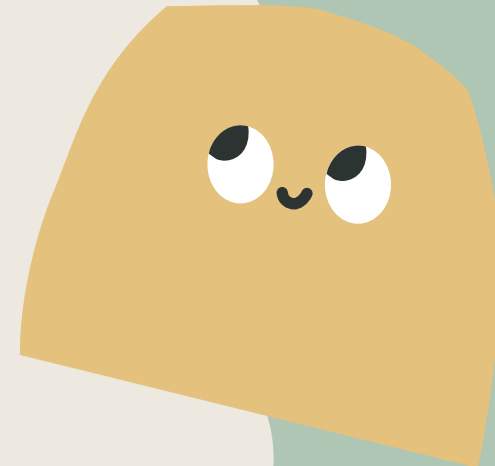
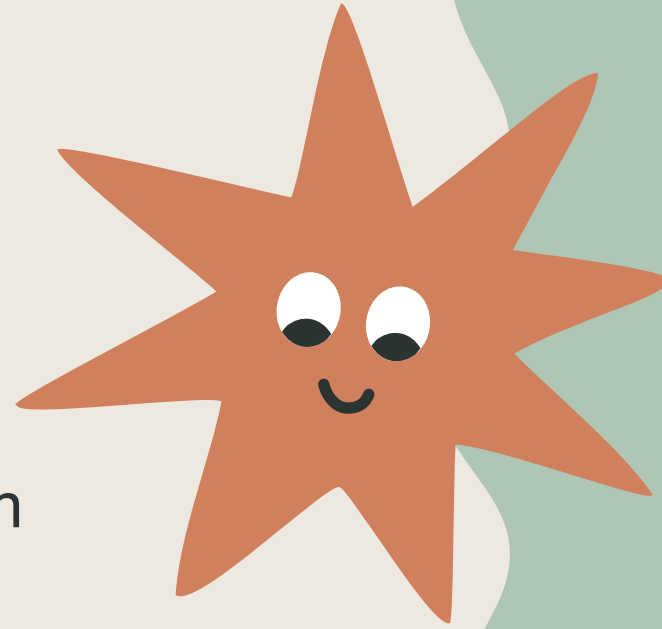


The Difficulties of Rovers

Things That Happened When I'm On My Own

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Oct 8, 2026



Roving has all the best of:

- Exploring
- Camping
- Visiting mountains, coastlines, scenic vistas
- Choose your own adventure + self-reliance
- Operating radios
- Being focus of a pileup
- Making do when things go wrong

Agenda

- Packing problems
- Camping problems
- Electrical problems
- Radio problems
- Medical problems

I Forgot Something at Home...

- Forgot my prescription meds (4 hours from home) +

Turned around and went home. Restarted next day.

- Forgot boots in the Olympic Rain Forest in rain season (5 hours) +

Stopped in Forks, WA and bought new ones.

- My guest forgot to load his sleeping bag (6 hours from home) +

He slept in my reclining office chair.

- Forgot my pillow (1 hour from home) +

Turned my winter coat inside out, stuff it with clothing.

I Forgot More Stuff at Home...

- Forgot a shovel and got stuck in snow high on Mt Rainier

+

(4 hours from home)

Traction boards are decent shovels.

- Forgot a shovel again (1 day away)

+

Continued without it.

- Discovered my amp required a 9-pin to 13-pin adapter (4 hr)

+

Rod WE7X bought one at HRO and brought it to me.

I Forgot Even More Stuff...

- Forgot the printed itinerary (1 day from home)
+ Continued, it was on a backup thumb drive.
- Backup thumb drive got corrupted (3 days from home) Continued without it.
+ Reconstructed route from memory and notes.
Found replacement waypoints on Google Maps.
This was hard – the route was compromised.
It wasted extra miles and stops.

Forest Fires

- In California parked at CN71 high above Crescent City, there was a 5,000-acre active forest fire, 0% contained.
- Ever since Ed N7PHY encountered heavy smoke in eastern WA (or Montana), I carry a respirator. This is a 3M dust/paint grade filter.

No Cellphone Signal

- In CN98, high above Arlington / Darrington, I had to hike a half-mile across the ridge to get any signal at all.
- Throughout Idaho, I put my cellphone on the van roof and linked it via WiFi to my laptop.
- In DN02-03 on Bacon Ridge, I stood on the tailgate and held my cellphone above the van roof.

No Cellphone, continued

- Roving is *hard* and super frustrating without internet.

I borrowed Ed's Starlink Mini for a couple trips.

In Aug 2026, I bought a used Starlink myself.

- Beyond arranging contacts, it's a joy to have a circle of friends in a Slack chatroom. I share photos, and sometimes they use AI to decorate them.



Locking Keys in the Car

- Camping in the Umatilla National Forest (6 hours from home, 1 hour off-road), I locked the keys in the car *with the engine running*. +

Windows are not *that* expensive, are they?

- The driver's window was open about 1". +

Next to my feet was a curved stick.

Window control is a rocker switch.

VW Jetta can be unlocked by pushing it down.

- Since then, I carry a spare key in my backpack. +

Always take it when I leave the car.

Firearms & Self Protection

- Managing risks include self protection.
- DL88 in Big Bend is on the Mexican border

+

I have no experience with firearms.

Different states have vastly different laws – I visit a lot of states.

Out-of-state license plate attracts police attention – Nephi, UT

At a traffic stop – they will ask about weapons.

At a border checkpoints - they WILL ask about guns.

I feel safer without a gun than with one.

Travel with a partner!

Charging System RFI

- I can operate 4-5 hours on batteries, and then things *must* get charged.
- The Victron inverter has terrible RFI on 6m.

I stop operating and charge during meal times.

- Solar panels are quiet – no RFI but they only charge the 48v battery.
Laptop and 12v battery require charging.

I added ferrites.

I will try a 12v-to-19.5v boost converter.

I will try a small 12v-to-120v ac inverter.

The RFI has not been solved.

Altitude Problems

De-rating a **Generator** at Altitude

- Honda EU2000i is more than enough for a 1 KW station. Unless...
- Generator *at altitude* doesn't produce 2 KW.
- Above 7,000' it's not enough power.

+

In theory, fix carburetor with high-altitude jets.
In practice, charger settings can reduce load.

De-rating **Me** at Altitude

- Bald Peak in Idaho is 9,000'.

I had a permanent headache.

Broken Coax

- 2018: I made a coast-to-coast trip, intending to activate every grid square along the way. I wore a gym timer on my upper arm and called CQ by voice every ten minutes. Hours went by. More hours went by. No contacts. Then I discovered my coax failed because it was continually shut into the 4Runner's lift gate.
- I had spare coax.
But I was discouraged and motivation destroyed.
I only activated a couple rare grids along the way.
I stopped and set up the whole Kilowatt+5el station.
EN02 Nebraska, EM87 Virginia.

Fridge Failure

- In all the places you need a fridge, the Chihuahuah Desert is the most necessary place. My fridge used an ugly barrel-connector for the accessory socket. It kept falling out. Ed N7PHY and I spent three days driving to Midland, TX, wrestling with the damn thing.
- I used to carry my PowerPole toolkit but haven't used it for 15 years. I needed the space for DL88 and left it behind. Oops.
- Our Texas host was Robert W5AJ. He brought his friend over, Alan N5NA, who loaned his tools. Problem solved. Guess what, Alan needed only one grid to finish FFMA, and it's CN78 on the Olympic Peninsula. So my next three roves went there to work him.

Calibrating Compass

- All magnetic compasses are not good.

Easily offset by stray magnetic fields.

- How to calibrate compass?

+

WSJT can tell you the sun's azimuth.
If the sun or moon is visible, use it.

Clock Drift

- WSJT demands clock accuracy of 1.0 second or better.
My laptop drifts $\frac{1}{2}$ second in $\frac{1}{2}$ hour.
- If you have cellphone internet, manually sync to NTP time server.
- If you have GPS, I can use NMEATime2 to automatically sync PC time continuously with high accuracy using its Kalman filter. But guess what? Continuous adjustments are *extremely* disruptive to WSJT.
- Use BktTimeSync to schedule periodic adjustments from a GPS puck.

Medical Emergencies

- In Idaho, I once stepped out of the van and fell hard. +
Always, *always* carry cellphone in pocket.
- At 9000', I had permanent headache. +
Always bring Ibuprofen.
- For a wingman in DL88, I had arranged Jim WM5L to join me.
He experienced a heart attack two months before departure.
Trip cancelled – got new wingman, Ed N7PHY. +
I can hardly imagine the awful outcome if we were four hours
from civilization and an attack was triggered by the heat stress.
Carry a first-aid kit.

Medical Emergencies, continued

Camping

Make sure someone knows where you are.

I touch base 1x or 2x a day with my wife.

Often just text message.

Stay within cellphone or Starlink range.

Driving

APRS plus iPhone stalk-a-spouse (“Find My” app).

Our running joke is she wants to be able to tell Search & Rescue that
“Barry was last seen driving toward this cliff right *here*.”

Thank You

May all your travel be trouble-free (with sufficient planning).

RAFO

Rove Around, Find out!