

Maddog Unleashed

Denied Desert in Winter? Keep Temperature High By Following the News

*If you love something, let it go. If it doesn't come back,
hunt it down and kill it. —Anonymous*



BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Valentine's Day, Schmalentine's Day. I hate February. Stamp that on your little candy heart.

The two or three of you who read this column on a regular basis without consulting priests, lawyers or gastroenterologists know that I like to enjoy a little downtime come February, preferably in a tent, in the desert, and without joining the Army.

There, free of news, chores, spouse and pets—and most important, winter—I can spend a refreshing week riding and running on ice-free trails, jump-starting my geek-tan and recharging the cranial solar batteries that run my self-preservation circuits, which keep me from squinting one-eyed at innocent bystanders through peep sights from atop some tall building.

Mind you, this is camping in the same sense that a hotel without room service is roughing it. My bolt hole for a while now has been McDowell Mountain Regional Park outside Fountain Hills, Arizona, and of its campsites may I say that I have lived in less-well-appointed apartments while paying significantly higher rent.

The campsites are intended for RVs, and boast parking, power, water, concrete picnic tables, barbecue grills and fire pits. But a ham-and-egger can pitch a tent on their manicured sand, unfold the propane stove atop the picnic table and slide a cooler underneath, then while away some pleasant hours doing laps on the Pemberton Trail before coming “home” at sunset to whip up a little stir-fry, sip a few drams and enjoy the aerial gymnastics over Sky Harbor International Airport while listening to jazz on KJZZ.

Not So Fast. This year, like a surly teenager accustomed to flaunting curfew without reprisal, I slouched toward my open window of opportunity only to have it slammed shut by vigilant authority figures. Chores were discussed. Sparks of rebellion flared and subsided like the Dow Jones. Eventually I agreed to behave, the way a freshly paddled puppy gives you the velvet-painting eyes right before waddling over to the water bowl for a long, deep drink and a dark glance at the sofa.

Denied my little corner of the desert, I contemplated other winter-avoidance measures. The trainer in the basement? Sounds like the title of an H.P. Lovecraft tale. The YMCA? That's no place for a Zen Druid (I hug the tree, even though I know it is an illusion). Whisky? Maybe I can tan myself from the inside out.

Well, there's always following the news. That's guaranteed to heat a guy up, even in February.

And Now, the Headlines. The Ermine Collar Comedy Tour was still going strong, with Georgie the Cable Guy announcing a \$3.1 trillion budget that included \$515.4 billion for the Pentagon, the biggest bite from the taxpayer's endlessly gnawed butt since World War II. That means bombs trump bike paths, in case you were wondering.

The Race to Replace was chugging right along, too, shedding hopefuls like bloated albino ticks dropping off a rabid dog. We were pretty much down to Billary, Barack F. Kennedy and Mr. Strait Jacket—pardon me, Mr. Straight Talk—before Valentine's Day.

Somehow all this was failing to cheer me up at the thought of a vacation denied. And then I remembered the really bad news: Mark Nobilette had finished my custom 'cross frameset and was taking it to the North American Handmade Bicycle Show in Portland.

It's a hell of a note when a guy's bike goes places without him.