

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



A SUMMER HIKE by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | AUGUST 2016

Summer solstice and Father's Day shared the same desk calendar square in 2004 (Sunday, June 20). I noticed this in my Dundee Street curbside office in near-downtown Asheville (NC, USA), while sipping some tepid tea.

Having knocked out the last item (replacement of a faulty electrical receptacle) on the to-do-while-they're-away list (my first wife and 38-week-old son were in the Philippines) at 7:07 AM, it was time to finally do that Kitsuma Peak hike. A decent-for-June high temperature of 77° (Fahrenheit; 25° Celsius) was forecast for Black Mountain (15 miles – 24 km – east of our house). I thought: *That's not too bad for summer. Might as well head out now while it's not hot. And, let's bring Viche, [my dachshund-mix rescue dog] too; she will enjoy getting out of this old fixer-upper.*

At – would you believe? – 08:08:08 AM, we were rolling east through the Interstate 240 Beaucatcher Mountain blast-cut. Traffic was light. We soon passed over Tunnel Road and took the exit for I-40 East. *Should be a great day. What could go wrong? Darn, why did I have to think that?*

Thirteen minutes later I was taking Exit 66 for Ridgecrest. I turned right at the STOP sign onto Dunsmore Avenue. We were almost immediately going over a pair of railroad tracks. *Wonder if I'll see a train today. Do they run on Sundays?*

I then made a quick left onto Yates Avenue. Viche, previously asleep in the shotgun seat, looked up, trying to discern our whereabouts. *Where on Earth is he taking me now?*

Yates Avenue, a quasi-rural two-lane highway, paralleled I-40 for a mile (1.6 km), and then crossed over it. Just after the overpass, I turned right onto Royal Gorge Road. We tootled down it for 689 feet (210 meters), where it ended as a small parking lot. Only one vehicle was there: a dark blue Jeep Wagoneer. *Good deal. It's not crowded.*

"We're here, Viche," I announced to my curious canine. "Are you ready to do some hiking?"

Viche looked at me with an excited expression on her little black-and-tan face.

We got out of the van. I got my backpack adjusted, and we were off. We soon arrived at the official beginning of the trail. An old wooden sign read:

YOUNGS RIDGE / KITSUMA PEAK

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I wasn't planning on doing an 8-mile (12.9 km) roundtrip hike. That would be way too much for Viche and her short legs. We would just take in some overlooks within the first two miles (3.2 km).

The narrow, dirt-and-grass trail was bordered by I-40 on the right (southwest) and a ravine on the left. After walking 984 feet (300 meters), we began a steep climb that consisted of a dozen switchbacks. The trail became a trench with numerous rocks, some loose, and bicycle tire tracks. *Wow! People mountain-bike this? Their bikes must have ultra-low granny gears.*

Halfway up the incline, we stopped at a little granite overlook for some water. Viche lapped it up. Her nine-year-old body was already feeling the burn; she was panting hard. My heart was pounding, too; I had already broken a sweat. *Let's take a 15-minute rest. Don't want to give her – or me – a heart attack. There's really no rush. No need to turn this into a race.*

We both parked on some semi-comfortable shaded spots on the gray craggy outcrop. Interstate 40 and the eastern part of the town of Black Mountain were visible in the distance. A pair of hawks soared on a thermal.

Then I heard a freight train to my right, chugging up the steep, winding grade from Old Fort. My mind meandered, just like the loopy railroad track layout to the north. (You really should see it: an array of clover leaves.) *When was the last time I was here? It was in the wintertime. The winter of '96? Late January? Sounds about right. I remember sitting right here, hoping that I would be married by 2000. Well, that happened. But, it looks like I married the wrong one. Moving to Asheville got her away from her pernicious sister in Charlotte, but that damn cellphone remains an unbreakable link to Miss Evil. I'll always be coming in second place to the slut-witch in terms of influence. She completely controls my wife's mind; programs her like a robot. Oh, what does it matter? My wife is really not my type, nor the Asheville type. She has no interest in kewl [sic] art or music. She doesn't like hiking, kayaking or cycling. She would never hike up here with Viche and me. She only likes spending money on shoes in Asheville Mall. She's not going to change. I've truly married the wrong woman. I was naïve. Got played. And*

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