

Sprawl (Austin, part deux)

Austin, Texas, U.S.

—

June 1, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

We eventually managed to book a campsite at McKinney Falls State Park, which is just a few miles from downtown Austin.





Making chocolate ice cream



Hummus



Peacocks dancing.



This is an animated gif, if you click it and are patient, it'll load. I should learn how to compress them, but meh.





It's a short drive from the campground into Austin, but it's not exactly a pretty one, it winds through the massive sprawling suburbs that encircle Austin.



Little boxes on the hillside, / Little boxes made of ticky tack / Little boxes on the hillside, / Little boxes all the same,

Corrinne grew up here, before all the sprawl, or perhaps in the first round of sprawl. This round of sprawl has happened shockingly fast. The difference just in the six years since we were last here is astounding. One of the blacksmiths we spoke with at Pioneer Farm had a son in a high school where the freshman class is three times the size of the graduating class.



Live action Ed Ruscha. From one of the many, many planned and half executed subdivisions around Austin.

Driving in we got an interesting tour of what's drawing people to town — mostly high tech companies, particularly hardware makers — and then the suburban sprawl where the employees live. It's easy to mock that sprawl, it's pretty ugly, but what other answer is there? Completely change your culture to embrace real, functioning cities? Probably not going to work. Until there's no other choice.

Athens has had some pretty intense growth as well, and the city tried to combat sprawl by encouraging development downtown, but all that did was bring in a bunch of huge generic high rises that turned downtown into, well, it could be anywhere — there's nothing left of the downtown Athens I knew and loved. So Austin has sprawl, but still has its downtown. I think that's the way to do actually because downtown Austin feels and looks about the same as it did when I first drove through a decade ago.

The traffic is crazy though. Our running joke was that nothing was less than a 25 minute drive away. Grocery is four miles? Twenty five minutes. Didn't matter what time of day it was, traffic was constant. In fact I passed on buying our house batteries because the shop was 15 miles away, but that 15 mile drive was never less than a 1 hour drive (according to Google Maps anyway).

I do still like Austin though. It's a little hip for its own good, but it has some fabulous food, great camping close to town and tons of stuff to do. It's hard to beat in that regard. The kids got to see their Gmommy, we took a trip to the coolest swimming pool ever, Barton Springs, and ate at quite a few food trucks.





2 Comments



Gwen June 10, 2017 at 2:07 p.m.

Wondering if you're headed to Dallas? I am considering going to a conference there this fall and wondering if it's an interesting city to visit. I think I would enjoy seeing downtown Austin from reading your post. If you are headed to Dallas, there is a state park nearby where you can see dinosaur footprints. I think your kids would enjoy that.



[Scott](#) June 10, 2017 at 9:55 p.m.

@Gwen-

We're actually in Dallas right now, or just north of it in the city of Plano. We're mostly here to visit family and make some repairs to the bus though so we haven't explored too much.

It's my second time here, but I've never really done anything more than drive through downtown Dallas. It seems pretty cool though. There's a lot of great sounding restaurants anyway. I'd say go. But I'd almost always say that.