

text by Chris Barnes | photography by Tom Smith

Every April the members of the North Jersey Jeep Club (NJJC) gather for their annual Spring Ride. This is more than just a monthly trail ride. It's a celebration of the beginning of great 'wheeling weather and the renewal of long-standing friendships. Sure, every 'wheeling trip is special for the members of NJJC, but this one is a definite don't-miss. Aside from the excellent time on the trails, the club not only pays the park entry fee for all of the members, everyone enjoys a catered lunch out in the middle of the trails.

Wheelin' It Yankee Style

The North Jersey Jeep Club started as a small group of Jeep owners who shared a passion for off-road adventure. Today, the club has grown to more than 100 members. While the organization is made up mostly of Jeepers from the northern New Jersey area, it is not restricted to people north of the Raritan River. In fact, there are members from as far south as Toms River, and even a few from Pennsylvania and Maryland. The vehicles run the gamut from stock, fresh-off-the-showroom floor Jeeps to fire-breathing, huge-tired monster Jeeps and everything in between. NJJC definitely does not discriminate. So long as you share a passion for Jeeps, you're welcome.

This year's Spring Ride was held at Rausch Creek Off-Road Park in Joliet, Pennsylvania. For those who haven't been to Rausch Creek, you owe it to yourself to check it out. There are trails for everyone. Whether you're a timid first-timer or a hardcore rockcrawler, you're sure to find some trails to your liking, vehicle and skill level. Thirty-nine members brought their Jeeps to Rausch Creek, and at least four other Jeeps met up with NJJC there to have a trial run with the club. Several friends and family members tagged along as well. In all, more than 80 people turned out for the big event.

The day started out in the staging area, where NJJC President Peter Bartell conducted a driver's meeting and went over a few basic safety rules for novices and veterans alike. Then everyone peeled off to join their respective trail groups.

The club broke down into six groups to keep the trails from becoming congested. There were three groups of stockers and mildly modified Jeeps running "green" and "blue" trails; one group of modified rigs without lockers running "blue" and "black" trails; one group of modified rigs running "blue" and "black" trails with lockers; and one group of highly modified rigs running nothing but the most difficult black trails.

At around 12:30 p.m., all of the groups made their way to the Picnic Area, where NJJC Vice President Frank Applegate and John Louman were manning a huge grill and serving up sausage



(Above) Club President Peter Bartell grabs some air on trail 6A in his '84 CJ7. **(Right)** John Kelly climbs out of a sinkhole on Trail 1.

That Jeeping crew from North Jersey hits the dirt at Rausch Creek

Wheelin' It Yankee Style



Tom Smith negotiates Rock Creek in his '82 CJ7.

sandwiches, burgers and dogs, chili and all the fixings. Music blared from the speakers of John's truck, making for a great family picnic atmosphere. And that's really what you get at an NJJC event. Everyone remained long enough to eat and mingle, then it was back to the trails.

At the end of the day, everyone met up back at the staging area where a few Jeeps were strapped down to trailers, doors were put back on and tops raised for the long ride home. Everyone shared their stories of victory and defeat out in the woods. The day was a total success, thanks to the leadership of NJJC, as well as the cooperation of its members. Certainly, we can't leave out Lynn Ehrenfeld, the host at Rausch Creek, who has been accommodating not just to NJJC but to everyone in the northeastern off-road community.

Oh, and remember those four guest rigs? Three of them signed up to join NJJC.



John Kelly wonders if his TJ has the grit. It does...



The Jersey Crew

If you live in the mid-Atlantic region—particularly in the New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania or southern New York areas—you may want to hook up with the North Jersey Jeep Club. This up-and-coming club holds monthly meetings and events, and includes trail rides, tech days and charity events as part of their organization's mission. For membership information, or to get to know this great group of fellow Jeep enthusiasts, visit them online at www.northjerseyjeepclub.org.



The Rausch Experience

Rausch Creek Off-Road Park is part of the larger Rausch Creek Motorsports operation located near Joliett, Pennsylvania, just off Interstate 81 (Exit 107). The park contains some 1,700 acres divided into eastern and western sections. Both sections contain a variety of trails, from beginner/stock "green" routes to the hard-hitting "black" trails. From April 1 through November 30 the park office is open Saturdays and Sundays from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. During the week reservations are required to go out and play.

Rausch Creek Off-Road Park has an excellent Web site offering detailed maps of the park, its camping facilities, cost, directions to get there and local hotel accommodations. Check it out at www.rc4x4.org.



(Top) Peter Bartell and Dave Stromwasser in his '82 CJ7 enter Rock Creek. Rock Creek is an 1,800-foot-long glacier deposit littered with large, tightly packed boulders. (Above) Tom De Caro pulls a hill in his XJ.

