Trail Tales

New Mexico 4 Wheelers Since 1958

Official Newsletter
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My First (and Possibly Last) Chile Challenge

by Jonathan Rivera

Three years in the making (2024—spinal surgery; 2025—heater hose failure), I finally made it to Chile Challenge in 2026. I went in with high hopes, but alas, the event did not quite meet my elevated expectations.

Wednesday started off less than ideally, with our trail lead having trouble reconciling the drivers in the queue with his paper sign-up sheet. Not that we NM4W trail leads haven't experienced similar issues ourselves, but when that was compounded by "I didn't pre-run the trail," my uncertainty began to grow.

We departed only a few minutes late and headed south on NM-187 toward "Area 51," so named because it is located at Exit 51 on I-25. Once we hit the trail, it was a beautiful day for wheeling, with sunny blue skies, calm conditions, and only an occasional light breeze. The terrain was typical of the area—rocks and ruts, especially after the recent rains—and things were moving along swimmingly until we reached a point 5.0 miles into the ride, just short of the entrance to "Ol' Skool."

I watched several rigs tackle a small waterfall and picked my line, failing to account for the slippage that pushed me off course just enough to leave my belly—and my rig—centered on a rock. Fortunately, a light tug from the rig ahead of me was all it took to scrape my way over the obstacle. The remainder of the trail was considerably easier, and no one else encountered any issues.



We finished the trail by 2:00 p.m. and headed back to Riverside Campground for the afternoon and evening activities.

WLWJT cigar rating for Wednesday: **5 cigars.**

Thursday began much like Wednesday, although this time the trail lead announced, "We should be done with Narrows by noon." And we were.

The Narrows was exactly that—really narrow, winding through the terrain like a snake. It was a technically fun trail, with off-camber angles reaching 32 degrees, waterfalls, and boulders that challenged both drivers and rigs. Unfortunately, it was short, and the fun came to an abrupt end.

Afterward, five or six rigs peeled off, while the remaining five JLUs continued to “Backstage Pass,” a rated 7 trail that the lead assured us we “should all be fine” on. Maybe it was the lead’s melancholy tone that made me think the trail would be challenging and/or fun. Maybe my ignorance convinced me this was an excellent idea. Or maybe foolishness was in the driver’s seat. Regardless, the day continued.

It took the five rigs nearly four hours to complete the trail. Everyone encountered their own set of challenges, but I seemed to need the most assistance. I required two winches, and the sounds coming from underneath my rig were unlike anything I had heard before.

My sidestep/slider had shifted two inches forward and was barely hanging on to its brackets. My rear bumper had moved enough that I could no longer open the tailgate, making the remainder of Chile Challenge even more eventful. The driver-side taillight was hanging on by its wiring harness, and the reverse light no longer functioned.

We eventually made it back to camp, where I assessed the full extent of the battle scars. With emotions running high, I spent the remainder of the day helping NMOHVA serve ice cream and enjoying some amazing food-truck calories. The Food Dude makes an AMAZING green chile cheeseburger. Hopefully, you had a chance to partake!

WLWJT cigar rating for Thursday: **5 cigars** (2 for each trail and 1 at camp).



Friday was exciting from the moment I woke up because I knew I would be spending the day with a group of NM4W members, led by Peter Vollers, on “The Odyssey.”

From the beginning, the day was awesome. Peter was organized, held a driver’s meeting at the staging area, and got us to the trailhead quickly. Our scheduled departure was 8:00 a.m. By 8:03 a.m., we were across Caballo Dam, and by 8:10 a.m., we were airing down.

The Batman group appeared to be running late and cut in front of us as we began our trek toward the trail. Peter graciously allowed them to get back on track.

Peter had pre-run the trail and anticipated areas where vehicles might need assistance. As a result, he knew which lines to call out and had even built a few boulder ramps to keep the group moving forward. That said, there were still places where spotting was necessary, and a few rigs needed a tug after slipping while attempting their lines.

Our biggest time sink was an electronics issue experienced by the Servatts in their JLUR. The vehicle’s “big brother” computers stopped communicating, and the rig refused to go into Drive even though the gear selector indicated it was in that position. The computers apparently interpreted the vehicle as being in Park.

It took approximately 45 minutes to disconnect and remove the batteries to power-cycle the systems and clear the issue. No OBD-II tool could resolve the problem; cutting power was the solution.

Afterward, a few vehicles chose to leave at an easy junction and head back to camp, while the rest of us continued toward Palomas Gap and beyond. It was amazing to see the lake refilling with water, along with the wildlife, including deer and a fox. Some attendees were reminded of their healthy fear and respect for shelf roads as we made our way to the end of the ride.

We crossed the Rio Grande at 6:02 p.m., and everyone went their separate ways for the evening. I didn’t return to camp, although I heard the potluck and evening activities were a booming success. I needed rest, and rest I got!

WLWJT cigar rating for Friday: **7 cigars.**



Saturday began much like Wednesday and Thursday: muddled. The trail lead was riding as a passenger in another vehicle, and I never really learned why. If I recall correctly, there was some discussion about it over the radio later in the day, but I can't remember the details.

We headed out on NM-187 again, taking a shorter route this time toward farmland, where we aired down and encountered local farmers moving equipment, cattle, and supplies. Heading east, we passed under I-25 through a tight tunnel and emerged on the other side for a short stretch before reaching "Rattler."

We reached an arroyo with plenty of tire tracks, yet the lead wasn't sure which way to turn to find the entrance to Rattler. After making a U-turn, we found the trail and began climbing through a tight valley with plenty of opportunities for pinstriping.

We climbed over rocks and a waterfall, making our way to the apex, where most of the group gathered while waiting for the tail end to catch up. The descent was equally fun and exciting, with the same types of technical challenges, but the trail was short and fast. We completed the trail from start to finish in just over an hour.

After lunch and some socializing, we turned around and headed back. This time, however, we encountered some issues. Leroy got his belly hung up on a boulder and needed a winch, and there was plenty of spotting required. The most significant problem was a broken axle suffered by another attendee.

Despite these challenges, we completed Rattler in less than three hours, so the lead decided to continue. We eventually reached the same U-turn location from earlier in the day and continued down the arroyo—until a Jeep Commander on 33-inch tires found its rear differential centered on a rock.

We used a bottle jack to lift the axle and placed rocks beneath the tires so the vehicle could be winched back safely. Afterward, we continued through the arroyo for several miles before reaching "Lost Desert Access to Green Canyon."

Along the way, the lead checked on a cow that had been stuck in the mud for some time. We were informed that the inevitable was approaching and that the rancher would have to put her down.

We continued along "Green Canyon Dam Bypass," followed by "The Pit," eventually returning to "Area 51," where everyone gathered to say goodbye and air up.

WLWJT cigar rating for Saturday: **5 cigars.**

Overall Impressions

Having heard years of positive discussions about Chile Challenge as an off-roading event, I went into it expecting to be "wowed" by the execution and planning I had heard so much about. My options were somewhat limited to moderate trails because I was driving a four-door JLUR on 35-inch tires, but I still selected trails that others had spoken highly of: Scratch (5—Moderate), The Narrows (5+—Moderate), The Odyssey (5—Moderate), and Rattler (5—Moderate).



Having just returned from the Green River/Moab trip, perhaps my perception of trail ratings was skewed, and perhaps my expectations of trail leads were biased by what I have come to appreciate through NM4W.

Throughout much of the event, radio communication was limited, with trail leads rarely calling out obstacles or unexpected hazards ahead. At times, the willingness to provide spotting assistance also seemed minimal, and other attendees stepped up to fill the gap. The trails also had an excessive number of protruding limbs and bushes that contributed to pinstriping. I had expected some trail clearing, although perhaps comparing other clubs with NM4W—and what we do well in terms of pre-running and preparing trails—isn't entirely fair.

Overall, I believe the event could benefit from combining shorter trails into longer days so participants aren't left trying to fill the time they set aside to wheel in a different part of the state. I also believe some form of trail map, whether a paper version or a user-friendly digital alternative, would be beneficial.

If other first-time attendees from outside the state experienced even a small portion of my frustrations, it raises a fair question: **Will they return?**

As for me, the likelihood of attending Chile Challenge in 2027 is looking pretty slim, especially if another event is scheduled immediately beforehand.

New Trail for Chile Challenge: Manilla Thrilla

by Frank Whiston

On Thursday, October 15, a cadre of Chile Challenge enthusiasts set out to tackle one of the newest additions to the 2026 event's offerings: Manilla Thrilla. Spotted and scouted by NM4W member Peter Vollers, this particular trail offered up a mix of technical low-range crawling, high-desert terrain, and Southwestern history.



As our convoy stretched out on the trail, it was easy to imagine the countless souls who had traversed this land long before any of us were born. The rugged Caballo Mountains form a formidable rampart along the eastern boundary of the Rio Grande—their limestone folds and crevices once having been traversed by New World conquistadors on *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro*, the royal highway linking Mexico City with Santa Fe.

The range is rich with legend, lore, and hard-scrabble mining history. Stories abound of hidden gold mines and secret church treasures that have lured prospectors into the range for centuries—most notably the legendary Father LaRue lost mine. Beyond the myths, the late 19th and early 20th centuries brought a real-world prospecting boom. Miners pushed up these very arroyos with hand tools and dynamite, chasing veins of copper, lead, zinc, fluorspar, and placer gold. Old prospect pits, crumbling stone windbreaks, and forgotten claim markers still dot the ridges along the trail, serving as silent monuments to those early fortune seekers.

The geology was perfect for hiding, too. Apache warriors and road agents of yesteryear used the maze of narrow slot canyons, deep gullies, and vertical limestone caverns (including the namesake Manilla Thrilla cave system that our crawl shared) to elude their enemies and stash their gear.

Our day began by crossing the dam at Caballo Reservoir and airing down on the east side of the lake. Thanks to New Mexico State Parks, the dam is opened for an hour in the mornings during Chile Challenge, saving participants from having to make the long drive south just to cross the river.





Once aired down, Vollers guided our group high up near the base of the Manilla Thrilla and Bat caves. The views were spectacular: looking up at the cave openings in the sheer rock face to our east, and gazing down at Caballo Lake shimmering in the Rio Grande Valley to the west. From there, we zig-zagged our way north past Turtle Mountain, where the route dropped down to the river. We traversed a lush two-track lined with green grass that at times felt almost like a tunnel through the dense salt cedars.

As we climbed back away from the river, the trail wound through vegetated sand dunes—a section where Snow took full advantage, enjoying zooming her 4Runner through the berm-lined curves. We eventually paused for lunch near the base of the Palomas Gap Trail.
In the afternoon, we pushed further north across the Palomas drainage to tackle the formidable ledge climb that warrants the trail's Level 5 rating. Beyond the ledge, the two-track skirted deep washouts and presented some off-camber sections as we worked our way toward the final river crossing, which safely deposited us back on pavement in Truth or Consequences. Covering 33.17 miles over four hours of steady running and racking up 3,349 vertical feet of elevation gain, the run provided an unbeatable mix of technical obstacles and high-desert scenery. By the time we reached the pavement, few runs could compare with the feeling of freedom and discovery our group felt out on the trail.



A big thanks to course scout Peter Vollers for finding and sharing this incredible piece of history with us!

Bibo Bar Ride, or Not!!!

by Jeff Boggs

We met at Sky City Travel Center. Aired down and drove over to the start of FR 400, the back way up Mt Taylor. It has been raining in this part of the state, and we did not know what this trail would give us. Most of the day's rain was east of us, all day. This is a clue to future events.

Beautiful rocky low range climb, up towards the low hanging clouds. Steep and tight in places. Nobody mentioned DUSTY, all day!!

As we climbed, we entered the clouds and we drove through a "London FOG". The aspens were still turning yellow, too. Lunch was at an overlook, with sleet coming down.
We decided to drive out on Horace Mesa, since Snow knew how to get there. One thing about a mesa, it is generally flat. This turned a mixture of sand, clay and water into..... MUD!!!!

We did the slip and slide down off the mesa after a great view of Grants, down in the valley. After airing up on pavement, we started our drive to Bibo Bar for a burger.
BUT, Jeff and Paula's Jeep started making a loud clicking sound from the front drive shift. We all pulled over and determined this was not good. There was a small amount of fluid coming from the front seal on the transfer case. We decided to drive slow and try to get the Sky City Travel center and get a tow truck to take the wounded jeep back home. But we stopped when the noise got even louder and the rig was jerking. I told the group to go on to the Bibo Bar and get a burger, and we would call a tow truck and wait for that.
Off they went , but they came back a little while later and told us that the highway was closed because of flooding. Nobody was going home to Albuquerque, tonight. Off they went to Grants to get food and find a place to spend the night.

We found out that the tow truck got stopped, by I 40 being closed. So, Glenn and Rebagayle and us got a room in Grants and left the wounded Jeep along the side of the road.

Snow and Wolfie had some folks stay at their house. How nice!
Sunday, everyone could drive home and we got the tow truck to get our jeep back home, too. To the repair shop soon for a new front drive shaft and maybe some transfer case work. The Rio Puerco and San Jose rivers were way out of their normal banks. Two places on I 40 had been flooded the night before and there was still water all along next to the highway.

So, bring your toothbrush and meds, along with you if you do a day run, is the lesson we learned, because, who knows what will happen.
Thanks to everyone who came on the ride. Everyone helped with our Jeep problem. Thank you all. The off road portion was a blast, the pavement , not so much. And nobody got to the intended goal, A burger at the Bibo Bar. Next time we should do that first????? LOL!!!!!

Jeff Boggs, Trail Leader



Meeting Minutes – October 8,2026

by Jonathan Rivera for Sec Lauri Rector

Call to order by Mary T. at 6:32pm

Members: Bruce Allen, Steve Allen, Jeff Boggs, JP Bowdoin, Susan Bowdoin, Janet Crosby, Mike Crosby, Cathy Dickey, Jack Dickey, Doug Elkins, Shirley Godfrey, Jeffrey Lee, Allison Martinez, Stefanie Olson, Travis Rendell, Jonathan Rivera, Don Roy, John & Julia Servatt, Jason Soares, Richard Steele, Douglas Story II, Josh Tucker, Mary Turpin, Anthony Weaver, Frank Whiston, William Zobel
Guests: Steve Nakamura

President's report - Mary Turpin: Mary thanked Jonathan for hosting and bringing cookies, drinks, and green chile stew.

Treasurer's report: Richard Steele - Mary noted her agenda was out of the typical order and everyone suggested to continue in the agenda's order. Rich provided current balances of checking, savings, and PayPal accounts.

Rich discussed an error he caught in the meeting minutes for the August meeting where he discussed changing the FY, but that was not correct. He wanted to propose to change when the membership dues were open for payment – July 1 to August 31. A motion was made to have this edited; it was given a second, no discussion, and all the members

present approved by raising their hand or calling out “yea”. Don took the action to edit the August minutes.

A motion to approve the Treasurer’s report was made, it was given a second, no discussion, and the members present approved.

Vice President’s report: Jonathan Rivera - Jonathan reported there were 3 applicants since the August meeting. Two of those attended their first ride/event and moved to guest status. One guest was present and eligible to be vote into membership, a motion was made, a second was given, no discussion, and all the members present approved. Steve was reminded to “PAY YOUR DUES!” by the members present.

There were several five self-reported fines levied for transgressions on various events and trips. Fines were paid as people made to walk of shame and described their transgression.

SECRETARY’S REPORT: Jonathan Rivera for Lauri Rector - Jonathan indicated the August meeting minutes were published in the August newsletter. A motion was made, a second was given, no discussion, and all the members present approved.
Trip Report: JP Bowdoin – JP report on 10 events, 5 club rides, 1 external club event, 2 local meetup events, and 1 class led by Frank. 35 rigs and 31 members participating in events.

JP talked about the 4th of July ride where 2 new guests (older females) joined the club on their very first off-roading event. Everyone that attended the ride was impressed by these two women and encouraged them to continue toward membership. JP gave a forward overview of the events to come and encouraged members to continue to watch the calendar for events.

Jonathan spoke about the Green River/Moab trip where he spoke about the 16-hour day the group tackled after trying to squeeze in an extra trail or two. He spoke about how all the attendees pushed themselves beyond their previous comfort levels and learned more about their driving skills and rigs’ ability to tackle more challenging trails. He noted that not a single bypass was taken by any of the attendees and how each of them showed great growth in their off-roading. He is looking forward to next year’s ride.
Bruce A. and Anthony W. responded by stating they greatly appreciated Joanthan’s and Leroy Lint’s spotting, guidance, and encouragement through the trip.

Environmental report: Jack Dickey – Jack discussed how one of House Committee on National Resource has opened a hearing to large environmental groups to discuss how they have been using taxpayer funds to get reimbursed for attorney’s fees they have been incurring to fight against their specific causes. They have been asked to give written responses and appear before the committee.
Cathy D. discussed how pro-land groups such as Blue Ribbon Coalition fight against these special interest groups.

Program Chair: Cathy Dickey – Cathy stated the new t-shirts are still in printing, and they should be here for next meeting, thus why she had no new inventory and the current inventory is low.

Historian: Frank Whiston – Frank praised the club for all the pictures that have been uploaded and stressed how pictures of the people are a great reminder to the club.

NMOHVA is conducting an impact study and stressed to all to get the word out and complete the survey. Our neighboring states use to take to their respective legislatures to request funds, and NM has not done this. Mary reminded all that NMOHVA represents all off-highway vehicles, hunters, fisherman, hikers, and anyone that uses off the highway roads. ~200 surveys have been filled out and 1000's are the hope.

Webmaster & Newsletter Editor Report: Don Roy – nothing new to report. Working on a PayPal option still w/two options currently. Anthony W. has expressed interest in shadowing Don.

Old Business: Committee Report – adding FR 24NAA (Tank Trap) to Santa Fe MVUM. Jonathan reached out again to the Ranger with no response. Discussion of continuing to email the ranger and visit but also reaching out to the next level Ranger.

New Business: Frank discussed a NMOHVA conference call with one of Ledger-Fernandez's Staffer. Mentioned that office had reached out to environmental groups but not to groups such as NM4W.

Shadowing board members was discussed and Anthony's interest in webmaster was discussed. Bruce A. expressed interest in the Treasurer position. Don reminded the members he is not a board member.

Jeff S. asked about any resources on the website with regards to selling, information, guides or opinions about off-roading items. The one-liners were suggested by members and discussions about a Members Tab with either a forum or Reddit like area for this information. Frank mentioned a private Facebook group that was in existence and had been mothballed since no one used it. Bringing it back was suggested.

Concerns of public vs. private access and how would that information be available. It was discussed that only members can post and it be publicly available. Mary asked for a committee of 4-5 members to review and discuss. Don said he would set-up an online meeting for the committee volunteers sign-up and to attend.
Jonathan mentioned the link on the website to the company that can print the club flag was broken. Jeff S. said he recently noticed that but was able to navigate the site and order a flag.

Douglas S. II mentioned he recently drove the full length of Route 66.
Meeting room discussion was brought up by Don, saying he requested a larger room (classroom 5) but we were given the small, first story room, he said he would clarify with the Domingo Baca Staff.

50/50 Raffle: Grant Mossman took home $32.50

Motion to adjourn was made and approved for a 7:14pm end time



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