



POINT BLANK

# A Tale of Trails Across Utah

Evan Cantor

Can there be any doubt that we live in an age quantified, represented and defined by the cell phone? I came to this conclusion a few years back when visiting San Francisco at the Thanksgiving Holiday. I had given two sets of friends several months' worth of notice, made hotel reservations and booked airfare. The dates were essentially set in stone. Yet our friends still asked, just days before our arrival, "So when are you getting in? Call us when you get into town." Well, that was reasonable enough I suppose and hotel rooms have telephones. Did I mention that I don't own a cell phone myself?

We arrived on time, made the requisite calls from our Union Square hotel room and had a marvelous Thanksgiving dinner of exotic seafood at a second floor chop-house in Chinatown. We were the only Caucasians in the room. But still, our friends couldn't find the gumption to commit themselves to meeting us at any particular place and time. "Call us in the morning and we'll figure it out." Finally, we managed to arrange the rendezvous, but not without confusion and what appeared to us as a determination to live entirely from one moment only to the next. That's when we realized that we were the ones who had caused the inconvenience and confusion. Our friends were accus-

Fast forward to the Spring of oh-Ten. We were preparing for our annual pilgrimage to the canyon country. The modern world had supplanted old methods. Instead of photocopying a map and sending it to Norden via U.S. post, I fired off an email. "Meet us where the Temple Mountain road enters the San Rafael Swell, just west of the Goblin Valley turnoff. A dirt track heads off to the right immediately before the road enters the rocks. Take the track and you'll find us camped hard against the slickrock swell on the left." This was a place where I had camped before, albeit many years in the past. I should have known that proximity to now-famous slot canyons down the Goblin road would have caused heretofore unimaginable changes.

So, yes, imagine my horror to find the mother of all graded parking lots where the Temple Mountain road entered the swell. My old dirt track had been fenced off and apparently re-vegetated to boot. My old campsite was now accessible only by foot and wire-cutter. On top of this, the wind was howling, easily topping 70 miles an hour without interruption. Tumbleweeds, paper plates and lost hats were flying by as if we were in the cyclone with Dorothy and Toto. We sat in the quaking car and had lunch, hanging out for a while. Finally, we couldn't take it anymore.

I posted a note to the BLM signpost, hoping the wind wouldn't tear it to pieces. "Dear



tomed to calling on the cell phone every hour and asking "where are you now?" ("I'm at the mall", "I'm on the bus...", "We're stuck in traffic by Daly City..." etc.) We wanted our friends to accept what we viewed as the adult responsibility of setting a place and time, but they couldn't bring themselves to do it. As inconvenienced as we thought we were, it was more truly accurate to say that we were the inconvenience. Because we had no cell phone.

But it doesn't always have to be that way. Witness the continuing adventures across southern Utah with my old pal Norden, his Jack Russell terrier Luna, myself and my

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wife Robin over the years. Luna died just last year at the venerable age of sixteen, but once she was the hiking dog that saved our sorry asses from the ignominious humiliation of crawling along rock ledges back to a campsite. We were set up at Fisher Towers, off the Colorado River Road, on the Memorial Day holiday. We had this magnificent place nearly to ourselves. The holiday weekend people had left, out on highway 70 heading back to Denver or Salt Lake. A wildfire was raging up on Fisher Mesa, opposite the towers, high above the valley floor, and entire trees were bursting into flame like incendiary devices. After a smoky barbecue of juicy-bloody buffalo burgers, corn-on-the-cob in their own sweet husks and plenty of cold ones, we toodled on down the trail and out onto the rocks for a spectacular view of the fire with our binoculars. We sat transfixed for quite a while.

And then it got dark. Not city dark, with streetlights, parking lots and traffic reflected off the sky. No doubt there was a streetlight down by the Sorrel River Ranch, but it wasn't lighting up anything in the night sky this particular evening. This was the dark of the wild, no moon, and we were out on the edge of a rock ledge above the labyrinthine maze of sandstone below the towers, stuck on the rocks with no flashlight. A moment of confusion ensued and then we hit on the perfect solution. We followed Luna, that little glowing white dog, all the way back to our campsite. Dear Luna, a great old broad of the wilderness if ever there was one.

Norden... wind is intolerable, we've gone to the John Wesley Powell museum in Green River, meet up there." After two hours at the museum, we left another note for Norden. "Wind continues, went to Bloab to get motel room, meet up at Slickrock Café at 6pm."

As we were walking up the street, headed for the Slickrock, who should we run into on the sidewalk but Norden and Luna. "Hey hey!" He had followed our trail of notes halfway across Utah with no cell phone assistance whatsoever. We adjusted our itinerary and enjoyed pizza and cold ones on the patio at Eddie McStiff's. The wind seemed to have blown itself out and Norden suggested we find a campsite the following day with a big rock on the west side to protect us from further wind.

I knew just the spot, way down the Spring Creek Canyon road, and sure enough, the wind never really let up, but the campsite worked. That was the season of the infamous Moab Mudfall. From that camp, we watched dusty clouds rolling and roiling in from the southwest. Muddy red raindrops polka-dot-spotted our tent and vehicles.

Another year passes and now it's Springtime of oh-Eleven. The email goes out to Norden, "meet us at Perfecto Martinez's campsite." No more specific direction needed. Norden had been there before, thirty years earlier when the two of us had enjoyed the mutual discovery of driving down dirt roads and camping just anywhere. Perfecto's campsite was so-named because Mr. Martinez had signed an adjacent boulder in 1921. There was also a prominent naked-lady glyph etched into the rocks by the Oliver boys in the mid-fifties. This was a campsite with a historical pedigree and I had even written a story about it for the Zephyr Pointblank once upon a time. Perfecto's campsite was off the beaten path, near a national park, beneath Navajo cliffs, astride a white slickrock

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mass with views of the La Sals and no biker's destination. In other words, it had been my own private Moab. Once upon a time.

It was a blazing hot sunny afternoon when we trundled down the dirt tracks south

of Crescent Junction headed for Perfecto's place. When we got there, we were plainly disgusted. A cow-camp had been established at the first clearing and we had to maneuver around a tank truck to get to Perfecto's campsite. There we found the vegetation trampled mercilessly, flies buzzing over-ripe sand dock and fresh pools of horse piss. In the shade of the biggest boulder was a pile of unburied human excrement. How lovely. Of course, it was 97 degrees in the shade, shade that was tainted by a pile of human... well, you get the picture.

We backtracked towards the highway, set ourselves up at the pulloff to wait for Norden's arrival. Draping a blanket over the rear-hatch of the 'roo, we made shade and stuck to it, downing a few cold ones for comfort. Finally, it was time to move on again. I bunjied a red rag and a note to the nearest signpost. "Dear Norden, Perfecto's campsite too hideous, human excrement and horse piss, went into Bloab to get dinner, meet up at Back Of Beyond Bookstore at 7pm."

Dinner was delightful. At Miguel's Baja café, I even asked the waiter, "Excuse me, but do I recognize you from a cartoon in the Canyon Country Zephyr?" Indeed I had and he was pleased to have been seen. I kept popping out to the Beyond, but there was no sign of Norden. Finally, it was time to either make camp or take a motel room. I wrote a note on a napkin and left it at the cash register of the Beyond. "Dear Norden... we've gone out the Spring Creek Canyon Road, just past the first draw, will seek campsite on left." We found such a campsite on a beautiful slickrock bench overlooking Hell Roaring Canyon. I'm almost ashamed to mention the name. But where canyon country is concerned, names are as evocative as the places are beautiful. I'm kicking myself in the ass right this minute for mentioning it, but hey, it's discovered country. Once again, I bunjied a red rag to a rock at the dirt-track turnoff.

The next morning there was no sign of Norden and Luna, nor his new girlfriend LT. There was nothing for it but to shrug and take a hike. We headed west along the canyon rim, through a maze of juniper and pinyon islands dotted with the greatest profusion of scarlet claret-cup blossoms that I have ever seen. We finally made it to where two branches of the canyon converged over a vast chasm filled with a huge tumble of rock that we immediately dubbed 'The Great Stupa'. Got back to camp in late afternoon, but still no sign of Norden.

Getting ready to fire up the barbecue, I realized that I had made a crucial miscue. What I had taken for a bag of charcoal was actually just a bag of mesquite wood chips. I gathered pinyon and juniper twigs and made a campfire in the hibachi. Eventually I had enough coals to barbecue some buffalo burgers and corn cobs. We had given up on Norden by this time, figuring it just wasn't meant to be.

But Norden had had car trouble in Idaho and was running 24 hours behind schedule. Halfway through that barbecue, he came driving down the dirt track in his storied old Volkswagen bus, a monster grin plastered on his face, with Luna and LT in tow, red rags and bunji cords waving in his hands. He had once again followed our trail of notes half-way across southern Utah without the aid of an electronic device. "You see," he crowed to Luna and LT, "I told ya, no problem!"

My point? All this happened without a cell phone. Proof positive that there's a real world out there, off the grid, if you only look hard enough.

EVAN CANTOR lives in Boulder, CO...

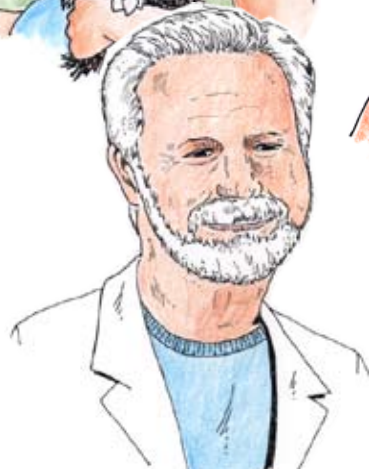
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## The Desert Rat's FASCINATING FACT OF THE MONTH!!!

**China Leads the Way as Demand for Coal Surges World-wide**

Coal remains a critical component of the world's energy supply, despite its bad image. In China, demand for coal in 2010 resulted in a traffic jam 120 kilometers, or 75 miles, long caused by more than 10,000 trucks carrying supplies from Inner Mongolia. India is increasing coal imports.

So is Europe, as it takes advantage of lower coal prices in the United States. Higher-priced natural gas on the Continent is creating demand for more coal imports from the United States, where coal is taking a drubbing from less costly natural gas. NY Times

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/13/business/energy-environment/china-leads-the-way-as-demand-for-coal-surges-world-wide.html?pagewanted=all>



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