

Is this the way to Santa Fe ?

Or ... Do YOU know the way to Santa Fe ?

Introduction

Manana Airlines, tours owned & operated by 'Tours by Bill' out of the cloud in McK, TX, received inquiry for price to carry two rich socialites to New Mexico locations for Christmas Holiday with selected prearranged stops. After considerable negotiations, a big deal was eventually reached. Master & commander, pilot, co-conspirator & driver Bill would agree to transport tc (travelling companions) Virginia (VA) & son West Virginia (WV) to selected locations in NM & safe passage back to departing point.

22 December 2014

Prelude: **I Can't wait to get on the road again ...**

11:00 pm

The rough plans took weeks ironing out wrinkles & zero hour is approaching within the 24-hour window of criticality. WV was to arrive by air from the frigid north country late this night but things got changed wrt flights & times too many times I couldn't keep up. The Plan was overnight at the cloud for an early morning departure with a plan to mount the cargo carrier atop the ship for am loading. This didn't exactly happen as planned as it is raining & we encountered the first setback. Only minor but navigable.

23 December

Day I: McK

Hi Oh Silver ... AWAY !!

7:48 am.

It is raining and departure from gate is pushed back for the delay. It was discovered that the rooftop cargo carrier was locked & could not be opened. The keys would not fit the lock so the box could not be opened. The wrong set of keys were taken from the equipment locker in Houston. Adjustments were made again on the fly.

We completed carefully loading Silver, assumed seats & pulled away from the gate. While taxiing out of town, we did an about face (think 180 degree course change for now) & returned to the terminal for the hard atlas of the US. As pilot & director of this operation/mission, I was NOT going to rely on an electronic gizmo (aka GPS) that could fail for any number of bad reasons up to & including ... dead battery, a short circuit anywhere (think misplaced drop of water), most probably at the WORST time, electromagnetic pulse (EMP) or a transient electrical surge for that matter & let's not forget 'operator error'. Op Err might include amongst numerous failure modes up to reading the display incorrectly, incorrect data on the map proper & low lighting. There may be more.

Maps, on the other hand, can be lost granted but seldom 'fail' outright.

With map in hand, VA assumes the position of Navigator while WV sleeps scrunched in the back seat.

8:11 am

380 West. Traffic moving in a well behaved fashion. Light drizzle as we gather speed, drink coffee & discuss a breakfast stop.

8:48 am

We stop for breakfast at local Waffle House at 380 & I-35. Service is slow. We are about ready to file complaint or just leave but then our orders arrives.

10:01 am

Back on the road again & settle in for a long stretch this time. Pass Decatur 287 NW towards Wichita Falls.

11:05 am

We stop at Wichita Falls for fuel & fizz. The wind is biting & a bitter cold penetrating to the bone. We remount & continue on 287 passing signs with familiar names for towns along the HH100 course. Burkburnett, Iowa Park & Verona all with fans lining the streets, waving & cheering. It was warm then & next August will be time to ride again in the heat hotter than ...

2:18 pm

We pass thru countless small towns and are forced to slow down for speed traps abound. Childress, Memphis & Goodnight all would be interesting stops had we the time, money & desire. We end up stopping at a rest area for stretches & pay careful attention to the warning sign.



2:36 pm

Pick up I-40 due west out of Amarillo. Reading signs & billboards, taking & recording hourly readings to document progress. Between exits, signs warn of 'severe crosswinds'. They are spot on. Most noticeable while passing large trucks. The window on the drivers side vibrates from the wind & in the 'wind shadow' of the semis the whistling stops. On occasion the wind buffets Silver suddenly & it is a mild struggle to maintain control at 122 km/h (75mph). Must stay alert & on task.

The wind blows small snow squalls which dart & drift ghost-like across the highway. They pop up suddenly and disappear before we can react or reach the next exit, we are thru them & carrying on.

Out of Texas ... into New Mexico

4:00/3:00 pm

We cross into the Mountain Time zone at the NM state line & stop at the first welcome station for fizzes. Everyone goes as stretches are welcome. Pilot & VA pick up *tourista* pamphlets & brochures for points & places of possible interest before resuming. The bitter wind continues to bite when given the chance. Change out of pilots.

5:49 pm

Dusk & getting dark so we change drivers. Fizzes because we are stopped & we can.

Al-b-q Final Approach & Landing: Safe & Intact

6:21 pm

Dark now & we hit Al-bq city limits. The city is lit up, a rank amateur has hung a fingernail moon & colors of the desert sunset are off of a post card. Traffic is more medium to light heavy but we manage to navigate on & land safely intact at hotel camp for the night. Still very cold as we unload.

7:44 pm

The [Owl Cafe](#) is right across the street by design of event planner & social orchestrator VA. The first of many eclectic places we will visit this trip. Signs highlight 'historic Route 66' and we are there. I am not all that hungry & the other two members of the party place an order. As we settle in for order delivery, a waitress, a rather large blonde unit with only a hint of a waddle, asks if we would mind moving & changing tables so she could use our table to accommodate an incoming party of ten (10). I immediately tell her no because we just got these seats warm. She catches on & plays along being ever the good sport.

We switch tables & she brings me a complimentary small bowl of pinto beans with green chiles. I think she likes me. Reminded me of home & the pintos I am now quite infamous for.

8:54 pm

Short walk across the street back to camp. Watch telly & read until overcome by sleep. Prayers of thanks for safe passage to this point & more for tomorrow.

end day I

Day II. Albuquerque

24 December

Christmas Eve

9:15 am

Struggling to reconvene, the room & bed are so uncommonly warm not at all like home at the cloud. It is well below 0° C outside, -7 I think. Our day plan is courtesy of VA with the highlight a ride on the Sandia Peak Tramway after stopping by her sister's house to pick up some ashes of her recently deceased Father to scatter at the top of the mountain where they would hike in years past. .

We drive by neighborhoods of adobes, low box-like houses that resemble Bedrock & the Flintstones meet Afghanistan. VA assures me these flat-roofed structures do not melt when it rains.

11:08 am

We tie up Silver at the Sandia Peak parking lot for the tram ride very close to the front gate. Kind of scary to get to park so close but we realize it IS Christmas eve & most SANE people are not looking to do such tourist-type activities the day before Christmas. In the frigid Arctic cold.

The facility is new, clean & nice as we get our tickets for the world's longest tram ride to the top of Sandia Peak. VA gives me some words of warning but my ears pop & the message was not received & lost. I have visions of rubbing butts with other passengers in the crowded car.



Going up, up & up ...



... up, up & up ...



... up, up & up ...



Photo bomb

We finally board for the less than 5 K (2.7 m) ride to the top. The car pilot/guide is an off-duty comedian & makes funnies on the way up as well as pointing out landmark rock formations to the left & right along the way up. Like Sandia is 'watermelon' in Spanish and at one point he informs us that we are 1000 ft (not converted to metric) above the ground & the door on the right side of the cabin will soon open for all the cowboy fans to get out. I think I laugh the loudest.

Arriving at the top it doesn't seem as cold. The wind is not blowing which helps so we proceed to a remote corner the observation deck where VA & WV produce the small tupperware container with the ashes of their Father & Grandfather, respectfully.



American Adventurer

I set up for the picture & start rapid firing because my fingers go a little numb quickly without the glove. As they poured out the ashes over the rail, an updraft caught them & some ended up on our coats which was unnerving at first but eventually made some allegorical sense. The session did produce one eerie stellar photo seen here that could be interpreted as Dad's spirit ascending to the heavens. An award winning shot for sure.



Preparing to release ashes ...



Final preps ...



Ashes rise spiritually to the Heavens ...

That duty done & duly documented, we find shelter for what WC Fields would call a 'libation.' The joint at the top is called High Finance and offered a great view as you can guess & perhaps have seen from earlier photos. However, the staff informs us that they CANNOT serve anything at the moment because the power had just gone out. We look at each other & wonder if Dad's ashes might have something to do with the outage.

So we find a table to collect & recollect a revised plan. A waiter comes over with a younger man introduced as the manager who promptly apologizes for the inconvenient loss of power. Being the ever smart Alec, I make a proposition to him that he CAN MAKE UP FOR IT with three shots for a dollar. He replies four (4) & remarkably agrees to the *ad hoc* proposal with the waiter taking our order. Three shots of Jagermeister it is in memory of ALL Dad's gone.

The shots show up and are certainly sippable. Which we do.

We settle up, wait for the next tram car to head down mountain. I start chatting it up with an older couple from Minnesota. 'Are there really a thousand lakes?'



Looking down starting descent

We arrive at the bottom looking up one last time in amazement before pointing Silver to the next camp as check-in time has arrived.

But before, from here, we drop WV off at the Aunt's while the remaining entourage makes way to the next camp near Old Town for the Holiest of Nights celebrations & activities.

3:18 pm

We arrive & settle quickly making a plan before setting out on foot to the square in Old Town. It is cold but a short walk keeps things warmer but only slightly. We are bundled & layered to battle the elements this night

4:29 pm

The Plan was to swing by San Felipe de Neri to check & get the Mass schedule for this night before strolling about Historic Old Town. We found the Church off the square & inquiring inside to an usher discovered Mass was at 5:00. Fortune has smiled upon us! We found prime seats closer to the back in case of a fire & settled quietly waiting for Mass to begin.

Mass & Old Town

4:46 pm

The nave of the church [San Felipe de Neri](#) was explored visually from our seats absorbing in the great depth & details. Compact & architecturally from a different period, the ceiling very high, walls & adornments gravitating glances in admiration. The Stations of the Cross were mosaics of spectacular detail and the rest of the available seats were rapidly filled.



San Felipe de Neri



Luminaria ... ALL over



Tourista on the plaza

5:02 pm

Mass begins with the processional. The ceremony & Eucharist are of course familiar & there is a warmth & power generating from those assembled.

Returning to the pew after Communion, I catch a glimpse of VA out of the pew chasing down the family that was sitting in front of us now sneaking out right after Communion with something in her hand. I see her reach the father & hand him the object. No alarms going off. Yet.

Arriving at my seat, however, I realize very quickly that she has given MY hat & gloves to the stranger. This is unacceptable so thinking AND more importantly ACTING quickly, I manage to reach the family heading out & start questioning the man. To abbreviate the story as much as possible, I find out that he passed the items to an usher & he points her out. She has my hat & gloves & this particular crisis is averted. Thank you God.

I am thinking strolling Historic Old Town this night would have been a very short exercise without these necessary comfort items & I thank God again officially & forgive VA for her oversight & momentary lapse.

6:15 pm

Mass is over & we are strolling the square outside of the little church. There are literally THOUSANDS of luminarias, brown paper bags with bottoms filled with sand for weight & votive candles lit inside of them. The site is spectacular the photos not doing the scene full justice. VA enlightens me that this is done only once a year & this is the night to light the way for Jesus. There are a lot of sidebars going on such as a live Nativity scene going on in another venue outside of the church. Pictures taken a few of which are posted here save your correspondent hundreds of words so enjoy them.

6:59 pm

It is afterall still a bit nippy & Yours truly mentions to VA a hot chocolate or *champurrada* would be not only fitting but tasty, nice & comforting. I inquire at two places to receive only the blankest of stares. We decide to do an informal survey of peeps on the street asking ten (10) complete total strangers in a random sample if they knew of this traditional festive Mexican Holiday beverage.

I explain my knowledge & history to my tc and we seek out & make inquiry to the first subject. Nope. Second thru 7 also ignorant. Number 8 is an older women having a smoke break in an alley that perhaps thought I had other intentions that HAD HEARD of *champurrada* and gave us a place to try back on San Felipe.

After thanking & PRAISING her, we back track to the place only to find *nada*. I am ready to go back, find the beast, take the cigarette butt & grind it out on her forehead but VA restrains me.

Number 9 sends us to another place and we are at about strike six. The last & number ten (10) surveyed heard of it but came across as nearly clueless so we wrapped up the survey with 15% of citizenary responding 'yes' which I found odd since this WAS afterall NEW Mexico but VA informed me that each year there was a frantic fight & race with Mississippi for the 50th spot on the list of the dumbest state.

Seeking shelter from the cold now & longing for a 'libation', VA directs the tour to a place called High Noon. Another eclectic joint, we get to the bar & order a beverage. The barmaid, a cutie that I extend the survey with, is also a graduate of local public schools but brought two longnecks & made change without incident.

We finish, walk a bit more taking in the lights on the ground before walking back to the camp.

Merry Christmas to all & to all a good night.

end day II

Day III. Albuquerque

December 25

Christmas day

9:49 am

A slow, down day for all the obvious reasons. We are to gather & reconvene at 4:00 pm at sister's house for planned Christmas family gathering in the afternoon.

But first, we decide a hike down near the Rio Grande running thru town would be a good, safe activity. It is crisp, clear & sunny as we park near the trailhead to work off the hotel's complimentary breakfast.

See the photos & captions and then we move on to this large family gathering. Some members are missing & one is totally unaccounted for. We stopped on a side tour at the subject MIA apt & the vehicle was there but no response to knocks so we left a brief note with some instructions on the door.



Rio Grande river



VA finds cattail



VA on the path ... First you see her ...



... then you don't !!

We are early so we decide to drop in for a brief visit with the Turtle Lady which turned into an experience worth noting. A sign welcomes & warns visitors to Beware of Attack Turtle. Only one turtle is inside in a large tank which we assist in the movement to the spot where the Christmas tree was. As a Holiday gesture, I take the tree outside & remove the two LONG strings of lights while the ladies yak. It worked for me. At the time. For a while.

We depart & resume the tour of the immediate area & hood around Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School she attended & VA's alma mater, U of New Mexico. We stop into a quaint looking pub on Nob Hill by the name [Two Fools Tavern](#). Of all places imagine that ?

Ordering a couple pints of the local micros, we break to soak up the ambience before moving on to the next activity.

A New Camp, New problems

3:15 pm

We depart Two Fools for the next camp & a problem develops which turns into a story & a half. After a cursory initial inspection of the suite, it was discovered that there was not only no refrigerator but also no microwave. We called the front desk & the innkeeper said one could be supplied for \$20 (US). This was unacceptable & we negotiate a second suite that we were assured had a refrigerator AND a microwave. We had bags of microwave popcorn remaining & it is a great snack or MRE under such circumstances.

We moved gear to the new suite & once again no appliances. The eff bombs were going off and long story short, we left premises after a brief 'negotiation' session, borderline argument with the ugly innkeeper to the camp of the night before that had the SAME rooms open & available. DONE. The innkeeper was most likely upset having to work Christmas I am thinking and we left slightly irate but unscathed.

4:10 pm

We arrive at VA sister's place for the family dinner & the clan slowly gathers. It goes pretty smooth. Interesting to see other siblings for physical similarities, manners & attitudes.

6:33 pm

VA & I leave the party leaving WV to spend night there with Auntie & cousins. Weaving Silver thru dark neighborhoods, we arrive at another party at the house of friends of VA. Food, drinks & gifts before venturing back into the dark towards camp.

9:19 pm

We settle into camp & enjoy popcorn, fruit, nuts & adult beverages ... beer & M & coke.

end day III

Day IV. Albuquerque

December 26

Moving Day

9:05 am

We rally early, more or less, and find Silver dusted with a light covering of snow. Very cold once again as we load Silver.



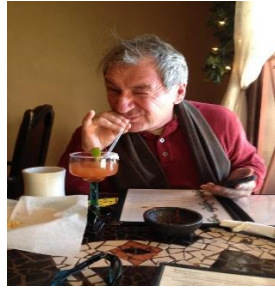
10:11 am

We find our way back to Old Town to check out Steadfast Soldiers, a shoppe specializing in miniature toy soldiers. Finding the sign, it says hours are 10:00 am til whatever but it is NOT open. A minor setback so we seek shelter to retool the plan. We make way seeking warmth finding the Church Street Café on the short side street we walked the night before.

The history of the [Church Street Cafe](#) is fully documented & the interesting story is found on the cover of the menu. The building has been in the Ruiz family since it was built in 1706 one of the first such buildings in Albque. The walls are nearly 1 (one) meter thick (2 feet actually) & one almost expects a Hobbit to poke its head out of one of the little nooks or crannies inside the surprisingly large interior of the building. But use the link to read the full story without the risk of memory errors by Bill.



Breakfast bowl of posole



Sampling Bloody Maria



Chips & salsa, coffee & cocktail

We swing by Auntie's to pick up WV before heading out to Santa Fe. VA knows the way out of town so a couple of quick turns, a few short exits, botta-bing, botta boom & we are on Interstate 25 for the short drive North to Santa Fe. The beverage cart barely gets thru the cabin with cocktails & we are at the city limits.

11:01 am

A requested stop was the National Cemetery to visit a Grandmother's grave. It is cold & snow flurries turn into a small light squall. We locate the general area for the grave & I remain with the vehicle while VA & WV trudge off down a long row of identical white markers the sheer numbers of which are staggering. To think of all the people that are there, why they are there is truly humbling I think while I watch & wait for their return. I say a prayer for the Dead & all of the sacrifices that each of them made in all likelihood long forgotten except by immediate families. I find it highly appropriate that someone, yours truly, remembers enough to say thanks. We all say thanks and may God rest & Bless their souls.



Signs outside the Admin bldg



The loved one's grave is located



Lone grave with a Christmas wreath

12:58 pm

VA takes the navigational lead as we head out of the National Cemetery to the Plaza area of Downtown Santa Fe for some look sees & sight seeing.

With a low degree of difficulty, we locate suitable parking and start out on foot for our first site to see [The Cathedral Basilica of St Francis of Assisi](#). It is a relief inside immediately finding shelter from the biting wind. There are a number of other *touristas* milling around the nave while some just sit in the vast interior. It's high vaulted ceiling, both the number & beauty of the adornments are stunning & staggering.



Front facade of Cathedral

There is a side chapel off the main altar that we move to for a closer look. There is a large, life size crucifix Biblically correct showing all of the wounds of Christ & there is a photo taken. I am sure that there are many other pictures on the virtual tour YOU can take from the link posted earlier.



Alter of side chapel with artifacts



Life size crucifix with wounds



Large oil painting

Every aspect of the Cathedral interior is visually overwhelming and there is a gift shop which is what it is & an excellent opportunity for the church & diocese to generate revenue and cash flow.

We head out once again braving the elements looking for some fuel or sustenance. VA knows a place & after a failed first attempt due to a long wait line we find a place serving fast Mexican food. I suddenly lose my appetite at the prospect of an *enchilada* or *borrito*. I think it has something to do with the 'average' presentation of such things. More often than not TO ME they look like someone got sick & hurled onto a large plate. Very easy to steer away for me anyway. I cannot recall ever being truly hungry enough to enjoy such a mess.

Anyway, my two to enjoy their meals with *frio cervaza* & we head back out into the elements continuing the self-directed tour on foot skirting the square. VA axes me if I would like to go on the periphery & look at the local Indians selling jewelry & I decline. It is altogether too cold to stroll, browse & 'window shop' for this camper this day.

We find our way to our next *tourista* stop [The Loretto Chapel](#) and the famous mysterious staircase. The chapel is considerably smaller than the cathedral so the crowd seems larger but it is in all likelihood the same. Like us, probably many of the same people.



Fascade of Loretto Chapel

Again, the inside of the chapel is just incredible & the focal staircase is all it is advertised to be and that is truly remarkable. The link will allow you to see for yourself so knock yourself out.

On the way out, surprise surprise, the traffic flow is routed thru a very impressive gift shop. I mean this huge revenue fountain is like a Home Depot for things religious & artifacts. You name it, crosses, crucifixes, rosaries, pictures, calendars on & on. I don't see anything I cannot live without so we move on to the next camp as it is past 4:00 & the next check in time.



Main Altar in the Chapel



Statue & two Stations of the Cross



Legendary stairway



Statuary in Loretto Chapel



Crosses in the gift shop



Rosaries at the low \$ end



Rosaries at the high \$\$\$ end

4:17 pm

VA once again takes the navigational lead past the State Capital complex of buildings which are impressive to note that they are smaller & certainly not opulent on a grandiose scale of some state capitals visited by previously by your correspondent.

4:35 pm

The [Silver Saddle](#) was a very cool little motel on the side of historic Route 66. We haven't seen such klitsch or quirky since leaving Albuquerque as we check in making small talk with the innkeeper on duty a very pleasant young lady who shows me to the Wyatt Earp room & my tc to theirs. My room has an old time quilt, a Route 66 road sign & pictures of fifties-era cars, photos, magazines and was comfortably cozy. A nice flat screen tv, cable, a refrigerator AND a microwave. EVERYTHING this wayward traveller could possibly ax for. The rooms have REAL KEYS not the plastic card keys that have become ubiquitous.

VA enlightens us to Jackalope, a place located next door, easy walking distance, that she describes as a healthy cross between a flea market & a yard sale. More quirk.



Tour owner operator with Jackalope

Her description is once again spot on and we stroll browsing or window shopping only to have the adventure curtailed with closing time at 5:00. At 4:45 they make the first announcement & I have just discovered the section of beads, stones & minerals for jewelry making. Again I look carefully seeing nothing I can't live without. I do however see some colored beads unlike any I have seen recently at NY6 in Allen. My bead & jewelry HQ close to home.

5:09 pm

Back at the Silver Saddle making a plan for food. Pizza is agreeable to all so we place an order for delivery.

5:37 pm

Dinner arrives & we eat in the Bat Masterson room. I retire to Wyatt Earp to watch the telly, glance at the map & determine a departure time for am.

end day IV

Day V. Santa Fe

December 27

Travel: Departure & Head for Home

6:15 am

The previous night we had agreed to a 7:00 liftoff but I am up early to shower & make preps. I get the layers of clothing on & head up to the front office/front desk for some coffee & the continental breakfast.

I was under the impression & told that the office opened at 6:00 am for breakfast however when I arrived the sign said 7:30. Oops. Someone will face the firing squad. Later.

A lady inside takes pity & opens the door for me. She says its OK for me to stay as the coffee is made & while she had planned to go to the grocery store for some supplies, she was the owner & could make arrangements for staff to go in later so make myself at home. Which is one set of directions I can & always easily follow. To the letter.

I wait for the rest of the party to reconvene while I visit with the owner chatting it up. We discuss airbandb & she gives me another URL for a similar place called vacation rentals by (home) owner. Very cool & fits nicely into my longer range plans.

She also tells me that she went up to Taos (NM) for Christmas. Seems there is an ancient Indian celebration there that has been going on for since ancieny times. Big bonfires, Native Indians dancing in the cold night with only light costumes for hours. Tours of the pueblos and NO PICTURES. I start to wonder to self if & how many such local celebrations go on every year, year after year, that are very interesting & very cool that most NEVER even HEAR about. I am thinking sad but a true fact of life & how cool it would be to do such a different activity every year.

WV enters the main office so I know things are moving & towards departure but the 7:00 start isn't going to happen. The command decision is made for a 7:30 lift-off and she heads back with chow to inform VA.

LIFT-OFF SANTA FE

7:38 am

We nose Silver away from the gate after giving her sufficient time to warm the cabin. It is bitter cold once again but Silver provides comfort as well the means to get out of town & start the journey home.

8:11 am

Traffic is light & the cabin is very quiet for miles. The country side is desolate, barren & flat. The sun shines brightly and as far as one can see in any direction there is next to nothing. No houses, no buildings or no significant signs of life. I do see a group of wild horses just standing their coats long & uneven a stark chestnut brown in contrast against the white snow, dark greens of the low scrub vegetation and darker shadows of the small hills. The outside temperature is -12° C.



miles & miles ...



miles & miles ...

9:08 am

We reach Clines Corner & pick up I-40 & head due east towards Amarillo. Taking & recording mileages, rates of speed, weather conditions and such make the time seem to go faster & also break the boredom & monotony of such long overland travel.

Traffic picks up and the temperature outside slowly warms. We are now dropping steadily in elevation & we pass through fog which is actually the clouds seen earlier in the morning.

1:14 pm

We reach Amarillo and take on fuel as well as some sustenance as nearly all party members are famished. The remaining three (3) pieces of pizza from the night before were consumed at altitude & on the fly. The light snacks in the cooler & dry bag are by now being severely depleted & not getting the job done.

Skirting Amarillo, we find I-27 South & we are now headed towards the next big destination town of Lubbock.

SIDE TRIP TO EARTH

2:27 pm

Intermediate destination before reaching Lubbock on I-27 was Plainview where we would get off the beaten path of the interstate & head due west on state highway 70 to a place called Earth. The SMALL town for photo ops & to only say we went there. The side trip cost us about an hour but see accompanying photos with captions from Earth & our explorations there before blasting off again.



Approaching Earth...



American explorer lands in Earth



America adventuress poses at Earth



Gathering samples ...



Displaying samples from Earth ...



Signs of intelligent life on Earth



There IS water in Earth



And of course a fire department

3:59 pm

We reach Lubbock having successfully escaped the gravitational pull of Earth. Lubbock probably gets a bad rap enough so I am not going to spend time continuing the bashing. S2 went to school there (TT Red Raider) & Emma from Oz at one time reigned & graced the Hub City streets.

6:18 pm

Heading east on 82/114 as dusk settles in on the highway with our intrepid travellers passing through smaller towns requiring slowing down for brief stretches that turn out to be not that bad for keeping the level of alertness elevated. As pilot during this time, I am finding fatigue increasing & attention drifting so when we stop for fuel which has gotten dangerously low for the first time we change drivers.

I rest but cannot sleep as VA has a very bad habit of not being smooth while driving with the steering wheel causing panic-type jerks of the wheel & vehicle. In fairness it gets better as tempers flair briefly also for the first time on the trip.

I amuse myself looking at the map in the dark with a flashlight & the overhead light for tracking progress. Earlier on VA as nav officer estimated arrival at 9:00-9:30 & that time is slowly approaching. It is 0 ° C outside.

8:20 pm

Continuing on 380 east after a change of drivers in Decatur. I circumnavigate Denton taking the loop around the city to the north & it cuts off at least half an hour of drive time.

9:14 pm

We berth at the cloud. Once inside the hanger, VA & WV grab bags & head out immediately. The trip is over & we are back from where we left. Safe, sound & each in the same piece. A prayer to St Christopher, patron saint of travellers, is in order for thanks at the conclusion of a safe journey.

SUMMARY

Final numbers: total distance: 2590.7 km (1610 miles). Fun ? yes. Do it again ? Likely but in a different season & making sure to take more time for more diverse & extended explorations.

*** *fini* ***