

Road Art – 1st Trip – Days 1-9

After a bit over a year of planning and building “my idea” of a dream van conversion, I finally get to experience it real life. Link to build summary: http://ridewithab.com/?page_id=543(opens in a new tab)

Day 1 – 8/24/21, Home to Amarillo, TX

I am no stranger to roadtrips, but they have always been on 2 wheels, 2-3 panniers and a very thoughtful pack prep. This time it was different, it’s a van and you can always pack more, and so I packed and then packed some more. I had everything but I could not find anything. I was suppose to leave at 8 AM, ended leaving at 11:15.



Once on the way, I was content, had an overnight arranged in Amarillo, TX, 365 mile drive with a 5 ½ hour estimated driving time. I have done that ride many, many times, usually on 2 wheels. It was uneventful and before long I was parked. Went for a short bike ride around my host’s neighborhood and later decided on an

avocado ham wrap for dinner and an early turn in for a good night rest. Overall and uneventful day and I was happy to be at the border of TX and NM.



Filling up with gas was a surprise, I was used to \$15-\$20 fill ups on my motorcycle, but not on the van, plus on the motorcycle I got about 45-50 MPG, the van is about 16-18 MPG depending on the speed.



Day 2 – 8/25/21, Amarillo, TX to Las Petacas (Taos), Carson National Forest, NM

Woke up early after a pretty restless sleep, I more like cat napped. It was a bit hot and the neighbors had a very bright light that flickered on/off most of the night. I should have trusted my instincts and just gotten a hotel.

After some oatmeal and a cup of coffee, both with almond milk, I hit the road at around 7:30. My first stop was the Cadillac ranch just outside Amarillo. I had driven by it on my motorcycle and car so many times and yet never stopped. Very cool place indeed and free! Morning sun affected the photography.





Notice the long morning shadow



And down the road, they had a gift shop with more Cadillacs including a Big Tex replica



On the way, the mandatory state line picture and a really cool railroad bridge I had never noticed before.



Traveling toward Taos, the road brought back many great memories among them Mosquero, the twisties in the valleys, my solo travels on my GSA and my trip with my Aussie mates in 2016. I found a new dirt road I had never been on.



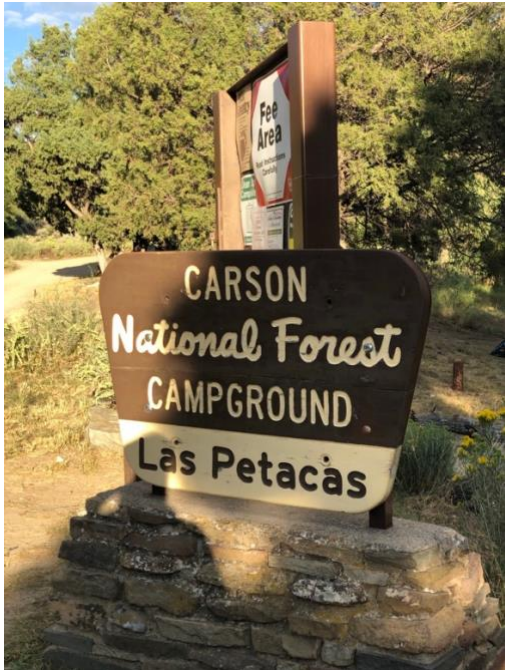
Road Art goes off road, LOL



Did I tell you I am enjoying the cooler northeast NM weather. Its just perfect, mid 80's and dry. After an awesome travel day, I went on a short hike near Angel Fire on the Carson Forest, nice hike until I returned.

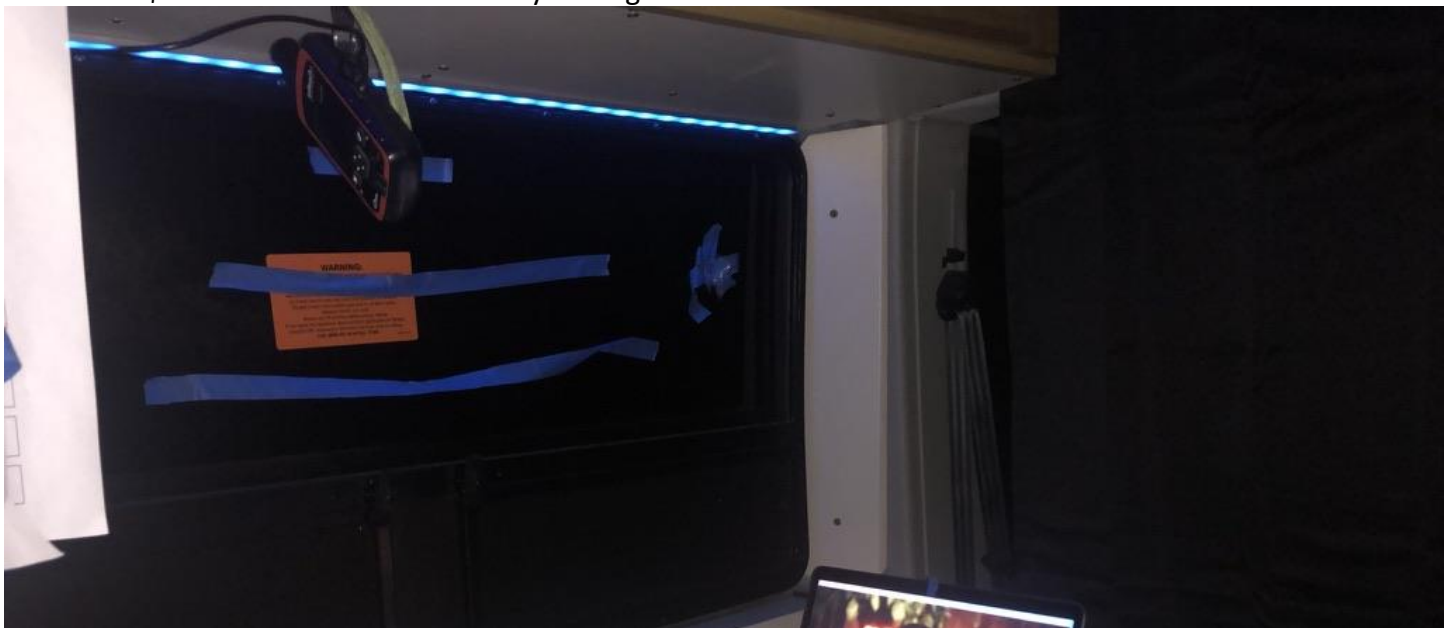
I was (and still are) totally bummed that during my hike, someone stole my bike from the trail head parking. All I can say they are low life M'fers and I am sure bad karma is coming their way. They cut 2 locks, and thankfully they didn't break into my van. The Ranger said that they are having lots of problems with theft and car break-ins. While the bike is replaceable, I had a trailer mount on it that cannot be replaced, it was a Kickstarter project. Major bummer!

I overnighed at Las Petacas campground and loved the quiet setting next to a stream, my cozy bed with Albertito's and Caroline's Casper comfy mattress. I slept like a baby!



Day 3 – 8/26/21, Las Petacas (Taos), Carson National Forest, NM to Durango, CO

Had to do a minor adjustment, I definitely need some light blocking curtains, so after visiting Taos Center, sipping my coffee and spinning stops/gyms & catching a few Pokemons, I headed to Walmart to shop for curtains. < \$15 later I have them and they work great.



Next up was one of my favorite spots in Taos, the Rio Grande gorge. This time I took my time, walked the bridge and the trail lingering and taking in the scenery for a good hour.





Apparently quite a few people jump off this bridge, suicide crisis hotline phones were everywhere. Very sad that so many are in such anguish and pain that their only outlet is to take their lives.



Next up was the western section of the Carson forest on Highway 64, what a beautiful place. Bathroom with a view LOL.



On the way to Chama,



I still remember my epic trip to Colorado with my Aussie friends, visiting again on my own brought lots of great memories. Look at the [Colorado ride report](#).

Or copy and paste link

<http://ridewithab.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Aussie-Colorado-Ride-BAK.compressed.pdf>



I have been to these places on my motorcycle, but with the van it's a totally different experience, much slower and far more relaxed. This is the first dispensary I ever visited 4-5 years ago, still there and with new competition right next door.



Colorado is so beautiful; I just enjoyed the landscape and didn't really take too many pictures.

And finally in Durango for the day, I decided to get an RV campground for the night, have a hot long shower and try cooking something for the first time. Made a nice burger, a bit crisp, but moist and flavorful. They had this random tractor as well.



Day 4 – 8/27/21, Durango, CO to Sunset Crater National Forest, AZ

On my way, without really thinking anything, I came up on a sign for Mesa Verde National Park. I had never really heard of it and was not on my radar. I still decided to head that way and go visit. What a pleasant surprise, it was simple, yet stunning. All mesa I have ever been to, have been brown or barren, this one was luscious and green, have a look.





The day was so clear, you could see for 40-60 miles.



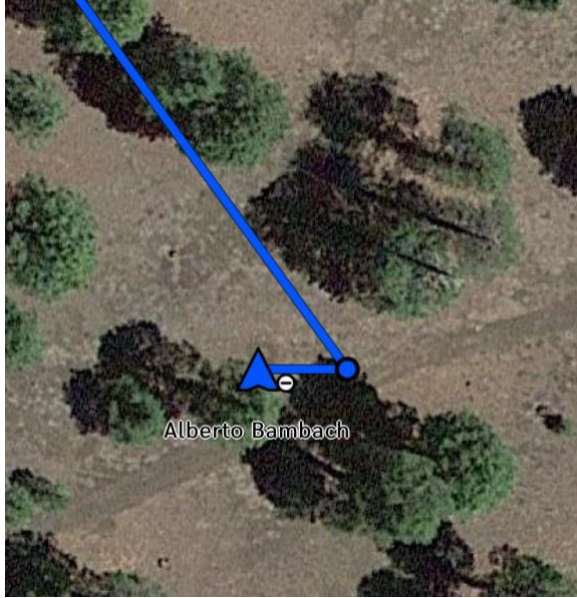
Among the many things Mesa Verde is known for, it is also an historical archeological site that preserves how people lived 800-1,200 AD. These communities built into the side of the cliffs, hard to photograph without a great camera, much of it was being reconstructed or preserved, have a look:



Look at the center near the bottom on how they built homes into the cliffs.



For the night I found some dispersed camping at Sunset Crater National Forest, AZ. It was a true boondocking overnight. The smell of the pine trees and the vibes with nature made it such a special experience. I could have spent a week there, but I needed to get to LA by Sunday. Definitely the middle of no where.



The best part, I had electricity, and could make ice on demand.



Day 5 – 8/28/21, Sunset Crater National Forest, AZ to Mojave National Preserve

I woke up to an awesome sunny morning, checked all systems, made some coffee, went for a walk and then I headed to Flagstaff, AZ.



I was hoping to be able to buy a new bike, I miss mine and have been feel like something is not right. Between the inventory shortages and the shipping delays, bikes are affected just like cars are riddled with the covid related shortages.

No bike but plenty of breweries. I only browsed, a cool place, I will have my beer after I park for the night.



I was going to go visit Grand Canyon NP, "it is Saturday and the crowd shuffles in" so I decided to skip. I deviated along some of the famous route 66 side roads, unfortunately most places have been decimated by (I assume) Covid. Hotels and shops boarded up everywhere.



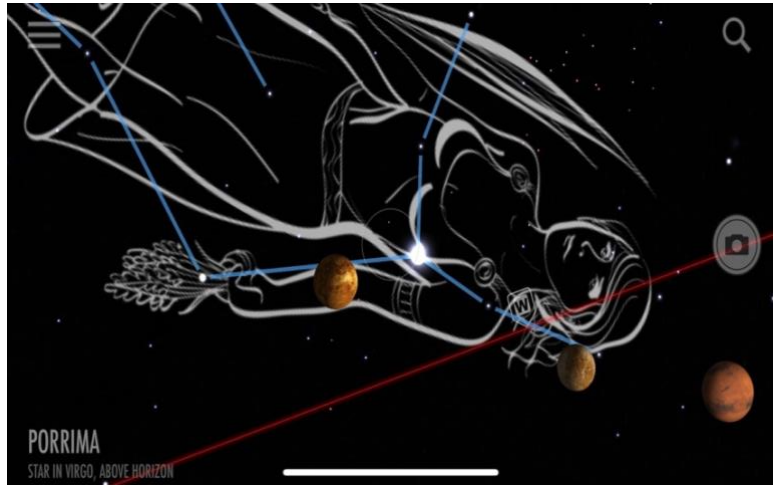
North eastern/central Arizona is a must visit, on the other hand, north western AZ to the California boarder, all you get is brownish landscape and hot, hot, hot dry heat. Notice the dash temperature at 113° F.



Arriving at Mojave National Preserve was easy, the temperature had already dropped (high desset) to mid 90°'s, but it did not feel hot. As the evening wore on, the stars came out and I had a most relaxing evening and a great night sleep.



As the sun set, so many stars came out, I could not photograph them with my iPhone. Sagittarius is superimposed with an iPhone app, it was an aweing sight.



The next morning, more amazing views



Day 6 – 8/29/21, Mojave National Preserve, CA to Los Angeles, CA - USC

The drive to LA was easy with plain landscape, my first stop was Lowes to pick up some wood and a sheet of plywood to make Christina a beer die table. After getting there and working the afternoon, whallah, there it is.



After a much needed shower, Christina and I went to get a Sugarfish sushi fix, how yummy. I stayed in my van in the driveway, had a very restful evening and good night sleep. The next morning I worked on my ride on her porch and picked a few limes from her backyard trees, saved a lot of money, HaHa



Seeing my little Putty was the highlight of my trip, I was so happy. Love you little girl!

Day 7 – 8/30/21, Los Angeles, CA – USC to Ventura, CA

Somehow it took me forever to get out of LA, groceries, Costco and gas. As I headed north on, I spent a couple hours organizing my thing and going for a walk at Will Rogers State Beach. It was your typical Malibu scene but much less crowded, lots of walkers, bikers, volleyball players, etc. Very relaxing. The most expensive fill up of the trip and a photo of the beach.



CA-1 is very scenic, and not too far from LA, I saw a sign for Channel Island National Park. I was instantly intrigued, I had heard of it, but did not really know where it was. I immediately pulled over, googled the website and decided to explore further.

Stopped at the Channel Island NP visitor center, was pointed to Island Pacific to ferry me over to one of the islands. Since it was right across the street from the beach, and I was a paying customer, they allowed me to park in their lot overnight. Nice Marina.



Had wine and cheese for dinner and a few other snacks, and tried my new cardboard temporary back window covers.



Day 8 – 8/31/21, Ventura, CA – Channel Island National Park

Woke up excited to visit a ne NP. Had a breakfast, coffee and oatmeal, and packed a day pack with a windbreaker, extra shirt, water, snacks and sunscreen.



After an annoyingly long safety briefing, we were off to Channel Island. The day was overcast, the ocean was very smooth. The boat's Capitan promised to point out wild life along the way and boy did we see some cool wild life.





All the sudden the water started boiling, pod after pod of dolphins, what a sight!



Click picture below for video:

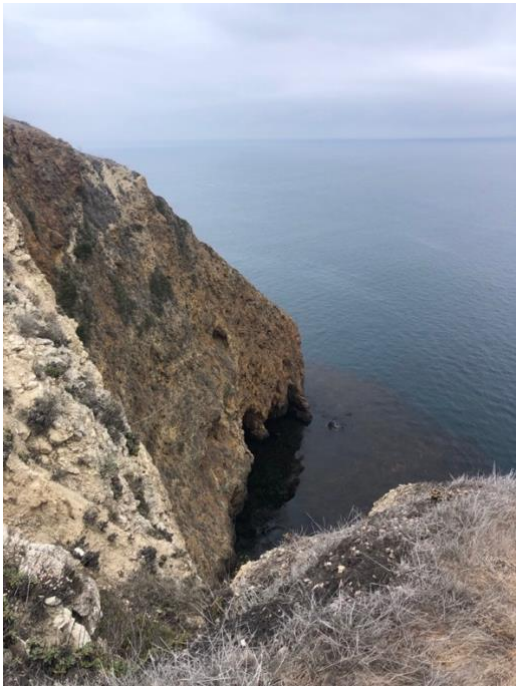


On the boat, they also had 2 sealion pups that had been rehabilitated and were going to be released back to their habitat.



The hiking was spectacular, after the initial climb, the terrain gently sloped up and down. Turns out the overcast day was a blessing, much cooler, mid 70's and pretty clear skies.





The island has many small foxes, on the way back we cruised by some offshore oil rigs, apparently, they have been there for 30 years, way before regulation.



It was a full day, and finally relaxing with some appetizers.



Day 9 – 9/01/21, Ventura, CA to Templeton, CA

I decided to rewire the heater control to near the bed. I did it while enjoying a beautiful view to keep me going. I had to stop at Harbor Freight tools to pick up some shrink connectors, magnets and duct tape.

After loitering on several beaches, I continued my drive inland. The roads and scenery speak for themselves.





Avila Beach, a small community, but picturesque and tidy. Although the water is way too cold 59°F.



The beach was wide and many were enjoying the sunny warm day.



This guy actually caught this fish, I witnessed him reeling it in. And more of the rolling terrain.



Boondocker.com came through with my overnight parking, The hosts had a beautiful home with a huge flat driveway to park. They were RV travelers as well and had just returned from Florida. I topped of my water tank and had a great restful night sleep. ***To be continued ...***