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CRUISERS & TRUCKS

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ESCALANTE GRANDEUR

A 200 Series Land Cruiser wanders through the famous desert wilderness.

ARCTIC ADVENTURES

Part 3 with adventures through the Yukon to Tuktoyaktuk.

OVERLAND EXPO WEST

A photo essay of the premier overlanding event.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Summer is here and that means it's time for another awesome issue of our adventure inspiration.

For over a decade we've been happy to gather stories of adventure, modifications, reviews, and exploration from around the world. This issue is no different.

With that being said, we are going through a transition right now. Our Editor-in-Chief, Phillip Jones, will be vacating that position effective 1 July 2019. He'll still hang around as a Senior Editor, sharing his stories of adventure from around the country. We thank Phillip for his time, energy, and spirit as the EiC. He has truly helped *Toyota Cruisers & Trucks* become a world class publication.

For the time being I'll be filling in with gathering content for each issue. We have many great contributors to help us share the best of Toyota based adventure, but we can always use more.

If you have a great story of adventure, modification, or exciting activities with your Toyota (or Lexus) vehicle, I would LOVE to hear from you. No experience with journalism is required, as we will be happy to help guide you through the process. Simply get in touch and we'll take it from there.

You can e-mail me directly: shane@tctmagazine.net, or send a text or leave a voicemail at 303-578-9868. I look forward to hearing from you!

Until next time,

Shane



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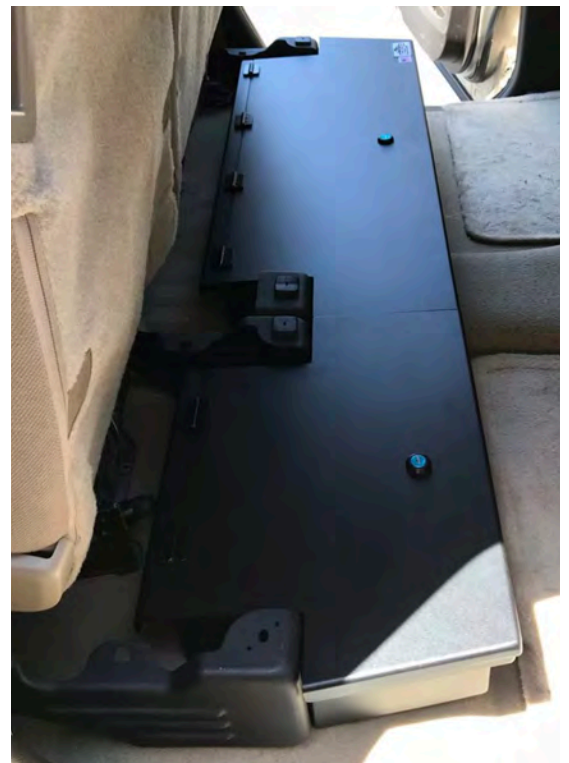
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They'll be adding a plastic CrewMax version to our upcoming Tundra Build to help keep gear out of the middle of the floor.

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The Delights and Splendors of Canyon Country

Overlanding through the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument

There! Did you see it?" My friend Denine asked.
"What?" I wondered.

"Stop. Look." Denine instructed. In the distance, I caught sight of what Denine noticed: a mountain lion's tail. The lion gracefully darted across the desert landscape known as Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The mountain lion is a rare and privileged sighting. I grabbed my camera and ran atop a knoll

for a better vantage. It was gone—vanished. The lion disappeared but the canyons of the Escalante appeared before us in full glory.

The Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument is a vast swath of public land located in south-central Utah. Many phenomenal overlanding routes exist within the monument's boundaries. Denine and I traveled along the Hole in the Rock Road (HITR). This 60-mile rough, dirt road somewhat follows the original trail set forth by

Mormon Pioneers in the 1800s while seeking a viable route for establishing a new settlement in southeastern Utah. Today, the road meanders and intersects numerous awe-inspiring canyons and narrow hold-your-breath slots. These provide for an ideal overland adventure.

"How far until camp?" Denine asked.

"Ahh... we'll continue down a bit and camp at a spot I know. Maybe another 15 miles or so," I replied. Denine hadn't previously wandered in this canyon country. I had visited the Escalante wilderness numerous times prior, so I reveled in experiencing the wonders of this exquisite land through a first timer's eyes. Denine repeatedly commented on the vastness and openness of the country while petting my dog Ruby, sitting on her lap. An occasional cow ambled across the road as we surveyed 50 Mile Mountain to our south.

I stopped the Land Cruiser 200 after we crossed another dry wash when we spotted the mountain lion roughly 100 yards away. I grabbed my camera; but with the wrong lens attached, I didn't get a picture. Oh, well. We recorded the sighting in our minds.

"There's the place." I said while pointing to our camping spot—Chimney Rock.

This roughly 150-foot high sandstone monolith towers over the vast Escalante wilderness. We set camp in

short fashion, prepared dinner, and started the fire. We expected my friend, Shane, to rendezvous with us. I had just poured my second glass of wine when Shane arrived. We stoked the fire and placed a couple of fresh logs on it as we caught up about life happenings. I couldn't help but notice the countless stars in the enormous desert sky. With the embers doused, we crawled off to our tents for a good night's rest.

After breakfast, we jumped in our Toyotas and headed toward adventure. HTR road serves as the main artery within the Escalante canyons. It's a high desert road that terminates at an actual hole in the rock. Pioneers blasted this hole so that they could descend to the Colorado River, float across it, and continue onward to the southeastern corner of Utah. This HTR road follows somewhat of the same trail the pioneers blazed and is signified with wooden, brown posts. Today, this road allows access to the many canyons that make this land of such wonderment.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), who oversees the monument has a done an excellent job of marking the major turns, and soon I spotted the sign for the turnoff. We followed the 40-mile Bench Road as it wound its way across the desert plateau. Many of the side roads and spurs can be sandy, so I was glad that I brought my ARB Tred Pro



Chimney Rock is a natural landmark in the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument

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traction recovery boards. At the trailhead, we prepared our packs with food and essentials. To appreciate this canyon country, we had to immerse ourselves in the canyons, so that was our plan.

As we set off on foot, a few cumulus clouds floated overhead in the otherwise blue sky. We descended down a sandy hill. Our conversations shifted between life's realities and the delights and splendors of exploring canyon country. Within 30 minutes, we stood atop a canyon's edge and stared off into the enormous canyon of the Escalante River.

We felt small and insignificant in comparison to the vast canyon and the river's tributaries. The Escalante River is one of the most remote rivers in the US. Lined with cottonwood trees and willows, the banks create a sandstone oasis. We found a path through the sandstone rock and descended to the waters of the Escalante.

We let our feet touch the cool waters, then waded through the ankle deep river. Ravens swooped in the air and an airline high overhead streaked through the sky. The joys of canyon country are simple. It was just us and Mother Nature. Shane, a professional photographer, set up for a photoshoot while Denine investigated the arch we spotted around the corner. I reclined on the slickrock and soaked up the final rays of sunshine before it set behind the high canyon walls. We hoofed it upward 500-feet to attain the canyon rim once again. From the canyon rim, we spotted Fifty Mile Mountain in the distance, which was also the direction of our vehicles. Onward. In an hour, we reached our vehicles, sat in our camp chairs, reminisced



about our day over beers, chips, and salsa.

While talking, a few gentlemen asked for our help with a vehicle concern. Their vehicle would start, but the battery would soon die. The alternator wasn't working. Mud, dirt, and grime got in the alternator after several puddle crossings and caused the malfunction. The HITR road becomes muddy when rains hit in a squall, and flash floods temporarily alter the landscape!

"If I can get it to town, I will replace the alternator." The vehicle owner stated.

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"So, you are going to replace it, for sure?" Shane and I double-checked.

"Yep." With that assurance, Shane grabbed a hammer and banged on the alternator. After a few forceful hits, the alternator "jumped" to life. The owner and his friends were ecstatic. They followed us out and down the road.

We turned off toward Chimney Rock, while they continued to Escalante. The stars "danced" once again across the otherwise black sky. In the evening chill, we appreciated the warmth of our juniper-wood fire. The desert was calm that night and the embers burned out with a pleasant glow.

The following morning we packed camp and drove south along the HITR road. With mud puddles dried, travel was easy. We passed the HITR historical site. This enormous sandstone alcove is where in 1879 pioneers spent their time while the actual construction and blasting of the trail continued down to the Colorado River. I imagined kids playing and socializing within the enormous sandstone alcove and adults conversing once the kids laid in bed. Simpler times maybe but not necessarily easier times. The "trail" was completed in January 1880 and the pioneers descended roughly 1,200 feet to Colorado River.

We stopped short of the actual hole in the rock and prepared for another day-hike into a canyon. Shane packed his camera and gear, while Denine and I prepared lunch for a picnic later. My dog, Ruby, lead the way while we all followed. The canyon started simple and shallow. But, as we descended, the walls rose dramatically. Within 30 minutes, the walls towered hundreds of feet above us. Water flowed from the natural springs; and within a quarter of a mile, formed into a small, pleasant stream. Cottonwoods, golden in color, lined the stream. It appeared humans planted the trees because their symmetry was aligned perfectly with





Petroglyphs adorn the canyon walls.

the stream. Mother Nature would have been random.

Whenever I find water in the deserts of Utah, I immediately look for signs of the Ancient Ones. Native Americans wandered this land for thousands of years. Their dwellings and rock art cover the southern Utah landscape. "What are those?" I asked Denine. "Look, there's an arch on the canyon rim." Our timing couldn't have been better. On a smooth sandstone wall below the arch, we saw an enormous rock art panel. Petroglyphs (carved pictures) covered the wall. Hundreds of petroglyphs!

"I see one, wait there's one behind it," Denine said. This panel appeared to have older petroglyphs etched into the wall and with a new panel etched sometime later. Crazy! We would see one, then refocus to see an older one. Weathering over hundreds of years had taken their toll on the etchings, but hundreds of them still appeared. The huge alcove next to the wall probably housed the Anasazi who used to call the canyon home some 800 years ago.

We ate our lunch streamside and speculated about the lives of the Ancient Ones. What was their livelihood

like? How did they find food? What did petroglyphs symbolize? We had many questions, but few answers. Just speculations. No matter, the canyon "was ours" for the day. We continued hiking and admiring the grandeur of canyon country. The stream flowed to the waters of Lake Powell, but the sun was low in the sky and it was time to return to my Land Cruiser. Reluctantly, we turned back toward the trailhead.

Ruby led the way as magic hour hit canyon country. Streaks of red and orange "painted" the Escalante landscape. We used the solar shower to wash up and afterward, enjoyed a few pilsners. Life was simple, but life was grand. I steered my Land Cruiser 200 toward the small town of Escalante. Shane was lucky enough to stay out in canyon country for a few days longer. The HTR Road is a gateway to canyon country splendor. However, just don't drive the road. Get out and wander on foot. The sheer natural beauty will astound and delight you. I drove the Land Cruiser onto pavement and aired up my tires for the trip home. Now, it's your turn to make the trip. *TCT*

Considerations:

- Many routes in the Grand-Escalante Staircase are remote. Be self-sufficient and prepared to wait for help. Extra food and fuel is essential.
- A stock four-wheel drive vehicle equipped with good tires can conquer most the routes and roads.
- Traction boards like the ARB Tred Pro are an essential piece of equipment for the many sandy stretches of road.

Hiking:

- **The Grand Staircase**-Escalante National Monument beckons the explorer on foot. Whether following a trail or wandering the landscape, you will be rewarded.
- **Peekaboo-Spooky Slot Canyon**-a tight, hold your breath slot. This loop hike is splendid. An enjoyable family-friendly hike.
- **Coyote Gulch**-a popular hike, usually a backpack that has jaw-dropping scenery all around. Tall canyon walls, enormous alcoves, and picturesque waterfalls make this a must do excursion.
- **The Volcano**-this stunning hike beckons the hiker to wander on slickrock to a natural depression filled with sand. No, it's not a volcano. It's a natural wonder!

Project 4 Adventure: Final Update



For over a year we've been using the Project 4 Adventure as our primary exploration vehicle. All of the modifications that we initially installed have continued to work well, especially the Toytec BOSS Ultimate suspension.

One of my favorite stories transpired when we were camping with neighbors last Labor Day weekend. We each pulled our trailers (our 24' with the GX, their 17' with the Diesel Nissan Titan) to a secret camping spot near Buena Vista, Colorado for the long weekend. The time came to head into town to our favorite steak house, Quincy's, so I suggested we load all seven of us into the GX.

As we tore down the unmaintained dirt road fully loaded with people, I stepped on the gas. Once we hit about 20mph the suspension really kicked in, and my neighbor Andre asked, "wow, how does this thing ride so smooth?" A Toytec Lift, of course, was my response.

Other than the suspension, I've been really pleased with how the Rhino-Rack pioneer platform has worked out. I was able to install our aging Thule ski/snowboard rack right next to the MAXTRAX. That allowed us to easily use the Metal-Tech OPOR sliders to store and retrieve our skis and boards.

For the last year that we owned the truck, we chose to add just a few small touches.

The idea was to make the GX a little more useable for our weekly adventures, and help set her up to serve us for years to come. As it turned out, however, we ended up finishing this truck up perfectly just in time to send her off to a new owner. (Read more about that story in a future issue.)

Our final upgrades to Project 4 began with new all-weather mats throughout the truck. In previous vehicles we've run everything from OEM mats, universal fit all-weather, and entry level all weather. For the first and second row in the GX, I chose WeatherTech due to their laser fit and well reviewed quality. For the rear cargo area, I wanted to try a Husky Liner. The idea was to compare high-end Husky to high-end WeatherTech.





While we only ran this setup for about 6 months, it was clear that either brand is a major improvement over OEM all-weather mats. If you already have OEM all-weather, wait for them to wear out, or sell them when they're brand new. The WeatherTech are a little more pliable than Husky, but either version will provide excellent protection.

Another upgrade that was well worth the cost and effort are LED headlights and fog lights. Since the GX uses as standard bulb for both, I found a well-reviewed option from Amazon.com for high/low beams, and Amber for the fogs.

The amount of additional light from both upgrades is nothing short of remarkable. As long as you install the LEDs properly, which is not difficult, they will serve your truck well for years to come.

While I was working on lighting upgrades, I also ordered a complete interior LED light kit. The kit included all the bulbs needed to outfit the GX. It even included bulbs for the foot light in each door.

When it comes to a perfect Family Adventure vehicle that still has plenty of power and towing capability, the North America market offers nothing better than the GX-





460. The well proven Land Cruiser Prado 150 Series based vehicle will last for hundreds of thousands of miles if properly cared for. In all reality, the only reason we ended up switching back to the full size truck platform was for a bit higher towing capacity.

As we say goodbye to our awesome Project 4 Adventure, we know that the new owners will continue the spirit of this build. She's likely in the middle of the Colorado mountains as you read this article. If you've started your own GX build, hit us up on any of the social networks. We'd love to see your vehicle! **TCT**



Overland Expo West 2019

A last minute decision with a friend allowed me to attend my first Overland Expo West—and it was a whirlwind!

Celebrating 10 years and packed with more than 400 exhibitors and over 22,000 attendees, Overland Expo West was a mass of companies sharing their newest and best products with overlanding and offroad enthusiasts excited for adventure. It was also Overland Expo West's largest show to date.

The frenzy for overlanding and offroading gear is being felt by everyone and the urge to get out, adventure, and document it is fueling the rush for companies to create these products for this popular and fast-growing segment.

There were a lot of amazing products and vehicles at the Expo—too many to list here!





Top to bottom, left to right: Lots of Expo attendees and vendors; Rebelle Rally founder, Emily Miller, and her GX, "Princess", fitted with Total Chaos suspension; VSSL is a new way to contain emergency items and supplies in a compact "vessel" (www.vsslgear.com)



EVENTS

Overland Expo West 2019



Always fun to check out all the different Toyotas at Expo; the TacoRail™ by 67 Designs is the lowest profile mounting system for the Tacoma Gen 3 available on the market (www.67d.com).



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EVENTS

Overland Expo West 2019



More amazing Toyotas; KW 17.5 heavy duty winch from Keeper (www.keeperproducts.com); wrench set and pouch from Tekton (www.tekton.com)





The Timberleaf teardrop trailer (www.timberleaftrailers.com); the Alpha and Stealth shovels from DMOS Collective (www.dmoscollective.com); the Brachio Kettle from Overland Coffee Co. (www.overlandcoffeecompany.com)



Dawson City is a historic town tied to the gold rush of the 1800s.



ARCTIC ADVENTURES IN IN A VINTAGE LAND CRUISER

PART THREE

The Top of the World Highway ends at the Yukon River. The drive is breathtaking, with forested vistas of virgin wilderness and a slow descent to where the road ends and the water begins.

Just across the river we can see Dawson City. There are a few vehicles already queued up for the ferry in separate lanes for cars, SUVs, trucks, and RVs. The George Black ferry is a free ferry that is open 24 hours. Fuel trucks and commercial traffic have priority, but this afternoon it was just us travelers.

Story and photos by Michael Perez

The Sour Toe.



The wife earned her certificate for kissing the Sour Toe.



We were directed aboard and soon were fighting the swift current, the ferry angling upstream to make an arc to hit the landing on the other side. We debarked and after a couple of blocks were in the world-famous Dawson City. I couldn't believe I was in Dawson City Yukon, someplace I thought I'd never visit, but here we were!

Over 100 years ago, Dawson City was the epicenter of the 1896 Yukon gold rush. When gold was discovered, word spread around the world there were riches to be made with gold nuggets lining the rivers and dotting the countryside. Many traveled the treacherous overland route from Skagway, Alaska over the Chilkoot or White Pass carrying the one ton of specified supplies mandated by the Canadian government. The Canadian Mounties had the job of collecting the import duty on these mandated supplies.

Once over the mountain, the "Stampedeers" had to cross Lake Bennett and get onto the Yukon River to Dawson City, a journey that took about a year. The other route, known as the rich man's route, also took a year, was by steamer leaving Seattle and traveling along the west coast of Alaska, and then on a river boat on the Yukon River to Dawson City. It didn't matter what route these fortune seekers took; the gold rush was over the day they heard the news and made their plans. From the time gold was struck and the year it took to get to Dawson City all the gold claims had been staked.

Yet Dawson City has remained and there are people still working gold claims, looking for the motherlode. But there is something else besides gold that has beckoned many a person to Dawson City Yukon as well.

The Sour Toe Cocktail challenge was conceived of in 1973 after a jar with a preserved human toe was found in a cabin. Legend has it in the 1920s, a rumrunner developed frostbite on his foot and lost his toe. As a remembrance, he saved his necrotic toe in a jar with

The Dempster Highway is the long and lonely highway through the Yukon.





alcohol. Placing this toe in a shot of liquor became the Sour Toe Cocktail. Since 1973, over 100,000 people have taken the challenge. This past August two more people earned their sour toe certificates.

The Sourdough Saloon had a crowd of about 100 people and at least 10 people in line for a chance to kiss the toe. Lisa and I got our shots. As we stood in line, we could see the black, shriveled appendage on a bed of white salt. We heard the "toe master" chant "Drink it fast, Drink it slow, but your lips, have gotta touch the toe!"

Being the Gentleman Adventurer, Mrs. Badlandsexpeditions went first. She sat down in front of the toe with a look of "why am I doing this?" I reminded her for better or worse. The "toe master" picked up the toe and presented it to Lisa to kiss. A quick peck and she quickly drank her shot of Yukon Jack. As soon as it happened it was over, and Lisa was a proud member of the "Sour Toe" club. I quickly took my place, kissed the toe, downed my shot and I too was a member. We both received certificates to commemorate the occasion.

Back on the ferry we went and then on to our campsite in the Provincial campground. Every Provincial campground we stayed at was very nice with free firewood and clean campsites.

The next day, we toured Dawson City. It was gloomy as we crossed the Yukon river and parked along the main street. Playing with the radio we found an FM station (106.9) playing an eclectic mix of music and commentary. It reminded us of the TV show "Northern Exposure".

We strolled around town and were impressed at some large residences off the main drag. The Jack London museum and Robert Service cabin were special

places for me. I grew up reading Jack London with *To Build a Fire*—a favorite story, and my favorite poem is by Robert Service:

*"The Men That Don't Fit in"
There's a race of men that don't fit in,
A race that can't stay still;
So they break the hearts of kith and kin,
And they roam the world at will.*

Once again, I marveled at being someplace I had dreamt about and now I'm there. I know I would never have made this trip without Lisa's prodding to do an unplanned trip. Quite the statement of adventure and support from someone who had never gone camping and was used to the luxury of civilized living.

We visited the modern and informative Danoja Zho Cultural Centre, which gave us a look into the life of the First Nations peoples of the area. We met back up with Larry and decided to explore the hardware store. The inventory of gold pans, portable sluices and other gold prospecting equipment are evidence of Yukon's long mining heritage. The old lifestyle of the Yukon is still alive for people who want it.

The plan was to drive to Carmacks, get on the Robert Campbell Highway and start heading home. Since we were passing the turnoff for the Dempster Highway, we would stop and take pictures. We had talked about driving to Tuktoyaktuk after the Deadhorse trip but decided it would add another several days to getting home. We had almost two weeks of steady driving and over 3500 miles to get home.



We left Dawson City and passed by the tailing piles and artificial lakes left behind by the massive gold dredges operating during the gold rush days. The turn off for the Dempster Highway was a short distance from Dawson City and soon we were stopped at the sign and taking photos.

Tombstone Territorial Park was only 50km up the road and boasted a beautiful visitor's center.

Although the road was dirt it was hard packed and smooth so we quickly arrived at Tombstone. The Interpretive Center was a beautiful wood constructed building with nice bathrooms. The exhibits were very informative and soon we were looking at the map. Before we knew it, we were on the road north to Eagle Plains, which is halfway to Inuvik NWT and boasts a hotel, bar, restaurant, filling station, repair shop and campground.

The scenery was spectacular, driving through the forest and crossing numerous creeks. We saw mountain goats clinging to side of a rocky cliff and surprised some Dall sheep crossing the road.

We stopped at a sign commemorating the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) dog sled patrols from Dawson City to Fort McPherson. These Mounties would spend two to three months patrolling, taking mail, checking on residents and exploring the region. In 1911, a patrol never returned, and a search party found the members dead. This was The Lost Patrol, an important chapter in the history of the RCMP.



We were soon on top of Ogilvie Ridge. The views were fantastic, and we marveled at our fortune to be able to experience such vistas.

There were some signs on the latrine and information board about an aggressive grizzly bear in the area with a special warning to bikers. Taking a break at the lookout was a group of about 10 bicyclists accompanied by a support van and trailer. They were on their way to Inuvik. The entire trip we were surprised at the number of bicyclists on this remote highway.

As we were descending the ridge it started to rain, and the road became muddy. I put the FJ60 into 4 high and the BFG KM2 M/T's earned their keep.

Breaking the monotony of breathless views, the manmade structures of Eagle Plains came into view. The rain stopped and the sun came out, an omen that we made the right decision. We checked in and pulled into the gravel camping area. There were only a couple of other campers at the site but as everywhere we went, we attracted attention with the two Land Cruisers. Soon we were answering questions about our travels and trading notes with our campmates.

As we prepared for dinner, we were beset upon by an unkindness of ravens. The raven is the provincial bird of the Yukon and is known to be intelligent. These birds were ready to distract and pounce on anything left out.



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We practiced our rock throwing skills while we cooked up some Coq au Vin in the pressure cooker. We ate with a beady-eyed audience cawing at us in envy.

With dinner finished and dishes done, it was time to check out the bar. The bar was rustically decorated with all sorts of animal mounts. What wildlife we didn't see in real life we could see up close on the wall.

Also, on the walls were pictures with the history of the "Mad Trapper of Rat River". The "Mad Trapper" was wanted by the RCMP and led a posse of Mounties on a 150-mile one-month long chase with firefights where a Mountie was killed, and a couple more wounded. The "Mad Trapper" was finally killed, though his identity was never learned.

The bartender was from the Czech Republic and we had an interesting conversation about her travels around the world and how she ended up here. The sun shone brightly through the windows of the bar, but we knew it was time to hit the rack. Tomorrow we were heading back south and head home. It was late July and we had been gone since May 25th.

The next morning, it was pouring rain and heavy fog. Visibility was less than 100 yards, so we decided to go inside for breakfast and wait it out. I made a request on my InReach for the weather. The fog should be lifting in a couple of hours.

After a couple of hours, the fog lifted, and the rain subsided. We were only about hour from the Arctic Circle so we thought we are this close why not go and we could have bragging rights of reaching the Arctic

Circle twice. The rain had stopped but the road was of a soupy consistency.

The miles went by and soon we were at the Arctic Circle sign. Without speaking we got back in our trucks and headed North. Next was the Border with the Northwest Territories. Another photo op at the sign and we realized we were going to Inuvik.

The Peel River rivals the Yukon in size, and we stopped on the riverbank to wait for the Abraham Francis ferry. It was just our two vehicles waiting. As a matter of fact, we had not seen anyone since we left Eagle Plains.

The Abraham Francis ferry is a cable ferry. A heavy cable is strung from the riverbanks with enough slack to sink below the water surface so boat traffic can pass over it. The ferry vessel has a winch amidships that grasps the heavy cable and winches the vessel across the river. Soon we were on the opposite riverbank and waved at a couple of adventurers heading south.

We had arrived at Fort McPhearson, the home of the Fort McPhearson Tent & Canvas Company and the graves/memorial of the Lost Patrol. We picked up some organizer bags and headed back on the Dempster north bound to Inuvik.

A short drive later we were on the bank of the Mackenzie River. The MV Louis Cardinal was our next ferry. Unlike the previous ferry, this ferry used screw propulsion. The ferry left the bank headed upstream against the strong current. We made a long arc and landed right on the ramp. Great driving by the Captain.

Inuvik was a short drive away. It was weird to have been



driving through so much wilderness to see billboards as we entered town. We went to Happy Valley Territorial Park where there were showers and laundry available but no vacancy. Off to plan B, another territorial campground just outside of town. The campground was okay, on the top of a hill and very windy. We were tired so we simply boiled up some water and had some Mountain House for dinner. Perfect for an evening like this.

Waking up in Inuvik we were excited at the prospect of driving to Tuktoyaktuk on the newly opened Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway. We headed out and drove through town passing the visitors center and Igloo church.

As we headed on our way, we chatted on the radio how lucky we were to be making this trip. The highway was opened in November 2017, less than a year earlier, and we were traveling on it before it became a popular and crowded destination.

The hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk, Tuk for short, was soon in view. Tuktoyaktuk means "caribou" in the native language. Tuk is also known as the land of the pingos, which are hills on the tundra formed by ice below the dirt and pushing the earth upwards.

We saw the white radomes of what was a DEW line station. The DEW line was the Distant Early Warning System, a series of radar stations across the arctic North in Alaska and Canada to detect an intrusion by Russian aircraft.

Driving through town there were many wooden buildings. We thought about how cold it must be in the winter. We headed to "the point" where there was an informal campsite on the banks of Kugmallit Bay, the Beaufort Sea, on the Arctic Ocean.

The weather was cold, windy, and rainy. As we stood on the rocks by the water we could feel and taste the salty spray from the waves hitting the rocks. There were a couple of other people camping here and there was a single porta potty that was fouled. That

combined with the weather, made our decision to drive back to Inuvik easy.

There was a local guy smoking white fish and we tried a sample, I think it is an acquired taste. We stopped at the grocery store out of curiosity. The shelves were well stocked; a gallon of milk only 12.99 CDN. We purchased our "I made it to Tuk" stickers and headed south.

We arrived back to Inuvik and this time Happy Valley Campground had space for us. We headed to the showers and caught up on some laundry. Lisa and I took a walk to the grocery store and picked up some supplies, then to the Igloo church, which was closed.

Back at camp I got the pressure cooker going and soon we would be having chili for dinner. The pressure cooker really is a must have to make nourishing meals in a short time.

After dinner, we walked around the campground and saw people from all over. We met a young family traveling full-time (Lifestyle Overland) with their 4Runner and Turtleback trailer. They were headed to Tuk and then Deadhorse.

The next morning, we fueled up and chatted with the gas station attendant. He was impressed we drove all the way from Texas to visit his homeland. He proudly shared whale hunting videos and caribou, polar bear hunting pictures.

Fuel tanks filled, we headed out of town and stopped at the visitor's center.

As with most Canadian visitor centers, there was a wealth of information about the area, the native peoples... and nice restrooms. We also received our Canada's Northwest Territories Certificate of Arctic Circle Chapter Order of Adventurers.

With proof of our intrepid adventurers' status in hand, we headed south back the way we had come. Now we were really heading home. But home was still at least two weeks away... if we avoided another detour. *167*



[FRAMED]

f/9 1/400s 22mm

Chimney Rock

PHOTO BY MICHAEL HOLLAND



[FRAMED]

f/1.8 1/127s 4mm

Lake Powell

PHOTO BY KYLE HANKES







[FRAMED]

f/4.5 1/320s 35mm

Nordoff Trail, Ojai, California

PHOTO BY COREY WHITAKER







[FRAMED]

f/2.2 1/2639s 4mm

4Runner outside of
Fairplay, Colorado

PHOTO BY ANGIE WILLIAMS

FunTreks Updates 2019

We've been covering FunTreks guidebooks, data cards, and GOS tracks since 2011. What's great about a company that's been delivering amazing off-road and adventure information for over 20 years is that they almost always have something new.

This year, 2019, is a actually a special year since FunTreks just released two new books for our home state, Colorado. The fourth edition of both their Colorado and Northern Colorado books, totaling 190 trails, are now available on their site. Along with the new books, they've updated their GPS Data cards for Garmin Devices, AND their iOS app that includes the GPS waypoints and tracks for every trail has been updated.

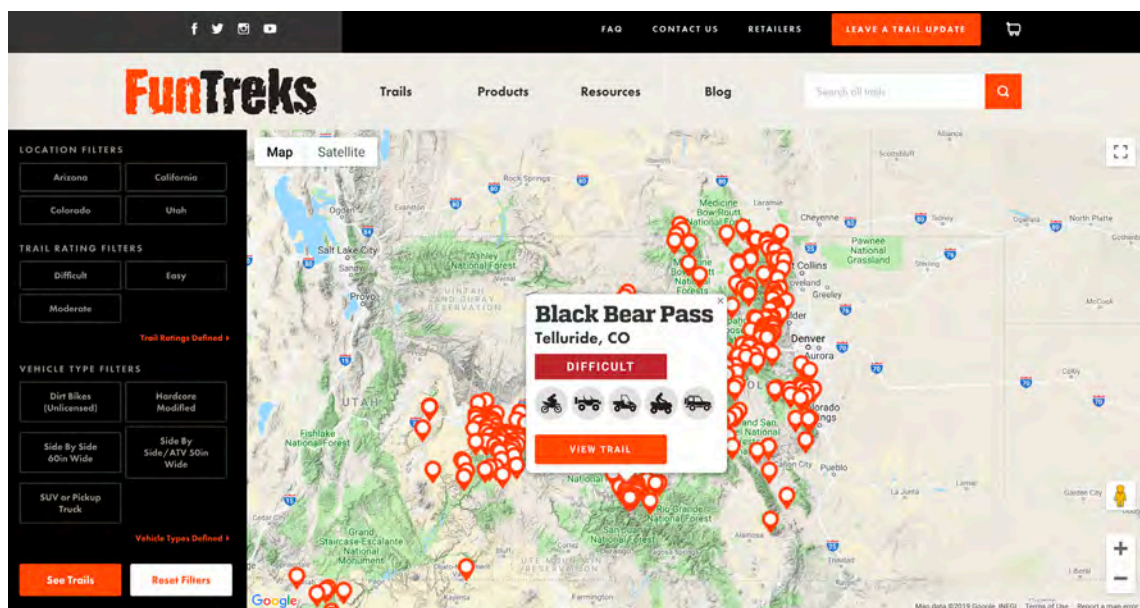
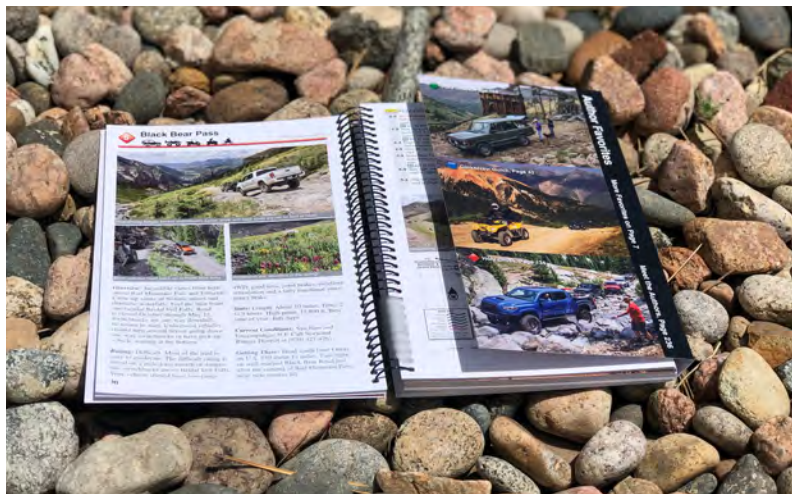
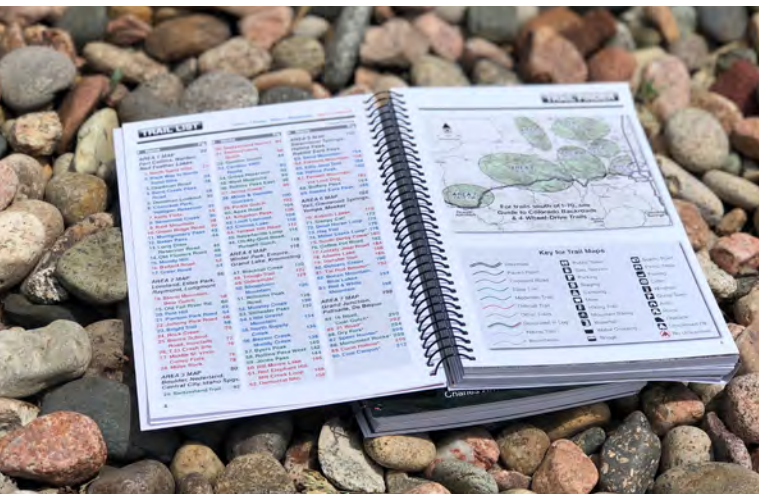
These new books include the standard spiral binding to make it easy to open and stay on the same trail page. The detailed map on each color-codes each section of the trail, so you know what to expect. The overview, details, rating, and stats for each trail have all be updated. A new feature for this printing is a built-in bookmark flap on the right side, which shows some of the author's favorite trails. This addition makes it easy to keep your place. Also, the new FunTreks Tacoma is on the cover of each book ;)

Another exciting development that FunTreks has recently released are the Tracks & Waypoints for all of their trails on the website. If you're planning a great adventure on any give trail, simply look it up on the site. Each trail page on FunTreks.com includes basic information, the trail rating, length, and expected time to run. Users can provide updates throughout the year for current conditions, and FunTreks includes information



to cal for the latest official conditions. You can also find links to preview the guidebook for that trail, right on the trail page.

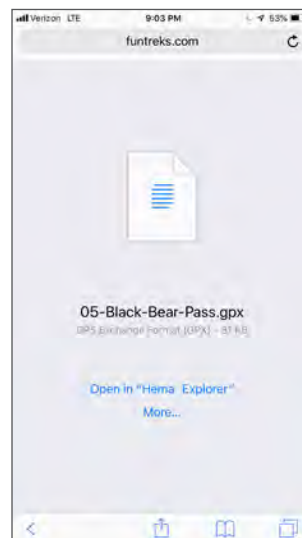
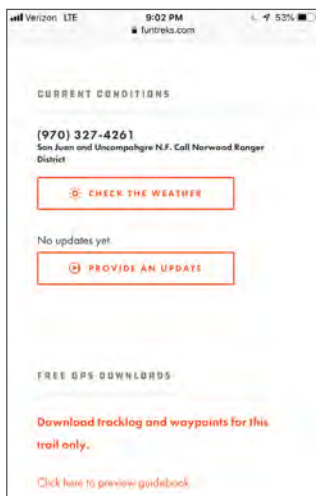
The best part though, is that you can download the track log and waypoints for each trail right to your computer or device. While our favorite app for off-highway adventure is still Hema Explorer, any app that can handle GPX files will be able to import the data. Combined with the great information for each trail in the



guidebook, you'll have everything you need for an amazing off-road or overland adventure.

For those heading to FJ Summit in a few weeks, the Colorado Guide book is your best bet. Guidebooks can be found in many locations around Colorado, or you can order directly from FunTreks.com for fast, inexpensive shipping. Combining guidebooks and data cards can also save you money.

Along with paper maps, we never hit the trails in Colorado, Arizona, Utah, or California without the latest FunTreks Guidebook. *TC*





GOLD AND BANANAS

An off-the-beaten-track journey in Ecuador

*WRITTEN BY KARIN-MARIJKE VIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY COEN WUBBELS*

WHERE

SOUTHWEST ECUADOR. AROUND ZARUMA ARE A NUMBER OF MINOR ROADS YOU CAN TAKE EITHER TO THE COAST (MACHALA) OR SOUTH TO THE BORDER CROSSING WITH COLOMBIA. IF YOU DRIVE TO COLOMBIA, MAKE SURE TO VISIT THE PETRIFIED FOREST OF PYUANGO AS WELL.

WHY

THIS ONE OF THE LESSER-VISITED CORNERS OF ECUADOR BY FOREIGNERS. YET IT OFFERS BEAUTIFUL COUNTRYSIDE, RICH HISTORY AND A SENSE OF ECUADOR'S LIFESTYLE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.





The Pan-American Highway, which stretches across the Americas from Alaska to Argentina, cuts straight through the Andes Mountains in Ecuador. Most overlanders driving the Pan-Am will cruise through this mountainous landscape. While a rewarding journey because of the stunning views, the drive is straightforward. For the unexpected and surprising part of the overland journey, you need to leave the asphalt and head into the countryside.

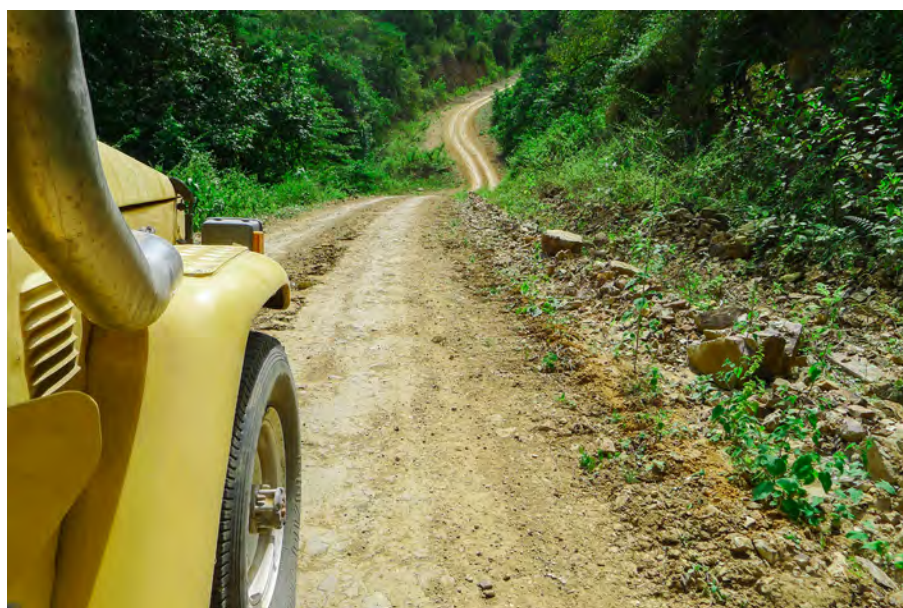
This is exactly what we did.

A turn-off took us to a hilly gold-mining town in the southwestern corner of Ecuador called Zaruma (or, officially, Villa Real de San Antonio del Cerro de Oro

de Zaruma). This was a perfect road for overlanding, a narrow dirt road that required us to keep a slow pace – bumpy but blissfully free of washboard as well as big trucks. It meandered through a green landscape of ferns with palm trees towering above all other vegetation.

In Zaruma we drove to the historic center, which is a labyrinth of narrow, steep roads, and stone stairs cutting between houses. Along the main road were high pavements with ornate columns supporting open-balustraded galleries that sat in front of beautiful colonial buildings painted in soft tinges with ornate balconies and balustrades.

Outside the scenic center, however, the town was just as ugly and concrete. However, on the outskirts some people literally lived on gold. From the hilly roads we looked down on homes where people had their own little gold mines in the backyard. This gold mining is not a recent development. On the contrary: indigenous people mined gold in the region at least 3,300 years ago. Fittingly, the province is called El Oro ('the Gold').



FOR THE UNEXPECTED AND SURPRISING PART OF THE OVERLAND JOURNEY. YOU NEED TO LEAVE THE ASPHALT AND HEAD INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE.

A GOLD MINE

We met Tito, who took us to the mine of Miranda Alta, a place with history. When the Spaniards arrived here around 1536, they used the same route that we were taking to the mine, the difference being that at the time it was a forest path and now an asphalted road. After the Spanish came the Jews, the English, the French, and the Americans. They all came for the gold. Today the mining companies are Ecuadorian.

Outside the mine we talked to Saul, who had worked here since he was fifteen. He and his 35 coworkers were paid per month, which he preferred to the system where miners were paid according to the weight of the stones containing gold they had mined, which happened elsewhere in the area. Five to eight times a day they walked into the 500-meter-long mine that ran as deep as 200 meters. They



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dug the rock and filled up the burro, an iron cart that was then pushed back outside when it was filled with 250 kilos of rock.

The rocks were put in bags up to a weight of 40 kilos, and when there were 250 bags, a truck took these to the factory where the gold was extracted using mercury. Saul explained that many things had changed, such as the law on child labor. He had started working at the age of 15, but today you could only work in the mines from age 18, and miners worked 6 hours a day, contrary to 10 hours in the past. In



SAUL EXPLAINED THAT MANY THINGS HAD CHANGED. SUCH AS THE LAW ON CHILD LABOR. HE HAD STARTED WORKING AT THE AGE OF 15. BUT TODAY YOU COULD ONLY WORK IN THE MINES FROM AGE 18. AND MINERS WORKED 6 HOURS A DAY. CONTRARY TO 10 HOURS IN THE PAST.



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earlier days you could dig anywhere; today you need permits. Of course, there still was illegal digging, but Saul knew of no stories of collapsing mines as a result of that.

A BANANA HARVEST

We said goodbye to Saul, thanking him for his time, and continued our route, following a country road that took us to Machala. Little by little we climbed a potholed road and reached the 2,100-meter Paccha Pass after which we meandered downhill again, this time into thick, grey clouds where the view was reduced to zero. At sea level the skies cleared, and we found ourselves in another world: green, humid and home to cacao and banana plantations. The cacao fruit was mostly red, dark purple; it would be another month before they were harvested. The bananas were all wrapped in blue plastic to keep insects away.

When glancing sideways, we spotted a group of people working on a plantation and stopped to see what they were doing. A man walked up to us and shook our hands. Carlos, the owner, offered to take us around, proud of his business. He grew up among bananas, his grandfather owned this plantation during the years that Ecuador was the largest banana producer in the world (1950s). Today, Carlos' son was learning the ropes.

Some 20 men and

women were working on the plantation. From trees heavy with bananas, one picker cut the big leaves away, freeing the stem so he could pull the whole bunch down using his elongated machete. His coworker put the bunch of bananas weighing 35 to 40 kilos on his shoulder and took it to the rail system, where he hung the bunch on one of the big hooks hanging from the rails. The network of metal arches ran through the entire plantation and instead of having to carry the heavy load, the worker could pull the hook with the bunch of bananas to the packing house, which obviously was much lighter work.

At the packing house, another worker took the bananas from the hook and measured them. If too big or too small, they were thrown back into the plantation to serve as compost. The bananas were then put into a bath with chemicals that would work on the skin to make it yellow, as well as make sure no insects stayed caught among the fruit. The last two workers packed the bananas in plastic in the all-too-familiar banana boxes. A truck was ready to leave for the airport from where they were going to their overseas destinations.

We thanked Carlos for the tour, climbed back into the Land Cruiser and hit the road once more, curious as to what else this part of Ecuador had in store for us. *TCT*



Bananas are measured to see if they are too big or too small.



HIS COWORKER PUT THE BUNCH OF BANANAS WEIGHING 35 TO 40 KILOS ON HIS SHOULDER AND TOOK IT TO THE RAIL SYSTEM. WHERE HE HUNG THE BUNCH ON ONE OF THE BIG HOOKS HANGING FROM THE RAILS.



Author and Photographer enjoy a South American evening.



Cooper Discoverer AT3 XLT

A first look at a new lineup

The Cooper Discoverer AT3 has long been a well-regarded all-terrain tire, and Cooper's recent update to the lineup adds an even better off-road option with the addition of the XLT offering.

Last year, Cooper unveiled a new lineup of Discoverer AT3 tires, which introduced the AT3 4s, LT, and XLT tires. The 4s is an excellent option for all-weather and all-terrain performance for truck or SUV. It is severe weather-rated and ready to tackle snowy or wet roads. The LT is focused on heavier trucks and loads. It is well suited for towing and hauling. The Discoverer AT3 XLT being the best option for off-roading and overlanding.

For added off-road performance, the AT3 XLT tire features Durable-Tread technology, which helps the tire hold up to off-road abuse and prevents



chunking and chipping. The tire also features added interlocking sidewall lugs for extra traction and sidewall protection. Other unique features Cooper has incorporated in this tire are: even wear arc technology to balance contact area and promote even tread wear; whisper grooves to provide a sound barrier and lessen road noise; and stone ejector ledges to help prevent small stones and gravel from becoming lodged in the tread.

Our AT3 XLTs are running in the LT285/75R17 size, and are being tested on a 2001 Tacoma, but Cooper does offer the XLT in over 30 sizes. The tires have an excellent 60,000 mile warranty, and my set is showing no noticeable or unusual wear after several thousand miles.

A good all-terrain should perform well over all surfaces and conditions, and so far the XLT has proven itself very well. A large part of our travels involves simply getting to the trail, so having a tire that balances paved road and off-road performance is a great choice. Throughout the 2019 Winter and Spring season, the XLT tires were tested in the mountains of Colorado and the deserts of Utah. Snow performance exceeded my expectations, with the tires being confidence-inspiring in both loose snow and packed and icy conditions. They handle wet pavement equally as well. Highway driving is smooth and well-mannered, with road noise being minimal.

Off-road, the tires have seen dirt, rocks, mud, sand, and snow, and performed well aired down to 15psi. Mud performance was quite good as the tires cleared themselves quickly. On slickrock, I thought the tires lacked some bite while getting up the desert ledges, but ultimately did get me up everything I pointed them at. Loose rock and sand performance were positive as well. While the XLT does not feature the Armor Tek3 sidewall of other tires in the Discoverer lineup, I found they held up well to being aired down, as well as a few hard rock strikes.

Initial impressions on the Discoverer AT3 XLT are very good. Cooper has done a great job expanding the AT3 lineup, with the XLT looking like an awesome choice for off-roaders looking for all-around performance. We'll be continuing to test these tires over the course of the summer, with many more off-road miles to come. I'm looking forward to more off-road adventures with these tires in the mountains and rocks. Watch for a long-term review later this year. More Info: [Cooper Tires 167](#)



Regional Overland Events

The importance of high-quality, low cost regional events.

One of the reasons we love Toyotas is their dependability.

Not only does this give us piece of mind in our day-to-day driving, that trust in the vehicle frees us to explore the remote and isolated places, those places where we find the greatest beauty and the fewest people. The challenge with those places is that if we run into trouble we are on our own. I don't mean trouble with the truck, I mean the unexpected challenges that can happen to any of us: roadways washing away, medical emergencies, coming across stranded passengers in an inappropriate vehicle, getting our trail buddies out of a sticky situation, etc.

Some of us have gained the skills to handle these challenges through decades of trial and error experience, which can be an expensive way to learn. There is an easier way—many organizations and clubs offer high quality training at events, rallies, and festivals. This isn't new, clubs have been teaching skills for decades, and there are some long-established national shows, but what we are seeing are more regional, family-oriented shows, or shows embracing new drivers and demographics.

One of our favorites is the Overland Rally series. The rallies started in Washington state nine years ago and now have additional shows in Whistler BC as well as a brand-new event launching this August in Gunnison, Colorado. What sets them apart is that they attract the same high-quality instructors as the national shows, but at a low all-inclusive price point, so entire families (Dad, Mom, even the kids) can learn essential skills. Some of the instructors we've chatted with say the rallies feel more like a family reunion than work, and many have told us they are their favorite events on the summer calendar. Eclectic class titles include trail-spotting for the whole family, ladies' only rally-racing, pediatric first aid, how to play a Ukulele, and camp stove cooking, as well as the expected fare of advanced winching and recovery, technical driving skills, field maintenance, etc.

The new Gunnison rally promises to have the same successful format—with vendors and instructors camped in a central teaching area, surrounded by regular attendees, who all spend a long weekend interacting and learning from each other while having fun (and often winning prizes like rooftop tents, winches, and sets of tires at the free nightly campfire giveaway). Experienced travelers enjoy meeting up with old and new friends, sharing their knowledge and stories, while those new to backcountry travel learn the essential skills they need to keep themselves and their families safe, in a very fun environment.

If you haven't been to one of the Overland rallies yet, take a look at their webpages (nwoverlandrally.com, bcoverlandrally.com, rockymountainoverlandrally.com) and see if there is one near you. TCT Magazine will be at the Gunnison show, since it's in our backyard, so make sure you come by and say hello, and tell us your stories around the campfire. *TCT*





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Finding the right light with Baja Designs LP6

Recently we retired our 40" roof mounted light bar from the Prinsu Roof Rack on our '07 FJC SE in exchange for something a little sleeker, and something more useful. We found the perfect fit and solution in the Baja Designs LP6.

We were able to find a great spot on top of the Warrior front bumper for the LP6. We also added a set of Baja Designs Squadron Sport Amber with the driving combo pattern that pairs nicely with the new LP6s. The Squadrons took some effort to install since the Warrior bumper did not come with pre-cut holes for fog lights, but the LP6 install was straight forward. Baja Designs provides all the necessary wiring and installation instructions needed for an easy project.

After finding the ideal location between the Toyota and the FJC headlights, we had to drill a few holes to bolt down the light brackets and route our wiring harness. The factory harness includes an on-off-on switch to control the light's high and low settings. For many applications, this setup is adequate and a much easier installation. However, if you run a switch system like a Switch-pro, S-Tech or sPOD, you'll want to do a little surgery to utilize your power system. The LP6 harness comes with four wires to control the lights; black, red, white and yellow.

A key reason Baja Designs includes the on-off-on switch, is to prevent both high and low setting being activated at the same time. So this version of installation comes with a



warning. Do not turn on both high and low setting at the same time! You run the risk of damaging the LP6s and may not be covered by any warranty. Do this mod at your own risk. When you have the wires separated, wire the black to ground, yellow to your marker/corner lights (to activate the amber lights within the LP6), red wire will activate the low output and the white wire will activate the high output.

Baja Designs originally released their LP9 as a tribute to their legendary 8" La Paz HID lights. Unfortunately, the size and price tag did not fit into everyone's build design and price range. Along

comes the smaller LP6 which is a perfect combination for the FJ Cruiser with a similar size round headlight. The LP6 comes in at only 6.5 inches tall in size, with a striking 200 degree spread of usable LED light, 10,300 lumens, and includes their patented Integrated Peripheral Technology (IPT). The IPT projects 1,700 lumens of peripheral LED light. According to Baja Designs, the LP6 Pro's lifetime is just short of 50,000 hours, 49,930 to be exact, which is a pretty extensive lifetime for LED lights. Extending the lifetime is Baja Designs Direct Ducted Cooling (DDC) technology, where indentations in the light housing

which is a pretty extensive lifetime for LED lights. Extending the lifetime is Baja Designs Direct Ducted Cooling (DDC) technology, where indentations in the light housing allow for air to travel through the housing and cool the product.

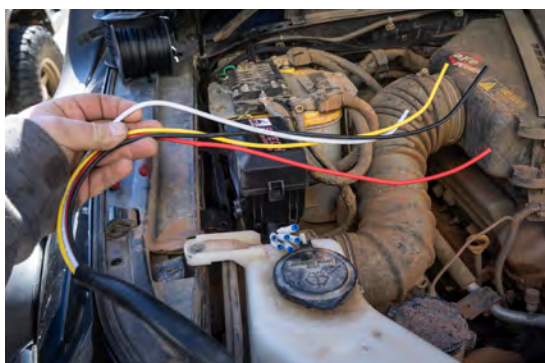
We took several photos to illustrate the spread pattern and significant improvement in lighting the LP6 and Squadron Sports can provide.

The Baja Designs LP6 lights are ideal for trail leading in the wake of nightfall. When you find yourself traveling behind another vehicle, I found myself in amazement with the Baja Designs Squadron Sport Amber LED fog lights. These fog lights shame the factory head lights and yet are gentle enough to travel on busy roads. In Colorado, the wet roads are dangerous without reflective paint on the roadway which Colorado does not have for the most part. The fog lights were able to illuminate what a driver cannot easily see and provide almost fifty percent more spread than factory headlights. The LP6s are also mounted closer to the ground than a light bar on the roof, where it's much more usable light shining where the driver needs it the most.

In recap, the LP6 Pro provides three options when a standard light bar has only one. Running amber setting on the LP6 and/or amber Squadron Sport is appropriate when running with other trucks and you find yourself not trail leading; running a light bar is definitely not suggested when behind a trail leader or other trucks.

We recently traveled into the desolate and sandy areas of Arizona. Traveling behind another vehicle, I used the LP6 amber setting and the Squadron Sport fog lights so that the trail leader and opposing traffic could easily identify me if needed.

I am very satisfied with the switch to the LP6s and wish it was done sooner! *TCT*



The fog lights were able to illuminate what a driver cannot easily see and provide almost fifty percent more spread than factory headlights.



FJ Cruiser Interior Mods

Whether you bought your adventure rig brand new or used, there's a common theme we can all relate to when it comes to outfitting our new to us vehicle. We make it our own. That could mean many things to many people.



In this series of articles, we'll be looking at a variety of accessories available to customize your FJ's

interior. There are novelty items that don't add any new functionality, but add a personal touch to your beloved rig (custom key fobs, climate control knobs, shift knobs, grab handles or patches and stickers). There are also those aftermarket products that do add functionality like storage accessories (rear side window racks, cargo drawers, center console storage and overhead cargo nets).

In this series opener, we'll delve into the world of custom key fobs, climate control knobs, shift knobs and grab handles. We'll be installing aftermarket climate control knobs and matching key fob provided by AJT Design (AJTDesign-LLC.com). We'll also talk about available options by other manufacturers. We'll mainly focus on products specific to the FJ Cruiser, but the companies we mention below also offer products for 4Runners, Tacomas, Tundras, Land Cruisers and more. Check their websites for vehicle specific product models.

KEY FOBs AND CLIMATE KNOBS

One company that stands out in the customizing space is AJT Designs. We remember when the first prototype key fob photo showed up on the FJ Cruiser facebook group. It was a crude, 3D printed version with a rough appearance. AJT has come along way since those days. They've perfected their designs and now offer almost every Toyota offroaders a way to personalize their key fobs with a plethora of color combinations using contrasting allen screws that come in black, red, stainless steel and blue. We requested a red key fob with contrasting black allen screws. The key fob comes in many different shapes and sizes depending on your vehicle model. Each design is different, but they all share angular design cues. They remind me of toy sci-fi ships. We can imagine all the different AJT fob models flying through space like a massive fleet. Taking apart your OEM key fob and installing the old electronic guts into

the new AJT key fob is a breeze. Everything is provided in the package... allen screws, allen wrench, fob buttons, shims and even an AJT sticker to slap on your window (+10 horsepower). There are also YouTube instructional videos to help you.

You simply unscrew a small screw in the OEM fob, pry it apart, take out the electronic gizmo thingy (official term), use a utility knife to weaken the plastic holding the metal key, then firmly grab the key and pull it up to break it free from the weakened plastic. Now it's time to install the new buttons into the new fob. Be aware of which button goes where (look at your OEM buttons). Place them into their corresponding hole then place the electronic gizmo thingy into the new fob (button-side down). It's now time to install the key. You may or may not need the tiny blue shims so the key doesn't wiggle in the new fob. We used one shim to keep it wiggle free. Place the shim into the slot followed by the key. Put the cover on and screw in the allen screws. Snug not tight, because you're screwing into plastic. Don't use any type of Locktite. It will eat the plastic.

Like the every day carry craze, you could literally change out your key fob and screws combo to match your new wallet, knife and pen combo. We bet you there are a few out there that do it.

Now, can we interest you in a set of climate control knobs for your FJ that matches your key fob? You read that right. AJT Design also carries climate control knobs that match the design style of the AJT key fob. As if it was meant to be. The knobs are made from impact resistant ABS plastic and feature a clear indicator light like the OEM knobs. We ordered a set that matched our red AJT key fob and just like the fob, the new climate knobs installation was just as easy.

Jump into your FJ and pull off each of the climate control knobs. Inside the back of each knob is a slotted spring clip. Use a small screw driver to gently pry them out. They have a tiny slot on each side of the clip where you can place the tip of the screw driver to pull up. Work on each slot at a time until it slides out. Take your time. We used a 2.0 mm precision screw driver. Firmly push each spring clip into the new knobs. We used the back of the screw driver to push it into the knob. Get back into your FJ and push on your new knobs. Now take a photo of yourself holding your new key fob next to your new climate control knobs and post it to Instagram. Tag @ajt_design and @tctmagazine.

Just like AJT Design, Ellis Precision (EllisPrecision.ca) and GZila Designs (GZilaDesigns.com) both offer climate control knobs, but theirs are CNC machined from aluminum, come in a variety of anodized finishes and are damn sexy. They also feature a light indicator similar to the OEM knobs. The GZila knob (\$100 per set with new



OEM spring clips installed) is machined with a scalloped edge while the Ellis knobs (\$169 per set) come in two styles; round with slotted edge or OEM-style knobs with a dimpled surface. Ellis Precision even went as far as to create a special tool for the milling process of their knobs to offer a high quality product.



SHIFT KNOBS AND GRAB HANDLES

One of the first mods I installed on my FJ when I bought it used back in 2012 was a set of Ellis Precision machined aluminum shift knobs and e-brake handle set (\$239). They are flat black with the shift knob featuring an engraved "FJ" on top. The transfer case shift knob has the OEM-style 4x4 shifting diagram engraved on top. Ellis Precision has been manufacturing shift knobs in various anodized colors almost since the first FJC debuted. Custom engraving is also available so, you can have your initials, TRD, etc on top if you choose.

AJT Designs and GZila Designs also offer their take on shift knobs. Machined from aluminum and each with their unique styles. Unlike the Ellis Precision and GZila Designs shift knobs, the AJT automatic shift and short manual knobs don't have an engraved top surface, but the short transfer case knob does have the proper 4x4 shifting diagram. They offer shift knob sets (\$169) and single knobs (starting at \$99) that come in three colors; black anodized, red anodized and clear coat. And like the key fob and climate control knobs, you can customize them with contrasting allen screws. The Gzila shift knob sets (\$100) come in a variety of finishes and that top surface can be custom engraved.

The shift knob mod is a popular one among FJ enthusiasts. We've seen everything from a cue ball, skulls, light sabers, and hand grenades. One creative individual in the FJ Cruiser group on facebook customized a flight simulator gaming joystick as a shift knob. He even went as far as to remap all the joystick's function buttons to turn on various aftermarket accessories like offroad lights. It was impressive to say the least.

You know those "oh shit" handles in your FJ? The one your copilot grabs when you pucker up and stagger down Black Bear Pass. Well, we've got some custom options for you. Both Ellis Precision (starting at \$189 black only) and GZila Designs (starting at \$80 for black, red or clear) sell custom engraved handles made from machined aluminum. We've seen everything from company names, 'hold on', 'pilot', 'copilot', 'TRD', and 'eject' engraved on them. Use your imagination. Ellis also sells a machined aluminum back plate if you want to install braided paracord handles instead of hard handles in your interior.

Rest assured, whichever company you choose to customize your interior, there is something for everyone and they all stand behind their products.

Look for part 2 in our FJ Interior Mods Series in a future issue. We'll check out popular rear storage accessories for the FJ, including a custom built rear cargo drawer. *167*



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The future of Vehicle Based Adventure Travel

I've been thinking quite a bit of what the future of Vehicle Based Adventure Travel (VBAT), aka 'Overlanding' will be like in the future. While people have been exploring with their vehicles since they were horse-drawn, the hobby really has come into its own within the last decade.

By all accounts, the VBAT community continues to grow and thrive. More manufacturers are producing high-quality, adventure-ready trucks (and some cars) right off of the assembly line. Thinking beyond Toyota, Ford, GM/Chevrolet, and most recently FCA/Jeep have genuinely great options for the duo and/or small-family adventuremobile.

So with all of this progress, what will we see going forward? I'm not usually one to try to predict the future, but certain things are becoming clear.

GO FURTHER ON LESS: HYBRID TECH

The Rivian (products.rivian.com/) truck has been well received by all who've had a chance to see it in action on dirt. It could very well set the standard that all other manufacturers will follow over the next decade. While I personally love the idea of a fully electric adventure rig, something tells me you won't be taking the Rivian around the world any time soon. I mean, SOMEONE will, but it won't be ready for regular consumers for quite a few years.

Ram is currently shipping a hybrid truck. The eTorque system adds up to 130 lb-ft of torque to the V8 HEMI engine and approximately 2mpg to the EPA Estimate (up to 19mpg from 17, mostly in the city). I've read quite a few reviews of this system and it seems pretty well suited for the daily drive that also needs to pull or haul. Read more at TFL Truck (www.tfltruck.com/2018/08/2019-ram-1500-hybrid-etorque-expert-buyers-review/).

With the Ram system already in product, our friend Tim over at Pickup Truck and SUV Talk has postulated ([LINK https://pickuptrucktalk.com/2019/02/2021-toyota-tundra-what-to-expect/](https://pickuptrucktalk.com/2019/02/2021-toyota-tundra-what-to-expect/)) that the 2021 Tundra will include a Hybrid drive option. With Toyota's experience in the Hybrid market, that idea certainly makes sense. Such a system would enhance MPG and possibly increase towing/hauling capacity of the new Tundra. We expect to see the first glimpse of the new truck at the 2020



Chicago Auto Show in February.

We all assume that eventually most SUVs and adventure-worthy cars will have an available hybrid system. Maybe we will end up with an all-electric Toyota Land Cruiser for the 400 series, only time will tell.

Until these advancements are revealed, we're happy exploring in our late-model trucks, gracefully aging 4Runners, or classic Land Cruisers. There will be plenty of time for high-tech upgrades in the future, but for today... stop reading this and go find adventure! **TBT**



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