

Dirt Devils Trip Report Anza Borrego Blair Valley Cultural Preserve and The Slot

by Tim Thomas

Prior to our trail day, I headed out Friday with guest Jim Haley to Mike Friese's home in the Salton Seas area as a city known as Thermal, CA. Upon arriving, we saw Mike outside with Ed Terwilliger, Erick Paule, and Todd Holritz. The greetings were great as we set up a camp circle around the fire pit at what Mike calls his Catman Resort. As I continued setting up my camp, Kevin Williams arrived. I continued setting up and a fire was started by all. I continued setting up and everyone gave me some wonderful comments about how hard I was working. So I continued to set up. We all had dinner that we cooked or some traveled to a local Mexican Restaurant for some of their good food. Later we all came back together to gather around the camp fire for good conversations and to enjoy the heat over a beautiful, cold evening. As we enjoyed, we watched as someone pulled up with her jeep, dog, and camping trailer. This was Debbi Craddock, the last guest to camp with us. We helped with putting her trailer in position and then enjoyed some more of the evening before all of us finally went to sleep in our cozy quarters.

Saturday, February 21, 2026

The next day, we woke up to travel over to the Chevron gas station to meet the rest of those who were joining us on this wonderful day. I pulled up to see many topping off their tanks, using the 10-100 inside, and getting what they needed for today. Using my roster I made, I took attendance to make sure we had everyone here. After all signed in and completed forms, we gathered for the driver's meeting and then headed South down hwy 86 to hwy 78 East and then to the S2 south to the trailhead. With 18 vehicles on the road, it was quite the caravan of rigs and we had one more to pick up at the trailhead. Overall, this was a great representation of Jeep, Ford Bronco, and...TOYOTA!!!! Also big thanks to Mike Friese once again for providing some fun and quite interesting facts around the area of travel down the 78 and through Ocotillo Wells. You will have to ask this guy about more things in the area...very good stuff!

Those who joined us today were Mark and Darlene Chadwick, Doug Francisco, Jim Haley, Ed Terwilliger, Todd Horitz, Leonard Masters, Gerhardt Liebel and his family, Kevin Williams, Debi Craddock, Enrique and his son Danny Silva, Bill and Donna Schopper, Curry Curry, Tom Lorenz, Steve Saiana, Roger Taylor, Katy Nachbar, Tyler Davidson, Erick Paul, and at the trail head Mike Costigan. Ok...I think that is everyone and myself of course with my step-daughter, Alyssa.

I did miss the turn I planned to make for Blair Valley, but was fortunate to have Mike over the radio call out to me. Some of us followed me over to the campsite where we would end the trail that was a loop. Getting all on the trail, we stopped to allow some last moment staging, a 10-100, and whatever needed to happen. As we all found a pull of spot, some had to go ahead because space was more limited than I estimated. As we left, we all re-grouped back into the order we had. A big thanks to our tail and mid gunner leaders. Doug Francisco took the tail and Bill and Donna Schooper were mid gunner. Many other thanks to Kevin Williams, Steve Sariana, Mike Costigan, and Curry Curry for their willingness to take on the same roles and I am sure were on a great lookout as they all enjoyed the day too!

The trail is a very simple dirt road that is not necessary to air down unless you just really need the comfort. We all made our travels and just enjoyed the wonderful weather after a rain. Some of us have never seen the Anza Borrego area so green. The exotic cactus and plant life felt like a bloom was just getting ready to surface. Too bad, it was not this weekend and maybe too good it was not this weekend so we did not encounter any other large crowds other than ourselves, the Dirt Devils. Traveling into a very green and open valley that we saw some amazing camp sites, we decided to stop and get a group picture of all the rigs. Most walked around for the opportunity to explore and we all moved on. The only real problem of the day was Ed's Jeep Cherokee decided not to start until Erick and myself walked over to help. I guess that was enough of a threat to the rig and it started like any vehicle would normally operate. We then continued our drive to get eventually to the Indian Monteros and Pictographs hiking. I think about half came along to find a few and then headed back. We went the wrong way uphill on our return and then corrected. At least we were all lost together for a moment!

Soon after, we continued to the Marshal South Home where the plan was to go and see. Arriving, I remember that I have done this trail a number of years ago. As the plan was to have lunch there too, I had to say we need to pass on the hike. As simple as one mile is, the hike is all uphill and I remember it taking about 1.5 hours. Unfortunately just too much time in the day as the plan was to soon get over to the Slot Canyon. At lunch, everyone's mood were outstanding as all appreciated the day to be out on the trail. We soon packed up and headed out. Leaving the area, someone accidentilly had a radio keyed in. A good reminder to be careful resting the handhelds on a coaster or other place. No big deal and an easy problem to correct. Getting back on the road again, we headed to the Slot Canyon. A few other rigs called in for their day to rest as they needed and to take advantage of the opportunity to head to Julian for some good Apple Pie!

This was back the way we came as I pointed out the trail as we first passed known as Butte Pass Road. At the front of the trailhead, we aired down. I was also introduced and greeted by a friendly park ranger who happened to be a Jeep owner, wished us a good day, and gave Alyssa a sticker. As we traveled, we made it to a parking area for hiking to the Slot Canyons. As we looked around, I was worried that my map may have been out of date as there did not appear to be a trail for the 4x4s. Luckily a Park Ranger was there and as the map had on it, our road to the left was for us and the legal OHVs. Along the road, the view of the Slot on the left was incredible. We arrived at what was supposed to be the most technical part of the trail, "The One-Way steep sand hill". It sure was steep. I reminded those to engage 4 low and even down to 1St gear if necessary to let the rigs do the work they were designed for. We kept space going downhill and all made great success. Not such a bad hill but warning signs posted to a Hyandi vehicle that traveled with us and then turned around. I guess that is what the signs are meant for. At the bottom, we took a hard left over some rock obstacles. Nothing too extreme, but a good technical part of the overall day we were having. Afterwards, it was smooth sailing through the Borrego Wash and then to San Felipe Wash. The final part was truning back onto Buttes Canyon road to return to the 78. There were questions about getting into Hawk Canyon. However, as Doug mentioned, it is very difficult for vehicles to turn around and with the fleet of 16, we continued. At the front of the 78, we aired up and said our farewells. Some still planned to stay out where they were for the weekend as the group of us did at the Catman resort for one more evening. Gerhart and his family went back to the Slot Canyon to get some hiking in. Many great photos shared. Back at our camp, we enjoyed dinner, fire, and some scorpion finding. Maybe Scorpions are soon the Mascott for the trip this weekend by the Dirt Devils.

Thank you everyone for joining and having a good time as friends!