



March 1, 2026

Trail Tales

Official Newsletter
of the
New Mexico 4-Wheelers



www.nm4w.org

Beyond the "Jeep Herders": The Evolution of the NM4W Club's 4WD Diversity

By Frank Whiston



In the rugged landscapes of the Southwest, off-roading has always been more than just a hobby—it's a way of life. The history of the New Mexico 4-Wheelers (NM4W) serves as a perfect case study in how the off-roading community has ebbed and flowed, moving from brand-specific origins to a diverse world of 4WD capability.

From "Jeep Herders" to a Broader Horizon

The story begins in 1958 with the founding of the **Albuquerque Jeep Herders**. At the time, the "flat-fender" Jeep was the undisputed king of the trail. However, by the mid-1960s, the off-roading landscape shifted as Ford, International Harvester, and Toyota produced capable machines that proved their mettle in the New Mexico sand.

In August 1976, the club officially became the **New Mexico 4-Wheelers, Inc.** The goal was to "soothe anti-Jeep feelings" and welcome Broncos, Scouts, and Land Cruisers. This inclusivity was eventually immortalized in the club's circular logo, which features a Zia symbol containing a Jeep CJ, a Ford Bronco, and a Toyota Land Cruiser—a trio specifically chosen to represent vehicle diversity.



The Modern Jeep Dominance (1990s–2020)

While the 70s and 80s were a "melting pot" of brands, the landscape changed significantly starting in the late 1990s. With the decline of many classic solid-axle SUVs and the massive success of the Jeep Wrangler TJ and JK platforms, the trails once again became a sea of Seven-Slot grilles.

From the late 90s all the way through 2020, the hobby was largely dominated by Jeeps. For a time, it seemed the "Jeep Herder" roots had returned by default, as few other manufacturers were producing vehicles with the out-of-the-box clearance and solid-axle articulation required for New Mexico's technical terrain.

The New Renaissance: 2021 and Beyond

However, the tide has turned once again. The industry has entered a new era of off-road competition, and the trails of New Mexico are seeing the results.

The reintroduction of the **Ford Bronco** has been a primary catalyst for this change, offering a high-performance alternative that has reclaimed its spot on the mesa. Simultaneously, other manufacturers have "stepped up" their engineering: **Chevrolet** began offering front and rear lockers on their Colorado trucks (specifically the ZR2), and **Toyota** has aggressively pushed the capability of their TRD Pro and Trailhunter lineups.

A Glimpse of the Future: February 2026

The impact of this renewed diversity was on full display at the **February 2026 NM4W club meeting**. The gathering served as a modern mirror of the club's 1976 mission. Among the crowd of veteran members were several newcomers, none of whom were tethered to a single brand.

Attendees arrived in a mix of late-model Broncos and high-clearance Toyotas alongside the ever-present Wranglers and Gladiators. This influx of varied platforms proves that the "4WD" designation is broader today than it has been in decades.

A Legacy of Inclusion

Today, the New Mexico 4-Wheelers stand as a testament to the idea that capability isn't brand-exclusive. Whether it's a vintage flat-fender or a 2026 high-tech mid-size truck, the club remains a home for anyone with four driven wheels and a spirit of adventure. As we look forward from 2026, the trail ahead is looking more diverse—and more capable—than ever.



Member Spotlight: Mike and Janet Crosby

By Frank Whiston

From Cockpits to Canyons

Janet and Mike Crosby are no strangers to navigating complex machinery or high-stakes environments. Long before they officially joined the New Mexico 4-Wheelers in May 2025, the Corrales-based couple spent over 50 years in the sky as pilots. As retired aerospace engineers and former business owners, they bring a unique technical perspective to the trail—whether Mike is reflecting on his time flying HU-16 Albatross amphibians for the Coast Guard or Janet is recounting her days on the U.S. Aerobatic Team.

While they've traded the clouds for the rugged terrain of New Mexico, their transition into the NM4W family was a natural evolution of a lifelong spirit of adventure. Today, they apply that same precision and passion for problem-solving to tackling technical rock crawls, proving that whether you're thousands of feet up or deep in a Level 7 canyon, the thrill of the journey remains the same.

As retired aerospace engineers, Janet and Mike naturally appreciate the "form follows function" philosophy of their two very different builds. Here is a technical breakdown of their rigs, highlighting the specific modifications that help them navigate everything from the highway to Level 7 rock crawls.



"Rojo" – 2021 Jeep JL Rubicon Janet's rig is a masterclass in modern versatility, designed to be a comfortable highway cruiser that doesn't blink at Level 6 terrain.

- Suspension: AEV 3" lift kit, providing the clearance needed for larger obstacles without sacrificing road manners.
- Tires: Mickey Thompson Baja Boss A/T 35" tires for a balance of grip and ride quality.
- Armor: Upgraded body armor to protect the JL's aluminum and

steel exterior during tight maneuvers.

"Punda"— 2005 Jeep TJ Rubicon (Mike)
Mike's "Punda" (which means "donkey" in Swahili) is a dedicated rock-crawling classic, built with a focus on mechanical simplicity and technical agility.

- The Build: A 4" suspension lift combined with a 1" body lift to maximize tire clearance and breakover angles.
- Drivetrain: Chromoly axles geared to 4.88s, ensuring the strength and torque necessary to turn 35" Cooper STT Pro tires in the rocks.
- Powerplant: A Titan 4.0L engine paired with a 6-speed manual transmission—a "no computers required" setup that Mike can wrench on himself.



Engineering in Action

While Janet admits their first attempt at Level 7 rocks at Gordy's was a "real eye opener", her engineering background shone through in her takeaway: she noted that while "people are crazy," these Jeeps are truly capable of anything when built right.

What Brought Them to Four-Wheeling

Like many of us, their passion started with simply "dabbling" in off-road adventures over time. Having owned several Jeeps and always enjoying the outdoors, joining NM4W was a natural next step — and one that has already led to some unforgettable trail experiences.

Favorite NM4W Trail So Far

When asked to identify their favorite destination with the club, the response was prompt: Gordy's Hill OHV Area. Their initial visit coincided with the club's installation of trailhead signs on National Public Lands Day 2025, followed by participation in the Friday Fun event at Gordy's shortly thereafter. They continued to return,

contributing substantial effort alongside fellow club members, demonstrating dedication comparable to those significantly younger in age.

They described it as an incredible area with unmatched scenery and trail variety — the kind of place that reminds you exactly why we do this.

Trail Memories and Club Runs

For Janet and Mike, every ride has brought something special. Whether it's the camaraderie, the problem-solving, or the laughs along the way, they shared that each club run has been memorable in its own way—and that's what makes NM4W such a rewarding group to be part of.



Janet still laughs about that first Level 7 experience at Gordy's. When a friend asked how the ride went, she replied, *"It was very educational."* Her friend then asked what she learned, and Janet answered: *"That people are crazy and Jeeps are capable of anything!"*

Bucket List Adventures

Like many dedicated Jeepers, The Crosby's eyes are on some of the most legendary trails out there — with the Rubicon Trail sitting high on the bucket list.

But their off-road dreams aren't limited to just one destination. From the slickrock playground of Moab, to the rugged terrain of Chokecherry Canyon near Farmington, and New Mexico's own iconic Chile Challenge in the southern part of the state, the Crosby's are always looking toward the next great adventure.

Life Beyond the Trail

When they aren't out wheeling, Janet and Mike enjoy spending time with their two donkeys, Gordon and Gracie, and soaking up the simple joys of rural life. You may also find them walking the Corrales Bosque with their pony "Dottie".

Mike's flying career includes serving in the Coast Guard Air/Sea Rescue, piloting the HU-16 Albatross amphibian, as well as flying UH-1 helicopters in the Army. Janet's aviation accomplishments are equally impressive — she was even a member of the U.S. Aerobatic Team, flying a Pitts S-1 Special.

Talk about a lifetime of adventure — whether it's in the rocks or thousands of feet above them.

Advice for New Members

Their tip for anyone new to NM4W is simple but powerful:

Take advantage of the knowledge within the club.

From trail leaders to long-time members, NM4W is full of people eager to help others learn, grow, and enjoy the outdoors safely and responsibly.

Since joining NM4W, Janet and Mike have jumped in with both feet and have quickly become some of the club's most active participants. From attending monthly meetings and club gatherings like the Annual Picnic and Christmas Party, to showing up for special events such as the King of the Hammers Race of Kings Watch Party and Gordy's signage projects, they've embraced every part of the NM4W community. On the trail, they've taken on a wide variety of rides — from the Jemez Mountains, La Ventana Mesa, and Diablo Canyon, to play days and challenges out at Gordy's, including runs like Hidden



Valley/Bad Hair Day/Doug's Dilemma. Their consistent involvement and enthusiasm have made it clear: the Crosbys aren't just along for the ride — they're already an important part of the club.

Janet and Mike bring a wonderful mix of experience, curiosity, and fun-loving spirit to the club. We're excited to see where Rojo and Punda travel next — and we're glad they're part of the NM4W community. Be sure to say hello on the next run!



Meeting Minutes

February 12, 2026

By Shirley Godfrey

President Jack Dickey called the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.
The meeting was held at North Domingo Baca Multi-Generational Center.
Jack thanked Anthony Weaver and Ali Martinez for hosting the meeting and bringing the snacks.

MEMBERS ATTENDING: Jeff Boggs, Glenn Boudreaux, Guy Conway, Janet Crosby, Mike Crosby, Cathy Dickey, Jack Dickey, Patrick Dobson, Shirley Godfrey, Michael Hoffman, Ed Kausche, Lyn Kausche, Karl Leigh, Leroy Lints, Allison Martinez, Cliff Meier, Jack Nutter, Oly Olson, Stefanie Olson, Matthew Ray, Lauri Rector, Jonathan Rivera, NaDeen Roland, Don Roy, Richard Steele, Douglas Story II, Josh Tucker, Mary Turpin, Anthony Weaver, Frank Whiston, William Zobel

GUESTS ATTENDING: Spencer Brown, Doug Caddell, Brandon Clements, Jim Cutillo, Ralph Lied-Lopez, Steve Nakamura, Laura Perlichek, Kevin Porter, Travis Rendell, James Salmonson, Doreen Shoemaker, Lee Shoemaker, Fred (Wally) Wallis

PRESIDENT – Jack Dickey

Jack mentioned hosts are still needed for the April, July and August meetings. The April meeting will be held at the North Domingo Baca Multi-Generational Center and July and August meetings are held at a member's home.

Cathy will do the 50/50 at the end of the meeting.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT – VP Jonathan Rivera

There were fourteen new applicates since the last meeting.
Johanthan went over this past month's transgression fines.

Adding to the coffers this month –

Stefanie Olson – forget they signed up for a ride and forgot about going. Ride leader called to make sure everything was ok.

Jeff Boggs – didn't pay attention, keep on going and left Richard behind while Richard was closing the gate.

Ed Kausche – stayed in 2-wheel drive when he should have been in 4-wheel drive.

Mike Crosby – had to be winched.

Jonathan Rivera – 1. Jonathan's map got away from him and he made a left when he should have gone right.

2. didn't wait long enough for everyone to catch up.

3. had to be winched.

SECRETARY'S REPORT - Shirley Godfrey

Meeting minutes can be read in the Newsletter. - A motion was made and

approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TREASURER'S REPORT - Rich Steele

Current balances for checking, saving accounts, and Pay Pal were provided.

Membership for the Blue Ribbon Coalition was paid, \$125.00. PO Box is on automatic payment and will be charged \$250.00 the end of February.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the treasurer's report. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TRIP CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – Mary Turpin

Mary explained her duties as Trip Chairman and went over past rides. Trip leaders/ride attendees gave a brief rundown of the ride.

Past Events and Trips (8 since last meeting!)

- January 10, Gordy's Hidden Valley, Bad Hair Day, Doug's Dilemma, Jack Dickey – fun ride and Lauri was winched.
- January 17, Diablo Canyon/Camino Real, Matt Martel – no follow up information
- January 23, Zuni's Hidden Secrets, Snow Petersen – scouting day. Double checked with forest ranger to use the trail
- January 24, Zuni's Hidden Secrets 2.0, Snow Petersen – day of the ride
- January 24, More Fun at Gordy's, Doug Elkins – fun day
- January 31, Gordy's Hidden Valley, Bad Hair Day, Doug's Dilemma, Mary Turpin -
- February 7, King of the Hammers - Race of Kings Watch Party, Mary Turpin – watched the Race at Mary Turpin's house
- February 7, Glorietta Mesa from "Blame Her Ranch", Jonathan Rivera – reached out to land owner for permission to go across their property. Very nice man. Lots of mud on the trail.

Upcoming Events and Trips

Six trips are on the calendar before our next meeting, refer to website for details.

Contact trip leader if there are questions.

DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPORT - Bill Zobel

No new news to report.

Program Chair Report – Cathy Dickey explained the 50/50 raffle and talked about the items with the club logo for sale.

HISTORIAN'S REPORT - Frank Whiston – Getting lots of pictures from the rides.

WEBMASTER'S REPORT and NEWSLETTER EDITOR'S REPORT - Don Roy – Newsletter, no new news.

Website, Don made a couple of enhancements to an Officer's tool.

OLD BUSINESS: Jack Dickey gave a recap of trying to get Tank Trap reopened. Tank Trap, a Santa Fe National Forest rock crawling trail, FR 24NAA, has been closed since about 2012. The reasons at the time were – soil erosion, wild life, it being a cultural area. People are still using it illegally (NOT OUR CLUB). Mary has been in contact with Forest Ranger Services. They stated they got her email. She will continue to keep in contact with them. Also, be on the lookout for grants that could help pay for things that need to be done,

i.e., surveys.

NEW BUSINESS:

Gordy's grant funds – There is \$3,000.00 left from the initial \$20,000.00 grant. NMOHVA OKed the use of the \$3,000.00 and with \$600.00 from Club funds, Frank can have 2 additional signs made for the Kiosk. These will be color coded tail maps with difficulty levels. A motion was made to use \$600.00 from the Club to make the 2 signs. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

Don Roy pointed out – trying new things that causes you to get winched should not be a fine.

Frank Whiston gave a video presentation on the Motor Vehicle Usage Map (MVUM). It covers five National Forests in New Mexico. Avenza Maps has the maps on their website. These are only Forest Service Lands and NOT BLM.

50/50 raffle \$41.00. Winner Cliff Meier, \$20.50. Cliff said to put his share back into the club.

A motion was made to adjourn and seconded. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion. Meeting adjourned at 7:47 pm.

NM4W Officers and Staff

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