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CRUISERS & TRUCKS

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LAKE TITICACA

The beautiful fresh-water lake surrounded by white-topped mountains.

TRD TACOMA BUILD

Check out all the goodies on the 2019 Voodoo Blue TRD Tacoma.

ALCAN 5000

The ComeUp Winch teams competes in the bitter cold with their FJ Cruiser.

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PHOTO BY Phillip Jones

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

COVID-19 HAS HAD AN IMPACT ON OUR PLANET, COUNTRY, AND INDUSTRY

in so many ways... it's impossible to summarize the magnitude of what's happened since our last issue. While we're all still struggling to find our way with the 'new normal', there is one thing that I know will continue: our search for adventure.

If your family is like ours, you were able to spend more time together over the last three months than ever before. Our entire team hopes that you've been able to remain safe and healthy during these unprecedented times, and hopefully you're able to get out and explore this summer.

While this issue ended up being published a little late, we think that you'll enjoy the inspiration from around the world that it contains. I want to point out two pieces by our Creative Director, Kathy Locke in particular: Her *Rebelle Journey* (Page 32) reveals how she went from enthusiast to competitor, and *The Last Word* has a special message from Kathy about the impact of the annual event cancellations.

Along with all of the other amazing content, this turned out to be one of our best yet. Please stay happy and healthy this summer, and keep searching for adventure!

Shane



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THE TUNDRA APEX ALUMINUM FRONT BUMPER is ideal for trucks running 35" or larger tires that also require a winch and light mounts in a lightweight option.

TUNDRA ALUMINUM FRONT APEX BUMPER

The bumper bodies are made from CNC laser cut, brake-formed, and TIG welded 3/16-inch thick Aluminum plate with 1/4" thick steel winch cradle that mounts to the frame and the bumper body mounts onto the winch cradle. Two 1-inch thick recovery points made from 1.5" x .250 wall tubing welded to 3/8-inch thick plates are also included. Two 4-inch fog light mounts are built-in, and built-in Light bar mounts can accommodate a 30" LED bar. This bumper also works with factory parking sensors.

TUNDRA REAR STEEL APEX BUMPER

THE 2014+ TUNDRA APEX STEEL REAR BUMPER will give you added peace of mind the next time you're on the trail. All-Pro's design improves the departure angle over the stock bumper so you'll have the clearance you need. For recovery or lifting points, two integrated shackle mounts tie directly to vehicle frame brackets.



PRICE: \$1,649 FRONT BUMPER, \$1,215 FOR REAR BUMPER

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FIRE ESCAPE CARABINER

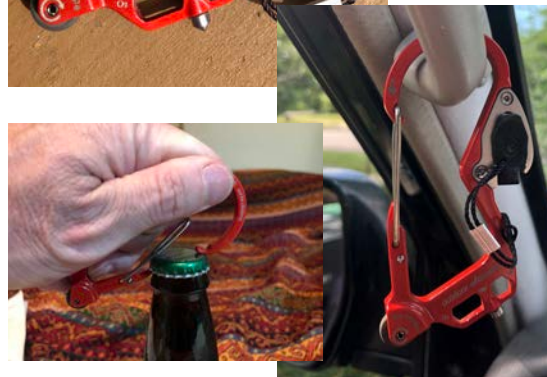
I'M NOT EASY TO IMPRESS. I yawn at new gadgets. Especially the Crowd-Funded, Kickstarter, Multi-Tool, Multi-Function, Pocket Multi-Tool, All-In-One-Can-Opener-Wrench-Screwdriver-AND-Saw-Blade, Last-Tool-You-Will-Ever-Need!, made of Titanium, of course.

Then I saw the Fire Escape Multitool Carabiner. I read Outdoor Element's "About-Us" and learned they are they are a home-grown Colorado company. That sealed the deal. I bought it.

The Fire Escape Multitool Carabiner is a carabiner (rated for 125lbs) that incorporates a seatbelt/cordage cutter, window breaker, spark wheel fire-starter, bottle opener, 1/4" wrench, and O2 wrench. Its a compact, lightweight, reasonably priced package.

For years I have carried a tire gauge with flashlight, seatbelt cutter and window breaker. It sits in my center console. I have been around situations where people have had to cut seatbelts and if your tool is not fixed somewhere, you won't find it in a rollover.

I will clip Fire Escape Multitool Carabiner close to me and know the window breaker and seatbelt cutter are there if needed. I'll probably never use the wrenches and I have plenty of bottle openers (I have tested the bottle opener. It works), but there is no harm in having those feature. I'll be testing the window-breaker next time I go to the pick-n-pull yard and will report back if it does not perform as expected.




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WIT'S END 80 SERIES "NUT HUGGERS"

EVERY TOYOTA ENTHUSIAST IS A TINKERER. Sometimes

it's driven by the desire to extend our vehicles capabilities, other times for improvement. No matter how good the engineers are, such complicated machines have places where a design could be improved, made more robust, or more idiot proof.

A major problem for 80 Series Land Cruiser owners over the last few is years are loose steering arm nuts. When the nuts get loose, a hammering effect may shear the studs leaving you with no steering. It's dangerous on the highway and is nearly impossible to repair on the trail.

The consensus is the studs come loose either after (1) a few cycles of steering arm removal for axle service, or (2) reinstallers are failing to fully seat the steering arm into the trunnion bearing, leaving a small gap that closes after driving with the resulting torque loss.

According to Joey Romero from Wit's End's: " 'Checking yer nuts' Has become part of every 80 series Land Cruiser owners pre-trip check. If it's not part of yours, add it."

One remedy is to remove the original studs when doing a front axle overall, thoroughly clean the threads in the knuckle, and install new OEM studs with red Loctite. New style OEM studs have a 12 point head making it much easier to torque them to the required 71 ft lbs. If you do not have the opportunity or do not need to do a full axle rebuild, Wit's End has a solution to secure your nuts. (Wit's Ends says "If your knuckle hardware is properly torqued, and not needing a rebuild, there is NO reason to take it apart just to use these. Keep your setup as is until the next rebuild.")

The same thickness as the washers you will remove and discard, the nut hugger bar has tabs you bend up against a flat surface of a nut. In spanning two studs, the bar is secured against rotation. Each tab, like the star washer for your axle nut, prevents the nut from rotating. Each bar includes two tabs per nut, making them good



for two front axle service jobs.

Wit's End's instructions are clear. You pre-bend a tab at each nut approximately 45°. Do not bend further! Install the cone washer, bar, then nut. Torque to spec. Do not bend the tab yet! Drive approximately 500 miles and then retorque. Bend using a screwdriver or small drift and hammer. Installation complete. Problem solved. **167**

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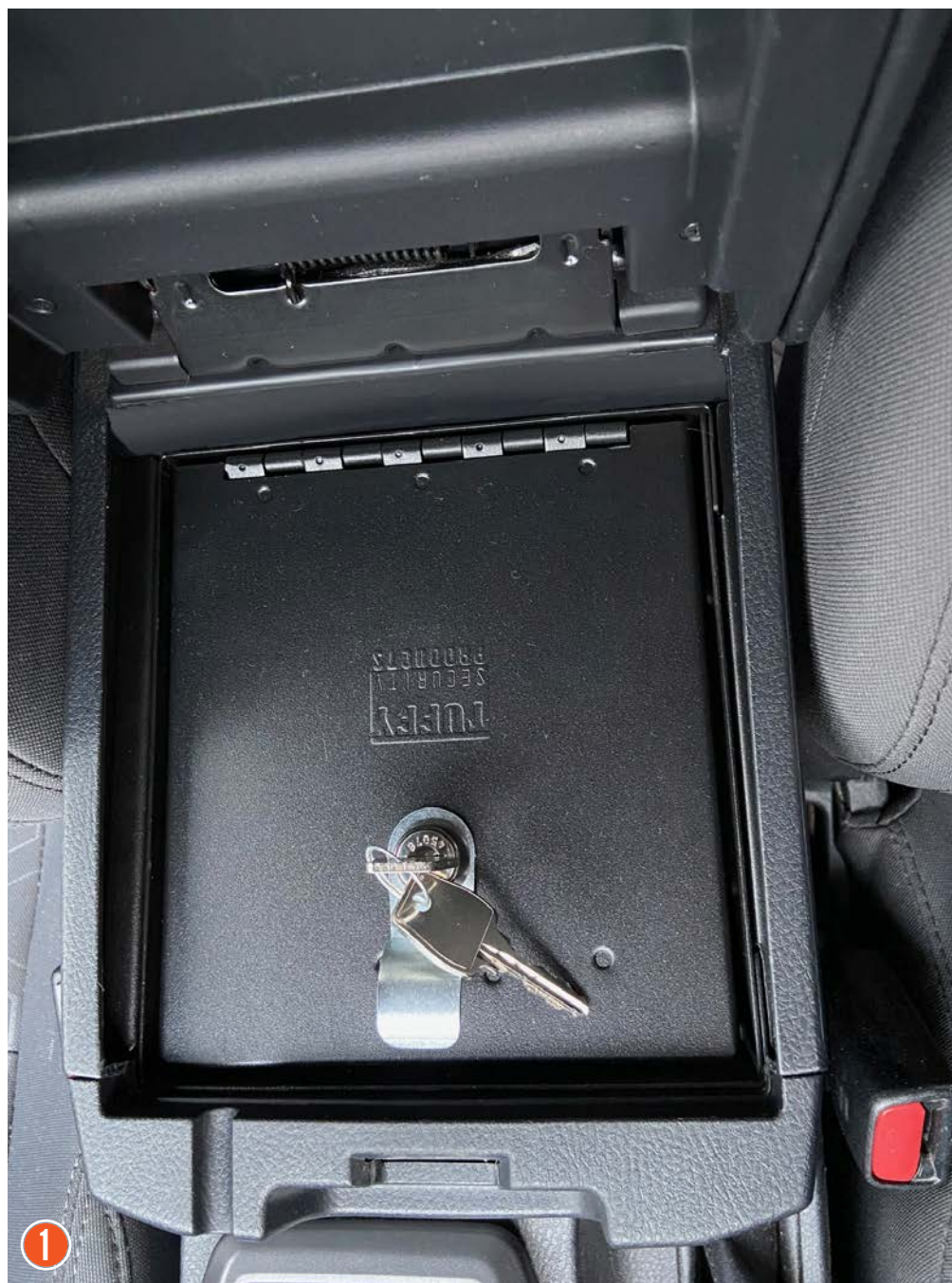


Tuffy Secure Console Safe Insert for 3rd Gen Tacoma

After installing and using a Tuffy Security Products console safe in my Toyota Tacoma, and running it for a couple of weeks, I am impressed with the overall product. This is a must-have for any conceal carry firearms owner, or perhaps a business owner/manager who makes regular deposits or withdrawals at the bank. One great feature is that the unit retains the bottom carpet in the Tacoma's console for a factory style finish.

The product design also allows you to retain access to the 12v socket factory mounted inside the console. This comes in handy for charging a phone, electronic device, or other items stored inside the console safe. You could also use that socket to wire a light inside the safe that will turn on and off with the vehicle ignition, if you wanted to customize a bit.

The safe sits inside the console, which leaves room on top to store a phone or other items you may not want inside the safe. However this product is not a fully enclosed safe, which is why the price differs when compared to other brands, luckily the safe does an excellent job of keeping your valuables secure. The locking mechanism is strong and functions smoothly. The safe door is 16ga steel, feels solid and secure. Any safe can be defeated with enough time, however this product will stand its ground against any "smash and grab" type of incidents.





INSTALLATION STEPS

Installation of the console safe doesn't take long and can be accomplished with basic tools. The hardware is imperial, but metric will work. It requires a 3/8 or 10mm socket, Phillips #2 screwdriver, and a 5/32 or 4mm Allen wrench for assembly.

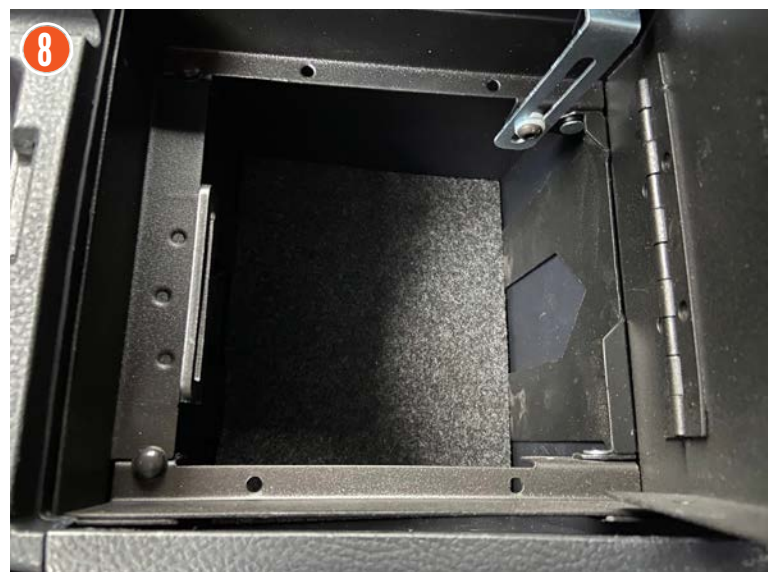
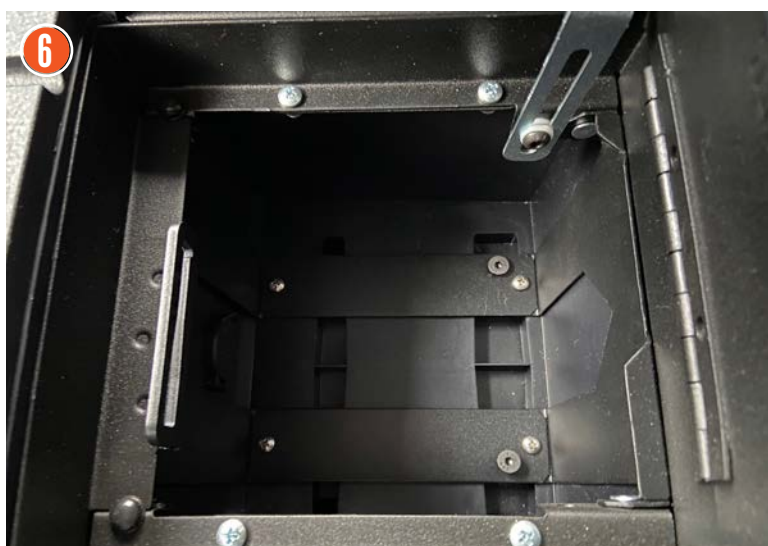
- For installation, start by taking everything out of the packaging and verify you have all necessary and correct parts. Empty out the center console to do any cleaning prior to installation. Next, you can start the assembly of the console safe.
- Bolt together the door opening mechanism, the screw torque will determine how hard/easy the door is to open. This will vary for each customer.
- Place the console safe inside the center console. Tipping the safe and sliding it back against the console

1. Tuffy Security Products offers a secure storage product for center consoles; 2. Installation instructions; 3. Parts; 4. Inserting the safe



door is the easiest way set it in. Just be sure to use caution as to not mar up the plastic of the trucks console or lid.

- Bolt together the legs and mounting brackets. I did this while the unit was inside the console and I left everything loose until it lined up and I was ready to mount. If not using an impact to tighten, it may be best to add a little thread lock to the threads.
- I bolted the left and right trim plates together. Getting them into position may be the trickiest part since this occurs inside a tight space. *TBT*



5. Opening the legs after inserting the safe; 6. Brackets assembled; 7. Inserting passenger side plate; 8. Carpet installed; 9. Trim plates bolted; 10. Internal storage; 11. Storage on top



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- **Get your tire where you want it in the wheel well:** Are your oversized tires rubbing the fenders or frame rails? SPC Adjustable Arms, in combination with OE adjustments on the lower arm, allow you to dial in alignment specs at the same time that you move the tire forward/outward in the wheel well by up to 1".

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FIRST NIGHT CAMPING IN THE ROOFTOP TENT
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A desert landscape at sunset with a signpost in the foreground. The signpost is a thin metal pole with a wooden sign attached to it. The sign is white with blue text. The background shows a vast desert with low hills and a few small bushes. The sky is filled with colorful clouds in shades of blue, purple, and orange.

TRD PRO TACOMA BUILD

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PHILLIP JONES

AFTER 12 WONDERFUL YEARS of off-roading and exploring in a built-up 2007 4Runner, I put it up for sale in August 2019. The day after I posted the ad on social media, a couple arrived with cash. With our family adventure rig gone, I set my sights on the next chapter of Toyota off-roading. I took advantage of the August Toyota rebate incentives designed to clear the dealer lots of 2019 models and came home with a Voodoo Blue TRD Pro Tacoma.

LET THE BUILD BEGIN!



The 4Runner build was a gradual process spanning 6 years. My goal with the Tacoma was to achieve the build within 6 months. The first product I ordered was the Southern Style Offroad Slimline Hybrid Winch Bumper with the 20-inch Baja Designs LED light bar. For side protection, I chose RCI rock sliders, which arrived within a few weeks. For dashboard accessory organization, I chose a well-made product from Expedition Essentials: the Tacoma 3rd Gen USB Powered Accessory Mount (3TPAM), which came with 2 USB ports and threaded holes for mounting RAM products.

To keep the back-end level when towing, I installed Firestone air bags. Since airbags require air, I installed an ARB air compressor in the engine bay using a Rogue Offroad bracket. Ditch lights are beneficial on backroads at night since they illuminate roadside wildlife, so those were next. I mounted CBI ditch light brackets and Cali Raised LED ditch lights, which have served their purpose well by revealing numerous deer. I also ordered Cali Raised Bed Stiffeners, Radio Antenna Mounts, and a center console tray.

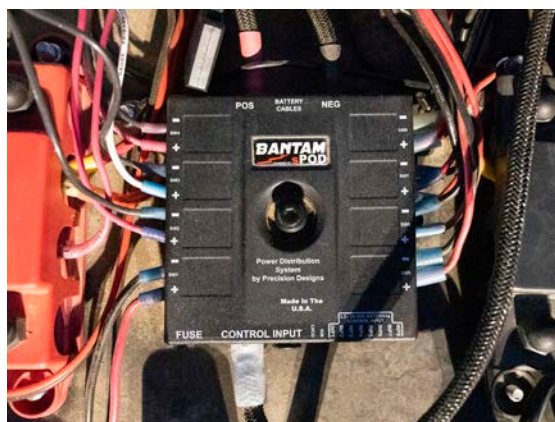
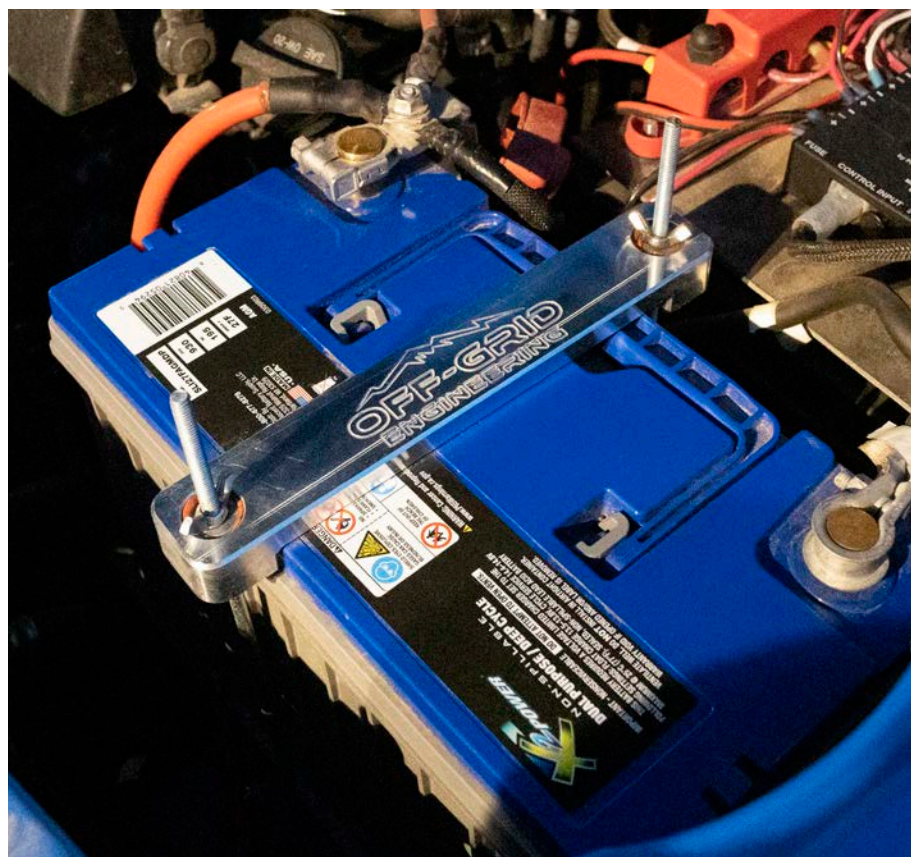
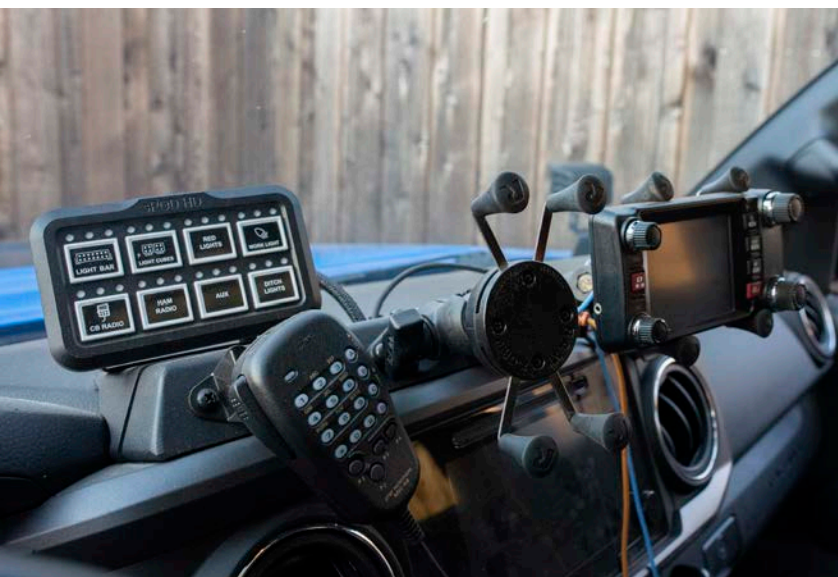
To power electronics and keep my fridge operational, I

installed a X2Power 27F deep cycle battery from Batteries Plus and secured it with a battery tie-down from Off-Grid Engineering. For power switching, I installed the sPOD Bantam circuit system with HD switch panel. One of my favorite items is the Mountain Hatch, which replaced the rippled tailgate liner with a nice smooth surface.

During the final week of October, I departed Dallas and headed to Colorado for a week before heading west to Vegas for SEMA. I stopped off in Moab for a few days to try out the mostly stock Tacoma on some off-road trails I had conquered with my previous rig, I was very glad to have the RCI rock sliders installed. The long double-cab Tacoma wheelbase, 1-inch stock lift, and 31-inch stock tires contributed to exposure to high-angled obstacles. The sliders proved effective over and over.

As I wandered amongst the multitude of vendor booths at the nation's largest automotive after-market industry show looking for items of interest for our *Toyota Cruiser & Trucks* (TCT) readers, I also paid attention to products for outfitting the Tacoma.

My appointment with the Yakima team turned into a shopping trip. As the marketing rep walked me over to



their new bed rack products, he pointed to a truck equipped with the new Yakima HD bed rack integrated with a Retrax Pro XR tonneau cover. Oh my! A solution that allows me to haul a roof top tent on a bed rack while securing my bed cargo with a locking tonneau cover. This combo moved to the top of my shopping list.

ComeUp has a reputation for making high quality winches, and I had one of their 9.5 models installed in my 4Runner, so I stopped by their booth to see if something would fit in my forthcoming SSO winch bumper. I was introduced to their new SEAL Slim 9.5RS winch designed specifically for hidden winch bumpers. The slimmer profile makes for a better fit, which I confirmed several months later as I installed the bumper and SEAL Slim winch.

OPPOSITE PAGE: SOUTHERN STYLE OFF-ROAD SLIMLINE HYBRID WINCH BUMPER WITH BAJA DESIGNS LIGHT BAR AND COMEUP SEAL SLIM 9.5RS WINCH;
THIS PAGE: EXPEDITION ESSENTIALS 3TPAM KEEPS ACCESSORIES ORGANIZED. sPOD SWITCH PANEL MOUNTED ON TOP OF THE 3TPAM; CALI RAISED BED STIFFENERS AND MOUNTAIN HATCH TAILGATE LINER; X2POWER 27F DEEP CYCLE BATTERY SECURED WITH OFF-GRID ENGINEERING TIE DOWN; sPOD BANTAM CIRCUIT SYSTEM



I hopped between tire booths of all the big brands and thought I had narrowed down which 32" tire would be taking me across off-road terrain. TCT teammate Bob H. suggested I check out the Kenda booth. Known for their UTV/ATV line of tires, I was surprised to see they had 3 product offerings for full-size trucks: an all-terrain, mud-terrain, and a rugged-terrain tire. It was the latter that impressed me the most, as it clearly exceeded the typical all-terrain tire in aggressive tread and sidewall, while being tamer than a mud-terrain. When I returned from SEMA, I chose the Kenda Klever R/T tires (265/70R17) and Fuel Vector wheels (17x8.5, -6 offset).



In a previous issue of TCT, I wrote about my experience of trouncing through the Ozark National Forest after a rainy week turned rarely traveled forestry roads into a mud fest. I have since tackled off-road trails in Ouachita National Forest, Moab, and

THIS PAGE: KENDA KLEVER R/T TIRES; YAKIMA HD OVERHAUL BED RACK WITH YAKIMA SIDEBARS FULLY INTEGRATED WITH RETRAX PRO XR TONNEAU COVER **OPPOSITE PAGE:** THE YAKIMA SYSTEM PROVED TO BE STURDY WHILE OFF-ROADING, DESPITE THE 180 LBS LIMIT WHEN USED WITH THE RETRAX TONNEAU COVER; NORTHERN ESCALANTE AREA TRAIL COVERED IN SNOW





Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The tires performed above expectations on all types of terrain, including trails covered in snow. With 6,000 miles on the R/T tires, I noticed the tire wear is evenly distributed and minimal.

My Utah trip into Moab and Escalante areas involved hauling my 114-pound hardshell rooftop tent atop the Yakima HD bed rack system. Yakima offers three HD rack height options. Only the tallest option, called OverHaul, is adjustable in height. This is the ideal solution for long hardshell rooftop tents that extend over the cab. I raised the Overhaul HD towers by 2-inches, which was sufficient for my tent to clear the cab and satellite radio antenna.

I went with the optional Yakima SideBars for mounting Rotopax and Maxtrax. The towers are pre-drilled and threaded for easy install of the

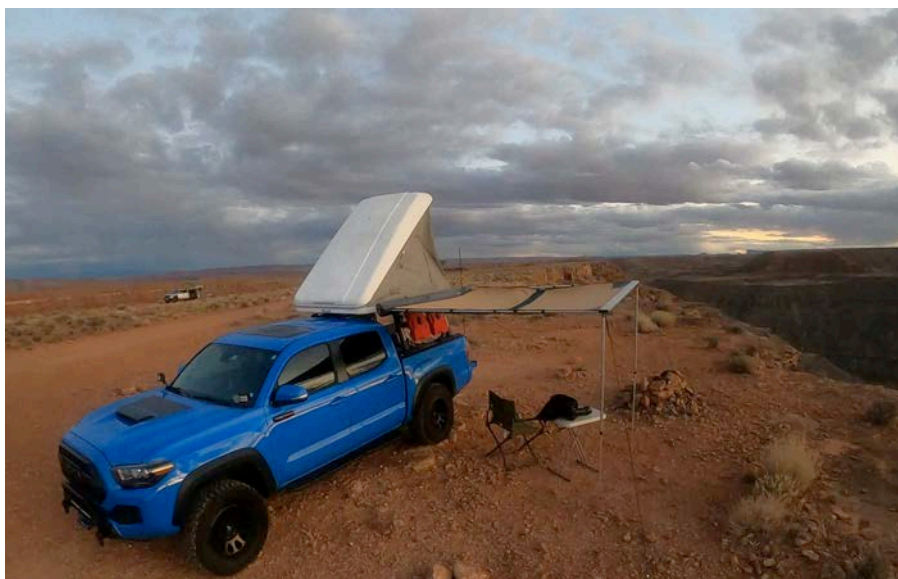
THIS PAGE: WHEN IN ROSWELL... OPPOSITE PAGE: VALLEY OF THE GODS

SideBars. The SideBars are adjustable, which is nice for owners of longer pickup beds who space their towers out further. Yakima deploys a t-slot system in the SideBars and manufactures an adapter for Rotopax mounts, as well as plates and straps for Maxtrax. The inner part of the towers have hooks protruding outward making it easy to hook in ratchet straps.

The Yakima crossbars have t-slots, which makes it easy to mount accessories on top, such as ARB awning brackets, and Rigid scene lights underneath. There is a pin at the end of each crossbar making it convenient to hang a lantern, trash bag, or whatever. Yakima offers 3 crossbar sizes: 60, 68, and 78 inches. I opted for the 60-inch to match the width of the pickup bed. The load capacity when using the HD system with standard mounts is 300 lbs for off-road use. That rating drops to 180 lbs for off-road when using the Yakima tonneau mount kit for the Retrax Pro XR tonneau cover. Awning, rooftop tent, 2 full Rotopax, recovery boards, and lights quickly add up: my load comes in at 168 lbs.

I am quite happy with the entire build. Yakima and Retrax provide a bed solution that keeps my gear dry, dust-free, and secured while carrying my hardshell rooftop tent. Kenda makes a tire that outperforms all the all-terrain tires I have owned in the past, while being more civilized than heavy and loud mud-terrains I've owned. ComeUp makes a winch that fits easily into my SSO winch bumper. Expedition Essentials makes a dash accessory organizer that holds my smartphone, InReach, HAM radio console, and keeps the InReach and tablet charged.

The build is complete. No really, it is. I am content with the current configuration. It's lighter than my previous rig, yet more practical and better outfitted. I look forward to many more adventures over the next decade in this capable and functional expedition rig. *TCT*



Cooper Discoverer AT3 XLT Long-Term Review



Putting the Cooper Discoverer AT3 XLT to the test

A bit over a year, many adventures, and nearly 12,000 miles later, I've had the chance to test the Cooper Discoverer AT3 XLT in a wide variety of conditions. They've been tested through deserts, mountains, the highways to get there, a snowy winter, and of course, the daily commute.

It's nice to have a tire that can do some of everything, and I've found the AT3 XLT to fit that description well. While I find myself pushing my truck off-road from time to time, I also spend a lot of time exploring fire roads, looking for an interesting campsite or fishing hole, or just

racking up pavement miles. Choosing a tire often seems to be a game of trade-offs, but I've found that the AT3 XLT is an excellent, well-rounded option to meet a wide variety of needs and uses.

OFF-ROAD PERFORMANCE

The AT3 XLT really surprised me in their off-road performance. I would consider them a bit of an unassuming tire, and you shouldn't underestimate their abilities. Sure, they won't clear mud like a mud terrain, but aside from that, I've been pleasantly surprised by

them. Sand, dirt, loose rock, and slickrock were all handled with ease.

I pushed these tires on some very difficult trails, aired down to as low as 12psi, and they were always up to the test. I put them (and myself) to the limit on trails like Behind the Rocks in Moab, and also spent a lot of time on rocky trails here in the Colorado mountains. I don't feel like I was ever held back though, as they rarely struggled to find traction.

ON-ROAD PERFORMANCE

I have not been surprised that the on-road performance of the AT3 XLT is very good. I have zero complaints with them on stopping, pushing a tight canyon corner, or handling wet conditions, and they also have very minimal road noise. Let's be honest - we all spend a lot of time on the highway, and the XLT is very composed on the pavement, and handles those miles in comfort and confidence.

WINTER PERFORMANCE

The AT3 XLT has been impressive on packed snow and ice as well. While they are not severe weather rated like the AT3 4S, they are mud and snow rated, and maintained traction very well on the snowiest of roads. Packed snow as well as fresh powder were handled with ease, and it took quite a bit to get them to break traction. When it came to snow bashing and deep snow off-road, they didn't do quite as good as a more aggressive tire, but pulled through reasonably well all things considered.

TREAD, WEAR & DURABILITY

As mentioned previously, I have just about 12,000 miles on my set of AT3 XLT. The tires have been rotated regularly and do not show any unusual wear. I measured an average of just under 15/32" of tread remaining, with 17/32" being the factory tread depth measurement. Based on that rate of wear the tires should have no issues getting close to the 60,000 miles treadwear protection offered by Cooper.

One minor complaint about these tires is they really like to pick up small stones and hold onto them. Cooper added stone ejector ledges in the large voids on this tire, but I often find rocks in the smaller voids on the sides. I



Not ideal for mud, but they will still surprise you with their performance.



The AT3 XLT showing the sidewall strength on some tough Colorado trails.

REVIEW



Winter testing in Steamboat, Colorado.



Tread depth after 12,000 miles.

have also seen very minor chunking around some of the siping in the tires, and some wear on the shoulder lugs. Higher speed gravel roads seemed to have contributed to this the most.

The XLT has a 2-ply sidewall, which I found the limit of on a very narrow section of Radical Hill here in Colorado. A sharp rock on the uphill side made a small cut in the sidewall, and required replacing the tire. While that very well could be attributed to my driving, and trying a little too hard to stay away from the edge, I would prefer to see a 3-ply sidewall. It would be nice if the XLT version of the AT3 was offered with the same Armor-Tek3 sidewall featured on the S/T MAXX and STT Pros. That being said, I've had no other sidewall issues, and have no noticeable cuts or issues on any of the other tires.

IN CONCLUSION

The Cooper Discoverer AT3 XLT is a well-mannered tire built to handle a variety of situations. They may not look like the most aggressive of off-road tires, but more than make up for that in how they perform. They are a long-lasting, dependable, and capable all terrain that I would recommend as an excellent option for a do-it-all rig. *TBT*

For more information on the Cooper Discoverer AT3 XLT and the Cooper tire lineup, visit their website, www.us.coopertire.com

VEHICLE AND TIRE SPECS:

Tested on: 2001 Toyota Tacoma
Size as tested: LT285/75R17
Wheel size as tested: 17x8.5
Approved Rim Width: 7.5-9.5"
Load Range: E
Overall Diameter: 33.82"
Tire Weight: 58lbs
Tread Depth: 17/32"



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[FRAMED]

f/1.8 1/1297s 4mm

Black Hills in Mammoth, AZ

PHOTO BY DAVID DAVIS







[FRAMED]

f/2 10sec 28mm

Orion Nebula and billions of
stars peak through the clouds
over the Goosenecks in Utah

PHOTO BY PHILLIP JONES



[FRAMED]

f/1.8 1/833s 4mm

Bonneville Salt Flats,
Utah/Nevada border

PHOTO BY KATHY LOCKE





[FRAMED]

f/2.8 1/160s 4mm

Tundras along the Colorado
River in Utah

PHOTO BY SHANE WILLIAMS





My Journey to *Rebelle*

Story by Kathy Locke • Photos by Kathy Locke unless otherwise noted

The days often blurred together after we left Squaw Valley Ski Resort—most likely, we lost track after leaving Salina, Utah on our trek to the famed site of the 1960 Winter Olympics. Days of the week didn't really exist anymore, and we only knew days by the actual rally specified day—Tech Inspection Day, Day 0 or Day 1, and so on. We knew what number we were for the start line the next morning and what time we needed to be there after drawing our ticket the night before. We quickly figured out our routines for the mornings, and at the end of a long day of navigating and driving. This was our new “norm” for 10 days in October 2019.





Photo by Richard Giordano

CURIOSITY CREATES QUESTIONS

I first learned about the Rebelle Rally in 2017 after purchasing my 2008 Toyota FJ Cruiser. I had only ever heard of the Baja 1000 or the Mint 400 living in California as a child, and through my dad's love of those competitions. I had never known about competitions outside of that and even more so, competitions just for women. What was this intriguing world filled with "cool" women who were off-roading through incredibly beautiful, but sometimes dangerous terrain? Who were these women repairing their own vehicles or towing their fellow competitors out of sticky situations? These women that were covered in dirt, mud, or sand that was blasted at them from the awe-inspiring sand dune they just drove over? How they used only velocity and maybe a little bit of hope to get them over the crest of that dune? Who were these women daring to compete in a "man's" world and challenging their vehicles, and more importantly, themselves? And, could I ever become one of "them"?

I decided to follow Team #154 Roads Less Traveled, online with the live tracking option for the 2017 Rebelle

I KNEW SHE LOVED THE
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CHALLENGE.

Rally. A "voyeur" of sorts, I wanted to watch and somehow "see" what they were seeing. The driver, Tiffany Walker, hailed from Colorado Springs, and was driving her 2008 Toyota FJ Cruiser. I thought since we had the same type of vehicle that would be enough of a connection for me to justify watching people I had never met. Little did I know how much following that team would alter my life in so many ways.

Watching online prompted me to cover the last half of 2018 Rebelle Rally as part of the *Toyota Cruisers & Trucks* media crew to gain more insight into this fascinating competition, and the women who compete in it. I followed the teams driving Toyotas working their way from Johnson Valley to Glamis Sand Dunes, and quickly fell in love with the rally community as well as its competitors. I picked their brains, spoke to them about their day, asked about their wins and challenges, and asked for tips and suggestions—any tidbit, a morsel even, to tell myself I could do this rally, that I could be one of these "cool" women.

When I returned home, I felt a sense of renewal—a sense of confidence I hadn't felt before, or even believed I had. I knew I could compete in the Rebelle Rally. I knew



I could drive the terrain, that my FJ could take me over that terrain. I also knew, the navigation part would be my biggest and toughest challenge. And now, I needed to convince someone else they could do this challenge with me—I needed a navigator.

I had met Stacey through her husband, my coworker. I knew she had the adventure drive, hearing of her and her husband's three-year trek throughout the United States in their Honda Ridgeline towing a good-for-them sized camper. I knew she loved the outdoors and (maybe subconsciously), I knew she was ready for something different in her life, too, and would be up for a unique challenge.

YOUR COMPASS AND ALL MAPPING TOOLS WILL BE YOUR BEST FRIEND

We spent the better part of 2019 fundraising, practicing our off-road driving skills, and most importantly, understanding and learning map and compass navigation—latitude and longitude to be specific—wherever and whenever we could. This was of the utmost importance—there is no GPS at the Rebelle Rally. You leave your cell phones and any digital navigation system at the door. This is old school navigation. If the rally was at night, we might've had to navigate using the stars.

It was important for both Stacey and I to



Opposite page: At the start line in Gold Point, Nevada; **This page top to bottom:** Feeling the win of finding a green checkpoint; Our mantra to keep us focused and inspired; Waiting in line with other Rebels



know and understand latitude and longitude and how to plot coordinates on a map. It was important for both of us to be able to understand geographical marks and topo lines on a map. It was important for us to understand distance and to be able to calculate it in kilometers then convert to miles. (The FJ's odometer was in miles only. Other than getting a device like a Terratrip or ICO Rally computer, which wasn't in our budget, we had no choice but to do our own conversions. It wasn't a big deal, but just another one of the little things you accept, do and move on.)

MY ANXIETY LEVEL RISES JUST THINKING ABOUT IT. LET'S JUST SAY THAT DAY WAS NOT A GOOD DAY AND STACEY HAD EVERY RIGHT TO KILL ME, OR AT THE VERY LEAST, NEVER TALK TO ME AGAIN.



Stacey was amazing at navigating and took her navigator role very seriously; reading and using the compass properly, learning how to use the plotter and map rulers to find and plot coordinates, quickly calculating the distance from one point to another, and all of the enduros. Oh, yeah, enduros. Also known as roadbooks, or TSDs (time, speed, distance), Rebelle Enduro Challenges (REC) are crucial during the Rebelle Rally. Following them will quickly and safely get you to the next checkpoint (CP) or final destination, and most often used during transit segments.

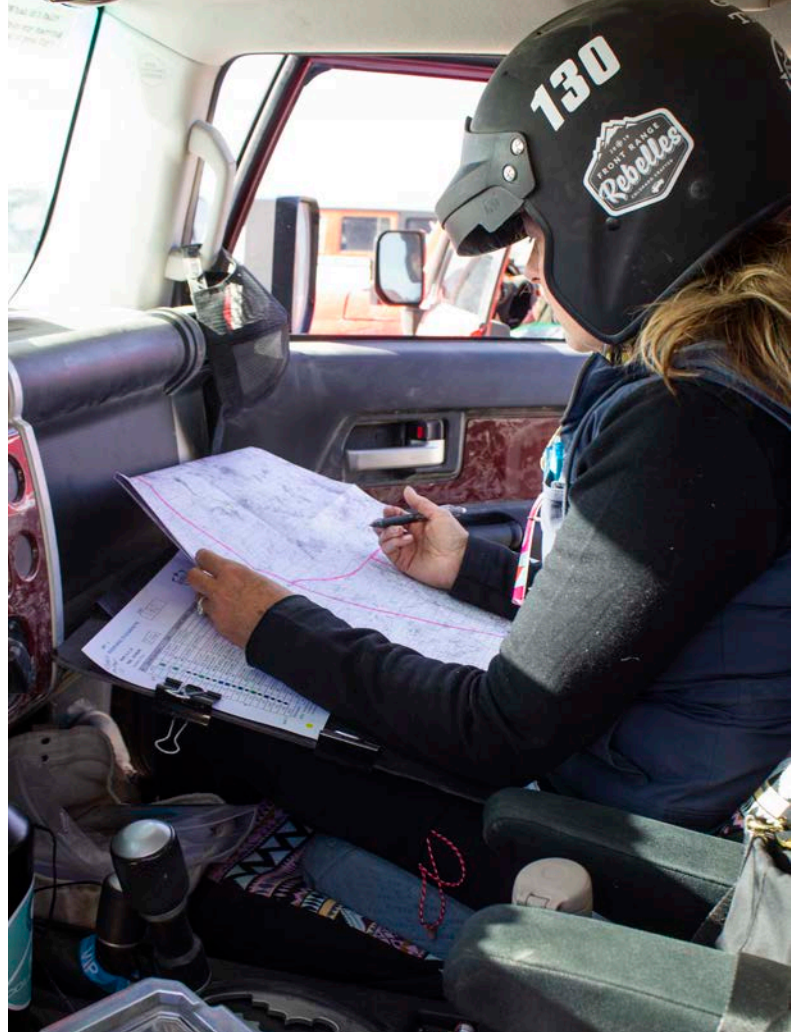
The roadbooks were my nemesis though—I could calculate them, but not with the efficiency and speed that Stacey could. She was also able to quickly recalculate them, for instance, when I accidentally reset the odometer during a 20+ mile REC, of which we were told to specifically *not* reset once we reached that CP. Because I had been resetting the odometer consistently at every CP, so Stacey could calculate the distance to our next CP, I reached over habitually to reset and feeling as if in slow motion, remembering at the exact same time Stacey started yelling, "nooooooooooo", to not reset, I reset the



This page top to bottom: Self camp night on Day 3; Stacey's helmet with our catch phrase; One of our many maps and our world for that day; **Next page:** Stacey in her "office" studying to see where we need to go next

odometer. We both froze and once the horror of what I had done passed, Stacey quickly went into calculating mode and updated the rest of the roadbook, which took an amount of time I would rather not specify. My anxiety level rises just thinking about it. Let's just say that day was not a good day and Stacey had every right to kill me, or at the very least, never talk to me again.

Time management and learning how to use all the mapping tools is a way of life during the Rebelle—if you want to get to the next basecamp, you don't have a choice. Stacey and I made sure we had duplicates of everything. We were "overplanners"—we feared not being prepared for everything. And, as much as you plan, something inevitable will happen, whether you planned for it or not. We lost a 100k scale map ruler on one of the days where it was our main scale for the map we were using, and then quickly realized we couldn't find any backups. If you attend any Rebelle Rally workshop, listen to everything Emily Miller, the founder of the Rebelle Rally, says. We had to make our own ruler for that day—a lesson utilized because of one of those classes.



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Photo by Nicole Dreon

TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

Even before and after the “odometer incident”, we were a great team. It surprised me how great we actually worked together and it still makes me smile to this day. We decided early on that anything that happened, good or bad, was a “we” thing. “We” drove over that rut too quickly, “we” miscalculated a CP, “we” got lost, “we” found that CP, or “we” did amazing today. “We” were never going to blame one another for something and do everything together as a team. When said rut was driven over too quickly, I slammed the brakes, jumped out of the FJ, making sure to slam the door really hard too, and quickly shouted every profanity I could at the rut, but mostly, at myself, for not paying attention and possibly risking damage to the FJ which in turn could’ve ended our rally right then and there. Stacey knew those profanities were not aimed at her, but merely me releasing a lot of anxiety and anger that had slowly been bubbling to the surface that day, but not because of her. Once I was done with my “fit”, and head held low, I got back into the FJ. Stacey asked if I was ok and if the FJ was ok, then calmly told me where “we” needed to go now. “We” still had many more CPs to get.

Our mornings started with Emily Miller, gently ringing

her famous cow bell “alarm” while other days it was the sounds of tent zippers being unzipped as some teams were up before the 5:00 a.m. cowbell—either from lack of sleep, anxiety, nerves—or all of the above—or just ready for that competition day to get started. Our routine was for Stacey to get up and ready first and head directly for the basecamp tent to get the map, or maps, for that

day and start plotting. She would figure out the enduro first then move on to plot the 20+ CPs. I would pack up the tent and our belongings and haul them back to the FJ as well as try and do a run-through of checklist items in my head—do a quick run through of the FJ and fluids and check the tires; pack the FJ to be accessible for things we might need that day; fill our water bottles, and pack our snacks for the day, and make

sure Stacey’s “office” was devoid of anything she didn’t need. I would head back to the main tent to find Stacey, get coffee and whatever breakfast for the both of us. She is a later morning breakfast person, but I on the other hand, needed breakfast. Being “hangry” doesn’t bode well for me, or others, so eating a big, full breakfast while helping Stacey finish plotting, or highlighting highways on various maps, or helping a fellow Rebelle with their plotting, was much easier to do with a full stomach, and

I REMEMBER SLEEPING SO WELL THE FIRST NIGHT—I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE GREAT IF THE REST OF THE NIGHTS WERE LIKE THIS. UNFORTUNATELY, THEY WERE NOT.

a safer way of maintaining friendships.

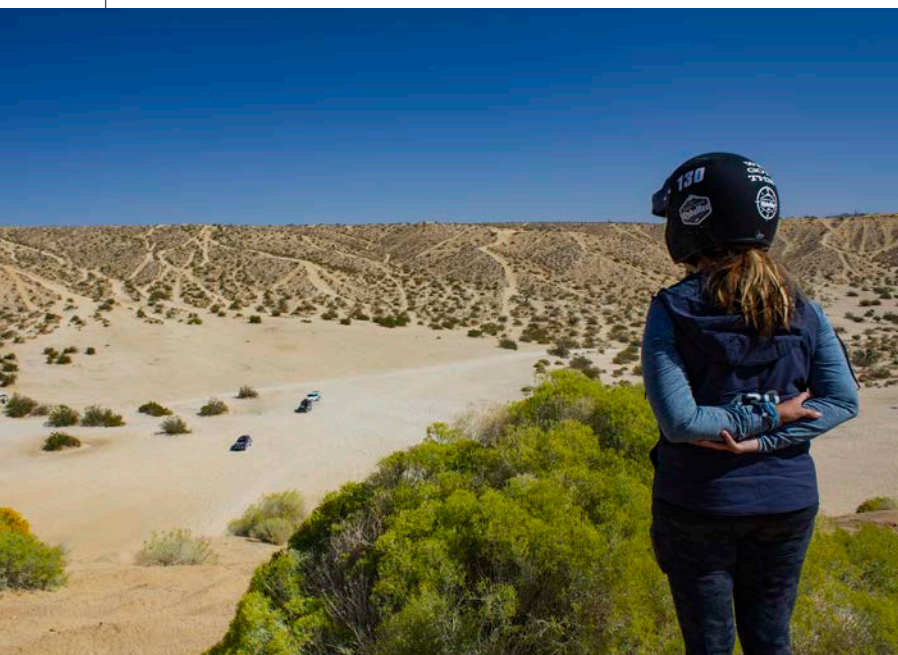
Every night, when we drove into basecamp after a mentally and physically exhausting rally day, we would get our camp belongings out and try to muster enough energy to carry them to a spot we were able to stake out amongst the other teams. We quickly figured out after Day 0, we didn't really need to bring ALL of our camping items with us and were able to quickly re-adjust our personal items into fewer bags, making the haul at night and in the mornings a little easier. While I would wait to get the FJ fueled for the next day, Stacey would start getting our camp ready. Some days we were lucky enough that both of us could set up camp together, enjoy some amazing food, chat with some of our friends and fellow competitors, then head back to the tent and sleep. I remember sleeping so well the first night—I thought this would be great if the rest of the nights were like this. Unfortunately, they were not. Self-camp night was possibly the worst—we were told the temperature that night was 25°—below freezing. Stacey and I were bundled in every clothing item we had in our bags and made sure to wear the clothes we planned on wearing the next day so we didn't have to try and change in the frost-bitten morning. The worst night also could've been our first night in Glamis, waking up covered in a coating of fine sand and numerous trains speeding by throughout the night next to basecamp. I think I counted four trains. With very bright lights...

SOMETIMES THE CHALLENGES AREN'T AS BIG AS THEY SEEM

Glamis Sand Dunes—this was the section I was terrified of from day one. For some reason, I was preparing myself for this to be the most challenging part of the rally. I anticipated having to dig ourselves out every 20 feet or feared rolling down one of the many massive dunes. Or even at the extreme, doing something so out there that I managed to get a ton of sand sucked into my engine. I know—I'm not even sure how I would do that, but I thought if it was going to happen, it would probably happen to me, because I was so fearful of driving in sand. I had never

Opposite page: Stacey and I checking out the vast desert and planning how to get to our next checkpoint; **This page:** The FJ in its natural habitat; Stacey and I after getting a blue checkpoint and taking a little break; Fueling up at the end of another long day





done it before. How was I going to drive these magnificent dunes that I was so sure were out to get me and for some reason, hated my FJ?

Stacey and I couldn't afford to take the Rebelle Dune Driving classes being held. Everything we had financially was going to our entry fee. So, we went with another Rebelle, Thayer Cook from Team #164 Anam Cara, to practice driving in the North Sand Hills in northern Colorado near the Wyoming border. Stacey and I watched YouTube videos about driving in sand. I read a book that Thayer gave me about driving in sand. We were studying sand. Sand be damned, we were going to figure this out.

The North Sand Hills are baby dunes compared to Glamis. But while we were there, we drove around for hours—up and down hills, in massive circles and following one another through various areas we felt would be good practice. We purposely tried to get ourselves stuck so we could practice getting unstuck and familiarize ourselves with our ActionTrax. The more we drove, the more fun we were having. But at the end of the day, the Glamis Sand Dunes were still terrorizing me.

The latter half of Day 6 of the Rebelle was mostly an R.E.C. transit day to get us into Glamis. I was anxious, to say the least, about our next and final day of the rally—driving the entirety in the sand dunes and mentally preparing to get stuck every 20 feet and only getting three CPs that day because of it.

The real dunes—the big, sky-high, fluffy majestic ones you see in photos are even more incredible in real life. The more familiar I became with how the sand felt under my tires, the more I started to understand how to drive in it. The more I drove, the more I began to love driving in sand—to the point of smiling with pure joy at how much fun it was and wanting to challenge myself even more. Driving fairly quickly on sand and avoiding the pesky little branches poking out became one of my most favorite sand driving moments. Hitting the gas pedal to keep momentum and climb quickly up some of the dunes was another one. It was where I felt I had finally conquered my fear of sand driving and

This page: Stacey watching and waiting for teams to climb the hill; Rebelle teams clicking their trackers at a blue checkpoint; The FJ again enjoying dirt time and a variety of trails; **Opposite page:** Zipping through the desert

Photo by Paolo Baraldi

realized, why was I so afraid in the first place and when can I go back and conquer the big dunes?

One thing I did learn and took to heart was Emily's quote, "Don't drive what you don't see." For some reason, I liked the simplicity but very explicit direction of those six words, and during our drive back into basecamp, I crested the top of a dune and quickly realized I had no idea what was on the other side. I slammed my brakes once we crested, and quickly yelled out at the same time, "Don't drive what you don't see!" Stacey and I both started laughing at the absurdity of what I just said, but also the truth behind it. The other side was steep—and I didn't want to take any chances going down it. I drove across the top of the dune to an area I did feel safer driving down and headed merrily back to basecamp feeling quite accomplished with my sand-driving prowess that day.



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WHERE THE HECK DID WE GO?

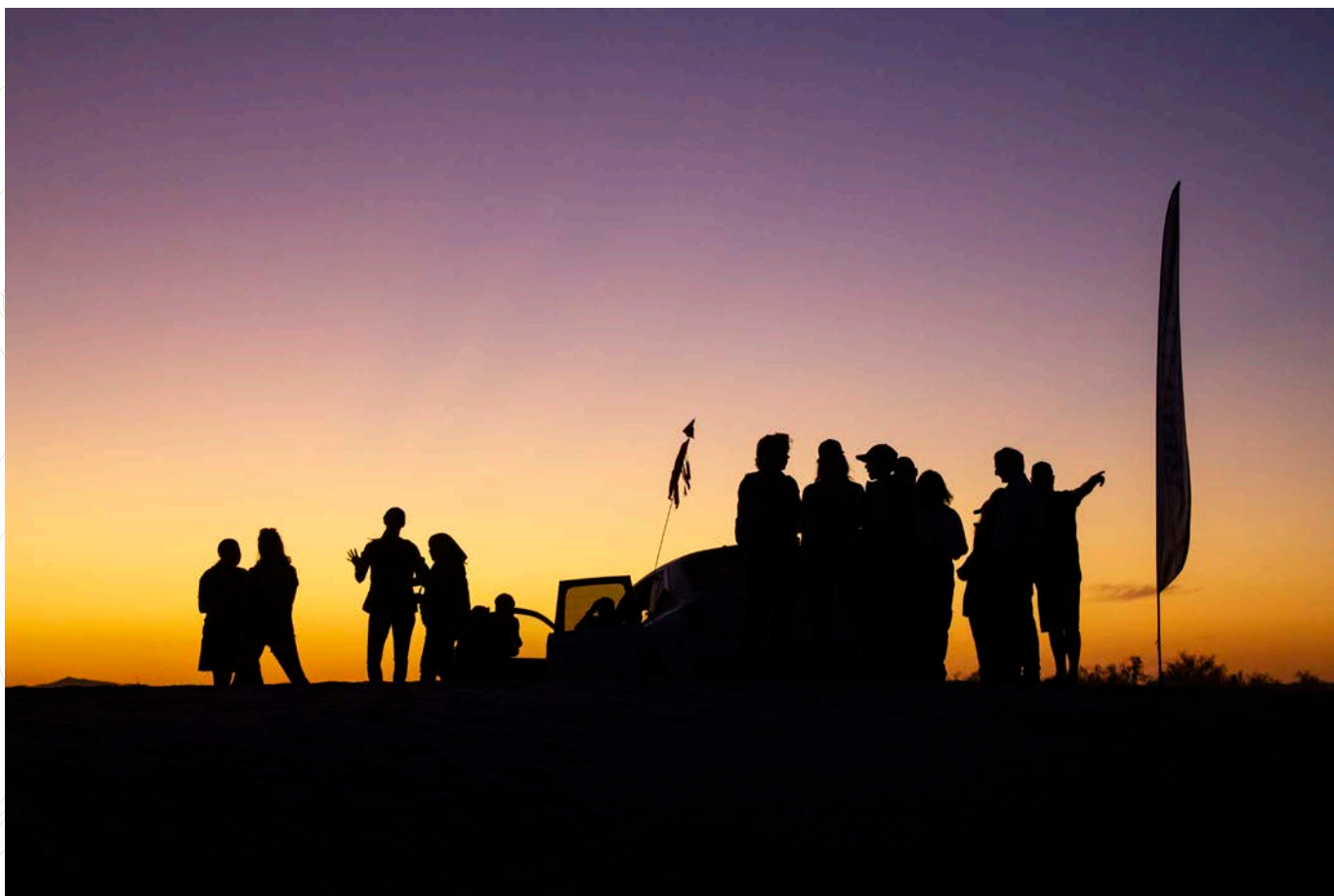
We covered over 1,400 miles through California and Nevada over 10 days. We drove through lush pine-tree filled mountains. We traveled to a small, dusty, unique mining town called Gold Point and traveled the expanse and vastness of Death Valley. We reveled in our moment together during the sunset at Cougar Buttes in Johnson Valley and drove through the wonder that is Joshua Tree National Park, and all the beautifully ragged rock formations in between. We were able to see the different but distinctive types of deserts as we journeyed to the Salton Sea to make our way to the Glamis Sand Dunes. We barely spoke a word during a few long stretches of pavement on various days as we admired the scenery around us, wind blowing in our already knotted hair, dirt and grime all over and around us. We were taking in the beauty of the silence, and even the enormity, of what we were so graciously allowed to experience but fully aware of our privilege in doing so.

WE WERE TAKING IN THE BEAUTY OF THE SILENCE,
AND EVEN THE ENORMITY, OF WHAT WE WERE SO
GRACIOUSLY ALLOWED TO EXPERIENCE BUT FULLY
AWARE OF OUR PRIVILEGE IN DOING SO.

I AM NOT JUST A...

What I realized in the end was that these women I had idolized and admired, weren't "cool" women. They were everyday women





doing extraordinary things—challenging themselves, proving they were more than their monikers claimed, and more than what society saw or expected of them. They were engineers or stay-at-home moms. They were nurses, bookkeepers, lawyers, CEOs, flight attendants, and small business owners. Some were still finding their calling after running a design agency for many years and one was just a graphic designer knowing there was a challenge calling her name and telling her, she can do this.

We at some point in our lives believe we are not smart enough or told we are too smart. Not skinny enough or too skinny. Our noses are either too big or too small along with our breast size. Our society values external appearance and phony and inconsequential abilities and forgets about bravery, resilience, and confidence. You don't have to be famous or have special talents to do the Rebelle Rally. You just have to want to do it and believe you can do it. *TCT*

Opposite page: A congregation of Rebelles at one of many checkpoints in Glamis Sand Dunes; Taking in a moment at Glamis Sand Dunes and pondering the fun I was having driving in the sand; **This page:** Rebelles at our last base camp celebrating our final day of competition with an incredible sunset; Stacey and I getting a final picture of our epic adventure



Rebelle Rally 2019
Team #130 Front Range Rebelles

A special shout out and thanks to my family, friends, and coworkers who supported and shared this journey with me. Extra thanks to my friend Christina for doing our social media posts while we were competing. Special thanks to sponsors, and companies that supported us as well—Toytec Lifts, ActionTrax, Refined Cycle and Offroad, Blue Crush Auto Glass, Colorado FJ Cruisers, The Art Consultant, Rad Rubber Designs, Topo Designs, our partnership with Girls Inc. of Metro Denver, and especially my *Toyota Cruisers & Trucks* team. It was an experience and challenge I will never forget and my heart is full. ♥



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Exploring a little-known corner of Lake Titicaca

Peru

Text by Karin-Marijke Vis
Photos by Coen Wubbels

With my back against a wall that protected me from the cool breeze, I closed my eyes, dozing off in the sun that warmed my body. The world was utterly silent and peaceful except for some chirping birds and buzzing insects. I opened my eyes and took in the view of South America's largest freshwater lake (3200 square miles). Surrounded by white-topped mountains, the landscape offered a magnificent picture of cobalt-blue water with the sun glistening and the wind sending ripples over the surface.

Located between Bolivia and Peru, high up at 12,507 feet, Lake Titicaca is the birthplace of the sun, at least according to Andean belief. It is also the birthplace of the Incas. On the Bolivian side, the ruins of the Inca era on the islands of Lake Titicaca are highlights for visitors. On the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca live the Uros people – not on the shore but on islands which they build from reeds. The history, culture, and

Crossing into Peru via lake Titicaca.



Top to bottom: Cobalt-blue waters of Lake Titicaca with the sun glistening and the wind sending ripples over the surface; Ruins scattered across the plains.

landscape of Lake Titicaca never ceases to amaze me.

Puno is the main city on Lake Titicaca, and for most tourists the starting point for a visit to the Uros people. However, we decided to steer around the town after we had learned about another place to visit Uros people, but without the crowds. Llachón is a village too small to be mentioned on our maps but I knew it was situated on the Peninsula of Capachica. I got up from my nice little nap behind the wall, returned to the Land Cruiser, and Coen started the engine. Asphalt changed into a potholed dirt road where we could drive only at a snail's pace, which was fine as we were in no hurry. The scenic drive followed the northwestern side of Lake Titicaca that was full of reeds and cut through agricultural fields. Despite electricity cables and the occasional satellite dish, it felt a bit like a time-warp back into time, into an agricultural world that appeared scenic from the outside but that must be tough and harsh in daily life.

Quechua-speaking locals were harvesting or preparing the soil before twilight set in. Others were homebound, tending their sheep while some carried their babies tucked warmly and comfortably in a woven blanket

Top to bottom: Tasting the local delicacies; Curious kids check out the Land Cruiser; Homebound after a day in the fields; Hair washing on a reed island.



on their back. Dressed in local garb, the women wore long, multi-layered skirts and embroidered vests or sweaters. But it was their hats that stood out—they have the shape of a kite, with two cotton balls on top. Flocks of sheep scampered across the streets, unpredictable in their movements as always. Sheep may start crossing a road, halfway decide not to cross and turn around. They may freeze, run or alternate between the two extremes within seconds. With sheep near the road, you always have to watch out.

Besides the main dirt road that cut down to almost the far end of the peninsula, there were no roads, just paths leading up to adobe houses with slate, zinc or thatched roofs. The inhabitants lived spread out on the peninsula with a small group living together in the village of Llachón. On arrival, Coen approached a man on the street, shaking his hand to introduce himself and asking





whether it was okay if we camped in the corner of the plaza. Thus, we met Primo, the Spanish-speaking owner of the small hospedaje in the plaza. The amiable fellow was born on one of the islands in Lake Titicaca but had lived here since he got married. He ran a hostel but also organized tours, which was exactly what we needed to visit the Uros Islands. Camping in the plaza was no problem and early in the morning we went for a walk, following a path up the hill just outside Llachón. It was Sunday and the peninsula was asleep. There was nobody about, which was bad planning on our side as agricultural scenes are always nice to take in. The place was scenic, the weather gorgeous, and everything radiated an unhurried feel.

On our return, Primo had a boat ready to take us to an island.

According to the story, when the

conquistadores, the Spanish colonizers, invaded their territory, the Uros fled and decided to go and live on Lake Titicaca in Peru. In the shallows of the lake grow torora reeds in abundance and the Uros had already been using these to build boats before they learned how to build islands and houses with reeds. Of course the reeds rot away in the water and so maintaining the islands is a continuous process of adding new layers of reed. They have lived like that for centuries.

Going to see local people often has something of a going-to-the-zoo feeling to it, and I generally find that very uncomfortable. Here the deal was simple and clear. Visitors get to see where and how the Uros people live and in return you buy handicrafts. It was an easy-going visit and it helped that we spoke Spanish and could converse with them. They had set up a miniature of their island, which they used to explain how building and maintaining the reed island worked. They provided answers to frequently asked questions with patience and humor. I particularly appreciated their honesty. They no longer use the torora-reed boats—"They are just here for tourists, would you like to sit in one?"—but open wooden boats with an outboard motor. They didn't hide the fact that they no longer cooked on reeds but on gas. Simple things, which gave honesty to the whole affair and prevented it from looking like some sort of mock-up.

After a pleasant afternoon we said our goodbyes, returned to the mainland and headed deeper into the Andes Mountains to another highlight of Peru: Machu Picchu. 167



Top to bottom: Author Karin-Marijke and Photographer Coen posing next to their Land Cruiser BJ45; Buying fresh fruits along the road. Opposite page: Harvest in full swing.



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An Extreme Winter Challenge: 2020 Alcan 5000 Rally

*Photo by Ben Huang*

Man and machine versus Arctic temps. Snow and ice-covered roads, along with blizzard conditions—the 2020 Alcan 5000 Rally was that plus much, much more. The 10-day 5,120 mile-long winter rally posed grueling challenges even the most seasoned competitors had to work through carefully. Ben Huang (President of ComeUp North America and Managing Director COMEUP Industrial Inc. based in Taiwan) and friend buddy Ben Liao teamed up to rally together for this event. They decided to commandeer one of ComeUp's company vehicles: a fully customized 2012 Trail Teams Edition FJ Cruiser. They prepared, they rallied, and they completed. Not an easy feat for any adventurer.

WHAT IS THE ALCAN 5000 RALLY?

The Alcan 5000 Rally (started in 1984 as a summer event but in 1988 as a winter challenge) is an extreme TSD (time-speed-distance) rally. Teams of two (or three) tackle tons of things together: like very long hours behind the wheel and navigating, severe terrain, and the harsh Arctic elements. In addition, each team must follow a detailed route book and complete all the mini-TSD rallies within the overall rally. There's a lot to keep track of, lots to concentrate on.

This year's rally started in Kirkland, Washington and took competitors through remote residences, heading due north through all of Canada (British Columbia,



Yukon Territory, and the Northwest Territories). Teams braved temps as cold as -40 degrees and unexpectedly closed fuel stations in the middle of nowhere to reach cities like Quesnel, Whitehorse, Dawson City (where the rally's ice races were held). Finally, they reached Inuvik, a small city not far from the Arctic Ocean. Those brave enough to conquer nature's harshest elements pushed their way up to Tuktoyaktuk, a tiny town built on stilts, nestled on the beaches of the frozen Arctic Ocean.

Teams then made their way back down to Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon Territory, and then switched gears to head west to Fairbanks, Alaska. After a few more days of TSD rallies and optional extreme controls, competitors finished in Anchorage—the day before the ceremonial start of the 48th annual Iditarod dog sled races.

COMEUP'S COMPETITION

Huang, who decided to participate as gift to himself for his 50 birthday, originally planned to drive a Mercedes G500 in the Alcan 5000



This page: Alcan 5000 traffic jam Dempster Highway; Canada's Arctic Circle Sign



Photo by Ben Huang

Rally. The week before rally, however, it had an electrical issue and couldn't be started. After discovering it could potentially take 2-3 weeks to fix the issue, he abandoned ship and decided to take FJ Cruiser.

However, Huang had never driven on ice roads nor completed any TSD rallies before. He wasn't sure what to expect. But, he saw it as a once-in-a-life experience. "As a Taiwanese, I probably don't have many chances to do it again," Huang said.

To him, the biggest challenge was driving on ice and snow-covered roads. As the primary driver, he had lean to overcome the fear of vehicle drifting when driving on ice roads—especially when it came to the TSDs.

Another challenge was driving in a snow storm. "In day two [during the evening] on the way to Fort Nelson, we hit a heavy snow storm and couldn't see anything. It just like white wall in front of car. We got to drive it very slow and make sure to keep the car inside the lane."

Many competitors, including my husband, Andy and myself as Team Crankshaft Culture, were also challenged by severe weather during the Alcan 5000 Rally. White-outs, driving snow, drifts that could span several feet long by a few feet high, and slick surfaces made for already

long days nearly unbearable. My team gauged from 13-16 hours of seat time every day—10 days straight. You were lucky to get a meal and a beer at the end of a day.

After a few decades that rally owner Jerry Hines has been traveling the Alaska, Dempster, Dalton and other highways, he's never seen conditions so bad. "The 2020 Alcan was our 25th Alcan 5000 since 1984, and the 11th Alcan 5000 Winter Rally," he said. "Most events since 1985 have included the Dempster Highway but 2020 was unique: It was our most difficult drive northbound in 35 years, but the best conditions & weather in memory driving 500 miles south just two days later."

A multitude of teams ended up in the ditch (4x4s, AWDs, and front-wheel-drives included), some teams more than once. Crushed body panels, cracked windshields, and missing fog lights, as well as a severe oil leak and other casualties were reported. A variety of causes led to kissing ditches, but thankfully, no one was hurt. Vehicles can be replaced but people cannot.

"On the way to Dawson city, we accidentally caught an ice patch and spun the truck to opposite roadside snow pile," Huang exclaimed. "Luckily there were no other vehicles in both directions. In the end, the sweeps team



pulled us out of snow pile." The ATs on there now got them to the finish line safely but he said next time he'd prefer rubber with studs.

Although there was a plethora of damage or issues with other rally rigs, Huang's trusty FJ only had a long crack in the windshield. It was quickly replaced once they got back. "It is a very reliable truck and never gives me any trouble. Even in -30F temperature conditions in Tuk, we still can ignite the truck without any problem," Huang said with a smile.

When asked if he'd rally the winter Alcan 5000 Rally again he said no, but he wants to explore the Alcan 5000 Rally in the summer (he'd rally it with his wife and their Subaru Outback). The rallies are held like the Olympics, winter then two years for the summer rally, then another two years for the winter one, etc.

**This page: An Arctic grader, a lifeline;
Old Yukon border sign**

EVENTS



Photo by Ben Huang



"I was planning a road trip from Vladivostok to Moscow with my partner in Russia, but now due to the virus outbreak I will postpone this plan," Huang said. As with all of us, the world has changed and we can't wait to get back out there. *TCT*

BUILD LIST:

Front bumper: Expedition One

Rear bumper and tire carrier: Metal-Tech 4x4

Winch: ComeUp Seal Gen2 9.5rsi

Front suspension: Icon Vehicle Dynamic

Rear suspension: ARB OME

Tire: BF Goodrich AT KO2

Fog light: PIAA

ABOUT COMEUP:

ComeUp originally based and founded in 1975 in Taipei, Taiwan under the name Chuan Phang Ent. Co. specialized in producing a wide range of industrial electric winches. ComeUp showcases award winning winch products.

In 2004, to enlarge worldwide product distribution, the company changed its name to COMEUP Industries Inc. and has expanded products in the following categories: Automotive, Powersports, Industrial, and AC Winch.

In 2012 COMEUP expanded to the United States and set up a branch office to develop the American market. Their US headquarters is located in Clackamas, Oregon.

Currently, COMEUP winches have been distributed in more than 60 countries on five continents. COMEUP offers consumers worldwide reliable, high performance products, and is one of the world's most recognized names for the "ultimate winch solution".

ComeUp is proud to offer a variety of premium winches for the offroad market. Whether you need a winch for weekend warrior adventures or you're facing extreme conditions of the Arctic or the anywhere beyond, COMEUP winches will reliably get you unstuck.

Stay tuned, two new ComeUp competition winches will be on the market soon: Blazer M2 & Blazer M3.

This page: Snow-encrusted Arctic trees; Wildlife was abundant



Welcome to

TUKTOYAKTUK

LAND OF THE PINGOS



Punakha Dzong, Bhutan

Land of Thunder

Last fall, my fiancé, Karen, and I traveled to a country I have been wanting to visit for a dozen years. The Himalayan country that proudly measures the Gross National Happiness, instead of the Gross National Product. It is the land of 24,000-foot high mountains, many beautiful old forts, called Dzongs, and the friendliest people I have ever met in all of my world travels. Bhutan is the name of this kingdom. It calls itself the “Land of the Thunder Dragon”. This scenic country is located between Tibet (China) to the north, and India to the south. Nepal is nearby to the west. We spent 11 days there, and although we never got higher than 13,000 feet, it is the most mountainous country I have encountered. Bhutan has a population of 755,000 people and is the size of Connecticut and Massachusetts combined, thus it is sparsely populated.

While touring Bhutan, I never encountered poverty-stricken populations. I think most people are comfortably middle class, or live happily on their small farms. The number one export of Bhutan is the electricity, which they produce from the numerous mountain rivers flowing from the many snowy peaks. Most of the people under 40 speak English. They are a Buddhist nation with a deep-rooted culture of always being kind and considerate to others.



Our driver, Tshewang, and guide Jigme, with Prado Land Cruiser

I saw a plethora of older and current Land Cruisers throughout my stay in Bhutan.

Bhutanese also have something in common with the readers of this magazine. Yes, they love Toyota off-road capable vehicles. I saw a plethora of older and current Land Cruisers throughout my stay in Bhutan. The travel guide company I used, Druk Asia, offers the Toyota Prado Land Cruisers for exploration. We had a guide, named Jigme, and a driver named Tshewang, dedicated to our entire stay. Why would I want a Land Cruiser? I have been driving my FJ60 "Precious" for 35 years. I take her to Utah every year to places like the Maze, the Needles, Lockhart Basin, and the Hole in the Rock Trail. I love Land Cruisers, and other Toyota off-road vehicles because of their reliability and capability. The road from Thimphu, the Capital of Bhutan, to our ultimate destination, the Bumthang Valley, is almost 200 miles of very tight twisty mountainous roads, each way, and half of those miles were on rough unpaved roads with harrowing drop-offs. I wanted to be in something I trusted.

Every day started with a breakfast most Americans would recognize. Then off we went in the Land Cruiser to go to our next destination. Along the way we visited beautiful old Dzongs, quaint villages, amazing temples, idyllic farms, and magical holy sites. The Dzongs were once 16th and 17th century forts, but most have been turned into either Buddhist temples, monasteries, or sometime as government offices. They are stunningly beautiful and meticulously well preserved. Our guide took us on hikes in the beautiful countryside. Children would run after us, laughing, smiling and saying "hello." Lunch and dinner were more local fare, which frankly



FJ70 Ambulance near Trongsa



Traveling on the Bumthang Highway

OVERLAND



Toyota Prado Land Cruiser
on the Bumthang Hwy

didn't offer a lot of variety, but offered enough nutritious vegetables and meat to keep us satisfied. Everything was clean and in order. All the bathrooms we saw were not only fastidious, but fashionable.

When we finally got to rural Bumthang Valley on day four, we hiked from 8,000 feet up to 11,000 feet, had a hot picnic prepared by our guide, then returned to the valley floor where a camp was set up and waiting for us. We were offered the local lager, but better than that is the local whiskey, which I liked so much, we brought four bottles back with us. It's the best \$3.75 a quart whiskey I have ever had in my life! After another typical Bhutanese dinner of chicken curry, vegetable and yak milk soup, chiles with cheese, turnip leaves, dumplings, noodles, and the ubiquitous pink rice, we got a good night's sleep in our tent.

The highlight of our trip was a couple of days later: the trek to the Bumdra Mountain Camp outside of Paro, followed by a descent to the Tiger's Nest Monastery, Bhutans most famous



Young girl carrying her little
brother in Tang Valley

We were offered the local lager, but better than that is the local whiskey, which I liked so much, we brought four bottles back with us.

sight. It was a strenuous hike from 9,300 feet up to 12,700 feet. It took us all morning. Once we arrived, there were a lot of tents and camp chairs set up, like I imagine an African Safari outfitter would do. We were offered hot tea with yak butter as we sat back, relaxed and enjoyed the view. Our tent was a walk-in with a queen size cot and plenty of blankets and quilts. After regaining our ambition, we climbed the remaining 300 arduous feet up to 13,000 feet and hung prayer flags we had bought in Paro, with names of our loved ones inscribed on each. Prayer flags were everywhere in the mountains and the countryside, especially Bumdra Mountain, and we wanted to experience hanging them ourselves.

After sunset, we had a communal feast of the usual suspects of culinary delights offered to us seemingly every other night. But we were hungry, so it tasted good. We enjoyed a night of interesting conversation with our hosts, our guide, and some fellow trekkers. When we turned in for the night, we were each given hot water bottles to help fend off the mountain air that was quickly falling to below 40 degrees. We slept well thanks to the physical exertion earlier that morning and the Bhutanese Grain Whiskey.

The next morning, Jigme, our guide was a little hungover, but it was all downhill from there... literally, not figuratively. We hiked down, down, down, to the Tiger's Nest. Most people hike up to it from the Tiger's Nest parking lot. But our climb was behind us. The Tiger's Nest was beautiful. We toured the entire monastery. By the time we got all the way down to our waiting Land Cruiser, we were more tired than the climb up the day before. Probably because we were never afforded a day to recover. The next day, we said goodbye to Jigme and our driver Tshewang, and flew to Katmandu, Nepal for the rest of our Himalayan adventure. They both did a great job, and never failed to stop the Land Cruiser and let me take a picture.

To end my story, I would like to expound



Buddhist monks having lunch near Gangtey



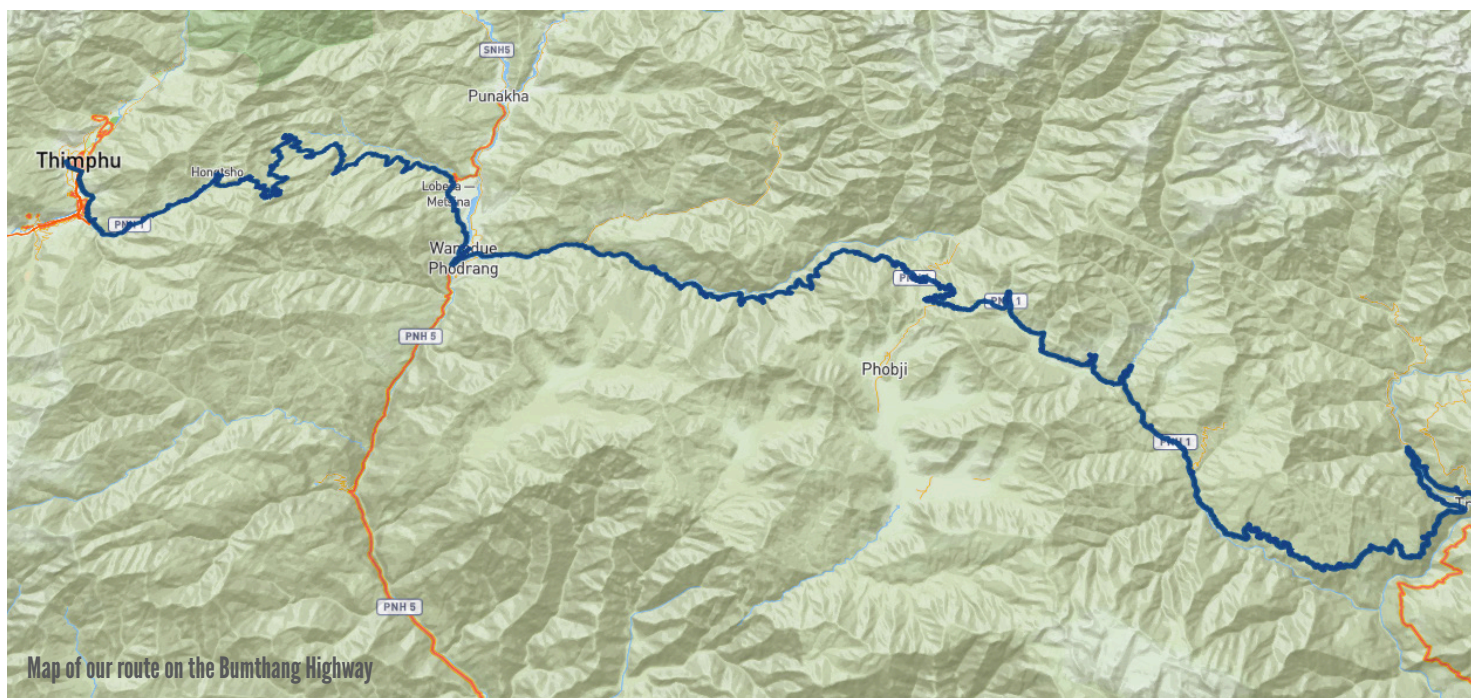
This man bought this FJ62 from the Royal Family 16 years ago



The author and Karen at the Tiger's Nest Monastery



Police EJ70 in Jakar



Map of our route on the Bumthang Highway

on the very capable Land Cruiser Prado that ferried us across Bhutan's rough mountain road on this trip. The Land Cruiser Prado our agency provided us with is the same body and engine as the Lexus GX, but with two differences: it has a ladder frame and it has a lot less luxury than either a Lexus GX or any Land Cruiser sold new in the U.S. the past 22 years. It is also half the price. It has a gasoline fed V8, two speed transfer cases, and as many as six speeds in either automatic or manual transmissions. Unlike the U.S. spec 200 Series, the Prado does not have a lot of expensive technology. There is no Crawl Control, Multi Terrain Monitor, Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System, Torsion Limited Slip Differential, Multi Terrain Select or Off-road Turn Assist. I doubt you can even get heated seats and memory seating! ARB does offer one of their lockers that can be installed in this Prado version of the Land Cruiser. As I noted earlier, I have been driving my FJ60 for 35 years and I take it to Utah every year. I love my "Precious" truck (her name), but sometimes I wish I could get a new Land Cruiser that had 400k less miles than mine, plenty of room like mine, and yes, a fuel injected V8 engine. I would like a U.S. Land Cruiser without all of the expensive fancy luxury and technical gizmos. Sadly, the Prado is offered just about everywhere BUT North America. Toyota... are you listening? *ter*



The author stops yet another FJ60 owner



Bumthang Valley with Buddhist Chortens in the background

Dometic PLB40 Battery System Long-Term Review

The Dometic PLB40 battery system is a box full of ease, peace of mind, and convenience, representing Dometic's motto: "Mobile Living Made Easy."

We've been using the **PLB40** now for 11 months. Its a plug-n-play, set and forget device. We've charged it from 120VAC, 12VDC, and unregulated solar (using a built-in PWM DC-DC charger). We've powered the Dometic

CFX75DZW fridge/freezer, ARB 45 quart fridge freezer, WeBoost Drive Reach cell booster, LED camp lighting, and countless cell phones. We've used it in two Land Cruisers, a cabin, and a tent.

The PLB40 is a 40 amp-hour lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO4) portable 12VDC power source. Outputs are a 12VDC 2-pin threaded connection specially designed for mobile refrigeration units (Dometic, ARB, and others), a standard 12VDC "cigarette lighter" outlet, and two USB ports (2.4A each, 4.2A total). Input accepts eight 25VDC and 120VAC via an included charger. You can power devices while the PLB40 is charging.

PRO tip: Dometic (and other brands such as ARB) made the 2-pin threaded 12VDC plug specifically for powered coolers. The 2-pin is built within the supplied 12VDC plug. Twist off the bottom portion to reveal the 2-pin plug. The 2-pin is threaded, won't back out, and assures a positive connection. If you currently use a standard cigarette type outlet for your fridge, get the dedicated Dometic or ARB 2-pin outlet. Whether or not you have a fridge with connection issues, use the 2-pin. This is why the PLB40 has the dedicated 2-pin outlet. It works better!

Sophisticated electronics make PLB40 operation plug-n-play (Said in a more complicated way by Dometic: "The battery's integrated Battery Management System protects the PLB40 from under-voltage, over-voltage, short circuiting and overheating for optimum charge time, performance and storage. With this power management system, the Dometic PLB40 has a cycle of life up to four times longer than more commonly used lithium ion batteries.")

Does it replace a dual battery system? In many ways, yes. In others, it exceeds the capabilities of a dual-battery install.

If you want to run your fridge in a second vehicle, outside your vehicle at camp, your pop-up camper trailer, backyard, rooftop tent, or cabin, you can put your power where you need it. A convenient carry handle and 16 lb weight makes the PLB40 easy to move.

The PLB40 electronics work with your fridge's voltage sensing electronics. While designed around the Dometic mobile coolers, it should work just fine with any brands.



The lithium iron phosphate (LiFePO₄) battery provides the voltage these units need.

In 18 years of owning my 1993 FZJ80 Land Cruiser I've never had an auxiliary/dual battery. I have instead run both standard sized Optima red tops, and, since 2009, a Group 31 size Deka Intimidator absorbed-glass-mat ("AGM"). Only once, running the stereo all day while parked, did I not have enough juice to start, but on several occasions the voltage protection built into the fridge turned off the cooling to protect my starter battery. Then I'd have to run the engine a while to charge the battery.

To keep the fridge running overnight, power a few LED lights, and charge a device, the PLB40 shines. You avoid the expense and complexity of hardwiring a second battery system. As newer vehicle electronics become more sensitive, care must be taken when wiring into electronics. As many newer vehicles already come with an accessory 12V plug in the cargo area that is only on when the ignition is on, you already have the perfect way to charge the PLB40 by day as you drive and operate your fridge when you shut the engine. On my 2006 Land Cruiser I simply plug the PLB40 into the rear accessory outlet and my fridge into the PLB40. At all times the fridge receives power from the PLB40 and the PLB40 charges when I drive.

Dometic sells an [auxiliary wiring kit](#) allowing you to add two 15 amp fused outlets anywhere you want. Install your own ignition-switched relay at the vehicle battery, the outlets in your cargo area, and you have a system that charges when you drive and is disconnected when you park.

What does a dual-battery system do that the PLB40 cannot? It won't help power your winch. But do you need that? Can you jumpstart off the PLB40, no. Dometic says: "It is not allowed to use the battery pack as a starter battery for a vehicle." Anyway, most of us already have a small portable jump pack. Can you trickle-charge a low battery off a PLB40? A comment from Dometic on its website says: "We just wanted to clarify that the PLB40 is not meant to jump start your vehicle, but it could trickle charge your vehicle battery in case of emergency." Output is limited to 15 amps. As a last resort if I was stuck I'd sure try to transfer some juice to my vehicle battery! I'm sure I'd disconnect before trying to start.

Overall, the PLB40 is a great tool for the job. *TCT*





The Roofnest Falcon fully deployed.

Sleek, Stylish, Sexy. Functional?

A Look at the Roofnest Falcon Tent

Oh, times are changing. I remember a few years ago when I was camping in my roof top tent in the backcountry of Colorado. A gentleman walked past my campsite, and his curiosity took over.

"What's that? Is that a tent?" He asked.

"Yes, it's a roof top tent." I answered. For the next 15 or so minutes, I explained where I purchased it, why I liked it, and how a tent came to sit atop my vehicle. Times have changed. Roof top tents are no longer rare. Rather, they are a staple in the overlanding world. Lucky for us, many roof top tent options now exist.

"Dad, is this it?" My daughter, Lilly, questioned.

"Ahhhhh, I think so," I replied in a tentative tone. We were perched on a mountaintop in Utah and had found a lovely place to call home for the night. Two latches later and a push, the Roofnest Falcon was ready. Both Lilly and I were dumbstruck.

"Yeah, that's it Lilly." I assured her.

"Oh, wait dad, there are two poles up here."

I quickly grabbed the poles and attached the rain fly to them. Done. Two minutes tops. For years, I have used soft-shell roof top tents but this was my first hard-shell version. Lacking prior experience, I was immediately impressed. Yep, the Roofnest Falcon captured my attention.

Want fast? Want easy? The hard-shell tents are renowned for quick deployment and closure. Hard shell roof top tents are generally simpler to set up but smaller in terms of bed size. The top of the hard-shell is essentially the cover. Many of the hard-shell models are made from plastic or fiberglass. However, the Roofnest Falcon is built from honeycomb aluminum. The tent weighs approximately 140 lbs., so it is not a feather atop your vehicle, but it is comparable to other roof top tent models in terms of weight. One major advantage to the Falcon is that it's only six and half inches tall, which means the tent is more aerodynamic as it travels down the road.

A major disadvantage to hard shell tents is that they cover your entire roof. Your roof rack or bars can no longer carry other goodies such as chairs and miscellaneous gear. Roofnest recognized this and designed the Falcon to accommodate other gear.

The Falcon has the ability to mount crossbars, which allows equipment to be carried above the actual tent. Once mounted, gear can be secured to the crossbars. Another unique attribute is that cover and bottom of the tent feature integrated slots. Mount an awning? Done. Mount a shovel? Done. The Roofnest Falcon becomes the roof rack!

Then, at camp, I found the tent to be quick to set up. Two stainless steel latches are opened, and then with a push, the gas struts hoist the top of the tent skyward. Think of a clamshell popping open. Done. It's truly that simple. There are two poles to prop open the back window and screen if desired. Many times, I simply rolled up the cover and used the affixed closure straps. Inside, an almost 3-inch thick mattress (2.75 inches) sat atop a lattice, moisture wicking mesh pad. The mattress is supportive and didn't bother me as I slept on my side. There are two sizes to the Falcon—the 50-inch wide (Falcon) and the 60-



Release the 2 latches, give the tent an upward shove, and the gas shocks will complete the deployment.



Plenty of headroom allows the occupant to sit. Roofnest offers crossbars, which attach to the top part of the tent for cargo storage.



Fully collapsed, the tent presents a low profile.

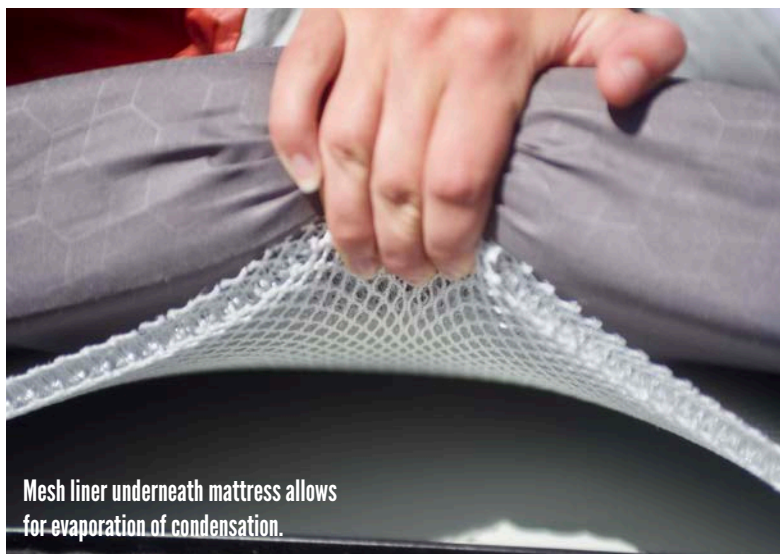
REVIEW

inch (XL). Lilly and I slept nicely on the mattress that measured roughly 48-inches in width. This is definitely a two-person tent. Also, make sure you like your bedmate. The XL version is 10-inches wider so a small child should be able to sleep with two adults.

"Dad, can I store my pullover in here?" Lilly pointed to the mesh netting on the roof. It's a great place to secure light items and not lose them within the sheets and bedding. The inside offered enormous headroom at the high point of the "clam shell." There are three windows/doors in the Falcon. You can access the inside from either of the two sides or from the rear of the tent. Stainless steel ladder mounts are easily maneuvered to allow the ladder to be deployed in a variety of ways. The one drawback to the windows/doors/screens is that they open from the top and therefore, the window/door/screen lay flat at the bottom. Lilly and I had to be mindful not to damage or tear the screen as we got in and out of the tent. Overall, the Roofnest Falcon proved cozy, comfortable, and functional.

One of the joys to overlanding is the journey to a new adventure, campsite, or vista. I do not want to spend time packing up a tent, sleeping pads, and gear. When adventure calls, the Falcon allows for a quick pack up. Lilly timed me. The poles were taken down and the tent closed in roughly 45 seconds. Okay, round up to a minute. Seriously, it is that quick. I stared at the tent dumbfounded and sure that I forgotten to do something. Nope. It's that functional. A bungee cord wrapped around the entire tent and sucked in the tent's fabric as I closed it. With the tent closed, I made sure the fabric was inside the rubber weather seal and latched the top with the two stainless steel latches. Boom! Done.

Motoring to our next campsite, the Falcon did generate some noise. Yes, I did hear noise but nothing that impeded conversation or listening to music as we traveled the mountain roads of Utah. Obviously, anything atop one's rack will generate noise; but overall, I was pleased with the noise level. As we eyed our next campsite in the Wasatch Mountains, the sun began to set in the western sky. Camping and overland equipment has made great strides in the last few years. We all are the benefactors. The Roofnest Falcon is an excellent example. *TCT*



Mesh liner underneath mattress allows for evaporation of condensation.



RESOURCE:

WWW.ROOFNEST.COM

PROS:

- The ease and speed of setting up and taking down
- Solid, quality construction
- Stylish—it simply looks good atop the vehicle
- Crossbars allow gear to be carried, making the tent multi-functional
- Integrated slots allow for mounting equipment
- Mesh liner underneath mattress allows for evaporation of condensation

CONS:

- Price is a consideration; Falcon retails for \$3400, while the Falcon XL is \$3500
- Ladder can't be stored inside tent
- Limited amount of bedding can be stored inside
- Such weight on top of your vehicle changes its handling

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Our outdoor enthusiast world during the time of COVID-19

Like many of you, I was planning to attend many off road and overlanding related events this year but COVID-19, also known as coronavirus, put an end to most of those adventures. One by one, I watched in painfully slow motion as each event sent their cancellation notices. I kept my fingers crossed that the next event would make it through and I could continue with my regularly scheduled event life. I could see my friends from other cities, states, even countries, as I learned about new products, new companies, and catch up on adventures had the previous year.

Unfortunately, coronavirus had other plans.

I usually get a little cabin fever which normally kicks in during the winter months. I'm not a winter wheeler, so that time is usually spent getting my FJ Cruiser ready when the wheeling season does begin. For me, my off-road season is typically kicked off by the Colorado FJ Cruiser Meet and Greet, usually towards the middle to end of April. This year though, coronavirus quickly put its crusty little contaminated spikes into that event as well.

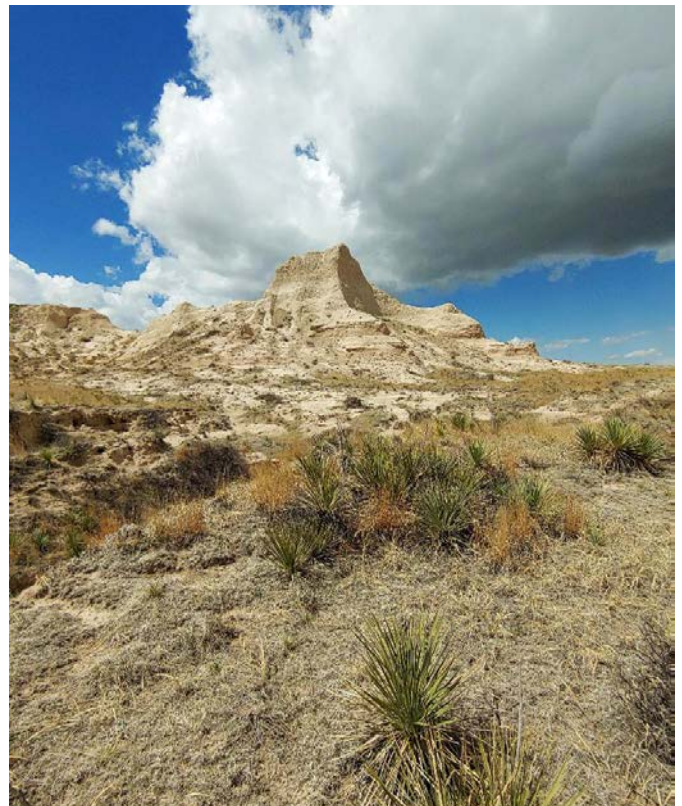
The coronavirus may have ended my events for most of the year, but it didn't end the adventures I could do, or at least, get away with. After almost two months working non-stop at home, cabin fever was hitting my family—mostly me—pretty hard. I was tired of my options being my house or the grocery store. Since the mountain towns were closed and most of the trails were as well, I decided the family—me, my husband, and three teenagers (two almost fully grown)—would go on a long drive as far as we could north to the Pawnee National Grasslands near the Wyoming border. All five of us crammed in the FJ Cruiser, brought a lunch, hiked around the Pawnee Buttes, with our now normal masks, and kept our “social distance”. It rained on and off, but the fresh air, the rain and stormy sky, and the vastness of the prairie and beautiful scenery did wonders for our cabin-fevered souls. On other days, I would just jump in the FJ and drive east into the prairie, just to feel the dirt road again and feel the sensation of “space”.

I'm sure many enthusiasts found other creative outlets and ways to adventure once their calendars became open. As restrictions have lifted, I have taken advantage

of doing smaller trips and more of them. I'm taking this time to check out places near and far as well as new challenges for myself.

Along with not attending events, I worry about the events themselves—the operators and the companies that rely on these events to share their products, knowledge, and trainings, to connect with customers both old and new. It's tough when you look forward to these annual gatherings of like-minded people, but now have to patiently wait another year. We can at least gather our new adventures that took place instead this year, share them with our fellow enthusiasts next year, and possibly find a positive from this unique, shared experience.

The outdoor community is a creative one and the year may speed by as you are out exploring with your now open calendar. Next year will be here sooner than we know. *TCT*





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» tctmag.us/myrig or tag [#thetoyotamag](#) on social.



BOUNDLESS ADVENTURE

Stock 2019 TRD Off Road
From Dominic P.

GRAND TETONS NATIONAL PARK

From TEARON_F



OFF-ROAD IN NEVADA

From Mariah I