

# The Cuba Chronicles

## A Travel Log from an Altitude Training Camp in the Wilds of New Mexico

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These reports were originally sent to the racewalk@reed.edu mailing list, hence the odd format.

Wigglers;

First off, It's been called to my attention that I've made no effort to tell the world I'm going to be conducting one of my World Class clinics in conjunction with the National 10km in Niagara Falls in July. Details on my web site at surf.to/worldclass. Secondly, what's been going on in my life... Several months ago when Mike Rohl called and asked if I'd like to join him for a high-altitude training camp outside Albuquerque, the "What the Hell, Why Not?" side of my brain pistol-whipped the rational side and I agreed to the deal": 5 weeks living in a free cabin at 8,500' outside of Cuba, NM with thrice weekly trips into Albuquerque to get in our quality speed work at a more reasonable elevation.

When Mike called from Albuquerque a few weeks before my arrival with the news that the cabin was stilled snowed in and he was staying with his saint of a wife Michelle and their three kids at Judy Climer's house "for a while" it still didn't register that this was doomed to be another "we'll laugh about this in 20 years" Rohl/McGovern racewalking fiasco...

Mike and family finally gave up on the original cabin last week and rented a somewhat smaller, lime green two bed/1bath box plunked down in the middle of a muddy cow flop and gopher hole ridden field somewhere in the Jemez Mountains above the non-town of Cuba, NM. We've been there about a week now, and if you can imagine the clown-car scenario of driving 90 minutes each way to Albuquerque to train with 3 adults, 2 kids and an infant crammed into Ford Festiva, you'll soon realize this ain't the way Daniel Garcia's doing things...

We are among the unwashed; the Other Half: National Team athletes who've sinned against The System by choosing to train anywhere but Chula Vista. The athletes who DON'T get \$12,000 from the National Office for their European races. The athletes who Elaine Ward's kind efforts DON'T touch. But heck, we're training hard, getting strong and having fun! I'll have to get the really embarrassing stuff vetted by Mike and Michelle first, but I'll try to keep you posted...

DMcG

Wigglers;

Baby sitting is the greatest: All the fun of having kids without the mess. Mike and Michelle went out to the National 20km/30km in Albany this weekend, leaving me with Sebastian (4) and Molly (7). Sure, on Pepsi and Cap'n Crunch they can get a little nuts, but my bowl is a lot bigger than theirs, so I was well prepared for the task.

As I told Mike when he got back, the kids were very well behaved all weekend--of course without any rules it's easy to be "good." Swimming in the fountain at the zoo? Fine with me (just don't try to steal any of the change at the bottom, Molly.) Finger painting with ketchup and mustard? A boy's gotta do what a boy's gotta do, Seb. It'll take weeks of de-programming now to get them to act like human kids in public now, but at least I had fun. (Sorry Mike and Michelle...)

The experience has reinforced a well-known truth: it's damn hard to train when you have kids. Mike and Michelle have done pretty well working a tag-team to get their training in while the other spouse is watching the kids. No such luck for me as I played single parent all weekend. Despite help from Phyllis Kissinger and Steve Petrakis, I couldn't squeeze in a workout on Saturday. With a 5 km race on Sunday morning I didn't sweat the missed training, especially considering a good 20 km workout Sunday afternoon (after a day with the dinosaurs at the Natural History Museum), but I "only" got in 121 km this week (in 5 days of training) because of it.

Mike and Michelle returned from Albany on a 10:45 pm flight via Cleveland and Colorado Springs. After picking up the sleeping kids from the baby sitter we didn't get on the road back up to Cuba until after midnight. Even with Taco Bell long closed, we didn't get back to the cabin until 1:45. Good thing Michelle had her hands full with the baby, Ayla. After the long car ride, Mike was the first to charge into the bathroom so it was he who found the dead mouse floating in the toilet. Not the kind of thing Michelle or the kids needed to see at two in the morning. I'm generally not concerned about rodents, but for some reason now I can't stop thinking "Hanta Virus" every time I get the slightest sniffle or itch.

Today (Monday) was a productive day. It was a scheduled day off training, so the laundry and shopping got done, and the 400lbs. of mud clinging to the wheel wells of the Festiva got washed off at the do it yourself car wash. We even had time to fit in burritos (big enough to figure in the plot of "Titanic II" if it ever comes to fruition...) at one of the three Mexican Restaurants in Cuba (the only kind of restaurant there is in Cuba.) The reason for the splurge? Cash! Mike had given me an ATM card before heading out for the weekend. Of course when there's only \$13.27 in the account they don't tend to work very well, so I lived on credit cards for the weekend, which is my habit anyway. Problem is, Taco Bell, the camel ride at the zoo, and the bums at the I-25 offramp at Rio Grande Blvd. don't take American Express. Mike sent a check to his credit union last week, which they received, but didn't credit to his account, so today he called to give them hell and we finally had some greenbacks to play with.

After the day in Cuba (pop. about 750, I'm told) Michelle drove back up to the cabin with the kids while Mike and I opted to hike the 8 miles back. On the way down in the morning we had stopped at an interesting road cut to look at an uplifted coal seam bounded by Cretaceous sand- and siltstones, hoping to find some fossils. No such luck, but we did come up with a decidedly un-fossilized scorpion and some small bits of amber and some bigger gypsum crystals to add to our collection of malachite from the abandoned copper mine in the hills above the cabin. The hike back up gave us a chance to take in the big picture. We're walking on some pretty cool geology around here...

Beyond that, the only other news is that I'm making some pretty good progress writing my next book during my non-training time here. I've been trying to read a biography of Che Guevarra in Spanish (this is Cuba afterall...) but it's been such slow going that writing has been an easier diversion.

OK... ¡Viva Cuba! ¡Viva Che! Y ¡Viva Taco Bell!

DMcG

Wigglers;

I woke up with my back killing me again. The mattress I've been sleeping on must have had a past life as support for a 300 lb. midget, because the middle of it is so caved in you could lose a Buick in the depression. I swear that even the mattress springs are bent away from the black hole that my sacroiliac settles into every night. Thinking I found a solution to my problem, this morning I pulled the shelf down from my closet to put under the middle of the mattress. As is always the case, it seemed like a good idea at the time. The result, however, was a two-inch layer of mouse crap falling into my open duffle bag and all over my clothes. I'm so glad we did the laundry yesterday...

Training is still going well for all. Yesterday was an easy day for Mike and I: 10 miles on a hilly but relatively traffic-free course outside of Cuba, while Michelle walked a 6-miler on the Cuba High School track in 46:47 (at 6,900 ft.!) Afterwards we packed the kids in the Festiva and drove to Bandelier National Monument to see the Anasazi cliff dwellings. Against the advice of the National Forest Rangers down in Cuba, we took a "short cut" over the mountain to get there. About two miles past our cabin, the road becomes a dirt track, then a heavily rutted, curvy, undulating mudslide straight out of a Jeep Cherokee commercial. But, as I kept reassuring Mike, the 1987 Ford Festiva was specially made for this \$#!+, so gun it! We did, in fact make it, but something must have shaken loose somewhere because now the headlights don't work, and there's an ugly clicking sound coming from under the hood and the alternator light goes on every time you try to turn the headlights on. Michelle seems kind of worried, but we really don't do much driving at night anyway...

Today (Wednesday, I think...) Mike and I headed down to the UNM track (5,160' for anyone keeping score...) for 10-12 x 1 km. Mike planned on 4:35-4:25/km, I shot for 4:15 or so since I did them that fast two years ago (a few weeks before walking 1:24:29...) Felt fine through 6, but then the lungs and legs started going and I fell back to 4:20s. Looks like another 1:24 20km is out of the question, but with Nationals in New Orleans this time around, pure speed isn't going to be the problem--the ability to tough it out in lousy conditions is going to be the key, and walking repeat kms on Cap'n Crunch and Taco Bell ain't easy. Mike ended with a 4:15 without puking or anything, so he's going to be ready for a good 20km soon...

We loaded up on another 6 pack of Gorditas (to go) on the way back up to Cuba. I was having a great time watching Mike spill salsa, soda, ground Chihuahua (or whatever's in them things...) all over himself while trying to shift and steer while woofing down an over-stuffed Gordita--until I realized he was wearing my T-Shirt! Hay Caramba! With friends like this... Most assuredly, more to follow...

DMcG

Wigglers;

If Tom Eastler or any of the other Mainers are out there, please, I want you to sell this idea to Stephen King: A racewalker notorious for barfing on his competitors gets his comeuppance when he becomes trapped in a horror house full of vomiting babies. Million seller...

Mike's sister rolled into town with her husband and four of their seven kids early Saturday morning. Mike, Michelle, the kids and I squeezed into a room at the Motel 76 in Albuquerque on Friday night since we would be walking in a handicapped 10K race Saturday morning. The rap, rap, rapping on our chamber door came before dawn. In piled Kelly and Bill; 6-month-old Sargon, already puking; 2 1/2-year-old Malcolm, seriously on the verge; along with Jarod (9) and Jewel (11). Normally, I'm only mildly claustrophobic--I like wide open spaces and I prefer to sit facing an open room, but I don't hyperventilate in crowded subways or huge road race starts. But seven kids and five adults in a small hotel room at 6:00 am definitely exceeds my tolerance envelope. I beat a hasty escape to the shower, then finished getting dressed in the parking lot to avoid the talking, crying, bed-bouncing throng.

With a 6:00 am wake-up call you'd think we'd get to the race on time. Luckily we didn't have to be there until about 8:30 or so. Since it was a handicapped race we were to start about 30 minutes after the first walkers, but when our time came Mike was pinning on his number, Michelle was off changing a diaper, and I--Mr. responsible it seems--was standing on the line wondering just when the heck we were going to get walking. When we finally did get rolling, Michelle and I took off together, with Mike walking a bit behind with local favorite Theron Kissinger. Mike never really got going, hobbled as he was by a visit to the Chiropractor From Hell the day before. We all got twisted up pretty badly, but Mike made the tragic mistake of telling the guy a whole laundry list of his problem areas so he got whacked a bit worse than Michelle and I. Mike dropped out at 5K while Michelle and I finished the very hilly course (5,300 ft. altitude) in 46:12. If she can avoid Dr. Mangele the rest of the trip, Michelle is going to tear things up this season!

Well, anyway, the real ugliness started at the Village Inn restaurant after the race. Luckily we had a big group at the restaurant, so I was spared most of the mess, but within 2 minutes of sitting down, little Malcolm began his Linda Blair impersonation. Have you ever made a milkshake without putting the lid all the way on the blender? Kind of looked like that. Fire hydrant projectile vomiting. Bill had the decency to remove the spewing tyke from the table, but then Mike had the brilliant idea to head straight back to the cabin after lunch. So here I am, back in the two-bedroom cabin with five adults (and I mean that in a purely chronological sense...) and seven kids, two of them puking at every opportunity, with two others soiling diapers at a torrid pace. Amoebas have the right idea: when you're ready to pass on your genes just split yourself down the middle and call it a day. This baby thing is surely God's revenge...

Non-sequiter of the day: I went down to Cuba this morning to call my mom for Mother's Day and found that: 1.) She's moved, leaving no forwarding address or number. 2.) She's in Italy for 10 days, according to my brother. You'd think she'd tell me these things... Now I know where I get my tremendous sense of responsibility and wanderlust from...

Well, anyway, the story ends well... The house guests are gone, and it seems that Cuba is a test market for Tequila, a new tequila- and lime-flavored beer put out by our fine friends at Anheuser Busch. After a very long walk (our favorite chronically incorrect forest ranger told us it was 7 miles to the end of Old Rte. 44--we turned around on our workout at 10 miles) we had 20 miles of precipitated sweat salt on our lips--a set up for the perfect post-workout combo: tequila, lime, salt, AND beer. It's the little things in life that give us the most pleasure and make the rest of it all worth while, isn't it folks? Still to come: The assault on Cabezón

DMcG

Wigglers;

Michelle emasculated us again... Mike and I were pretty happy with our 12 x 800 meter workout yesterday. Walking at the Cuba High track (7,000 ft.) I was around 3:29-3:26 for each with 2 minutes rest and Mike was within a second or two on every repeat. Michelle did 10 x 800 today in 3:26-3:18. Our fragile male egos are beyond bruised at this point...

To reaffirm our manhood, Mike and I threw Michelle and the kids into the Festiva after her workout and took of for San Luis Cabezón; a 2,000 ft. volcanic neck 20 miles south of Cuba. Visible for miles, El Cabezón is a slightly smaller version of Wyoming's Devil's Tower. Both are huge, columnar-jointed basalt monoliths that are all but impossible to climb without technical gear (by which I mean pitons and climbing ropes, NOT Teva flip-flops and New Balance racewalking shoes...)



El Cabezón

Situated on BLM lands, the Cabezón is only accessible via the heavily rutted cattle range roads that criss-cross the area. After nearly circumnavigating the tower by bumpy car ride and by foot with Michelle and the kids, I saw a possible chink in its armor: Beyond the rubble field at its base the huge column is faced for 359 degrees around with an absolutely vertical, 1,000' high wall of unbroken stone, but in one spot only there was a deep cleft between two fractured columns that appeared to offer a way up.

After we all hiked for about two miles across the exposed batholith to the base of the rubble field, Mike and I set off alone while Michelle hiked back down to the car with the kids. Taking turns leading the way up the skree field, Mike and I each survived repeated small rockslides initiated by the leader's misplaced trust in a block of fallen basalt held in place against gravity's tug by nothing more than the thousands of other precarious blocks below it. Making it to the top of the field posed a far greater problem: climbing the vertical face before us (in inappropriate footwear) with no clear idea as to which of the infinite sequences of hand holds and foothold--if any--would lead to the top, and which would lead to dead ends. Or worse...

Although I've used my Texas for just about any activity imaginable--including yesterday afternoon's hike across the still knee-high snowfields on the trail to and around San Gregorio Lake--today's task crossed the threshold of the ridiculous. Especially when I consider that there's a perfectly serviceable pair of Merrell rock-climbing shoes under my bed in Mobile. But somehow the ever-adaptable flip-flops molded themselves to the task and we progressed ever higher within the fissure. About midway up the tower the gap we had been following ended at a narrow horizontal ledge that we were able to follow to gain access to a number of climbable crevices that I hoped would somehow get us to the top. But which one to take? Forced to cling so closely to the rock there was no way to step back to gain perspective. Our only option was to look ahead the few feet that we could, map out the various routes in our minds, and take the one that appeared to lead to a safe spot to rest while pondering the next route. Several junctures reinforced the disconcerting fact that the best route may also be the scariest. At one point approaching the top of the tower our options were to either climb a rubble-filled gap between two columns that blocked our view of the 1,000 ft. vertical drop to the rubble field below us, or to climb hand-over-hand on the outside of one of the same fractured columns. After a few failed attempts to keep our footing amid the rubble, it became obvious that despite the sheer drop to either side of us, the climb up the column was a safer route than the climb within. Our frightening choice was rewarded with access to a wide, solid platform which enabled us to map out the final route to the top: a

relatively easy path through a jumble of huge, maroon and black boulders. At the top of this last rock pile I was surprised to see the sun for the first time since we began our ascent: We were leaving the shadow of the huge tower and nearing the top. After scrambling over a few hundred cactus-strewn yards of sloping volcanic debris we reached the table-flat top of El Cabezón. Territorial swallows dive-bombed us, and gale-force wind sandblasted our eyes, but nothing could detract from our sense of accomplishment--or the incredible view of the valley far below us. After the obligatory childishness of heaving more than a few rocks off the top and watching disappear into nothingness, we headed back down. Knowing the way making the descent only a bit easier than the climb up. Once safely back at the Festiva we looked up at the huge mountain before us wondering just how in the hell we managed to make it up the thing. But, like everything in life, with persistence, there's always a way...

I often ask myself during or after such a feat why I'm still bothering with this racewalking nonsense when there are so many wild adventures out there to be had. Then I quickly realize that if not for racewalking I wouldn't be doing any of this stuff. Kind of gives meaning to tomorrow's 30km workout...

DMcG

Wigglers;

In the course of tracking down parts for a new potato cannon, Mike and I explored just about every business establishment in Cuba on Thursday morning. We were easily able to get all the plumbing supplies we needed from the owner of the local hardware store/pawn shop; the brother of the guy who rented us the cabin. It didn't seem to phase him in the least that a couple of grubby looking characters who were living for 6 weeks in his brother's place were rustling up an assortment of PCV pipes, threaded end caps and step-down pipe connectors. He probably just figured we flushed an over-sized rodent down the john and were repairing the ensuing damage...

Anyway, by happenstance we came across the Chiropractor/Bail Bondsman/Bounty Hunter's office. Michelle told us that she had seen a small chiropractor's sign on the sidewalk in front of one of the buildings on "Main Street" last week, but we couldn't find the place again. After Dr. Mengele beat the crap out of us last week we were ready to try anything, but it didn't dawn on us to look in the Bail Bonds office. With an interesting collection of wanted posters and Polaroid shots of bail jumpers on the walls, we were ready for just about anything, but this guy actually turned out to be a real pro. He lives and works in the spa town of Jemez Springs, about 60 miles south of here, but takes the trip up to Cuba once a week to work on the large local population of Navajo and Jicarilla Apache indians who mangle themselves nightly on Rte. 44--one of the deadliest highways in the nation in terms of DWI-related auto accidents.

All refreshed after a great adjustment, we should've followed things up with a great group workout, but with temperatures in the 30s in Cuba, and a heavy snow storm hitting the cabin, we decided to fire up the backyard barbecue, settle in with a six of Tequila and enjoy the Seinfeld marathon preceeding the (highly disappointing) final episode.

DMcG

Dateline: Cuba, New Mexico

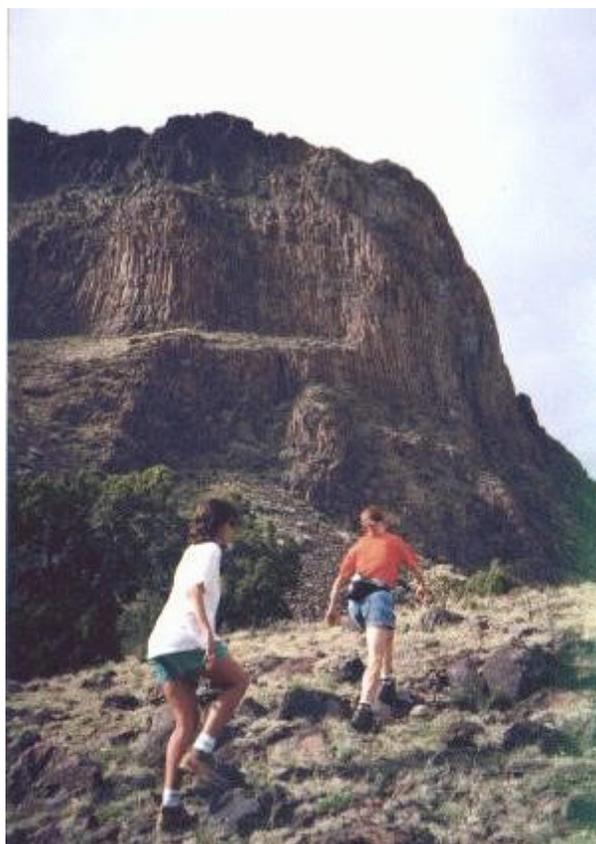
Special Report by Mo Roberts

Spinach burritos, how far would you go for 'em? Wait, did I mention they were *free* spinach burritos? It does make a difference you know, especially if you're hanging out with struggling national racewalk team members as I was this week. (And I DON'T mean struggling in the sense of training, but more about that later.)

With all of Dave and Mike's he-man talk of climbing Cabezón last week, Michelle and I were at once envious

and tired of hearing about it. On previous expeditions into the wilds of racewalking Dave had taught me to rock climb, sort of, and had tricked Michelle into day-long arduous hikes, sometimes into blizzards at 11,000'. So naturally she and I felt that after an easy day of distance (with Michelle lapping me on a one-mile loop-- and I prefer to think that's because she's that good, instead of I'm that bad) we were ready and able to tackle any climb those two kilometer-heads had mastered. With Mike relegated to baby duty, Dave, Michelle and I set off on our "Fearless Rock-Climbing Women" excellent adventure.

As Dave mentioned before, there's a pretty good little warm-up hike as you approach the tower, and you've barely even begun the climb from 6,000' to 8,000'. I call it a good warm-up now, but at the time the one of us who wasn't used to any altitude over sea level was huffin' and puffin' away like it was a hard interval workout.



Mo and Michelle on El Cabezòn

To make a long story get to the part about free burritos, let's just say the climb was everything Dave said it was, not that we ever doubted him. Michelle, who's done even less rock climbing than me--and believe me, that isn't saying much--was the picture of persistence even in the face of terror. Dave talked us up the really scary parts, and hung close to Michelle so as to not be blamed for ruining American women's racewalking, should anything go awry. When Michelle expressed concern that snakes or other mountain vermin might be dwelling in some of the cracks into which Dave urged us to stick our hands, it was Dave who assured us it was too early in the year for such worries. At one especially precarious juncture, only the knowledge that Mike had been stymied there for some time on the first trip gave Michelle and I the courage to scamper onward. Michelle came up with a useful mantra to help get her to the top, and she repeated it to herself loudly and often: Don't look down! Don't look down! And you know, I don't think she ever did.

Once at the top, Dave insisted we throw rocks at the tiny speck that seemed to be the car, but the rocks disappeared into the thin blue air long before reaching terra firma. The only other thing to do before the descent was sign the message pad provided to prove we'd made it.

That's where Michelle saw the note about free burritos. "Bring a rock from the top of Cabezòn to The

Laughing Lizard Cafe in Jemez Springs and get a free spinach burrito." You know, it doesn't really take much for any of this Cuba, NM training camp gang to take off on a tangent, and this note was more than enough to incite a trip to Jemez Springs. Where is Jemez Springs? How far away is it? When did we tell Mike we'd be back?? These were not questions we asked ourselves.

After a treacherous descent we set off in the general direction of where we believed Jemez Springs to be, giddy with our recent accomplishment and bearing rocks. Hours later, and well after dinner time, we arrived to find The Laughing Lizard decidedly closed. Our disappointment was topped only by our hunger and thirst and we wrote a pitiful note describing our travails and left it there at the cafe, anchored by a rock from the top. This tale could go on and on, but in the interest of letting everyone get back to true racewalking news (not that this isn't true! Every word is.) we somehow convinced Mike to accompany us on a return trip to Jemez the next day, determined to get those darned free spinach burritos. Not being one to speak out of school, let me just say that the return trip was preceded by a heavy-duty tempo workout by Dave and Mike (on whose coattails I tried to hang onto for 200m at a time) and a blistering 6 X 1,200m by Michelle who was unfazed by her mountain-climbing soreness from the moment she stepped onto the track at Cuba High until the moment she stepped off. The second trip yielded no spinach burritos either, but at least this time we scared up the manager, who bunks in the back, and were let in for a pit stop and a sympathetic ear. The manager, who had also climbed Cabezón-- hence the free burrito offer--swapped Cabezón stories with us for awhile and, thankfully, Michelle was out of earshot when he told us we were truly brave to attempt the ascent now, at the height of rattlesnake season. DAVE!!!

Mo

Wigglers;

What a week... The baby's got a snotty-nose baby cold, Michelle has a sore throat, and the kids and I have all been coughing up lung matter all week. As if the clouds of road dirt billowing through the car on a daily basis wasn't enough, the thick brown haze from the Mexican forest fires finally made its way to Albuquerque and Cuba on Tuesday. I was just starting to feel good again after a couple of rough days brought on by an overdose of liquid ferrous sulfate. We've been taking iron to boost our hemoglobin stores, but I've had a real sensitivity to any sort of mineral or fat-soluble vitamin supplement ever since my first bout of pill-induced hepatitis in 1991. So, even though I've been taking 1/2 of Mike's dosage, I started to feel really run down in the middle of last week. I figured out what was wrong by Saturday and started to feel good again by Monday after eliminating the liquid iron and switching to a higher dosage of iron-fortified Capn' Crunch. Then the skies turned brown...

And just in time turned for our deep-lung workouts, too. I went down to Albuquerque on Wednesday to drop Mo off at the airport so I took advantage of the lower elevation to do some repeat kilometers on the Bosque bicycle path at about 5,000 ft. Away from Cuba, I was able to get down to under 4:10 per kilometer, but even at the lower elevation I was sucking enough wind to get that smoke way down into my lungs. Michelle followed up on Thursday with a hard 7-miler in Cuba (at 7:42 per mile!) so now we're both coughing up loogies at near potato gun velocities.

And speaking of such sub-aerobic nonsense... The ground squirrel shoot in the front yard has become a daily ritual. Before anyone sends PETA after us, it's a fair fight. Those buggers can hear the 'taters whistle as they come screaming towards their arrogant little heads and they always get out of the way just in time. They're mocking us, they are... Time to call Bill Murray. Plastique explosives are the answer...



The Nuclear Spud Gun

Mike's cross-training has consisted almost entirely of changing flat tires on the Festiva. The things were pretty bald anyway, but the pre-Memorial Day crowd has descended upon the lake, apparently bouncing more than a few loose screws and nails out of the back of their trucks. Two flats in as many days. Now those same Memorial Day Warriors are busy draining the lake. Not sure what that's about. I'll let you know after Mike and I get back from the Nat'l 15km in Chicago this weekend. Time for bed... If I can get Mike away from the XXX channels...

DMcG

Wigglers;

Where the hell to start? The National 15K was a bust. I wound up somehow pulling a lower abdominal muscle during the race, which looks now like it may be a hernia, and Mike was kind of sluggish from this low-grade sore throat/coughing thing we all have so he wasn't able to go with the pack when they bolted at 5km. Curt and Tim really tore it up the last half of the race--impressive to watch...

I used a free ticket to get to Chicago. Mike spent \$400, so I definitely won, but Mike was able to upgrade to first on the way out while I had to "suffer" two rows behind him in coach. On the way back I was able to talk my way into an upgrade from Chicago to Atlanta, so I figured I'd try the same on the Atlanta-->Albuquerque leg. Flashing my Delta Gold Medallion card got me nowhere with the Big Burly Guy at the gate, so I tried again with the first-class flight attendant once we were settled on the plane. At first she said she couldn't do it since I was flying on a free ticket, but after telling her what a pain in the ass Mike would be for the whole flight if I wasn't sitting next to him to restrain him, she took my card and went back to the gate to arrange the upgrade. (Apparently Mike was already telling the pilots how to fly the plane from back there in seat 1D.) While these negotiations were going on in the aisle at the front of the first class cabin there was a growing rumble coming from a VERY drunk and irritated woman in the last row of first. Mike was dressed in jeans and an old PR\*Bar T-shirt so she assumed he belonged in steerage class and had somehow talked his way into first, and now the grubby guy with the beard, long hair and flip-flops was trying to do the same. I tried to ignore the growing commotion as she tried to whip the other passengers into a frenzy to get Mike and I

thrown back behind the blue curtain where we clearly belonged. (Good God, flip-flops in first class!!! What's the world coming to???)

Mike and I vainly tried to distract the other stewardess until the upgrade came through, but of course that only made things worse: Now we were the two "cute guys flirting with the stewardesses for upgrades" while she had to spend \$700 for her seat. At this point I knew something was up because nobody pays for first class these days with the ease of using free frequent-flier upgrades. (Incidentally, that's the second time this week Mike and I have been accused of being cute guys. The first time was from my girlfriend, Mo, but that still counts, eh?) Hiding behind my first-class glass of orange juice wasn't helping at all. The commotion from 4B was getting so bad and verbally abusive that I headed back to my coach seat--mainly to get out of the vituperative wench's sight, but also to ready my bags for my move up to first. Good move, because from 13C I didn't have to turn around or crane my neck to watch as the first of four Delta management team "red coats" boarded to settle things down in the 4th row. Her reaction was all too predictable, but since she was, after all, a full-fare first-class passenger, she probably still could have kept her seat. But alas, it wasn't to be... Her situation took a dramatic turn for the worse when she decided to call the pilot who had stepped in to help a f---ing A--hole loud enough for the guy in the rear coach John to hear. To his credit, the pilot remained very calm. And to their credit, so did the two enormous, shaved-headed Atlanta Police Department officers who pulled her and her luggage off the plane. 4C, on the other hand, remained decidedly un-calm, going so far as to shove the bigger of the two jack-booted thugs into the wall of the jetway as they dragged her off--which, by the way, adds resisting arrest and attacking a law enforcement officer to her already serious list of FAA violations.

Turns out Ms.\$700 Ticket was actually a Los Angeles travel agent returning from a first-class trip to London that had cost her a total of \$42--the cost of her US and British airport taxes. Over another orange juice (in the nice glasses) Mike and I were told that in addition to her likely time in the Fulton County jail, the woman who dared to screw with the two Cuban Racewalkers was to be permanently barred from Delta, possibly barred from flying at all by the FAA, and would in all likelihood have her travel agent's license revoked. I can't help but think, if Mike had had the class to wear a PowerBar T-shirt maybe none of this ever would have happened...

Yesterday (Tuesday) we all hiked the La Luz Trail or took the tram up to the 10,679 ft. Sandia Crest. It's an 8-mile hike each way, so the kids had to be trammed up by Michelle and down by Mike after they bailed out a mile into the hike up. Mike was supposed to meet us at the La Luz trailhead at 7:00 p.m. Of course he didn't show up, so after three hours the Bernalillo County, Albuquerque City and Forest Service Police became involved. They finally found him and the kids, safe and as unsound as usual, some 25 miles from where he was supposed to be. And, as usual, in his mind it wasn't his fault, but Michelle's and mine. Loads more details here, but I don't want to talk about it, and we're not talking to him, so I'll leave it at that.... Three more days...

DMcG

Wigglers;

Not a heck of a lot to report on this, the last day of camp. Mike and I have kissed and made up over the bailing on the hiking partners affair. We'll just chalk it up to a big misunderstanding and Mike's sometimes twisted logic--which can be kind of fun when things are going well but maddening when you're expecting and relying on him to be rational. 'nuff said.

We dropped Michelle and the kids off on Wednesday. The smoke and dirt in the air was getting to be too much for the kids, not to mention Michelle. Not that Mike and I are enjoying it much either. With a well-written medical excuse Michelle and the kids got off scott-free without having to pay \$150 in changed ticket fees. Some day I'll have to write that How to Scam the Airlines book...

Other than seeing 4/5 of the Rohl clan off, Wednesday was a complete waste of a day. The night before we stopped in at Victor Villardes' house to tell him we'd be moving out of his cabin soon. Mike has been desperate for cash for weeks since nobody in the State of New Mexico has been willing to cash the \$1,000 check Michelle won in the Cherry Creek 4-Miler last month. They even tried opening a savings account at the local bank but were turned down--something I've never heard of before, but this is Cuba afterall. Anyway, Mike was really counting on the \$150 security deposit to get him and the Festiva to New Orleans this weekend where I'm doing a clinic and he thinks he's going to meet me, but Villarde had to check the cabin first to make sure it was in the same sub-standard condition that it was when we moved in. It seems the last group of out-of-staters to rent the shack had used it as an elk hunting base camp, and unfortunately they got one. Seems it was a pretty cold day so the goofballs gutted the buck in the living room, leaving a Hitchcockian nightmare for Señor Villarde to scrub down. At least we knew what we were shooting for: a minimum of visible elk or other body parts and fluids on the walls and ceiling before vacating. With that in mind all we had to do was clean out most of the dirty laundry and get the potato slime off the front door and walls and we were in the clear. But then Molly and Sebby got hold of the PlayStation...

Sebby doesn't know what the heck to do with a video game--he doesn't even realize he's just watching a demo instead of really playing the Mortal Kombat game in the SaveWay--but he sure as hell knows he doesn't want Molly messing with him when he's got the controls in his hands. When Molly decided it was her turn to play Sebby tried running away with the control pad and actually did get clear to the other side of the room, but since the URF adapter only has three foot cord something had to give, and it did, so we had to give as well: a new URF adapter to the Villardes. Problem is, they had one of the old PlayStation models that you can't get parts for unless you happen to have snapped your URF adapter in Tokyo, so Mike and I Mall Walked for our workout Wednesday afternoon. The zit-faced geek at Circuit City tried to sell us the new adapter which looked nothing like the old one. Swore it would work (probably because he gets the commission whether it works or not) even though there couldn't be two more different looking pieces of video equipment. Ultimate Electronics didn't have it, but they had a Sony WebTV adapter that looked identical to the PlayStation adapter but cost twice as much. WalMart, where the Villardes got their PlayStation, "probably" only had the new adapters, but they might have had an old one, and it would have been really cheap if the girl could have found the key to the cabinet where they were locked up... And so on...

So anyway, back to Ultimate Electronics (where they greet you at the door with a free soda or coffee, or even a witty retort to a bad joke if you're lucky, but no cheap URF adapters) to finally settle on the \$40 adapter that began its life in the nimble hands of a \$40 a month child labor slave in Indonesia. Total time for the purchase: 'bout 3 hours, so no workout before the final drive through the desert to Cuba.

Turns out Villarde never bothered to check out the cabin while we were gone, so we probably could have gotten away with leaving the spuds to rot in the rain gutters afterall. After a final round of Tequizas and a good 10 hours of sleep we headed back down to Albuquerque. And I'm happy to report that although when travelling at 70 mph in a jam packed Festiva a 5-foot-long potato gun is as difficult to load as it sounds, it can easily hit the broad side of a grazing bovine from 50 yards, and when it does they let you know about it. I only did it once, because the bull I hit kind of acted like that supersonic potato actually stung a bit. Imagine our surprise: all the time we figured these cud chewers were made out of the same stuff as baseball gloves so how would we have known that a baseball-sized hunk of Nolan Ryan-speed potato would be enough to incite a fence-crashing stampede? Anyway, getting a bit longish here, and as said, not much has happened this week, so I'll close here. Overall it's been a pretty good training camp for all involved. We'll see how it all shakes out in New Orleans...

DMcG

p.s. If anyone has a W T D or Z in Taco Bell's "Find Godzilla and Win" game, we need to talk...

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