

Begun on 29 march 2000
Walkabout Journal

So I decided to leave texas altogether. I was tired of the heat, the desert climate and the just plain boringness of it all. There are the eastern forests and the gulf coast, but I live in the middle of texas, right in the thick of scrub-brush desert. It's nice in the winter, we get about 2 months of tolerably cool temperatures and the spring rainstorms are likeable but then come 6 months of living in a nuclear blast furnace. I swear texas in the summer is just a piece up the road from hell. Not a single day under a hundred degrees and no rain. Hot, dry and miserable. Of course Austin is just an hour from where I live and I go there sometimes. It gives you somethin to do but I would hate to live in a big city like that. And I'd hate to live anywhere in texas during the summer. Which is why I had to leave. For the summer at least, and I may stay gone longer but I don't know yet.

Use to I would sit around thinkin about leavin but never did anything about it. Mainly because at the time I didn't have a van or money to spend on travellin. I always wanted a van so I could live in it on the road. A car just doesn't do it. And of course I would need the money to do it. So in october of 1999 I traded my 1965 buick skylark for a 1982 ford van. Theres plenty of room to move around in it and theres a bed and everything. Theres no need for a head and holding tank to take up precious space. I can pee on the side of the road and go to kwikymarts for my other business. Ive got it all rigged with boxes for food, books, tools and other stuff I'll need on the road. And money in the bank. My brother rick lives in logan, utah and has been kind enough to let me live with him during the summer. I tell you what im gonna get all over that state.

So on the 13th of May in the year 2000, I headed west. Well, northwest actually. My first day was taking the long way out of Texas. I went out to Abilene, then Lubbock and through Amarillo. After rolling through umpteen jillion miles of Texas dirt and flatlands, I passed through the Oklahoma Strip and barreled up into Colorado. When this day of driving was over, I settled into the KOA campground at Lamar, and sat down to a dinner of spam & cheese sandwich, chips, a pear and a glass of coke. The one thing I find I like best about all this is the nomadic outdoorsyness. The wind at sunset is cold at ten knots and though there is light traffick nearby, I can hear the field birds clearly. This must be what it was like for the Elil rabbits of "Watership Down". Tomorrow I head for the other side of the state -- Cortez, Colorado.

On my way to Walsenburg on State 10 is all flat prarieland. There's the occasional farmhouse but that doesn't count. Then at 45 miles out, the shadow of the Rocky Mountains came into view. Almost mythical in form, the huge formation was the color of the sky itself, distinguished only by the outline of the snowcapped peaks. A half hour later, I got into Walsenburg, and passed on through. Since i was hungry i stopped to eat lunch on the way to LaVeta Pass at a rest stop beside a hill peak. I met up with some travellers from virginia who took my picture here. Stopping at the Continental Divide was the highlight of my day. I took pictures like any ol' tourist would. There was still snow at the top of america. Being from Texas im not used to seeing snow anyway, and to see so much of it nearly blew me away. It was wicked neat. On my way down, between Durango and Cortez, I stopped for petrol in a tiny village called Hesperus. I was at The Hesperus One-Stop when i realised it should be called The Hesperus Only-Stop. As I looked around, i noticed one house and a post office. By 6 o clock i was in Cortez cooking dinner. These two cows in the field next to me seemed delighted at the smell of fried spam and tater chips. After salivating all over the fence, they went to

grazing on the grass. The deafening silence was shattered only by birds and crickets, but in a musical sort of way. Still, the black hereford seemed intent on getting my dinner even though it had been finished for a while now.

I left Cortez about 630 in the morning and was at the Utah line by 7. I had breakfast at the Kokopelli Restaurant in Monticello, Utah, about 20 or 30 minutes in. By 8 o'clock, I was on my way up north. I rolled into Moab at about 930 and stopped there. I didn't stay long because I had to make time to Logan, but in the half-hour I was there, I was home. Physically, spiritually, in every way, this was my town. Situated in a big bowl canyon of rusty sandstone, it was beautiful to look at and the air was fresh and clean. It even had a refreshing mint flavor. After Moab came Price Canyon and the run to Salt Lake. Aside from Wolf Creek Pass in Colorado, Price Canyon is one of the best drives I've ever had. This is a tight-walled crack in the ground cut by the Price River, which is paralleled by the Union Pacific Railroad down in the bottom of the cut. This brought me to Spanish Fork and on to Salt Lake City, Utah. Salt Lake is the maddest place I have ever been to. The traffic was horrid and the highway was a mess. It's not worth going back to. I was on loop 215, which goes around the city, but then I saw a detour sign, so I took the detour. This put me in the center of downtown SLC at 3 in the afternoon. Finally, I found US 89 and booked it out of there. After following 89 north up to and passing Brigham City, I fell into another canyon. I don't know what this one is called but from BC to Logan was almost as good as Price Canyon.

Logan, Utah is nothing to brag about. It's a small town with small town ways, except that it's a college town, which means there are a few of the out-of-state hippie types. Set in the foothills of the northern range of the Rocky Mountains, there is a lot of good camping to be done in Logan and Green Canyons and throughout Cache Valley. I spent 2 months looking for work, about 2 weeks working and most of my spare time was spent at the local coffee shop, in fact the only coffee shop, in town. The Caffe Ibis is where all the high school punks and college rastas hang out and drink too much coffee. I don't do coffee. I stuck to drinking tea, the selection of which is just as massive as the coffees they offer. Aside from camping and working, there really is nothing to say about this town.

When I did work, a temporary agency placed me at a chicken farm 25 miles away. There were about 6 of us at a time on this job. They would bring in pallets of eggs in big boxes and we had to take them out and put them in little boxes and send them back out for distribution. I also spent a couple of weekends at a small factory that makes plastic parts for treadmills.

Usually I was at the coffee shop, like I said, or I went camping in the canyons. There are 2 canyons in town and I was staying about equally between them at my brother's house. I went to Logan Canyon most often, I liked Guinivah Camp especially. A hillside nestled in a thick woodland with a river going through? You can't beat it. I would go hiking there more than anywhere else. I also went camping in Green Canyon. The road through Green is just a gravel track and you can turn off into a campsite from there.

Then there's Bear Lake. About an hour's drive from Logan, through Logan Canyon, and on the Idaho border. We went there 2 weekends while I was visiting. Whole days were spent just swimming or sleeping or throwing sticks for the dog.

In July, we went to visit the family of my brother's girlfriend. They live in Portland, Oregon. Halfway between Portland and Logan is the Snake River, the north-south border of Idaho and Oregon. We met up here in the middle and camped out at Pioneer Bend State Park on the Oregon side. After setting up camp, the wind kicked in and just blew and blew like nobody's business. It was that way the entire weekend. On Saturday, we all loaded up the truck and went to the Oregon Trail Museum and tourist trap. Boy howdy that was neat. I was standing up on top of one of the hills outside and there was a huge raven hovering just beneath the crest. There are actual vintage covered wagons there, too. Not reproductions for the tourists, these things date to the 1840's. Sunday, we cleaned up the campsite and headed back home.

When I left Logan, I went south to Ogden then turned east. As I got around hi-way 84, I took a wrong turn and went to Evanston, Wyoming instead of Heber City, Utah. But I did enjoy it. Sometimes the best turns are the wrong ones. I went through Evanston, Wyoming, which is your basic big town of anywhere USA. Then I turned south on a local road to go to Mountain View. This seemed a normal enough drive and stopping at the Fort Bridger Trading Post was almost fun. But then just as I passed out of Mountain View, all the dirt turned green. Not gradually so that after a while you notice it, but in a sharp contrast. I figure there's a lot of copper or phosphates in the dirt. It wasn't grass on the ground, the dirt is green. But whatever it was really creeped me out.

I drove on and came down beside the long side of Flaming Gorge. As I rounded the southern end of the gorge, the road turned east again and I was headed back to Manila, Utah and the Uinta Mountains. As I was going up the first big hill of the Uintas, I stopped at a roadside lookout point and the whole great mess of it opened up before me. The Green River in the bottom of this red, orange and brown hole in the ground was just unbelievable. Well as I got out of gorgeland and on up the mountains, I drove through Ashley National Forest. They were paving the main road that goes through, and we all had to merge into one lane and follow a lead car down one side of the road while the other side was being covered with steaming hot asphalt. No more country fresh, even in the country. This provided me with the wonderful view of miles and miles of thin groves and clearcut patches of where forest used to be. After half a days drive, I crossed the line and I was in Colorado.

As I was going through Rangley, Colorado, a wild pronghorn crossed the road. They have open cattle range out that way, and mixed in with the cattle is the local native wildlife. It was nightfall when I drove into Delta, and about 8 o'clock that night as I passed through Ouray. This is where I found out that the craziest drivers in America live in Colorado. I know there is a certain skill and talent you pick up when you grow up there and learn to drive there. But they zip up and down the mountains at hi-way speed like there's no tomorrow. Double switchbacks, 50 ft turning radius, speed limits of 10 and 20 miles per hour, and I'm being passed up by these wacky hillbillies. It was 10 o'clock when I reached 10,000 feet at the top of Red Mountain just south of Ouray, Colorado. I remember because I noticed how the time and altitude matched up. So back down the south side of Red Mountain on State 550 and it was midnight before I reached Durango.

As I left Durango, I had no idea what awaited me in the American Outback of New Mexico. First at the state line, I always stop to take pictures of the borderposts. While I was there a trucker approached me and asked if I could jump off his truck. So I pulled out my jumper cables and sat there for a half-hour while his batteries charged up off of my van. Then I was off again for Roswell. There is this place where the road goes one way, the continental divide goes the other way, and the state line cuts right across the middle of the two. I thought it would be neat to get a picture of the spot where three such important lines intersect. When I got to Chromo, New Mexico, I went to the post office. Kinda hard to avoid, its the only building in town, aside from private homes, and it also houses the general store in one end. I went in and asked the old guy there, Harold or Billy or some such sort of guy. I asked him how do I get to this here road? And do you know what he said? Of course not, I haven't told you. He said "That road disappeared 25 years ago. You wanna go to Chama, just take that road there." And he pointed me in the right direction south. I stopped at the sign that marks the continental divide and took a picture of it. As quick as that happened, a nice older couple from Virginia stopped to have a look. We took each other's pictures, said hi and bye, and we were on our opposite ways again.

Now as I rolled south to Santa Fe, New Mexico, I ran into a rain storm. And in this prophetic rain I find Echo state park. The only thing I've ever known about Echo is that I had been there before. When I was about 3 feet old (I don't remember my age) I went on vacation with my dad. Never knew where it was. And I run into it and nearly have a happy fit while I'm driving. It was still raining as I walked up the trail to the big, carved-out hole in the wall. After the rain, I went back to the van, got my camera and had someone take my picture for me. Then I was off for Santa Fe and eventually Roswell.

As I pulled into Chama, I saw all the police gathered around the main turn-off to Santa Fe. I pulled into the Chama Superette parking lot and since it was lunchtime, I ate a can of spaghetti-o's and drank a can of hawaiian punch. I asked what was going on, I thought maybe a bad accident, but a local man told me it was the parade for the beginning of Chama Days. This is a celebration where everyone celebrates the founding of the town of Chama New Mexico with a parade and rodeo. Missed the parade, not interested in the rodeo, so I went on to Santa Fe.

I stopped to get petrol in Vaughn and a young guy, about mid-20's I guess, asked me if I was going north. He wanted to hitch a ride. I told him I was going to Texas and he was off to bum another ride. Then there is a small town called Ramon. Don't blink or you'll miss it--literally. There is, in the middle of a half-grown corn field, a kwikymart with broken gas pumps and 3 travel trailers in the back. I assume Ramon lives in one. And that is the town of Ramon, NM.

By about 5 o'clock I was in Roswell. Along the way, I saw a billboard that said "UFO CRASH SITE-THIS WAY" I thought about it, but then I realised it was nothing but a farmer's empty field and I would be disappointed. So I trucked on through to Bottomless Lakes state park. This is outside of Roswell and about 20 miles into the bush. That plus being down in a sink of the land, you cant see the town at all. That night after dinner I had to go back to town and buy bug spray because the mosquitos are vicious. I also had to find a different campsite because the mosquitos live right there in the water, where I was before. After I got back and found a different spot to camp, it was perfect. I closed up the van and it was so hot in there i had to open up again. After opening the back doors to the breeze, and popping the side windows, it cooled off drastically, but with a full moon on a clear night, it was too bright sleep. I finally fell asleep after midnite I guess but I wasnt paying attention to time.

The next day, I came home through Texas. Absolutely nothing happened. The land is flat and boring. I got home safely, and that is the end of it.

I spent the next three years working in Texas wondering when my next big road trip would happen. With all the things that can happen in life, I simply hadn't had the money or time to do anything about it. But in May of 2003, it finally happened. I had saved up some money, packed up the old van and hit the road. I had decided that would go back to Logan Utah to live.

Day 01- Tuesday 15 May 2003

Today I left Copperas Cove TX for Roswell NM and Bottomless Lakes State Park. All through Texas, not much of anything happened. Half way between San Angelo and Big Spring, the wind began building up and gusting on regular occasion. In Brownfield I ran into a sandstorm. Galeforce winds were holding steady at 60+ MPH, and this lasted all the way to the park in New Mexico. That is a distance of about 150 miles. Even as I write, the winds still blow strong, but not so much as earlier. All during the storm, the sky was brown with farmsoil and herds of tumbleweeds crossed the road like small prickly cattle. Listening to Woody Guthrie sing his Dustbowl songs on the radio only enhanced the experience and gave me an historical perspective which I have learned to appreciate. Now at camp, I have parked the van broadside to the wind, and set up my tent on the leeward side of the van.

Day 02- Wednesday 16 April 2003

Last nite I slept a perfect dreamless sleep. I got up once to pee and have some water. After breakfast and picking up camp, I'm off to Chaco Canyon NM. The road between Roswell and Nageezi was pretty uneventful except for State 96. I had to buy gas at Clines Corner and there was some hi-way construction in Santa Fe. Santa Fe to Abiquiu again was pretty boring, but State Road 96 from Abiquiu to Cuba was very interesting. 96 is a Forest Service access road that winds thru the mountainous red rock country of the Santa Fe National Forest. 53 miles long, this is one of the prettiest roads I've seen. Just before Nageezi, I turned off for Chaco Canyon to camp. 16 miles of dirt track took me into the heart of the wilderness and made me think of all those TV shows I've seen about the Australian Outback.

I went out and toured the park, exploring thousand-year-old ruins of the Chaco Indian culture. At the Pueblo Del Arroyo site, I discovered that they still live there in spirit. The thought occurred to me that "people used to live here", and another thought, not my own, said "we still do." And I felt the presence of the Indians.

This nite I heard the sunset. I was outside the ranger building waiting for a programme about petroglyphs to begin when the sun began to set. The rock wall to the west turned a brilliant golden, then orange, and finally deep red as it is sandstone. It was so quiet that the silence was deafening and I could actually hear the particles of sun light streaming down onto everything in existence. It was like hearing sand trickle onto the ground, only quieter and much more elemental. Now I sit at camp at the Chaco Culture National Historic Park.

Day 03- Thursday 17 April 2003

Today I left Chaco NM for Moab UT. After having lunch in Durango CO, I headed up into the mountains. I had to run at about 40 miles per hour in 2nd gear the whole way. It was slow but still fun. I stopped and played in the snow at Coal Bank Pass, elevation 10640 feet. On my way down to Silverton, my brakes started heating up and smelling bad, so I spent some time here in town until I was satisfied that my brakes would be able to complete the journey.

Left Silverton about 2pm. I drove over Red Mountain Pass and down to Ouray, had a glass of tea at the Timberline Deli, and was on my way to Utah. After turning out at Ridgway and passing thru Naturita, I came upon 15-20 miles of straight, flat road called 146. With a few rolling hills, I pushed on at 75 mph all the way and just flew by. Let me tell you about the town of Bedrock Colorado. I am amazed this place shows up on the map. When I pass thru this little outpost, I saw 2 people, a pickup truck, and one and a half buildings. Literally--a half a building. I moved on to the top of another mesa and down the back side in towards the Utah border.

I drove on up to Moab. What used to be a humble outpost of culture has become a mad sprawling small city. As far as 10 miles out before the city limits, there are scrap yards and trailer houses strung out with no discernable plan. A new rodeo place, bill boards, it looks like the eternal cosmic yard sale. And I'll be damned if I didn't arrive during jeep safari. All the campgrounds in town were filled to capacity so I went out of town and found a side road. Off the side of the side road was an empty patch of ground. I saw other people were camped there so I decided to camp there too.

Just as I was writing this, a gust off wind nearly blew the tent over. I positioned the van to block the wind a bit, and duct taped the rainfly to the poles. Well I didn't lose anything in the windstorm but it blew the tent flat and now there's sand inside.

Day 04- Friday 18 April 2003

The drive from Moab to Spanish Fork was fairly uneventful as this part of Utah is all desert and rangeland. High mesas lined the east side of US 191 all the way into Price. At Price, the road goes up into the hills, and from here to Spanish Fork, I drove thru canyons, mountains, and it snowed in Price Canyon. I bought gas and lunch at Spanish Fork, then continued north on I-15 to Farmington, where I turned onto US 89 for Wellsville. Again fairly uneventful except for the higher peaks around which wound the road. I took a wrong turn into Wellsville and tooled around town until I found Rick & Lori's house. I found the house, moved in, there ya have it.

Life in Cache Valley

I stayed with Rick & Lori for 2 months and moved into an apartment in Logan. Apartments in this part of the country are odd. I'm used to seeing big square buildings, but here they just renovate and convert old Victorian houses. I got a room in a house and had to share the bathroom with 2 other guys that were living there. It was like living in an English hotel. Winter was different for me. I love the snow and the cold crispy air, but I hated the inversions. Since this is a valley, fog builds up on the ground and has nowhere to go. In November 2003, the van finally died. The engine block seized up and I had it hauled off to the scrap yard. Two weeks later, I found a pickup truck for \$500 dollars. I took it and went to Jackson Wyoming on the Thanksgiving weekend. I finally made to the Grand Tetons National Park. This will leave a lasting impression and I hope to go back someday.

During the first weekend of May 2004, I went to Moab and Arches National Park with Pat Easterling. We all got together and hiked up to Delicate Arch. the trail is about a mile long, and the scenery along the way is just as impressive as the arch itself. We stayed at a guy's house in Castle Valley, which isn't in a valley, that's just the name of the town. On our way back from Moab, we took a wrong turn and went west instead of north. We went thru the Badlands of Utah and saw all the messed up twisted rock formations. Finally at Nephi we headed north again on I-15.

In August, Rick took me out to the Railroad Festival at Promontory Point. There is a museum displaying some of the real vintage things that were used to build the railroad. In the afternoon, there was a re-enactment of the meeting of the UP and CP railroads, and the spikedriving ceremony that finally united the nation.

I spent time working a couple different jobs, but I finally got the urge to migrate yet again. I tried to settle down but it just was going to happen for me. In June of 2004, I bought a 1968 Red Dale truck camper and began outfitting it for full time life on the road. I moved back with my brother in Wellsville to save roadtrip money, and go back to Texas for the winter.

Things I have learned from Nature

I have noticed that when camping, or otherwise in the wilderness alone, you cease to think in words. When talking to people you tend to break your thoughts bits of information easily digested by the brain. But when you're alone in the woods or desert or wherever, there is no one to talk to and your thought process changes accordingly. One tends to have longer more open ideas of abstract and concept that can be impossible to comprehend. Rather than short broken words of speech, the mind will phase into an almost musical instinct of ephemeral sounds. The gentle hum of the wind accented by stocatto bird calls. The river as a constant companion. You begin to understand the language of nature. And what a language it is with leaves rustling, tree branches creaking, the crows calling each other from miles apart. What I have learned in the west is that humanity is just another animal. So we have two opposable thumbs and a keen sense of reasoning, but that means nothing under the age old presence of the mountains. They were ancient before man could stand upright, and they are enlightened, living creatures unto themselves. Think of all the knowledge and wisdom absorbed by these rocks. They are Buddhas out of time, these Rocky Mountains. And it is the birds and the squirrels and the deer who can teach us how to live. [29 may 2004]

The trees are talking again--oak, aspen, willow, pine, cedar, they each have their own distinct dialect of wind. The cool air of sunset wraps around your mind, as though the machine of your body has no meaning. Absolute knowledge is there, but always just beyond reach, like chasing a rainbow, ungraspable as a ghost. There is no key, its not a matter of just turning off the noise. Twilight is soft and insulating. It takes its time so that it might be appreciated. The sound of traffick is muffled somewhat as it mixes with birds and windchimes. [17 july 2004]

You know that feeling when you're reading a really good book for the dozenth time? The characters in the story have become like friends. You're coming to the end of the book so you stop reading in order to avoid coming to the end. This book of being in Utah is in its final chapter. I have enjoyed his place immensely but its time to move on and see other places. [08 august 2004]

Road trip to Texas

Day 01 Sunday 19 September 2004

I left Mantua, Utah ready for this road trip. It rained off & on all day. In Spanish Fork UT I bought gas and got turned around and a bit lost and confused. I made it down to Salem, where the car battery died. I got a jumpstart and drove to Payson, which is about five or so miles down the road, and bought a new battery. Unknown to me at the time, the alternator belt also broke and I was driving on battery power alone. After several jumpstarts got me through the Price Canyon, I made it into Price where I bought and installed a new alternator belt. As I was leaving Price, I picked up David, who was hitching to Arizona. Nothing much happened on 191, and I drove on through to Monticello, where I let David off and continued to Cortez,

Colorado. I finally got to sleep about midnight.

Day 02 Monday 20 September 2004

I left Cortez and went to Mesa Verde National Park. As it turns out, I don't have an interest in Native things, but I did enjoy roaming around the park on top of the mountains, and I did get a few good pictures out of it. I stopped for lunch in Durango and turned south for Albuquerque NM. In Bloomfield NM, I got another hitchhiker- Larry- who was headed my way so I helped him out. He was a friendly type who slept most of the way. I took him into town in Albuquerque and dropped him off at a gas station. I proceeded back to IH25 and went to Caroline & Nicole's house.

Monday 20 September to Friday 24 September

I spent the week in Albuquerque with Caroline, Nicole, and Holly. Caroline and Nicole had to go to work and school everyday, so for a couple days I just watched TV while Holly did her homework on the computer. When Holly was free to do stuff again, we went to Petroglyphs National Monument and hiked the Rinconada Canyon trail. The back end of the trail is littered with petroglyphs, both authentic, and modern graffiti. On Thursday, we went to Olde Town, which is a touristy section of downtown that tries to preserve the old Spanish Colonial influence of the city's history. After moseying through the shops and galleries, we ate lunch at a Chinese place. We also went up to the peak of Sandia Mountain. On the way back down, we stopped at a couple of roadside parks on the mountain slope and played in the woods. Just as we left the mountain roads for flatland, we went to the Tinkertown Museum. This museum is a collection of antiques and junk that took 40 years to complete, and it opened as a museum due to the popular local interest. Friday morning, we left town to come to Belton.

Day 03 Friday 25 September 2004

Nothing to talk about today. The land of east New Mexico and west Texas is dry and flat. Nothing to see or do but drive. In Post, Texas, the transmission started to slip. I didn't know at the time what it was and was able to make it work and get home safely. Holly bought all the gas for the drive through Texas and I greatly appreciated it. We had talked about splitting the gas costs and she agreed to it, but it was a hell of a lot of money because that old truck sucks gas like it's going out of style. We came into Temple and I dropped her off at her house about 1130 Friday night. I got to my parents house about quarter to midnight and went to sleep around 1 am.
