

MOAB NEEDS A TRUCK STOP

Winter is usually a quiet time in Moab. Most of downtown is closed and won't reopen until February. It's cold, of course, and few visitors are interested in hiking or biking in the winter time and our mountains don't attract many from out of town. You can actually walk across Main Street without having to wait for the light to change.

This winter has been busier than past winters, especially considering how cold and snowy it has been. There are more visitors on the weekends and many more trucks and OHVs; town does not feel as sleepy as it used to in the coldest months of the year.

Christmas day was a quiet snowy day in downtown Moab. A great day to curl up with a book by the fire. That is until a loud engine screamed down the street and started spinning in circles on 100 North. The first time it happened I was surprised, especially seeing this on the street and not just the in the parking lot next door. Over the course of the day I think they returned at least three times. Each time, by the time I thought about it long enough to think to report it they were gone.

Turns out apparently the four seater OHV spent a lot of the day doing this, all along 200 North, 100 West and who knows where else. The vehicle was loud, but this behavior was worse than irritating, it could have damaged property or people or my cat who likes to walk on the street from time to time.



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I hesitated to call and complain because I have a longer standing reason I call the dispatcher, and on a holiday I knew it would be dispatch I would reach rather than the police department. Ray tells me I am starting to sound a little insane about it. Perhaps I am. But the number of trucks parking and idling all night in Moab is getting on my nerves. And I am learning it is not just happening downtown.

Joining the long haul drivers overnighting regularly in Moab, and the occasional rented RV or pick up truck camper, are now trucks delivering materials for the new hotel on Main Street running their engines for heat all night long. During some busy days several park right out front waiting to find out where they will be unloaded since there is no space at the construction site across from the post office. Once the season hits and visitors return it will be comical on 100 North, except when I need to get out of my driveway or when someone wants to pick up some bar oil or steel at Rim Supply.

There are City ordinances that apply even in the downtown that disallow camping on city streets or private properties outside of RV parks and campgrounds. Basically overnight camping is expressly prohibited everywhere in Moab City limits, public or private, except where it is expressly permitted. Per city code:

8.20.010 Camping in undesignated areas.

It is an infraction for any person to establish a temporary site for the purpose of human habitation to provide overnight or short term camping on a public or private road, street, alley, or lot, other than in designated campgrounds or recreational vehicle parks, within Moab city limits.

8.20.020 Use of public property.

It is an infraction for any person to engage in camping upon any public right-of-

way, public property, park, or other property owned by a governmental entity and not a designated campground or recreational vehicle park within the Moab city limits during the hours of eleven p.m. and six a.m.

8.20.030 Camping defined.

For purposes of this chapter, the term "camping" means to establish, for human habitation or temporary lodging any tent, lean-to, tepee, yurt, hut, tarp, sleeping bag, blanket, vehicle, trailer, camper, or other means of shelter as temporary lodging out of doors for vacation, outings, or other outdoor recreation purposes, or for any business purpose. Nothing contained in this definition shall prevent the use of umbrellas, sun shades, or other usual equipment for temporary protection from the sun or elements and not for human habitation or overnight use. The term "camping" as used in this chapter shall not be defined to include any camping activity authorized pursuant to a special event or special business event license issued by the city pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 5.09. (Ord. 08-26 (part), 2008)

This is happening downtown with more and more regularity.

During the season I am told it also happens near residential neighborhoods. Behind the Super 8 – where the zone was just changed from residential to commercial – I am told that trucks park in the empty lot all night long, often running their engines for air conditioning. Haz-Mat placards mark some trailers as obviously carrying materials that would generally not be allowed to be stored in a residential neighborhood. And apparently those of us who live here, who work here and who pay taxes to support local infrastructure have little recourse to enforce our own laws.

In addition, it is illegal to park a vehicle longer than 4 hours on any city street, and the ordinance that outlines this again mentions that it is illegal to park on any street to camp overnight. Seems to me, the way this rule is written is nearly impossible to enforce – technically the rule prohibits parking anything on the street for more than 4 hours anywhere in the city, even in front of your own house. The ordinances say:



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10.04.230 Unlawful parking--Vehicles left standing for more than four hours and overnight camping in vehicles.

A. It is an infraction for any person, company, or corporation to park or to cause to park or leave standing any inoperative vehicle, truck, recreation vehicle, or trailer on any public road, street, alley or municipal property except for loading or unloading of equipment. In no instance shall the vehicle be parked for a period of time that will exceed four consecutive hours. Any vehicle so parked or left standing may be fined, impounded or removed by any regularly employed and salaried officer of the police department of the city of Moab.

B. It is unlawful to park any vehicle or motor home on a public road, street, alley, or lot, other than designated recreational vehicle parks, for human habitation or overnight camping. Any vehicle or mobile motor home so parked or left standing may be fined, impounded or removed by a peace officer or designated official.

12.16.020 Parking of inoperable vehicles, commercial vehicles, and recreational equipment on city streets.

B. For purposes of this section “operable commercial vehicles” shall be defined to include any vehicle which: (1) is currently licensed for lawful operation on public roads by the state of Utah or any other lawful authority; (2) has a capacity of two tons or more; (3) is utilized for commercial or business purposes; or (4) is wheeled or tracked equipment including, without limitation, tractors, bulldozers, back hoes, construction equipment, delivery vans, tow trucks, utility trucks, or equipment such as flat bed trailers, box trailers, or equipment trailers used to carry other equipment. **It is unlawful to park any operable commercial vehicle on any public street within the city limits for a period of more than four consecutive hours, except that such vehicles may be parked for a period not to exceed forty-eight consecutive hours where necessary for: (1) individual deliveries or pickups to/from an adjacent residence or business; (2) construction related activities that are the subject of a valid building permit from building authorities; or (3) services provided to an adjacent residence or business (i.e., repair services, landscaping, or the like).** (EMPHASIS ADDED)

I am told by police officers that the ordinances are interpreted to target vehicles that repeatedly park more than 4 hours in the same location or are broken down, not when it is a different vehicle each time I call. Since it is rarely the same truck every time that does this, I am told the 4 hour parking restriction cannot be enforced. So trucks that park all night long, in violation of the camping prohibition on city streets, can only be moved on after 10 pm if the officer happens by when the engine is running so that they can cite the noise ordinance to move them on.

The other night I happened to arrive home at 9 pm and noticed a truck pulling up across the street. It was a flatbed loaded down with steel of some kind. I decided to go talk with the driver before he got too settled. He was nice enough – though obviously ready to be done for the night and not terribly pleased to find someone approaching his truck in the dark. He told me that he was delivering the decking for the new hotel but couldn't figure out where they would unload his truck or even if there was much happening at the construction site. I told him that they'd likely unload him off 100 West somewhere, or in front of my house. Telehandlers and backhoes regularly use 100 North to access materials stored off 100 West for the hotel project. I asked him to please not park in front of my house and run his engine. He was nice enough about it and moved.

When I first moved here Moab had a truck stop. Not any more. Now, when we need one to handle all the long hauls through Moab and the trucks delivering into town for new construction and other goods there is nowhere legal for them to spend the night.

I have had some fascinating conversations with many long haul drivers this past year and a half. One driver parks downtown regularly – he happens to have enough battery power to handle heating and cooling and lights without running his truck. He brings a bicycle that I have seen him bring to Rim Cyclery for repairs. He left a Christmas card in our mail box this past December. He passes through about once every 2 weeks and quite obviously prefers to stop in Moab to Green River or points south. He usually is here around 24 hours and rides around town for whatever it is he needs to do. And uses the 24 hour laundry next door.

It is obvious Moab needs a truck stop sooner than later. This problem is not going to go away; we are, after all, on a major north-south truck route from Mexico to Canada. The more built up we get there will be more trucks that need to overnight for deliveries to town as well as those passing through. One gentleman I spoke with last summer proudly explained how his very new tractor was fully equipped with a battery bank he could recharge running his engine for about 30 minutes. I must say, the interior looked pretty plush and comfortable to me. He had researched where to stop on his haul and planned this trip to stop in Moab expressly to check out the area. He had even called the county to ask if he could park for 36 hours in Moab and sleep in his tractor, and was told yes. Had he been asked to move he would have been violating federal laws mandating he take a 34 hour break from driving as required after driving 60/70 hours over 7/8 days (<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/regulations/hours-service/summary-hours-service-regulations>). I find myself feeling for these drivers. Especially the long haul drivers who just need a place to sleep so they can get back to work the next day.

Apparently Moab has even become a tourist destination of sorts for long haul drivers.

NORMAL PEOPLE ARE JUST THE ONES YOU DON'T KNOW REAL WELL

I am not usually one for New Year's Resolutions. I choose other ways of marking the passing of my years, rituals related to growing plants and watching seasons turn and reflecting on what has been and what I would like to become. This year, about two weeks late for the New Year I am making a resolution. I am resolving to better understand opinions on issues that affect our town and our region that differ from my own.

We all know that the internet, and now even more social media, either creates an echo chamber for our ideas, or helps broaden our understanding of differing perspectives. Most often it seems to do the former. Never before has it been so easy to find opinions, interpretations and ideas. The sheer volume of all that chatter makes finding real facts and reporting based on research rather than opinion much harder.

When I first moved into Moab I knew no one here. I got high centered caretaking Horsethief Ranch and met a number of people while there who I still know today. Over 20 years have passed and I am still in Moab. Writing for the Zephyr during the past year has created a more structured and public place for my thoughts and ideas about Moab than I have experienced before. This month I found myself yet again complaining, and then I realized my complaints are about what is changing. I don't have a solution to it, though I am working on it between scratching out a living growing plants and making sure to get some time out in the desert that enticed me here in the first place. Writing has led me to consider why I am staying here if I am complaining so much – after all, things are changing everywhere, and everywhere has its problems. After some thought I know that I am staying in Moab, but why? What is it about this place that keeps me here despite the things I whinge about? I hope to better articulate that later in 2016.

Moving here in my 20s and witnessing wildly divergent opinions about grazing while caring for a small group of horses and living in the middle of an active cattle grazing

allotment didn't make me an expert on much of anything. But it did round out my education in ways that I could not have understood then. One January I managed to figure out that some of the free ranging horses in my care were eating loco weed before they were permanently damaged by it. I learned A LOT in caring for them in an old corral not made for that many animals as they recovered. I still can't ride well, though I'd like to.

My passion for plants meant I learned a lot about what is really out on the range that is edible and how it grows and why it is possible, when done well, to graze without destroying the landscape. I saw up close and personally the hilarity and potentially fatal ignorance of many of the visitors to the desert who got lost because “there are no land marks around here” despite the very visible La Sals, Henry Mountains, Book Cliffs and Cleopatra's Chair – not to mention a 1000' deep canyon a 1/2 mile or so to the north AND south of them. I met up with well meaning visitors who had given all 10 gallons of water to Shasta and Blackie, leaving them none for their drive through the desert. And who looked at me with amazement when I told them that the horses knew where to find water on the mesa top, but if they broke down on the way to town that July day they wouldn't.

I learned to garden where there is no rain. I loved the little shrimp in my glass of water attesting to how clean it was and giggling at freaked out guests insisting on bottled water. I learned how to keep water and beer cool in summer when the fridge was full of garden bounty waiting to be eaten or canned. It certainly exposed me to the fact that for all land management, whether private or public, there are many backseat drivers, but

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few people who actually live the realities of what it means to raise animals or wrangle people out there, or deal with the aftermath of large groups and events.

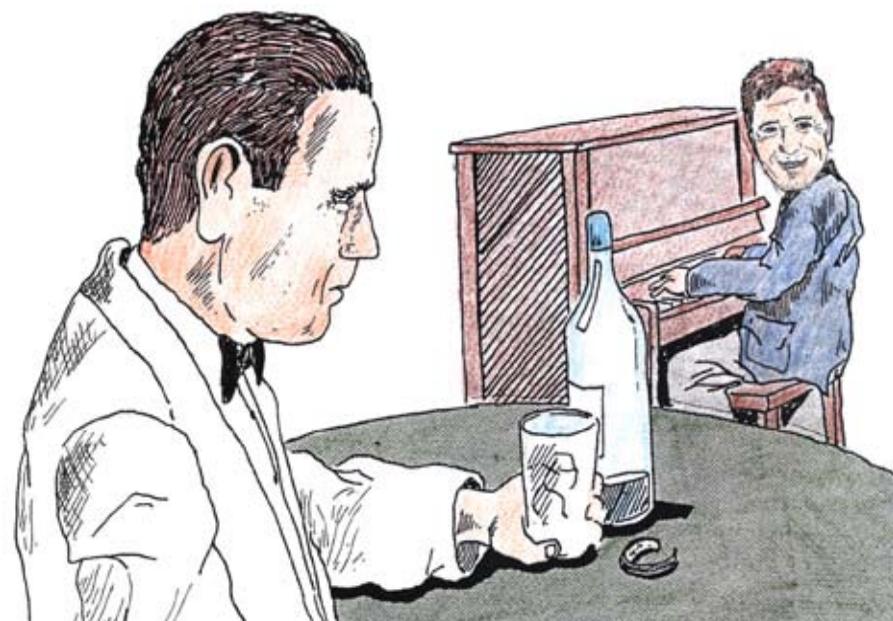
Part of why I left the San Francisco Bay Area was that I didn't like living in such a full and busy place. I prefer open space and quiet and the natural world over pavement, parking lots and traffic lights. Eventually I came to understand another benefit to small town rural life – daily interaction and friendships with people from different backgrounds and perspectives, and a respect for each other. I began to understand how much you can disagree with someone but still have respect for each other and like to spend time with them – and in that appreciation your understanding of their perspective deepens your own convictions or at times makes you question yourself and learn.

We all make assumptions about each other based on all kinds of things – clothing, vehicles, music preferences, body art, what we do for a living, where we grew up, where we went to school...the list goes on and on. The problem comes when we assign negative qualities to people based on the assumptions we have made about them. When we assume that someone cannot have morals without sharing a religion; or are stupid because they don't agree with us about how to use land around us. I resolve in 2016 to learn more about those opinions that I most violently reject, and to articulate more of what it is about Moab that keeps me here.

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