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Whether on four wheels or two, it's nicer to be nice

Josh Nichols

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Let's start by reviewing the stereotypes: ATVers are rowdy, environment-hating backcountry ramblers who blow exhaust in the faces of mountain bikers as they pass them on the trail. Mountain bikers are self-righteous trail users always working to get backcountry access closed to all-terrain vehicles, right?

If only it were that simple. On a recent mountain biking adventure, two buddies and I did the Poison Spider Trail just outside Moab. It's considered a classic ride for mountain bikers, and it's just as popular for ATVers.

On one steep climb, we came upon a group of four Jeeps. The drivers were gathered around one vehicle with a man lying beneath it, apparently trying to figure out where a drip or funny noise was coming from. They were right in the middle of the trail, and as we got closer, I assumed the folks standing around watching would honor trail etiquette and step aside for us.

They didn't.

I got off my bike and walked around them, restraining a snarl. "Inconsiderate, trail-hogging jerks," I grumbled as I made my way up the trail. "Take your beasts somewhere else."

A mile up the trail I was still fuming when I noticed that my pedaling had all of a sudden gotten harder. Drat! My luck for the weekend had finally run out. I had a flat. I already had my bike flipped upside down and the punctured tube removed by the time a Jeep came creeping up the trail.

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"Great, go ahead and get your kicks as you rumble by the broken-down mountain biker," I thought.

The Jeep came to a complete stop next to me. "Got everything you need?" the driver asked, leaning out the driver-side door and examining my situation.

"Yeah, I'm good. But thank you."
"Are you sure? Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Nope, all covered, but I really appreciate it."
I looked at my two buddies as the Jeep drove off, "Nice guy."

With my flat fixed, we continued on our way. One buddy took off ahead of us, the other lagged a bit behind. I rode for what had to have been three, four miles, soaking up the sun and scenery on a beautiful fall ride in canyon country.

Then it hit me. The buddy that would always ride ahead would usually stop and wait for us to catch up every mile or so. But I'd been riding for a lot more than a mile. He was nowhere to be seen.

Somewhere, I'd missed a turn. I looked for answers from my buddy, who had just caught up from behind. He looked left, he looked right. "Yeah, I'm not sure," he said. We were lost in Poison Spider's tangled web of trails. We backtracked a few miles and took a turn that looked right. Our third friend never appeared, and we were convinced we should have reached a ridge overlooking Moab that was our way out of the slick-rock wilderness.

We then did what any tired mountain bikers would do. We took a seat on the nearest rock, removed our helmets so we could scratch our heads and ate a granola bar. Then another Jeep pulled up. We explained our situation, and the driver pointed behind us. "That's where you're trying to get."

Our Moab overlook, and access to a trail down, was just 200 yards away. We couldn't believe it. Five minutes earlier, we were prepared to backtrack two hours, when our way out was 200 yards away. Saved again, by a

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Josh Nichols

• Burning question

Jeeper.

When we finally made our way back to the parking lot, our buddy was waiting for us, looking pained: He'd waited for us on the ridge for more than an hour. He said quite a few people in Jeeps stopped and asked if he was OK while he waited, and no, they hadn't seen us. One Jeeper gave him a Gatorade, and then asked, "You hungry?"

Now remember, some in the ATV community will lead you to believe that they live to snarl at mountain bikers, and some in the mountain biking community would lead you to believe that riders should do the same.

Once again, someone forgot to tell this Jeeper that. He tossed my friend a six-inch Subway sandwich, wished him the best and headed on his way.

* JOSH NICHOLS is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, a service of High Country News (hcn.org). He is managing editor of the Grand Junction Free Press in Grand Junction, Colo., and admits that he got started in mountain biking because a cheap mountain bike was a lot cheaper than a cheap Jeep.

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