

JPFreek

LIFESTYLES OFF THE BEATEN PATH



April / May 2007 • Issue 1 • Volume 2



King of the Mountain



ON THE TRAIL 4x4 UK Mac Challenge • Paragon Trail Run
Hypothermia Run 2007 **CLIMBING** The Grand Wichitas
MOUNTAIN BIKING Iditarod Trail Invitational
CANYONEERING Adventure in the Abyss

**ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE**



It all started during the Christmas break in 2005. Richard Tinnell and I were enjoying a savory brew in the midst of a new year when the craziest of ideas began to form from our conversation: the idea to start a magazine. We tinkered with the idea and in late January 2006, the first proof of what would later become JPFreek Adventure Magazine was born. Three months later, JPFreek hit the web with a mind-blowing ten readers and nary a hope of developing a following. Things sure have changed in the past year but our passion for Jeeps, the outdoors, and our gratitude to you, our readers, will be as strong as they were since issue #1.

On another note, this spring has truly been a remarkable time within the Jeep realm. DaimlerChrysler announced the release of its latest member to the Jeep family, the Jeep Patriot, and renowned expedition company Earthroamer.com LLC recently announced the creation of its XV-JP vehicle based on the new Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicon. In addition, a German team took a pair of new Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubiconss to the Chilean Andes and set a new world record for the highest elevation that a motorized vehicle has ever reached. We have also been working with our friends at Jeepbrokers.com in providing sponsoring support for a cross-country excursion involving a legendary Willys Jeep, built in the late 1940s and owned by a WWII veteran, and its travels across

America that will complete a stretch along America's legendary highway, Route 66. We are thrilled to provide exclusive coverage of this event in a future issue of JPFreek, and it's truly a great time to be a Jeep enthusiast. In the meantime, I hope that our current issue provides as much excitement to you as it was for us to put it together.

JPFreek has some big plans over the next year. As we firm up our preparations to become a print publication in 2008, we would appreciate any continued feedback that you may have regarding our plans for print, suggestions on what you would prefer as far as size formats of the magazine, and anything else you would like to share with us.

Thanks again from everyone at JPFreek Adventure Magazine. It's been a great first year for the magazine, and we're looking forward to sharing our adventures with each of you throughout the remainder of 2007.

Frank Ledwell, Editor-in-Chief



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Photo by Frank Ledwell



Earthroamer.com LLC Releases Brand-new Expedition XV-JP vehicle in time for Easter Jeep Safari 2007

Earthroamer.com LLC recently released its all new expedition vehicle called the Expedition XV-JP, based on the all-new Jeep Wrangler platform. The new Expedition XV-JP features a number of innovative Earthroamer design elements that make it one of the most capable off-highway and expedition-ready vehicles in the world. For full press release information and photos, visit:

www.jpfreek.com/news_events/Earthroamer.pdf
www.earthroamer.com/jp



The Ultimate Roadtrip...An American Legend on America's Legendary Highway

The founders of Jeepbrokers.com, in association with JPFreek Adventure Magazine, recently announced their plans to feature a two-week trip that will feature a one-owner 1948 Willys Jeep that was previously owned by a WWII fighter pilot. Nick Fallier, now in his mid 80s, flew over 129 combat missions in the south Pacific during World War II and upon his return to the States, he purchased his Willys Jeep and kept it for nearly sixty years. The vehicle will tour cross-country from Georgia to Arizona with the remaining '1948 miles' to be driven on America's legendary highway, Route 66. For more details on the trip, please visit:

www.jeepprokers.com/roadtrip_2007.htm

An exclusive write-up of this trip will be featured in the Aug/Sept issue of JPFreek Adventure Magazine so be sure to visit the JPFreek website for future updates

Have an event that is worthy of coverage in our 'News, Events, and Stuff' section? Send info about your event to: editor@jpfreek.com. Include the date(s), background info about the event, and any other specifics that are relevant to the event. We'll either make note of the event in this section, feature the event in our magazine, or possibly even show up at the event...who knows?!

Tim McGraw to Headline Camp Jeep 2007

The Jeep ® brand recently announced that Tim McGraw will play a special concert at Camp Jeep 2007 on July 26 at the Oak Ridge Estate in Nelson County, VA. More details can be found at: www.jeep.com/jeep_life/events/camp_jeep/index.html



2008 Jeep Liberty Unveiled at New York International Auto Show

On Wednesday, April 4 the DaimlerChrysler Group unveiled the latest update to the Jeep ® brand lineup with the release of the newly designed Jeep ® Liberty. More details can be found by visiting Jeep ® at:

www.jeep.com





Oil + Water Project Completes America's Tour for Biofuels Education Coalition

On April 1, the O+WP completed their nearly six month tour on the Pan-American Highway. Over their six month journey, Seth Warren and Tyler Bradt traveled over 36,000 miles, visited 32 schools, held press conferences in 14 major cities, were hosted by 5 different U.S. embassies including: El Salvador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. Seth and Tyler also kayaked 37

whitewater rivers and surfed in 14 different ocean locations. The planned World Tour will span 6 legs over the next 10 years in an effort to educate the world about biofuel use as an alternative source of energy. To read more about the O+WP and their efforts, please visit:

www.oilandwaterproject.org



Upcoming Events

April – May 2007: **'Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour'**. The BMFFWT is a festival targeting those who have a passion for mountaineering and adventure. All films that are shown throughout the tour are independent and capture a number of adventure elements. For information on the festival event nearest to you, please visit: www.banffmountainfestivals.ca/tour/

April 13-15: **"Land Between The Lakes Jeep Jamboree"** in Kentucky. For more information, visit: www.jeepjamboreeusa.com or call 530-333-4777

April 16-19: **"International Film Festival – Adventure & Discovery"** in Val d'Isère, France. Pioneering travelers who have undertaken daring adventures, and filmed them, will be present to share their adventures. For more information, visit: <http://www.whatsonwhen.com/events/event.asp?/events/~42379.jml>

April 20-22: **"Off-Road Expo"** in Salt Lake City, UT. For more information visit: www.offroadexpo.com and for a discount coupon to attend the event, visit:

www.jpfreek.com/news_events/coupon.pdf

April 20-22: **"Tennessee Mountains Jeep Jamboree"** in Oak Ridge, TN. For more information, visit: www.jeepjamboreeusa.com or call 530-333-4777



April 20-22: **"Oceanfest"** at Fort Lauderdale, FL. A massive diving and adventure sports expo that will feature over 200 exhibitors who will display and demonstrate the latest in diving and related adventure sports. For more information, visit:

www.oceanfest.com

April 21-22: **"BP MS150 Cycling Tour"** from Houston to Austin, TX. A two-day, 170 mile bike tour benefiting the multiple sclerosis foundation. For more details, visit:

www.ms150.org

April 24-28: **'Jeep-Body Glove Surfboat'** in San Clemente, CA. This five-day world-class surfing event will feature top-tier professional surfers, local surf hopefuls, domestic and international junior competitors and supporters of the renowned Trestles break. For more details, visit:

www.transworldsurf.com/surf/pressrelease/article/0,19929,1603272,00.html

April 27-29: **'Lone Star Jeep Club Hot Springs Trail Run'** in Hot Springs, AR. A fun-filled weekend with Texas Jeepers who plan to enjoy a good time on a number of varying difficulty trails in Arkansas. For more information, visit:

www.lonestarjeepclub.org/board/showthread.php?t=7319

May 4-7: **"Ballyhoura International Walking Festival"** in Kilfinane, Ireland. Visit the stunning landscape of the Golden Vale around Tipperary and Ballyhoura. For more details, visit:

www.ireland.travel.ie

May 5-6: **"10th Annual O'Reilly Auto Parts 4-Wheel Jamboree Nationals"** at Ozark Empire Fairgrounds in Springfield, MO. For more information, please visit:

www.familyevents.com

May 17-19: **"Two Rivers Jeep Club Illini 4x4 Safari"** in Pittsfield, IL. A fun-filled weekend on the off-highway trails in the Pittsfield, IL area. For more information, visit:

www.trjc.com

May 18-20: **"JPFreek Adventure & Excursion to Guadalupe Mountains National Park"** in west Texas. Join the JPFreek crew as we depart from San Antonio en route to Guadalupe Mountains National Park to enjoy a weekend of Jeeping, camping, and a hike to the summit of Texas' highest peak, Guadalupe Peak. For more information, email the JPFreek crew at:

editor@jpfreek.com



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GONE WHEELIN', BE BACK LATER

Sorry folks, I'm taking a month off . . . but for good reason. Henry David Thoreau said it well with, "How vain it is to sit down to write when you have not stood up to live." It's time I put down the pen, and head out on an adventure. I'll be back for the June/July issue of JPF.

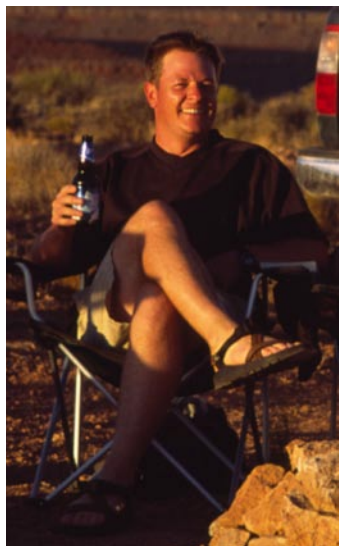
We've hashed out a lot in the last three issues – cargo management in a TJ, three kinds of radio communications, and GPS navigation. The really cool thing is that I received positive feedback from several readers – I'd like to say thank you for reading. So I think we'll keep this thing going since it was so much fun. You probably take long trips in your Jeep, and I've really only covered things that you implement before heading out. You know that there's a lot more to talk about.

In the next few issues, let's discuss some more involved aspects of expedition journeying. How about advanced recovery techniques? I think that will be a fun project to take on, since recovery isn't always as simple as unspooling the winch and flipping the switch; sometimes it's even easier than that. Let's go over what some of those things are.

I'm asked quite often how I managed to bait and trap such a fun chick who likes to go out in the Jeep – my wife Brooke. I'm no relationship doctor, but I learned what to do to make camping easy and fun. So we're going to talk about those elements: modding your Jeep for painless and comfortable camp set-up, and "essential" creature comforts.



Finally, we're going to need to talk about conservation and environmental concerns. The whole point of getting into your Jeep and embarking on a trip in the mountains is to experience the wilderness (right?). I think it's important to understand why we ought give value to places with wildlife, open space, indigenous sites, and all forms of "rocky mountain highs."



With that, amigos, I'm off to Baja, California – a Mecca of sorts for North American vehicle-dependent expeditions. We're camping on the beaches of the Sea of Cortez and the Pacific Ocean, visiting remote 300-year old Spanish missions, and driving the dusty tracks that lead to the next best fish taco and sleepy cantina. Don't hate me if you don't like country music, but Kenny Chesney has a song on the radio these days in which he sings, "Sit right here and have another beer in Mexico." Doesn't it just make you want to go too?

I'll see you in June and, again, thanks for reading.

Mark D. Stephens

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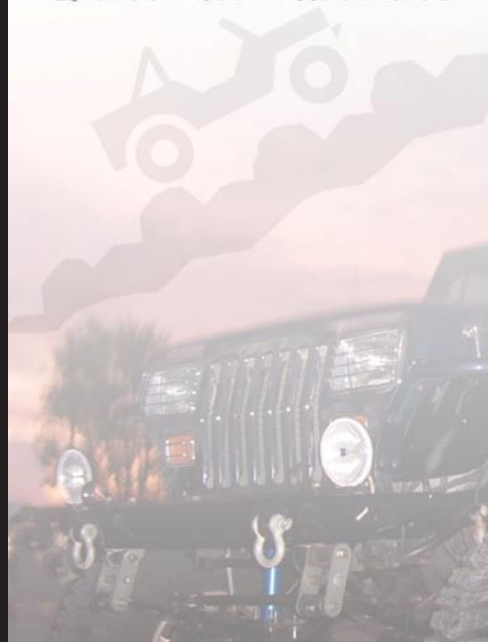
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5 Jeeps take The Mac 4x4 Challenge

Text by Mike Pavelin. Photos by Mike Pavelin, Iggy Quazi and Lord Flasheart

It's 8pm on Friday, March 9th 2007. Sixty four-wheel drive vehicles wait in a cold, dark car park at Craven Arms, Shropshire in the West Midlands of England. They are approximately 40 miles west of Birmingham and 20 miles east of the Welsh border. There's an air of excitement and anticipation as the crew in car number 1, a Land Rover Defender, are handed a sealed envelope. Seconds later the Defender drives off and car number 2, a green Jeep Wrangler, pulls up to the start line. One by one, every 60 seconds, another 4x4 vanishes into the night. This is the beginning of the 2007 Mac 4x4 Challenge.



Since 2002, a collection of 4x4 enthusiasts competes in this event and raises thousands of Pounds (English currency for the layman) for UK charity Macmillan Cancer Support. The charity provides practical, medical and financial help for cancer sufferers and their families.

The sixty crews of driver and navigator have come from all over the UK. Some have competed before; some are complete beginners; all of them have been planning and raising sponsorship throughout the past year. Their reward? An uncertain 48 hours on the road. This is an endurance event, the route is secret and instructions are given in sealed envelopes at the beginning of each stage. The navigator has to guide the driver to each new destination using a variety of navigational skills. No set of instructions uses the same format. GPS devices are illegal for use in this event, and the good old compass and maps will be the weapon of choice for the weekend.

We're in car number 50, so we have nearly an hour until it's our turn. We have travelled from Essex, not far from London located in the southeast of England, to be here. It's the second time we've entered my '91 Cherokee in the Mac and we can't wait to get started. We grab a last minute coffee and take some pictures while we wait. The other four Jeep crews have never participated before, so they are keen to get advice from us on what to expect. As our start time approaches, we get





in line and wait with anxious anticipation. As usual, the marshals joke about me sitting on the wrong side (my Jeep is a left hand drive, typical in the U.S. but quite rare in the UK) as we're handed our first instructions. Fifteen seconds...ten.....5,4,3,2,1...GO!

As my navigator, Iggy opens up the package and we drive off. 'What have we got?' I ask. They've given us written instructions and a series of clues to find on the way. As soon as we leave the car park, the work has begun, Iggy zeros the newly fitted Brantz trip meter as I spot the first clue and head off into the night. Last year, we struggled to keep track of mileage on the dimly lit mechanical odometer in my old Cherokee, so now the Brantz

immediately proves it's worth as Iggy directs us through the Shropshire lanes and into Wales. This year I'm more relaxed as I can keep my weary eyes firmly on the narrow roads and watch for landmarks.

We meet other competitors along the way. Everybody makes stops to check on clues and check their position from time to time. Sometimes a group of parked 4x4s makes one of the clues easy to find. We come across a group parked around an ancient milestone. We record the markings on our check list before moving on. Eventually we arrive at a clearing in a forest. We grab a snack under an awesome array of stars, the sky seems so much clearer out here than back home. As the other trucks continue to arrive, we hand our check sheet to a marshal and collect another envelope. This time we have maps to follow as we head back out, collecting more clues on the way until 1.30 am when we get to our first rest stop at Clyro

We're in the shadow of Baskerville Hall, said to be the inspiration for the house in the Sherlock Holmes stories. It certainly looks eerie as it loomed over us in the darkness. We're the last Jeep to arrive, and most of the other



competitors have parked and had begun to rest. Some are camping on the field next door while others try to grab some sleep in the front seats of their trucks. Two Land Rover teams have sneakily gotten rooms in the hotel. We park with the other Jeeps and try to get some sleep. I'm told the burger van will arrive at 6am for breakfast.

A driver's briefing is scheduled at 8.30 and the first competitor will start the second day at 9.00am. It can't come a moment too soon. The competition seats in the Cherokee don't recline so I have a tough time with only a couple of hours sleep wedged under the big





steering wheel. By the time salvation arrives in the shape of the guys with the catering van, I'm frozen and miserable so I fire up the 4.0 to get some heat going. Iggy stirs about and the other crews start to surface. Conversation revolves around tales of snoring, sleep deprivation, and complaints of bad smells in confined spaces as the aroma of frying bacon wafts across the still gloomy car park.

Some make tea and coffee on camping stoves and tinker with their trucks as dawn breaks and the breakfast van opens for business. We're near the front of the queue, so once we're done, we slip down the road to refuel the Jeep before the others get on the road. At the briefing we get more instructions. The navigators huddle in groups and plan a route from road maps. Then we pack our stuff and watch the others start off. At 9:50am we head for a Ministry of Defence site in the Brecon Beacons with warnings to watch for police speed traps on the way.

About half an hour later, we arrive at our next destination, located in the Brecon Beacons. The huge MoD training site is hilly, but almost devoid of trees. There are sheep roaming everywhere and a column of soldiers marching along the road as we queue for the start of the next section. We collect our instructions and start off. This time we're working from Tulip diagrams, a system developed for rally navigation. To make things more interesting, we've been given our distances in kilometres (Mental note... next year do dual calibration on the Brantz) and we have to spot and record marker boards en route. We have to convert to miles as we go along. The dual scale on the Jeep speedometer comes in handy for this and we soon get the hang of it.

As we navigate through the maze of lanes, the route takes us down a slippery grass embankment. A Land Rover Defender 90 is stuck in the ruts but he already has help so we drive around them. Further along, there are a couple of water crossings. The organisers have made crossing these optional for the less confident and those with stock vehicles. The water turns out to be pretty shallow and no problem for most of us but the crew of a borrowed Volvo XC-90 take the second one too fast. The Volvo comes to a rapid halt as the diesel engine ingests enough water to assure its destruction. We drive up the embankment onto the road to clear the way as a Land Rover tows the dead Volvo out of the water. The last section we come through has a





twist. We have to drive through a slalom of poles with the driver blindfolded. We pass through without incident, handing in our check lists to the marshal at the end of the line. We then collect our next instruction packet and check what we have. Our route now has to be plotted using an Ordnance Survey map from the eight digit coordinates given in our instructions. It's a long section so we park up and plot the whole route in advance. It takes us through challenging roads and stunning scenery around Lake Vyrnwy.

We stop to take a look at the dam which dominates the valley and creates the vast lake. As night falls we take a wrong turn and find a fantastic mountain trail. It was a real shame but we had to turn back and get to the correct route. Maybe we'll drive there another time. Before continuing to our destination and overnight stop, Bala, we meet at the White Lion Hotel and hand in our papers to the marshals at about 7pm. We're instructed to proceed to an overnight area a few miles up the road where we can camp or sleep in the Jeep again.

Tonight, however, the lure of a clean hotel bed and proper food is too strong for some of us and we go hunting for somewhere to stay for the night. The main street of the small Welsh town is jammed with parked Mac 4x4 trucks and several other teams have had the same idea. It's Saturday night and the town was already full of visitors taking a break from their hiking and other outdoor pursuits, so the hotels are turning most of the 120 Mac crew away. Iggy and I team up with Simon and Addey from the number 19 Wrangler and look further afield. We drive out of town and find a guest house. The lady owner says she is full but gives us the location of another house just on the edge of town.



We find the house and it's dark and doesn't look hopeful. Iggy wanders inside through the open door and finds the owner. He's not open for business yet and he's going to the pub. A deal is struck. "Two rooms, help yourself in the kitchen, and don't worry about the door, the keys have gone missing. Just leave the money on the dresser when you leave. I'm off down the pub, I'll give you a fiver off if I don't get up in time to make you breakfast" In spite of fears that we could be checking into the Bates Motel, we gladly take the deal. With the Jeeps parked outside the guest house, the four of us walk back to the White Lion to meet the others. We spend a couple of hours drinking beer and swapping stories about our journey with the other crews before hunger gets the better of us. Once outside, we go to Bala to find that it is already closing down for the night. We hurriedly find a Chinese restaurant and order take-away food for four. We march back to the guest house, set the table, and thoroughly enjoy the meal before hitting the sack around 1am in the handsome Victorian building. After a good night's sleep, we helped ourselves to coffee and got our stuff together. The landlord surfaces just in time to see us off. We thank him for his hospitality and check our schedule. 8.30am; it's time to get to the start of the next section at Bala 4x4 centre just a few miles up the road.



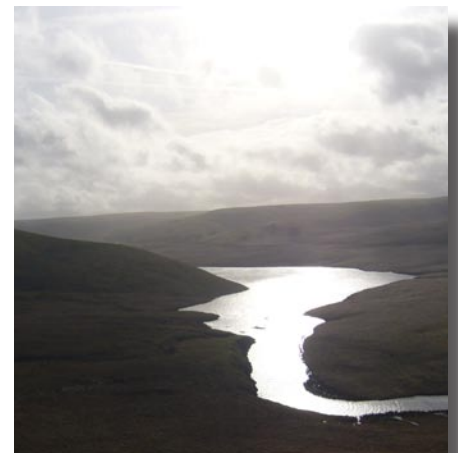


We join a procession of 4x4s snaking through the woods to the start line. We have thirty minutes to spot and record as many marker boards as we can and be back to the checkpoint in time. Points will be deducted if we're late so when it's our turn, we head for the wooded area. We have no route to follow, it's a free for all and there's some great offroad driving to be had. We have to focus on covering as much ground as possible in the available time to maximize our chances of spotting all the boards. This excludes driving anywhere where we might get stuck and waste valuable time, but

there are still plenty of obstacles to keep everyone entertained. Onlookers are particularly impressed with the progress of a VW Toureg which was totally stock apart from mud tires. The VW looks as though it's glad to escape the horrors of shopping mall traffic and have some fun. After finishing with a minute to spare, we get instructions to meet at the public car park in Bala. We have plenty of time and are low on fuel so we head for the tiny station in town and fill the tank again. With time to spare before the next section, we park and get coffee and paninis in a small café on the top floor of a converted chapel, and we watch the others queue for fuel. When we're done, we head for the car park to collect our final set of instructions.

Our leisurely progress this morning makes us one of the last to show. A Land Rover is undergoing surgery for a seized hub bearing as we collect our envelope and check its contents. The mixture of co-ordinates and instructions means we park up and plot the whole route before heading off. As we drive the route back towards Lake Vyrnwy, spotting and recording landmarks on our checklist, we elect to take it easy today. The scenery is awesome as we circle the lake and enter the Snowdonia National Park, traversing the winding mountain roads towards The Ponderosa Café, a popular stopping point for visiting motorists, hikers, and motorcyclists since the 1950s. We hand our papers in at the finish and take a break at The Ponderosa before continuing to the hotel where the teams are invited to attend a presentation dinner and charity auction to end the weekend.

We check into the Daresbury Park Hotel in Cheshire with a couple of hours to spare, and are glad to have the opportunity to shower and lounge in the hotel's excellent pool and sauna before dressing for dinner. The hotel bar is filled with tired but happy Mac crews exchanging stories about the weekend. The beer flows freely and by 7 pm we're ready to eat. Following an excellent meal, Peter Rowland from Macmillan Cancer Relief and Selwyn Kendrick from the organizing team, give speeches thanking us for our participation. They announce that with our help, this year's event has raised over £75,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support. As the drinks continue to flow, the prizes are given. First place goes to Tony Ludford and Suzanne Ray in their Land Rover. The highest placed Jeep is Nigel Thomas and Russ McKenzie in 23rd out of 60. Land Rover team Graeme and Chris Elliott win the award for the team with the highest sponsorship raised at over £8000, a fantastic achievement.





With the formalities over, the charity auction begins. Peter starts off the proceedings but the sale of donated goodies is soon hijacked by Irishman Chris Elliott, who proves to be a fantastic auctioneer and entertainer. He skilfully persuades the revellers to part with even more cash for the charity.

When the auction ends and the final speeches are made, we all return to the bar for a while before retiring for some well earned sleep. The group meet again over breakfast before checking out and going their separate ways. Iggy and I chat about the weekend's events during the 150 mile drive back home. We've thoroughly enjoyed the last few days and are proud to have raised over £2000 in sponsorship for Macmillan Cancer Relief. A week later the final results are published. Team 50 comes in 47th place this year. We sucked but who cares! The winners are the cancer sufferers and their families who'll benefit from the money we've all raised.

Many thanks to all our sponsors, including many friends, family and fellow club members, GT 4x4 Jeep Club, The Institute of the Motor industry, National Westminster Bank, Maldon Accessory Centre, and Essex Chronicle Newspapers. The total donated at the time of writing has exceeded £78000 and is expected to reach in excess of £95000. We would also like to thank Peter, Selwyn and the rest of the Mac team for spending so much of their own time organizing this event every year, and the rest of the teams for being such a great bunch to spend the weekend with.



APRIL / MAY 2007

The 2008 Mac 4x4 Challenge will takes place March 7th – 9th. You can view details for the event at:
www.Mac4x4.co.uk



THE GRAND WICHITAS



Text by Alan Ellis. Photos by Alan and Jackie Ellis



Trailhead (above) Jackie and Rene gear up at the trailhead.

The Narrows (right) Looking north through the Narrows with the Wichita Mountains in the distance. Photo by Jackie Ellis



When people think of Oklahoma, they think of flat boring plains with tumbleweeds blowing across long straight highways. Nothing could be further from the truth. Oklahoma is host to several small mountain ranges that offer not only great Jeep destinations, but numerous other outdoor activities. The Wichita Mountains of southern Oklahoma is one of these ranges.



Jackie At The Crux: Jackie pulls the “diving board” on Fantasy Roof (5.8).

The highlight of this little mountain range is the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (WMWR). Situated in the southwest part of the state near Lawton, the WMWR is one of Oklahoma’s gems. There is something for everyone there including hiking, boating, fishing, camping, scenic roads, biking, and wildlife viewing. The refuge has one of the largest bison and elk populations east of the Rockies. Although all these activities are fun, that’s not why Jackie and I head to the Wichitas.

Little known to most is the outstanding rock climbing at the WMWR. World class climbers like Duane Raleigh (owner of Rock and Ice Magazine) cut their teeth on the granite slabs, faces, and cracks of the Wichitas. Raleigh, and climbers such as Bill Thomas, Mark Herndon, Jon Frank, and numerous others put up great routes in a bold style that is still the standard today.

Jackie and I love to head to the Wichitas on a typical winter weekend to enjoy a day of Rock climbing. Our 2006 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited 4x4 is perfect for hauling all the gear, dog, and climbers for the hour and a half drive south from Oklahoma City. Off-roading is not allowed in the WMWR, but there are many miles of roads that are perfect for enjoying the scenery.

This winter day in February, we hopped in the Grand Cherokee with friend, Rene, and headed to The Narrows, one of the more popular areas of the WMWR. This

was a beautiful winter day with temperatures in the 60s and not a cloud in the sky. A one mile approach is needed to access the Narrows and you’ll be breathing hard as you negotiate the ups and downs of the trail while getting there. Our favorite area in the Narrows is Zoo Wall. Zoo Wall has about 20 beautiful granite face and crack climbs that will keep you busy all day. This time, we chose the left side of Zoo Wall and we were not disappointed. Left Zoo Wall is a nice moderate area with routes from 5.5 to 5.9. Since my lead ability is about 5.8, this area is perfect for leading a route or two, then setting up a top-rope for some of the harder stuff. My favorite route of Left Zoo Wall



Alan On Lead: Alan reaches for a hold on Side Saddle (5.6).

is the Sundown Dihedral (5.8). It is a little hard to protect on lead, but the moves are sweet and the holds are always there when you need one.

We were the only ones on the wall that day which was nice. But after a while, we could hear the voices and shouts of other climbers and day hikers as they also enjoyed the Narrows. As the sun started down, we headed back to the Grand Cherokee, sore and scraped, but happy about our successful climbing day.

I invite all of you to head down to the Wildlife Refuge the next time you're in the area. Bring your rack, fishing pole, and binoculars, and spend the weekend. You won't be disappointed.

Check out more of the Ellis Family Adventures at their site:

www.jackieandalan.com

Learn more about the Grand Wichitas:

www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/wichitamountains/index.html



Scramble: Jackie and Rene scramble up to the climbing area at Zoo Wall Left.



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APRIL / MAY 2007



PARA-BODIES?

PARAGON ADVENTURE PARK BENEFIT RUN

Text and Photos by Michael Hopkins

Paragon Adventure Park, located in Hazleton Pennsylvania, recently had an event to raise funds and public awareness for a legal battle that it is currently fighting to maintain a place for off road enthusiasts. Over 18,000 off-roaders visit the park annually, and the park offers a range of trails with difficulty ratings from mild to wild. The park is in the central part of Pennsylvania near the end of the beautiful Pocono Mountains, and it has over 130 miles of established and marked trails. The 8 year old operation was just three years into a twenty-five year land lease when it announced to the public that it may close its trails. Recently, after losing ground from a court hearing, Paragon was ordered to vacate the property by February 5, 2007. Kyle Knosp, owner and manager of the park, has compared the court battle to David vs. Goliath as a multimillion dollar corporation is literally paving its way for a large cargo airport to be built on the property that the park is currently situated on. The only thing that stands in the way is Paragon Adventure Park, its patrons, and wheelers from abroad.

The fundraiser was scheduled for the first weekend of February where nearly 500 rigs rallied on Saturday and another 375 on Sunday. License plates hailed from Texas to Ottawa visiting one of the largest off-roading parks in the nation. The short notice event had the largest turnout ever for the park, even though it was competing with sub freezing temperatures and the biggest game of the year-the Super Bowl. On Saturday morning, a large crowd of supporters gathered at the edge of the vehicle staging area to learn about the future of the park and to get a crack at winning some off-roading gear. After an emotional speech from Mr. Knosp, a large raffle was held with items provided by some of the nation's leading off-road vendors. Some of the winners donated their prizes back to Paragon in an effort to help raise more funds for the park in its legal efforts.

There were vehicles with every level of capability that had assembled in acknowledgement of Paragon's plight, and all of these vehicles were prepared for a



Saturday staging area line up for the benefit trail ride just before Kyles' address to the public

weekend of fun and exciting trail rides. "You can feel the energy and spirit of support in the air" said Jeff Burgess, a patron that drove in from Connecticut with his friend Mike Catrini for the chance to wheel at Paragon one last time. Mike had built his Jeep Cherokee specifically for the terrain found at Paragon. "I wanted to get it down here before they closed the park so that I can test the leaf to coil spring conversion that I did on some hard terrain" he said. Many wheelers are now left to face the reality that there really isn't any other public land in the Northeast US that they can enjoy their hobby, outside of Jeep ® sponsored events. Enthusiasts make the pilgrimage to Paragon a couple of times a year, intent and literally bent on having some trail riding fun. Most of the wheelers weren't focusing on covering as much ground as usual this day, and divided up in groups based on vehicle capability and driver skill level. The groups were unusually large and made the going a little slower than normal; however, the point was to get out, have fun, and help the park if even for only one last time.

The park itself was actually on the same land that was once a bustling coal mining operation that left the land stripped and not well suited for much, other than the dream that Kyle and his wife Stephanie built and named Paragon. The boulder strewn hillsides and washed out valleys make for some beautiful scenery and challenging



Mike Catrini from Connecticut in his heavily modified 1994 XJ enjoying a 'black' rated trail called 'Turtles Revenge'. Mike's XJ features a Clayton coil and long arm set-up that was the envy of a number of fellow Jeeps at the park.



obstacles. The park is a Mecca for thousands of friends, families, novice wheelers and professional rock crawlers.

While at the park, I met some Jeepers at the filling station outside and I introduced myself. I asked if I could ride

along with them at Paragon for the day as Paragon has a minimum requirement of 3 vehicles per group to go out on your own. They were extremely accommodating, as Jeepers usually are, and they let me know that they were happy to have me along. It was an example of the true Jeep spirit that is typical with Jeep folk who understand our passion for our vehicles. We headed out to traverse some of the more difficult terrain in the snow, and to enjoy the most that we could out of the park on the last two days that it would be open. Mike Catrini, in his heavily modified XJ Cherokee, and Jeff Burgess operating his Wrangler TJ, along with my lifted Rubicon, took turns traversing the parks numerous obstacles. With park maps in hand and the desire for some real metal bending, we headed out to hunt down some of our favorite trails. Our little group stopped on occasion to talk to those who were passing through, take pictures of some of the trail

head signs, and maneuver between the many obstacles that we had become so familiar with. The CB radios crackled with all of the chatter and channel bleed

(Right) A rock buggy with a Jeep Badge parked near the Paragon entrance on Saturday.

that emanated from the small army of machines traveling through the park for the weekend. Occasionally, you could hear laughter, as well as ewes and ahs, or catch a glimpse of a vehicle passing through the trees in the distance with its orange safety flag swinging about like a happy puppy tail. Ice crystals formed on the edge of my rims from the rocks that pressed onto the sidewalls of my pressure relieved tires, and slowly forced its way into the bead compromising the seal and stopping us on three separate occasions. Despite this, Mike and Jeff were always quick to the rescue with an onboard assortment of spare parts, tools and tricks that they had learned from sharing time on these trails with other wheelers in the past. We weren't in any hurry to get moving, and we used the opportunity to talk Jeeps, share wheeling stories, talk about the park.

At the end of the day, we were tired from the cold, having navigated the slippery snow covered rocks and steep descents even though we had a late start earlier that morning. These guys had a 4.5 hour drive to get back home after picking lines on the technical trails that we were on all day. I think the group was also feeling a little down about the park closing, and as we conquered each obstacle on the trail, we knew that we were getting closer to the inevitable last few minutes at Paragon. With thoughts of the day drawing to a close, I decided to offer my new trail companions a stay at my home in the Poconos in case they wanted to visit the park the following day for one last time. Plus, I had concluded that the hotels would probably be booked around the area because of the turnout to the park so in a nanosecond, the decision was made and they opted to stay at my place. We were all thrilled to get another opportunity to wheel again, and we decided that Sunday would be a whole day of even more technical snow covered wheeling. After we garnered approval from our wives, we aired up and left the park, headed to my place to recharge, and talked about the day we had just enjoyed.

On Sunday, we started out on a few easier trails and moved on to try a more familiar and difficult trail, as well as a personal favorite of mine: Turtles Revenge. Snow cranks a trail difficulty rating up a few notches and made 'Turtles Revenge' much trickier than it had been during the previous summer when I last drove it. Winch use, dead batteries, radical inclines, lack

(2nd to Top) Checking out the snowy trail by foot in search for the best line of challenge.

(Middle) A group held up and hanging out on the trail while a stuck XJ waits for a rig to pull him out.



(Bottom) The overcast setting set the mood for a thrilling but sad weekend at Paragon Adventure Park.



Paragon entrance sign in the Humbolt Industrial park

of traction and off camber obstacles proved that this thousand yard stretch was all that we could handle. This trail was having its way with us by practically eating up the sheet metal and glass from our peripheral equipment and turn signal lenses. We really enjoyed ourselves as we tried to tame the beast that ultimately consumed the remainder of the afternoon, and our last few remaining hours in a Jeeping paradise.

At day's end, we had permanent grins from the fun we had enjoyed, the limitations we discovered with our vehicles, and the new friendships we had shared. Most of all, we had permanently filed into memory something great that could not be taken away. If not for the park, we would never have met or shared the experience that resulted in what I would call a perfect day of wheeling. We lingered in the parking lot and we watched as advertisements were removed and heavy equipment prepared to relocate park structures and miscellaneous park property. Nobody is sure of the future of Paragon other than knowing that there is a fire that will continue to burn amongst the patrons of the park. The unfortunate reality is that there are land use issues that threaten nearly every established legal off-roading park, which is a painful reminder for my wheeling brethren that this is a warning that we must do what we can to keep the remaining established wheeling areas from becoming just a memory. My memories from Paragon are sweet, and Paragon as an off-road park resource has truly been a world-class model and operation by definition that will remain in our memories. People have forged friendships and life-long memories in the park, and have spent countless hours with their families there. As Kyle noted in his address to the crowd on this bittersweet weekend "Paragon isn't the park, it is you, the people".

Check out more about Paragon Adventure Park and the efforts to save the park.

www.paragonap.com

www.petitionspot.com/petitions/savePAP

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PRACTICAL TIPS FROM THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Text and Photos by Mark Filonowich

One of the biggest secrets to successful trail rides isn't what tires to buy or lift kit to install. It isn't at all related to how big a 'wheeling budget you have. Simple preparation...making sure you brought everything you are going to need...can go miles toward helping you enjoy your time outdoors. I send my customers a detailed checklist that includes things like sunscreen, bug spray, sunglasses and sturdy footwear that really make the difference. If you are not comfortable (both in the Jeep and walking around on trail stops), you will find yourself wishing you brought a few more essential items.

I recommend careful meal planning. Too often, people stop at the gas station on the way to the trail and load up on whatever they can find. I'm not your mother and I'm not going to tell you what you should or should not eat, but I can give you some tips to better eating on the trail. A few minutes of preparation the night before keep you from foolishly rushing around in the morning. Apples are better than squishy bananas when the trail gets rough and things in your food pack or cooler shift around. Tortillas are bread that's already flattened. They make great PBJs for the kids. I bring along a tube of squeeze peanut butter and a bottle of squeeze jelly and make my sandwiches when we stop for lunch. Those same tortillas are used in "manifold meat" burritos. Just make sure you double wrap in foil and remember to flip the pack a few times as it heats up. Chips are fine, but buy them in a tube if you want anything more than crumbs. Trail

mix (peanuts and M&Ms and raisins) is easy to pack, easy to grab for a quick snack, and virtually crushproof. A cooler full of cold, non-alcoholic beverages is a must have (keep drinking fluids to avoid dehydration...a common trail malady), but remember to properly secure the cooler (and its lid) in the vehicle. You've heard it before...all those items are potential missiles bouncing around your head if the vehicle tips or rolls over. A simple ratchet strap keeps my things where they belong.

"Simple preparation...making sure you brought everything you are going to need...can go miles toward helping you enjoy your time outdoors."

Think about your "must have" items and jot them down. Everyone's list will be different... but write them down (or type it up) and refer to this list each time

you go. Ask others what they always bring, and consider adding those things to your own list. Before long, you will have developed a useful tool. Something that ensures you will have what you need, every time you go. You will be comfortable, prepared, and ready to tackle anything the trail (or Mother Nature) throws at you!

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GARAGE

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Conventional wisdom among Cherokee folk states that Rock Rails or some sort of rocker protection is one of the first modifications anybody who intends to wheel their Jeep should do. Not only do they save the vulnerable rocker panel of the Cherokee, they protect the doors and side, and can aid in pivoting around obstacles.

Despite this, I never bought any. I never found any commercially available rock rail that I liked. I saw them as all being too much of a compromise. Yes they protect, but they also rob you of clearance and can get you hung up, as they are attached below the already low hanging rocker panel.



My omission of these popular body saving, but breakover angle robbing devices has lead to some damage. In the grand scheme of things, and as much as I go wheeling, I've not had that many problems, but it was bordering on ridiculous; like it was hard to open the doors. Once I used a broken axle shaft to bash them back to I could close my door. Not an ideal situation, but I was still unwilling to compromise.

The only solution I had seen that appealed to me was to totally remove the existing factory rocker panel and replace it with something more durable, a set up a couple local Jeep guys have done. I asked my good buddy, Jeep guru and offroad shop owner to help me out in this process; enter John Mathews of Auburn Car Repair & Offroad. For reference, John's Jeep is the big burley blue one in the snow run article in this issue.

The first task was to fabricate the rails themselves. We began with some 3x6 3/16th box steel sections, and cut them down and angled the ends to match the lines of the wheel wells with John's fancy new plasma cutter. John then welded on end caps, and ground them down to fit.



(Top) The result of having unprotected rocker panels.

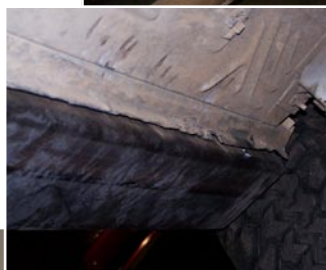
(Middle) Rocker panel all the way cut out.

(Bottom) Matt grinds down some excess metal on the new rocker rails.



The next step was to physically remove the mangled and twisted rocker panel, again accomplished with a plasma torch. This is all doable with less exotic tools, but it does take longer. We then mounted the rock rails in their new home and welded them into place along the edge of the door. This was relatively easy, we found, and nowhere as difficult as the bottom side would prove.

We've experimented with several techniques to attach the rails to the pinch seam, but found the best to be simply welding. You can also reinforce this by building supports that tie into the unibody rails, which we have eventually done as well.



The result looks like it came from the factory this way, yet is several orders of magnitude stronger than stock, and still offers superb protection from tree roots, rocks and even door dings. It even stiffens up the rather weak structure of the Cherokee. Additionally, they can be made into air tanks as well.

While some of this may seem advanced, the hardest part is the welding. The result is worth it, though. Truly the best of all worlds in this important modification. Big thanks to John and Auburn Car Repair & Offroad for his help and expertise in this project.



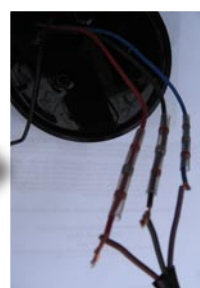
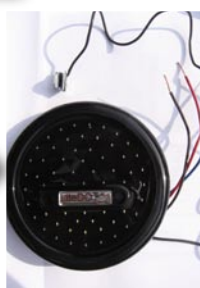
(Top) John Mathews cutting out the old panel with a plasma torch. (Middle) From underneath, the battered pinch seam about to be attached to the new rail. (Middle and bottom) I now have the confidence to go over big rocks, and still be able to open my door afterward.

OFF-ROAD ONLY MAKES LEDS A BREEZE



When LED lighting was first developed over forty years ago, the application of this technology was considered more of a luxury than necessity. Today, LED light applications are becoming more of a norm rather than the exception due to their superior longevity (average life expectancy is 100,000-1,000,000 hours), durability, and efficiency. Off-Road Only's LiteDOTS taillight system is a perfect example of a practical alternative to florescent and incandescent lighting, and because they are designed to withstand the rigors that an off-highway adventurer may encounter, their compact design and polycarbonate construction are a must-have for any weekend warrior.

The beauty of this particular installation was its simplicity. The included instructions, which had photographs embedded within the text, were so easy to understand and follow that anybody can feel confident in this install. Expect the installation time to be approximately one hour or less with simple tools.



The most timely part of this install was pulling the taillight wiring harness out from between the body panel and the body panel opening (I'm probably the lone exception to this as I suspect most vehicles have this conveniently positioned). Once the harness was pulled through the opening, it was merely a matter of cutting the wiring from the taillight assembly, removing a portion of the wire insulation, and then attaching the appropriate color-labeled wires to their corresponding wire on the LiteDOT assembly. After splicing the two together and heating the soldering points with a cigarette lighter, all that was left was to re-feed the wiring harness and ground wire through the body panel opening, affix the ground wire to the body panel, and then attach the LiteDOT assembly to the body. After that, repeat the process for the other taillight assembly and then test the LiteDOT assemblies to ensure that they are functioning correctly. Please note that the LiteDOT assemblies

do not include a flasher in the kit to alleviate the 'fast blinking' of the signal flashers due to reduced electrical resistance in this setup; however, a quick-fix modification to this can be found at: http://mesa4x4.com/tech_articles/flasher_2/flasher_2.html

Off-Road Only's LiteDOTS are easy to use, look sharp on the vehicle, and their practical use while in the city or on the trails in the backcountry make them an excellent and inexpensive enhancement to your Jeep vehicle. If you plan to update your exterior lighting needs, LEDs are the wave of the future and the installation is so easy that you'll feel like a pro once they're on your vehicle.

For more information about the benefits of LED lighting and Off-Road Only's LiteDOTS, please visit:

www.wavicle.biz/led_why.html
www.offroadonly.com



Text by Frank Ledwell, Editor



“Unbelievable, tremendous, phenomenal... the Wranglers are unbeatable!” The raw emotion of Mattias Jeschke’s excitement was felt throughout the Jeep® World on March 13, 2007 when his Extrem Events expedition team set a new Guinness World Record™ by climbing 21,804 feet to the rim of the world’s highest volcano, Ojos del Salado in Chile.

(Top-right) Members of the Extrem Events expedition team show their enthusiasm for their upcoming adventure. (Middle) The team takes a rest stop and sits for a photo session en route to the plateau of Ojos del Salado. (Bottom) The two Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicons enjoy time at the ‘World’s Highest Parking Lot’ at 21,804 ft.





"I cannot remember to have driven an off-road vehicle before that makes such extreme rides that easy. The effect of the stabilizers is incredible; also, the power of the engine is very good."



What made this challenge such an amazing feat was the fact that it was accomplished by driving. More specifically, this record was achieved by driving two brand-new Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicons, named 'F1' and 'F2', through a grueling two-week period in the second tallest mountain range in the world. Hurricane-force winds, temperatures near minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, and obstacles that included malicious glaciers, fissured rock cliffs and volcanic sand, made the success of this expedition in the Chilean Andes that much sweeter.

The twenty-one-person team from Germany began its expedition to the Chilean Andes on March 4 with the plan to gather the next day in Copiapo, a small mining village located in the desert sands of Chile. After one day of preparation that included everything from logistical support to national TV press coverage, the team began its trip to base camp.

En route to base camp at an old police station, several members of the team began to feel the physical effects of high elevation including shortness of breath and dizziness, both common symptoms of high altitude sickness. Considering the fact that base camp for the Extrem Events team was situated at an altitude higher than the tallest mountain in Western Europe, Mont Blanc,

the minor symptoms the team experienced were merely a hurdle along the way and a true testament to their determination in achieving the goal: to set a new Guinness World Record™. A restless night at elevation would eventually become a precursor for the remainder of the trip; however, it didn't stop the team from completing several important hikes from base camp that were necessary to help them continue to acclimatize to the significantly lower oxygen levels and bitter cold at elevation. The day would also prove to be a big one for the two Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicons as their capabilities were challenged and tested on

The Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicons prove their worth as the boulder-infested and snowy terrains provide ample challenge in the Chilean Andes

the rocky, boulder-infested terrain. As Mattias Jeschke, team leader, later said, "I cannot remember to have driven an off-road vehicle before that makes such extreme rides that easy. The effect of the stabilizers is incredible; also, the power of the engine is very good." With the knowledge that several other teams were forming in the region to make an attempt to set a new Guinness World Record™ as well, including a Mitsubishi-sponsored team, Mattias was excited at the prospect of answering the challenge of other teams by successfully achieving its altitude goals with two vehicles that he knew were up to the challenge.

The next day, March 9, the team began its initial push from base camp towards the plateau of the Ojos. The terrain was the most challenging that the team had seen since arriving in the mountain range, as 50 degree slopes with loose scree, drifting sand, and strong winds made the trek a tough one. On top of this, a large boulder had broken

free from higher elevation and became trapped under the rear differential of one of the Rubicons which required the vehicle to be jacked up in order to dig the stone out from underneath; not exactly an easy

chore when you're at an altitude of nearly 18,000 feet. Furthermore, the rocky lane that had become the only route to the rim of the Ojos del Salado was infested with a number of large boulders that had found their way there from glacier runoff. This challenge later forced Mattias and several team members to spend a day moving boulders from the path in order to traverse the mountain in their Rubicons while other team members spent that time on acclimatization hikes. Unfortunately for one team member, the windy conditions had caused a severe problem with

sand becoming lodged in his eyes but he managed to prevail and continue the journey.

Following a busy day, the team began its ascent up the rocky lane on March 10. Mattias was the first person to ascend the rocky lane and

to his amazement, his Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicon, 'F1', managed to climb one of the most difficult terrains in the world using 4 low in 1st gear, activated front and rear differential lockers on, and electronic disconnects disengaged. All of this was done without any help, without extreme tire spin, and without the use of a winch.

According to Mattias, "I almost could not believe it." His excitement continued as the vehicles pushed their way upwards to an eventual snow penitent field. With barely ten feet of width to drive through, the Rubicons

inched their way through snow and sand with only 10 PSI in the Goodyear Wrangler MTR tires, something that Mattias and his team found to be remarkable. In the end, the team had reached an elevation of nearly



(Top) A member of the team gets a thorough 'check-up' from the team doctor.

(Middle) Mattias Jeschke gets the latest updates via satellite phone. (Bottom) Team members ascend a section of the route during an acclimatization hike from base camp.



The approach to the Ojos plateau included a sloping sea of ice and water that posed the biggest challenge for the Extrem Events expedition team

19,500 feet before leaving their vehicles and returning to base camp for continued acclimatization. At base camp, they enjoyed an extra hour of sleep due to the time change from summer to wintertime in Chile.

The journey thus far had brought a number of challenges to Mattias and the Extrem Events expedition team. However, on March 11 the team had reached the elevation of the old high-altitude world record and every continued push towards the plateau of Ojos del Salado would be a new record in the making. Naturally, the task would continue to prove relentless. As the team reached just over 20,000 feet, they encountered a sloping sea of water and ice that had been created from glacial runoff that was nearly 4.5 feet deep and over 300 feet in length. At this point, the team felt it prudent to setup winch line anchors while crossing the 'sea' as a safety measure to keep the vehicles from being lost in the event of ice breakage or strong drifts. The first vehicle, 'F1', made it across this frozen sea unscathed however the second vehicle, 'F2', began to drift before the 'F1' Rubicon managed to drive forward and help the second Rubicon 'skid' from the frozen surface to the shore. Ironically, once ashore, the vehicles electronic control switched to



Mattias Jeschke navigates the 'F1' Rubicon through a narrow ridge near the plateau of Ojos del Salado.

'emergency mode' due to the documented shortage of oxygen and then shut-off. Mattias must have had good karma on his side, though, as a short pep talk to his vehicle lead to its restarting without a problem. Full performance was back on track and as the day drew to a close, both vehicles had reached an elevation of 20,500 feet, an historical milestone for two standard transmission vehicles.

On March 12, the team decided that a rest day was in order considering the enormous amount of physical and mental stress that this undertaking had entailed. The idea would prove to be a good decision as each team member was able to relax and rest before the 'summit push' the following day. A note of concern did hit the team that day as cloud coverage had begun to form over the Ojos, but in the end, the mountain would be kind to its visitors.

"A new Guinness World Record™ had been achieved with one tire from each vehicle in Argentina and one tire in Chile"

After a day of rest and relaxation, the team pushed forward through a series of rocky and glaciated terrains to eventually reach an elevation of 21,804 feet! A new Guinness World Record™ had been achieved with one tire from each vehicle in Argentina and one tire in Chile. Said George Murphy, Chrysler Group Senior Vice President of Global Marketing, "This was exactly the challenge to separate the new Jeep Wrangler Unlimited from all other 4x4 vehicles. A climb like this in not just off-road, but extreme conditions, is a testament to the performance of the vehicle's power train, suspension and overall quality. We are very proud that Wrangler Unlimited was the first vehicle to be able to complete such a rigorous challenge, and believe that it really does set the vehicle apart from its competition." The world's highest 'parking lot' featured two new Wrangler JK Unlimited Rubicons in their true element amongst the rocky, glaciated and windy terrain of mother Earth.

As the sense of accomplishment finally hit Mattias and the Extrem Events team, the overall sentiment was one of surreal astonishment. The team had achieved its goal and in so doing, had accomplished an achievement that was previously thought to be unattainable. Success had been achieved without major injury or damage to the vehicles. In short, the expedition was a dream come true and for Jeep® enthusiasts the world over, this 'trip of a lifetime' was a true testament to the Jeep® brand's coveted core values of freedom, adventure, mastery, and authenticity; it was also the summation of everything that makes Jeep® vehicles the one-and-only 'go anywhere, do anything' vehicle.



Special thanks to Jurgen Malieske on behalf of the Extrem Events Expedition Team, as well as DaimlerChrysler Media Services for supporting content

For more details about the Jeep® highest altitude world record, please visit:

www.hoehenrekord2007.com
www.mattiasjeschke.com



IDITAROD TRAIL INVITATIONAL 2007

By Bill Merchant



Peter Basinger leaves the Puntilla Lake checkpoint 160 miles into the 350 mile race on a record pace heading over the Alaska Range for the next checkpoint in Rohn . Word at the checkpoint is there is no trail put in from the Puntilla side of

Rainy Pass the normal route for the race. Trail breakers are working to make their way over from Rohn and have made it almost to the top of the Pass. The lack of snow has left a forest of brush in the trail. His mind is busy with---should he turn into Rainy Pass fighting the brush and snowdrifts or take a longer alternative route with an established trail through unfamiliar territory. This route is used by the Iron Dog snowmobile race held earlier and leads down a river notorious at least in legend for open water and bad ice? No problem for hot shot pro-snowmobile racers who skip across open water at high speed but a bit of a challenge to human powered racers. How far behind are his competitors Rocky Reifentuhl, Jeff Oatley and Jay Petervary? Which route will they choose? The clouds are moving in. If he chooses the unfamiliar trail will it snow and cover the snowmobile tracks making navigation difficult and hiding bad ice on the river? His options considered he chooses the 33 mile longer Ptarmigan Pass route to the South Fork of the Kuskokwim River and plunges into unfamiliar Alaskan winter

(Middle) Anticipation sets in as the racers await the beginning of Alaska's 'coldest' backcountry race
(Bottom) Racers take a break to pose for a still-shot in front of a cabin along the route





wilderness in the hopes of riding the bike rather than dragging it up the shorter Rainy Pass trail. Only time would tell if he has made the right decision.

As trail manager/trail breaker for the 2007 Iditarod Trail Invitational I had the good fortune to meet Joe May one of the legends and winners of the early Iditarod Sled Dog Races. The history lesson for all of us at the Rohn cabin 200 miles up the "Trail" can't be bought or read in books. The stories of races in the early days told with a lot of humor fascinated us and kept us laughing. The more I listened the more I was reminded of the philosophy of the Iditarod Trail Invitational when it was organized 6 years ago with the input of several veteran racers. We all agreed support should be kept to a minimum. Winning or even finishing in the extremes of Alaskan winter weather would depend on how comfortable the racer may be with their abilities, level of experience and amount of risk they are willing to take. We differ from other races in that we allow racers to make the decision for themselves about what to carry, when to rest and when it is safe to travel. There is no designated route only mandatory checkpoints racers

must pass through. As a race organizer it would be much less stressful to have all the rules, restrictions and support of other races but as a racer I and many others want to make and be responsible for our own decisions. We try to limit the amount of support to just what is necessary to prevent our race from imposing on lodges and other folks along the trail when things don't go as planned. Words from a story told by Joe May say it best and I am paraphrasing, "Some times when you offer too much support you cheat the true adventurer out of a big part of why they are in the race. They come to race, to confront and hopefully overcome what ever is thrown their way. To solve problems for them diminishes the experience."

The race starts under blue skies and bright sunshine. The temperature is a balmy 10 degrees F. There has been no fresh snow for weeks. The trail from the starting line across Knik Lake is hard packed and fast with near perfect conditions for the 19 cyclists, 11 runners and lone skier starting the 6th annual Iditarod Trail Invitational. 12 are entered in the 1100 mile race to Nome and 21 in the 350 mile race to McGrath Alaska.

The mountain bikers shoot across the lake riding like they are on asphalt. The sleds behind the runners and skier pull as if they weigh nothing. Some who forget the unpredictability of Alaska's winter weather may even be thinking, "It may not be so tough this year after all."

After dark the temperature drops to - 15 for the racers still on the over land part of the trail and



(Bottom photos) The serenity of Alaska's backcountry provided plenty of challenge, including snow-covered routes leading to the finish line



The snow-white setting along the Iditarod Trail was a testament to its peaceful serenity.

as low as -30 for those already on the Yentna River. The bikers have the advantage and fly across the frozen swamps, lakes and rivers. The first 24 hours it appears the records for bike and foot divisions might be at risk. Steve Reifentstahl is looking to break his own foot record in the 350 mile race and is maintaining a good pace. Peter Basinger is far ahead of the cycling record pace set by Mike Curiak in 2005.

The first 160 miles go well for most with a few scratches because of injury and equipment failure. At the Rainy Pass Lodge checkpoint things begin to change. By the time the chase pack of three bikers (Rocky, Jeff and Jay) depart the checkpoint in pursuit of Peter it is snowing and the wind is increasing. Hurricane force winds can come up without warning in the area making human powered travel all but impossible. All the questions Peter had to answer earlier run through their heads. They too choose the longer route and find themselves often searching for the trail under the fresh blowing snow. Other cyclists come through the checkpoint and all decide to use the longer route as well as Steve Reifentstahl the runner. As Steve and the last of the bikers leave the windstorm increases. Wind chills drop down to

-72 F making just surviving an adrenaline sport. Several runners and the skier head out and are driven back to the checkpoint by the gale force winds and blowing snow. Visibility is near zero at times.


With no end in sight to the windstorm many scratch for various reasons and decide to come back next year when maybe Mother Nature is in a better mood. Jose Diego, Marco Berni, Eric Johnson and Franz Nel all on foot catch a lull in the storm and decide to give Rainy Pass a try. Joe May and two friends have driven their big workhorse snowmobiles through the brush and broken the trail up the pass connecting with the trail put in from the other side on their way to the Rohn cabin.

Meanwhile Peter Basinger rides into McGrath breaking the record of Mike Curiak by 20 minutes in 3 days 5 hours and 40 minutes despite using a route 33 miles longer. Rocky, Jeff and Jay finish in second place nearly 24 hours later. Steve Reifentstahl wins the foot division. Louise Kobin rides in winning the women's division and is the only female finisher this year.

Back in Rainy Pass the 4 runners find the going easier after reaching the top of the pass and descend through Dalzell Gorge to the Tatina River. In Rohn we are glad to see Marco come in to the checkpoint. He lets us know the other 3 have made it over the pass. At 3:00 am Jose Diego comes in telling us Eric has fallen through the ice and has frozen feet. It is -25 F and we waste no time in getting dressed while Jose explains Eric has gotten off the river and is in the shelter of the trees. Jose hands me his GPS with Eric's location marked on it and Terry Boyle an Iditarod Sled Dog Race volunteer, our checker Rob Kehrer and myself jump on snowmobiles and head out. Onto the river and after crossing about ½ mile of overflow (water running over the top of the ice) up to 2 feet deep we stop on good ice. Looking at the GPS we are almost on top of Eric. Calling loudly we hear Eric's whistle. We find him in his sleeping bag under the trees. Loading him on the back of Terry's machine we head across the water to the

warmth of the cabin. Eric escaped with only minor frost nip and is picked up by ski plane and flown out the next day. Jose Diego makes it to Nikolai only to succumb to an ankle injury from a run in with a dogsled the first night of the race. Marco and Franz continued to finish in McGrath. Out of 31 starters only 16 finished in McGrath and 3 of the original 12 signed up for the 1100 mile race continue on to Nome.

On March 3 at 10 am Jan Kopka from the Czech Republic, Jose Dundee from Massachusetts diagnosed with MS in 2002 and riding to raise money for Multiple Sclerosis research and Masaru Adachi from Japan left from McGrath to continue their race another 750 miles to Nome, Alaska. At last word Jan and Jose have reached the Yukon River and Masaru is somewhere behind. There are times when they will travel through communication "black holes" of nearly 150 miles where self rescue is often the only option. All our best to the racers on their epic journey.



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Congratulations to all who participated in the All Things Jeep/JPFreeK, "Who Is The Biggest Jeep Freek" contest. All Things Jeep recieved an enormous response with many submissions that were worthy of being dubbed the Biggest Jeep Freek. The following is the winning submission chosen by All Things Jeep. Other entries, including the runners up, are posted on Allthingsjeep.com

JPFreeK Adventure Magazine did not alter or edit any text in this contest submission as we want to provide our readers with the actual winning entry received from All Things Jeep.

When I heard you were having a contest in search of the biggest Jeep Freek, I just had to enter. The only problem is, the biggest Jeep Freek isn't myself, nor my husband or our 3-year-old son, and it isn't yet our 5-month-old daughter...it is our ENTIRE FAMILY! I have always had a passion for Jeeps and purchased my first Jeep brand new, a 1995 Wrangler. That was it; I was bitten by the bug. My husband drove it to work a few times in summer topless and without doors and then he was bitten as well. He bought a 1979 CJ-5 and rebuilt it by also purchasing a 1976 CJ-5 from which he swapped tubs, upgraded axles, transfer case, and engine. We have done all our own work to our Jeeps. We build them, drive them, paint them, wheel them, break them, enjoy them, fix them and sadly, have now totaled one. (As I sat writing this submission this past weekend, our Cherokee was rear-ended by a tractor-trailer truck while towing our snowmobile trailer). As anyone who owns a Jeep knows, they are the ultimate freedom vehicles. No matter how bad a day you have had, if you just get in and drive (topless and without doors, of course) nothing else matters! And if you don't own a Jeep, well then..."It's a Jeep thing, you wouldn't understand!" We have been avid

Jeepers, attending and guiding Jeep Jamborees, wheeling with our local club, 4-wheeling on our friend's property and on land we own near the Adirondacks in New York State, and participating in shows and cruises. To say that we are "all about Jeeps" is an understatement. When we run into people in town, they say, "yeah, you live on Kenyon Road"...and it is ALWAYS followed up with "the house with all the Jeeps!" Our annual Camp Out Bash consists of an invitation of friends to join us at camp and drive or ride in a Jeep on the trails over obstacles and through the mud and water. By the end of the weekend, we have converted another person and someone returns the following year in their OWN Jeep. We have sworn that for as long as we live, we will never, NOT own a Jeep. We have a collection of Jeep paraphernalia which includes hats, t-shirts, sweatshirts, ties, glasses, mugs, coolers, blankets, gear bags, posters, watches, compasses, die casts, remote control rock crawling Jeeps, even a toddler Jeep Halloween costume and an over abundance of spare parts! While pregnant with our first child, my husband "painted" the Jeep smiley face on my belly. My baby shower consisted of lots of Jeep baby gear (the play yard, bouncer, walker, Liberty stroller and a few Jeep diaper bags too),



not to mention all of the Jeep related outfits and onesies. The nursery was decorated in primary colors and JEEPS! My mother-in-law stitched a custom Jeep quilt and bumper for the crib, a friend made Jeep graphics out of vinyl for the wall border and we had many of the Jeep posters framed and hanging on the walls. Unsure of the sex of the baby, we decided it would work for boy or girl...then we had a son, and named him Cory James or "CJ" for short (Just a coincidence that he was born on the 5th of May). At just 6 weeks old, he was in his infant carrier on his first off-road trip with our local club. At only 3 months of age he came along for a 3 week road trip in our 1993 Grand Cherokee across country to Moab, Utah where we wheeled the ZJ before driving

it back home to New York. Since then he has had many Jeep rides and loves to talk about 4 wheelin' in the woods up at camp. He is a pro and knows how to get through the mud, over the rocks and use the winch to get unstuck. He has a power wheels Jeep that he drives in the same fashion as mom and dad!!! The newest addition to our family was born in September of last year and named appropriately Zoë Jo (or "ZJ" for short). Already she has used a majority of the Jeep baby gear from her brother. She has yet to experience the same realm of wheeling possibilities that her brother enjoyed since birth and before, but rest assured...she will get her fill. Once again, I believe that as a family, WE are the biggest Jeep Freaks out there! (We have many friends that would agree and can attest to it as well!)

-The Cook Family Ontario, New York

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR WINNING ENTRY AND THE \$500 SHOPPING SPREE TO ALLTHINGSJEEP.COM!

To view the Cook Family photo collage, as well as the other finalist entries, visit www.allthingsjeep.com

JPFreek readers can enter the code 'jpfreek-10' to receive a 10% discount on all items at All Things Jeep.



It's a sunny spring day in the desert, as you hike through sand, sagebrush & cactus. There before your feet, the earth cracks open into a narrow slot. Rappelling in, you enter into a different world: the walls are narrow and in some places, you can't place a single foot to stem back across against the striped sandstone. As the canyon curves, the light in different spots does amazing things.



Sometimes the sandstone seems to glow, bringing out all the subtle colors and taking one's breath away. The walls radiate heat like an oven, and the walls of the inner crevasses emit a deep shadow along the top of the canyon. High above your head, a narrow strip of light is all that can be seen, and the temperature suddenly drops to chilling levels. The canyon widens out in spots to let full daylight in, only to narrow down once again. Water fills holes that require you to wade and swim through, and the cold water prickles your skin like a cactus in the desert heat. Once you pass through the frigid water, a climb continues down further into the abyss, and you find yourself squeezing, scraping, and stemming through an unfolding, corkscrew path. This is canyoneering.

Text by Jeff Baird
Photographs by Jeff Baird, Neil Baird,
Maureen Mangum and Greg Miller



WHAT IS CANYONEERING?

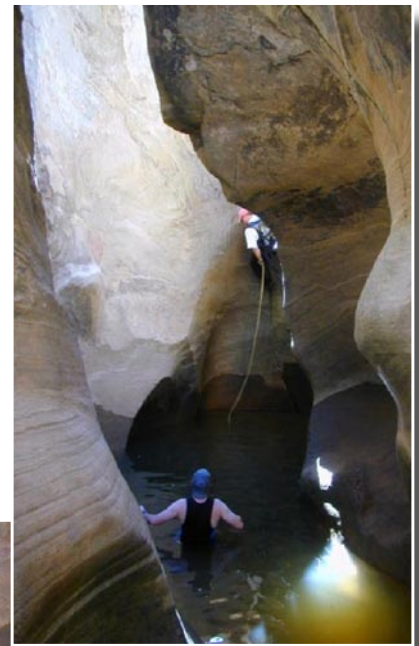
Canyoneering in the U.S. has grown a lot in popularity in the last few years, and while you'll still get some puzzled looks from people who scratch their heads when you mention it, canyoneering is really catching on as the next great adventure opportunity. What is canyoneering? My short definition is that canyoneering is an activity where you descend a water course (wet or dry) down a narrow canyon. If you've ever hiked or descended the narrow slot canyons in Southern Utah, you've at least dabbled in canyoneering. At its easiest, canyoneering can be a simple hike down a slot canyon. On the other end of the spectrum, the canyon might include fast flowing water, multiple rappels, swimming through narrow corridors, climbing out of deep potholes or over log jams. For me, obstacles such as these are what make the sport fun as you may start down the canyon, not knowing for sure what you'll find around the next swirling bend.

WHERE DO YOU DO IT?

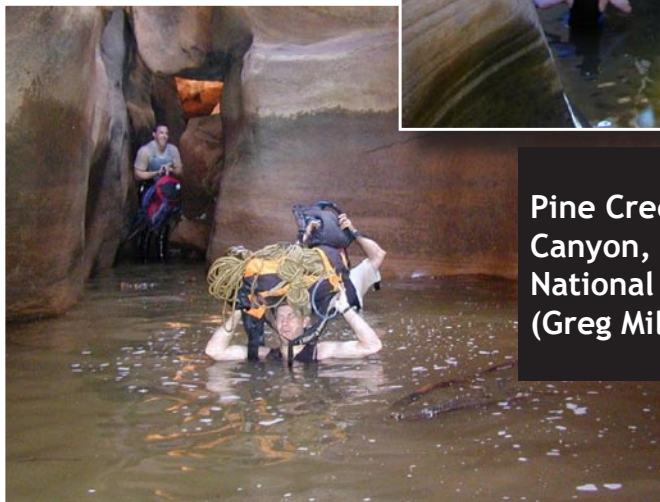
In Europe and in other places throughout the world, canyoneering (or canyoning as they call it) has been popular for years. In the U.S. the central hub of canyoneering has been Southern Utah, particularly

Michele Baird in Three Canyon (Jeff Baird)

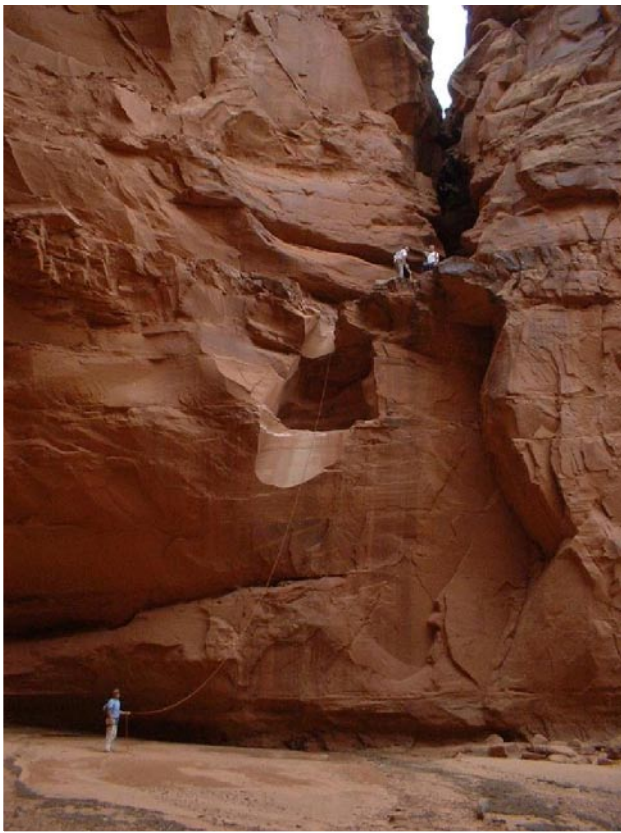
Zion National Park which is considered by many as a canyoneering Mecca. There are hundreds of great slot canyons in the Zion area that offer some of the best that desert canyoneering has to offer, as well as a number of other areas in southern Utah that flourish with opportunity. San Rafael Swell, Robber's Roost, Cedar Mesa, and Escalante are just a few as they are all areas with abundant opportunities for exploring slot canyons. In the past, most of the attention has been on the desert southwest but as the sport has grown, the exploration opportunities have spread beyond Utah. Today, there are popular routes in virtually all of the states throughout the western United States with Colorado and the Pacific Northwest becoming well known for alpine style canyoneering. Since the sport, as it is known today, is now beginning to take off, there are ample opportunities to explore and descend canyons anywhere.



Pine Creek Canyon, Zion National Park (Greg Miller)



Futile attempt to keep our packs dry (Greg Miller)



WHAT HAZARDS EXIST?

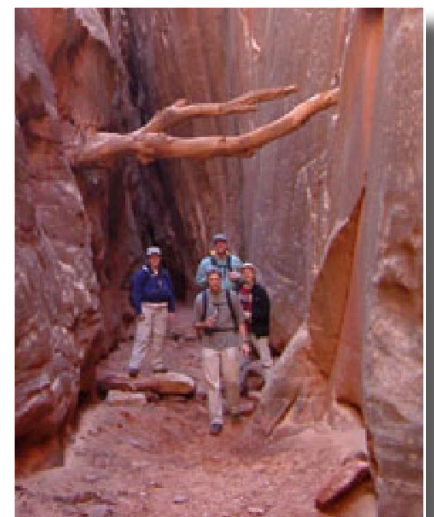
Due to the nature of being within a confined, narrow watercourse, there are a number of potential dangers to be aware of. However, if you have the proper training and enjoy the sport with someone who is experienced, you can learn pretty quickly how to handle various hazards. Nonetheless, the following dangers are specific to canyoneering and you should be aware of them.

Flash floods are certainly a concern while in a canyon. Floods can happen quickly and without warning, and sometimes even if the sky directly above you is clear, a storm far up stream from the canyon can create a wall of water that could head your way and result in entrapment and even death. Many deaths have resulted from flash floods, including areas at Antelope Canyon in Arizona, Kolob Canyon in Zion National Park, and others. It's important to understand the drainage within a canyon before leaving for a trip, and to check the weather where the canyon is located, as well as upstream from the canyon. Some canyons will have multiple branches of drainages that converge on your canyon so learning how large the collection area for water above the canyon can be essential.

Hypothermia is the biggest killer in the outdoors, and in canyoneering it's even more prevalent. The canyons often have water which gets little or no sun light. Canyoneering is a world of extremes, where it can be near 100 degrees outside of the canyon but a chilly 40 degrees in the canyon floor water. Wetsuits or dry suits are a must in many of the canyons to keep you warm.

Canyoneering requires a commitment. If there are multiple rappels, you'll need to bring your rope with you as you descend the canyon. Once you've pulled your rope down from that first rappel, there's no going back. This means if you run into trouble, there's usually only one way out; to keep descending the canyon. Injuries, even if minor, can be a major problem in this environment. You'll also want to be careful about pulling your ropes so that they don't get stuck as it takes special care to properly rig a rappel so that you can easily pull your rope down after a descent. From prior experience, we've had fellow canyoneers join us who got their ropes stuck which made it difficult to progress further down the canyon. Again, going with someone who knows what they're doing is the best way to learn how to do this properly.

Another way to get stuck in a canyon is from debris that gets washed down during flash floods and then gets jammed in the narrow canyon, blocking your progress. The Black Hole, down in the Cedar Mesa area, is a perfect example of this. The Black Hole is usually a relatively simple canyon that does not normally require rope or other special equipment. However, a few years ago, massive floods clogged



**Bluejohn Canyon,
Robbers Roost
(Neil Baird)**

**Rappel into Horseshoe Canyon,
Robbers Roost (Jeff Baird)**

the canyon with logs and other debris which made it difficult and dangerous to get through. For a while, the canyon was considered unsafe for anyone but an experienced canyoneer. Canyons are very dynamic and can change frequently depending on what the floods do. Whenever possible, it's a good idea to find out what the current conditions are in a canyon before committing yourself to descend it.

One unique feature that you'll find in some canyons is what is referred to as a "keeper pothole". A keeper pothole is a pothole in the canyon that has been scoured smooth by flash floods, making it difficult to get out of. If the pothole is shallow, or if it's filled to the brim with water, they're simple enough to get through. However in some canyons, you could be treading water in an overhanging, smooth walled bowl. Special techniques are required to get out, or you will become the main ingredient in canyoneer soup. Proper training and practice are essential to learn the techniques for dealing with these obstacles.

There are many more dangers and hazards, but the few mentioned above give you an idea of the unique nature of this sport, and will hopefully prompt you to hook up with someone who knows what they're doing before you head out to the canyons.



Chad Mangum on the first rappel into Keyhole Canyon, Zion National Park (Jeff Baird)



Typical canyoneering equipment and attire (Maureen Mangum)

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

As with any adventure sport, the best way to get started is to get expert advice, training, and to go with someone who "knows the ropes". There are a lot of resources out there, especially on the internet, to learn about the activity and get information on particular canyons. I'll mention just a few here to get you started:

Shane Burrows has been running www.climb-utah.com for years, and has one of the best resources for information on canyons. Also, www.canyoneeringusa.com, run by Tom Jones, is another great source for canyoneering information. He also has his own line of canyoneering specific equipment, so you can make sure you're properly geared up for your adventure. If you want to hire a guide to help you begin, www.deserthighlights.com runs trips in the Moab area. The last resource I'll mention here is the American Canyoneering Association (www.canyoneering.net). The ACA provides many resources, including canyoneering training, to help you get going in the sport. All of these sites include links to canyoneering forums that also provide you with a community to learn from, and to arrange trips with people experienced with the canyon.

These are just a few of the great resources available to learn all the ins and outs of canyoneering.

Canyoneering is a great sport; the problem solving, the physical and mental challenges, as well as the peacefulness of being in the outdoors, are all what make it so exciting and adventuresome. As with any outdoor adventure, make sure you seek the proper training to help you get your feet wet. Once you've learned the basics, exciting adventure opportunities await for people of all skill levels, ages and interests.



Hypothermia Run 2007

Text by Matt Adair

Driving for hours up a mountain in the snow, with the express purpose of sleeping outdoors in freezing temperatures, sounds like lunacy to most people. Nearly everybody I mentioned it to, in fact. Looking for someone to go with, I floated the idea to a couple of local Jeep clubs that I belong to: NAXJA (which regular readers may remember from last month's snow run article) and Pacific Northwest Jeep club (PNWJeep.com). After all, misery loves company but in the end there were only three people crazy enough to do it: me, as well as my good friends Ian (blue XJ) and Michael (grey XJ), both NAXJA members.



Ian and I had never done any true "snow camping" before so we were very grateful to have Michael along with us. He's so hardcore that he even manufactured his own snow saw. Really.

Our route this trip would be up Tinkham Road, off Interstate 90 about 45 minutes East of Seattle, Washington, just west of Snoqualmie Pass. "The Pass" as the locals call it, crosses the Cascade Mountain range, effectively the dividing line between Western and Eastern Washington. Snoqualmie Pass is also home to several popular local ski areas.

The three of us met at 9:00am on a blissfully clear and crisp February morning and aired down to about 10 psi, just off the freeway. We shared an icy frontage road with cross-country skiers for a while, before making our way up the mountain. Dodging them was an additional challenge.

At one point I came upon a group of three skiers without them hearing me until I was pretty close. I double-clutched into first, blipping the throttle to match the revs. The sudden and loud noise of a barely muffled 4-liter 6 turning 3500 rpm sent them jumping into the ditch. Of course, I was only doing 2 mph and was still a ways away from them, but it gave them quite a start. Luckily they were cool about it, all grinning sheepishly as they brushed themselves off and we went on past them.

The road leading up the mountain goes under the historic Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad's Chicago to Seattle line, built in the late 1800's. It was abandoned in 1980 and turned into biking and hiking trails, now called the Iron Horse State Park and John Wayne Pioneer Trail. Just further east it snakes its way under the mountains into a 2.3 mile long tunnel, one of the longest in the U.S. when it was built between 1908 and 1914.

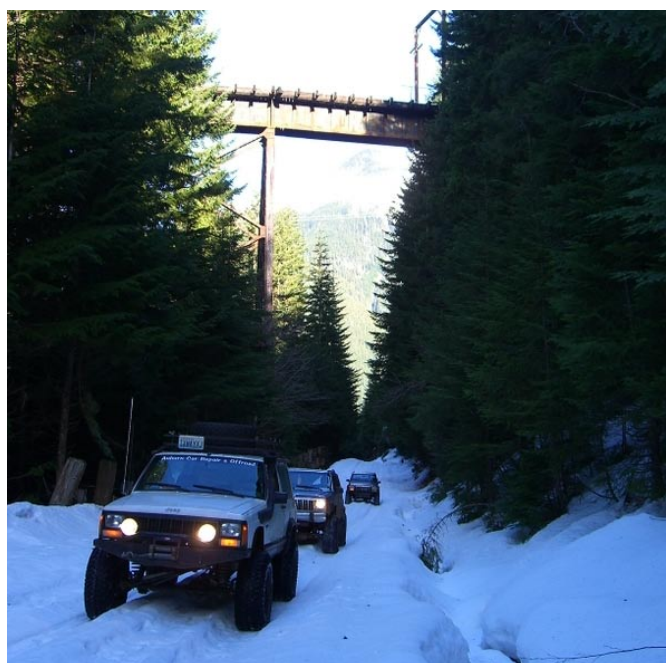
The snow had a VERY thick crust, but under it the texture was that of fine sand. You could scoop up some in your hand and watch it sift through your fingers. The trick was staying on the top layer. A couple of times I had to stop and work at it a few times to get back on top; drive forward, sink in, reverse. Drive forward, sink in, reverse. Repeat as many times as necessary.

We were blessed with incredible weather, mostly clear skies and a bright sun. The temp during the day was only in the 30's, but it felt warmer with the sun on our faces. We made great time up the road, covering the same distance in just minutes that took us hours the last time we were up there in the snow. We all shared the hope that we would be able to get to the top, usually not possible until the snow melts in June. All was going well until we came across a huge crater in the snow, where someone had been stuck and had to dig themselves out. It looked big enough to swallow my Jeep whole, so I attached a tow strap before going in. Amazingly, the snow was fine and I was able to power through it with no problem, as did Ian behind me. Then Michael got stuck halfway out of the hole. Ian and I went back to investigate and help, and quickly discovered that the front wheels were not contributing to the cause.

**"Try 4-wheel drive, Michael,"
we both said, chuckling.**

Pause.

**"Uh, it is in 4-wheel drive," replied Michael
with grim realization.**



**Our group crossing under the Historic
Iron Horse Railroad trestle.**



Ian yanking Michael out to inspect his nonfunctioning 4WD system.

First task was to get the Jeep on level ground so we could figure out exactly what was wrong. It took a few good tugs to get Michael out of the hole. After a few minutes, we discovered the vacuum-disconnect line had been torn off when he dropped into the hole. Easily fixed, we were back on the trail after only a few minutes delay.

We were now on totally virgin snow; no vehicles had been up here since before Christmas, and a month of heavy snow had all but erased their tracks. All I had as a guide were cross-country skiers' shuffle marks and a scattering of footprints to guide the way.

Around 11:00am we broke out of the trees into the huge clearing/rock quarry that we refer to as "the Lower Shooting Spot" due to it's popularity with teenagers drinking and shooting their daddy's shotgun. We stopped there for a few minutes, had a hot pocket (cooked on our engines) and chatted while admiring the stunning solitude and incredible vistas. Back on the trail, it was quickly apparent that if I thought the trail had been challenging up 'til now, it was only a glimpse of things to come. We estimated the snow to be about four feet deep at this point, with many thousands of feet yet to climb.

My forward progress was nearly nonexistent, and Ian's was totally focused on just getting back on the trail. I struggled for 15 minutes trying get back on top of the snow and moving again. It was just not happening; no matter which gear I used, high-range or low, slow or fast, I just plowed into the deep powder and stopped.

Meanwhile, Michael and Ian were having similar problems. For the hell of it, I decided to air down slightly. I went from 8 to 5 psi, and like that, I was back on the trail cruising along at 15 mph. Ian followed suit, aired down further and had similar results.

Now I was really hauling up the snow-covered road, having to shift out of low range due to my speed. My progress was such that it was decided that I would keep on pushing ahead while Ian and Michael aired down some more and followed a few minutes later.

Once we regrouped, we went the last of the way up to the 'top' where the gate is to the Seattle watershed. The snow was even with the top of the gateposts, about five feet high. We decided to camp there, in a small grove of trees that would hopefully block some of the wind.

While Ian and Michael started to get camp organized, I aired down to 3 psi and went a little further up the road to get some pictures of Mt. Rainier, which looks close enough to touch from where we had stopped to camp.



Majestic Mt. Rainier in the background at 14,411 ft.

With that accomplished, what else would three responsible adults do but go sledding and build a jump? Michael had the foresight to bring along one of his children's sleds, and we took turns trying to get as much air as possible; luckily there were no broken bones to report.



Ian going for a land speed record

Our original plan was to build an igloo to sleep in, something I'd never tried before, but Michael assured Ian and I that it was relatively easy and very warm. We got Michael's ice saw out and started making the bricks that would make up the walls of our little domicile. It was quickly apparent that it was just not going to work. The snow was

so fine and unwilling to pack that we could never get it to work well enough to sleep under. Luckily, everyone had good cold weather tents and mummy-bags so this was not a major setback. Nonetheless, we built as much as we could for the experience of it, and we're all looking forward to making it work sometime. I might even have to get Michael to fabricate me one of his custom snow saws....

With the sun beginning to set, we got the fire going and began to start thinking about dinner. Ian brought his little Weber BBQ along for this purpose (more on it later) and we buried it in the snow. It worked well and kept us warmer than we would have been otherwise. While we were sitting there, a couple of cross-country skiers/hikers came upon our little clearing. They were incredulous that we had driven up there. Our conversation went like this:

Hikers: "How the hell did you guys get up here?"

Me, after quickly looking at the three

Jeeps: "Well, we drove."

Hikers: "Yeah, we saw your tracks down there and thought it was from a Sno-Cat or something. I can't believe you drove your Jeeps up here!"

Me: "Only in a Jeep, buddy."

Hikers: "Dude, you guys must have fawking HUGE cojones!"

I looked around our campsite with its fire, cooler full of beer, steaks and the pot of chili

that was cooking, and then at the two guys. They had just climbed 3000 feet in five miles and were only halfway through their trip.

Me: "I think you've got it backwards, man, but thanks!"

Ian, our official camping chef, again came through with some delicious NY steaks and chili. The chili may have been inadvisable, due to our close proximity, but it sure tasted great. With the bourbon gone (Sasquatch drank it, that's our story and we're sticking to it) around 11:00, we all shuffled off to get warm in our sleeping bags. At this point, it was only in the mid teens, and there was a lot of night to go.

The next morning was as clear as the day before, which meant it was freezing-damn-cold! It was beautiful though, as we drank some coffee and huddled around the campfire to get warm. Meanwhile, Michael broke down our camp and filled in the holes that we had dug, lest someone fall in later in the season.

All of a sudden it was nearly 9:00am when we were scheduled to meet the second part of our group for the day's wheeling. Unfortunately the BBQ was still hot, and besides, Ian's truck was so full from careless, hasty packing that there was no room.



The morning broke to amazing views and my new passenger, Sputnik the BBQ.

"Shit, just throw it on my roof rack," I volunteered, not fully considering how stupid a Weber BBQ would look strapped to the top of my Jeep. Once it



was up there it was clear, though. "It looks like I've got Sputnik strapped to my damn roof!" It was too late for me to do anything about it, so that's why it looks like I have a satellite attached to my roof in the rest of these pictures. Ian even volunteered to put together a CD of "Beep-Beep-Beep-Beep" so I could have the complete effect. Thanks buddy.

On the way down, Michael lost a bead on his right front tire, not surprising considering the breakneck pace we were keeping on the trip down, bouncing from rut to rut. We stopped and re-seated it, a simple process considering both Ian and Michael have on-board air compressors.

Once I saw that Michael and Ian had it under control, I went ahead down the mountain to meet the other group at the bottom. There I met four more vehicles, three Cherokees and one YJ. After a few minutes, Ian and Michael joined us and we set off up the other side of the freeway to the Denny Creek road. Before I-90 was built, this road was how you crossed Snoqualmie pass into Eastern Washington; it winds through the trees, crossing many streams and comes out by a popular ski resort at the pass.

Our now larger and more diverse group took off up the road, the snow to the other side; as long as you didn't break through the top layer, it was no problem to drive on, especially running 3 psi. John (BIG blue XJ), one of the head honcho's at PNWJeep.com, and

I, took off quickly; he's running 35x13.50 BFG Krawlers, tires very well suited to the snow, also at very low pressure. His is the same color as Ian's XJ, so the wheels and tires are the easiest way to tell them apart.

He and I got pretty far ahead of the group before stopping at a huge crevasse, allowing Ian to catch up. One of the creeks had spilled out across the road, eroding

the snow away and forming a formidable natural obstacle. With two winches between us, we decided to give it a shot. There were a few tense moments while dropping down the bank, but all three of us made it fine though Sputnik got a little banged up on re-entry.

We finally heard from Michael and the rest of the pack; they were stuck. Apparently, dual lockers and at least 33" tires were the winning ticket; anyone not set up that way was just waiting to sink in the snow. We drove back and picked up the drivers of the stuck vehicles and spread them out in our vehicles, and then we turned back to the summit.

There were only a few issues; we had to saw through a large downed branch, and the Aaron in the YJ broke an axle shaft coming out of the crevasse. Apparently too much 'stupid pedal' for 35" tires and a stock axle. After getting that swapped out, we pushed on towards the pass, making great time and admiring the scenery.

Although we didn't go the distance to the pass, we did get to have a lot of fun playing under the I-90 West overpass; both John and I went down the steep sides and tried to get up the other side, but it just wasn't in the cards. After winching both of us back onto flat ground, we all decided it was time to head back home.

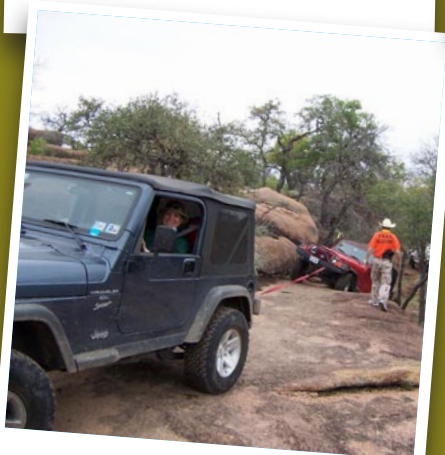
The consensus was that this had been the best snow-wheeling trip we'd been on. We also discovered that Sputnik the BBQ, despite its apparently rugged Russian engineering, was not 'Trail Rated'. The poor little thing was just a shadow of its former self after a day of getting bounced around on top of my truck. Another important lesson learned is never to leave your whiskey unattended in the mountains; Sasquatch is a lush.

Even after the successful completion of the event, people still look at me funny when I describe it. As they do, I'm busy planning our next trip.



**The front-runners
at a seemingly
impassible crevasse.**





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