

2025 Afterburner Report

I know, you want to see [the pictures!](#)

Whoop! And with Black Rock City in the rear view mirror, the sixth journey of the Turtle tribe into the temporary alternative zone of Burning Man is in the books. Scholars will debate whether this was the Best Burn Ever, or maybe the weather made this a Problematic Burn, or perhaps Best and Problematic are just different axes. I am a mere chronicler. Maybe we learned something.

It's kind of a cliché, but it's true: "you get the burn you need, not the burn you want." The most consistent thing about going to Burning Man is that no matter what you expect and what you plan, what you actually get is really very very different, usually in a way that appears to suck and be very painful, but you learn, lick your wounds, and emerge better from it. This year I worked pretty hard on building new things for the camp: a cool kink fort which was destroyed by wind on the very first night, a cool Turtle sign which would not light up after the rain on the very first night, and our cool new conical Turtle Pavilion which immediately blew down in the wind on the very first night. None of them were really capable of dealing with 50mph sustained winds or intense rain. All of this was interesting, I think, because I'm taking it as an OMEN and CHANGES WILL BE MADE. More on that in a minute. Hang on. Let's do a recap first.

Build team: best year ever, by far. We had a big build team and easily got everything built on time. Weather during Build Week was not perfect, but also not really problematic. When the turtle bus arrived and everybody got off, they saw, for about five minutes, a fully complete camp ready for what promised to be a great week.

Hey, most things worked amazingly well this year! Our interactive program was friggin' amazing and as usual we blew away our neighbors. We had all our parties on time despite the awful weather. In chronological order: The opening night party was gorgeous and well-attended, the first event on playa and in the neighborhood and a bit of a flex that we have our shit together as a camp even while the gates have just opened. The kink party on Tuesday night almost looked like it wouldn't happen due to the shitty weather, but, come on, you know better than that--of course it happened and of course it was just a repeat of the mud party and of course it was the talk of the town. Then on Wednesday afternoon we hosted a million nekkid bike riders and if I remember correctly the rain coincided perfectly with our turn on the pub crawl, but that didn't stop us and we had great music and drinks and spirits. All of this stuff was so successful (in a year when many neighbors were cancelling or delaying their events) that you may wonder why I am thinking about CHANGES that might be MADE, but, all in good time, I'll come to that. Keep reading. It's only another 200 pages or so.

More interactivity! Basil had this really cute idea for Gaywatch, a sunscreen station. This smallish idea by just one turtle became so famous so quickly that I met somebody camping way over in the 3:00 zone who literally knew our camp as the Gaywatch camp. We continued to have Shuai's Tarot Readings which drew a big crowd. Tristan ran a lovely and well-attended yoga. At least twice, we

made quesadillas on the griddle for passers-by.

Let's talk about infrastructure. It went great this year! We did not have any significant problems with water, grey water, or electricity. The improvements we made to the Gayflower in Empire worked well and we had plenty of fresh water that tasted great. The generator only had one problem, fixed quickly by the vendor, and this year our friends from 8-bit Bunny and Camp Beaverton got all trained up on generator maintenance which meant there were plenty of people taking care of keeping it humming.

And food. And drinks! Both, again, amazing, as usual. I know the food team works their balls off. That's how food is, apparently--I've seen The Bear. Getting a Playa Michelin Star is not for the faint of heart, but we got our second star this year. Thanks to Chef Christophe and the entire team that helped him get it done, and all our spectacular chefs.

Crikey Strikey. This was the Best. Strike. Ever. Our new Strike Czar (or, Strike Emir, if you prefer) Effendi led a smooth and pleasant demolition of the camp over two perfect days. The only trace we left was a piece of canvas stuck under the wheels of the pillow fort -- and my friend from Gerlach with the unlikely name "Public Menace" swung by afterwards to remove it for us.

We had glorious art, with Klajdi's strollers, and architecture, with the new Turtle Pavilion (not the Turtle Erection!), composed of elegant and graceful sails that were no match for the weather, but never mind -- that is the point of Burning Man. We had heroic rescues, great photography, emotional ups and downs, and lots of new turtles, who, I am told, were all simply delightful. I truly apologize that I was too busy to notice them and they all blended in my mind into a splendid ghee suitable for making pancakes.

We have this thing where some people came to Burning Man expecting certain things to work in certain ways and specific fashions, and then Burning Man laughs at their plans, and they are shocked, even dismayed, maybe even saddened, and they are, probably, weeks later, realizing that there is some lesson in there, although it may not be a flattering one, but a lesson it is. I recognize this happening to you because this is what happened to me on my sophomore year, where, having been at Burning Man all of one time, I was utterly confident that I had a very specific hour-by-hour plan of the awesome way Burning Man 2.0 would unfold (ha!ha!) and you can guess where that ended up.

There are many people to thank for a great year on playa. Thanks to Adam and Tristan for the pillow fort, Alejandro for the truck and a million other lovely things, Coachella Alex for build, drinks, and LNT, the other Alex for transportation and bikes and taking everyone's GARBAGE to the DUMP, DJ Alex for food and music, Ben and Basil for Gaywatch and hard work during build, Coachella Ben and Coachella Matty for incredibly high spirits and hard work and for not even knowing that you don't have to enjoy the bad weather, it's acceptable just to endure it; DJ Ben for music and guardianship and opening and closing ceremonies that gave it all meaning, Benny for food and leading the night shift, Coachella Charlie for acting like this was all pretty reasonable and fun, Coachella Chris for being a shiny beacon, Christophe for powering through the sophomore slump and making great food happen, Dat for building, Dimi for playing bananagrams with me and taking me to shabbat to say kaddish, Coachella Ed for joining build on his very first burn and cooking a lot

of the meals for us, Effendi for making Strike great, Fotis, Morgan, and the Guardians for saving Coachella Hsiang, Coachella Hsiang for showing people how to bounce back, Gary for designing the Turtle Pavillion and endless hard work during build, Coachella Jack and Coachella Michael for always volunteering, Jeremy for methodically and patiently taking care of audio and lights, Jihoon and Jorge for guardianing, Coachella John for literally reinventing what it means to fluff, Space Master for being the only person as obsessive as I am about putting things (but never people!) in their place, Klajdi for build and art, Kyle for always being up to help, Coachella Milo for helping with infrastructure and, together with Space Master, filling out log books in a way that, frankly, were so careful that it made me cry a little bit from happiness when I read them, Peter for being my playa rock and best friend, who, as the only other turtle besides me to make it every year since 2018, most exemplifies the spirit of the turtles and got every party to happen even when people were confused about how this could possibly be possible; Coachella Phillip who brought art to 7:00, Romain who got volunteers shifted, Scott who came for build and was a great friend to many, Axle who dragged that fucking food truck yet again, with endless challenges but ultimately no problems, Shuai who made beautiful music and drew crowds to Tarot readings, and Coachella Will who was always up to a challenge. I know I'm forgetting people and this is only the tip of the iceberg but the bottom line is that I love every one of you and you all nailed it this year. Outside of the camp, thanks to our neighbors, especially at Camp Beaverton and 8-bit who helped with the generator, and to a few turtle-adjacent who don't camp with us, like Neptune, PB, and Mike, who nevertheless do a ton of work in camp--thank you!

I snuck out of camp on Monday to finish my Ranger training and am now qualified as a shiny penny: a brand new ranger. I found that I enjoy rangers when I am rangers people I don't know (non turtles, that is), in other words, I am a Stranger Ranger, but rangers turtles is not fun to me so I will leave that up to the Guardians.

We had, gosh, 15 new campers out of 43? I think that's right. That is a lot of newbies learning the ropes which is normal but one thing I saw is that some stuff that we used to do really well (like deal with our trash) was collectively forgotten. Nobody seemed to understand how to stack the plates or sort trash. That is NOT any new turtles' fault; it more reflects the fact that camp leadership or more specifically me did not take into account what needed to be done to transmit the culture. BTW next year there will be a moop czar (please volunteer now! You're reading this!) and we'll get it together. What I'm realizing is that the camp has a certain natural turnover that results in lost knowledge. On the plus side that means we are a Learning Engine but on the negative side that means we have a Terminal Velocity -- a maximum amount of knowledge and sophistication that we can reach in any given year about How To Do Burning Man.

I also recognize that it's hard to join a big group of new people, make friends, and feel at home right away in the first year.

Let me wax on that for a minute. We, as a camp, try to strike a balance. Our intent is to treat turtles as independent adults making their own decisions. As a camp, we're not a Scout Troop or an Afterschool Religious Ministry or even a College Frat where the Adults In Charge are Responsible for some kind of Emotional and Intellectual Journey of the campers. Unlike summer camp, we don't try to program your day or tell you what to do or where to go or how to feel about it. We are just here to hold space for people to have their own burning man transformational experience and then

we offer to be there as a group of friends after you have those experiences.

So sometimes I hear people saying that our camp seems to lack some of the kumbaya woo woo or the trust falls and group marshmallow roasting confessions that other camps might do, and I say huzzah, yeah, that's intentional, they are wonderful but we don't have them.

Or maybe people are confused because there is not enough structure and they don't know what to do or who to listen to or how to build or strike something or who is supposed to be In Charge, and I actually think that is on purpose and intentional: a part of the Burning Man principle of radical self reliance, maybe, but even more a part of treating you as adult humans with agency, not a Boy Scout club and certainly not an army platoon.

But. We are meant to be creating and holding space for stuff, and a part of that is making sure that turtles feel like when they are coming back to camp after a night out they are coming into a place with friends whom they know. And I am confident we do that very well by the second year, but for new turtles, my very sensitive Village Auntie barometer is telling me that we need to do more. So beginning next year one change we will make is more activities to insure that new turtles make friends, even if they do seem kumbaya.

Finally. Omens.

It has rained three out of three years. We currently build our camp using the assumption that it Will Not Rain. That means we make certain build choices that are terrible if it rains on the theory that Rain Is Very Rare. One example is tarps on the ground, which help with the dust a little bit when it doesn't rain, but are much, much worse when it does rain. Good bye, ground tarps.

Another example is using a simple black rock shade structure for our dining area, which is fine, unless it rains, in which case, it's almost worse than nothing. We should get one of those enclosed, weatherproof event tents.

This year a ton of stuff was just destroyed by the weather and that is an omen that it is time to rethink and rebuild. Instead of starting with last year as the starting point, this year we're going to actually start with a blank slate design for the camp. Instead of carrying forward inertia, assumptions, or outdated projects, we're going to reinvent and justify everything we build, do, and gift in our camp. It's kinda crazy, right? Yeah I know.

Revision #1

Created 2025-09-26 15:12:34 UTC by Jetpack

Updated 2025-09-26 15:12:57 UTC by Jetpack