

Breakdown

Ridgway State Park, Colorado, U.S.

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

We planned to leave Ridgway and head back to Utah by going over the Dallas Divide, which, while somewhat high, was within what the bus had done previously. Alas it was one of those days that did not start well and then got worse from there. I was feeling a bit dizzy all morning, not bad really, just slightly off. Corrinne wanted to stay and leave the next day but I really wanted to go. I should have listened to her, but when I get it in my head to go I tend to plow forward like a tank, come hell or high water.

Things started to really go south when I got the dump station. I was emptying the tank when I noticed fluid leaking out the front of the bus. Quite a lot of fluid. I crawled under to investigate. Transmission fluid. Lots of transmission fluid. Leaking. Again. I had noticed a bit a transmission fluid leaking over the last few weeks, but it wasn't leaking enough to even hit the ground, just a bit would dribble out on the suspension from time to time. This, however, was something else.

I finished up dumping and pulled over to the day use area to get a closer look. After a bit of digging around I found the problem — a flared compression fitting had cracked. It's worth here noting that someone had already done a considerable amount of surgery and patching to the transmission cooler lines, which were not single tubes but several connected together, three different diameters and types of hose in fact, all cobbled together. It was a crap job, but it was working. Until now.

It so happens that I installed our propane system on the road, so I have flaring tools. What I needed was 5/8in tubing, but of course that's pretty much impossible to find outside an auto supply store, which Ridgway lacks. So I rigged up a standard fuel hose with overtightened clamps that seemed like it would hold about five miles into town. And it did. Sort of. I managed to get to the one mechanic shop in town. I explained the situation and the mechanic was nice enough to just give me some 5/8in tubing.

Corrinne took the kids to the playground in the center of Ridgway and I sat down on the curb outside the shop and got to work with the flaring tools. About half an hour later I had it sealed up again. By now it was well past noon and I was hungry and the dizziness, which I attributed to not eating, was much worse. I decided to limp back to Ridgway State Park and try again the next day. Corrinne being right.

I made it back, found a site and parked. I wanted to see how my handiwork was holding up so I crawled under and goddamnit there was transmission fluid pouring out of the hose behind where I had fixed,

which was some kind of bizarre flexible hose with a flare at one end and screw fitting at the other. I kicked the tailpipe in anger, while wearing flipflops, which as you can imagine was not a good idea. I instinctively tried to grab my foot where it was burned and sat up, hitting my head on the floor of the bus above me. This would probably have all been hilarious to watch.

Finally I rolled out from under the bus, staggered inside for some water, staggered back outside and lay down on the concrete around the picnic table. I was pretty much over it. I lay there waiting for Corrinne and the kids to be done at the park scheming ways to sell the bus, use the money to buy plane tickets and just disappear into the far east somewhere to hide from my failure and shame. Eventually I fell asleep and that's where I was when Corrinne and kids finally found me.

That's when Corrinne took my temperature and I realized I was quite sick, with a fever of 103. I stumbled back in the bus, put up my bunk and was pretty much incoherent for the next 18 hours or so.

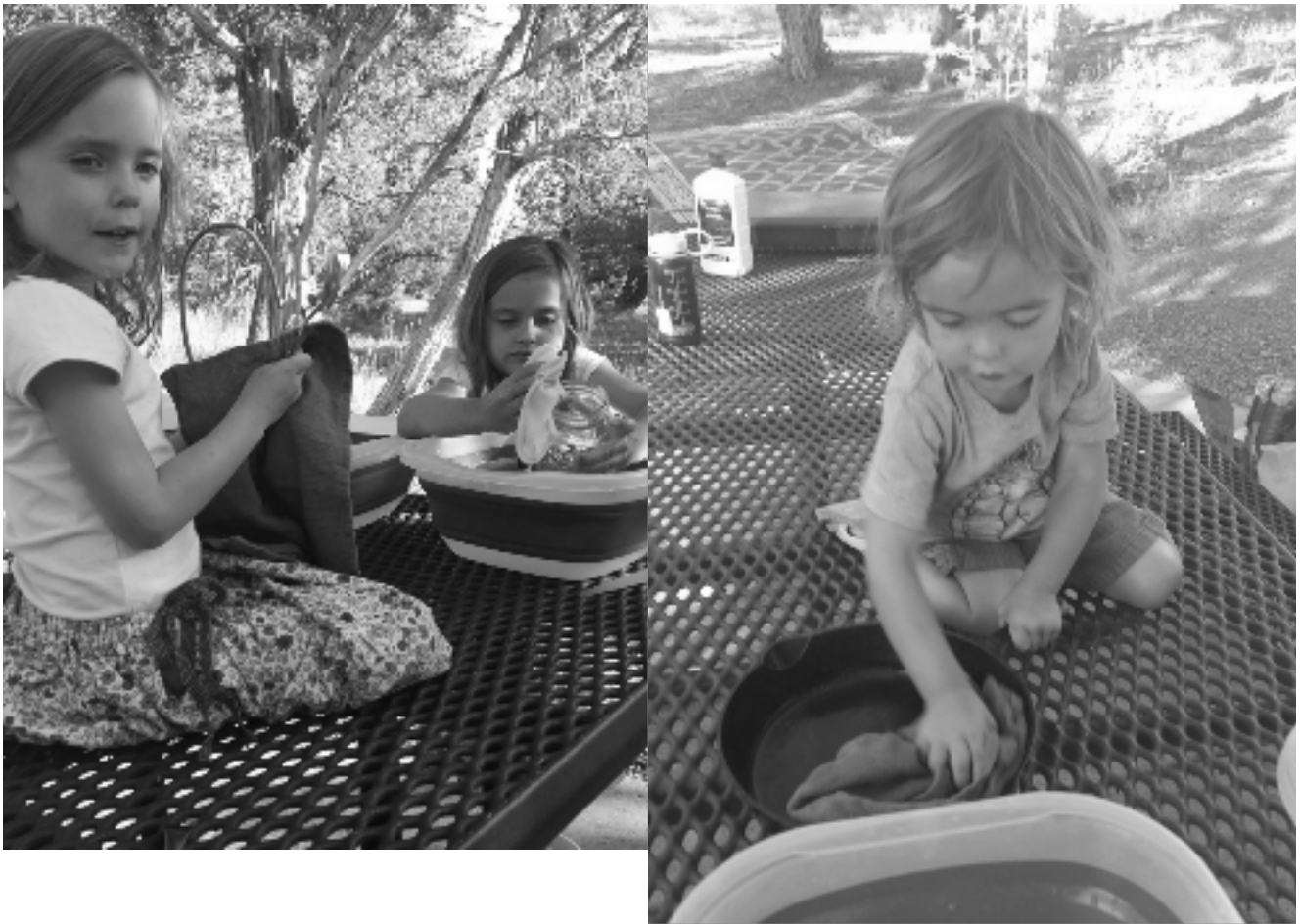


About 10 seconds after this was taken I fell asleep for about 18 hours.



Much to my wife's chagrin, when I am sick the kids are helpful *and* let me sleep.





When I finally felt up to it — two days later — I did a bit of research and discovered that the only place with the transmission cooler lines I needed was Summit Racing¹, which I needed to have shipped somewhere, which is one of the challenges of living on the road². I've also been wanting to put on shocks for about, oh, five thousand miles now.

A while back the speedometer and odometer broke and I tried putting in a new cable but that promptly got chewed up just like the first one. I pulled the speedometer and took it to a shop down in Montrose that was recommended by some friends. They weren't able to tell me much, other than recommended a speedometer shop in Denver, but I liked the two mechanics I talked to so when the fever broke and I decided I was tired of spending my days under the bus I called the shop to see about fixing the transmission cooler lines, new shocks, and some other odds and ends I'd been wanting to do, but hadn't had the time.

Unlike a lot of places I've called on this trip, Diamond G repair in Montrose was unfazed by the size of the bus and could start in on it the next day. The only question was — should I tow it or could I rig something up to get it twenty miles down the road?

I'd spent some time patching the black tank a week prior and had discovered this interesting a pretty

cool stuff that starts as a flexible tap type material but dries hard as a rock. It gets sold to fix everything from leaky pipes to broken rake handles and in my experience it actually works pretty well. I went back to the hardware store in Ridgway. Again. And grabbed another roll to see what would happen on a flexible hose. I put it on and let it harden for a while. I fired it up and check underneath, no leaks.

I drove down to the dump station, still no leaks. I hit the road. I stopped to check the engine temps — no leaks doesn't mean tightly sealed vacuum — but, while hot, nothing was over 200 degrees. I kept going and eventually made it to Diamond G without further incident.

We grabbed what we needed for a week's worth of tent camping, somehow packed it all in the minivan and hit the road. We had mail waiting in Monticello, UT and wanted to get up in the high mountains, to some places the bus couldn't go. I left a laundry list of fixes for the mechanic and we hit the road, Beverly hillbilly style in a packed-to-the-gills van.

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1. Could I have used some brake lines instead? Probably. A couple people on Facebook suggested that, but honestly I was tired of rigging things, I wanted the right parts and I wanted them installed properly. More than that, think less of my mechanical abilities if you will, but I wanted to spend time with my family, get some *paying* work done and not spend my days under the bus. [↩](#)
 2. Some companies are fine with what's called General Delivery, but far more online companies can't make heads or tails of it. I never wrote about it, but getting our Engle fridge was a two week long exercise in frustration. Amazon is hit or miss, really depends on what you're ordering. If it's Amazon fulfillment you're usually fine, if it's not, anybody's guess. [↩](#)