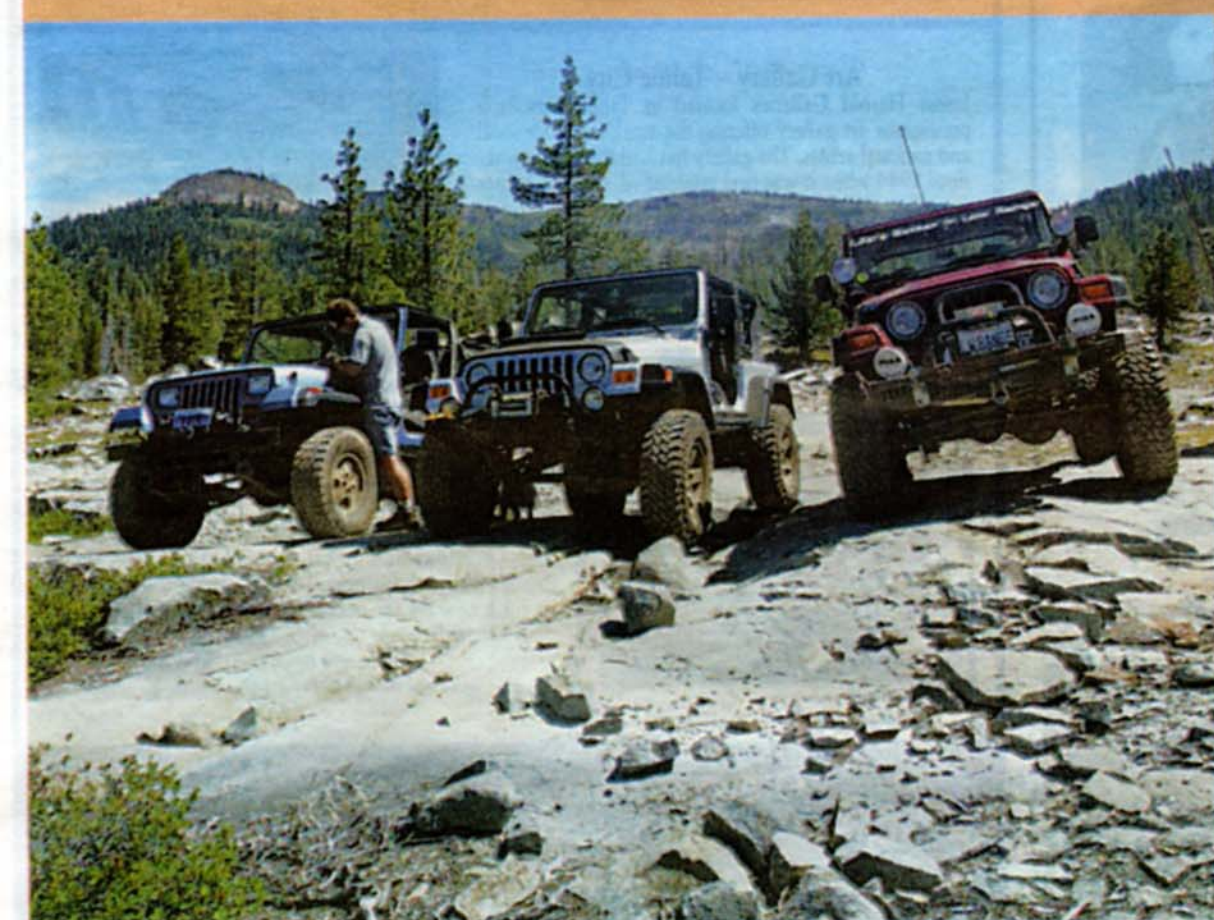




On the right trail



Volunteers along with county and federal officials work together to keep the renown Rubicon Trail open for all ...

STORY BY ALANNA LUNGREN • PHOTOS BY RYAN SALM • SIERRA SUN



thought of by some as noisy and destructive — and in general only garnering attention when a meadow gets torn up — off-roaders get a

bad rap.

But the Sparks, Nev., firefighter who spent a lot of his youth on Tahoe's west shore and now serves as the director of the Rubicon Trail Foundation, Doug Barr is one of hundreds of "Jeepers," as they are known, who volunteer endless hours preserving and maintaining the gem of off highway vehicle (OHV) routes — the Rubicon Trail.

The 22-mile trail crosses the Sierra from Tahoma and climbs thousands of feet to the old Gold Country burg of Georgetown. The trail is a magnet that draws hundreds of lifted vehicles of every stripe, beefed up with 35-inch tires fit for crawling over the granite-lined Sierra.

"I love Jeepin' and I love a clean lake — and I think both can coexist," said Barr, who led a group of volunteer drivers, Placer County engineers and a Tahoe National Forest representative up the

Rubicon Trail on Monday. The goal that day was to identify and check each possible work area for a trail maintenance day on July 22.

Degeneration of routes and hillsides due to overuse and poor trail practices led the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board to issue a cease and desist order against Placer County in 2000. The original order was issued in 1994 and stated that Placer County needed to halt sediment from the McKinney/Rubicon Trail from running off into streams that feed Lake Tahoe.

In order to keep their beloved trail open, the grassroots organization Friends of the Rubicon formed overnight by members of various four-wheeling groups and got to work.

In 2001 they repaired the non-maintained county road to comply with water quality requirements — translating to several volunteer work days and moving

tons upon tons of rock and crushed stone to create better flowing and less-eroding water bars and route passings.

In March of 2006, Placer County received a grant totaling \$40,000 from the California Department of Parks and Recreation OHV Division as a part of the Recreation Trail Program to maintain the nationally recognized OHV route. Engineer Amy Green from Placer

County Department of Public Works was on the trail Monday to record GPS coordinates of the work areas and take measurements to estimate the amount of fill needed for some of the projects, as well as to see logistically how far a dump truck could reach.

"It's not a one-year fix," explained Barr. "We're trying to keep the trail open, keep forest on either side."

The majority of the problems, according to Barr, stem from OHV drivers veering off the designated trail, leaving

human waste and garbage. To combat the problems, chemical toilets are strongly encouraged and volunteers work on trails to prevent new roads from being formed.

"Our goal is to keep people on the route," said Susanne Jensen from the Truckee Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest. "Preserve watershed and water quality — a loss of vegetation accelerates erosion, which hurts water quality."

Jensen called one of the work areas where the volunteers will block off two bypasses and keep open the highest of the three. "A great restoration project." She is also there to make sure that any work to be done will not threaten sensitive areas or archeological sites.

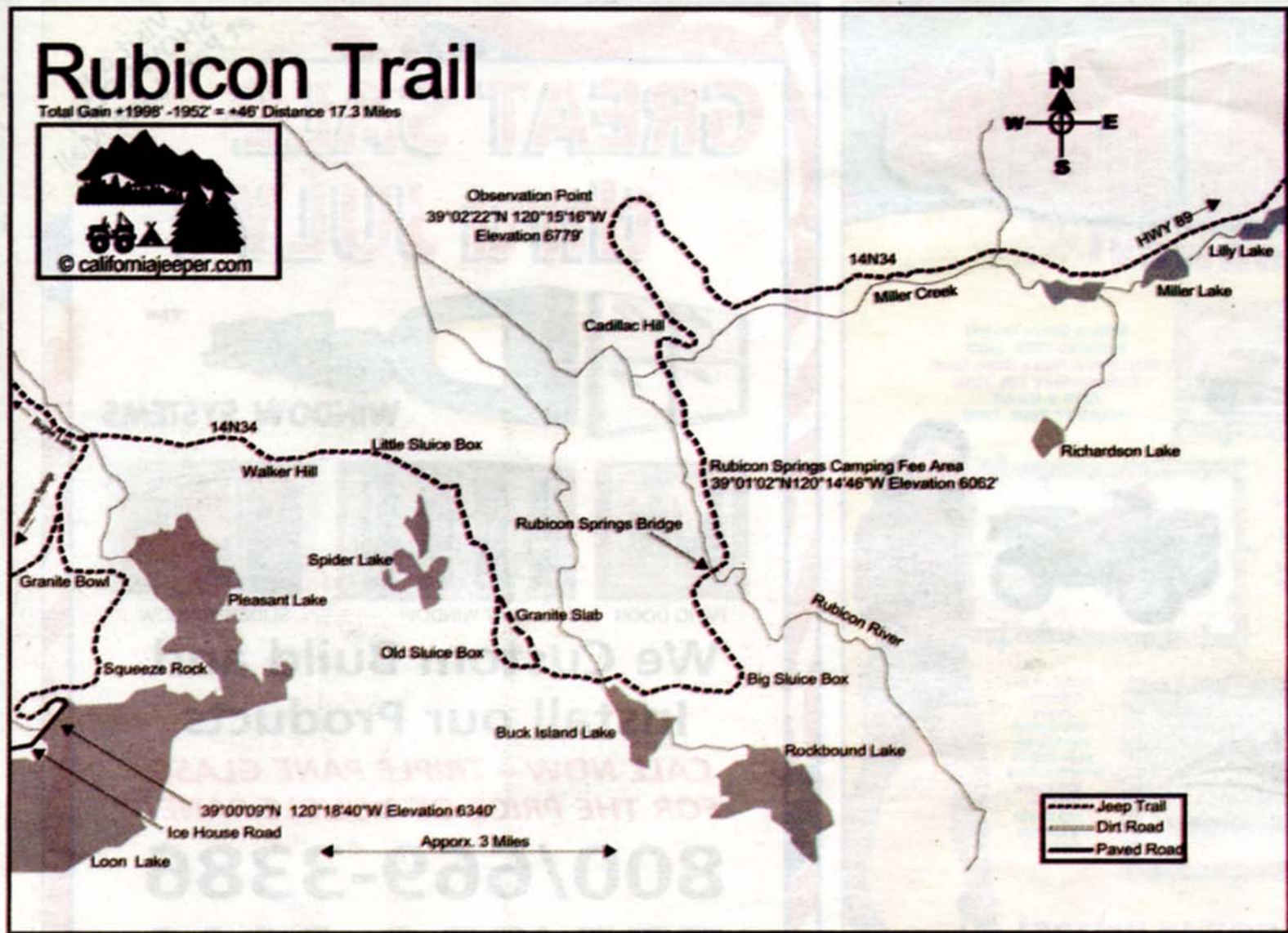
The four-wheeling enthusiasts and trail volunteers said they don't want to change the level of difficulty or challenge of the trail by closing certain bypasses or blocking where OHVs have attempted to drive off-route. But just as important to them is the viability of the trail and preventing others from ruining it for the everyone.

"We worry about the yahoos all day long," said Steve Sampson, one of Monday's volunteer Jeep drivers. "It takes one to screw it up."

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Doug Barr

Rubicon Trail Foundation Director



MASTERING A PLAN FOR THE RUBICON TRAIL

Spider Lake, a popular spot along the Rubicon Trail in the Eldorado National Forest, has had a spotty past. In 2004, the U.S. Forest Service closed the area due to sanitation problems caused by visitors leaving excessive human waste.

In 2005, a court order superseded the Eldorado National Forest closure, restricting motorized vehicles to forest system roadways. According to Rich Platt, Eldorado Forest resource officer, only user-created routes existed in the Spider Lake area.

"For the most part, people don't like the restrictions, but they understand why," Platt said.

A Rubicon Trail Master Plan is in the draft review and public response stages and is being developed to establish guidelines to manage the use of the entire Rubicon Trail where it crosses public land.

The Rubicon Trail Master Plan can be viewed at El Dorado County's Web site at www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/Rubicon/MasterPlanReports.html.

Left: Amy Green from the Placer County Department of Public Works measures tire tracks on the Rubicon Trail on Monday.