

Reasons To Do The Rubicon Trail

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Last August, 2008, I had the opportunity to be escorted down the Rubicon Trail with Tom Severin, of Badlands Offroad Adventures, Inc. (www.4x4training.com) This trip was one of the most valuable experiences in my life.

Most reports of trips down the Rubicon consist of little more than travelogues. They show you pictures of vehicles and obstacles but don't do much to give you any insight into lessons learned on the Rubicon.

Discussed below are some of the benefits of (lessons to be learned from) taking a trip down the Rubicon Trail.

Earn Bragging Rights

Everyone reads and hears about the Rubicon. This trail is one of the ultimate off-road destinations in the US. Frankly, this is an understatement. If you conquer the Rubicon, you have earned the right to brag to everyone about the trip. Interestingly, at the beginning of the trip, all of us bought t-shirts that stated "I conquered the Rubicon Trail". Everyone resisted wearing the t-shirt until after the trip was completed. The sense of accomplishment was extreme at the end of the trip.

Exercise Your Patience And Self Discipline

Intense concentration and focus were required throughout the whole trip. Extreme obstacles were presented over and over. The straight flat sections of road were short and infrequent. A loss of concentration and focus for just a few seconds could have disastrous effects. I was not paying close attention at one time. I bashed my drivers' side door pretty badly.

Patience was required to enable cars in front of you the necessary time to carefully negotiate frequent, very bad obstacles and to handle problems like broken axles. The pace could sometimes be maddeningly slow, so you had to calmly wait your turn. Impatience could easily result in your jamming through an obstacle and performing major damage to your vehicle, such as a broken axle.

Obtain A Sense Of Self Sufficiency

The trail is short and difficult. We took 4 days to travel the 12 miles. Several days were very long – as much as 10 hours of driving. At the end of each day, you camped in a campground. You had to setup camp, make dinner, and clean up, even though you were totally exhausted. Additionally, you had to plan for every supply and piece of equipment that you could anticipate needing. And, you had to pack your vehicle to get at everything you needed in an efficient manner. All through the trip you were having to evaluate

situations, decide the supplies that you needed, and find them where you had packed them into your vehicle. Just like a boy scout, you had to be prepared for any situation and deal with the situation quickly and effectively.

Improve Your Offroading Driving Skills

If you think you know how to drive off-road and you have never driven the Rubicon, think again. Every few feet you will encounter a new obstacle, most of which you have never seen or experienced before. An example might be a 6' rock face that is slippery at the bottom. You have to run at it, bounce off the skid plates, and commit to an aggressive attack on the obstacle. After 4 days of these extreme obstacles, your self confidence and your ability to conquer difficult obstacles will be significantly improved. Trails that you though were difficult before you did the Rubicon will feel like a walk in the park after you have conquered the Rubicon.

Learn Advanced Recovery Techniques

You will get stuck. You will have beads come off rims. You will have tie rods break. You will likely have an axle break. You will learn ways to overcome these kinds of difficulties. Reinflating a tire onto a bead will become second nature to you. You will acquire ways of thinking out of the box for solving difficult problems. One time I was stuck on a rock and couldn't be pulled or winched off in either direction. Tom and Bruce Bogart, one of our trail leaders, decided to jack up the front of my vehicle on a hi-lift jack – and then winch me off the jack and off the obstacle. This demonstrates the type of thinking out of the box that most people would typically not even think to consider.

Acquire Advanced Line Picking Skills

Picking lines is a skill that requires a great deal of experience in dealing with a wide range of obstacles. As you move through the Rubicon with a group, you will find that you get regular opportunities to pick lines through obstacles for other drivers. The obstacles are so frequent and often so difficult, that you will need a spotter for many of the obstacles. Be prepared to help one of your fellow drivers get through a difficult obstacle by pushing your own line picking skills to the limit and beyond.

View The Gorgeous Scenery

Throughout the trip, you are treated to some of the most beautiful scenery in California. The trail is up in the mountains just west of Lake Tahoe, CA. You are sometimes moving through deep pine forests. Other times you are driving across wide vistas of rock slabs with panoramic views of mountains and lakes. The sunrises and sunsets are just breathtaking. You can see for miles and miles.

Hang Out With The Group

Perhaps the best part of each day comes after the daily trail has been completed. You sit

around eating and talking about your common experiences through the day. You also talk about those odd things that happen to you that did not happen to anyone else. I recall the time that I was stuck between a tree and a huge rock hill. I had to get my vehicle up at the maximum camber angle on the rock and work around the tree inch by inch. Each time I moved an inch, my vehicle would threaten to roll over. I had to patiently wait for the vehicle to settle down before moving forward. And, then you get into comparing life experiences, philosophies, and telling some of the worst jokes.

Warnings

- Don't Do This Trail Alone

This trail requires help all along the way. You will get into situations where you need at least one other vehicle and sometimes multiple vehicles to help you out. Since you can't possibly have every possible piece of equipment and replacement part, going with a group significantly increases the likelihood that SOMEONE will have what you need to solve a problem.

- Have At Least 2 Persons In The Group Who've Done This Before

Picking lines is one of the most difficult aspects of traveling down the Rubicon. Some obstacles are just so difficult that you need to be guided through them by some one who has been shown the line before.

The person in the rear has the most responsibility for dealing with recovery issues. The person in the rear is in a position to see all of the vehicles and to radio to the front of the line and to other vehicles with warnings and suggestions. A person who has been down the Rubicon at least once will have a much better feel for the upcoming difficulties and will be in a better position to anticipate and suggest approaches to take.

Summary

If you do the Rubicon Trail once, you will likely want to do it over and over again. The experience of conquering the Rubicon Trail is one that will you will remember for a long time. And, you will simply become a much better off-road driver with the ability to conquer a much more difficult terrain.

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