

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



High Peak Revisited by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | APR 2016

“Where are we going, dad?” Agent 666 asked from the right backseat as I turned the gray Kia Rio hatchback left onto Etowah Park Road (from US 64 West).

“High Peak, son. It’s where I lived from December of 1997 through November of 2001.” *High Peak? Sounds like the top of a tall-ass mountain.*

“How far is it from here?” my son then asked. *Gosh, I hope it isn’t more than five minutes. I have to pee.*

“Four miles,” I replied.

I made a left at the stop sign that came up in just 700 feet. We were now going south on Etowah School Road. The old elementary school quickly came up on the left. A mile and a half later we were crossing an olive green stream.

“What creek is this?” Monique (Agent 32) asked from the shotgun seat. *I bet my geo-nerdo [sic] husband will know.*

“It’s the French Broad River,” I replied. “The same river that flows through Asheville. We’re probably about 30 miles upstream of the Craven Street Bridge.” *I knew he’d know. / What bridge was that? Gosh, dad is such a geography freak.*

I turned right at the stop sign onto Pleasant Grove Road. We stayed in the river valley for one mile, passing farms and a small creek. Then we turned left onto Pleasant Grove Church Road. Next, after just a tenth of a mile, I turned right onto a wide dirt trail: High Peak Road.

The orange-red clay roadbed was severely rutted. I had to drive very slowly to carefully maneuver the car around the pits and craters so as to not bottom out and get stuck. *It's just as bad as it ever was. Some things never change in this land that time forgot.*

We began to pass a string of rundown mobile homes. Many of these old trailers looked like they were barely keeping the elements out. They were in very rough condition. *Everyone has got to live somewhere, but this looks even bleaker than before. / Did dad live in one of these? / This is poverty acres. Was Parkaar [my ailing alias] really that poor back then?*

"Damn! There's a confederate flag, dad!"

"Yeah, I just ignored those people, son. I think this area is now more Mexican than redneck."

"That's an improvement," my son added.

"I agree," Monique then said.

"Me, too," I concluded.

The luckily dry road (was a complete nightmare to traverse when muddy) began to ascend. Then it became a grade C gravel road. *They must have just had another load of gravel dropped on it. I wonder how many of the homeowners actually pitched in. 40%? 30%? So many deadbeats on this mountain. I sure don't miss this road.*

I slowly swung wide in the first switchback. Then we began to climb the mountain in earnest. There were no residences

in this section. *What an insane road! / I wonder how high we have to climb.*

The second switchback was a tight hairpin. I dropped the manual transmission into 1st gear, as this was a very steep ascent now. *Hope I don't shoot gravel.*

"Back in January of 1998, snow and ice sat on this road for several weeks," I said.

"Why did it last that long?" Agent 666 asked.

"Because they cut this road on the northeast side of the mountain, son. With the low winter sun angle, no sunlight ever hits the road surface. Thus, minimal melting occurs during cold snaps. Oh, I almost slid off the mountain in this section in my old green Plymouth Voyager minivan." *Yikes!*

The Kia successfully scaled the incline. I then turned the steering wheel slightly to the left.

"We called this curve 'the elbow'," I announced. "There was a collision here one winter. One car went halfway down that ravine on your right." *Woah!*

"Did anyone die?" Monique asked.

"No, just bruises."

I carefully negotiated the third switchback. We climbed on. Then we rounded a left curve to see a nice log-style home for sale on the right. *Well, it's definitely nicer up here. / Glad to get out of that valley.*

We passed some average-looking mobile homes on the left as we curved around the pond known as Banks Lake. *Wow, I remember walking with my little dog around that pond 18 years ago. I sure miss that dachshund-feist rescue mutt.*

Next, I made a hard left turn. Another very steep climb on loose gravel commenced. Two hundred feet into the ascent, I slowed down and pointed to a black and gray, small, decked house on the left.

“Well, that’s where I lived,” I said. “1085 High Peak Road. 1.085 miles from where we left the asphalt.”

“Were you alone there for those 47 months, Agent 33?” Monique then asked. *I know that he’s recording this. / She knows that I’m recording this. / Agent numbers again. Dad is so crazy.*

I stopped the car across from the house as the late afternoon sun dropped below the western rim. *I grew to loathe this drive, but I always liked arriving back here. So peaceful. So serene.*

“Very much alone, 32. A few dates and visitors from Charlotte. Some neighbors would stop by, who you will soon meet. But, mostly just me and my four-legged companion, Viche.”

“What did you do there, dad?”

“I did technical writing for money and creative writing for fun. I also did a lot of wall art while in that house. Took lots of

nice hikes around the mountain, too. Did a lot of exploring. Found some odd things in the woods.”

“It seems so lonely, dad.”

“Yeah, it was at times, son, but I grew to mostly like it. I was a lone wolf back then.”

“A perfect place for an antisocial hermit,” Monique then added.

I let out a half-chuckle. “No, no, I wasn’t a Ted Kaczynski. I wasn’t making bombs.”

We had a chortle over that. Then I let the clutch out and we continued climbing the hill. We curved right at the top and passed some mobile homes in good repair. *I wonder how Don and Fay are doing. So many of these people up here are former Floridians. Maybe they couldn’t take the humid heat anymore and traded a few chilly weeks in the winter for escape from six months in the saunasphere. [sic]*

We then arrived at a three-point intersection. I veered to the right and we descended. After braking for 333 feet (best guesstimate), I turned into a gravel driveway: Angeline and Kelvin’s house. *It still looks about the same. I wonder if Kelvin is already drunk.*

“Well, we’re here,” I said. “Time to get out and put a face to Angeline and Kelvin.”

We slowly got out of the car and began to march down a gangplank-style wooden walkway to their cozy, two-bedroom

house. Their new dog detected our approach and excitedly greeted us with a wagging tail and body. *When did their old dog Jay-Jay die? Was he still alive in '06? My memory is fading fast.*

Once on the 1st floor deck, Kelvin, a 60-year-old Caucasian dude, originally from Indiana but a longtime Miami resident, sporting a Hulk Hogan mustache, stepped out to welcome us. (I had called ahead.)

“Well now, Mr. Single-Dingle is a party of three,” he said. “Come on in.”

We entered their living room. Angeline, an 81-year-old Caucasian lady from Miami, was leaning against the wall.

“Hello Michael,” she shouted. *Michael? Just like Al Niño.*

“Hello Angeline. Looks like you’re holding up well.”

“Michael, I think you have some introductions to make,” she demanded.

Everyone then said their hellos. I later updated them on my life changes. And then Angeline and Kelvin started telling me about the deaths on the mountain over the past decade: several suicides (one in the mobile home below my old house via a shotgun blast to the face), a pair of drug overdoses, a homicide, an accidental fatality, and a couple of natural old-age passings.

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