

Northern GUIDE TO **California Backroads & 4-Wheel Drive Trails**

By CHARLES A. WELLS

Sherman Pass 4 x 4 Trail

This eTrail Provided
in Partnership with





Bakersfield Trailblazers 4WD Club at start.



Club could fix minor damage.



Lucky shot of black bear.



Large sequoia was cut into smaller pieces and rolled off trail.



Forest Service fixed this later.



View from 33E29 south of Sherman Peak.



Fixing bear-damaged sign.



Fire did not damage camp spots at Bonita Meadow.

Sherman Pass 4x4 Trail 68

Location: Northeast of Bakersfield, north of Kernville and northwest of Ridgecrest.

Difficulty: Difficult. The first half is very steep and susceptible to washouts. The second half is rocky and rutted in places. Aggressive, high clearance SUVs can get through but vehicle damage is possible.

(Authors note: I had a rare opportunity to drive the trail as part of a volunteer work party sent in to see if the trail was passable after the 150,000-acre McNalley Fire the previous summer. Supervised by a ranger from the Sequoia National Forest, the Bakersfield Trailblazers 4-Wheel-Drive Club headed up the mountain to make repairs. In places, the trail was literally obliterated with 6-ft.-deep ruts and giant fallen sequoia trees. We repaired small damaged areas, but the worst sections would require major equipment. The club managed to complete the run despite the obstacles. The Forest Service later brought in earth moving equipment and officially opened the trail.)

Features: Despite the fire damage, this trail is still quite scenic as it climbs to almost 10,000 feet at Sherman Peak. New wildflowers grow in abundance in the fertile soil and wildlife is returning to the area. Because underbrush was burned away, I was able to get a rare picture of a wandering bear (see opposite page). The fire did not reach the east end of the trail where excellent camping was found at Bonita Meadows.

Time & Distance: As described here, the trail measures 16.5 miles and takes 3 to 4 hours depending upon conditions and equipment. You can camp overnight and explore many other roads in the area.

To Get There: Head north on Sierra Way (Mtn. Rd. 99) from Kernville which is just north of Lake Isabella. The road follows the gorgeous Kern River about 20 miles to Sherman Peak Road. Turn right and go northeast 8.2 miles to the well-marked Sherman Pass 4x4 Trail on the left.

Trail Description: *Reset odometer at start (01).* Head uphill through gate on a steep, narrow road with many tight switchbacks. These switchbacks are prone to washouts and could be rough. Only a chimney remains of a burned cabin at 1.7 miles. At 2.4 a large 5-ft. diameter sequoia tree had fallen across the trail during the fire. Thanks to the Bakersfield Trailblazers, this tree was cut into smaller pieces and pushed aside (see photo opposite page).

Cross North Meadow Creek at 2.5. The road, which follows the creek northeast, is partially blocked by fallen trees in places. Some maneuvering around trees may be necessary.

Roads converge at a clearing in an unburned area called North Meadow at 3.4 miles (02). You'll come back to this point later, but for now, turn right and follow North Meadows Pass Road 33E29 towards Sherman Peak. Bear left at 4.3 miles and continue to climb. (North Meadows Pass Road goes right downhill to paved Sherman Pass Road in 2.3 miles.) Sherman Peak is reached at 5.2 miles (03). The peak itself is not that attractive since it is covered with radio towers, but you get a birdseye view of the surrounding mountains and the fire coverage.

Return to North Meadows (02) and *reset your odometer*. Turn right and continue north. As you head through the open trees a short distance, you may see a 4x4 road that goes to the left. Ignore it; it soon dead ends. Stay on the main trail and bear right at about 0.2 miles. (Straight is an alternate route but very confusing.) After turning right, the trail drops down a steep, rocky hill which involves some rock crawling. At the bottom of the hill, at about 0.4 miles (04), the trail swings right. Cross a short boggy area at 0.7, followed by more rock crawling.

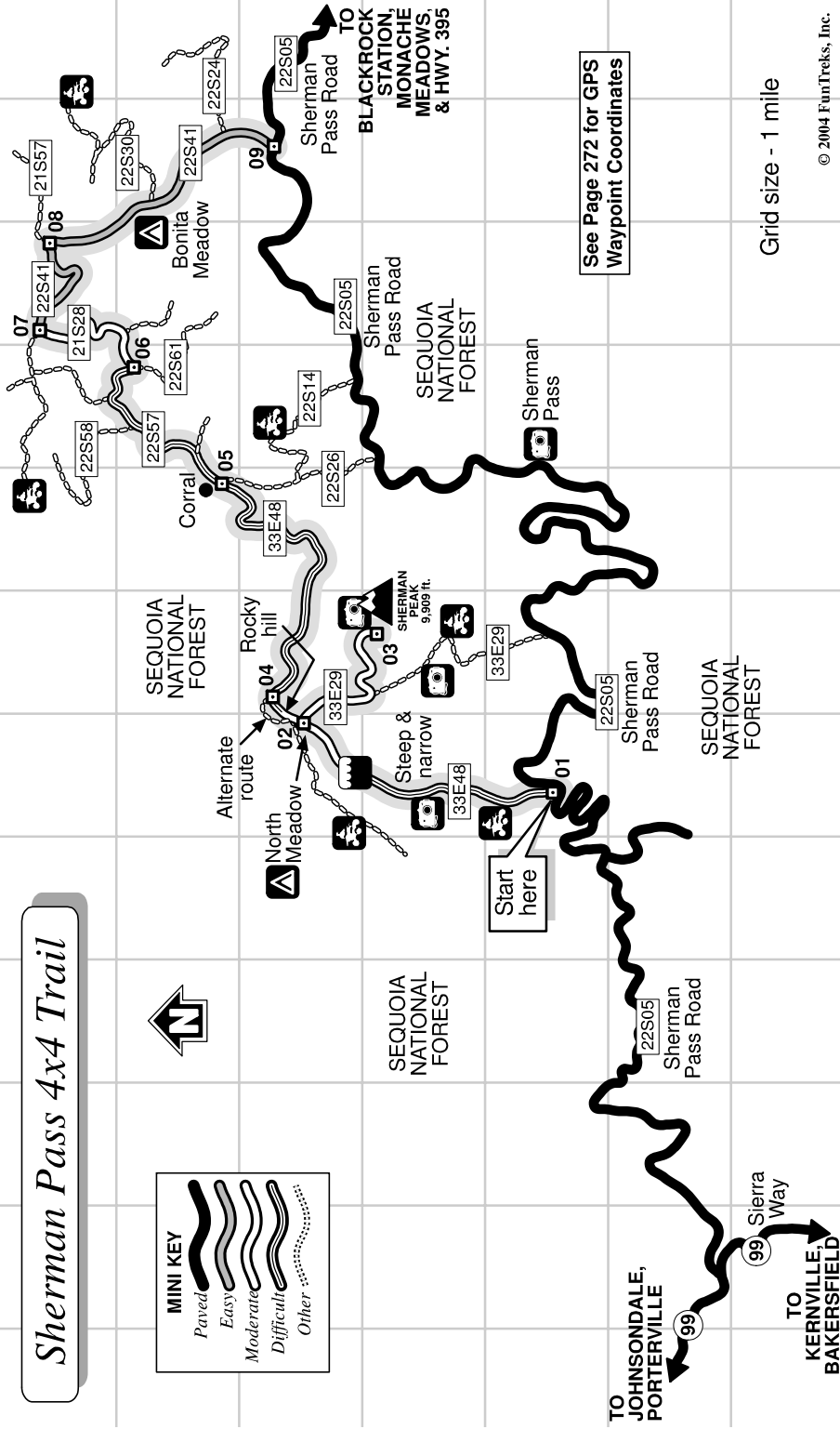
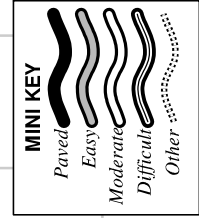
Make a hard left by a corral at 3.2 miles (05). A motorcycle trail crosses before reaching a fork at 3.5 miles. Turn left at the fork as the trail winds tightly through the trees with more rock crawling. Bear left at 5.7 miles (06) where a sign indicates the trail is maintained by the Bakersfield Trailblazers and the Ridgecrest Geargrinders. Turn right at 6.4 miles (07) on 22S41, Bonita Meadows Road. Make another right at 7.5 miles (08) as the road gets much easier. Small roads branch off to the right at 8.4 miles to great camp spots under the trees at Bonita Meadow. Paved Sherman Pass Road 22S05 is reached at 9.9 miles (09).

Return Trip: Right on paved 22S05 goes back to start of trail and on to Kernville and Bakersfield. Left goes to the Blackrock Work Station and Monache Meadows, Trail #67. Left eventually connects to Highway 395 about 37 miles southeast of the work station. Take Highway 395 south to Inyokern and Ridgeway.

Services: Closest gas at Kernville and Inyokern. Full services in Bakersfield and Ridgeway. No services along trail, although a portable toilet was located at the start.

Maps: Sequoia National Forest map, Forest Service map of the Kern Plateau Off-Highway Vehicle Routes, USGS 100,000-scale map, Isabella Lake, CA,

Sherman Pass 4x4 Trail



See Page 272 for GPS
Waypoint Coordinates

Grid size - 1 mile

Wpt.	Mile	Latitude North		Longitude West		UTM Easting	UTM Northing	Zone
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You should set your GPS unit on Datum NAD27CONUS.

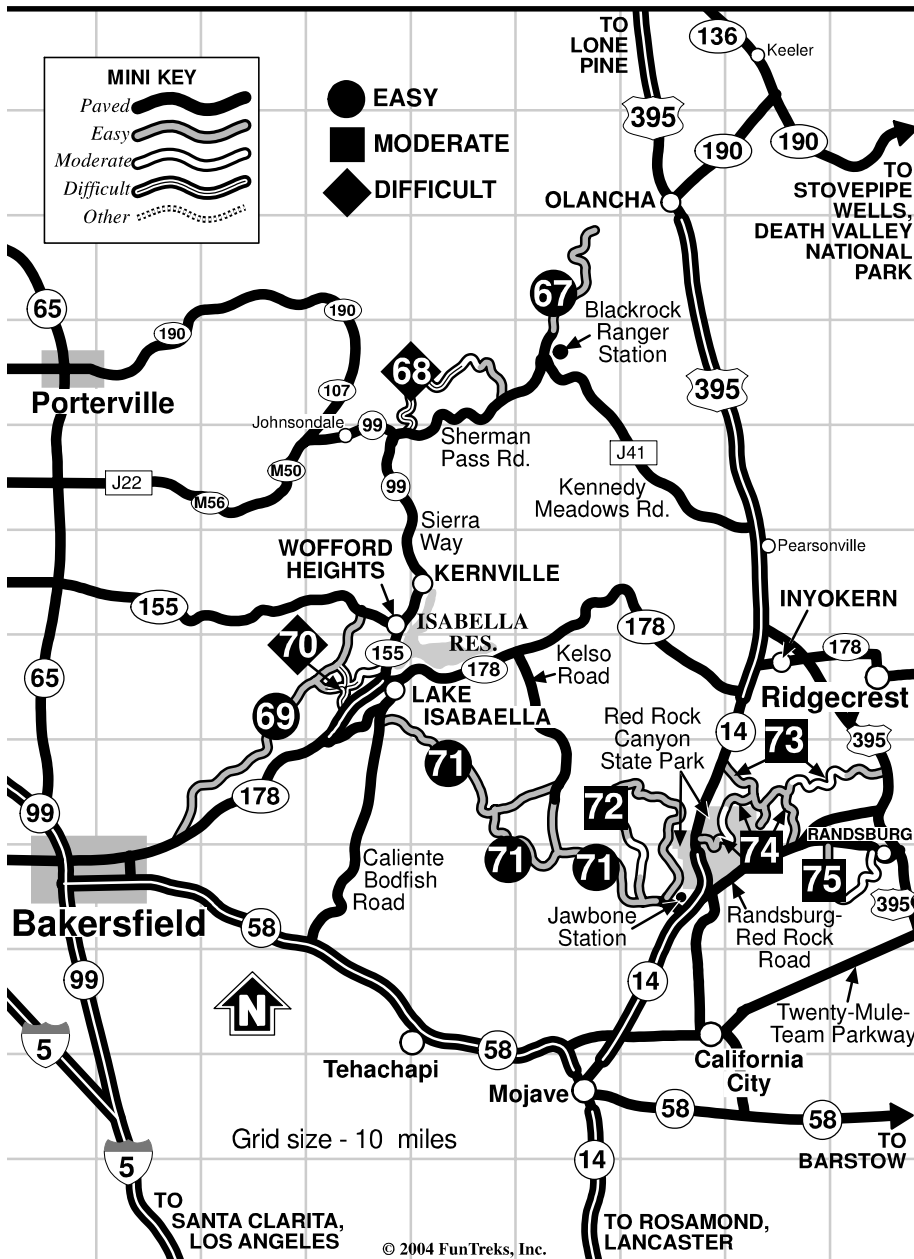
68. SHERMAN PASS 4X4 TRAIL

1	0.0	35	59	15.0	118	24	47.4	372607	3983286	11
2	3.4	36	1	9.0	118	24	7.3	373662	3986784	11
3	5.2	36	0	36.8	118	23	22.3	374775	3985775	11
4	0.4	36	1	22.1	118	23	53.8	374006	3987183	11
5	3.2	36	1	46.3	118	22	1.8	376820	3987887	11
6	5.7	36	2	38.5	118	20	48.9	378667	3989472	11
7	6.4	36	3	3.2	118	20	44.3	378791	3990229	11
8	7.5	36	2	57.6	118	19	59.4	379913	3990043	11
9	9.9	36	1	22.5	118	19	7.2	381179	3987092	11











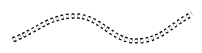

























AREA 9

Bakersfield,
Lake Isabella,
Ridgecrest,
Mojave

- 67. Monache Meadows
- 68. Sherman Pass
4x4 Trail
- 69. Rancheria Road
- 70. Freeway Ridge
- 71. Jawbone to Lake
Isabella
- 72. Jawbone OHV Area
- 73. Bonanza Gulch/ EP15
- 74. Opal Canyon/
Last Chance Canyon
- 75. Rand Mountain



Map Legend

	Interstate		Toilet
	Paved Road*		Gas
	Easy Trail*		Parking
	Moderate Trail*		Picnic Area
	Difficult Trail*		Camping
	Other Road*		Mine
	Described in text		Hiking
	Hiking Trail		Cabin
	Boundaries & Divides		Water Crossing
	Cliff, Canyon		Fishing
	Railroad		ATVs, Dirt bikes
	Mountain Peak		Scenic Point
	Lake, Sand Dune		Windmill
	Map Orientation		Ghost town
	Interstate		Major Obstacle
	U.S. Highway		GPS Waypoint
	State & County Road		
	Forest Service Road		
	BLM Road		
	Starting point of trail		

Scale indicated by grid

Scale is different for each map; check grid size at bottom of map.

* These items repeated on each map for your convenience. See Mini Key.

CALIFORNIA LAWS, LICENSING AND FEES

California has the greatest number of off-highway vehicle (OHV) enthusiasts in the nation and the number is growing rapidly. In the last twenty years OHV registrations have increased 83%. Unfortunately, since 1985, land available for OHV recreation has decreased 47%. Much of this land was lost in 1994 when Congress passed the California Desert Protection Act. Over 7 million acres of land were designated wilderness and closed to OHV recreation. To deal with this problem, California has enacted special licensing classifications, strict OHV laws and additional fees which are explained as follows:

Street-Legal Vehicles. This classification includes licensed SUVs, Jeeps and dual-purpose motorcycles. They are allowed on major highways, forest roads, state park roads and in most OHV areas. Fees are paid when license plates are purchased and vary with vehicle type. Normal highway laws apply.

Green-Sticker Vehicles. This category includes ATVs, dune buggies, sand rails and unlicensed dirt bikes. These vehicles are allowed in OHV areas and on certain BLM and forest lands. Green stickers are good for two years. (See OHV laws on next page.)

Red-Sticker Vehicles. ATVs and motorcycles made after January 1, 1997, must meet stricter emission standards. Those that don't get a red sticker, which is exactly the same as a green sticker except the riding period is limited. Cost is same as green sticker.

National Forest Adventure Pass. You'll need a special Adventure Pass if you camp or stop to recreate in Los Padres National Forest. If you are just passing through, a pass is not required. This situation applies to five trails in this book as follows: #51 Prewitt Ridge, #52 South Coast Ridge, #55 Pine Mountain, #56 Garcia Ridge and #57 Twin Rocks. Cost is \$5/day or \$30/year. Fee does not apply to green-sticker vehicles. You can get passes at Forest Service offices and at many local vendors (see www.fsadventurepass.org).

ATVs & DIRT BIKES

This book is primarily a guide for street-legal, off-highway vehicles. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide for green-sticker vehicles (specifically ATVs and dirt bikes). Most trails in this book allow green-sticker vehicles but not all. Dual-purpose motorcycles (i.e. street-legal dirt bikes) can run on both primary roads and legal open land. The following is a simplified list of state OHV laws.

State OHV Laws:

- Riders must wear approved safety helmets.
- A safety course is required for riders under age 18.
- A safety certification is required along with parental supervision for riders under age 14.

- ATVs cannot carry passengers.
- No riding while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Speed is limited to 15 mph near campsites and groups of people. You are the final judge of unsafe situations. Be extra careful.
- Vehicles must have muffler, spark arrester and brakes plus lights if used at night.

In addition to state laws, most OHV areas have additional rules. Some common ones include:

- Safety flags must be used.
- No glass containers are allowed.
- No open alcoholic beverage containers are allowed.
- Campers cannot dump sewage or gray water.
- In most areas, you must pack out your trash.

Irresponsible use of ATVs and dirt bikes is one of the biggest concerns of the Forest Service, BLM and other land management agencies and a major reason for trail closures. It is your responsibility to understand and obey laws wherever you ride. You must stay on designated routes when required.

OHV AREAS AND SVRAs

Despite many land closures, California still has nearly 100 off-highway vehicle (OHV) areas. These areas include upwards of 100,000 miles of unpaved roads and countless acres of open land. Many of them are located in southern California and the major ones are covered in *Guide to Southern California Backroads & 4-Wheel Drive Trails*. This northern book covers four OHV areas and two State Vehicular Recreation Areas. OHV areas include Cow Mountain, north of Santa Rosa, Clear Creek Management Area, between Hollister and Coalinga, Pozo/La Panza, northeast of San Luis Obispo and Jawbone/Dove Springs, east of Bakersfield. SVRA areas include Oceano Dunes, south of San Luis Obispo and Hollister Hills, southeast of San Jose. If you would like a detailed listing and a map of all OHV areas across the state, contact the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation (OHMVR) Division of the California State Parks.

National Forests. This book includes routes in 11 different national forests as follows: Eldorado, Inyo, Lassen, Los Padres, Plumas, Sequoia, Shasta-Trinity, Sierra, Stanislaus, Tahoe and Toiyabe. Rules and regulations are generally the same, however, there are differences. You are responsible to know and obey all rules, so read forest maps carefully. Whenever possible, visit the closest ranger station to learn as much as possible about where you are going. Los Padres is the only forest of those listed above that requires an Adventure Pass. Plumas National Forest, in addition to its regular forest map, has a separate map for OHV trails.

SAFETY TIPS

File a Flight Plan. Determine where you are going and when you plan to return. Be as specific as possible. Inform a friend or relative and call them when you return. If something goes wrong, you'll have the comfort of knowing that at least someone knows where you are.

Travel with another vehicle. Your chances of getting stuck in the backcountry are immensely reduced with two vehicles. If one vehicle breaks down, you have a back-up. If you can't find anyone to travel with you, contact a local four-wheel drive club near the trail. To locate a club, contact the California State Association of 4-Wheel Drive Clubs. If you don't already belong to a club, consider joining one. It's a great way to learn and make friends.

Know location of closest hospital. Before you leave on any trip, check the location of the closest hospital or emergency facility in the area.

Carry extra maps. The maps in this book will clearly direct you along the trail. However, if you get lost or decide to venture down a spur road, you'll need additional maps with topographic information. Carry a compass or a GPS unit to orient yourself. At the end of each trail description, I list additional maps applicable to that specific area.

Booklet-style maps, like the *DeLorme Atlas & Gazetteer*, are very handy because they are easy to flip through and they cover the entire state. (Two volumes are required for California.) Latitude and longitude are printed along the edge of each map. With the simplest GPS unit, you can quickly determine your location. The *California Road & Recreation Atlas* by Benchmark Maps is very similar to the *Gazetteer*. It has better graphics but doesn't show quite as much backroad detail. Either atlas will work just fine.

The greatest amount of detail is shown on 7.5-minute U.S. Geological Survey Maps; however, each map covers a small area and many maps are required. Since I carry a laptop computer, I buy 7.5 minute maps on CDs. They are extremely economical and easy to use in this format, but they would be useless if something happened to my computer. I use them because they provide maximum detail for GPS tracking. In addition, I always carry paper maps.

Changing conditions. California's backcountry is fragile and under constant assault by forces of nature and man. Rock slides can occur or an entire road can be washed away from a single heavy rainstorm. A road may be closed without notice. Directional signs may be removed or vandalized. Route numbers are sometimes changed. Maps seldom keep up with changes and sometimes have mistakes. Take these factors into consideration when faced with a confusing situation. Rely on your own common sense.

High water, flash floods. Many of California's backroads cross or follow dry washes, small streams, and narrow canyons. Heavy rains can turn these places into raging torrents of water in minutes. Check weather fore-

casts and keep an eye on the sky. Be conservative and don't take chances. Cut your trip short if necessary. Don't attempt to cross a fast-flowing stream unless you've done it before and know what your vehicle can do. Wait if necessary; water levels usually go down quickly after a single rain shower. If you're in a narrow canyon and water begins to rise, drive perpendicularly out of the canyon if possible. If this is not possible, get out of your vehicle and climb to higher ground. Most people who die in flash floods attempt to outrun the rising water in their vehicles.

Inspect your vehicle carefully. Before you start into the backcountry, make sure your vehicle is in top operating condition. If you have a mechanic do the work, make sure he is reliable and understands four-wheeling. Tell him where you plan to take your vehicle. Pay particular attention to fluids, hoses, belts, battery, brakes, steering linkage, suspension system, driveline, and anything exposed under the vehicle. Tighten anything that may be loose. Inspect your tires carefully for potential weak spots and tread wear.

Wear your seat belt. You might think that because you're driving slowly, it's not necessary to wear your seat belt or use child restraints. I've learned through experience that you are much safer with a seat belt than without. Buckle up at all times.

Keep heads, arms, and legs inside a moving vehicle. Many trails are narrow. Brush, tree limbs, and rock overhangs may come very close to your vehicle. The driver must make it clear to every passenger to stay inside the vehicle at all times. Children, in particular, must not be allowed to stick their heads, arms, or legs out the windows.

Cliff edges. Watch children and be extremely careful around cliff edges. Hand rails are rarely provided. Watch for loose rock and stay away from these areas when it's wet, icy, or getting dark. If you climb up a rock wall, remember it's harder to get down than to climb up.

Lightning. During a storm, stay away from lone trees, cliff edges, and high points. Stay low to the ground or in your vehicle. Lightning can strike from a distant storm even when it's clear overhead.

Mines, tunnels, and old structures. Be careful around old mine buildings. Stay out of mines and tunnels. Don't let children play in these areas.

Trail Ratings Defined

Trail ratings are very subjective. Conditions change for many reasons, including weather and time of year. An easy trail can quickly become difficult when washed out by a rainstorm or blocked by a fallen rock. You must be the final judge of a trail's condition on the day you drive it. If any part of a trail is difficult, the entire trail is rated difficult. You may be able to drive a significant portion of a trail before reaching the difficult spot. Read each trail description carefully for specific information.

Easy: Gravel, dirt, clay, sand, or mildly rocky road. Gentle grades. Water levels low except during periods of heavy runoff. Full-width single lane or wider with adequate room to pass most of the time. Where shelf conditions exist, road is wide and well-maintained with minor sideways tilt. Four-wheel drive recommended on most trails but some are suitable for two-wheel drive under dry conditions. Clay surface roads, when wet, can significantly increase difficulty.

Moderate: Rutted dirt or rocky road suitable for most sport utility vehicles. Careful tire placement often necessary. Four-wheel drive, low range, and high ground clearance required. Standard factory skid plates and tow hooks recommended on many trails. Undercarriage may scrape occasionally. Some grades fairly steep but manageable if dry. Soft sand possible. Sideways tilt will require caution. Narrow shelf roads possible. Backing may be necessary to pass. Water depths passable for stock high-clearance vehicles except during periods of heavy runoff. Mud holes may be present especially in the spring. Rock-stacking may be necessary in some cases. Brush may touch vehicle.

Difficult: Some trails suitable for more aggressive stock vehicles but most trails require vehicle modification. Lifts, differential lockers, aggressive articulation, and/or winches recommended in many cases. Skid plates and tow hooks required. Body damage possible. Grades can be steep with severe ground undulation. Sideways tilt can be extreme. Sand hills very steep with soft downslopes. Deep water crossings possible. Shelf roads extremely narrow; use caution in full-size vehicle. Read trail description carefully. Passing may be difficult with backing required for long distances. Brush may scratch sides of vehicle.

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DISCLAIMER

Travel in California's backcountry is, by its very nature, potentially dangerous and could result in property damage, injury, or even death. The scope of this book cannot predict every possible hazard you may encounter. If you drive any of the trails in this book, you acknowledge these risks and assume full responsibility. You are the final judge as to whether a trail is safe to drive on any given day, whether your vehicle is capable of the journey, and what supplies you should carry. The information contained herein cannot replace good judgment and proper preparation on your part. The publisher and author of this book disclaim any and all liability for bodily injury, death, or property damage that could occur to you or any of your passengers.