases on iTunes, it's still something of an open secret as far as music festivals go - nothing like the music love-in that is Jazzfest or the rolling wreck that is Lollapalooza. Kerrville's "Big Folk" is first and foremost, closest to those who have visited the longest. And Darron's been folking for a long time.



There are now two folk festivals; "Big folk", straddling Memorial Day weekend is the original and the busiest, and has the most new artists and old favorites. "Little folk", held over Labor Day weekend has a shorter schedule, fewer people, and is a good way for "Kerrgins" like ourselves to get acquainted with the people and culture.

My friend Darron was a staff photographer at big folk for many years, and has shared many stories about his adventures (don't drink any grapefruit juice) with the late "Schmidty" and lots of musicians you might not have heard of, but should. When Patrice and I decided to move to Louisiana, our trip took us through I-10's south Texas dip just in time to spend a weekend at "little folk". So there we were.

Day five. Round Rock to Kerrville.

Darron and I had three stops to make on Saturday morning.

1. Cigar store. Good cigars are a good thing, especially after a couple of drinks.
2. Costco, for a bottle of good Tequila. For when the cigars get going.
3. Jim's house, to pick up his Airstream trailer, leaving Darron's Volvo in it's stead.

After wandering around in the humidior for a half-hour, quizzing the Costco people on which Tequilas were available, and making a supreme effort to get some dog shit off of Darron's shoe, we were underway in Jim's F-250, hauling his beautiful Airstream trailer.



Without a trailer, the F-250 is a fine pickup. Hauling a full-length Airstream humbles it thoroughly. I can't imagine hauling one of these with a mid-70's, emissions-crippled truck.

By the time Darron and I reached Dripping Springs, we were ready for lunch and a break from watching the silver Tylenol gently sway in the rearview mirrors. We stopped at another Bar-BQ shack and ate up. Good food, but not quite as good as Cooper's....

Meanwhile, Patrice and Sue were en-route in Sue's Black Saab 9-5 through Fredricksburg (home of the Chester Nimitz Oriental gardens), where they dropped off the dogs for some dog-sitting. Despite all the errands we had to perform, Darron and I made it to Quiet Valley Ranch twenty minutes ahead of Patrice and Sue - who were held up by a Class C motorhome that decided to catch fire on the two-lane Texas highway leading to the ranch.

We leveled and chocked the Airstream, parked the car, set up a tent for Patrice and I, and had a beer. Things pretty much slowed down until sundown and beyond.

Then came the campfires.

Late night.

The Kerrville campfires are legend. Ever heard the *Campfire Tapes* CD by Michelle Shocked? Recorded around a Kerrville campfire. I don't have the experience or history to name them all, but many a great folk artist has meandered by and plucked the night away around a random campfire. It's a great way to hear great music - some jams, some slow stuff.

Just don't do what I did and tire out before midnight. What can I say? Three days of driving on top of some tequila will do that to a man.

Day Six. (it's Saturday, if you're counting - we left Monday)

Morning in Kerrville - at the folk festival, at least - is a combination of your worst roommate, the worst band you ever heard, and an eternal walk to the bathroom. After that, though, it's all uphill. Uphill to get coffee, uphill to pee, uphill to take a shower...you get the idea.

The four of us decided to scoot into town to get breakfast along the Guadeloupe river in Kerrville proper. After a great meal and conversation, we headed to Gibson's, avoiding a pack of "Harleys For Jesus" riders who'd arrived in time to create a lunchtime rush.

Gibson's is one of a dying breed - the small town general store. That's the best description I can give to a place that carries things Wal-Mart won't, under a roof half as high. Plastic models and paints. Deer loads. Deer urine. Lures. Jumpsuits. Butane. Propane. LSU insulated cups. UT insulated cups.



Tablecloths. Rubbers. Chimenas. You name it - Gibson's has it. And whatever "it" is, it's cheap if you buy it there.

We decided to drive to Luckenbach Texas (although not with Waylon and Willie and the Boys) to see Candace and T-Roy. Unfortunately, we were rear-ended by a Suburban with a deer guard on the front, sending Patrice to the hospital for a precautionary checkup and sending me into a dimension of ticked off I have rarely been in.

The other driver wasn't just not paying attention - she was wearing flip-flops, and insisted that because she'd just had her car washed, the brake pedal "must have had Armor All" on it. I'm no idiot, and any car wash that swipes the pedals with silicone deserves to have it's ass sued off.

Patrice, who was sitting in the back of the car when we were hit, couldn't move her neck. Stiffening faster than a 16-year old boy at a cheerleader's convention, Patrice's already-weak neck muscles

were causing a lot of pain. The Kerrville municipal police called for an ambulance, as required when there's even a remote chance of a spinal injury.

I've had enough of being in hospitals this year. At the time, a backboard and ambulance almost seemed a tad excessive; but after some research, I found that often, "spinal" patients

don't have symptoms right

away and refuse treatment - then discover that they've got cracked vertebra or worse. So while the backboard might have seemed overboard, it was the right precaution to take. Beats a damaged spinal cord.

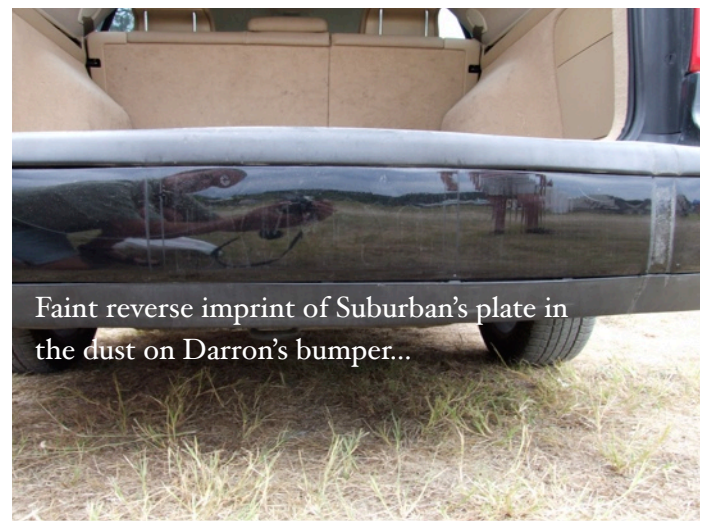
Trust me, the only time I ever want to see a loved one on a back board is when it's completely unnecessary.

I learned two important things from our four-hour side trip to Kerrville's hospital:

1. Saabs have amazing bumpers. The 5200-lb. Suburban was still above walking speed when it hit us - with a 200-lb. steel deer guard on the front. The Saab will need a new bumper cover and supports - that's all.

2. We're not pregnant.

Whoops.





Airstream at night with colored gels and flash.

Day Six, Nighttime

Patrice and I spent the day relaxing with Darron and Sue, sitting around doing nothing under an EZ-Up. After a while (time isn't precise in Kerrville), Jim and Shana, the owners of the Airstream trailer, arrived in Darron's Volvo. Introductions were made, and the Tequila made an appearance from the ice chest.

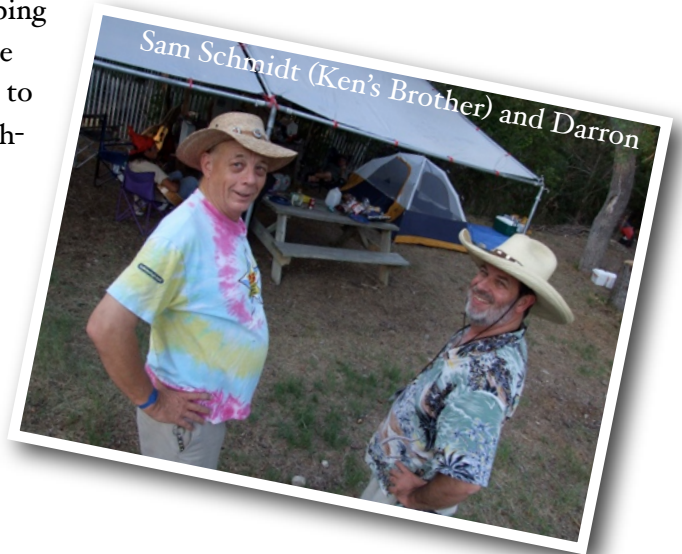
A cast of, ah, diverse characters came by, and no, I don't remember many of their names. Several hours after re-tuning from Kerrville, Patrice decided to turn in (luckily, Darron and Sue provided an air mattress for us as

well as a huge-ass tent), but Darron and I made a beeline for main stage - where Caroline Aiken was set to play.

Not on time, mind you. Since Caroline was almost an hour late, Darron and I went to an out-of-the way spot and killed a couple of cigars while we waited out the act on stage. The festival's main stage area sports a ring of booths selling everything from handmade guitars, to jewelry, to beer (yay!) and, of course, CDs, posters, and T-shirts, so we browsed.

Caroline started up and I got restless, so I started jumping around the main stage with my camera, deferring to the staff photographer who, as it turned out, was deferring to me. At any rate, I got a couple of OK pictures, but nothing of the caliber Darron is known for.

Ken Schmidt, Darron's long time friend and a superlative staff photographer for the Festival, died a couple of years ago in a kayaking accident on the Guadalupe river. There's a shrine dedicated to him on the ranch, with a tree growing vigorously on the spot where Schmidty was known to camp. Schmidty photographed the folk festival for lots of years, and he's still legend there.



Caroline dedicated Elton John's "Madman Across the Water" to Schmidty, and the crowd fell silent.

Her performance was electric, like her. After she finished the set, Darron and I went backstage to say hello, and both got big hugs.

Caroline hugs good.

Hey, I know people, man!





After the concert was over, around 1:00 a.m., I was feeling a bit tired.

Some people say I had a bit to drink that night. In the new press tradition of being “fair and balanced”, I’d like to say that I really don’t remember that, and can’t be held responsible. (Hey - that excuse works for Condoleeza Rice - why not me?)

Upon returning to camp, I went to sleep, waking six hours later to the sound of a **really** bad harmonica player two camps away. And then the really bad harmonica player’s friend started to sing. Really badly. Ugh. Not all of the music in Kerrville is good - just most of it.

But that’s one of the benefits of good tequila - no hangover. And I was ready for another day of Folking Up.

Day seven.

If I say “more of the same”, it makes the day sound boring, But a day at the Folk Festival is anything but boring.

Patrice and I got to meet Jim and Shana and their daughter Shelby. There’s this thing with Shelby and the pink hat. I didn’t quite get it, but I think it has to do with goth. Ach! Kids these days! At any rate, Darron kept chasing Shelby around with the pink hat. We all got to be better friends. People

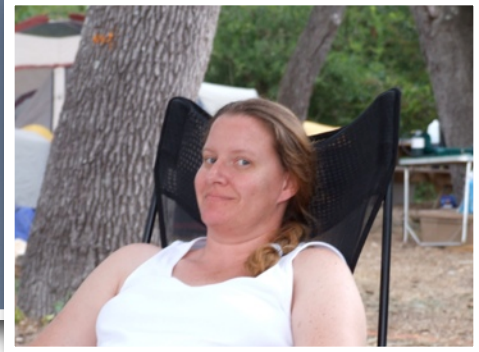
wandered by, some with guitars. We heard good music. I felt more relaxed than I had in weeks. Even with a sore neck, Patrice was having a good time.



Jim and Shana



Nice Hat, Darron



When it threatened to rain, I took advantage of the storm-light to shoot a few pictures of Jim and Shana's Airstream.

Too much more to go into in detail. Besides, I've learned through the years that one of the benefits of actually going to the Folk Festival is getting to tell the stories in person over good Scotch.

Kerrville Folk Festival: Every Labor Day and Memorial Day. Find out more at:

<http://www.kerrville-music.com/>

Day Eight. Last leg home.

I don't suppose there's much to tell about this day. We struck camp, said goodbyes, and left the Folk Festival. True to my nature, I started getting uptight about time, since I'd told my folks that we would try to be in Baton Rouge about 8:30 or 9:00p.m. - before dad went to sleep for the night. But first, we had to try a restaurant in Fredricksburg (home of the Chester Nimitz Oriental Gardens) called Mamacita's. OK. Fine. Let's get some food and get rolling.

Mamacita's has a salsa that's new to me. It's not, strictly speaking, what most people would call salsa. It looks like pistachio pudding with tomatoes floating in it. It looks, in a word, gross. It does not taste gross at all. The salsa disappeared very quickly once I verified that it wasn't a wayward component of Waldorf Salad.

The entire meal was very enjoyable, despite my palpable itching to get moving - like a seven-year-old with a full bladder. We paid up, drove back to Round Rock, collected the cats and our stuff, and then we were off - east out of Austin on Texas highway 290 to Houston, where we filled up and joined I-10 for the last time.



Almost out of Texas.

There's just not much more to write. This document was supposed to be a travelog, so I guess I should relate the last few miles, but after leaving Austin, it was nearly a sprint home, and there's not much to remark on except for Lake Charles and Lafayette - a handful of exits off of I-10 we will revisit at another time. We left Austin at 3:30 p.m. and made Baton Rouge by 10:00 p.m. - without unsafe speeding. Honest.



Last Texas Exit

I'll leave you with some pictures from the last leg. We hope you enjoyed taking this little trip with us, and we encourage you, one and all, to come to Louisiana and spend some money here. especially in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. They need it - and more importantly, just a short jet flight away, they deserve it.



Welcome to Louisiana!

If you're reading this, you've always got a place to stay, and friends to visit, eat, and make merry with in Baton Rouge.

love,

Doug and Patrice



...so we could put it in our townhome.



Our stuff arrived that Wednesday...

Significant Facts and Figures:

Cumulative mileage in the Exploder: About 15.7 m.p.g - not bad for 1200 lbs. of people and stuff in a 4300lb. truck.

Total Mileage: 2572 miles.

Number of Beers Consumed During the Trip: 2 (outside of Texas) 37 (inside Texas).

Number of Mysterious Roadside Smells: 37 (outside Louisiana) 322 (including Louisiana).

Number of Recreational Vehicles Pacing Semi-Trailers: 1.8295e+19

Number of "Whoa! Cool!" moments: Stopped counting at 49 in Mojave.

Number of times Doug said "Beeyootiful!": Stopped counting at 54...inside of California.

"Crap that's not on my iPod, but it'd be great to hear it." moments: 5

"Oh, Shit!" moments: 2

Total length of tire stripes after "Oh Shit!" moments: 147 feet.

Number of times Doug stretched his neck to see if the rooftop bag was still in place: 732

New Friends Made: More than thirty. But who is counting?

iPod Recharges: 14

Snapshots: 300+

Average Speed: Just fast enough, but not too fast.

Number of "The THING" Billboards Passed: 32

Average Time Spent Locating Things in the Truck: Twelve minutes - though it seemed like an hour at times.

Calories burned while unloading in Baton Rouge: More than the Olympic Cycling Team burns in a week.

Zero to Sixty, Fully Loaded: Way too long at times....

Sixty to Zero: Way too many feet....

Special Thanks to:

Our families: Your help and support keep us going.

Brooke and Aaron: For patience and laughs. Good luck in California.

Michael and Jackie: For the friendship, warm feelings, geekery, and good advice over the years.

Darron and Sue: For helping us get to Kerrville. Finally. Oh, and everything else.

Janet and Greg: For being there - even when you had to fly cross country.

Les and Amy: For the great parties, the EDA lessons and so many good memories.

Lars and Tammy: For the innumerable good times. And hockey.

Rich and Susan and WCI: For helping me understand the subtle, and command the technical.

To all of you: Thank you for your friendship and support. Come enjoy Louisiana! We know where all the good food and music is hidden!