

BURNING MAN 2009 – BREAKDOWN IN BLACK ROCK PT II

In our [previous post](#), we wrote about getting to **Burning Man** and setting up our camp, affectionately dubbed Camp Craigslist. In Part II, we look at the food we came across as well as some of the more notable bars that became like second homes. Also, we ride around in a birthday cake and learn a lesson in desert survival.

Naked Sushi

Considering it's in the middle of a desert, **Burning Man** offers a surprisingly varied menu, if you're timing's right or you pay attention to what's in the guide. (The guide tells you what's happening at what camp and when.) It seems nothing is beyond some enterprising campers, from poutine to Vietnamese iced coffee to the ever-popular sno-cones and even sushi. Which was good news, considering all I'd brought was a box of Clif bars, some Kashi cereal and tins of Amy's organic soup and (ugh!) Campbell Chunky Beef Soup (which I never touched, and is earmarked for the local food bank, though I'm not sure even the homeless deserve such dreadful chemical putrescence).

Chief among the surprise food finds was the aforementioned poutine, made and served by a group of Montrealers every night, starting at midnight and until supplies ran out, and sushi, which I missed but heard about from the chef who'd flown in from Japan and picked up the air-packed fish from San Francisco (he mentioned that it was served on the bodies of nude females, and gone in five minutes).

Some of the foods I was lucky enough to stumble upon included crepes, being served by a camp one afternoon as I was passing by on my bike; something deliciously sweet called "coconut bliss"; and bacon-wrapped Fudgee-Os. Even after all the flogging, dildo jousting, and pole-dancing I witnessed, this delicacy – served at a camp made up mostly of Vancouverites – was the most debauched moment of the whole week. (Burners love their bacon; it seemed every time I turned around I smelled bacon frying. Apparently, it's good for restoring the much needed salt balance.)



Sarah and Liz enjoy a Vancouver delicacy: Bacon-Wrapped Fudgee-Os.

Another camp served pancakes every morning, and most seasoned camps had at least one event during the week where they pulled out the bags of corn chips and nuts and served a specialty cocktail to anyone who made the effort to stop by.

The Shot-Ski and the Mankini

One of my favourite stops was the Golden Cafe, which was a tent with a Moroccan (as if I know Moroccan!) feel and a more particular way with its drinks than other camps, which basically just served cheap vodka by the caseload. The Cafe, which did indeed have a golden calf in the centre, abides by three rules: drink what they serve you, finish your drink, return the glass. Where most camps encourage you to bring your own reusable cup (to tie in with Burning Man's no-trace-left-behind ethos), the Golden Cafe staff insist you use their glasses. I found this out the hard way – I set my Hello Kitty sippy cup down on the bar, earning a glance from one of the bartenders who then grabbed a megaphone. "Just a reminder," he blared, "we don't want your stinking, dusty playa cups. You'll use our glasses or you won't get served." And though your libation is up to whoever your bartender, including Maria who wants you to bring her your sex toys, might be, if you're a "preferred customer" (i.e. you have contributed mix; the pop and juice always runs out before the booze) you get a medallion and whatever drink you want.

The Golden Cafe was notable also for the "shot-ski," a ski with five shot-glasses attached and which requires the participants to coordinate the tipping over of the ski, and

an appearance by the “mankini.” On the day I had my first (and only) “shot-ski” (of tequila), five guys burst into the tent. All wore mankinis, fluorescent green versions of the one-piece suspenders-and-banana-hammock bathing suit a la Borat.



Bloody Marys and Aerobics, Amateur Flogging

I also kept returning to the Duck Pond, the camp/bar I came across my first morning. As near as I can tell how these things work, the more interactive and welcoming and full-service a camp is, the better its location; the Duck Pond was close to the action on the Esplanade, though still a few streets away. The Duck Pond had several things going for it, and several of the visits I made there turned out to be among my most memorable Burning Man experiences.

For instance, there was the amateur flogging I came across one afternoon. An older, stocky dude was attempting to show Mandy, a brunette in her 20s, the ins and outs of using a cat o’ nine tails (attached to the ceiling by a chain). However, Mandy just couldn’t seem to master the knack despite a steady stream of subjects eager to insert their wrists into the wrist clamps on the bar and hike up their skirt or lower their shorts. “I don’t want to hurt people,” said Mandy, aiming another ineffectual lash at an exposed pair of (male) buttocks. “I want to give them hugs.” Then there was the “Bloody Marys and Aerobics” session one morning – if you followed along with the class, even for just a few minutes, the bar would serve you a Bloody Mary.

Dear Penthouse, I’ve Always Wanted to Hear Porn Over a Megaphone. Well, One Day at Burning Man...

Other notable camps included Bob's Rainforest (thanks for the correction, James!), a corner camp near ours. The only spot of green in the desert, it was furnished in plastic (I think) trees and shrubbery. One of the favourite activities for the campers at Bob's, located kitty-corner from our camp, was reading *Penthouse* and *Hustler* letters over a megaphone. Not leaving out any of the juicy parts. They also used the megaphone to comment on passersby, kind of a "what-not-to-wear" for **Burning Man**. Although there's really no such thing as "what-not-to-wear" at **Burning Man** – except maybe for shirt-cocking. (This is where a guy wears nothing but a T-shirt; "it's the worst way to see a naked man," I was told by one enlightened female. Then again, other camps had happy hours devoted to shirt-cocking.)

Speaking of megaphones, I noticed in the **Burning Man** Guide that at least one camp had a session devoted to the proper use of megaphones. Like glowing hula hoops, megaphones are among those items that have never led to financial ruin for anyone selling them to **Burning Man** devotees.

Love for the Pole

A couple of bar camps showed love for the pole. The G-Spot, near our camp, had one, and every afternoon the female bartenders and passersby would give it a go. At the microbrew bar where I saw Iron Man (see [Breakdown at Black Rock Pt. I](#)) we were treated to an astonishing display by a full naked (and this was only Monday; most people didn't start walking around fully nude until Tuesday) woman with a stripper's lean, muscular body, sans implants, show off on her moves. "Eleven years dancing, six years out of the business, you don't forget," she said after her performance. Another camp took pole dancing seriously enough to even have judges and official competition times and, for all I know, prizes.



But flogging and pole-dancing were only two-thirds of the naughty fun; another third was the dildo jousting. Right around the corner from our camp was Love Puddle. The Love Puddlers liked nothing more than to strap home-made dildo contraptions (complete with dangling little ping pong balls) onto a couple of girls, then have them try to knock each others' balls off while balancing on teetering planks. "It's too much responsibility," cried one girl after her joust. When I think of whether I'll return to Burning Man next year, it's usually this I think of.



Lawrence of Arabia

But I promised a tale of desert survival, so here it is.

You hear a lot about staying hydrated in the desert; at least you do if you're me and you announce your intention on going to **Burning Man** to all your friends. Anyway, Tuesday morning, the morning after my first night, I awoke as the sun was coming up and knew I would be unable to sleep. Figuring I'd check out what was happening in the camp, I hopped on my bike and road around the dusty streets before coming out onto the playa. I was following the music; out in the middle of the vast white expanse was a bus, and atop the bus a DJ, spinning everything from the Who to techno as the sun rose.

I joined about half-a-dozen other dancers in the desert, spinning around in the shadow of the bus while some sleepers were curled up in their bags a few yards away. I stuck around probably for half an hour or so before crossing back towards Black Rock City; on the way I spied a young woman in a silver lame one-piece doing the downward dog.

I joined the yoga class, already in session, out there on the dust. While doing my vinyasas or whatever the hell they are called I could hear a steady stream of oldies, like "Beyond the Sea" and some Frank Sinatra songs and some Elvis. The tunes were coming from a giant birthday cake art-car that was driving around the periphery of the playa. Hmmm, I thought, all I need is to stash my bike somewhere...



So after yoga I did just that, and hopped aboard the birthday cake. So now I'm on top of a two-storey birthday cake as it drives slooowly (five mph is the speed limit) around the desert. It's about 7:30, 8 a.m. I'm dancing with my fellow birthday cakers, about six of us in total including a couple guy passed out on the couches at the back of the platform, and waving and yelling "happy birthday" at people as we pass. I'm a little too wired to be totally relaxed but it's fun, and I'm thinking well, soon this moving birthday cake is

going to go back the way it came. But instead the driver took it out to the very outer edge of the encampment, which was enclosed by a short orange mesh fence, as far from the actual camp as it was possible to get. At 5 mph....

I was getting pretty thirsty by this point and, well, I hadn't brought any water – I'd left camp with the intention of returning right away. The sun, meanwhile, was in full beat-down mode. I realized it would be faster for me to walk back across the playa to my bike than to stay on the birthday cake. I felt like Lawrence of Arabia as I made the 30-minute trek back across the dry dusty playa under the hot morning sun. Not that I was ever in any real danger, but it was a wake-up call, and reminder that yes, you are in the desert. I didn't leave camp without water again.



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