

Golden Gatecrashing Part 2 - San Fran 2007

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Seals at Fisherman's Wharf San Francisco USA THE SEYMOUR MONKEY CHRONICLES:

The smell seemed sure to be betraying the remnants of a previous guest who had somehow failed to check out and was slowly decomposing in a plastered over alcove within in the hotel room walls. The street noises drifted up from Geary Street through the window that would not close completely. The TV bred familiarity of the banshee wail of black and white cop cars speeding to a crime scene or preparing for a ski jump down a hilly San Francisco street as part of an unbelievable car chase, drifted in above the pedestrian mutter and random curses of hobos. Despite this the room had more character than the alternative I had been offered with views of brick walls and alley garbage bins at the rear. I unpacked. Welcome to the Handelry Hotel San Francisco.

Climbing out the window I could get a good view of Union Square. The metal structure of the fire escape was another movie and television cliché complete with the retracting ladders and stairs that fleeing jewel thieves and adulterers could scramble down to evade pursuit. On TV cheesy presenters were flogging pharmaceuticals as cure alls for everything followed by more disclaimers than a Clinton blowjob admission.

Out on the piss with the sales team, bar hopping and talking shop. Fumbling with currency denominations in the dim lighting - Could the money be any more similar? Monotone bills in a technicolour world causing frustration only surpassed by the angst of the defacto sales tax called obligatory tipping. Then come 1am and everything starts shutting up. By 2am the place is a ghost town. Hey isn't this Friday night?

Next day we hit Fisherman's wharf en masse. Bikes hired and we were off riding along the foreshore to the Golden Gate. We pause for photo opportunities along the way with Alcatraz providing an interesting backdrop as we pose with seagulls the size of turkeys. From the shore Alcatraz is an intriguing blend of watch towers and ramshackle buildings surrounding a fortress of concrete. We comment that the distance certainly seems swimmable, a fact seemingly confirmed when a 14 year old is reported as having completed the annual race from the island to shore. “Oh but don't forget the fierce currents” say the tourist shop experts. We reserve our judgement.

The Golden Gate is blood red and dominates the scenery as we ride past The Presidio which was once an army base, (and a Sean Connery film), but has descended to a fate of being chopped up into housing developments. At the base of the bridge is an old fort that still symbolically guards the bay with its neutered cannons pointing out to sea. The stars and stripes flutter from every vantage point as we begin the ascent to the bridge up a slope seemingly designed for Lance Armstrong. I abort the peddling and dismount and push amid accusations of being a soft cock. Soon I am joined by another and we wear our cycling flaccidity as a badge of honour as we stroll to a more friendly gradient.

Peddling across the Golden Gate - Looking up at the immense girders and cables - Imagining Grace Jones wrestling with a geriatric Roger Moore on the tightrope of cables in the James Bond film A View to a Kill. Looking left as a huge cargo ship sails way below. Looking ahead again just in time to see the bike path detour around a gigantic pylon, narrowly avoiding becoming Golden Gate road kill.

Freewheeling through Sausalito to the ferry station - Beers on the boat and million dollar views of the bay and surrounds. The Captain swings close to The Rock for photo opportunities. Seems it is a day of Sean Connery film references. Behind us seagulls float in the wake waiting for any thrown treats.

Sunday comes and I'm on a train with my bosses to Silicon Valley - The land of nerds with rock star lifestyles and the Googleplex. Lunch meeting at a French themed restaurant in Palo Alto - Think Sizzler with a few photos of the Arc De Triumph and Eiffel Tower on the wall - An over-bubbly waitress greets us at the door with “Bon-Jaw.”

We sit and order drinks. Small talk and shooting the shit - “Hey you guys are from Or-stray-lee-ah” - Waitress returns with a beer and an orange juice instead of the requested tomato.

“…oh you mean Tom-Ay-Toe juice.”

Life in the world outside the borders of the red, white and blue seem to confuddle many . I hope these guys never get angry with Austria and bomb us by mistake.

We talk turkey. Deals done. Plans made. Wine drunk. Meals arrive. My hamburger looks like it has been rescued from

the bin out the back of Burger King. Burned black and smothered in that vile orange cheese the Yanks love. Handshakes and smiles. We get back on the train to San Fran.

More drinks at the swish Redwood Room. Animated artworks freak out the unwary & Hey that pictures eyes moved!

The working week starts and we hit the conference venue floor. Sales heaven USA. Tacky gimmicks, cheesy smiles, fake boobs, and handshakes alternating between limp fish and finger breakers. We trawl for business in shark infested waters.

The venue could have easily hangared a jumbo jet and our stand feels like Wally in a sea of stands and over-hyped marko-babble. All week we play an endless perpetual game of "Where the bloody hell are we?" - Every time we duck out for lunch or a call to nature. Klickeroo our robotic marsupial mascot grinning cheekily from our stall panels guides our way. & Hey you’re the Kangaroo guys.”

Cable cars rattle down Market street. Struggle up sheer slopes allowing walkers to rest weary limbs. Conductors swing around poles and hang off the edges like monkeys. I marvel at dangerous work practices that would never pass muster back home. But here it seemed the right to kill your self by doing something stupid is enshrined in constitutional law.

Breakfast menu & Heart attacks in a wide variety of flavours. Fry it up and dump it on a plate. Finally get my coffee sorted with cream and sugar to balance out the syrupy sludge and Captain Over Service arrives out of nowhere and fills up my cup without asking. Plastic smiles, fake sincerity, necessity to continually do something for or to you to justify a tip, genuine blissful ignorance of anything happening more than 100 metres off shore & Beginning to think that the famed US hospitality industry is anything but.

Next day looking for a fix of news - Fumbling for coins but coming up short.- Newspaper seller says “no problem fix me up later.” - Finally some genuine good service. I hunt him down later and slip him five bucks for his kindness. My faith restored.

A night of networking, which basically meant party hopping to various bars and clubs and drinking someone else’s bar tabs. Hook up with Lee a Pom and his mate Gedys a Lithuanian and drink on. Hail a cab and we pile in to go to a club in the Mission District. I had heard of this part of San Fran before, generally as a place where Karl Malden would find the corpse on TV or the locale for some crack house.

Lee rides shotgun upfront and Dean, Gedys and I pile in the back. Lee greets the driver with a cheerful hello and moves to put on his seat belt - This instinctive action prompting a verbal blast.

“Hey don’t you go putting on that belt.”

Lee thinks he’s joking and moves to buckle up. The driver reaches across and grabs the belt from his hand. We sit stunned. Any thoughts of perhaps aborting the trip and getting out quashed when the cab driver hangs a U turn across three lanes of traffic to a chorus of car horns and white knuckles cracking from clenched hands on arm rests. We head out of the CBD into an area filled with warehouses and completely deserted of human life. The traffic light turns red, the driver ignores it and makes an un-indicated right hand turn. Earlier in the night Dean had been detailing his phobia of cabs and we had ribbed him mercilessly, right now it seemed completely valid. We looked at each other as the car started occasionally straying onto the wrong side of the road.

“This guys off his face.”

We consider asking him to pull over but the deserted streetscapes seemed marginally scarier than our current predicament. Especially as we had no idea where the Hell we were. Then with a sudden turn down a side street we were there. Parked outside a club with a queue stretching half a block & Quickly pay and exit & Politely declining the chance to “buy some weed” from the psycho driver turned entrepreneur.

Seconds later another cab pulls up and a few guys from the previous party arrive and take us to the head of the queue where we flash our conference passes like rock stars. Mike Tyson doppelganger on the door unclips the velvet rope and we are inside.

Go-Go dancers on stage stripping to DJ’s playing urban beats. Lee and I raise an eyebrow each & “Hello what have we here?” & Followed by the realisation that the performance would stop at the spandex hot pants and boob tube. Two beers later we were bored and looking for something new. We left the beautiful people to swim in their pool of pretension and emerged outside just as another cab pulled up.

This time the cabbie appears to be from planet Earth. He pisses himself at our story then offers a heartfelt apology on behalf of all San Fran. We find ourselves back in the inner city and in another bar. Lee and I have fun hamming up our

accents for the locals. His sounds right of an episode of The Sweeney from the 70's I go for Steve Irwin meets Bazza McKenzie.

“No worries cobber I'll have another frostie.”

Sin Francisco Part 1