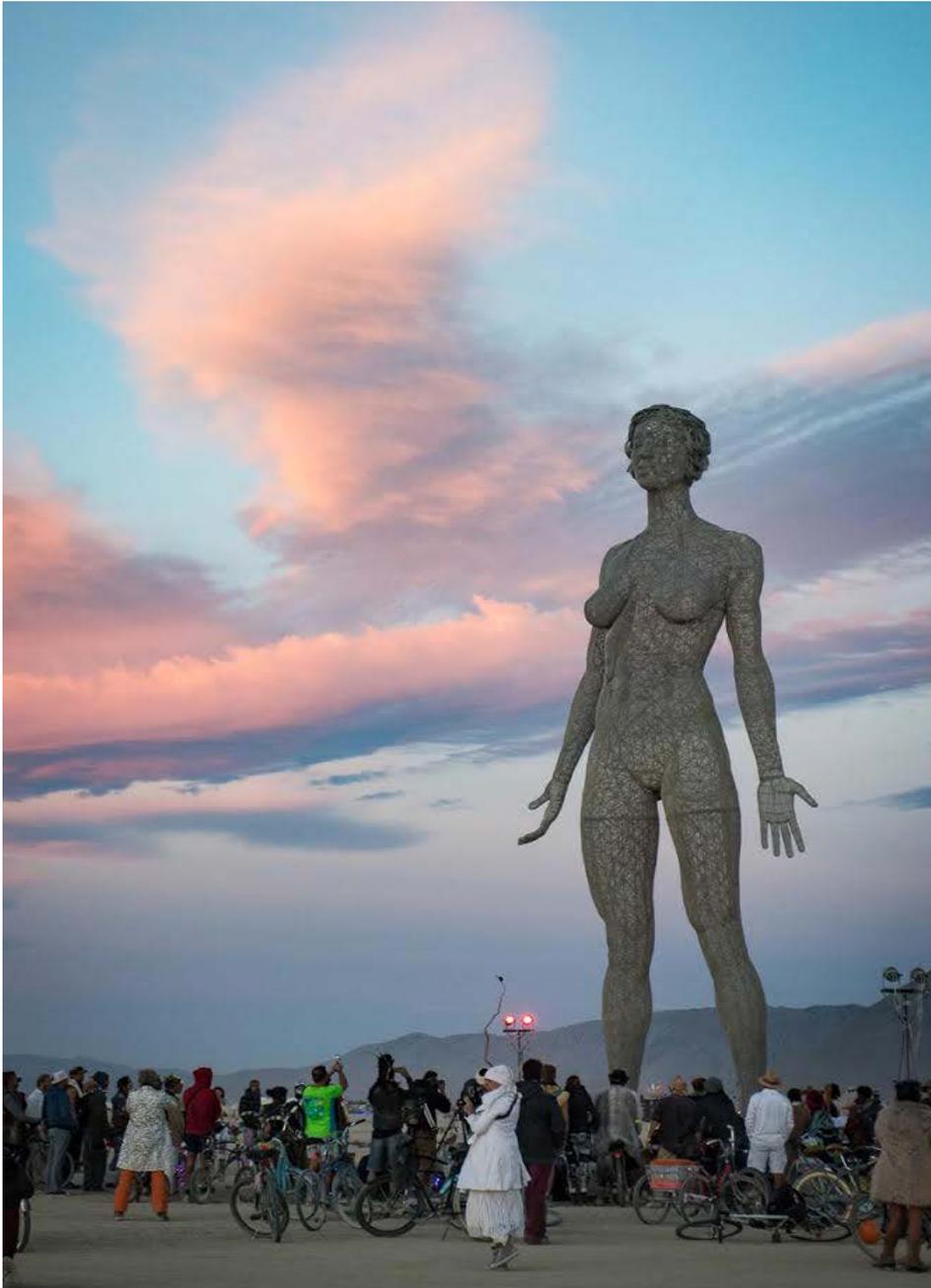


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Following up,



It was another good year at Burning Man. All the things that could drive you crazy at Burning Man were there for the force. But we've come to expect that and it's part of the experience. You have to be prepared to enjoy the misery.

It was the coldest Burning Man we've ever been to. I don't think the temperature ever got much over 90° and most the time was considerably less. Tuesday morning when we got up to come home the radio said the temperature was 39°.



It was however dusty. When we arrived on Saturday, the gate was closed due to whiteout conditions, making driving impossible on the playa. We hit the gate at about 5 o'clock and it took the next 5 1/2 hours to get through will call, gate, and the greeters. Then we got to our preferred spot, 3:30 and Jolly, and the three corners that we don't like were already taken. Our preferred spot was available which surprised us greatly. In past years there hadn't been anybody around us at all when we picked our campsite.

Set up went very well, considering I wasn't as strong, as steady or as flexible as I had been in the past. But we really had no problems, although I was certainly tired when we were finished. Once again we had to set camp up by ourselves as we had no compatriots with us this year.

The main reason for the solar panel and attendant hardware was the electric recumbent tricycle and we used the solar power to charge the bike. That worked pretty well until about Wednesday when I think we killed the deep cycle battery in the Cupcake that was about three or four years old and maybe was going to die anyway. I had a spare battery I usually use just use to charge the cameras. So I wired that in in parallel with the battery in the Cupcake, and that kept us going until Saturday. There was just enough juice left to keep the circuit board in the refrigerator alive, but not enough to charge camera batteries or the bike. I had to reset the fridge a couple times on Monday, but we did have ice cream from the freezer on Monday night after nine days in the desert.



After that failed, we charged the camera batteries and cell phones off the RV engine battery. This eventually killed that battery and we needed a jump to get started when we left on Tuesday. We pretty much crossed our fingers and stopped charging the bicycle. It lasted until Monday night on our way back from our last trip away from camp. Just exactly long enough!

We had fun meeting our old friends on the photography team. Some had followed along with my two-year saga from Susan's emails and others found out at the party on Tuesday afternoon. The organizers of the documentation team took pity on us and gave us a somewhat smaller assignment I think. Ordinarily, this would have made our job a lot easier. But the cold and wind offset that.



We pretty much did everything that we usually do. The man burn, the temple burn, the monkey chant photographing our art assignment and our other assignment, the airport. We met some nice folks and caught up with a bunch of our other friends who often camp near us.

The powered tricycle made a world of difference for my getting around. I thought it would enable me to keep up with Susan but I think it actually tired her out trying to keep up with me. It was really great when the surface was smooth. Late in the week when the roads became very bumpy and worn you find out the downside. Riding a tricycle means you get three times the chance of hitting a bump. So there may have been some spinal compression going on there.



Like I said it was colder and windier than it had ever been any year that we'd been at Burning Man. The first night we were there, the wind blew until 2:30 or three in the morning. It seemed to come and go during the days until Friday when it blew hard all day and was basically whiteout conditions on the playa. We really couldn't go out and take pictures of art or activities. We went to center camp on Friday but abandoned that at about 5 o'clock and headed back to our camp. We then cooked and ate inside and covered in the RV until we went to sleep.

But with all the strange weather, the burns still went off on time and were blessedly short this year. We didn't spend as much time wandering the open playa and looking at art as we usually do. Partly because of the wind, partly because we were just a little slower, partly because we were just a little older I think.

Before we went. I wasn't sure how up to it all I would be. Some of July and much of August I spent fixing things on the RV and getting things ready. This was more physical activity than I'd had in previous year and a half and was pretty exhausting. But that meant when I got to the playa everything was much easier than I expected it to be so we came and went and did and had fun just like we used to. Susan felt a little beat up like she usually does the first couple days in the desert. I had some minor G.I. distress, probably from the alkaline dust on the playa or a small change in medicines they made just before we left but nothing serious or long-lasting. I felt strong through it all and kept myself slathered with SPF 30 and managed to never get sunburned. And mostly, the real miracle, I mostly managed to take my eight times a day medicine. I never did experience any bad effects from it.



Coming home was another somewhat less exciting set of adventures.

When the battery wouldn't start the Cupcake, I went and got a friend at a different camp. The same friend who loaned us the tricycle. He came over to give us a jump. He decided the battery was truly shot in the cupcake and so brought a spare deep cycle battery from his RV, the Open Wound. With some difficulty he installed it. It got us going in the direction of Reno. We blew a tire about an hour and a half away from Burning Man. Since all the trucks for AAA were up on the playa towing other RVs, after two hours they managed to locate a truck in South Lake Tahoe, 95 miles away, and it took him two hours to get to us to change the tire. We didn't have a spare so he took off the wheel that was flat in the back and we drove it to Reno on three wheels.

The next morning I got up and couldn't get the engine to start off the battery. It almost started but not quite so I rigged the jumper cables around to where the deep cycle battery was and used the extra bit we were getting from the bright sun in Reno through the solar panel and what was left of the old deep cycle battery was just enough to get the thing to start and so I left it running. A solar jump. We went to Les Schwab in Reno to buy a tire the next day instead of coming home. The tires are on a 16 1/2 inch wheel and so are not commonly available, generally discontinued by most tire manufacturers. It took most of the afternoon to get a tire put on and we left Reno and made it over the hill and down to Kingvale before we blew a second tire. The first AAA truck didn't have tools big enough to work on the small truck body that the cupcake is built on, but the second AAA truck that arrived at that event was finally able to help us and once again we were down a tire, and driving on three and it was already dark. The tires are too small to qualify as truck tires which you could get from a 24 Hour truck repair place. So we drove down to Auburn and stayed at our second Motel 6 in two days. The next morning we got a tire in Sacramento and the guy told us that all the tires on the car seem to be the same age and based on the numbering on the tire he thought they were made in either 1989 or 1999. He couldn't tell because the coding only included the last number of the year of manufacture. This didn't make us feel real good. But we pressed on. We almost made it home. I think the engine broke at the Marinwood exit on 101. It made a god-awful noise, got us off the exit and wouldn't turnover. Afterwards, I realized it appears the oil light is burned out. It took us two more days to get it towed from there to an RV parking lot in American Canyon, California. The Cupcake sits there now waiting for us to find an engine and a mechanic and another AAA call. But at least we don't have to deal with it at the moment. It's a month by month rental and will get to it after we deal with a few more pressing matters.

Susan has semi-involuntarily separated from her employment six months before she turns 65 which has caused some messing about related to medical insurance and Social Security decisions.

More immediate is the 60 day eviction notice from the landlord for an Owner Move In which will make us decide on a new place to live pretty soon. San Francisco is not really an option with walkup studios going for \$2000 and up. Many other places are in play.

It was a great Burning Man year, no reason that we can see not to go back. Get new engine, battery and tires before we do!

Bill & Susan

