

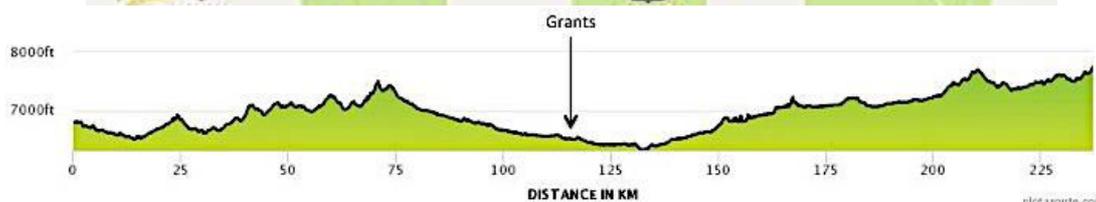
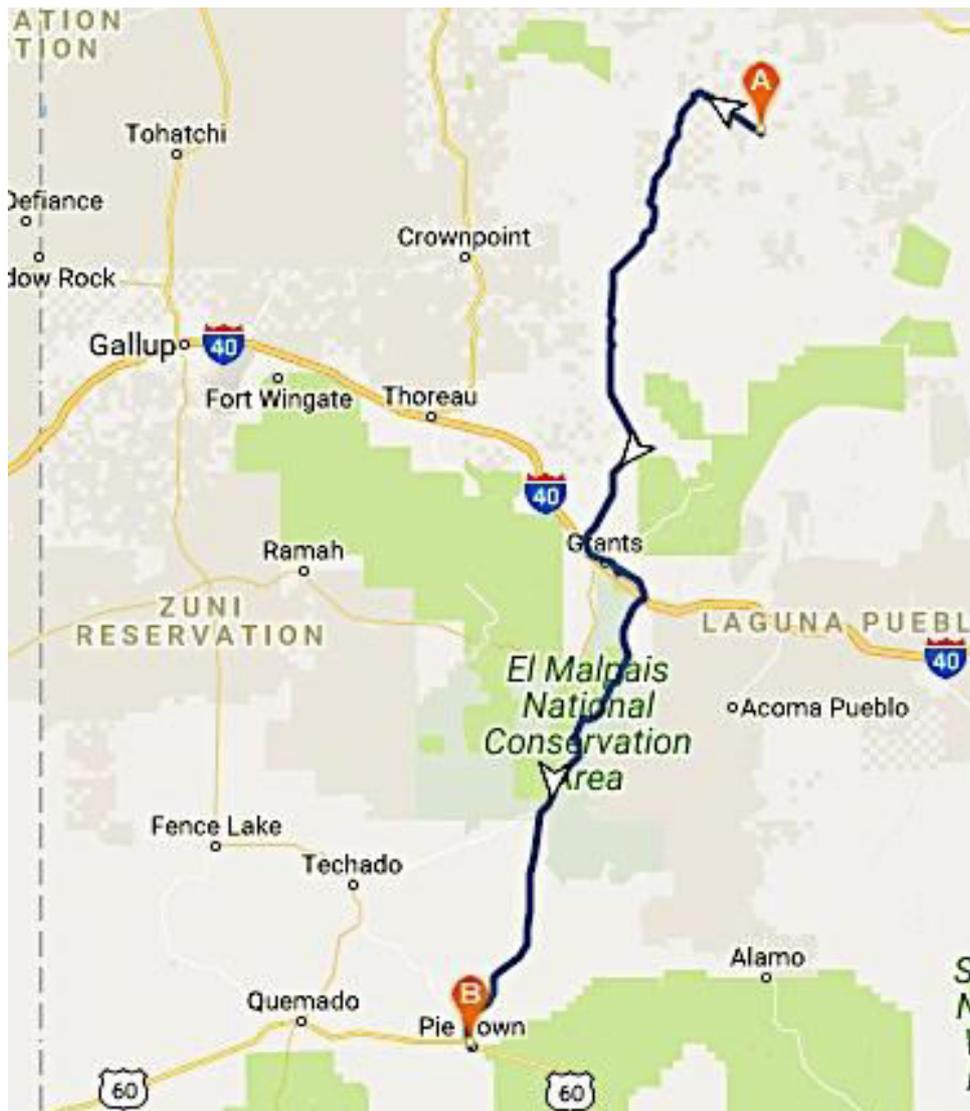
Day 27 5th July 2017
Chaco Mesa road bivis to Pie Town

237k / 147.2miles

2471m / 8106ft (2183m / 7162ft descent)
41.4%↑ 38.2%↓ 20.4%→ 21.1% max

*Until I came to New Mexico
I never realised how much beauty water adds to a river*

Mark Twain



My memory of today is a little hazy, probably a combination of restricted sleep, lack of a map to mentally 'hang thing on' and the relentless nature of the terrain.

I started the day on Highway 197, heading northwest. Highway 197 is renowned for its scenic beauty (not), the complete absence of litter (not) and, judging by the number of shattered/discarded bottles and general alcohol related detritus on the road side, the obvious abstemious nature of the local inhabitants (not). Based upon by the discarded drink related detritus I believe that New Mexico is sponsored by Bud Lite (if it isn't it certainly should be).

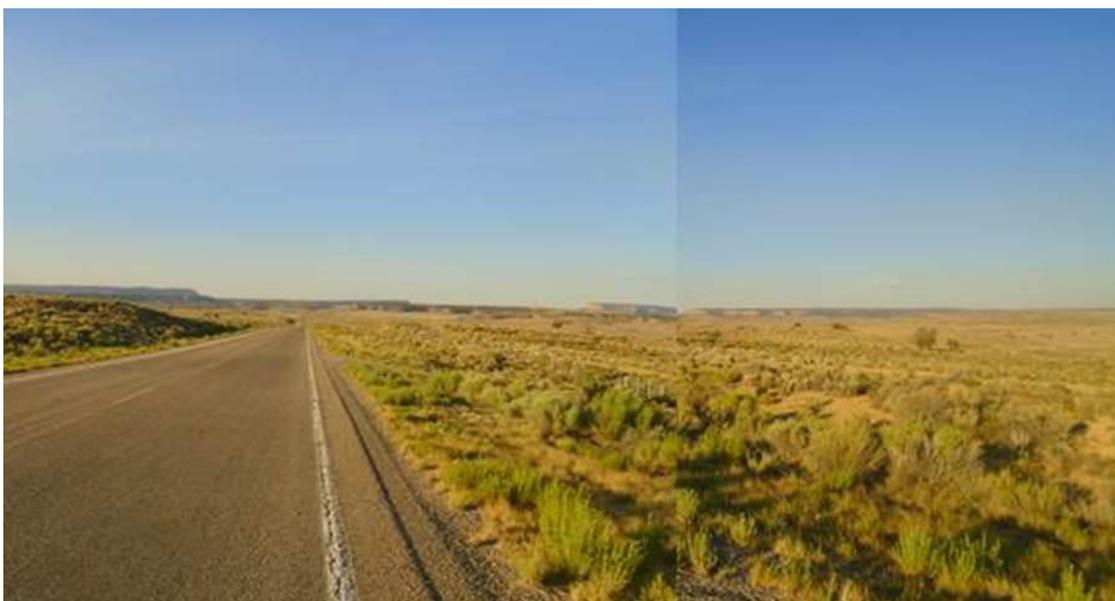
As we know I had bivied up the night before, principally because I was sick and tired (very tired) of cycling into a relentless headwind, but also because I was really rather apprehensive about being ploughed into by a drunken drugged up driver with his foot hard down as he zoomed along the deserted road into the setting sun.

Once I had made the decision to stop I discovered that it was surprisingly difficult to find a flat piece of ground within easy reach of the road which was not both obviously polluted with shattered glass while at the same time not readily obvious to passing traffic. I didn't want to be robbed by the aforementioned inebriated car drivers who might spot a lone tent. This was another reason why I bivied up rather than camped.

As it turned out I am glad I did bivi up because when I awoke at about 00.15 and discovered that the wind had dropped and indeed there was now a very faint hint of a favourable breeze; had I been in my tent I would not have appreciated this change.

I quickly loaded up the bike and was off enjoying both the lack of heat and the adverse wind, with the added bonus that there was less potential for inebriated drivers to be about.

I made steady progress until the road took a sharp left and headed south and an inevitable adverse wind started to get up again. So I stopped again about 03.00, having got another 40+ miles safely under my belt.



Yet another busy day on a traffic clogged road

I was off again at 06.30 – packing up the bivi was definitely quicker than using the tent and it was pleasant not having to worry about the dew wetting everything.

I had made the conscious decision to ignore the possibility of snake and scorpions while sleeping out – it's amazing how tiredness dulls one's apprehension about perceived dangers.



Early morning view down the road to Grants

Shortly after starting, as I progressed towards Milan and Grants, I passed both Marty and Ko, who had separately also camped out. We exchanged good mornings as I cycled past.

I was struck by the obvious low income, which seems to characterise the economy of the local area – this probably went some way to explaining the obvious alcohol problem and generalised lack of care for the environment. Lots of isolated run down shacks, rusting cars etc.

As mentioned previously my bike seatpost creaks when the ambient temperature rises. 'So what?' you might say but a creak every pedal stroke for 10 hours eventually gets to you. I discovered that pressing down hard on the tip of the saddle temporarily stopped the noise for 5 mins before it returns.

Accordingly I experimented with cord (tensioned with my pump) as a means of stopping the problem long term but this was only partially successful.

I arrived in Milan having crossed the railway line (saw a train comprised of 4 engines pulling 98 wagons) and stopped for a rest and refreshment in a truck stop – no WiFi unfortunately.

It had become very hot and I must admit I lingered too long in Milan/Grants. Stopping again to stock up with a Subway sandwich I was joined by Marty who passed me here as I turned off looking for a supermarket. He said he was making for Pie Town nearly 90 miles away. I did not have a map but still thought that that was optimistic but wished him luck.

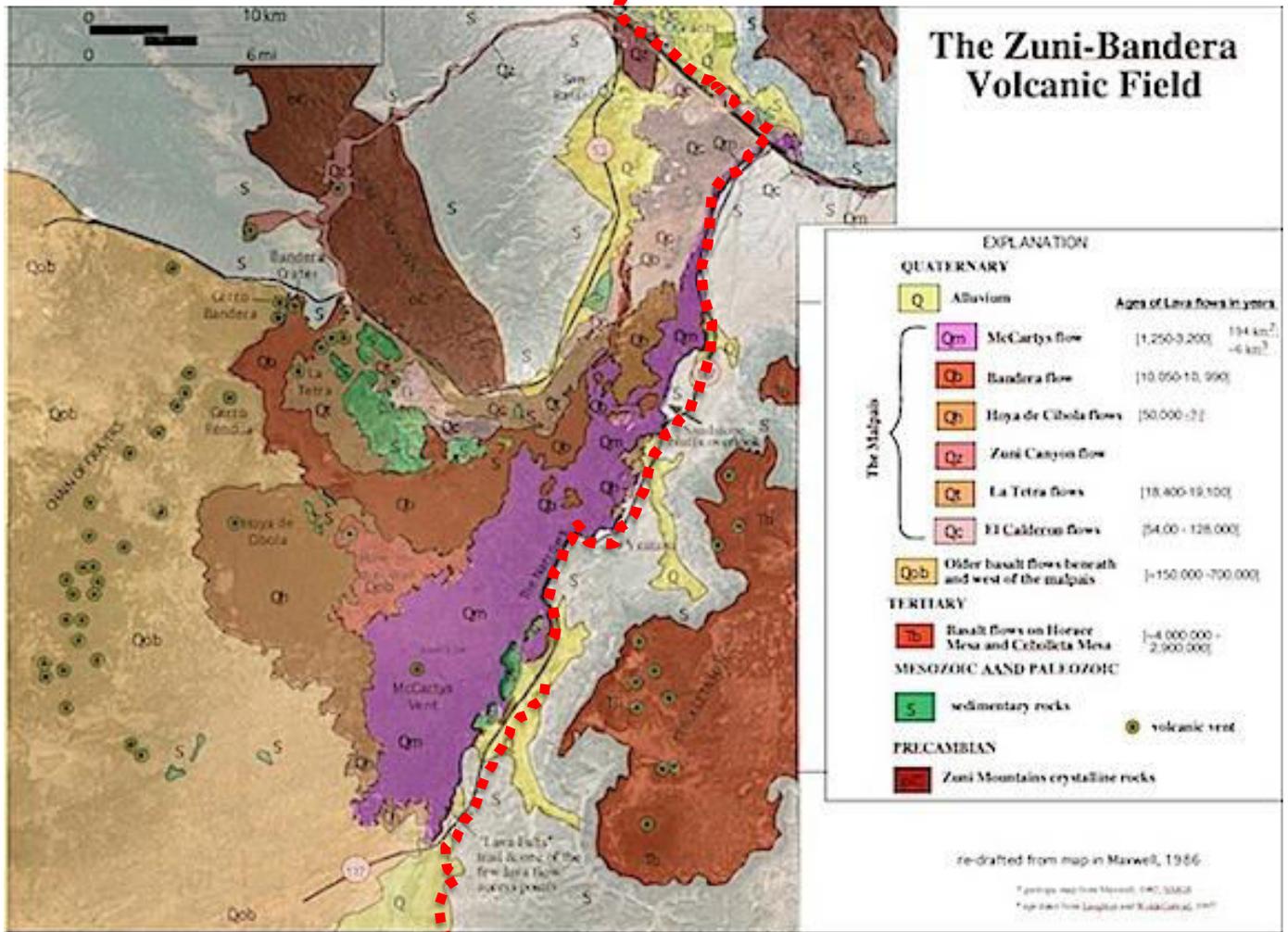
Eventually after restocking and buying provisions I hit Highway 117 and commenced on the El Malpais alternative having, as I said, dwelled too long in Grants.



Cycling in the El Malpais National Park, under a cloudless sky

This part of the day was much more interesting as I found myself running parallel to a large bluff on my left, with a huge lava field on the right. The edge of the lava field presented itself as an irregular black cliff some 20' high.

This feature proved to be the McCartys lava flow, part of Zuni-Bandera volcanic field, which covers most of the broad valley between the Zuni Mountains in the west and Cebolleta Mesa to the east. Dating between 2,500 and 3,900 years ago it is the youngest eruption in New Mexico. Apparently it is a typical inflated pahoehoe¹ type lava flow and retains characteristic surface glass features (tachylite) of fresh lava flows.



Map of the Zuni-Bandera lava fields. My route is marked in red (from N to S)

1. Pāhoehoe, derives from the Hawaiian; it is a basaltic lava with a smooth, billowy, undulating, or ropy surface; caused by the movement of very fluid lava under a congealing crust. Pāhoehoe typically advances as a series of small lobes and toes that continually break out from this cooled surface. It also forms lava tubes where the minimal heat loss maintains low viscosity. The surface texture of pāhoehoe flows varies widely, displaying various bizarre shapes often referred to as lava sculpture. Pahoehoeic lavas typically have a temperature of 1,100 to 1,200°C. On the Earth, most lava flows are less than 10km (6.2miles) long, but some pāhoehoe flows are more than 50km (31miles) long. With increasing distance from the source, pāhoehoe flows may change into 'a'ā flows in response to heat loss and consequent increase in viscosity.



In the 1940s the Malpais lava field was one of eight sites considered by the Manhattan Project as a candidate for the testing of the first atomic bomb.

Ultimately the definitive 'Trinity' nuclear test occurred on 16th July 1945 at the White Sands Proving Ground, some 300 miles to the southeast.

Various views of the black lava flow edge, as seen from the road, as I cycled past



I approached 'The Narrows' presumably named as there is minimal distance from the bluff cliff to the edge of the lava field.

It must have been quite something seeing the lava flowing so close by to the escarpment when viewed from the top of the cliff.





*The Narrows
At some points on this road there is a max of 25m between the lava flow and the cliff edge.*

I stopped at a natural arch, just off the road and got talking to some tourists.

I casually said that it was fortunate the lava flow had stopped in time and that the road had not been inundated. I also said that the highways authorities must have been worried...



The Natural Arch

They obviously did not appreciate the joke as sadly, in all seriousness, they agreed with me!!



Given the arid nature of the terrain I think someone was taking the mickey!!

I eventually turned off highway 117 and headed south, and noted rain clouds building in the distance.

The dirt trail I was now on is notorious for becoming impassable when wet so I pressed on in the hope that I could make as much distance as possible before progress was halted by the impending deluge.



Approaching rain clouds

The road developed into a rollercoaster with 100+m high rollers every half a kilometre. You hurtle down one roller, ignoring the wash boarding, trying to keep as much momentum as possible to carry you as far as possible up the next hill before having to pedal like billy-o only to eventually reach the crest and then see exactly the same feature appear immediately to your front.

I found this relentless topography wearing in the extreme and, coupled with the imminent prospect of rain impeding progress and the considerable number of miles I had already ridden today, morale was about to crumble. I had really wanted to stop at the Toaster House in Pie Town, an iconic feature on the TD route. Secretly I knew it was too far away and I would be forced to stop, possibly at a 'cyclist only' campsite I knew existed some 15 miles before Pie Town.

Consequently I was 'reconciled' to passing the Toaster House tomorrow in the daylight and not getting to stop overnight. However due to my map having been pinched I did not know exactly where I was and so couldn't confirm this fear. Things were not helped by my stopping to speak to the lady driver of a passing car. She said that Pie Town was 'only' 37 miles further on. This reinforced my darkest fears.

Then it started to rain.... Ho joy.

Somehow, contrary to all my worst expectations, the rain petered out very rapidly and the portended downpour did not occur. However I was left on tender hooks as several further showers were encountered. Surprisingly none resulted in the expected Armageddon on the mud front either.

The smell of the New Mexican desert earth, once it has rained is something I will always remember from this trip - a sweet, almost aromatic, odour completely different to the smell of damp loam or wet mud, which epitomises the English countryside. Apparently this smell is called *Petrichor*.¹

I continued plodding on directly south, in the approaching gloom expecting to see but not finding signs for the mythical 'cyclist only' campsite.

As we known by now this trip has been characterised by lows rapidly followed by highs..... well I did not know it but I was about to encounter a massive high. I say this because in the distance I saw some houses and thought I could make out a road crossing my front;

No it couldn't be - could it?

YES it was - it was **Pie Town!!**. Thank *uck for that!!!

Pie Town is a linear settlement with a motley collection of dwellings dispersed along the 'main' east /west road. My route went straight across this highway, but where was the Toaster House? I stopped at a trailer park and asked – next door they said.

Contrary to all my fears and expectations I had actually arrived!!

237k (147 miles) - my longest day so far in this trip.

The Toaster House proved a ramshackle establishment. However, given the number of miles I had completed in the last 24hrs as far as I was concerned it was a 5* haven with food in the fridge/freezer, and a couple of beers.

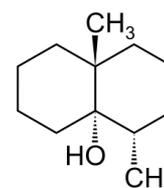
When I arrived there was only one other occupant, Jacki Klancher. I'd last met her briefly in Steamboat Springs, shortly before my 'dying' Etrex saga.

She was not feeling at all well - D&V. I took a quick history and based upon this did not think she had any surgical problem; probably *Giardia*. She took herself off to bed and I never saw her again. I subsequently noted on trackleaders that she had pulled out.

1. Petrichor the smell of the earth after rain:

The term, coined in 1964 by IJ Bear & RG Thomas, describes the distinctive scent emitted by wet soil. A plant based oil is exuded during dry periods, and absorbed by clay based soils and rocks. Rain releases this oil, along with another compound, geosmin, a metabolic by-product of certain actinobacteria (see right).

When a raindrop lands on a porous surface, air from the pores form small bubbles, these float to the surface and release aerosols, which disseminate the scent. Slower moving raindrops produce more aerosols; this explains why the petrichor is more common after light rains.





The Toaster House





Scattered around the place were several copies of this very ingenious sticker.

For those non mathematicians who have made it this far:

$\sqrt{-1}$ = the imaginary number *i*
 2^3 = **8**
 Σ = the sign for 'sum the following' and
 π = **Pi** (3.142.... etc)

Hence the 'formula' reads: **I 8 sum Pi**
I Ate Some Pie

Unfortunately due to the late hour the local pie shops were closed.

Way back in Banff we had all been given a head set cap which entitled a rider to a free slice of pie if we managed to get this far. However, right at the start, I had decided I would be keeping my token as a memento of this trip, irrespective of my need for free pie. I intended to replace my current cap if/when I eventually arrived at Antelope Wells. I thought it would be tempting fate to install it on my bike before the end.



Said Salsa TD 2017 head set cap located immediately behind the stem GPS locking device mechanism

Shortly after I had settled in Jill Simek rolled up and later Marty came too. I don't really know how I came to be in front of him, having last seen him in Grants.

We chewed the fat for a while and I washed some kit. My knee had become very sore especially since I'd stopped and I was a little worried about it, but in true TD style chose to ignore the discomfort.

The only WiFi available was in the BBQ pit of the nearby trailer park next door (obviously!) so I 'watts apped' from there for a while before returning to my room.

My bed was a matress on the floor in front of a large mirror. I was quite surprised by my appearance looking in said mirror - as you can see I had lost a significant amount of weight. Just how much became apparent when I discovered a set of scales. I discovered that I weighed in at 9st 3lbs. As I had started at 10st 11lbs this meant I had therefore lost some 22lbs in weight (16% of my body weight). I took this as an indicator for me to have a second meal before I went to bed.



*Not too much subcutaneous fat in evidence is there?
My disrupted right acromioclavicular joint
and associated dropped shoulder is also very obvious!!*

When I subsequently got back to the UK and purchased a replacement map, for the one which had been stolen, I discovered that it is 'only' 32 miles from the Highway 117 turn off to Pie Town.

So quite how the woman driver could have conceived that I was 'only' 37 miles away from Pie Town, when in fact I would have been a maximum of 22 miles away I have no idea. Very much like her perception of distance !!

Only 304 miles to go!! Secondary to my state of eudeimonia¹ I slept well.

1. Eudaimonia the contented happy state you feel when you travel