

Jeep Grille Adventures: Expediciones de las Mojave

By: Mark M. DeNittis

Equipment Features: 12 Volt Lunchbox Oven

Recipe Features: Rajun Cajun Rigatoni, Yucatan Style Beef, Chevre, Rice and Black Bean Burritos

Restaurant Features: Javier's Lindo Michoacan Las Vegas, NV, Carnecería: Baker, CA

Linda's Café: Westslope I-70 Colorado

JEEP LOG DATE: 10:6 - 10:9:2007

Last minute notice of four open spots from www.JeepExpeditions.org, group for a Jeep Expedition across the Mojave, pronounced *Mo-ha-vay*. The trek included 120 miles across the open desert of the Mojave Desert Trail in Southern California. Starting point, Laughlin, NV with a finish point somewhere near Barstow, CA.

Total Miles: (1948miles) 1720 Pavement; 128 miles Off-Road

Denver to Vegas 1am – 8pm:

Leaving Denver after teaching a 6:00am – 7: 30pm stretch ... toss in a one hour nap...and get on the road by 1am on Friday morning... what do you have? The beginning of a 4-day road trip of a lifetime. I picked up co-pilot Adam a fellow colleague with a sense of adventure, and we were on our way. One way to either, make a friend or have a complete loathed enemy is to spend four whole days in the confines of a small Jeep. Fortunately it ended up being the former.

Having both grown up in the same era and area we had lots in common and a lot to talk about. Caffeine and lots of snacks, nothing fancy as I had been teaching doubles all week and the weekend before was busy with XRRRA Finals in Colorado Springs. Stopping just outside of Grand Junction to catch an hour nap, we slowly made our way to Laughlin. The head winds were insane, in particular from the middle of Utah all the way to Vegas.

Along the way was a lot of historical information regarding the State of Utah, not on the top of my list (explained later) other than of course, Moab and Ikea in Draper. Outlaw Country, the Place Nobody Wanted and Cove Creek Fort were all great and informative stops along the way. This lends well to the educational aspects of our trip.

Finally a quick stop by an intriguing sign off the highway somewhere in Arizona/Nevada indicated the state of my sometimes twisted sense of humor, mind and demeanor which most that know me would certainly agree! "Area of Critical Environmental Concern"!

A stop in Vegas and getting lost, no not the gambling kind either, I mean really getting lost! I would not recommend getting off at Lake Mead Drive and taking a right...it seemed a little shall I... say *hoodish*. I must have had the right *colors* as we made it out alive and eventually headed back towards highway 93. Of course it could have also been following right behind a fire engine that aided in getting out of that area quickly.

A quick shot of the new....let's see think Tr...and probably ends with the letter "p" Tower trying to dwarf the Wynn Casino in Las Vegas!?!? At this point hunger was really kicking in and the down home goodness of Big Momma's near the hood looked great however we wanted to "Leave Las Vegas". Venturing through the bright lights and action we found Javier's Lindo Michoacan, a highly overpriced and way overrated food quality of a Mexican restaurant (see The D.I.R.T. at <http://jeepgrilleadventures.com/thedirt.aspx> for the full scoop and lowdown.

At least the cold carbonated beverages were good it's kind of hard to screw those up! Let's be real \$3.25 for a taco...absurd! Had we not been extremely hungry I would have searched for a simple carneceria with \$1.25 tacos and a cold Tecate or Negro Modelo. After a full belly of overrated and overpriced Mexican slop we were on our way to Laughlin.

Vegas to Laughlin NV 8pm-7am:

Getting to Laughlin around 11pm and seeing the all the pretty lights, in the middle of nowhere, was neat. All this glamour in the middle of... absolutely nowhere, absolutely was intriguing!

We found the Riverside Motel, an older place on the west side of town with great clean rooms and hot shower the last to be had for at least 3 days. Now what happens in Laughlin after 11pm stays in Laughlin, I will however elude that there are some interesting folks in particular the locals at the Lazy River Lounge. What was most fascinating was the persistence of the locals in expressing what a...nice place Laughlin was and how it is such a "nice" and "great" place to settle and raise a family.... Sure..O.K. if you say so?!?! It felt eerily like we were in an episode of the Twilight Zone. I would however, visit again and maybe even retire there. One of the highlights was shooting pool with old Al, a regular at the Lazy River and fellow Massachusetts native was great, I haven't shot pool in ages. I think most remarkable and memorable was the "Al Shuffle" a little jig when the game went well. Finally retiring after being up for 48 hours with only two hours sleep I looked forward four more hours of restful bliss. Getting up at 6:30am on Saturday we had a cup of coffee on the little patio of the bar, and reflected on how nice life in Laughlin must be... the drive behind and of course the drive yet ahead.

MOJAVE TRAIL First Leg: 8am – 6pm

The meeting point for the whole group was south of Laughlin at the Avi Resort/Casino. All in all there were a total of 21 vehicles with folks mostly from Arizona and some from southern and even Northern California. I think though, "the boys from Colorado" as we infamously became known, trekked the farthest to attend. I don't know if it was the loud laughter, the most dented nerf-bars, the insane amount of time driving or the combination of it all that contributed to us becoming known as such.

Our trail leader was freelance editor Jim Brightly that was actually doing an article for Sport Utility Magazine. The first leg of the trip was 68 miles to our camp destination. The trail itself was a

combination of semi soft sand and hard packed sand, pretty much a road that could be traversed by most cars, compared to what I am usually accustomed to. I sort of admired that aspect as it was a nice change from the hardcore trails I usually traverse. Not having to worry too much about major parts breakage and enjoying the diverse scenery was great fun.

There was some minor breakage though, first a flat tire due to a sidewall tear on a TJ and a Grand Cherokee steering pump that bent a pump and snapped a belt. Someone pulled out their tool box whilst I went to go get the “shop-box” out of my Jeep. This is one of those testosterone things, my toolbox is “bigger n’ yours”, and by far when I whipped it out, folks were impressed. “Look at the size of those channel locks, my I feel insignificant” and “damn that guy could build a whole Jeep with what’s in there”!! It was a “Tim the tool man” moment “oohh ahhh ahhh”! Needless to say it was another feather in the cap of preparedness and boost to the Jeep ego. I have collected those tools, bolts, nuts, lubes, thread locker and the like over a period of 17 years, the epitome of “just in case”. I did not however have the needed fan belt or 16mm wrench. *Mental note-to-self, go buy these items...just in case!!.

The magnitude of the diverse ecology of the first 68 miles was amazing, as was the history behind the trail from days of it being a route used by the government back in the day for communications. At one point the government attempted army desert training, inclusive of using camels instead of horses. Finally arriving at the camp spot mid-Mojave dessert we quickly unloaded and set up the kitchen. COFFEE first and foremost followed by a cold carbonated beverage was in order. Tonight we dined on a not so stable camp table that ended up being more like a wind chime.

Ragin’ Cajun Rigatoni Pasta with Chicken, Andoullie and Tasso Ham in a Mushroom Creole Cream Sauce I made this ahead and assembled the separate ingredients on the trail. I do recommend complete assembly at home and simply reheating on the trail for even quicker cooking and clean up. Some of my newer recipes will be more specifically geared towards this however here is the basic outline.

Serves 4-6

1lb Penne Pasta – Pre cooked

1 Tbs. Oil (either canola or olive oil works well)

3 Cloves Garlic: chopped

The Holy Trinity: onions, celery & pepper

1 small onion – diced small

1 celery stalk – diced small

1 green bell pepper – seeded and diced small.

1 roma tomato – diced small

¼ pound – Andouillie Sausage diced John Folse’s

¼ pound – Tasso Ham (spicy ham product from Louisanna) John Folse has the best!!!!

7oz. – Pre-Cooked Chicken (I used the packaged stuff from the supermarket) like the chunk tuna packs or you can grill up some at home, cook to 165F, cool, dice and freeze.

4 Tablespoons – Bellissimo Mushroom Cream Powder or other dry powdered cream sauce from a supermarket.

Franks Red Hot Hot Sauce – As Needed

MADE ON THE MOJAVE TRAIL: Saute the “trinity”, andouille, tasso ham, tomatoes and garlic in the oil. Add in the chicken, let heat up. Add in the pasta. Follow directions for powdered cream sauce. The Bellissimo product called for ½ cup water per 4 Tablespoons of powdered mix. Stir all together thoroughly until all is coated and creamy. Add Frank’s Red hot to your desired heat level. Remember....hot going in...hot going out!

MAKE AHEAD AT HOME REHEAT 3 Options to choose from:

- **Portable Lunchbox Oven** www.roadtrucker.com/12-volt-cooking/12-volt-portable-stove.htm : Follow the above all the way through to the end. Cool down and place in a tin pan that fits in the porta oven to be reheated on the trail.
- **Sous Vide (BOIL IN THE BAG):** Follow the above recipe all the way through and let cool. Place cooled ingredients into Ziploc or Foodsaver bag. On the trail add the filled bag to the pot of boiling water and reheat to an internal temperature of 165F. Use your Culinary Tire Gauge (thermometer) to test. Fold bag over the thermometer so as not to pierce the bag.
- **Reheat in pan:** Simply cut the bag open and put ingredients in a non stick pan. Reheat to 165F. Eat!

After this evenings dinner we went to the group area to sit by the fire, mingle with the members of Jeep Expeditions and chat. It was an early night for most dispersing at 9pm, quite an early night, must have been something I said. Of course the “boys from Colorado” stayed up late by the camp site, chatting more, laughing a lot and enjoying cold refreshments in the cold windy desert night.

Mid Point Mojave Mile 68 – 128 and into Utah Sunday 10/7:

Setting up the back of my trailer as a sleeping unit proved to be great. Although I don’t have any pictures it was great to be out of the cold nights wind. Dreams were intense and vivid at one point feeling like coyotes were nipping at my toes and desert rodents running up inside my trailer, nonetheless deep sleep from the lack of previous days was refreshing.

Waking at 6:30am and starting breakfast coffee I enjoyed the desert morning air and silence.

Breakdown and packing up took up most of the morning and we were on our way by 9am.

First stop was the Mojave Mailbox to sign the traveler's guestbook. Of course having to leave a www.JeepGrilleAdventures.com sticker strategically located on the bottom of the box was in my plan. Inside the mailbox people take and leave multiple goodies. The most unique was the bag of Shrimp Chips, tasty little puffed rice chips with shrimp flavoring, treats.

Onward to a side trip to see some ancient volcanic tubes in the earth...note to self this would make an awesome family trip in the cooler months of the year. My wife and daughter would really enjoy researching and being immersed into the abundance of historical and ecological surrounding this whole area. The "cylinder tubes" we and others explored were really cool. Ancient lava flow bubbles, the champagne bubbles of the earth if you will. One family was GeoStashing, which I believe is an online GPS type game, at this area as well during the trip, pretty neat stuff I'd say.

Along the way we crossed a salt lake bed to add to the Rock Pile at mid point. One must climb up and read the plaque inside at the top. I will not divulge what it says as it would perpetuate years of horrible events, you must travel to the sacred spot to find out for yourself. I of course had to be different and balance one rock atop another (a little reddish rock balanced atop a triangular rock). Adam climbed to the top to read the plaque, also leaving his rock from the trip. The crystallized flats were semi soft and salty mud flew everywhere as we trekked across it. After the salt bed came an area of soft sand dunes until finally reaching the mines area. It was a great little playground where the JGA Jeep got to stretch and flex a little.

Lunch today consisted of *Yucatan Style Beef, Chevre, Rice and Black Bean Burritos* Serves: 4-8

2lbs Beef Cubes $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch thick (I used the trimmings of ribeye steak rib bone meat) Diced Stew meat works well for this too.	3 cloves Garlic – chopped fine
1 Tablespoon Oil	1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon Cumin Gound	1 pinch Cinnamon
Pinch Ground Cloves	Water
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Black Pepper	$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup Chopped Cilantro
1 teaspoon Paprika	Plain White Rice Pre cooked and cooled
1 teaspoon Chile Powder	1 - 14 oz can Black Beans, strain liquid off
1 teaspoon Achiote (ground annatto seed)	8 oz. Chevre (Soft Goat Cheese)
	Flour Tortillas

MAKE AHEAD AT HOME: In heavy bottom pot heat the oil over medium heat. Add the beef cubes and let sear/brown on all sides. Add in the garlic and other spices, incorporate well. Pour in water to cover the meat and stir well, especially the caramelized

bottom bits and pieces on the bottom of the pan. Bring to a boil and reduce to simmer. Simmer until almost dry. Sample a piece it should be fork tender, if not add more water to cover again. Bring to a boil, reduce to simmer. Let simmer until almost all the liquid is gone. Once the meat has become fork tender, take out of pan and let cool. Assemble all of the cooled ingredients, layout tortillas and begin by putting a little of each of the ingredients in them. Roll into a burrito and wrap in heavy duty foil. Refrigerate or freeze until needed. When reheating in a lunchbox oven or on the engine block, make sure that the internal temperature reaches 165F. ENJOY.

The final stretch to pavement in California:

Leaving the playground for a scenic photo opportunity of the whole group was a neat railroad bridge. Leaving the bridge stop around 4:00pm it was onward to Afton Spring campground. We came across the only water crossing for miles and concluded the Mojave Desert trip, the desert part anyway. For some it was another couple days onward to an expedition to Octillo Wells. We were graciously offered to join, tempting as it was we both had a few personal days saved up...the consensus was we should get back to Colorado. We aired up and said our gratitude and goodbyes until the next expedition.

A quick stop off I-15 in Baker, CA we rested and reflected, ate some great tacos and drank wonderfully flavored horchata. Something about a restroom essenced restaurant would deter most, but this didn't scare us off. It's gotta be good because no gringos would even consider entering a place like this. I of course had to order the burrito la lengua with chiccharon, yes cow tongue burrito again with crispy fried tidbits of pork fat. YUMMMMM is all I can say. Although next time in Baker I think the Alien Jerky place is deserving of a visit. Realizing we had a long trip ahead this was the first of many stops this evening. For some reason it seemed as though an additional 1000 miles was added to the trip back to Colorado. A stop 15 miles west of Vegas for a quick nap we were awoken to the voices of Nevada's finest, not directed at us rather at someone they pulled over and stopped right behind us. Fascinatingly enough they didn't even come to check on us in the Jeep, just leaving after they finished with the folks they pulled over. Pretty awkward we thought.

Utah proved to be the longest, as the first 250 miles into the state seemed to last forever, especially since there wasn't a single place to get a cup of coffee. Everything was closed to get coffee. I am proclaiming action be taken against the state of Utah for

lack of adequate coffee supplies to weary road travelers. We finally did find one place that was open for coffee.

Driving for 30 minutes...sleeping for 30 minutes...driving for an hour and sleeping for an hour proved to be prolonging the trip that much more.

Monday morning to Monday Night:

Finally daybreak and still another 500 or so miles to go to Denver! At least this time there was not a head wind we were traveling into and the snow storms originally forecasted for this day were not in sight. It was clear sailing all the way. A roadside stop on I-70 around 3pm just outside of Grand Junction we ate at Linda's Rainbow Truck Stop. Linda herself was our server but explained she no longer owned the place. The BLT was decent; although I prefer crisp bacon rather than undercooked rubbery bacon. The "fresh made" beef soup Adam ate although filling was less than desirable.

Finally arriving back in Denver around 8 pm...home it was back to reality.

Summary

I have to say it was one of the most epic trips, on many levels I have yet to experience. Adam is a former Jeep owner, and now after the trip I am holding him accountable for getting back to his roots by trading in his little Subaru and getting his Jeep-on once again! Of course his wife may or may not approve, however we (Jeep folks) know one of two things will happen regarding trading in a vehicle for a Jeep, either way though it will be a win-win situation.

FULL Restaurant/Stops Reviews and Rants from this trip : can be seen at The D.I.R.T.:

<http://jeepgrilleadventures.com/thedirt.aspx>

La Michoecan: Las Vegas, NV: rating 1 food quality, 5 beverage quality 3 service.

PRICE \$\$\$\$\$\$ OUT-F*&%\$NG-RAGEOUS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Carneceria: Baker CA Ratings: 4 Food Quality; 4 Beverage Quality (no beer), 4 Service with a very cute smile. Downsides: Stinks kind of like a restroom.

Linda's Rest Stop: I-70 East of Grand Junction in the narrows: 3 Food Quality; 4 Beverage quality; 4.5 Service PRICE: Fair to midland

State of UTAH Caffeine Supply: Negative 1 Quality. Seriously the state of Utah needs a bitch slap from Mistress Kitty, jailhouse style even.