



## The Jeep Lover's Jamboree

# 4-Wheel 4-Real

By Lyndon Conrad Bell

The Earth is a different place at 13,000 feet.

The sky is bluer and the air is cooler when you drive to an altitude most people only experience when they are safely ensconced in an airplane.

Imogene Pass runs through the Colorado Rockies. A former stagecoach trail, it is only accessible by hikers, helicopters and off-road vehicles. The pass peaks at 13,100 feet before it descends into Telluride from Ouray (you-ray), and it traverses some of the most beautiful terrain in the United States.

Peaks of solid rock rise 2000 feet above the trail. Aspen trees color the hillsides with gold, yellow and red leaves in early autumn. The rock faces range in color from gray to reddish brown. Luminescent waterfalls tumble into gorges 1,000-feet deep. Everything in this landscape exists on a grand scale.

There I was picking my way along a primitive trail in Jeep's 2001 Grand Cherokee. Miles Davis on the CD player, chilled bottled water from the cooler in hand, the climate control system set at 72 degrees, luxurious leather cradling my tush, and an incredible automobile underneath me,

I was hugging the trail like a mountain goat in love.

The Grand Cherokee inched its way up sheer rock faces, straddled boulders, and waded through pools of water and mud so deep that the name on the door of the vehicle was submerged. Yet, when we arrived back at the hotel, it was as if I had just returned from the grocery store.

To get an idea of the ruggedness of the terrain, we started at 9 a.m. and returned at 5:30 p.m. Yet, the odometer had only advanced 58.6 miles. One does not *drive* the Imogene Pass, one inches his way along it — carefully!

Just after lunch, we met someone who'd learned this lesson the hard way.

Rounding a bend, a sudden cloud appeared. Our caravan stopped. Everyone jumped out of their vehicles and ran to the front of the pack to find a white Grand Cherokee clinging pre-

cariously to the trail by three of its four wheels. The fourth wheel (the right front) was hanging helplessly over a 1,500-foot dropoff.

Our group helped him and his passenger out of the vehicle, and then we continued into Telluride and sent help.

Later, they told us that after three hours, \$350, and one highly experienced tow operator, they were on their way. The amazing part is, they continued up and over Imogene Pass after the harrowing experience. Their Jeep looked totally unblemished. The guys, well, let's just say they were trying to be brave.

That seems to be the essence of the four-wheeling experience. You see places you'd never see any other way. Relying upon your skill, self-confidence and equipment, you'll have the experience of a lifetime. And if you're very careful, you'll come back to tell others just how cool it is.

"Every Jeep Jamboree features adventurous trails and is supported by knowledgeable trail guides who help the participants negotiate the trails," says Lou Bitonti of Jeep.

Each Jamboree is limited to 100 vehicles that are broken up into small groups and led over the trails. The cost to participate is \$215 for children age 7 - 14 and \$75 for kids age 3 - 6.

For more information, log on to [www.jeepunpaved.com/woj/jamboree](http://www.jeepunpaved.com/woj/jamboree) or call 530-333-4777.

