

Introducing a New Generation to Off Roothing

July 2, 2011 Nine vehicles and thirteen members of the Montana Back Roads 4x4 Club, Inc., introduced children and staff from the Watson Children's Shelter to what 4x4 vehicles can do on an adventure to Telephone Butte in the Blue Mountain area. Some of the members have grandchildren, some have grown children, some have teenagers and some have small kids, but they left their own at home today to let some others experience the great outdoors.

The trip filled six hours on a typical sunshiney summer day with a break for juice and a picnic lunch, as well as having to remove some fallen trees from the trail. It's a fairly easy trail, but several huge nasty mud puddles gave each vehicle a new coat of color and lots of cleaning time later in the day. At lunch President Willie Worthy did a short presentation on the different trees of the area with samples of each type of foliage along with their cones that were passed among the children, as well as talking about the various animals that live in the Lolo National Forest.

In addition to the four wheeling we saw a group of quads on the trail, several motorcycles, and even a few bikes, along with a couple of deer. At the stops the kids got to switch to different vehicles, so each had a chance to ride in an open top vehicles if they chose to, run around in the woods, play in the remaining snow, and identify some of the wildflowers. The children asked many questions ranging from "what is that noise?" (rocks bouncing up in the fender wells) to "what lives in that hole in the tree?" (a woodpecker), and "what are all those purple flowers?" (lupine).

The kids had a great time, judging from some of their comments: "Jeeps are tough", "It's awesome, I'm having lots of fun.", "Go faster!", "Go slower..." "Make a big splash in the mud puddle.", "No, don't get me wet!", "My Jeep has to take a rest.", "It's like riding a roller coaster, hands in the air and all when we go down steep hills.", "Can we do this again next weekend?" The youngest girl hung on tight to the sides of her car seat and closed her eyes in many places.

Club members also had a great time, with comments like "It was fun to look at four wheeling from a young child's view", "Interesting to see the children's perspective on what we take for granted.", "I think I like snow better than mud--just wait for a warm day and it cleans itself off.", "Climbing to this higher elevation was like spring all over again, with glacier lilies and shooting stars just beginning to bloom.", and "I enjoyed how enthusiastic the children were."

The 4x4 Club has volunteered at the Missoula Food Bank several times and wanted to be more involved with our community. The Watson Children's Shelter trip allowed us to not only have a good time but to interact with the kids and provide a new experience for them. The members all agreed that we should do this as an annual event.