

Relentless Fun on the Rubicon!

by Mary Turpin



"So how was the Rubicon?" It's such a simple question. I have almost no way to answer it, though. Yes, it was fun. Yes, it was awesome. It was a million more things, though, that I have no way to put into words.

How do you express the pride and satisfaction that come from spending 10 months of planning with my incredible NM4W crew for a ridiculously huge undertaking? How do you come close to describing the laughter and the silly moments that happened, or the tough moments that required all of us to dig deep to work through? I feel like I need to put my soul through an x-ray machine for others to truly understand it.

For the sake of this little article, I will focus on what I learned about myself as an off-roader, and specifically a rock crawler. For the rest, I can chat with you at our next get-together and try to find words to describe the rest of it.



It's not just the rigs, it's the people

Part of our off-road ethos is the trust we place in each other. We all go as prepared as we can with our rigs and our gear, knowing that if something goes sideways, we have each other to rely on for help. This community-oriented spirit flowed through every aspect of our Rubicon adventures. From the 10 months of online meetings, the ridiculously long group email thread, the oodles of text messages the

last month, and every waking moment of our time on the road and the trail – it was about working together to make our shared dream happen. There was no “I,” it was all “We” or “Us.”



Our Rubicon adventure was a collective effort by all of us – it was the combined NM4W energy that made it happen. As much fun as any of the rocks were, the people I went with and the teamwork we shared will always be my favorite part of this trip.

Confidence & Stamina

This one is huge. The Rubicon is rated a Level 7 trail. That rating is fairly general, and I’ve run day trips on harder and more technical L7’s. What the Rubicon has in store for you are relentless obstacles that

absolutely demand your full attention the entire time. I’m not even sure you can describe the trail as separate obstacles – it’s more like 20 straight miles of one single continuous gnarly thing to navigate.

I realize now how different our normal weekend runs are. We noodle along the trail a little way, then we stop and spend an hour to get the group through an obstacle. Then we move up the trail a bit more and spend another hour on the next section. We stand around and talk. We’re purposeful but not keeping any particular pace.

The Rubicon cannot be run that way. On the Rubicon, there’s not much stopping. You get in and you go. The Rubicon doesn’t enforce a maximum speed limit, but in a way, it enforces a minimum one. There are miles to cover, and standing around or taking too much time in one place is not on the agenda.



One of the things that crystallized in my brain was the need for each driver to watch the trail and make their own rapid-fire decisions, plan their lines on the go, and independently get themselves out of sticky situations. I’ve never in my life run a trail where I had to constantly map 30 yards of trail in front of me all day long. Map a section of trail, put it aside in my brain while I run it, and start mapping the next section – again and again and again, all day long. Look ahead, plan your line, work through it, look ahead, plan your line, work through it – for hours on end.

The Rubicon gives you about a half second to breathe anywhere in this process. The two times I took a full second to breathe, I got stuck on a rock. There were only a handful of times where one of us hopped out to spot someone else. We knew we had each other for support, but we all knew we had to run the Rubicon largely on our own.



On past trails I've become accustomed to lots of time spent getting out to walk every obstacle and talk through every line. We take all day to run a mile or two on trails. On the Rubicon, we took 6-8 hours to run about 6-7 miles each day. Each of us had to take all our knowledge and skills and put them to use nonstop.

For me, I knew that Willy and Ron and Jack and Cathy and Doug – they were all there if I needed them – but that I had to rely first and foremost on myself

to do this thing. We were all in the same boat. There would be support, but no handholding. The Rubicon was about proving to ourselves that we. Could do this hard thing.

It took about 20 minutes on the Rubicon for me to grasp exactly what this trail was going to demand of me – the ability to stay calm and focused, to pull every ounce of rock crawling skill out of my brain, and to believe without a doubt that this was something Nellie and I could do.

The Rubicon pounds you into oblivion. While there are often multiple lines there are no bypasses. You're doing some form of ugly thing on everything to get through.

The running commentary in my brain went something like this for three straight days:

"Uh, ok...."

"Zowie, that's a thing..."

"Ummm, really?!?!?"

"Wait, where's the front of Jack's Jeep, and why am I only seeing the butt in the air?"

"Ok, that's nuts!"

"Oh come on now, just give me a break!"

"What in the world?!?"

"Um, hold on, why is Willy's rear passenger tire in the air at that angle?!?"

"You're kidding, right?"

"Ya, I think not."

"Ya really, you're not serious!"

"Hold on, why is Doug's Jeep leaning over like that?!?"

"Like really, where's the bypass?!?"

"There's a line through this mess, right?!?"

"Holy cow, like what?!?"

"CLUTCH! LOCKERS! TURN! OMG, WHAT WENT CRUNCH?!?"

"This is fun, right?"
"Better life choices starting tomorrow, woman..."
"Well, at least you didn't pee in your seat."
"Come on Nellie, we got this..."
"Take a breath, you got this..."

I have moments in life where I doubt myself, and the Rubicon helped me understand that simply believing in yourself and staying in the fight goes a long way. By the time you reach the end of the trail, you have had a thousand opportunities to doubt yourself and then to reach inside yourself and prove that you can do it.

If the Rubicon is nothing else, it is relentless. It allows you those moments of doubt, and then it immediately brings you back down to Earth and forces you to have faith in yourself and believe you can do it. There's no way off the trail once you're on it. Once you start, you're committed to reaching the end. Game On, all the way.

The Rubicon asks one question: "How bad do you want it?" The faith in yourself and the determination to conquer it becomes your answer.

Ultimately, I found myself sliding into something of a happy stupor each day. The Rubicon lulls you into submission. It takes all your driver skills and instincts and fine tunes them a thousand times each day. In a sense, it was like going to work, in terms of the focus and attention it constantly required. The stamina required to run the Rubicon was something I didn't understand before, and something I am grateful to understand now.

At about hour three on the first day, I was beginning to understand some of this. The more we tackled, and conquered, the easier it became to enjoy the challenges. By the time we'd

run through our first 30 back-to-back obstacles I was able to find a rhythm.



I have a thing where I go crashing over something, and there's a loud crunching sound that comes from somewhere under Nellie – and I laugh loud and hard. The Rubicon delivered a lot of crunching underneath and a whole lot of laughter from the driver's seat.



I learned more about myself as a driver on the Rubicon than on any other trail I've ever tackled. I'll take that confidence and strength with me into the rest of my life. "It's ok to be nervous or unsure, but girl, you just gotta go."

I learned more about Nellie and what she is capable of. She ate that trail for lunch, and I am even more in love with her and what she can do.

When we reached the McKinney-Vento trailhead on our last morning on the trail, the only word we all agreed on was EPIC. Whatever we had just been through – the rocks, the challenges, the struggles, the teamwork, the laughter – it was epic in every awe-inspiring sense that word can conjure.

For off-roaders, and specifically for rock crawlers, the Rubicon is our Ironman or our Mt. Everest. For each of us on this trip, there was collective pride both in ourselves and in our group. We did it.

There used to be a bridge mid-trail which was covered in stickers placed there by those running the Rubicon. That bridge has been reclaimed and repainted, and instead, a small outbuilding at the McKinney-Vento trailhead has been surrendered to our community-wide sticker mania. Back in our planning stages, we realized we needed to take a club sticker with us. That last morning, as we came off the trail and began airing up, we all signed the edges of our NM4W sticker, and with more pride than I can begin to describe we placed our New Mexico 4



Wheelers sticker amongst the hundreds of other stickers.



The pride and joy in my heart at leaving our club's mark on the Rubicon was everything. It wasn't me or Jack or Cathy or Doug or Willy or Ron, individually, who ran the Rubicon. It was the New Mexico 4 Wheelers who ran it.

Running the Rubicon has been on my bucket list for decades. To be so fortunate to run it with such incredible friends and such fierce off-roaders from the New Mexico 4 Wheelers makes it even more special.

For those considering running the Rubicon, I guarantee NM4W will be going back. Hopefully in 2028, as part of our 70th anniversary celebrations, which would make that trip even more EPIC than this one was. Eat your Wheaties, people, the Rubicon is out there and waiting for us!

Happy Trails,
☺mary



What We Learned on the Rubicon

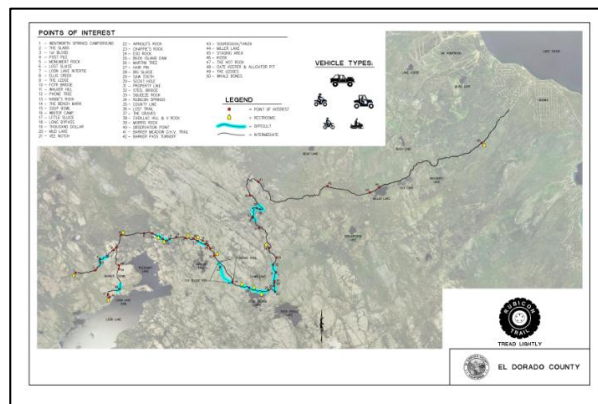
by Cathy Dickey

June 19th through 27th, 2026, five NM4W members (Mary Turpin, Doug Elkins, Willy Crawley, Jack and Cathy Dickey) and one member's BFF (Ron Tennyson) ran the famed Rubicon trail in California. Once assembled at the Rubicon Trail head we were 4 rigs.

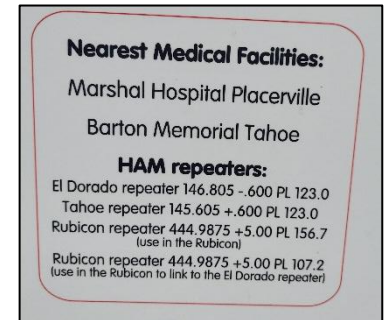
Three of the rigs departed the Albuquerque area around noon on June 19th and headed for Flagstaff, AZ where we spent the first road night. Ron and Willy left earlier in the week, as they were making a "grand tour". Willy and Ron did their own thing all around Nevada and Utah until we met up at Sugar Pine State Park Campground near Lake Tahoe on the 21st. The other three rigs stopped in Tonopah, NV for the second road night, then pushed on the Lake Tahoe area. The logistics for the return trip were essentially the same, only the humans and the rigs were happily exhausted. Here are some of the things that we learned.

- The Rubicon Trail is not over-hyped!! It really is as difficult as it sounds. We are used to rock crawling trails that have a fun arroyo leading up to some "ledgey" scrambles and some basketball-sized boulder fields. The Rubicon a sustained, level 7, 22 mile long crawl. We put the rigs in 4-low, lockers on, on Monday morning and they stayed that way until we got off the trail on Thursday. Many of our trails have easy by-passes for the hardest obstacles. There is no such thing on the Rubicon. Little Sluice does have a "by-pass" called Indian Trail, but serves mainly to avoid traffic jams. The "by-pass" is every bit as gnarly as the trail.
- Avoid running the Rubicon over major holidays (even Father's Day, as we found out). You and half of California will be sharing the trail. Planning extra days for travel, as well as doing the actual trail will help with those inevitable "aw sh*t" moments that arise.

- If at all possible, consider towing your trail rig to the trail head. Rigs that are built well enough to run the Rubicon do not have very good highway manners!! Yes, you will burn more fuel and maneuvering gas stations and parking lots is a hassle, but you won't be nearly as exhausted. And, if your tow vehicle should happen to break down, you stand a chance of being able to rent a tow vehicle and salvage the trip. You can't rent a Rubicon trail-ready rig! And there is always the piece of mind knowing you can get back home if you break your junk on the trail.
- If you do tow your rig, you will have to find a safe place to leave the tow vehicle and trailer. Do this as part of your pre-planning! DON'T plan on leaving it at McKinney Trail Head!!! McKinney was absolutely packed, as was every wide spot on the side of the road leading to it. We also heard stories of vehicles being broken into there.
- Probably the best place to camp the night before you start the trail is Loon Lake Campground (assuming you plan to run it west to east, see below). Check the website to find out what the current reservation window is and be ready to jump on it just as soon as that window opens up. It is a busy place.
- For rigs with 35-37-inch tires, it is easier to run the trail from west to east. Running it this way means you are going DOWN Big Sluice, but UP Cadillac Hill. Cadillac Hill was tough, but not as tough as going UP Big Sluice would have been. Rigs with 40" or larger tires would have no problem running east to west.
- Four-low, lockers on, climbing STEEP, rocky hills is a gas-guzzler. The rigs that were new enough to have real-time fuel consumption readouts were reading 1 to 2 miles/gallon. Plan accordingly!! Fuel up in the small town of Pollack Pines, which is just a few miles past the turn for Ice House Road to Loon Lake. There are also stores for last minute supplies. Carry extra fuel on the trail.
- We used Avenza for navigating the actual trail. We also found this map (<https://www.eldoradocounty.ca.gov/Land-Use/Parks-Trails/Rubicon-Trail/Rubicon-Trail-Map>) to be very useful for knowing where the out houses were, where the hardest sections of the trail were, and just generally planning each day's travel and camping.



- The bears and the mosquitos are NOT just stories. We had a couple of bear raids. Bear vaults or bear-resistant coolers are a MUST. You could use the old bear bag method, but the Sugar Pine trees really don't lend themselves to getting a rope strung over the branches. There are many good videos out there for tips on camping in areas with habituated bears. Oh, and bears like wine.... Just saying.
- There is ZERO cell service on the trail. We used GMRS radios for car-to-car comms. We had a Garmin In-Reach for emergency comms, but a cell phone with satellite capabilities would work. Friends of the Rubicon monitors the HAM repeaters as shown in the photo. We were told that they will even coordinate parts deliveries for busted rigs!
- There is plenty of camping on the trail; just know that many of the spots are small. We were glad we had hammock tents or cot tents. There is not much in the way of level real estate! Ellis Creek and Buck Island Lake are popular camping spots. You can camp at Rubicon Springs for a fee; they take reservations for groups of 5 or more rigs. Be sure to check ahead of time to see if there is a large event being held there.



NM4W Award for Most Points!

Winner: Mary Turpin

Each year the person accumulating the most points for the fiscal year, Aug 1 to Jul 31, is awarded a \$100 prize. This year Mary Turpin was at the top of the list! VP Jonathan hands Mary a check.



Points from 08/01/2025 to 07/31/2026

Primary Member Name	Participation Points	Leader Points	Total Points
Mary Turpin	82	13	95
Snow Petersen	69	19	88
Jonathan Rivera	66	19	85
Jack Dickey	55	13	68
Josh Tucker	52	4	56
Doug Elkins	40	6	46
Jeff Boggs	38	6	44
Lauri Rector	42	2	44
Leroy Lints	38	6	44
Richard Steele	35	5	40
Mike Crosby	40		40
Frank Whiston	31	7	38

Meeting Minutes – August 15, 2026

by Jack Dickey for Sec Lauri Rector

The August meeting was hosted by Laura Perlichek at her northeast heights home in Albuquerque. Members provided a variety of pot luck dishes resulting in a great meal. Dinner was served at 5:00 PM. President Mary Turpin called the business meeting to order at 5:43 PM.

Members Attending: Tracy Bakewell, Cheryle Bakewell, JP Bowdoin, Susan Bowdoin, Spencer Brown, Mike Crosby, Janet Crosby, Jack Dickey, Cathy Dickey, Preston Garner, Melissa Garner, Shirley Godfrey, Ric Henry, Diane Henry, Ed Kausche, Lyn Kausche, Leroy Lints, Allison Martinez, John Nolen, Jack Nutter, Paul Ortega, Virginia Ortega, Laura Perlichek, Matthew Ray, Jonathan Rivera, Christine Robson, Steve Robson, Don Roy, Diego Serna, Richard Steele, Mary Turpin, Anthony Weaver

Guests Attending: Lora Baca, Jeremy Baca, Jeffrey Lee, Jack Lovell, John Servatt, Julia Servatt

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – Mary Turpin: Mary thanked Laura Perlichek for hosting the meeting. Mary introduced the new board of directors elected at the July meeting.

VICE PRESIDENT'S MEMBERSHIP REPORT – Jonathan Rivera: Jonathan reported that there were 10 applicants since the last meeting. Four of those 10 attended their first ride/event and moved to guest status. Although two guests were eligible to be vote into membership, neither were present.

There were several fines levied for transgressions on various events and trips.

SECRETARY'S REPORT – Jack Dickey for Lauri Rector: Jack indicated that the July meeting minutes were published in the August newsletter. A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes as published. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Richard Steele: Rich provided current balances of checking, savings, and PayPal accounts. Rich also presented the annual corporation financial report as required by the SOP. A motion was made and seconded to approve the treasurer's report. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion. Rich reminded members present that dues collection closes at September 1st.

Program Chair Cathy Dickey ask for approval to spend \$15.00 to purchase raffle tickets. A motion was made and seconded to approve the expenditure. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion.

TRIP REPORT – JP Bowdoin: JP introduced himself as the new trip chair and provided his contact information. JP reminded members to keep their trip status, either yes or wait-list, up to date so that as many members as possible can participate.

Past Events and Trips (Six since last meeting)

- July 23-26 – Zuni Mountains Camp & Ride, Snow Peterson
- July 26 – Easy Ride Santa Fe, Caja del Rio, Matt Martel
- July 25-August 1 – Mile High Jeep Club All-4-Fun, Gunnison, Colorado, Mary Turpin

- August 1 – North Jemez, Cliff Meier
- August 8 – Rigs and Coffee, Albuquerque, Mary Turpin
- August 15 – Cedro before August Meeting, Cedro Peak, Jonathan Rivera

DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPORT – Jack Dickey: Jack reported that Cibola National Forest has published the San Mateo Mountains Bear Trap Disaster Recovery NEPA Plan. This plan lays the groundwork for forest road and trail stabilization/restoration after the Bear Trap Fire. Unfortunately, due to flood hazard Bear Trap Campground is being transitioned to a day use area.

PROGRAM REPORT – Cathy Dickey: The store was open for business.

HISTORIAN REPORT – Frank Whiston: not present/no report. Members were reminded when uploading gallery pictures choose quality over quantity and avoid duplicating photographs: yours or those other members have posted.

WEBMASTER & NEWSLETTER EDITOR REPORT – Don Roy: Don mentioned that the SOP with approved changes has been uploaded to the club website. He asked for Rubicon Trail trip stories for the September newsletter.

OLD BUSINESS

- Proposal From Chalmers Ford to Conduct 4x4 Driver Training for New Owners: Mary Turpin reported that this project is not being actively pursued. The last email to Chalmers from NM4W informed them that a BLM permit would be needed in order to conduct a commercial event at Johnson (Gordy's) Hill OHV area and that Chalmers would need to contact Socorro BLM to obtain a permit. Contact information for both Socorro BLM and Tijeras Ranger District was provided. There has been no subsequent communication between NM4W and Chalmers Ford. Jonathan Rivera asked if another venue had been presented to Chalmers. Jack Dickey responded that Gordy's Hill was presented to Chalmers as NM4W preferred venue do to our familiarity with the area and variety of trails.
- Committee Report on Adding FR 24NAA (Tank Trap) to Santa Fe NF MVUM: Mary Turpin reported that there has been no committee action. Jonathan Rivera agreed to chair the committee now that Mary is club president. Jonathan recently contacted Española Ranger District. Unfortunately, District staff were out on fire assignments so there was no one available for discussion.
- General and management liability insurance: Rich Steele reported that there has been no further attempt to obtain insurance. Liability insurance that fits the club operations and needs does not appear to be available in New Mexico.

NEW BUSINESS

- Presentation of Award to NM4W Member with Most Points for FY 25-26 – Jonathan Rivera began by saying that he, Mary Turpin, and Snow Peterson were the top three points earners. Jonathan announced that Mary earned the most points. Jonathan presented Mary with a NM4W check for \$100.00.
- Summer Pot Luck Meeting Format and Trips – Josh Tucker raised the question about separating the business portion from summer pot luck meetings. The idea being that club business could be conducted at a week night meeting and the pot luck would remain a social meeting thus freeing up the weekend for additional trips. Jack Dickey reminded those present that per the SOP all club actions, either those

presented from members or board of directors, need to be approved at a regular meeting. Members noted that summer pot luck meetings at a member's home have been a tradition for many years. Mary Turpin made a motion to not change anything for 12 months. The motion was quickly seconded. Without further discussion, Mary called for a vote to approve the motion. There was not a strong yea voice or show of hands from those present indicating approval of the motion. There was not a call for those opposing the motion to vote. Mary did comment that it could be discussed at the next meeting.

50/50 Raffle – winner Janet Crosby

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn. Motion was approved by a majority of members present without discussion. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:42 PM.





Officers and Staff

President Mary Turpin pres@nm4w.org	Vice-President Membership Chair Jonathan Rivera vpres@nm4w.org	Secretary Lauri Rector sec@nm4w.org
Treasurer Rich Steele treas@nm4w.org	Program Chair Cathy Dickey prog@nm4w.org	Historian Frank Whiston hist@nm4w.org
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