

ULTIMATE

ROAD TRIP

TSN



1 3 4 2 6

miles the Road Trippers have driven so far.



\$330:

total fine for speeding, which TSN says Jeff cannot label an expense.

23:

states they have traveled through.

SMALL TREASURES

By Jeff Carlton

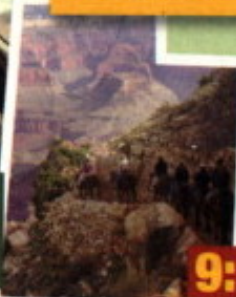
For about two months now, I have traveled with my fellow Road Trippers and, for the record, we haven't "found ourselves" or referred to this as a "journey of self-discovery."

People have romantic notions about life on the road, but it's not like we're out here on our own, surviving on wits and crashing for the night where we can. We have expense accounts, company credit cards, a travel agent and the guarantees of decent lodging and reliable transportation.

We're not wandering aimlessly from state to state on some quixotic jaunt crisscrossing America.

The long hauls, anonymous hotels and strange cities can be taxing. This trip's about half over and already much of it is a blurry jumble of wake-up calls, checking in, checking out, searching for food and catching up on the home front.

The football aside, what stands out are those occasional moments that you aren't supposed to laugh about until 10 years from now: a speeding ticket in Nevada, a fender-bender in New Orleans, missing our exit on an interstate in Georgia and not noticing for 80 miles. With us, it's usually an hour before we start laughing.



9:

miles they hiked in the Grand Canyon.

5a.m.:

how late Dawn and Brian stayed out gambling in Las Vegas.

DENVER: Monday, Nov. 13

65:

average miles they drive before stopping for a bathroom break.

KANSAS CITY: Sunday, Nov. 19



GOING TO THE PASS: On the job in an NFL press box.

3:

sunrises they've seen while driving.

\$1,157.18:

amount of money they have spent on gas.

DALLAS: Sunday, Nov. 17

Some of the day-to-day details of this trip are pretty mundane. You try to find excitement on the Nebraska plains while sitting in a car all day. Still, when most people hear about what we're doing, they seem pretty envious. And they should be.

There's nothing quite like reading a different newspaper in a different city almost every day. Or finding that perfect restaurant, nightspot or moment that captures the essence of where you are. In New Orleans, it was losing track of time in a karaoke bar, stumbling out onto Bourbon Street at 4 a.m. and discovering that no one had gone home. In San Francisco, it was talking about our career options in a bar where Jack Kerouac used to drink. It was seeing the sun rise over a desolate Wyoming landscape and watching it set over a tranquil Puget Sound.

I'm not sure if we've learned a great deal about ourselves, but I know we've learned about each

other. How do you spend 24 hours a day with the same people for four months? It's a fair question that's often asked of us and carefully answered.

Our trip is a life lesson in diplomacy and the delicacy of relationships. Dealing with each other on this trip is usually fun, sometimes frustrating and occasionally dull. But even in the worst moments, I know that all of this is once-in-a-lifetime.

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FEELING THE POWER

By Brian Murphy

BEST FOOTBALL TOWN (VISITED SO FAR)

1. OAKLAND
2. NASHVILLE
3. SAN FRANCISCO
4. NEW ORLEANS
5. BALTIMORE
6. TAMPA BAY
7. SEATTLE
8. JACKSONVILLE
9. PHOENIX
10. SAN DIEGO
11. ATLANTA

They might have lost a step, but it has been replaced by wisdom, better conditioning and the swagger that comes with having been there, done that.

This can be said about any number of aging NFL stars, the ones I grew up watching on television, the ones I now get to see in person. They are the heroes of Sundays mostly in the past: Jerry Rice, Deion Sanders and Bruce Smith, to name a few.

Surrounded by all the fast food and chicken sandwiches, it's easy for football to get lost in the chaos of this trip. Sunday, the focus comes back to football, drawn there by the brilliance of Rice with his precision routes, the flair and gamesmanship of Sanders, and the power plus agility of an ageless Smith.

The game, in its present packaged-for-television form, has wrested the title of the national pastime from baseball. But though television was the catalyst to this rise, TV cannot transmit the smell of a freshly mowed field or the rush of a wildly exuberant crowd. Television doesn't do justice to the aroma from grills outside the gates, or the tension of an important third-down play. These sensations can be experienced only at the game.

The players—most of them giants—appear small on TV. The holes—usually tiny—seem enormous from a living room recliner. The speed of the game and the impact of the collisions, such as on kickoff returns, cannot be truly comprehended until standing on a sideline.

Complex offenses and cloaked defenses—aspects of football simplified in video games or by stop-and-start telestrators—don't read so easily from ground level. On the sideline, the most basic of acts can amaze: watching the defensive linemen charge out of crouched stances, the offensive linemen poised to protect, the quarterback dropping back, the timing and execution that must be perfect—all over the field.

The hush of a home crowd realizing a last-second defeat or the euphoria of a victorious home crowd are not easily measured until standing among the cheering throng.

Long after the scores of games we have seen on this trip are forgotten, the sensations will remain.

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THREE'S COMPANY: From the left, Murphy, Carlton and Reiss.



MINNESOTA: Thursday, Nov. 30

GREEN BAY: Monday, Nov. 6

DETROIT: Thursday, Nov. 23

BUFFALO: Sunday, Dec. 3

NEW ENGLAND: Monday, Dec. 4

N.Y. GIANTS: Saturday, Dec. 23

CLEVELAND: Sunday, Dec. 17

PITTSBURGH: Saturday, Dec. 16

PHILADELPHIA: Sunday, Dec. 24

CHICAGO: Sunday, Nov. 5



INDIANAPOLIS: Monday, Dec. 11

ST. LOUIS: Monday, Nov. 20

CINCINNATI: Sunday, Nov. 26

36: touchdowns they've seen through Week 9.

1: minor car accident sustained, mainly because of Brian's subpar parallel-parking skills.



CAROLINA: Monday, Nov. 27

13: total rushing yards by the Falcons against the Giants, a franchise low and the worst offensive performance they figured to see.



A COMMON BOND

By Dawn Reiss

A grandma. A 300-pound, dog-collared behemoth. A gentleman athlete named "The Freak." A New Orleans streetcar driver.

As we travel America's highways, one thing is obvious: Football is a common thread of our culture. It's not pop culture, either. It's personal.

Why else would a 62-year-old grandmother, Frances Lindquist, have a life-size cardboard cutout of Joe Montana in her living room? Simple, she says, it goes with her neon Coors Light 49ers sign in the window and the autographed No. 16 jersey that hangs framed over her mantel.

Why else would George Manley, a 30-something technical support specialist for an Internet company, pack his massive body into a skin-tight Raiders jersey, pads and helmet on a Friday afternoon? Simple, he says, it goes with his dog collar, spiked gloves, tire chains and Fu Manchu. And if he didn't wear all that, he would be ostracized from the Black Hole, a place where Raiders fans wear black leather, silver studs and bondage collars while chanting near a skeleton-filled cage.

These are two extreme examples of the football fanatics we've met on our journey. They come in all shapes and sizes. They come from all economic backgrounds. And they all share that adrenaline rush when the ball flies

NEXT UP: CHICAGO AND GREEN BAY. CATCH THE WHOLE TRIP AT www.sportingnews.com/nfl/roadtrip.

through the air each Sunday.

Gregory Brown, a onetime banker, drives a streetcar past the French Quarter, old southern mansions in the Garden district and Tulane. For Brown, with his starched-white shirt and tie uniform and an elaborate silver crucifix hanging from his neck, driving on Sundays is difficult. That's a holy day—when the Saints play.

In Nashville, a city where people can name a country tune in three notes, Titans jerseys outnumber rhinestone-studded shirts. These NFL neophytes pack their football altar, wagging their red foam swords to the beat of a drum, like red lobster tails, and praying to their sack god, Jevon "The Freak" Kearse.

Football might not be life's work for Americans, but it is their life.

It doesn't matter who you are or where you are from. Everybody is talking football. Even in Arizona, people might not discuss Cardinals football, but they talk for hours about the Packers and the Cowboys.

Whether it's college or pro, high school or a backyard league, football, even in a small Wyoming town with the population of two, is a way of life—and, more important, a common bond from coast to coast.

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