



Trail Tales



May 1, 2026

Official Newsletter
of the
New Mexico 4-Wheelers

www.nm4w.org

A Journey Through Hidden History and a Night We Won't Forget By Frank Whiston



NINE RIGS FROM THE NEW MEXICO 4-WHEELERS RECENTLY SET OUT ON A TWO-DAY OVERLAND JOURNEY THROUGH the remote backcountry south of Magdalena, tracing a route where three centuries of history are written directly into the land. From Spanish travel corridors and mining camps to sheep empires and frontier ranches, this trip reminded us that some of New Mexico's best trails are also its most meaningful. But while the history made the trip memorable... the weather made it unforgettable.

Day One: Trails End and the Road into the Past

Our adventure began in Magdalena, once known as "Trails End," the terminus of the historic Magdalena Stock Driveway. Beginning in 1885, cattle and sheep were trailed as far as 120 miles across open range to reach the railhead here, where they were shipped to markets across the country. At its peak, more than 150,000 sheep and 20,000 cattle

passed through town in a single year, filling the valley with dust, noise, and the energy of the frontier economy.

Looking southwest, Magdalena Peak stood watch over the valley, home to the famous “Lady on the Mountain,” a natural rock formation whose profile has been recognized by travelers since the 1500s. According to tradition, Spanish explorers believed the formation resembled a St. Mary Magdalene, likely influencing the town’s name and becoming one of the region’s enduring landmarks.

Continuing south along NM 107, the group passed near the ghost town of Rosedale, once a small but productive gold mining community founded in 1882 after a discovery by prospector Jack Richardson. At its peak, the town supported several hundred residents before a 1916 fire destroyed the stamp mill and filled the mine shafts with toxic gas, effectively ending large-scale operations and leaving Rosedale to slowly fade into history. Turning onto Forest Road 86, the route followed what is believed to be part of a secondary corridor tied to El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro. While the main Royal Road followed the Rio Grande Valley, Spanish scouts, traders, and settlers often used mountain routes like this one for shade, water, and strategic advantage. Today, these same corridors form the foundation of many of the backcountry roads we enjoy exploring.

Passing Bell Hill, the group traveled through country once associated with Solomon Luna, known as the “Sheep King of New Mexico,” who managed vast grazing operations across the region in the late 1800s and early 1900s. His livestock empire helped shape Magdalena into one of the most important livestock shipping points in the Southwest.

By late afternoon, the group reached Luna Park Campground near the historic V Cross P Ranch, a remote mountain operation where cowboys continued living a frontier lifestyle well into the early 20th century. Stories from the ranch describe isolated camps, long rides across rugged country, and a way of life that changed little from the late 1800s through the 1920s.

That evening, NM4W members gathered around the campfire beneath clear skies, sharing stories in a place that has hosted centuries of travelers—from Piro hunters and Spanish explorers to miners, ranchers, and homesteaders.

Then, sometime in the night, the mountains reminded us who is really in charge. A powerful overnight front rolled across the San Mateos, bringing sudden high winds that shook camp for hours. Gusts ripped through the trees and rattled tents well into the early morning. The Serna’s tent suffered a broken pole in the sustained wind, sending its occupants scrambling to secure gear in the dark. It was a vivid reminder that even today, traveling in these mountains requires the same adaptability and resilience relied upon by those who came before us.

Day Two: Descent Through the Desert’s Storybook

Morning brought calm skies and renewed appreciation for hot coffee. Breaking camp, the group began descending toward the desert, following a route marked by place names that tell stories of survival in a harsh land.

At La Cuesta de Trujillo, the road traverses steep slopes long used by early Hispanic ranching families. The term “cuesta” refers to a steep grade, and climbs like this challenged wagons, pack trains, and early livestock drives moving through the region.

Further along, Red Rock Arroyo cut a vivid path through volcanic stone. Arroyos like this served as natural travel corridors for centuries, offering both passage and occasional water through otherwise rugged country.

The route then crossed what locals still call X Ranch Country, named for one of the historic ranching operations that depended on seasonal movement between mountain grass and lower winter range. In early New Mexico, brands often defined property boundaries more clearly than maps, and the iconic “X” brand became a lasting symbol of ranching heritage in the region.

Continuing north, the group passed Whiskey Hill and Lightning Ridge, landmarks whose names reflect the colorful and sometimes dangerous realities of frontier travel. Lightning Ridge in particular is known for intense monsoon storms that build quickly across exposed ridgelines.

At Los Pillares, tall rock formations rise like natural monuments, serving as navigation points for generations of travelers moving through the San Mateo backcountry. The final rugged stretch wound through Carbon Canyon, where prospectors once searched for coal and mineral deposits during the mining booms of the late 1800s. Eventually, the group emerged onto NM 1, standing on the original alignment of US 85 and the historic El Camino Real corridor itself — a route used by Native peoples, Spanish explorers, traders, soldiers, and travelers for centuries.

Why Trips Like This Matter

This journey highlighted something NM4W understands well: access to public lands is about more than recreation. It is about experiencing the living history of New Mexico firsthand.

Routes like this connect modern explorers to centuries of travel, trade, and survival. They remind us that responsible motorized access allows people to engage directly with landscapes that might otherwise be inaccessible.

And sometimes, they remind us to double-check our tent stakes.

From calm campfires to midnight windstorms, the Ghost Road of the San Mateos delivered exactly what backcountry travel promises: challenge, discovery, and stories worth sharing. We look forward to the next adventure.

Watch the Adventure

Experience the route, scenery, and camp firsthand:

The Ghost Road of the San Mateos – NM4W Overland Adventure

https://youtu.be/vd53eFhiESY?si=T_0U3ycMaBxa8l_1

How To Be A Good **Trip Leader**

Submitted by Mary Turpin

Adapted from an article written by Nina Barlow, Motor Trend Network, June 11, 2019

MOTORTREND



When people think about what is required to be a good trail leader, they often think of spotting skills; however, it's much more than that.

Trip leaders don't just know how to drive their own rigs through some tough terrain—they also help others drive their rigs through it. And, most importantly, they properly prepare for the trip in advance with information, comfort

concerns, and safety logistics to help the group enjoy the whole day from start to finish.

Good trail leading means starting with a plan.

Beyond the date and time you are inviting the group to meet, provide information about the intended route; itinerary; pace for the trip; weather forecasts along the route; whether the group needs to bring lunch on the trail; if there are bathroom facilities or the participants need to plan otherwise; and any other special considerations people should be prepared for, like permit or entrance fees; gas stops and fuel range expectations, and if pets and children are recommended or permitted in the areas you are visiting.



Although each driver is ultimately responsible for safely navigating the obstacles or choosing to turn around, **a good trail leader will provide some intel on the trail for people to make informed decisions in advance about whether this is an outing in which they would like to participate.** Because difficulty varies by experience, I usually provide measurable information like how tall the ledges are, how steep the hills are, or what I recommend their tire

height or armor needs are to safely navigate the pitfalls of the trail.

Good trail leading means providing a thorough safety briefing when you meet. Does everyone have fuel, water, and food? What is the general flow of the day? How will lunch and bathroom breaks be handled? How will the group communicate with each other on the trail? In every briefing, I also include Tread Lightly reminders and what we call the "Rubber Band Technique" for keeping everyone together—each driver simply watches out for the vehicle behind them to keep the group together.



Establishing and using clear hand signals for any spotters to use for obstacles or recovery situations is a must too. T-rex arms are useless—hold your arms way up or out to make signals as easy to see as possible. Make sure spotters are standing in a safe place where the driver can see them, and don't walk backward blindly while spotting (more people are injured out of the Jeep than in it). I also find it useful to discuss the plan for the wheel placement, and gear and throttle control, for the section with the



drivers before proceeding through the obstacle.

Good trail leading means having a plan for recovery and mechanical problems. Jeeps do get stuck and sometimes break. Are you or someone in the group willing and able to provide at least basic trail fixes? Do you keep the whole group together to wait for the fix, or does someone stay to help while the rest of the group continues? What if the break or stuck is beyond the skill level and equipment available? Do you know how and who to call?



Having a plan for medical emergencies is part of being a leader too. You should have or arrange for someone in the group to have at least basic first aid (if not wilderness medical) training. Do you carry a medical kit? If something happens that can't be addressed with basic first aid, do you know the closest hospital? Do you have ham radio, a satellite phone, or a personal locator beacon to call for emergency evacuation?



Remember to not get so caught up in the details that you forget to have fun; everyone wants to enjoy the trip. Keep things in perspective, provide accurate and thorough information in advance, be considerate of the needs of each individual in the group, and above all, be prepared.

For the original article, please visit:

<https://www.motortrend.com/news/1904-how-to-be-a-good-trail-leader>

Climbing the Caldera: Paliza Canyon Loop **By Frank Whiston**

When a colleague from the rolling hills of East Tennessee calls you up to say he's flying into Albuquerque and wants to see the "real" New Mexico from the seat of a Jeep, you don't just say yes—you start scouting. I didn't have a destination yet, but I had a name: **The Appalachian-to-Adobe Invitational.**

With the Tennessee guest of honor ready for some elevation, I waited for the weather gods to smile before settling on a classic: the **Paliza Canyon Loop**, topped off with a side quest to the **Cerro Pelado Lookout.**

My last attempt at this loop was back in 2019, but the Forest Service had other plans that day, shutting down FR266 for a controlled burn. Little did we know then that fire would remain the defining story of this area. In April 2022, the Cerro Pelado Fire—sparked by a reignited winter slash pile—tore through over 45,000 acres of the southern Jemez.

Rolling through the canyon today, the scars are a sobering reminder of nature's power. We passed through sections where the ponderosa pine and mixed conifer stood like blackened sentinels against the sky. The fire had burned with such intensity that it actually re-burned parts of the old 2011 Las Conchas footprint, leaving behind a landscape that is both haunting and beautiful in its resilience.

Fast forward through those years of closures and recovery, and the path was finally clear.



No smoke, no active fire lines—just the open trail and a front-row seat to the forest's slow process of starting over.

The loop officially kicked off on **FR266 (Bear Springs Road)**. We clawed our way out of Paliza Canyon and onto the southern ridge, gaining enough altitude to leave the valley floor behind. Where the road takes a turn south, we hooked a left onto **FR266NA**, which dropped us right back into the heart of the canyon.

Passing through a delightfully mangled, wide-open steel gate we followed **FR271** up the canyon floor until we hit junction **FR270B**. This was the highlight of the climb—a ridge run at nearly **9,000 feet**. The views through the pines were spectacular, offering that perfect mix of rugged terrain and high-desert vistas that makes New Mexican wheeling so unique. From the ridge, we dropped down to **FR270** and pointed the grills toward the **Cerro Pelado**



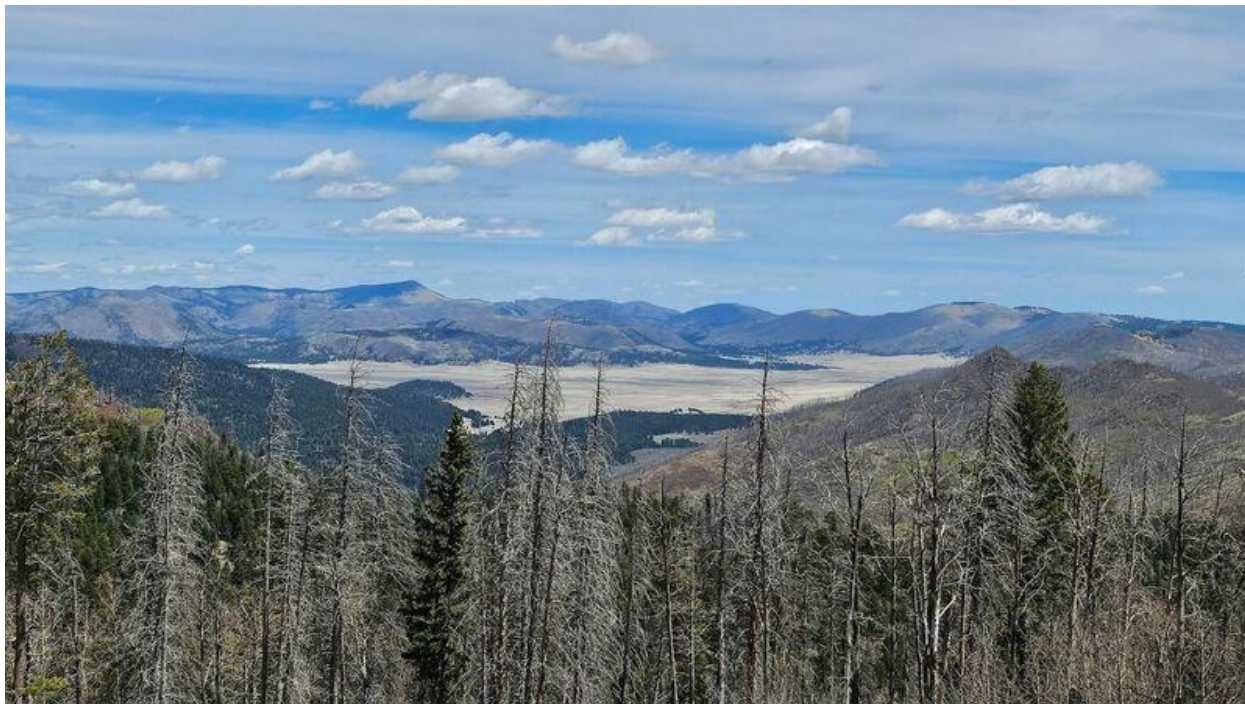
Frank and Ray (Tennessee Guest)

Lookout. We kept climbing until the altimeters hit a cool **10,000 feet**. While a locked gate stopped the Jeeps just short of the very top, the communication tower provided a perfect staging area for a high-altitude lunch.

A few of us decided the Jeep ride wasn't enough and took the short hike past the gate to the lookout tower. Standing at the base of the lookout tower, the "Adobe" half of our invitational name really came to life. From that 10,000-foot perch, the Jemez Mountains unfold in a spectacular display of geological

history. To the north, you can look right into the heart of the **Valles Caldera**, where the massive green expanse of the Valle Grande makes even the largest rigs look like specks of dust.

To the south and west, the world just seems to fall away. You can trace the jagged line of the **Sandia Mountains** rising above Albuquerque, and on a clear day like we had, the **Mount Taylor** volcanic neck sits prominently on the horizon like a distant monument. It's a perspective that puts the whole of Northern New Mexico into focus—from the scorched ridges recovering from the fire to the deep, lush canyons that survived it. For a guy used to the rolling, tree-covered ridges of the Appalachians, seeing 100 miles in every direction was the ultimate "Welcome to the West" moment.



The descent was smooth, mechanical-drama-free, and scenic. By **2:30 PM**, we were back at the air-up spot, swapping trail stories and dusting off the rigs.

The Appalachian-to-Adobe Invitational was a resounding success. We proved to our Eastern guest that while Tennessee has the greenery, New Mexico has the sheer, vertical scale that can take your breath away—literally.

See you on the next one!

 **Watch the Adventure**

Climbing the Caldera: NM4W Paliza Canyon Loop

<https://youtu.be/MmeVPp2jJ8Q?si=JGp1cAPnzG0yW-hZ>



Meeting Minutes

April 9, 2026

By Shirley Godfrey

President Jack Dickey called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.
The meeting was held at North Domingo Baca Multi-Generational Center.

MEMBERS ATTENDING: Jeff Boggs, Glenn Boudreaux, Janet Crosby, Mike Crosby, Cathy Dickey, Jack Dickey, Aimee Domines, Shirley Godfrey, Ed Kausche, Lyn Kausche, Leroy Lints, Allison Martinez, Cliff Meier, Jack Nutter, Oly Olson, Stefanie Olson, Lauri Rector, Jonathan Rivera, Don Roy, Andrew Schwebke, Carol Sheriff, John Sheriff, Richard Steele, Douglas Story II, Josh Tucker, Mary Turpin, Anthony Weaver, Frank Whiston, William Zobel

GUESTS ATTENDING: Gerald Bush, Jim Cutillo, Karen Gill, Robert Gill, Dale Leschnitzer, Ralph Lied-Lopez, Grant Mossman, Laura Perlichek, Amy Silver, Fred (Wally) Wallis

PRESIDENT – Jack Dickey

Jack thanked Allison Martinez and Anthony Weaver for hosting the meeting and bringing the wonderful, delicious, homemade snacks.

We still need hosts for the July and August meetings. These are held at someone's home and the date and time is up to the host.

Cathy will do the 50/50 at the end of the meeting.

Mary Turpin and Glenn Boudreaux received first time trail leader medallions.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT – VP Jonathan Rivera

Jonathan explained full memberships and associate memberships.

There were 5 guests at the meeting.

A motion was made and approved by a majority of members present without discussion to vote in the following as new members -

- Ralph Lied-Lopez, Albuquerque, voting (full) member
- Fred (Wally) Wallis, Edgewood, voting(full) member

Johanthan went over this past month's transgression fines.

Adding to the coffers this month –

Rich Steele – on the pre-run, the dirt road with a washout caused his Jeep to flip in the ditch

Bill Zobel – ran over a coffee cup

Glenn Boudreaux – accidently changed radio channels and went in the wrong directions from the others

John Sheriff – likes to add to the kitty

Leron Lintz – on the ride to Los Alamos, dropped his radio, missed turns and turned off his radio

Mary Turpin – front fender light dangling and ripped off fender flairs

The fines collected over the year is raffled off at the Christmas party.

SECRETARY'S REPORT - Shirley Godfrey

Meeting minutes can be read in the Newsletter. - A motion was made and approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Rich Steele

Current balances for checking, saving accounts, and Pay Pal were provided.

Prorated dues for a new member is \$20.00

Rich informed the insurance agent the Club is not interested at this time for insurance

A motion was made and seconded to approve the treasurer's report. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TRIP CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – Mary Turpin

Don Roy gave a little bit of trivia – there have been 225 people on the past 25 rides.

Trip leaders/ride attendees gave a brief rundown of their ride.

Past Events and Trips (9 since last meeting!)

- March 12, Rigs & Coffee, Lauri Rector – fun time just talking
- March 14 - 15, Two-Day Overland Adventure: Old Spanish Trail & X Ranch Loop, Frank Whiston – Frank provided a video with history and beautiful scenery
- March 14, Gordy's Hard Run - Hidden Valley/Yeehaw/Cat Scratch, Mary Turpin – changed the trails at the last minute and everyone enjoyed the new trails that were selected
- March 15, Diablo Canyon/Camino Real redux, Matt Martel - cancelled
- March 21, El Dado Stagecoach Station Ride - Exploring New Mexico History, Glenn, Boudreaux – there are areas that are still standing and dwellings that have fallen apart
- March 28, El Dado Stagecoach Station Ride #2 - Exploring New Mexico History, Glenn Boudreaux – part 2
- March 28, NMOHVA Annual Meeting, Ric Henry – no report
- March 28 – April 5, Easter Jeep Safari - Red Rock 4 Wheelers – there were Broncos, Tacos, and Jeeps
- March 29 - Mt Taylor Spring Scouting Trip, Snow Petersen – Doug Story II said there was a little snow

Upcoming Events and Trips

Six trips and events with several pending are on the calendar before our next meeting, refer to website for details. Contact trip leader if there are questions.

DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPORT - Bill Zobel

Santa Fe Forest Department opened all roads. The Tijeras trails are closed due to a rebuild of the area.

Program Chair Report – Cathy Dickey asked for \$950.00 for 10 hats and about 25 t-shirts.

HISTORIAN'S REPORT - Frank Whiston – They are trying for May 16th for the ribbon cutting ceremony at Gordy's. Everyone is doing a good job uploading pictures into the gallery.

WEBMASTER'S REPORT and NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S REPORT - Don Roy –

Notifications have been made for ride leaders.

OLD BUSINESS: Jack Dickey & Frank Whiston are scheduled to install two additional panels (color coded trail map with difficulty levels) for Gordy's kiosk, April 10th.

Mary Turpin said she still needs to get back with the Santa Fe National Forest Office regarding the Santa Fe Tank Trap project.

Election of Officers, president, secretary, and environmental affairs will be vacant. Nominations open at the May meeting and elections will be held at the July meeting.

The general and management liability insurance has been tabled and may be revisited at a future date.

NEW BUSINESS:

Jack Dickey – 4-Wheeler of the Year voting will be open on the website at the May meeting and the award will be presented at the June meeting.

There are now three Club members on the board of NMOHVA. Elected – Jack Dickey - vice president, Mary Turpin - at large, Frank Whiston - continues as media director (at large). Leland Sharp is the recreation resources director. Having these members from our Club will help NMOHVA learn more respect for the trails.

50/50 raffle \$65. Winner Ed Kausche, \$32.50

A motion was made to adjourn and seconded. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

Meeting adjourned at 7:43 pm.



Keep PUBLIC lands open to the PUBLIC

NM4W Officers and Staff

<p>President Jack Dickey pres@nm4w.org</p>	<p>Vice-President Membership Chair Jonathan Rivera vpres@nm4w.org</p>	<p>Secretary Shirley Godfrey sec@nm4w.org</p>
<p>Treasurer Rich Steele treas@nm4w.org</p>	<p>Program Chair Cathy Dickey prog@nm4w.org</p>	<p>Historian Frank Whiston hist@nm4w.org</p>
<p>Trip Chair Mary Turpin trips@nm4w.org</p>	<p>Environmental Affairs William Zobel envdir@nm4w.org</p>	<p>Membership Info Shirley Godfrey info@nm4w.org</p>
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