

# I Say “Potato,” You Say, “Aaiiee!”

August 2015, Slide Rock Point Adventure

From Buckskin Jim's Journal

My daughter Anna had a few days off from her job as a NICU nurse so we used the opportunity to have one of our father-daughter campouts.

I had been wanting to explore a particular area in the Little Belt Mountains south of Great Falls, so we tossed some food, sleeping bags, and my old backpack tent in the Jeep and set out. Like me, the Jeep is pretty old but still mostly functional.

I checked my old Forest Service map and found a nice route through the area in question. Marked “unimproved road, dirt” it was just the ticket for a leisurely Jeep ride across the mountains. I was pilot: Anna, with the map, road shotgun.

The road turned out to be more rock than dirt but then these are the Rocky Mountains. Anyhow, that's what a Jeep and compound low gear are for. We had a bit of bother finding the route once or twice but came right in the end. All part of the fun!

As the road came up out of the trees and crossed the side of a high bare mountain peak we were treated to a magnificent vista across the mountains to a beautiful sunset over the plains on the distant horizon. It was great...like being on top of the world. Anna, our excellent navigator, found our exact location on the map.

By this time we were starting to lose daylight and decided to head for one of our favorite campsites on the headwaters of Moose Creek; a beautiful spot with frequent opportunities to see deer, elk, bear, and sometimes, cougar.

By the time we hit Moose Creek it was full dark and starting to cool off nicely. Anna, bless her heart, just loves to busy around setting up camp and doing chores. So rather

than interfere with her fun, I lay on the ground watching for shooting stars while she enjoyed putting up the tent and rolling out the bedrolls. We had a light snack and hit the sack.

In the morning we were sleeping in a little when we were awakened by one of those wonderful mountain thunderstorms right on top of us. It just doesn't get any better than this! We were getting a little rain in the tent through a broken zipper but Anna mended that with hair fastener stuff and medical hemostats, of all things.

While our trip was pretty much uneventful and routine, it was a great opportunity for father and daughter to spend a couple of days relaxing together in the mountains.

#### From Anna's Journal

We decided to go on an adventure and drive some roads previously unexplored by us. According to the map... the very old map...the roads were well traveled, as far as forest roads go, and fine for recreational driving. We started off our adventure by stopping at a fun little campground next to a creek that had some wonderful wading areas. We continued up and over the mountain with me reading the map to navigate. As we are driving along I tell Dad that the road we wanted was our next right. Looking at this road we saw an uphill trail of boulders with a sign that said, "Share the road," and it had a picture of a snowmobile on it, or something like that. (Can't remember exactly what it said) We thought, "This can't be the road, can it? Maybe it is a short road that connects to the road we want; it can't be that bad once we get past this rough spot." So away we go in a 2-door Jeep with the doors and top off. After a few minutes of driving on this 'road' the conditions got worse and the boulders got bigger... what had once been a road had been washed out or eroded until all that was left was a trail of rocks. We found a spot and Dad turned the Jeep around while I squeezed my eyes shut, thinking we had the wrong road. We looked at our map and the surrounding roads only to come up with one conclusion; that was indeed the road we wanted. Faced with the decision to either turn around and drive all the way back or just endure a little

rough road until it evened out, we decided to keep going... saying, "Really, how bad can it get?"... famous last words!

So we tightened our seat belts, gritted our teeth and away we went over our road less traveled. Thank goodness for seat belts. You know the road is bad when you are literally bouncing up and down off your seat only to be saved by the strap of your belt. As we climbed higher the road conditions continued to worsen. The road seemed to become nothing but one pointed rock after another. After an hour or so of this and a couple of miles we come upon a beat up old sign on the side of the road that read, "Not maintained for Low Clearance Vehicles". We thought, "Well that's no problem for us... we are in a Jeep and seriously, the road has to get better soon! It's just 16 miles to the highway!" So off we went. Not maintained for low clearance vehicles was an understatement... not maintained for any vehicles, ever, is more like it. 16 miles doesn't seem like that long of distance until you are crawling along at less than one mile and hour in the middle of the afternoon wondering where on earth you are. Creeping over rock by rock, unable to turn around we pushed forward, for what else could we do, saying to ourselves what had become our mantra... "The roads have to get better soon". We climbed higher and higher and the roads became rockier and rockier, just a path of rocks on the side of the mountain. Dad was lucky, he was driving so he was on the inside of the mountain; I on the other hand got to see just how high we were. With no door, I had a straight shot view of the long drop off the mountainside below me... not especially comforting since we were sliding and bouncing all over. As we climbed, we cleared the timber line and saw a jutting peak of shale rock. As we continue the road disappeared to just packed shale rock in a winding path on the side of a mountain with a sheer drop, for what looks like, miles below me. As we are driving we are jostling up and down so much I was surprised we were moving forward at all. Over the bumping I hear a noise and look down and see falling rock sliding down the mountainside as our wheels slip and slide over it. I remember thinking as it began to get dark "Oh my gosh, we better not die on this mountain". Finally as the sun began to set we crested the peak and came to a stop in a little meadow. Looking at the map trying to figure out where we are I see a spot on the road we are traveling that says, "Slide Rock Point". Now I may

not have a clue what the GPS quadrants were, what mile marker we were at, or what direction I was facing, but reading that name on the map I knew with 100% certainty that that is where we were. Dad says, "Hmm, I didn't see that there when I looked at the map." We decided to push on forward and go camp in the comfort of our favorite spot at Moose Creek instead of camping in an unknown area and location. As we started down the road began to slowly improve... flying along at 5 miles an hour we began to make progress. Finally as the last rays of light were still visible in the sky we see a sign, the 1-mile marker. I have never been so happy to see a mile sign in my life! We had 1 mile to the highway. We sped up and took the road to the right, the road to the highway and after a mile we see another mile marker sign, it too said one mile. Worry sprouted in both our minds... we already went our mile, where was the highway? Thankfully this marker proved true and after this last mile we reached the highway as it became truly dark.

At the start of this journey we had grand plans for a big camp dinner, steak and potatoes cooked over an open fire. As the day progressed this gradually dwindled to, "Well we have sandwich meat, we can just make sandwiches," to "Well we have a can of beef stew we can just heat up," to "I wonder how it would taste cold". As we pulled into Moose Creek and parked, we got out and prepared to set up camp. Dad, exhausted, lay on the ground looking up at the stars, I set up camp while holding a flash light in my mouth. I set up the tent, not bothering with tying it down. For dinner we had a banana, a string cheese, and a granola bar and it was one of the best dinners I think I have ever had. Exhausted we crawled into bed and fell asleep. Morning consisted of some strawberries and cereal and then back to bed for a morning snooze only to be awoken to the howling wind. I said, "Dad I think it's going to storm and we didn't tie down the tent". Just then a huge clap of thunder erupted above us and rain started to pour. We jumped out of the tent and hurriedly tied it down to anything substantial we could find. We gathered our camp supplies and threw them in the back of the Jeep and covered them in hopes of keeping them dry and together. With the cooler in the tent so we had some food. We jumped back in drenched as the rain poured outside. Knowing the bottom zipper of your tent doesn't work doesn't seem like a big deal until you're trying to

keep the rain out... thankfully I had a hair clip, pony tail holder, and hemostats and with all that we managed to seal the bottom of the tent and keep most of the rain out. The rest of that day we spent in and out of the tent between storms and just resting from our adventure the day before. As stressful as it was on that drive, wondering if we were going to ever make it off that mountain, it is one of the best camping memories I have with my Dad.

~Anna