

# Escaping Texas

Trinidad, Colorado, U.S.

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June 12, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

By the time we left Denton we'd put in a new radiator core, new water pump, new thermostat and new power steering hose that had cracked when I made too tight of turn in the hotel parking lot. In Texas we had in fact pretty much redone the entire cooling system of the bus. Ideally that would have solved the overheating issues, but it did not. I left ahead of Corrinne and kids, hitting the road by 6AM to avoid the forecasted 105 degree midday temps.

The night before I purchased one of those nice digital thermometer guns in hopes that perhaps the problem was the temperature or sending unit. Armed with that I stopped frequently to crawl under the engine and take temp readings all over the place. What quickly became obvious was that most of the temp readings were well within ideal operating temps for the engine. The exception was right around the sending unit, which sits roughly on the first piston on the passenger's side of the engine. That area was notably hotter than everything else, though still not overheating hot.

Despite the heat I made it Amarillo without overtaxing the engine. And just for fun, since I have the digital thermometer anyway, I started taking readings in cab of the bus... about 122 degrees on the dashboard (direct sun), about 108 on most other surfaces and 115 by my right foot where a bit of engine air still leaks out. Hot. Damn hot.

That night I sat out sweating in the Amarillo night talking with my uncle Ron who serves as official bus mechanical repair consultant. He walked me through a few scenarios/possibilities, but in the end the most likely fix will probably involve flushing the engine block. In the mean time, the temp readings stayed pretty constant and within operating params for the engine so we decided to push on out of Texas, out of the heat wave and into the mountains where the bus, and we, would be much cooler and happier.

That meant bypassing one of my favorite places in this region, [Comanche National Grassland](#), but with a forecast temp in the mid 90s and not a hookup for three hundred miles, we were hesitant to push it. We still hadn't actually camped without hookups in the bus so we didn't know what sort of temperature would be comfortable and what would be miserable. 93 degrees sounded miserable so we decided to skip it (turns out it's not bad at all if you have a breeze, but oh well).



I left Amarillo at 5AM, well ahead of Corrinne and kids, trying to push through to the mountains before the heat of the day kicked in. I was halfway out of Texas when the sun finally did start to glow on the eastern horizon of the vast nothingness that is the western Texas desert. This is part of Texas I know reasonably well and happen to really like, the wide open, barren land, parched badlands of windswept sand and nearly endless grass and creosote. But only crazy people come out here in June. Even if you're not crazy when you get here, you will be soon, the heat bakes you until you come unglued. The day we passed through the forecasted temp was 112.



I was well into New Mexico long before the sun got high enough for those temps.

When I stopped to take this photo:



This train honked and I looked over to see the engineer waving and giving me the thumbs up:



I've driven a lot of miles in this country, seen a lot of trains, but I've never seen or heard of train honking and waving at a car. The bus is like that though, it extracts the extraordinary from the ordinary.





The kids' first view of real snowy mountains, the Sangre de Cristo range.

The bus struggled to get over Ratan pass, which is just shy of 8000 feet. It made it, the engine wasn't overheating even, but I didn't have much power. I was doing about 35 by the time the road finally started down again. From there I coasted on down to Trinidad Lake State Park, which has two campgrounds, one with full hookups and one totally dry with nothing save a communal water spigot and some pit toilets. We grabbed a site in the latter area, filled our new water tank and settled in to enjoy an afternoon at the lake.

Unfortunately I made the mistake of asking the ranger if there were any good sandy, beach-like areas further down the road. I was promptly informed that there was no swimming in the lake. Say what? The ranger was unable to provide any reason for the no swimming, but I'd already blown it — there's no plausible deniability after you ask. Never ask permission, just do and play dumb when you need to. Sometimes my mouth gets ahead of my brain.



We don't have a lot of space indoors, but we have some nice views.

We ended up just sitting around the camp, which was nice enough, if a little warm. The heatwave was still too much on us, so we hatched a plan to head higher into the mountains the next day.



That night was the first in the wide open big sky of the west. The sunset reflected on the clouds for hours. I let the fire burn down and watched the sky instead. Later on thunderheads rolled in over the peaks of the Sangre de Cristo range. Arcing flashes of lightening bounced around the clouds like streaking silver pinballs. Just as the last light faded away coyotes began to bark and sing. Finally, the

west.