

2012 Watson Children's Shelter Trip

That was a good trip! The girls with me were really nervous on the way up Blue Mountain. "Are you a professional driver?" "No." "Have you ever crashed?" "Not lately." Squeal! "Have you ever rolled?" "Not yet." Squeal and laughter "that's not very comforting." They were worried about the narrow road, the potholes, the steep sides, but they really liked the views of Missoula.

When we got to the start of the trail, I asked if they wanted me to take the side windows out so they could experience nature more directly. No way, they wanted no part of that. I aired the tires down, and one of the girls came over to ask why I was doing that. I explained about the smoother ride and better traction. She disappeared among the other kids. Right when we were about to load up, the other girl came over and shyly asked if I could put the top down. Sure! Two minutes later the top was down and the girls were buckled in and joking nervously about all the sky around them, the bugs, the dust, and maybe touching plants out the side.

We started up the trail and the first big waterbar brought screams as the front of the Jeep climbed the hill and the road disappeared. More screams as we topped the mound of dirt and the road rose up like a cliff in front of the Jeep. As with most new adventures, by the time we hit the last waterbar, they didn't even notice.

When we hit the first puddle, one of the girls was surprised to get some water drops on her arm. On the next couple of puddles, they huddled under a blanket to stay dry. Finally the staff person pulled off the blanket and kept it in front. "You girlies have to experience nature" she said. We went through a couple more puddles slowly and they got just a few drops on them. On the next puddle I asked if they wanted to go slow or fast through the next puddle. After some debate, they decided to go fast. The next few puddles were fairly small, but hitting them fast resulted in a fair amount of splash into the back seat much to the girls delight. When we came to the BIG puddle, everyone stopped to let the vehicles get together to watch each other go through. The girls couldn't see anything, so I invited them to stand up and grab the roll cage. Then they could see the other rigs going through the puddle. We drove through slowly with the girls standing up, laughing and screaming and generally having a great time. They buckled up until we got to the next puddle, then they wanted to stand and go through fast. They got pretty wet, but it must have been fun because they wanted to do that through the next puddles.

After lunch on the way out they wanted more speed and more water, so the experience escalated to them standing up grabbing the roll cage while I hit the puddles hard. Steve and Jay were behind us, and they said it looked like the Jeep hit and drove through a wall of water! Several puddles were deep enough that the water was splashed ahead of and well above the windshield so the girls caught the water full force. They were absolutely filthy and wet and muddy and having a great time laughing at the mud on each other.

Driving out the last quarter mile with the waterbars was a whole different experience on the way

down. Yes, I probably was going a bit too fast. The front of the Jeep would go up and over the top of the mound, and when the rear went over it sort of whipped the back seat passengers up into the air. Good thing they were belted in, but again lots of screaming and laughing at the new experience. They got used to the feeling over the next few waterbars so the laughing was dying down. The last bump needed to punctuate the ride, so I hit it faster than the previous water bars. The girls were really surprised and there was renewed screaming and laughter. Curtis was already parked at the bottom of the trail, and he came over to say "You get the entertainment award for the day - you caught air on that last bump!" That wasn't my intent, but it sure was worth it getting that last big scream!

Overall, it was great seeing the girls changing from nervous little mall shoppers to adrenaline junkies embracing the experience and the water and the mud and the bumps. The Blue Mountain road that had them so nervous on the way up was boring on the way down. Hopefully it was a day they will remember fondly for a long time.