

Deer Lodge trip Mountain Ben 4, Club 2

Mountain Ben scores big against the club!

Willie and Jeanne went up Racetrack canyon to Alpine and Albicaulis Lakes on Friday and had a fairly uneventful, but great day. Visited with a couple of ATV riders that lived in Deer Lodge, and they shared some interesting information on the area. Trail to the lakes was more difficult than it has been in the past, most likely due to lots of usage. Jeanne drove most of the way. On the way back down visited with a bear that was collecting huckleberries, he wasn't very friendly and didn't want to share his berries.

Saturday we were joined by Derek, Larry, Eric, Jim and grandson, and Mark and daughter Erin. Four others that said they were coming were no shows. The trip to Carruthers and Mountain Ben Lakes turned out to be a lot harder trip than we had figured on. We had heard that the trail to Mountain Ben had turned pretty bad but didn't figure it would be that bad. Six of us started on it. Mark had fuel injection problem that we could not trouble shoot on the trail and decided Carruthers was a good turning around spot and would not attempt Mt. Ben. He made it back to Deer Lodge and had to call his wife to come with truck and trailer.

So Willie took over the lead position and started up the trail. Derek took a look at the first steep ledge and figured that was a good place to park and ride with some one else. Jim was next, and his Optima battery shorted out internally when he hit that first ledge pretty hard. Derek had to carry a battery up the trail to him to get him started. Jim headed home hopefully remembering not shut off the engine. Larry and Eric started up. At about the 1/2 mile mark Larry drove over a large tree across the trail and it rolled up under the Jeep, forced a stick around the fuel tank skid plate up onto the top of the tank, and took out the wiring and the fuel fitting. Must have been trail trolls at work. Larry went to work dropping the tank and attempted to fix the destroyed wiring and broken fuel line. Even with his "McGuyver" skills it just wasn't going to happen. While they were trying to turn him around with tow strap, winch and starter power, Eric broke an axle joint. Luckily he had a locker up front so at least had one front wheel driving.



Photo: Larry being towed down the trail

Willie didn't have a clue that this was going on behind him as on this trail once you're committed you can't really stop for about 2 miles due to its steepness. Figuring something must have happened he finally found a place to turn around just before the lake and started back down to be met by Derek walking up the hill to find him and tell him what was happening. Unless you have been on this trail you have no idea how tight and steep and twisty it can be. It has changed from a 4 trail to almost a 5. Jeanne couldn't believe that Willie didn't do body damage to the Grand Cherokee. Coming down Willie met up with Larry and Eric and assisted in guiding and getting Larry pulled around the bends in the trail and over rocks. At one point the side of Larry's Jeep was up against a tree that unfortunately was leaning over the Jeep. We put a rope around the upper part of the tree and had bodies pulling on it as Willie took the chain saw to it and several more along the way.



Photo: Erik and Larry deciding whether to move the Jeep or the tree.

Eric, because he started the tow, figured he would finish it and pulled Larry all the way back to Deer Lodge. We all know Larry likes to save a buck now and then on gas, but having to tow him off bad trails twice now is getting a bit old. Besides that, driving without power brakes or power steering working has to be, well "a weight loss work out" to say the least.

Oh and on Sunday with just Derek and Willie fully operational, we hit the Bowman Lakes trail and Eric was such a good sport that he even went along with his three wheel drive Jeep (with Larry as passenger) and did a very commendable job on what is also a somewhat difficult trail in places.



Photo: Derek (Toyota) and Erik and Larry (Jeep) on trail to Bowman Lake

One of the highlights before we even made it to the trail was the "river of ewe" that flowed around Eric's Jeep ... there must have been 200 head!



The lower section of this trail has a wide selection of wildflowers and was quite colorful with purple lupines and delphiniums, yellow arrowleaf groundsel and stonecrop, and a whole meadow full of mariposa tulips dancing in the wind like butterflies (mariposa is the Spanish word for butterfly).



The upper section of this trail descends a very steep switchback road with great views of Racetrack Canyon in the bottom....a LONG way down! Not the place for those with fear of heights and/or bad brakes! The trail then crosses the creek in several sections and crawls back up a boulder strewn area to a well built cabin and the three Bowman Lakes.



For those that didn't make it, you missed a great trip, and some great weather for such a trip.

