

A Late Encounter with a Circular Future

by strannikov

Grange had made the same mistake any idiot West Texan made leaving the peace, security, safety, and perversity that is West Texas by driving north on I-35W out of Fort Worth: not only had he left the area east of Abilene for the last time, not only had he crossed into Oklahoma, not only had he driven north through the entire state of Oklahoma to spend his first and last night in Wichita, Kansas, but on leaving Wichita next morning, he continued driving north on I-35 bound for Emporia, heading east with every mile he drove north instead of aiming due north as he wanted by taking I-135 for Salina.

Grange, himself a wind turbine technician in his native Texas, drove unimpressed amidst the towering windmills that would have intimidated even Don Quixote. On this expedition out of state as on his previous few to New Mexico and Arizona, he never once consulted GPS to discover where he was or where he was headed, but on this fatal trip he had failed equally to consult the Rand McNally atlas on the seat beside him.

By the time he left Emporia, after his pleasant jaunt across and through the Flint Hills, he realized that he was heading northeast for Topeka on I-335, not north for Salina, a course that would take him much closer to Missouri than he intended and not toward Wyoming, his chosen destination for trout fishing. He didn't correct his navigational error, though, until he reached Exit 147 and US 56 to begin barreling due west for Herington, at which point he aimed to take a right to go north to Junction City so that he could reach I-70 West bound for Colorado and I-25 North for Wyoming.

The actual trouble overtook him in Morris County, just west of Council Grove on the well-paved highway east of Herington. Grange was still cussing up storms and other calamities in the well-

illuminated heat of central Kansas at mid-day when he thought he spied Dennis Hopper in his buckskin fringe speeding beside him on or off the right shoulder of the highway. It was not Dennis Hopper, of course, who'd already been dead for some time, and the rider wasn't even on a motorcycle: Grange shook his head after the alert from his peripheral vision and instead saw astride a painted pony an Indian with black paint smeared from jaw to jaw below his nose with feathers in his hair all aflutter matching Grange's camper-clad F-150 speed of 78 mph, which in fact astounded Grange, who'd never seen a pony quite so nimble.

Grange floored his truck to disabuse this unsolicited escort of his pretensions to velocity. As soon as the speedometer registered 92 mph, however, the Indian and his pony were just as readily seen through the cracked passenger-side window racing down or beside the right shoulder with a velocity equal to Grange and his pick-up.

Grange was so perplexed and enraged by the nonchalance of the Indian and his amazing pony that he failed to see at just the wrong moment that he was no longer driving US 56 West but unpaved prairie and that straight ahead of him were the enraged and fierce ghosts of some three or four dozen mounted braves with lances and eager arrows ready to charge as soon as the last drop of gas evaporated from his anachronistic gas tank.

Whatever future Grange had thought himself to be living in no longer existed, and he would not be making Colorado that afternoon, much less Wyoming by nightfall. As luck would have it, the entire length of US 77 between Herington and Junction City had been chewed up for resurfacing and would have presented a sonic challenge for any driver exceeding 45 mph.

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