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Diablo 4-Wheelers: Opening the Bear Valley Loop Trail for 2010!



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The Diablo 4-Wheelers of Concord, California, and I go back a long way! During June of 1967, I met the president of the club, Stan Johnson. A long story made short, we struck up a conversation about four-wheeling that led to a memorable outing. Stan invited me to join the Diablo 4-Wheelers on a “weekend outing” in July.

Coming from the East Bay, the club members would camp overnight at South Lake Tahoe. At the time, my home was Gardnerville, Nevada, so I drove up Kingsbury Grade at dawn that morning in my folks '64 CJ-5 Jeep. Camping gear on board, the trip would be a chance to see how “city folks” wheeled. After meeting the group, we headed for Homewood and a dirt road they called the “Rubicon Trail”...

That was forty-three years ago, and this June, I had a chance to meet the latest generation of the club. On the weekend of June 12th-13th, they were

encamped north of Truckee, near the Bear Valley Loop, repairing and opening that trail.

Mid-June meant snow, so I watched carefully for signs of drifts, but the trail toward the camp had none. Jenny Ward, a leader in the group, met us on the main dirt road, and several rigs led the way to a slushy stream crossing. The freezing water, fresh off a Sierra snow pack, had several members shoveling rocks and filling sink holes.

Bear Valley is a popular trail for the Diablo 4-Wheelers and many other clubs. Maintaining access has involved a commitment between the U.S. Forest Service and the club. The Diablo 4-Wheelers open and close the trail in accord with the seasons, providing the necessary maintenance to keep the trail passable with minimal impact.

At this pre-summer gathering, the club was busy bolstering the water crossings and making sure the

22-mile loop had no impassable obstacles. En route, the volunteers would also inspect their adopted fire

lookout project, another club effort to serve the public and meet U.S. Forest Service needs.



Bear Valley Loop encampment—a weekend of trail repairing and opening the loop trail for the summer. The club’s volunteers drive 150 miles to get here. They camp out, work and enjoy the surroundings. Areas are wet and slushy from a long winter and late spring. (Photo by Janet M. VonDerLinn, photographer and member of the Diablo 4-Wheelers)

Proactive on several fronts, the Diablo 4-Wheelers represent modern four-wheel drive clubs well. They share camaraderie, fun recreational ‘wheeling, service to the community and a collective voice for the continued access to our forests, deserts and backcountry. And, yes, they could ‘wheel well in 1967, and they can still ‘wheel well today!

Additionally, the club has a strong commitment to the Stephen J. Wampler Foundation’s camp for youth with disabilities. Celebrated founder Steve Wampler’s experience with cerebral palsy has led to a lifetime commitment. His youth defined by an incredible camp experience, Steve Wampler has devoted his career to the furtherance of outdoor activities, especially those that enrich the lives of youth with disabilities. Steve is an avid outdoor enthusiast and participant!

The Diablo 4-Wheelers play a unique role around “Camp Wamp” at Hawley Lake. Providing 4x4 transportation to and from the remote campsite, the club and several affiliates make it possible for hundreds of youth to experience outlets like camping, water skiing, scuba diving, cycling, climbing, archery and a host of other extraordinary, transformative experiences!

For information on how you or your club can assist, contact Jenny Ward at jenny_ward@att.net or visit the Stephen J. Wampler Foundation website: <http://www.wamplerfoundation.org/>. This summer, 4WD Mechanix® Magazine will participate in the Camp Wamp transportation program through the Diablo 4-Wheelers. Donna and I look forward to making this an annual commitment!

Diablo 4-Wheelers: The Club’s History

“Forty-Four Years of Wheeling and Giving Back by Volunteering,” by Jenny Ward, past-President of the Diablo 4-Wheelers Club

“The Diablo 4-Wheel Drive Club was formed in September 1965 with the purpose of promoting four-wheeling. The founding members also wanted to participate in community service activities and enjoy and protect our natural resources. Needless to say, Diablo 4-Wheelers have continued to uphold these standards.

“Over the last 44 years, the club has been very active, and today we have over 80 members and are

growing. For 27 years, our members helped out with the annual March of Dimes Walk-A-Thon in Walnut Creek. Five years ago we became involved with Camp Wamp (Wilderness Access Mountain Program). Each summer over a three week period, we help to transport kids with special needs in and out of Lake Hawley who get to spend a week at this camp. Lake Hawley is owned by the Contra Costa Youth Council, which was started by State Senator John Nejedly and is now run by his son Jim Nejedly. We are members of CA4WDC, Blue Ribbon Coalition and Members are on committees for the Cal 4 Wheel Winter-Fun-Fest as well as Sierra Trek. Over the years the Club has donated monies to many non-profit groups, we have sponsored kids to summers camps for the blind as well as the Wampler Kids Program.

<http://www.wamplerkids.org/video.html>



Winter, especially a harsh one, can erode a trail. Each year, the Diablo 4-Wheelers drive over 300 miles per weekend to repair, restore and open their adopted Bear Valley Loop trail. This is a valuable, 34-year commitment!

“D4W is involved in the Adopt-A-Trail program with the Tahoe National Forest, and for the last 34

years has maintained the Bear Valley Loop in the Tahoe National Forest outside of Truckee. The Club also has adopted Sardine Lookout above Bear Valley, helping to restore it so that it can be used and appreciated by others and be available for future generations. History of our parks and conservation is very important to the club!
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/spotlight/2009/sardinelookout.php>

“Most of our D4W Memberships are families. We really enjoy four wheeling together and have lots of laughs. Some of our Members started out riding in car seats in the back of their parents’ Jeep and now are Members themselves with their families. Our Members range from teens to the ‘seasoned citizens.’ We have very experienced as well as ‘newbie’ off-roaders.

“We do a variety of runs from mild to wild, as they say. The Club has monthly trips starting out with our snow run in January and then in February, during Presidents' Day weekend, it's off to Death Valley to explore different areas of Death Valley. We reserve Area 5 at Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area in May & November to test our own vehicles as well as help guide the new members to the world of safe, fun and responsible wheeling. Each Memorial Day weekend we plan trips to Nevada and the Gold Country. We also have get-togethers from time to time, such as dinners, BBQ's and Christmas parties. Seasonally, we have safety clinics, inspections, Christmas tree runs, snow runs and help out with March Madness, an event put on by 4 Wheel Parts Wholesalers.

“The Club has many different vehicles, from stock to extreme rock crawlers. Depending on your skill and rig, you can pick and choose your runs, whether it be the Rubicon, Fordyce or some of our SUV runs. Some of the best times are in the evening around the campfire when you share all of your experiences of the day.

“Diablo 4 Wheelers is based in Concord, California. The Club Meetings are held the 1st Tuesday of every month at Round Table Pizza, 504 Center Ave., Martinez, CA. For more information call Jenny Ward at (925)980-2743 or email jenny_ward@att.net”



No four-wheeling venture lacks supervision when the canines come along! As the group sets up to clear and restore a vital creek crossing on the trail, this faithful, four-legged friend makes sure everyone knows he's there. Toss an occasional stick his way, and he'll be sure to bring it back!

Rocks roll, shift and move out of position, especially when 4x4s, ATVs and dirt motorcycles trample over them. Here, club members load and unload pickup loads of rocks. The area will see a lot of backcountry traffic. For forest officials to permit this degree of travel, there must be assurances that the creek beds and crossings will not erode. Many years ago, the Diablo 4-Wheelers committed to preserving this lengthy, scenic trail.





After enough stacking, the rocks now provide a creek bottom that will sustain a season of four-wheel drive, ATV and dirt or dual-sport motorcycle traffic. This is manual, voluntary labor, and the Diablo 4-Wheelers deserve applause! Between the club and U.S. Forest Service, a productive alliance helps keep our trails open.

Winches, Hi-Lift Jacks and four-wheel drive systems are standard tools of the trade for four-wheeling. When the Diablo 4-Wheelers and their Reno affiliate clubs show up at Bear Valley, they come prepared to work. Here, a club member tugs a hefty log to the creek crossing.





Pulled into place, this log will help prevent a delicate stream bed from sloughing away. The idea is to preserve the environment in whatever manner works best. The club collaborates with the Forest Service to determine the means for repairing and protecting fragile environments.

Between the rock and log dams, this creek bed has stability. If the snow-melt runs off quickly as anticipated this year, the soil at this crossing will now stay in place. The Diablo 4-Wheelers will spend the entire weekend working their way over the Bear Valley Loop, repairing trail and clearing debris for summer traffic.



Diablo 4-Wheelers: Working with the Forest Service

The Diablo 4-Wheelers, based at Concord, California, have a collaborative working relationship with the U. S. Forest Service. Many clubs have assumed these relationships with local forest managers to help minimize environment impact and keep existing trails open. This kind of volunteerism is valuable to the U.S. Forest Service.

Sardine Lookout in the Bear Valley Area will become a Forest Service rental this summer. This significant development owes thanks to the Diablo 4-Wheelers, whose hard work restored decks and

other parts of the structure that were in dire need of attention. The remote lookout will provide guests with a spectacular, sweeping view of the region.



Here are the Diablo 4-Wheelers working on the Sardine Lookout. See U.S. Forest Service website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/spotlight/2009/sardineloakout.php> (Photo courtesy of U.S. Forest Service.)

This kind of relationship with the Forest Service takes years to develop. The public at large benefits from the venture, as the Forest Service could not have accessed the lookout or performed these repairs without considerable expense. Club members drove hundreds of miles and volunteered their carpentry skills, labor, tools and portable generators.

The project earned wide recognition from the U.S. Forest Service. Ann Westling, Public Affairs Officer, Tahoe National Forest, shares these positive comments when describing the project in 2009:

“Thanks to the hard work of the Diablo 4-Wheelers, Sardine Lookout is that much closer to being opened as a rental fire lookout tower. Over the August 29/30th [2009] weekend, 10 members of the Diablo 4-Wheelers from Concord restored the old catwalk, 18 feet off the ground, as they removed

the rotten pieces of deck, stairs, and railings and replaced it. They also installed custom made siding where, over the years, it had either weathered or been shot. In addition, they installed new over-flooring to protect the existing floor and provide additional strength.”

Michael Baldrice, Archeologist on the Sierraville Ranger District and Sardine Lookout project coordinator, stated, “These folks really worked hard. Not only did they have the skills to repair a historic structure, but they brought all their tools including 3 generators. If we had had to pay for these master carpentry skills, in this remote location, it would have set us back well over \$5,000. There was a whole lot of cutting going on!”

He went on to say, “This work has been critical in order for this lookout to become a rental facility. To maintain the historical integrity, we use materials

and design features that mimic the 1930s when this lookout was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. There is still quite a bit of work that needs to be done to complete the lookout, including painting the whole structure and restoring the interior of the cab, however we are making steady progress thanks to the hard work by volunteer groups and Forest Service employees.”

Jenny Ward, member of the Board of Directors and past president of the Diablo 4-Wheelers, affirms the group’s interest in the trails and historic lookout. She notes, “In addition to helping the Forest Service open and close the Bear Valley Trail each year, we have an interest in history and have adopted Sardine Lookout. The group decided to help restore the lookout so that it can be used and appreciated by others and be available for future generations.”

According to the Forest Service, Sardine Lookout will rent for around \$45 per night. Similar to the Calpine Lookout to the northwest, it will be rented through the National Recreation Reservation System.

Quentin Youngblood, Sierraville District Ranger, has direct experience with the Calpine Lookout rental. In his words, “Calpine Lookout has been so popular, it has been rented almost nonstop since it was opened five years ago...Sardine Lookout has an even better view, and so we expect it to be as popular, if not more.”

For more information on Sardine Lookout, contact: Michael Baldrice, (530) 994-3401 ext 6651. The U.S. Forest Service website with information about the Diablo 4-Wheelers’ project:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/spotlight/2009/sardinelookout.php>