El Mirage Trail Maintenance & Cleanup Weekend



October marked our annual trip to El Mirage for some much-needed trail maintenance and cleanup. As many of you know, El Mirage depends heavily on volunteers like us to help keep the trails in good shape and the area accessible for everyone to enjoy. Beyond the physical work we put in, those volunteer hours are extremely important. Many of the grants that help fund and maintain El Mirage rely on documented volunteer hours each year, making these work weekends even more valuable. It's always rewarding to give a little something back to an area that provides us with so much wheeling enjoyment throughout the year.

Terry and I made it into camp early Friday morning. After getting everything set up, we met up with Steve and Snoopy, who had rolled in the night before. Once everyone was ready, we held a quick driver's meeting, discussed the plan for the day, and headed out to get our hands dirty.

Our route took us up Hugger's Hill, through Snoopy's Gulch, and eventually across into some of the newer trail sections. Along the way, we made plenty of stops to pick up cans, bottles, and whatever other trash we could find. Fortunately, the first portion of the trail was in pretty good shape, so we were able to make good time while still keeping our eyes open for anything that needed attention.



Once we reached the backside, we began working our way through the newer sections of trail. These areas still needed some breaking in, so putting a little more vehicle traffic on them while picking up trash was a win-win. As we worked our way down one of the sections, I spotted what I thought was a Desert Tortoise up ahead. Naturally, I quickly jumped out to investigate, only to discover that it was nothing more than the remains of a tortoise shell. Not exactly the wildlife encounter I was hoping for! We moved the shell off the trail and continued working our way through the final new section.

By the time we wrapped up that portion of the trail, it was getting close to lunchtime. We started making our way back toward camp, looking forward to a delicious lunch generously provided by Extreme Terrain and their Clean Trail Grant program. However, as soon as we dropped back down the front side of the mountains, the amount of trash started to increase considerably.



We came across an entire car bumper, an old television, and countless bags of cans scattered along the trail. It was a good reminder of exactly why these cleanup trips are so important. We slowly but surely gathered what we could and eventually made our way back to camp to enjoy some lunch.

After lunch, there wasn't much time for relaxing. We headed back out and continued our cleanup efforts along the backside of Fearless. Overall, the trash situation wasn't too bad, but we made sure to grab anything and everything we came across before calling it a day and heading back to camp.



That evening, Doug rolled into camp along with two of his friends, Brian and his son Konoa. The temperatures dropped pretty quickly, and the weather radar made things look a little concerning. We could see what appeared to be some pretty significant rainstorms developing on both sides of us, and for a while, it looked like we might be in for a wet night. Fortunately, the storms managed to pass us by, and we escaped without getting soaked. We spent the evening gathered around the campfire, enjoying some good conversation and discussing our game plan for the following morning.

Saturday morning came quickly, and Cole joined us at camp just before our driver's meeting. With everyone accounted for, we reviewed the work that still needed to be done and came up with a plan for the day. During Friday's run, we had made note of several areas where trail signs were either missing, damaged, or in need of replacement. That became our first priority.

We headed back out and essentially retraced Friday's route, but this time with a little different mission. Along the way, we replaced damaged signs with fresh stickers, repaired existing markers, and even broke out the auger to install several brand-new signs where they were missing altogether. The newer trail sections needed the most attention, as many of those areas had never been properly marked. It was a productive morning, and the additional vehicle traffic was another great opportunity to continue breaking in those newer sections.

As lunchtime approached, we made our way back to camp for another generously sponsored meal from Extreme Terrain and their Clean Trail Grant program. After lunch, we loaded up all the trash we had collected, including the car bumper and television, and hauled everything over to the maintenance area dumpster. With the cleanup portion of the weekend largely handled, it was time to get back to work on the final new trail section.



We headed out and worked our way up the gulch, continuing to establish the trail while adding new signs along the way. This particular section starts with a small but rocky waterfall before transitioning into a fairly steep and loose climb. I managed to pick my way through and make it to the top, but Cole wasn't quite as fortunate. He found himself in a legitimate rock-and-a-hard-place situation. With a massive boulder directly behind him and his differential firmly planted on a rock, he wasn't going anywhere without some assistance.

We decided the best approach was to try winching him forward. I climbed back up to my Jeep, repositioned, and walked the winch line down the hill to Cole. We got everything hooked up and started applying tension. Unfortunately, there was one small problem. Instead of Cole moving forward, I was the one moving, sliding right down the hill toward him! Clearly, that wasn't going to work out as planned.

Time for Plan B.

We disconnected the winch line, backed Cole up just a little, and started building a road with whatever rocks we could find. After piling up enough material to create a better approach over the obstacle, we finally had a workable line. With a little patience and some careful driving, Cole was able to climb up and over the differential hanger and continue making his way up the hill. Sometimes the best trail tool isn't a winch or a locker, but a good pile of rocks and a little determination!

Steve, driving Snoopy's yellow LY, brought up the rear. He had managed to walk through every obstacle along the trail without much trouble, but that final steep climb proved to be a little more challenging. It took two attempts to find enough traction and finally make it to the top. Once everyone was up and through, we finished installing a few more signs and called it a successful day. We made our way back to camp, wrapped things up, and enjoyed the satisfaction of knowing we had accomplished quite a bit over the weekend.



Overall, it was another fantastic and productive weekend at El Mirage. Between the cleanup efforts, trail maintenance, and work marking the newer sections, we managed to accomplish a lot. In total, we hauled away an entire truckload of trash, repaired and installed numerous trail signs, and continued breaking in several new sections of trail.

A huge thank you to everyone who made the trip out and donated their time and effort. Every set of hands makes a difference, and it's great to see our club continuing to step up and support these areas that we all enjoy.

An additional thank you goes out to Extreme Terrain and their Clean Trail Grant program for providing the meals and helping make these volunteer weekends possible.

We are already looking forward to our next biannual work event at El Mirage. Hopefully, we can get an even bigger group together next time and continue making a difference through our volunteer hours. After all, a little time spent maintaining the trails goes a long way toward keeping them open and enjoyable for everyone.

Until next time, keep the shiny side up and the trash out of the trails!

Thanks to the Extreme Terrian for the Clean Trail Project Grant, lunch, snacks and refreshments was provided to all volunteers that came out to help on Friday and Saturday. This grant also covered the cost of all supplies that were needed as well. The Roughwheelers greatly appreciate our sponsor Extreme Terrain for their support!

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For more information on this program: https://www.extremeterrain.com/clean-trail-initiative-program.html