



**TRAVELING AMERICA'S
ROUTE 66
PAGE 2**

**BECKTON'S TO CLOSE
INDEFINITELY
PAGE 4**



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THE TEXAS SPUR

SINCE 1909 ★ NEWS FOR DICKENS AND KENT COUNTIES

Vol. 114 No. 41 | Thursday, July 18, 2024 | www.TheTexasSpur.com | ONE DOLLAR

Spur firefighters move into new home VFD rings out old station, rings in new state-of-the-art facility



FIREFIGHTERS AND FAMILIES celebrated the Spur Volunteer Fire Department's move-in day at the new fire station July 15. | SPURVFD PHOTO

BARBARA BRANNON | THE TEXAS SPUR

Back in the fall of 2021, a new fire-department facility for Spur was just the spark of an idea in the minds of donors Eric and Linda Swenson, with hometown firefighters also involved in discussions.

Through a complicated process of property swaps, collaboration with the City of Spur and numerous agencies, and design and construction challenges, though, the spark has at last burst into reality.

On Monday night, in a private event, active and retired firefighters, along with their families, gathered at the old station—Spur's long-outmoded original electrical generation plant at the foot of Burlington Avenue—to ring it out of service with their ceremonial bell. A procession up the street followed, with all the station's trucks. “Old

Betsy,” the beloved hundred-year-old truck that makes occasional ceremonial appearances, was last out the door as planned, with fire chief Wess Abbott shutting it behind her.

Taking her place at the head of the procession, she then led the vehicles to their glistening new home at Third and Burlington.

The event marks the end of an era for the city, but the beginning of a new one for Spur's hard-working volunteers and the safety of an entire community, thanks to the Swensons' vision and a lot of teamwork.

A public ceremonial grand opening is slated for Saturday, Oct. 5 at 10 a.m. at Spur's next Homecoming Weekend, said Abbott. The meal and program for the Spur Exes are expected to be held inside the spacious fire hall, along with the evening's other festivities.



FIRE CHIEFS process proudly from Spur's old firehouse to the brand-new one July 15. | THE TEXAS SPUR

SEE MORE PHOTOS ON PAGE 6



NEPHEW HIT The nephew of U.S. Rep. Ronny Jackson, whose District 13 includes Dickens County, was among those injured during the July 13 shooting that is being investigated as an assassination attempt on former president Donald Trump. | GRAEME SLOAN/SIPA USA VIA REUTERS

Texas U.S. Rep. Ronny Jackson says his nephew was injured in shooting at Trump rally

ISAAC YU, TEXAS TRIBUNE

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Ronny Jackson, R-Amarillo, said Saturday night that his nephew is “doing well” after his nephew's neck was grazed by a bullet during a shooting at former President Donald Trump's July 13 campaign event in Pennsylvania.

The congressman, who was not himself at the event, appeared on Fox News and Newsmax after the rally, describing how the events unfolded. Jackson, a former Trump White House physician, said his nephew was seated in a

“friends and family” section behind Trump when shots were fired. He was later treated at a triage tent.

“My family was sitting in the front, near where the President was speaking,” Jackson said in a statement. “They heard shots ringing out — my nephew then realized he had blood on his neck and something had grazed and cut his neck.”

The Associated Press reported that one attendee as well as the suspected shooter were killed, and two other people were critically injured. Jackson said his sister-in-law was also at the event.

Up and down in post-Soviet Georgia

DAVID PAFFORD | SPECIAL TO THE TEXAS SPUR

David Pafford of Spur and his son Caleb continue their eastward travel around the world. “If you would like to see more photos and hear the ‘long version’ of our story,” wrote Pafford, “please visit the website www.farther-beyond.com/circumnavigation. I hope you will join us each week to hear the latest report.”

I had not done much research on Georgia before we left.

Other travelers I met during this trip often provided the best information. I met an older Georgian couple

walking the city in Prague. I told them I was going to Georgia in a few weeks and asked for tips. They asked what I had planned, and I mentioned Batumi and Tbilisi. “I have no tolerance for heat,” said Mrs. Georgian. “It is too hot there in July. You should go to Svaneti.” Since I, too, enjoy cool weather, I decided to research Svaneti. It turns out all the amazing mountain pictures you see from Georgia are from Svaneti. I didn't even know what Svaneti was when I left North America. It ended up being the centerpiece of our time in Georgia.

See PAFFORD, page 4



TOWERING ABOVE THE COUNTRYSIDE in Svaneti, in the alpine region of Georgia, are manmade towers dating to medieval times and towering mountains dating millenia farther back. MORE PHOTOS, PAGE 8 | DAVID PAFFORD PHOTOS



DIVE IN! Spur pool staff reported on Facebook last week that the diving board is now installed and operational. The diving board was delayed after the wrong size was initially delivered in May. | COURTESY PHOTOS

South Plains Electric Cooperative and CoBank to present \$10K pool donation

STAFF REPORTS

Progress continues on Spur's newly reconstructed swimming pool—with the diving board delivered and installed last week.

The City of Spur will also receive a \$10,000 donation from South Plains Electric Cooperative and CoBank to help it further renovate pool facilities. A check presentation ceremony is scheduled for Thursday, July 18, at 1 p.m. at the pool (Swenson Park Road).

South Plains Electric Cooperative's donation was matched by CoBank through its Sharing Success program, which was established in 2012 to celebrate the International Year of the Cooperative.

“CoBank is proud to partner with customers like South Plains Electric Cooperative through our Sharing Success program,” said Dean Church, vice president of CoBank. “Through this contribution, South Plains is making an investment in the

future growth and vitality of this community and CoBank is delighted to join them in this important effort.”



COMMUNITY | news@TheTexasSpur.com
What's happening
COMING UP IN TEXAS SPUR COUNTRY

Submit your community announcements (maximum 75 words) to news@thetexasspur.com for events within the coming month, to run up to 4 issues

Local Events

Please let us know of any corrections: News@thetexasspur.com

DICKENS COUNTY-SPUR LIBRARY story time, Thursdays, 10 a.m., ages babies to preschool, 403 E. Hill St., Spur

DICKENS COUNTY-SPUR LIBRARY will have Charley's Burger Wagon on site, Thursday, July 18.

DICKENS COUNTY PUBLIC MARKET Saturday, July 20, 10 a.m.—4 p.m., Spur Community Center

KENT COUNTY GOLF COURSE is hosting a Two Jacks and a Jill Golf Tournament, Saturday and Sunday, July 20–21. Entry is \$100 per player. Contact Margo Clay (806) 470-4375 or Cody Scott (806) 893-8980.

SPUR GOLF ASSOCIATION will host its 10th Annual Fat Daddy 3-Man 18-hole Scramble, Saturday, July 27, 9:30 a.m. Entry fee is \$150 per team. Contact Tyler Luke, (806) 269-1606, to get your team entered.

KENT COUNTY GOLF COURSE will host the 18th Annual Hot Mama's Golf Tournament, Saturday, July 27, 9 a.m. Contact Christy Long (806) 789-4294 to enter.

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Please send announcements, calendar events, and news items to news@thetexasspur.com
Display ads, classifieds, legal notices and obituaries should be submitted to spur@thetexasspur.com
Information may be dropped off locally at 424 N. Burlington Ave., Spur.

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SUBSCRIPTION QUESTIONS Changes of addresses, renewals, temporary stops can be emailed to spur@thetexasspur.com

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Go to www.thetexasspur.com to subscribe using PayPal, or send payment to The Texas Spur, P.O. Box 430, Spur, TX 79370.

ADVERTISING display rates are \$5.70 per column inch local and \$8.00 per column inch national. Obituary notices, classified ads, and text-only legal notices are \$10 for the first 35 words plus 25¢ for each additional word; photos are \$5.00. In display format, such notices are \$5.27 per column inch. Engagement, wedding, anniversary, and birth announcements are free (500 word / 1 photo maximum).

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We welcome letters to the editor via mail or email—to thank a group or organization, suggest an idea, or state an opinion, for instance. Be sure to provide your name and address to verify your identity.

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https://house.texas.gov/members/member-page/?district=83

The Texas Spur encourages citizens to consult www.ballotpedia.org/Who_represents_me for their elected officials at every level of government.



EDITORIAL | spur@thetexasspur.com
Paragraphs & pixels
BARBARA BRANNON

ROUTE 66 RAMBLE, PART 1

In search of the Mother Road



WISH YOU WERE HERE Postcard and photo props—like this one in Joliet, Illinois—abound all along the 2,448 miles of historic Route 66 from Chicago to Los Angeles. | TEXAS SPUR.

It’s rare that local newspaper editors—especially ones like us, who have an active stake in hometown publications that go to press once a week year round—get to take an extended vacation. No Caribbean cruises or gala getaways for us.

Yet, our comparative freedom to report from the road does provide some unique opportunities for perspective, when we can sync travel with deadlines.

Given the fractious state of our national consciousness these days, along with simple curiosity as a couple of important American anniversaries approach in 2026, your editor and publisher itched to get out and see a few things for ourselves.

Kay and I saw an opening in the calendar with sufficient time and resources to drive across the country’s heartland in midsummer. Starting out on the eve of America’s birthday, we got ourselves to Chicago, our Mile Zero.

If you’ve ever listened to the famous song, from that first Nat King Cole version to the Texas take by Ray Benson and Asleep at the Wheel, you already know where I’m going with this.

“If you ever plan to motor west . . . Get your kicks—on Route Sixty-Six.”

Visions of tailfin convertibles, neon signs, sleeping in an ersatz teepee might spring to mind. We’d do our best to find those. Streams and rivers spanned by two-lane arched bridges, old-style milk shakes, mom-and-pop motor courts, giant roadside statues. Tales told by old-timers. And that legendary highway shield with its magical double digits.

But like John Steinbeck in his 1962 opus, “Travels with Charley: In Search of America,” we also wanted to get a handle on what makes our nation tick, or not. Steinbeck, who had himself provided Route 66’s most famous nickname, “The Mother Road,” in his Pulitzer Prize-winning 1939 “The Grapes of Wrath,” set out to learn what people in all corners of the country felt and thought in the midst of a global nuclear stalemate, a race to space, and a time-bomb of racial tension. He took a poodle for company. Not considering cats companionable for travel, Kay and I left them home at the newspaper office and took each other.

We reset the trip meter upon finding the Begin Historic Route 66 marker at Michigan and Adams, as so many travelers before us have done. Our Rocinante would be a 2015 half-ton Ford pickup nicknamed “Black Beauty.” She’d seen us through any number of adventures already. She was outfitted, like Steinbeck’s rig, with a high-capacity fuel tank, tools we hoped not to need, and too many books.

It was a beautiful evening on the Lake Michigan shore, with summer revelers taking in a music festival in Grant Park, riding the Navy Pier Ferris wheel, enjoying a hot dog, or simply cruising the Route. Navigating the mighty multi-lane traffic, we followed the trail of brown signs.

Today, most of the 1926 (and later) blacktop of Route 66 has long since been paved over, moved, or obliterated altogether. The legendary highway that once funneled freight traffic and fun-seekers

westward, or delivered desperate families from the Dust Bowl to a more hopeful home in California, was subsumed bit by bit by wider and straighter throughways. Its original alignments through the heart of small downtowns lined by brick storefronts, cafes, and newfangled service stations gave way to bypasses and eventually to the inexorable juggernaut of the Interstates. In 1985 the route made famous in song and story was decommissioned altogether.

“Excessive truck use during World War II and the comeback of the automobile industry immediately following the war brought great pressure to bear on America’s highways,” reads the U.S. National Park Service’s informational website (“Demise and Resurgence of Interest in Route 66”). “Automobile production jumped from just over 65,000 cars in 1945 to 3.9 million in 1948. Meanwhile, the deterioration of the national highway system was appalling. Virtually all roads, including Route 66, were functionally obsolete because of narrow pavements and antiquated structural features that reduced carrying capacity.”

But in 1990 the Route 66 Study Act of 1990, recognizing that Route 66 had “become a symbol of the American people’s heritage of travel and their legacy of seeking a better life,” paved the way for restoration of some segments. A resurgence of interest and heritage tourism groups (such as the one in which I was employed at the time) led to historical waymarking, interpretation, and economic development incentives.

Those efforts, boosted by the Disney/Pixar “Cars” film phenomenon in 2006, got the traffic flowing again. Today, an estimated 85 percent of the old route is driveable. It’s hard to even get a grasp on the numbers of leisure travelers from around the U.S. and world who choose Route 66 as a “destination.” The economic benefit to local businesses is staggering.

Yet does the bubble of Route 66 reflect the temper of the country in tempestuous times?

I don’t know. On the day we left Chicago, the Sun-Times newspaper reported twenty-one people killed and at least 84 others wounded by gunfire in the city during the extended Fourth of July weekend. By the time we’d reached Tucumcari, New Mexico, at the end of the week, the nation was rocked by news of an assassination attempt on a former president. Animosities personal and political continue to threaten our nation, it’s regrettably clear.

Fiery words, firearms and firebrands. Are the divisions they signal greater, or lesser, than in the roiled-up nation President Abraham Lincoln faced when elected to its highest office in November 1860? Only six weeks after, Southern states began seceding from the Union. To understand the temper of America in those dark days, spend some time among the exhibits at the Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in the Illinois capital of Springfield.

We’ll take you there, in next week’s installment. The perspective is illuminating.

2024 Community Calendar
Community Services and Organizations

SPUR VISITOR CENTER, 101 Hill Street at Burlington Avenue, is operated by the Spur Area Chamber of Commerce and open during regular hours Tuesday–Saturday. Visitors seeking information on the area may email spurchamber@gmail.com or call (806) 271-3097.

THE SPUR AREA FOOD BANK serves families throughout Dickens County. The Food Bank is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization operating via private donations and welcomes donations to this community work. Donations are tax-deductible and are accepted directly into the Food Bank’s account at Spur Security Bank or at 612 Burlington Ave. The Spur Area Food Kitchen Inc. does not discriminate due to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

THE KENT COUNTY LIBRARY, 156 W. 4th St., Jayton, is open for patron services Monday–Thursday, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m. Library patrons may also check out e-books and audiobooks on the Libby app for free with their library card. For information call (806) 237-3287 or “like” Kent County Library on Facebook.

THE KENT COUNTY SENIOR NUTRITION CENTER, 156 W. 4th St., Jayton, is open Monday and Wednesday from 8 a.m. to noon and Tuesday and Thursday from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. A lunch meal is served at noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays for a nominal cost, and is also available for carry-out. For information call (806) 237-3288.

THE SPUR-DICKENS COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY, 403 E. Hill St., is open Monday–Thursday, noon–5 p.m., and extended hours on the first Monday of each month until 7 p.m. Call (806) 271-3714 for questions. Free WiFi (password spurlib2017) is available inside and from the parking lot. Also contact the library for inquiries regarding the Spur Photography Club.

SPUR-DICKENS COUNTY MUSEUM, 327 Burlington Ave., Spur, is open April through October. For a tour please call a board member: Froney Morris, (806) 271-3577; Linda Swenson, (806) 271-3238; Woodie McArthur, (806) 271-4415; or Don Wright, (806) 271-4520.

SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER/SOUTH DICKENS, 210 Burlington Ave., provides a dine-in meal at noon Monday–Friday. The salad bar is available on Wednesdays. A donation of \$4 is suggested for ages 60 and older, with an \$8 donation for those younger than 60. For more information call (806) 271-4472.

SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER/NORTH DICKENS, 511 Montgomery St., Dickens, provides a meal at noon Monday–Friday. A donation of \$5 is suggested. For more information call (806) 623-5520.

DICKENS COUNTY MUSEUM on Montgomery Avenue in Dickens is open 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., the second and fourth Saturdays monthly. For a special viewing or other hours please call Ruby Combs at (806) 269-6215 or Bron Combs at (806) 294-5302.

KENT COUNTY LIONS CLUB meets the second and fourth Mondays of each month at noon at the Kent County Community Center, 156 4th St., Jayton. Lunch is served at a cost of \$10 per person; please RSVP to Daryl Ham at (806) 269-1179.

SPUR ART GUILD Open painting day every third Monday at the Spur Senior Citizens Center, 201 Burlington Ave., Spur.

Public and Civic Meetings Coming Up

- Please let us know of any corrections: News@thetexasspur.com
- JAYTON-GIRARD INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** board meeting, Thursday, July 18, 6:30 p.m., Jayton Public School Board Room, 700 Madison Ave., (806) 237-2991
 - KENT COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT** Monday, July 8 and July 22, 9 a.m., County Courthouse, 101 Main St., Jayton, (806) 237-3373
 - KENT COUNTY LIONS CLUB** Monday, July 22, noon, Community Center, 156 W. 4th, Jayton
 - SPUR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** board meeting, Monday, July 22, 7 p.m., school administration office, 800 Williams Ave., Spur, (806) 271-3272
 - SPUR MASONIC LODGE** meeting, Tuesday, Aug. 6, 7:30 p.m., 309 Burlington, Spur
 - DICKENS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT** Monday, Aug. 12, 9 a.m., County Courthouse, 201-US 82, Dickens, (806) 623-5532
 - PATTON SPRINGS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT** board meeting, Monday, Aug. 12, 1261 E. FM 193, Afton, (806) 689-2220
 - ANDREW KENT MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT** Tuesday, Aug. 13, 4:30 p.m., District office at Kent County Courthouse, 101 Main St., Jayton
 - SPUR CHAMBER OF COMMERCE** Monday, Aug. 19, 6 p.m., Community Center, 101 E. Hill St., Spur, (806) 271-3097 (NOTE that the Chamber rescheduled its July meeting.)
 - WHITE RIVER MUNICIPAL DISTRICT** Monday, Aug. 19, 7 p.m., District office at White River Lake
 - CITY OF SPUR CITY COUNCIL** Tuesday, Aug. 20, 6 p.m., City Hall, 402 N. Burlington Ave., Spur, (806) 271-3316

CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS

Abbott demands probe into power outages

AUSTIN—More than 2 million Texans lost power when Hurricane Beryl hit the Texas coast, and Gov. Greg Abbott wants to know why. The Austin American-Statesman reported Abbott has ordered the Public Utility Commission to conduct an immediate study into why the Houston area has again been hit by widespread power outages.

“I want to find out, was there a structural flaw with regard to the electrical delivery system?” Abbott said. “Was that the cause of it? If so, what needs to be done to shore up, or was this a personnel issue of not having enough power personnel in all the right locations to get power back up?”

CenterPoint Energy is the primary electricity transmission company serving the Houston area. Its CEO, Jason Ryan, appeared before the PUC last week and was questioned about the outages.

“To our customers that not only have power out but have significant property damage from the trees we talked about coming up from the roots, our hearts go out to you and our hearts go out to our community,” Ryan said.

As of Sunday morning, CenterPoint’s website indicated 461,247 customers were still without power, nearly a week after Beryl made landfall.

To date, 67 counties have been approved for federal disaster assistance, while other counties may be included as damage assessments are concluded. Those counties in the initial list are: Anderson, Angelina, Aransas, Austin, Bowie, Brazoria, Brazos, Burleson, Calhoun, Cameron, Camp, Cass, Cham-



bers, Cherokee, Colorado, Dewitt, Fayette, Fort Bend, Freestone, Galveston, Goliad, Gregg, Grimes, Hardin, Harris, Harrison, Hidalgo, Houston, Jackson, Jasper, Jefferson, Kenedy, Kleberg, Lavaca, Lee, Leon, Liberty, Madison, Marion, Matagorda, Milam, Montgomery, Morris, Nacogdoches, Newton, Nueces, Orange, Panola, Polk, Refugio, Robertson, Rusk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, San Patricio, Shelby, Trinity, Tyler, Upshur, Victoria, Walker, Waller, Washington, Webb, Wharton, and Willacy.

FOREST SERVICE ASSESSES TREE DAMAGE AFTER BERYL.

More than 400,000 acres of rural forestland was potentially affected by Hurricane Beryl, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service, which has closed W.G. Jones State Forest in Conroe until a damage assessment can be undertaken. In addition, hurricane force winds potentially affected as much as half of Houston’s urbanized area tree coverage, the service reported.

“We used a combination of on-the-ground observation, remote sensing and Forest Inventory and Analysis data to conduct a

SPOTLIGHT ON ROUTE 66 RAMBLE: DAY 1, NORTHERN ILLINOIS



SIGN, SIGN This colorful new sign helps Route 66 travelers mark their starting line along busy Michigan Avenue across the street from the Art Institute of Chicago.



EVERYWHERE A SIGN Following the 2,448 miles (give or take a few, depending on which routing you take), brown-and-white official signs mark different alignments of Route 66 over different periods of the road's history. Sometimes stretches of original, or at least older, pavement exist; in other places, original road was torn up, blocked off, or overpaved by other highways. A map is a must.



ON THE ROUTE there's no telling what sights you'll see—or from which viewpoints.

ROUTE WARRIOR Route 66 champion and former schoolteacher Bill Thomas of Atlanta, IL, chair of the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership, was named in 2022 to the national Route 66 Centennial Commission, which is planning ways to observe and promote 100 years of Route 66 in 2026.



IN ATLANTA, ILLINOIS (one of 19 Atlantas in the U.S.), the newly opened American Giants museum tells the story of roadside advertising figures from Muffler Men to Paul Bunyan, to Big Boy and the Esso Tiger. Photo ops abound.



BERGHOFF'S RESTAURANT on the Chicago Loop—only steps from the starting point of Route 66—has been family-operated for more than 125 years.

PAFFORD FROM PAGE 1

We made Mestia our base camp for exploring Georgia's Upper Svaneti region over the next several days. We visited the Svan ethnographic museum first to learn more about the Svan people responsible for the striking medieval towers prevalent in the area. We quickly moved on to the Mikhail Khergiani House Musuem, which has a tower that you can climb. In the process, we learned about Mikhail Khergiani, a Georgian world-class mountain climber; the museum was in his childhood home. Khergiani still holds several speed records for climbing specific mountains. He won seven world championships in this category during the 1960s. He fell to his death while climbing in the Dolomites in 1969.

We saved the tower climb for the end. The first couple of levels of the tower had wooden stairs, but the upper levels were accessed by wooden ladders that did not feel like they were made for people my size. As I got to the top of one, I noticed that the tops of the vertical segments had broken off at some point and other pieces had been nailed onto the sides. I squeezed through the tiny holes in the upper levels of floor and peeked out the hole cut in the roof. It was magnificent, and worth every bit of the climb, and the small fee.

I did learn something about Georgian negotiating

skills here. On the Internet, I had read that the fee for this museum was only 3 Georgian lari (about a dollar), but this was not posted anywhere onsite. I asked the fellow who seemed like a sort of self-proclaimed museum tender how much it cost. "Ten lari, but boy free." The ten-lari fee also got us a long explanation in Georgian about all of Khergiani's exploits, with an occasional English phrase thrown in here and there. A Jordanian fellow staying at our guest house in Mestia had joined us for the walk to the museum. Apparently, my 10 lari not only covered Caleb, but Sanad, too! He wasn't asked to pay anything. I hadn't considered the difference between three lari and ten worth arguing about. My parsimonious Jordanian friend, on the other hand, was a much sharper negotiator and apparently was able to see the museum on my 10 lari.

We headed back to the room and rested for a bit before heading out on our final activity for the day. About half a mile up the hill from our guest house sat a pair of ski lifts. For 25 lari, you can catch a ride up to a restaurant and eventually to the top of the nearest mountain ridge, which promised to offer even more spectacular views of the Caucasus mountains that form the Georgian border with Russia. A sign said that the lift ceased opera-



tion at 5:00, and it was already after 3:30. We were told the lift only took ten minutes or so to reach the top, so Caleb and I decided to head on up. I read that sometimes they didn't run the upper lift, leaving you to ascend the rest of the mountain—so I was sure to ask if they were both operational. I was assured they were both running, so up we went.

As we approached the top of the first lift, the second one looked stationary. We hiked a couple hundred meters over to the second boarding point, and sure enough, it was stopped. Another couple was there waiting. I asked them how long it had been stopped. "Only about five minutes," they cheerfully replied. After waiting half an hour and seeing the clock near 4:30, they decided to head back down. A Georgian in another small tourist group asked the technicians how progress was coming, and was told it was about ready to start back up, and that

they would keep it running a bit late so we'd have time to spend at the top. We heard some creaks, groans, and beeps a few times, and finally at about 4:30 the second lift was back underway. We hopped on to make our ascent. Three times on the way up, the lift stopped for several minutes. Once we finally arrived at the top, the lone employee there hollered at us and yelled something that obviously meant it was closing time and we were not being allowed out of the car and should just go right back down.

I used my translator to ask at the bottom of the second lift if we could get a voucher for riding the lift another day, and just got yelled at by a technician who couldn't be bothered to use the translator back. I don't know what he yelled, but it was obvious that it was closed, I wasn't getting another ticket, and it wasn't his fault that it was closed or broken. So, tough luck! Georgia had been part of



the Soviet Union for a long time. Nothing feels more Soviet than old, broken-down equipment and paying full price for something that doesn't work and having no recourse.

Ushguli is a complex of four villages which remained off-road and isolated until only about five years ago. Even now, most visitors there do a four-day trek. You can either carry your own tent, or stay each night in guest houses along the way. My son Andrew would have loved to hike this trail through the Caucasus high country, but it would have been a four-day complaint trail with Caleb. Now that you can reach the villages by road, I decided to take a marshrutka up on Monday, spend the night at one of the guest houses, then come back to Mestia the following day.

Although the distance is only 46km, it takes about an hour and a half for the marshrutka to get you there. It is a picturesque drive. We saw a medieval chapel high on a mountain, and some Svan towers here and there. The biggest collection of Svan towers was in the group of four villages, which run only about 2 kilometers from the first to the fourth. Ushguli is in the peculiar state of being ripped from medieval times straight into the 21st century. The high mountain setting and the medieval stone buildings and Svan towers are like nothing I have ever seen from a distance. As you get closer, it becomes apparent that every building in that is not falling down has been converted to a guest house. Cows still walk the streets, all of which are unpaved other than the new highway. At the same time, neon signs advertise rooms with free Wi-Fi. The arrival of the road in the last few years has rapidly accelerated Ushguli's jump toward modernity. It would

be interesting to see what the place looks like in ten more years. I suspect there will be high-rises and commercial resorts.

Our guest house was extremely rustic. It was clean, but the walls were made of unpainted particle board. It was sturdily put together with raw 2x12s. Our facility was in the farthest, least developed village. We did not have climate controls or Wi-Fi, which would have seemed out of place in Ushguli anyhow. Our host spoke no English and seemed to have difficulty reading Georgian. She was kind and provided us a delicious meal with huge portions for both supper and breakfast. It seemed from the advertisement as if meals were included in the price of the room. This turned out to be too good to be true. The room was only 55 lari (about \$20), but the meals turned out to be another 80 lari! Those were some of the most expensive meals we ate the entire time we were in Georgia. Caveat emptor! In Georgia, you had better know what is included before you consume it, and negotiate the prices beforehand. Fortunately, this was by no means ruinous by American standards.

Caleb and I walked among the Svan towers in all four villages. We climbed to Queen Tamar's winter residence. Sadly all that remains of this is a single tower, as the Soviets dismantled the rest of the buildings to use the rocks to fence farm plots. We walked to medieval churches and monasteries. We sat on a hill chatting with the trekkers as we gazed at Shkhara, the highest mountain in Georgia, high upon the Georgia-Russian frontier. We sat in awe of the glaciers others had recently hiked. It was a truly amazing experience, all the more for me as I had not even known of Svaneti when we left North America.

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