

Trains, Hot Springs and Broken Buses

Bishop, California, U.S.

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October 6, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

After a night in the middle of Gold Point we hit the road, continuing our somewhat random plan. I came up with something I thought was pretty good: take highway 266 west from Gold Point, grab highway 168, go over the White Mountains, drop down into Big Pine and follow 395 up to my aunt and uncle's house up in Wellington. It seems simple when you type it out. I bet it made the gods chuckle anyway.



Highway 266 was uneventful, a little climb up into the White Mountains, through a ghost town and down into a small town called Oasis. It was when we turned on 168 that we got some hints of what was to come. The signs read steep, winding roads ahead. Okay, no biggie, probably. Then there was a sign that said one lane road ahead, trucks not recommended. But we're on a two digit state highway in California, those don't narrow down to one lane. I thought maybe it meant there was no passing lane. It did not mean that.

Up and over the second pass was not too bad either, though it was the windiest road we've been on. Down the back side despite my best efforts at downshifting the brakes started to smell. We took a break

to let them rest and enjoy the view. Of absolute nothing. Excepting perhaps some portions of route 50 (the so-called loneliest highway) route 168 is the most remote road I've ever been on. There's no civilization for its entire run over the White Mountains. Just empty desert and one lone building set way back from the road with a huge sign that says "no telephone available." The only other vehicles we saw were a few empty hay trucks driving way too fast for the road.

We had snack and a road work crew we'd passed up the mountain came down and pulled into the same turnout we were in. I took the opportunity to ask them about the next pass. They seemed to think we'd be fine, though one of them did say, "there's one part we call the narrows, it's only one lane through there." I just stared at him for a minute. "Seriously?" "Seriously." "Don't tell my wife that."

We said goodbye and hit the road again. Climbing the third pass I started to smell that sweet smell of radiator fluid and pulled into the next turn out. The bus sat boiling over for a bit, maybe a quart, and then it stopped. We climbed out to sit for a while and consider our options. Except that there weren't any really. With no cell reception to call a tow truck, no real way to turn around, and no where else to go even if we did, we had to get over the pass. At one point an older gentleman on a Harley stopped at see if we were okay. We chatted for a bit and he told us the top of the pass was only about four or five miles ahead, which was encouraging.



Overheating. Again. | image by Corrinne Gilbertson

After an hour or so the bus, and I, had cooled enough to tackle the pass again. And the Harley guy turned out to be right. It wasn't that bad and we didn't overheat again. Shortly after the top of Westguard Pass though with very little warning the road did indeed become one lane. It turned out to be less than half a mile, just a stretch where they simply couldn't blast the cut any wider. Fortunately we didn't meet any hay trucks going through.

The downhill grade on the other side of the pass was 10 percent all the way down which had us stopping to rest the brakes four or five times, but eventually, around dinner time, we finally made it to Big Pine.



Resting the brakes.

We grabbed some gas and found a small county park with no one in it. Perfect way to end a long day. We parked for the night in the shadow of the High Sierra and ate dinner looking up at the mountains.





Our plan for the next day was to check out the Laws Railroad Museum and then head to a local hot spring. Every morning while the bus warms up I walk around it and check things out, make sure all windows and vents are closed, no fluids are leaking and so on. This morning the rear wheel well caught my eye. It seemed someone closer to the wheels than I'd ever noticed. But that's virtually impossible, how often do axles move? Has to be my imagination. I walked around the other side. Not my imagination. I crawled under and saw this:



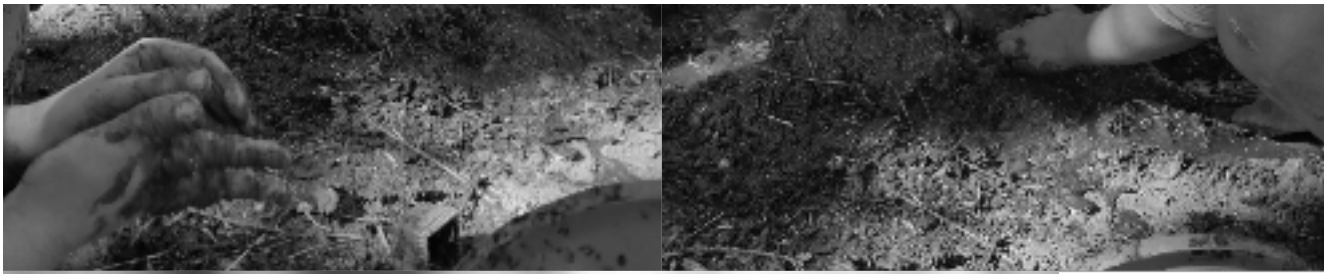
That's when I called my uncle. He's already helped me fix a few things via the phone. I sent over some pictures and he told me what to do, but I had neither tools nor jack to do it so he offered to come down and help. A couple hours later had some bolts, some beer and something like a plan. Or at least he did. I

had hope.

And the next day we did it. Or my uncle did anyway. We lifted the bus with a grossly underpowered jack, pounded on the spring joint until it slowly slid back into place and then we put new bolts in. It was a long day, but we got it done. Thanks again Ron.

The kids, generally oblivious to our breakdowns, found plenty of mud to get them through the day.





Snorkel costumes. We really need to get back to the beach.





After that adventure we finally made it to the Laws Railroad Museum, which turned out to be a lot of fun for the kids, plenty of stuff to climb on, in and round and no one to tell them not to. Well, except for one old crone volunteering in the station house who proceeded to chastise the children before they were

hardly in the door. I turned around and walked out because if I'd stayed I'd have involuntarily backhanded her. I sat on the porch listening to her tell visitors a completely false story about the origin of the Murphy bed. Some people I don't know, they won't leave you alone.







Specialization is for insects.



That afternoon we trekked over to Keough Hot Springs. There are a lot of hot springs in this part of the country, but not many of them have a really cool old pool. We ended up spending the night and the kids and I spent all afternoon in the pool.



Most of the appeal of Keough Hot Springs was this pool, built in 1912.

3 Comments



[Jeena](#) October 29, 2017 at 4:02 a.m.

I love your long posts with many pictures. Although I often don't really read the text because the pictures alone tell a comprehensive story already :)



Drew November 15, 2017 at 12:57 p.m.

Do you just stay pissed off? That lady would of had it coming.



[Scott](#) November 15, 2017 at 1:07 p.m.

@Drew-

I walked out because if I'd stayed I'd punched her in the face and we live in times when that is not acceptable. So I walked away and took pictures of the mountains.