

TDS DESERT SAFARI

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Over 40 Years of Getting Twisted

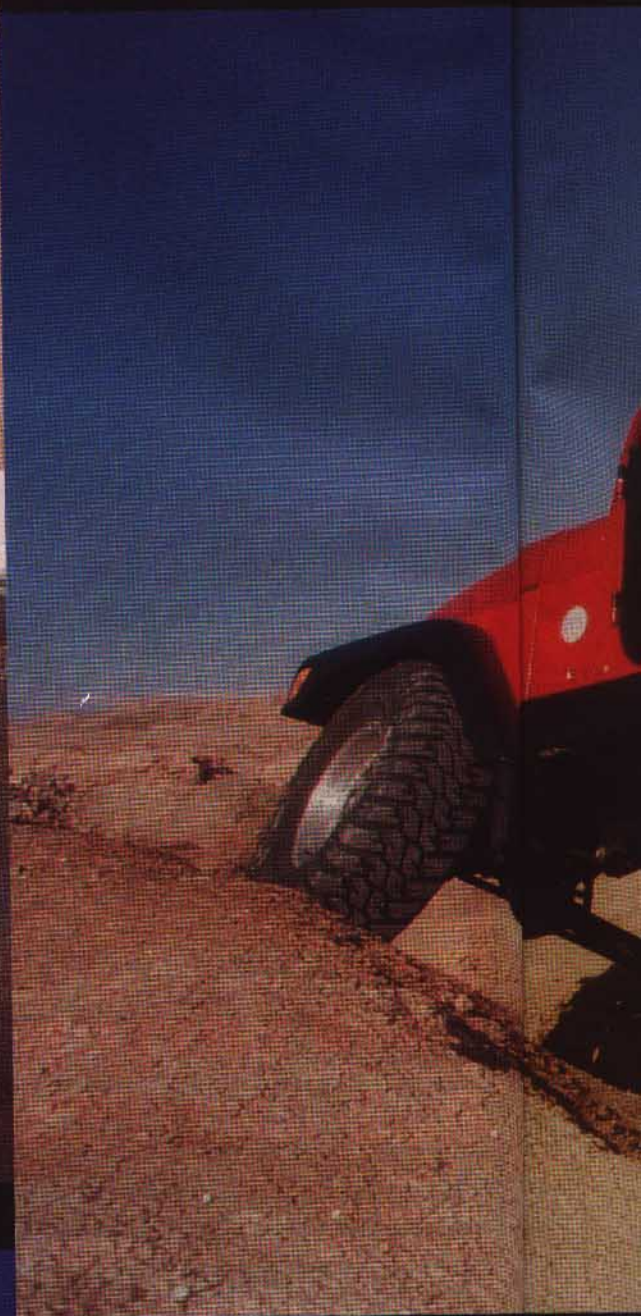
MILLIONS of years ago the Gulf of California extended far beyond its present shores. The waters of the Pacific Ocean extended though the present Imperial and Coachella valleys, and on into Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys. Eventually the Peninsular Ranges on the west and the Chocolate Mountains on the east began to rise and the whole area came up out of the water, sort of. You see, this land locked desert is still well below sea level and from time to time the Colorado River meandered into the area forming fresh water lakes. The last of the Pleistocene lakes to occupy the basin was Lake Cahuilla. Lake Cahuilla was six times the size of the present Salton Sea. The mighty Colorado dumped 150,000,000 tons or more of silt into the area every year, until finally changing its course again. Lake Cahuilla dried up before the first Spanish Explorers came to the region in the 16th century, but the silt, sand and gravel bars from the ancient lake and sea floors remained.



▲ Even short, little flat fender Jeeps can find the trails so tight that they lift a wheel or two.



▲ The Trail Guides have a meeting just before heading out to staff the various checkpoints along the trail. The volunteers at the event try to ensure that you have a fun and safe time.





▼ The Terrain at the Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari will test your suspension to its limits. You'll see lots of articulation and plenty of air time.

▲ Many vendors bring displays into the main camp and show off their wares. Typically the crowds are small until a few hours before the raffle on Saturday night. After all, everyone is on the trail.



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Full Size trucks and SUVs are welcome at the event. The trails are marked with bypass routes for those tight areas where longer vehicles might scrape the body. Just look for the Green routes and you'll be fine.



▲ Even seemingly easy sections of trail can twist and flex your suspension.

▼ Here you can see the original, flat terrain typical of an ancient lakebed or sea bottom. It's the top of the mesa. The eroded terrain around these small dirt mesas creates a labyrinth of trails to enjoy.



Off-Road Adventures

About 300 years after the Spanish first explored the region, an adventurous group from the San Diego area began exploring the foothills and mountains and prehistoric seabeds of the area. Of particular interest was the region now known as Truckhaven Hills. Joe Branch, one of the founding Fathers of the event, told us that back in the 1950s he used to come to the Truckhaven area every February with five to six friends, to do some four wheeling. Sometime in the 1960's this small group from the El Cajon Search and Rescue, (SAR) formed the Tierra Del Sol Four Wheel Drive Club. Joe Branch, Bob Londo and Bill and Doris Wynn where among the Charter members of the club. Bill has passed on but as of last year, Joe and Bob where still enjoying the desert.

At first, the Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari (now known as "TDS") was sort of a local secret, and kept small on purpose. However, after 33 years word spread and now the event has the largest attendance in California.

The Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari and the Truckhaven Hills area is known for its sandy washes, rocky canyons, deep gorges with almost perpendicular walls and great hill climbs. The fine silt of which the soil is composed, washes out like powdered sugar whenever it rains in the area, which happens at least a few days a year. This ensures an ever-changing terrain to play on and in the end

▼ Narrow canyons with steep walls are common in the area.



Keeping all the wheels on the ground can be a challenge on the trails of Truckhaven Hills.



▲ The gather dollars

▼ Play Hills is



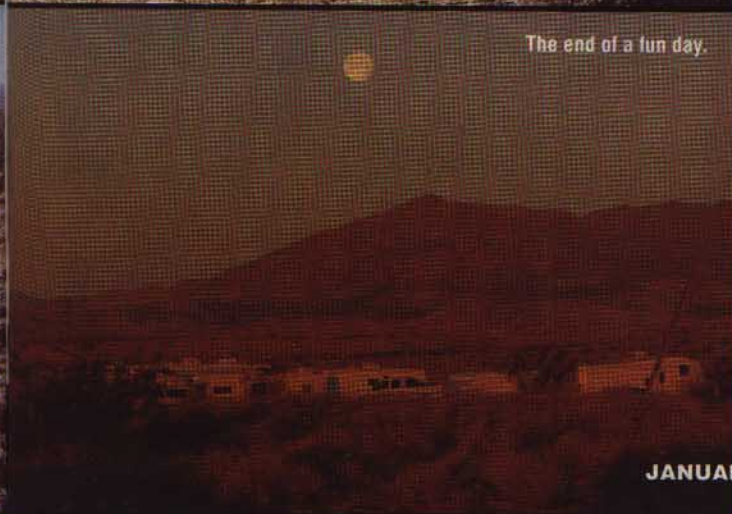
▲ The Prize Raffle in Saturday night is a big draw. The crowd begins gathering early and most everyone stays till the end. Thousands of dollars in prizes are handed out to a multitude of lucky winners.



▼ Playing Follow the Leader through the notches and slots of Truckhaven Hills is always fun.



The end of a fun day.



▲ The steep hills make for some exciting four wheeling. Care should be taken as most are loose and may have sharp descents on the other side.

◀ Setting up camp can be as simple as parking a motorhome along one of the many pieces of pavement that branch off Marina Drive. The open desert also offers plenty of space to pitch a tent. (Jim Friga photo)

results in some of the best obstacles in the state to flex your suspension on.

The 43rd Annual Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari is just around the corner. Mark your calendars for March 5-6, 2005 and don't miss your chance to four wheel on ancient sea beds and lake shores in the Land of the Sun. (Tierra Del Sol means Land of the Sun in Spanish). The event is held in the Truckhaven Hills area, just west of the Salton Sea, off Marina Drive, about two miles north of State Route S22 and Highway 86.

The main event is on Saturday, and an orderly line-up begins the night before. The crowd is split into two groups and are sent out to tackle trails marked with red, green and blue flags. Red are the difficult areas, green are the bypass routes for SUVs and large wheelbase rigs. The blue flags are reserved for extreme obstacles meant for rigs that are equipped with the best gear money can buy and piloted by those who are driven to tackle any challenge.

Sunday you can sign up for a "Rough Run" that is a follow the leader trip over the twistiest terrain navigable in a Jeep, or take the easy trips to the Calcite mine or "Pumpkin Patch." Last year also had a "GPS Treasure Hunt" on Sunday for those who wanted to practice their land navigation skills.

In addition to great four wheeling, the Tierra Del Sol club also offers a Saturday night prize raffle. Last year there were 45 vendors who contributed to the event. Of course 4 Wheel Parts along with Pro Comp tires were on the list. Thousands of dollars in prizes were awarded to numerous lucky winners.

To attend the 43rd Annual (March 5-6, 2005) Tierra Del Sol Desert Safari, go to their web site, www.tds4x4.com, and pre-register. Or show up at the event and register there. Last year pre-registration was \$45 while on-site registration cost \$60. Remember, only street legal 4x4 vehicles are allowed, no motorcycles, dune buggies or ATVs. Also you must meet the minimum equipment requirements. ▲

Required Equipment:

- Roll bar or Metal Top
- Seat Belts for Each Occupant
- Functional Emergency brake
- Mufflers
- Fire Extinguisher
- Tow Strap, Cable or Winch

Recommended Gear:

- First Aid Kit
- Serviceable Spare Tire
- CB Radio