

Don't Break Down, Southern Humboldt

After hitting an unavoidable 2 ft. deep pothole I heard, "POP, POP, POW! Whoosh!" Up came the flames from beneath the hood as I scrambled to gather my laptop, purse and pile of paperwork -jarred by another bumpy ride. Luckily I wasn't wearing my seatbelt, for the purpose of swiftly escaping to safety. As I waited for the flames to die and smoke to clear from the tin-can loaner truck I found myself in that day. I thought, while the fire is a twist, this was the fourth time I found myself on the side of Salmon Creek Rd. in 5 attempts, in 3 different vehicles. The obvious cause- there are endless potholes, some so deep they display homemade signs appropriately navigating people to China through them, for you literally cannot see the bottom.

Breaking down in Southern Humboldt for many, is a death sentence. Beyond the obvious inconveniences, So Hum is a special sort of dysfunctional, especially for those without roots in the area. There are no consistent tow companies (that work with AAA) who venture very deep down private roads. All while there are constant threats of "Car-BQS" if you leave any vehicle anywhere overnight (according to one local fire dept. chief). Im not even going to mention the vigilantees.

It is a minimum 3-week wait to see any mechanic within a 60-mile radius, many requiring 50% cash upfront. Beyond 60 miles- the other two mechanics shops I also use-both burnt to the ground within in a year- I couldn't make this shit up (McGees and Redwood Auto). The public transportation is laughable, taking you nowhere typical workers need to go. The few walkways between the sister towns of Redway and Garberville CA are scenes mirroring those only stunt-doubles might dare cross, while grow-dozers swerve by drunkenly going over 55 mph. These pedestrian pathways, some less than a foot wide, overlook sharp 200 ft. cliffs; so dangerous people get hit, pushed, thrown over, and fall to their death regularly. We are up to number 3 just this year at the cliff, in addition to 2 pedestrians hit and killed earlier in the year, in addition to one bicyclist hit who survived on redwood drive early October. These figures would be startling in downtown LA at Hotel Cecil, but this has happened in a very small town and approximately 1 mile radius, without even mentioning the bodies found in the rivers seemingly every week.

Welcome to So Hum; if your pockets are deep, you may be able to stay a while! Most items from food to toiletries to hotels and restaurants include a hefty grower tax of 200% more than average cost for typically cisco/monsanto quality. Be aware if you happen to stay - with the property values and cost of living, the economy demands you move into cannabiz just to survive, but do not fool yourselves the days of making a livable wage have been in decline for 5 years and were officially over for most last year.

My clutch had to be replaced for the second time this year, I got the truck back late August, and it broke again 2 days later. I had to wait 6 weeks for the mechanic to start the work, after pre-paying \$1k for a \$1500 head gasket. That's a grand total of 2 days use of my truck in the past over 80 days. My boss called to tell them I was about to loose my job over this and they didn't budge and inch. How do we continue to accept these roads juxtaposed by our government's inability to take responsibility for them and the devastation they cause people?

This story I share is not rare, it is the norm; the wholly inadequate roads from Sprowel to Alderpoint, Salmon Creek, Mattole-Honeydew and beyond regularly cripple workers. Some longtime community members have the luxury of second cars, however many elderly, newcomers, internationals, and the poor do not have this option. Often they are but one breakdown away from a life crippling domino effect. This occurrence is also not new era-wise,

ask around and you'll find many members of Southern Humboldt began living here because they broke down and it took so long to leave, they just fell in love with the place while waiting.

While the cost to me is unquantifiable, applied to a large group the loss to our local economy is catastrophic. I alone no longer buy coffee at the cafes (\$4), and either breakfast (\$30), lunch (\$40), or dinner (\$50+) almost every other day. I carpool to shop at the friendly coop in Northern Humboldt and at Shop Smart if I must once every couple weeks (\$80), instead of whenever I can afford to get the munchies (\$100 2-3xs weekly). Without a way to work, I naturally have less to contribute monetarily, and my non-profit volunteer roles have diminished as well. At least I am minimizing my contribution to gas companies, climate change and Measure Z funds used to fuel the criminalization in justice institution, there with a ticket every time our headlights jiggles loose from all these pot holes.

My registration is supposed to be my contribution to keep 1207 miles of public roads, in a state of total emergency as declared by Gov. J. Brown. This emergency declaration is technically still in effect in Humboldt starting January 3, 2017 and is estimated to cost \$20 million. The private roads are worse. Back in the 60s a local explained that people were so unsatisfied with the road conditions, they rode horses to town. Maybe it's time we giddy up again? The salt in wound is that many of the private roads we use, were made by logging companies, of which our elders stood up against to protect these very forests. The same roads we were staunchly against, we are being asked to repair with fleeting pound prices, diminished budgets, and added road etc. expenses and taxes on top? All while county budget is entirely bloated post prop 64 and in total denial of this misappropriation of funds. Yes the irony is steep. But what did we expect doing business with undoubtedly the worst middleman in the history of middlemen - "the man"?

A black chopper whips over my head, as I walk back to the cabin from likely volunteer-watering all day TBD. I consider my over \$2500 debt to the Mechanic over 80 days of being immobile, a fix-it ticket and registration due, on top of my boss entertaining the idea of my somehow squeezing out \$8k of his tax bill for the year, questioning the point of paying taxes if I have to pay so much for the roads already? And I wonder what people do on in my position who work minimum-wage jobs? What about those who have families to support and children to get to school? On my way back from work, the road workers finally started repairs to Salmon Creek Rd, thanks Humboldt County, as usual way too little and far too late. I guess there is always summer next year and here's to my truck's flakey reputation not inhibiting future employment!

The government will work for us only when we demand it, and until we stand up together we will individually get screwed as the man siphons off everything we value and represent. I came here because I heard this community cultivated; unity, inclusiveness, love, peace, anti-establishment/war sentiments and pro- living sustainably. I say its time we revisit our roots. If you have significant damage in car repairs from the past year and want justice, and/or are unsettled that the county is tasking you with thousands or even millions in private logging road repairs to continue on the "legalization" path you now possibly feel duped into, or perhaps you spent money and time fixing your road on your own contact privateeye@greenfuse.work to explore participating in an empowering community action.

- **SHAKTI**

Please Don't Scare the Trimmigrants!

The trimmigrants really snuck up on me this year. A few Fridays, maybe a month, ago we were all talking about how dead it was in town. I recognized every face in the Garberville Town Square that day, strictly locals. The following Thursday evening, however, at home, almost 20 miles from town, 3 miles from the nearest county road, I heard a faint "halo" outside my window. I looked up to see two young women with big backpacks, looking at me with hopeful eyes.

"Do you think you could maybe, please, give us a ride to where the dirt road meets the paved road?" one of them asked with an accent I didn't quite recognize. It was about 7:00pm, dusk. I asked them what they planned to do when they got to the end of the dirt road. "Hitchhike back to town." she told us. I advised against hitchhiking after dark. I told them that they were welcome to camp around our place until morning, and that we had planned to go to town ourselves, the next day. "No" she replied, "We want to get out of here now."

I could tell she was frightened. I asked her how they got here. She told us that one of our neighbors had hired them. He told them he had a few weeks work for them, but after two days, and one night, he had completely freaked them out. He had scared them so badly that they decided they would rather hitchhike back to town, after dark, than spend another night at his place. We understood completely. We gave them a ride to town.

By Southern Humboldt standards, we live in a pretty good neighborhood. We don't know everyone in our neighborhood, and there's some we know that we wish we didn't, but I do know that we have a lot of dangerous men around here, who live alone on large tracts of land. I believe these women had good reason to be frightened, and we were happy help them get away from a scary situation.

On the way to town they filled us in on more of the details. One of them was from Belgium and the other, Argentina. They had met in Mexico, and came here together looking for work, in hopes of extending their travels. Originally, they were a group of five, with three guys, but my neighbor singled out the two women, and they got into his car. He told them he lived on a "peace community" where they "practice permaculture and green building techniques." They became suspicious when they didn't see anyone else there. He also became more unpredictable, and went from peaceful, green, eco-hippie, to angry psychopath without warning, and at the slightest provocation.

They both seemed very shaken by the experience, and were kicking themselves for their poor judgment. I could tell that they had never met anyone like this guy before, and he really scared them. We commiserated. I explained that a lot of people who live out here, alone, on large tracts of rugged land, do so because they don't get along with people very well, and living out here doesn't

really help them develop those skills. We warned them that there are more guys like our neighbor out in these woods, and encouraged them to be more careful.

We wished them luck as we helped them unload their packs in Redway, where they headed straight into Deb's for the wifi, and something to eat. All around us there seemed to be dozens of young, hopeful-looking people, with big backpacks, getting in and out of vehicles. Suddenly, we have trimmigrants everywhere. Since then, several people have asked me, in a variety of accents, if I know where they can find work. I've seen people hitchhiking at every conceivable intersection, and there's a lot more young people in town, not as many as in years past, I think, but still a good showing.

I see them shopping all over town. Local merchants should be happy about that. Things had been pretty slow in town, for a while, before all of these kids arrived. Trimmigrants have got to make up a significant portion of the tourist dollars spent here in SoHum. Still, I see "No Trimmigrants" bumperstickers all over the place.

How bad do things have to get, economically, before we start to appreciate the people who come here and spend their money in our stores, restaurants and hotels? I've got a feeling we're going to find out. Let's hope we haven't scared them all away by then.

John Hardin
lygsbtd.wordpress.com