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FEATURE

Review by Tom Severin, photos by Budd Stanley

SAFE Departures

Organize an end game for
your 4WD adventure



Last issue we reviewed the 10 qualities of a great trail leader. That article took us from the planning and preparation stages to the conclusion of a 4WD trip. This month's article discusses what you as a Trail Leader need to do once everyone has reached the departure point. Even though the ride is over, several additional steps are needed to bring that enjoyable event to a successful conclusion. This is riveting information if you are a trail guide!



Having a safe place out of traffic to air up is ideal.

1. Departure Point Selection

But before we arrive at the departure place, let's review the selection of the departure point and the time-of-day goal to end the trip.

Pick a safe place to allow the vehicles to be aired up, anti-sway bars to be reconnected and people to say goodbye. It should be near a major road home. The departure point need not be right when the dirt ends. Continue to lead the group until it is a simple matter to head home. A great location has a trash bins nearby. Everyone wants to unload their trash as soon as possible. Access to fuel is a plus after a long off-road trip. An ideal location has available flush toilets (or at least pit toilets). You need to identify the closest car wash for situations when it is imperative the mud comes off as soon as possible.

Can you have them back on pavement early enough to drive home that day? 2:30 or 3:00 pm is OK when the return trip is 200 – 300 km. It will be a late arrival for them but still gives a very full day on the trail. If it is the last day of a long holiday weekend, you can be sure most guests will be anxious about getting out ahead of the traffic. You should plan to have them on pavement by noon.

2. Get your guests back on the road

Your fellow four-wheelers will be eager to get going. But you need to ensure that each driver and vehicle is ready to go. Drivers

should inspect their vehicles to make sure they are road worthy. Visit each driver and ask, "Everything all right?" If anyone needs assistance, either lend a hand or ask others to help. If not obvious by their comments, make sure drivers are clear about the route home. Retrieve any gear or equipment (radios, shovels, etc.) you lent out.

You should always be the last to leave the departure area. You never want to leave anyone behind. Be especially patient with newer four-wheelers. They often take a little longer to get prepared.

This is a good time to collect the evaluation forms. Incidentally, those should be handed out just prior to arriving at the departure point. Stop about a half-mile out and distribute the forms. If you wait until the departure point, drivers will be too distracted and anxious to get going.

You could mail them later, but don't expect much of a response. It's better to approach the drivers while they're still on the trail.

3. Clean your 4WD vehicle and restock your equipment

This is an important step. Even though you're probably tired and eager to put your feet up, take time to properly deal with your vehicle, equipment and supplies. If you put it off for more than a day you will forget the issues you had with the vehicle



It helps if your end destination is near a car wash.

and supplies that were used up. Clean and restock any fluids or gear (including medical supplies, spare parts, and fire extinguisher) you used or that became damaged (such as recovery straps). Create a list of repairs and other action items during the trip or on the way home while it is still fresh in your mind. Make sure you put back all the essential

items, and that your vehicle is tidy and prepared for your next trip.

4. Update your notes, records

With the four-wheeling experience still fresh in your mind, update your trip notes, journal/log or other document. In fact, I recommend taking notes during the trip. Sometimes it's possible; other

times not. Record what worked and what could be improved upon. Refer to the evaluation forms for valuable insight.

In addition to your main journal, you should have an equipment list, emergency packet, tour narratives and other resources. Update and replenish as needed. Use mapping software to save your GPS tracks. Edit those files to remove any wayward turns you made. Once cleaned up, that information will be invaluable the next time.

If you had to get a permit to access the area, you may need to send a post-trip report to the appropriate agency. Note any issues or problems you encountered that officials could remedy such as broken signs, vandalized rest area, landslide and such.

Now that you're accumulating notes and related stuff, you need a filing system.

5. Set up a filing system

A filing system is really handy. Containing both electronic and paper documents, it helps you make sense of all the information you've collected and generated.

Store your maps, notes, checklists, brochures and other paper items to help with the next trip.

Think through your electronic storage, too. This contains navigation information, emergency number(s), handouts, tour narrative and other documents. Simply print out what you need next time. Take advantage of what you've learned to make your next trip more enjoyable.

Trail Leader duties don't end at the departure point. There are several more steps you need to take to wrap up that four-wheeling experience. Doing so ensures that your guests get on their way properly and that you're prepared for your next 4WD adventure.

Tom Severin, 4x4 Coach, teaches 4WD owners how to confidently and safely use their vehicles to the fullest extent in difficult terrain and adverse driving conditions. Visit www.4x4training.com to develop or improve your driving skill.