

Dirt Devils Rubicon Trail Itinerary July 17-19, 2026



We had nothing but an amazing time on the Rubicon Trail for 3 days. The members who joined for the trail were all outstanding. Our trail line up was myself as the trail leader, “Jungle Gym” Tim “Toyota” Thomas with DD Member and passenger “Roaring” Jimbo Haley in my ‘01 Toyota Tacoma. Next in the original line up was “Warrior, Defender, Gladiator” Erick “Fisherman, Mufasa” Paule with passenger Monica “the AMAZING”!!!! in his ‘20 Jeep Gladiator Rubicon. Third in line was “Billy Goat” Bill Schopper with passenger and son, Brett “the Hitman Spotter Heart” in ‘18 JKU Jeep. Fantastically fourth in line was driver “Superman” Steve Sariana with son “Avenger” Aaron in a ‘25 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon. Next in our line up was “Rock n’ Foppin’ and rolling with the DANA Strength of 60 Men” Bob Berg and son “All of the Above” Bob Jr. Last in the Tail End was driver “Jumper, Jeeper, Jungleman, Fighter” Jeff Stubbart with the lovely wife, Gina “the Genie of all wishes on the Trail of Magic”

Everything began starting the prior days, with a Driver meeting on June 23, 2026 to look over vehicles and discuss gear with any other possibilities or plans. This was very helpful and allowed us to plan an immediate start with confidence once we were on the Rubicon Trailhead. On Thursday, July 16, 2026, traveling up to the Mother Lode Motel was

where most of us stayed the night before. Jim and I made the drive with a few good stops such as the Harris Ranch to pickup steaks for the trail at camp at Buck Island Lake. Heading North on the I-5, we had Bill and Brett pass us giving a good hello on the radio and then later Steve and Aaron doing the same on the way. Once we arrived and settled in the Placerville Motel, we met most members at a great Mexican Restaurant. But we missed Bill and Brett as they were staying in Georgetown that evening.

On Friday, July 17, 2026 we woke up and loaded up our rigs to meet at the last gas stop (Chevron) on HWY 50 @ 7AM. Well, that turned into 730am or later as I was thankful for Jeff's help with getting my rig situated with my gear secure. Jeff was gracious enough to carry the emergency equipment provided by our club. The Bobs asked where we were and I got a hold of them to let them know we will be there. Fueled up, another group of those excited for their Rubicon Trail adventure accidentally drove off with the gas nozzle still in the vehicle...WHOOOPS! They told the gas station and unfortunately had a bill for the expense. Travel to the Rubicon Trailhead and Loon Lake staging area took about an hour where we met Bill and Brett. As always, just so incredible driving over the dam and into the main staging area where many are with their trailers and toys. We met a nice individual who was with or affiliated with the Rubicon Trail Foundation. He gave us some free merchandise such as a spill kit, potato bag, and bandana promoting the care of the trail. As we staged at this frontier, we completed our air down, and had a BRIEF driver's meeting from what was conducted June 23, 2026. Main words of the meeting: **Pace yourself and stay positive because it will be a long day.** The goal was Buck Island Lake.

The trail begins with a drive around a good granite slab and immediately into a gate keeper obstacle. We then travel and encounter another granite slab and bowl. Through these passes, we had some traffic and some wheelers stopped on the side making repairs.

No big deal. We just worked out who went where and how our group could get through.

After what I remember as going over Walker Hill, we had the El Dorado Sheriffs in their well set up jeep pass us. Good to see officers out there supporting and allowing us all to wheel with a great piece of mind. Overall, I had great help with some spotters through the trail. Big thanks to Brett “the hit man spotter heart” who earned his name well. He was there instantly to help run over, get rocks placed if needed and just as I worked out some obstacles, he and I coordinated one to the other in order to make it all a success. “Avenger” Aaron jumped in there with help on the end of things and that made us flawless. As said before, the obstacles on this trail are intimidating at times and things have to move very slow. “Warrior, Defender, Gladiator” Erick “Fisherman, Mufasa” Paule had the skills to move slowly and tactically with the Gladiator. I learned a few great lessons with him behind the wheel and that also reminded me of the patience I needed on each tire step I took. With the many times vehicles caught up to us or approached the other way, we kept our pace and did what we had to do.

As we hit each mile mark, we finally found Little Sluice. The plan was to take the bypass and we made the left. However, the obstacles are still challenging. Along the way, Bill navigated the group through one side of the bypass and myself and Erick went another way. As said before with the vehicle encounters, we had some between us and a repair going on. Bill and his part of the group were parked and Erick and myself in our rigs met up with the road to regroup soon. Before we did, we had a picnic table and all of us radioed for a lunch break until maybe the repair was done as well as lunchtime. Meeting up with the trail from the bypass, I clipped my truck bedside and punched a hole in the fiberglass. That motivates my flatbed project sooner I hope. Eventually we became introduced to more obstacles as we found the Old Big Sluice Intersection.

It is difficult to go into all the details and describe everything. It is a trail I encourage all to find themselves on. As we moved slowly, we made our arrival around 6pm to Buck Island Lake to set up camp. After this being my second time on the trail, I will remember when going over the wall of the dam to keep eyes open everywhere from the lake area to even high above on the hill of boulders. There are many places to camp and the trail goes many different ways while knowing which way to continue the next day. Once everyone had established a camp site, we all unpacked and prepared dinner. We all had good food and after talked with some beverages about the day and good stories we had to share. At certain times, people checked in for the night. I kept doing my house keeping and organizing myself around the camp and went to sleep as well.

Saturday, July 18, 2026 we stayed put at Buck Island Lake. People enjoyed a lazy and relaxing day fishing, swimming, hiking around, reading a book, and just having conversations. It was so quiet and peaceful. Everyone was glad to have a break from the trail and just enjoy mother nature. Around 5-6pm was where the noise happened as the next group of rigs came to camp. A few of us hiked over to the area of the dam to see some rock buggies playing on some extra credit. I saw a rollover, where the buggy was winched back up and just continued. Later in the evening, he rolled by camp and told us he rolled once more further down the trail. Amazing what becomes so built and what a buggy can do. We had some of the same ideas with dinner from yesterday, but we did get to enjoy the day and other meals at a nice spot with a lakefront. The evening came to the point where we got our rest as needed for the next day.

Sunday, July 19, 2026 was time to head out. Erick wanted to change places in the line up as he felt like my lines are not natural. All was good and I had Steve behind me doing really well. Erick knows his rig well and I cannot doubt those skills of expertise. I think

the most interesting, difficult, and fun is going around Buck Island Lake. We had serious concerns of being able to get off the trail by 5 and some thought it could be closer to 7pm. We also had to travel to Big Sluice as it is required. I am not sure but I think Big Sluice is my favorite part of the trail. The scenery of the forest is amazing and the trail of obstacles just keeps me entertained. There can be plenty of tricky situations and I know I found some of those, but I had good spotters like Brett and Aaron helping me out. The trail through this area descends into a beautiful area and then you find a bridge with green railing to enter Rubicon Soda Springs. Upon entering, we took a break in these large and amazing redwood looking trees. I felt like I was in Star Wars, Return of the Jedi and was just missing Ewoks on the Endor Moon. After the break, going through the campground is still a rock crawling adventure. Bob also said that in the race he was going to catch up to me and we put Bob behind me for some of this next portion. I spotted Bob through some places and as others helped with those spots, Bob had pulled over to add some transmission fluid. All remained good and we kept going. Throughout this course we were approaching Cadillac Hill. Cadillac Hill is no joke and very steep. Wow! Was it something! All of us climbed and climbed...and climbed some more.

After we leveled out, Observation Point was our landing site. What a spectacular view! Here we enjoyed another break, lunch time, and group photos. The concern from the beginning of the day to get out really late was far behind us. The rest of the trail is just beautiful and easier, but **do not let your guard down**. Potato Bottom and Bottom Dollar Hole are the last major obstacles that get their name for respectful reasons. From there we continued our travels as we enjoyed the lily pads and ponds in the view. From my previous week's rescue of a backpacker thanks to the help of Doug Francisco, I found two boulders in

the middle of the trail I recognized as knowing we had about 1.5 miles to go. This was a good 10-15 minutes vs our first 1.5 miles that took about 2 hours.

Finally, we crawled off into the McKinney/Rubicon Trailhead, Olympic Valley (Tahoe side). This is such a successful feeling to accomplish as we then began to air up. Jeff discovered somehow the AED fell off his rig after we strapped it down. Graciously, a host from the Rubicon Springs Camp found it on Cadillac Hill and UPS'd it back to us! Great people! I had to tighten a drain plug on my rear diff and I asked that we all stay to make sure everyone was aired up and could then drive away. Much appreciated from all and where they were to travel. I know Steve Sariana was feeling lucky after the trail and made his plans to hit the Nevada Casinos! I hope his luck only got better! Jeff and Gina made plans to travel to their cabin home in June Lake. Bill and Brett headed out for their next fishing day and the rest of us, Erick and Monica, the Bobs, and myself and Jim went to the Tahoe Pizza restaurant before getting back to shower at the Mother Lode Motel as things would be closed if we did not eat. I also appreciated that, because I only had water through the busy day and pizza and beer sounded **REALLY TACOMA TRUCKIN' GOOD.**

Traveling back was some road construction that added some time, but we all checked in and after organizing, a shower and a moment of pause, I celebrated with some whiskey and a cigar. It has been over 5 years since a cigar and will be something like that again, but worth the occasion for myself.

Monday, July 20, 2026 was our travel back. Erick suggested the scenic route of towns through the 395 HWY and Jim and I went that way. It was great but we had a major fire delay just into Independence so we stayed in Big Pine. The good news was some of the most amazing smoked BBQ for dinner. The bad news was that the next day the 395 was still closed in our direction and we had to go through Death Valley to Baker and take the I-15

home. We made it and I can only say that I will make plans on trying to keep a semi tradition of trying to run the Rubicon Annually with the interest of members of the Dirt Devils. Thanks everyone once again!