

DEBCAR

MAGAZINE



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- New Mexican Devil Highway

magnificent
moab!



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DEB talk

First, let me take this opportunity to wish all you Debcaroids a slightly belated "Merry Christmas!"

Now, with that out of the way and the appropriate holiday mood established, please return with us via the magic of the internet once again to last winter, and enjoy lucky installment number 13 of our on-going saga.

And with that, I'll wish you "Happy New Year!" and we'll get on with bringing you tales of what we've been up to in 2005, highlighted by a fantastic spring windsurfing in Corpus Christi and what's turning into a sprawling loop around the country this summer.

At the moment, we're camped on the almost-but-not-quite-lakefront property of a self-described Jewish hillbilly/lawyer/salad dressing entrepreneur/simulator customer in Michigan. We're surrounded by a phalanx of trees so tall our internet satellite dish can't see over them, but this is otherwise quite a pleasant spot to live and work from for a while.

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CAR talk



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- Carey

Smothered

In Salt Lake

FRY SAUCE

By Debbie

Having decided the anticipated storm was never going to hit Reno, and now being on a schedule, we departed for Salt Lake City. The overnight stop was [Wendover, Nevada](#), on the Utah/Nevada border. Its biggest drawing card appears to be that it's the closest gambling to Salt Lake City. If that tells you anything.

We got to the [Wendover KOA](#) after dark. I went to check in, a process that always takes longer than it should, and in this case even longer than the usual long. The woman at the desk was having trouble working the computer and muttered something along the lines of, "It's been so long since we had anybody check in." I thought, "Isn't that



what Anthony Perkins said to Janet Leigh as he was checking her in to the [Bates Motel](#)?"

Fortunately, our stay was far less eventful than Miss Leigh's, and in the light of day we realized we were indeed the only people there.

And did you happen to click on the link our story about the Reno KOA, where we mentioned people lying about the campground? Well, [they're at it again](#). We cannot figure out who's writing those things, but it looks like the comments go through some sort of [internet translator tool](#).

Without a bunch of other RVers to bother us, we got an early start across the [Bonneville Salt Flats](#).

Unfortunately, the [World of Speed](#) event is in September, and I don't think they have a division for motorhome plus toad. But we would have been ready if they had.



It's *really* barren out there.

Along the side of the road, people have created messages with rocks, which helps break the monotony.



Judging from the stones, the water is about an inch deep

for miles, providing ready proof of just how pancake flat this place really is.

The monotony is even officially recognized with a series of road signs.



Then, something really odd appears on the horizon.

You go past this thing at highway speed, there's no warning, and even if you could screech to a stop once you realize it's something

possibly interesting, there's no parking. Turns out, it's the Tree of Utah, an 87-foot high sculpture as close to the middle of nowhere as I can imagine, as evidenced by this view from space.

I was driving on this leg and I handled the approach to Salt Lake City. And pretty admirably, since our exit had one of these new interchanges called a "single point urban interchange," or "SPUI" (pronounced spooey). They look fairly straightforward on paper, but driving them is an entirely different matter, especially when you're 60 feet long and almost comatose and blind after crossing the



salt flats, and turning left means you'll be going through the SPUI with oncoming traffic hurtling toward you on the RIGHT!

The main feature I see that speeds the traffic through these things is that when you exit a freeway, there's no access road to go straight on through the intersection, so a whole section of traffic is eliminated. And turning left is more like a sweep than a hard left, which means you can go through them really fast. But with oncoming traffic on the right. Just keep your eyes on the road in front of you, and there won't be any trouble.

The freeways there were improved for the 2002 Olympics and have a lot of these SPUIs. But that's Salt Lake for you--they also have this insane street naming system, where the major streets are called things like "West 700 South," which means it's the west half of an east-west street that is 7 blocks south of the center point, Temple Square. The streets adjacent to Temple Square are called Temple, like South Temple. In most places, that would mean the southern part of a street named Temple that runs north-south. Not here. South Temple runs east-west along the southern edge of Temple Square. It intersects South Main and South State, which both run north-south and somehow got normal names.

Not only that, if there's a street that's less than one block from the previous one, it gets an interim sort of number, like E 2240 S. With enough thought, you can figure out where something is, but it makes using a map a migraine-inducing experience.

Then again, you can end up with clever names, like "9th and 9th," where I went to a movie at the Tower Theater and where there

was a card and, uh, "novelty" shop next door, where I, as usual, picked up whatever free weekly newspaper was around, and this one turned out to be gay. So I think 9th and 9th is hip. It sounds it, anyway. But be careful--there are possibly four 9th & 9ths, making gay cruising a little sketchy if you're not perfectly triangulated.

In less hip Sandy, Utah, there is Ardell Brown's Quail Run RV Park, on the southern



edge of Salt Lake City. We had to do some maneuvering to avoid hitting the tree when we extended the slide, and to make room for the car.

Remember that little mouse problem we developed at the SKP POS in Coarsegold? Despite our best efforts with traps and peanut butter and arctic temperatures and whatnot, he was still riding along with us a month and 1000 miles later. But not for long, because one of our new neighbors had a cat that Carey thought "looked like a good mouser," and sure enough, the very first night we were there, we hear a loud "MEOW" followed immediately by an even louder slapping sound, like something hit the side of the RV. We never did quite figure out what that slapping

sound was, but we never saw another mouse dropping again.

This cat was amazing. He would stand upright on his back legs for a long time getting himself lined up, and then jump about four feet straight up into the fifth-wheel hitch on his trailer. That cat had ups!



I did some walking around town. The streets in Salt Lake are extremely wide--132 feet. Brigham Young decreed that they be wide enough for a team of four oxen and a wagon to make a u-turn (or that they be wide enough for him and all his wives to walk arm-in-arm with no one forced in the gutter, depending on which story you believe). For whatever reason, they're really wide, even in the outlying areas.

I happened across one that didn't have a stoplight anywhere near where I wanted to cross, but had a bucket with some orange flags in it that you're supposed to carry with you as you brave those 132 feet. That was just too queer, so I just ran like hell like I always do. But it's probably a pretty good idea for someone who crosses with less alacrity.

Being the mass transit maven that I am, I actually used Salt Lake's commuter rail line (also built for the 2002 Olympics) a few times

because the RV park was only about a mile from one of the stops. On one inbound trip, I heard two different religious discussions, one of which included people who didn't know each other. This place is crawling with Mormons, I tell you.

And one inbound trip wasn't matched by an outbound trip because I called from town and talked Carey into picking me up and going to Pie Pizzeria, a write-on-the-walls joint near the university--one of his favorite pizza joints. Carey talked me into branching out from my usual cheese topping, and I picked sun dried tomatoes and artichoke hearts, which turned out pretty good. Although I still like just cheese. So did my mother, and I'll never forget the eureka! moment one night when we were ordering pizza and both admitted with great embarrassment that we like just cheese on it.

In other culinary treasures, Palace Burgers still makes absolutely the best bacon-cheeseburgers in the world (according to Carey--I take my burgers less adorned), mixes utterly delicious banana shakes, and reigns supreme in the fry sauce category. You think it's just ketchup and mayonnaise until you try the fry sauce at Crown Burgers, a similarly-named knockoff local chain, and realize that what they have is indeed just ketchup and mayonnaise. Palace



Burgers' fry sauce is different. And much better. Notably, Palace Burgers charges extra for it, while Crown Burgers has it for free in a dispenser--that should have told us something right there. You say you've never heard of the stuff? Get with it--there was even an Olympic pin representing fry sauce.

You may recall that we had come to Salt Lake City at this particular time because Carey had some simulator business to attend to. He was working with a guy named Fred who lives here, and who had put together a deal to develop a custom driving simulator for the Bingham Canyon copper mine, commonly called Kennecott after the company that runs it. This is the largest open-pit mine in the world and is one of only two man-made things visible with the naked eye from space, the other being the Great Wall of China. This was a planning trip for Carey to "meet the miners" (as he insists on calling them) and understand how to design a simulator to meet

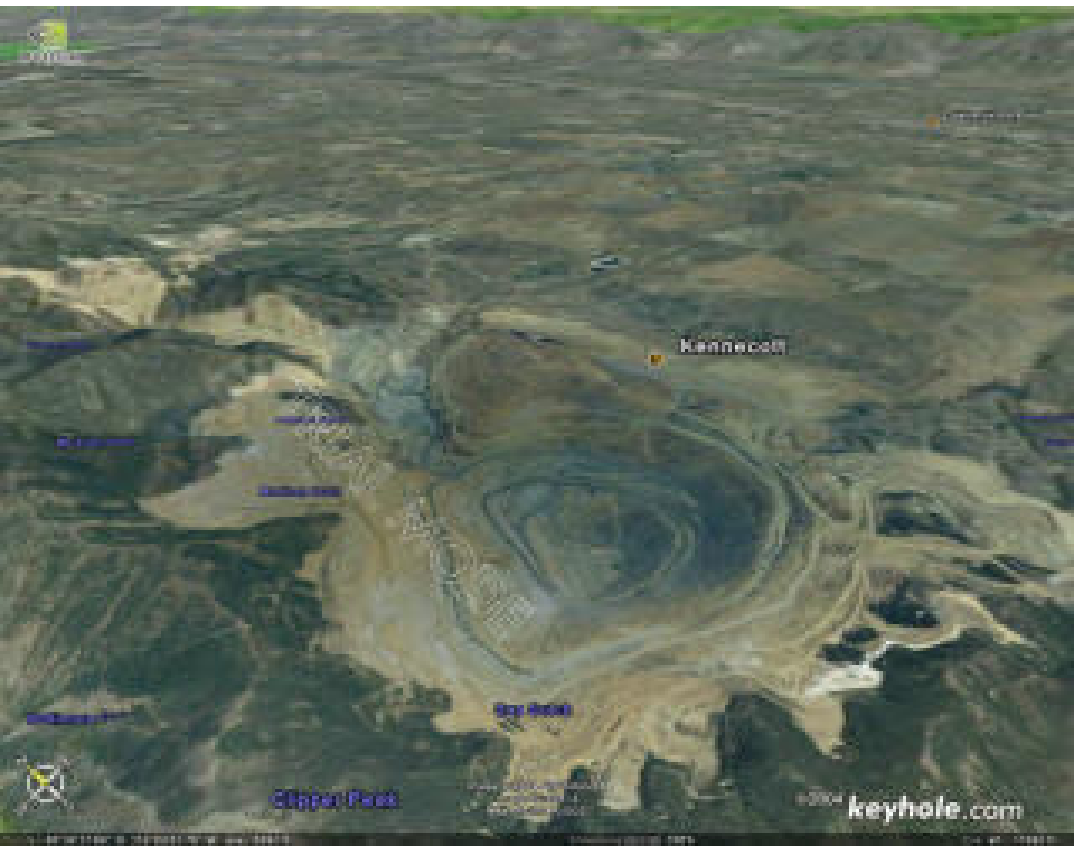


their needs. In this case, they need a system to teach people the rules of driving around the pit in their little pickup trucks without getting smushed by the enormous (building-sized) dump trucks that carry all the excavated material around in the mine

We would then go back to Austin for a while, design and build them a machine, and he'd either fly back here or we'd come back in the RV in a few months to install and fine tune the system.

Well, we did eventually return here via RV (in the summer, after a longer than expected delay in getting the deal finalized) and did the "tourist version" of the mine then, so we'll cover that experience in a later update.

Petty impressive stuff though.



Carey also managed to go skiing a couple of times, including one nighttime outing to Brighton with Fred and his ski-patroller wife Sarah, and another more conventional day at his favorite area anywhere, Alta.

Check out the slide show online for all his ski pics, and the sidebar below for his tales of adventure (or misadventure, from the looks of it). •

SKIING DAY AND NIGHT

Yes, I managed to take a few days to ski. Here's the story.



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MAGNIFICENT MOAB

FEATURING ARCHES NATIONAL PARK



Story by Carey
(Italics by Debbie)

It started out as a simple observation.

I was looking at a map to figure out the fastest way to get back to Austin from Salt Lake City in time for Christmas, and noticed that Moab was right on the route. We hadn't planned to stop and do anything along the way, but maybe we would get lucky and the predicted snowstorms would hold off for a couple of hours and let us take just a quick look around?

Well, we made it to Moab fairly early and quickly set up camp at the delightfully empty Portal RV Park. We were greeted by a gloriously clear afternoon, so we hopped in the car and headed up to Arches National Park to see as much as we could before sundown.

I had been to Arches about 15 years before, and thought it was pretty cool, but this was really special. Showing up in the dead of winter, we had this amazing place practically to ourselves, which made us feel like we'd been invited to a private showing of nature's finest. The snowcapped La Sal mountains stood many miles away as a beautiful backdrop to all the famed red rock formations, clearly visible through some of the crispest, chilliest air imaginable. Throw in some low-angle lighting that makes for those coveted dramatic shadows in pictures, and the overall experience was quite breathtaking.

Carey airs it out in one of the Window Arches



Delicate Arch at sunset

After watching the sun set over Delicate Arch, we decided to throw our travel schedule out

the window and spend a full day in the park the next day and do a little hiking. If it weren't for needing to be back in time for

The aptly-named Balancing Rock



Panoramic Hoodoo vista

Christmas, we would have loved to stay here much longer.



[And I was even happy hiking because of the rampant use of cairns that actually clearly marked the trails, rather than being two pebbles that may or may not be stacked on top of each other, hidden off in some corner, as if that's an effective way to show somebody the trail.]

This is a notoriously photogenic place, of course, and the slide show online is probably one you'll particularly enjoy. But I've tried to include enough highlights here to satisfy you lazy/busy types who can't watch the whole thing.



We also snuck in a little bicycle adventure the morning of our second day before heading back over to Arches. Moab has become one of the most popular places in the world for mountain biking as that sport has exploded over the past few decades.



The most famous trail, Slickrock, is pretty much unique in the world, primarily due to the unusual surface and terrain. The name is something of a misnomer because the rock you ride on is actually very hard and grippy, being basically petrified sand dunes. The attraction of this material is that you can climb and descend things that it would otherwise be impossible to find traction on. It's also a fast surface (almost



like pavement) which thrill-seekers always love.

We had just bought our miniature folding mountain bikes, and naturally I couldn't resist the opportunity to try one out on Slickrock. The full trail is a loop a little over 10 miles around, but there's a "practice loop" of about 2 miles that I thought I might be able



Carey, out of steam

to do. So I took off on the little bike, thoroughly enjoying the weird terrain and supernaturally grippy surface, and bypassed the first opportunity to pick up the practice loop since it was in the shade and covered with a layer of not-at-all-grippy-looking ice.

Up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down, and up and down again I went, quickly racking up lots of vertical feet in a very sneaky way. They say this

trail is about equivalent to climbing a mountain even though the elevation doesn't actually vary by more than about 100 feet probably, and I wholeheartedly agree.

By the time I made it to the "back entrance" of the practice loop, I was sweating profusely despite the air temperature of about 20 degrees, and breathing so hard I thought I was gonna need an ambulance. Having encountered literally nobody else on the trail so far (quite a contrast to the rest of the year, when this place apparently gets elbow-to-elbow thick with bicycles) I figured I better bail out and head back the way I came, and not try this again until I'm in better shape and/or better prepared.

I am a novice mountain biker to begin with, and this was my first off-road outing on these new bikes, so it was interesting trying to

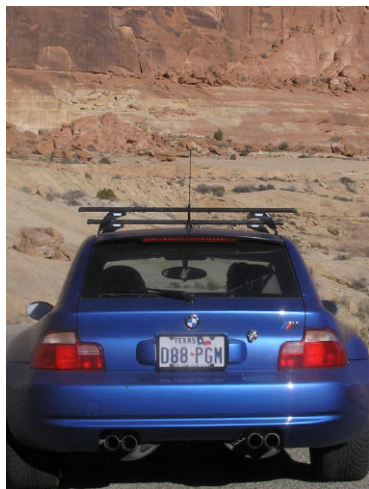


Endo averse Debbie

ride even a little bit of Slickrock. The small wheels and relatively short wheelbase of the "clown bike" did make it prone to doing an "endo" (going over the front wheel) at the bottom of each dune, and it was also all too easy to do a wheelie climbing the steep hills and lose steering control. By the end I was getting the hang of exactly how far I had to shift my weight back and forth to keep the wheels on the ground, and reckon a cyclist in good shape would probably get a kick out of riding this trail on one of these. Hey, some people ride unicycles at Slickrock, so why not?



Anyway, I eventually huffed and puffed my way back to where I'd left Debbie sitting, and encouraged her to take a quick spin to see what it was like. Unlike me, she buzzed around for a while and managed to figure out the bike's tendencies to "endo" without ever actually flying over the handlebars and landing with the bike standing vertically between her legs. Smart girl. •



We had the Portal RV Park practically to ourselves



Native American wall art

NEWS THAT CAUSES FITS?

One more note about Moab--I've mentioned before that I always pick up whatever free newspapers I can find because they tend to give a visitor some insight into the character of the area. Some of that is inadvertent--millions of plastic surgery ads in L.A. Weekly, ads for yoga mats wheatgrass in Metro Santa Cruz. But for some reason I also enjoy reading about local political intrigue even when I don't know anything about the issues or the people involved.

But I have found one that transcends them all--the bi-monthly Canyon Country Zephyr, whose motto is, "All The News That Causes Fits." The online version includes the harsh commentary and wry observations I always enjoy, and it even includes some of the ads found in the print version, which feature drawings of the business owners done by the Zephyr's editor.

*Very highly recommended.
- Debbie*

Taking the Devil's Highway Home for Christmas

(How Ironic)



Story By Debbie

After spending an extra day in Moab enjoying Arches National Park, we faced several long days to get back to Austin in time for Christmas. Not far outside of Moab, we came across an arch right by the side of the highway, free for the taking. Now they tell us!

The enormous windshield on the moho really does al-

low for some great sightseeing--you can see the windshield wiper in that photo.



Get this: the weasels who do the highways renumbered famous Highway 666. People kept stealing the signs, presumably because of its association with the number of the beast business.

This was a surprisingly big deal.

Check out this treatise on the history of Highway 666 from the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. Your tax dollars at work.

The thing is, I'd driven it a few times in the past, and rarely has there ever been a highway more appropriately numbered than Old 666--it's in the middle of nowhere and cuts through an Indian reservation and it was always a white-knuckle experience because it was full of cars held together with baling wire and pipe dreams, all too often driven by drunks. Whenever one such driver managed to get his hoopty rolling faster than another, he would just take his place in the opposite traffic lane for as long as it took to overtake the slower one, oncoming traffic be damned. I can't count how many times I've had to slow down and/or finally go onto the shoulder to avoid an oncoming car in my lane.

Based on my experience, it would be better just to get rid of the road entirely rather than renumber it, but nobody asked me. And now we find that the number we should fear may not be 666 after all, but 616, lending credence to my opinion that the number described the road rather than pre-ordained its nature. Then again, I will say that this latest trip on the Devil's Highway was less eventful than previous ones. Maybe it was the number causing the problems after all.

Waiting out the whole controversy is Canada, which still has a Highway 666, in northwestern Alberta. God bless 'em.

Viewable from Highway "491" is Shiprock, New Mexico's more natural version of the Utah Tree of Life.



Below is the traffic at the intersection of "491" and Interstate 40 in Gallup, New Mexico. I've been through this area a few times in my day, and it's been like this every single time. It didn't help that this was the day before Christmas Eve and there is a Wal-Mart on the other side of I-40.



We had a brief stop in Albuquerque for Carey to visit a former autocross pal of his who now lives there, Mike Kirkpatrick, and his wife Claire. Mike still feels the need for speed, evidenced by his latest acquisition, a Subaru STi. And of course the hat.

After a comical bunch of unhooking, parking, re-parking, and re-hooking of cars, we even-

tually managed to get the motorhome parked on a side street and everybody over to the historic Owl Cafe for a good lunch and chat.



Mike and his ride

We wanted to get down the road a little farther, to Santa Rosa, for our quick overnight stop. It was getting late, but we figured we could break our don't-arrive-after-dark rule because we'd been to the Santa Rosa Campground before and were familiar with it. Nice theory, but we didn't take into consideration the snowstorm that greeted us as night fell, and the igloo that the park had become.

The main problem was that we needed water, and the water spigots had frozen, even the ones that were wired with heating elements. I went to the office three different times for guidance. They were fixing to close and the woman sort of threw up her hands and said, "It doesn't usually get that cold here." Well, thanks for the weather report, but that's not getting me any water. So Carey was running around in the dark looking for a site that we could fit in and that had a working water tap, while I ran back and forth to the office to try to get some help before they got away for the night.

We eventually found a site that looked good and just told the unhelpful people in the office we were taking that one and got parked.

When I went to get our water hose out, it was utterly frozen into its coiled shape. So I took it inside for a few minutes to warm it up, and by the time I went back out, the water spigot had frozen. Arrrggghhh.

I got my hair dryer and plugged it into the electric pedestal outside and heated up the spigot enough to get the water flowing. And I had even thought to take the hose back inside during the process! I was filling the water tank via the outside opening, which has a little locking door on it sort of like a fuel filler door. Every time a little water would splash out it would instantly freeze solid onto the side of the RV. Jiminy crickets, it was cold.

When I had enough water to survive, I unhooked everything, only to find that the key to the water door had frozen in the lock. Arrrggghhh. Hair dryer to the rescue once again.

So we have a new rule to go with the don't-arrive-after-dark one: Never travel with an empty fresh water tank.

When morning came around, it was still really cold (there's a decimal point between the 9 and the 0)...



...but sunshine made everything seem substantially less sinister:

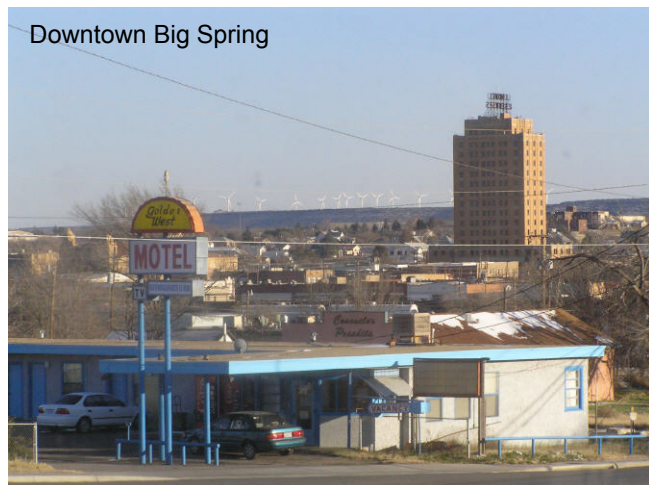


Santa Rosa RV Park

We continued our trip through what turned out to be one of the biggest cold snaps this area had seen in a very long time, to an overnight stop at the Texas RV Park in Big Spring.



Of course, Big Spring derives most of its fame from being home to Cokers Restaurant for decades. Also, back in its heyday, Big Spring was on a major route from California



to Florida before the advent of airplane travel, with a constant stream of celebrities stopping over. The city also boasted a Webb Air Force Base, a VA hospital, and a mental institution (when we were little, if you acted weird you were threatened with being sent to Big Spring). Sadly, they closed the air force base in 1977, but turned part of the land into a federal prison (which counts among its alumni David Duke and Billie Sol Estes--and it's not even on Highway 666!). It was a big blow to the city, but they're trying to keep things going.

We were particularly taken with their Christmas Festival of Lights in Comanche Trail Park (site of the actual big spring), which was right near our RV park and really quite impressive.

Our only beef was that they advertised it as free, but didn't mention the official beggars who would be posted in the middle of the tour. That's dirty pool.

These giant poinsettias were out in the water. It's the only time I've seen light displays out on a pond, and photos don't do them justice.



Well, ours don't, anyway. But look at this guy's--they're fabulous. Then again, he's a local and was no doubt set up to take quality pictures at night, while we just happened across it with a handheld camera.



Flowers made of light



Giant poinsettias reflecting in the pond

Some parts were accessible only on foot. Of course, in Texas people don't walk anywhere even when it's not really really cold, so we had them to ourselves and could engage in officially prohibited tomfoolery. (Note that I'm the one who aids and abets and photographs the activity, rather than being the actual miscreant. My usual m.o.)

One more tidbit about Big Spring: Many years ago my friends Dorothy and Boyd were riding with me from Austin to Lubbock. As we passed through Big Spring, Boyd was looking around and said something like, "I can't imagine why anybody would live in a place like this." Right about that time, I put on my blinker and he said, "Where are we going?" I answered, "To my brother's house." Whoops!

The next day was Christmas, which was spent driving and washing the RV. The driving part was planned, and the washing part popped up because we saw a high-bay

car wash in Burnet. After driving all those miles in the snow, we were in serious need of at least a rinse.

And this one gave you so much time for your quarter that we did the entire RV and car for way less than \$10. Highly recommended.



Debbie atop the rig

That's me up on top, as our home and auto are fed into the gaping maw of the car wash.

We left impressive remnants of various other states on the ground, as you can see below.



What was surprising was the number of people washing their cars on Christmas Day-- there was a steady stream of them and they didn't seem like loners or serial killers or other people you expect to have nothing better to do on Christmas.



Kind of like us, I guess.

But driving on Christmas has the advantage of far less traffic than usual, which made our approach to Austin a real breeze, even on Highway 183 (old timers will remember the "Pray for me, I drive 183" bumper stickers). And next thing you know, we're ensconced behind Digital Vehicles International World Headquarters once again.

It's funny...when I was little, I loved to watch Top Cat, a cartoon about a cat who lived in a garbage can in an alley. I always thought it



was neat that he was able to get all his stuff in that garbage can and still have room to live. And here I am, basically living in a can in an alley. Evidently TV really is a bad influence on impressionable young minds. •

BY THE NUMBERS

CAMPSITE LOG

Arrival	Mile-age	Days	Rate	Total	Name	City
12/12/04	15,823	1	\$17.39	\$17.39	Wendover KOA	Wendover, NV
12/13/04	15,956	8	\$23.57	\$188.56	Ardell Brown's Quial Run RV Park	Sandy, UT
12/21/04	16,178	2	\$17.00	\$34.00	Portal RV Park	Moab, UT
12/23/04	16,685	1	\$27.65	\$27.65	Santa Rosa Campground	Santa Rosa, NM
12/24/04	17,005	1	\$23.87	\$23.87	Texas RV Park of Big Spring	Big Spring, TX
12/25/04	17,296	61	\$0.00	\$0.00	Digital Vehicles	Austin, TX

DIESEL LOG

Date	Mileage	Total	Gallons	Price	Name	City
12/12/04	15,416	\$139.36	75.37	\$1.85	Baldini's Blue	Sparks, NV
12/21/04	15,991	\$136.93	65.55	\$2.09	Flying J	Springville, UT
12/23/04	16,683	\$93.46	46.75	\$2.00	Love's	Santa Rosa, NM
12/24/04	17,001	\$126.75	66.74	\$1.90	TA TravelCenters of America	Big Spring, TX