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News and views that inform, inspire, and connect the Drummond Island and De Tour Village communities and points west.

First Ever Winter Jeep Jamboree

By Julie Covert

What kind of event, in the dead of winter, would be so popular that it filled within 22 minutes of registration opening?

That would be the highly anticipated first ever winter Jeep Jamboree, January 24-26, 2019. At the end of 2018 when it was announced that there would be a winter snow Jamboree, people started getting their Jeeps ready, even before they were registered. This event promised three crucial elements: a fabulous location in Michigan's beautiful Upper Peninsula on Drummond Island; a terrific trail system with snow; and a host town that knows how to make folks feel welcome every where they go.

As a national organization, Jeep Jamboree USA holds dozens of Jeep events of all levels across the country. Drummond Island has hosted Jamborees for 26 years but why was it selected as the location for the first even snow Jamboree?

Eric Loewenhagen, Jeep Jamboree USA event staff, said, "Local event coordinator Mike Olmstead and his crew had been wanting to do an event here on the island for quite a while. They kicked it around for a year or two, trying to figure out if it was feasible and logistically possible.



"And last year that came up and did a mock Jeep Jamboree on their own and figured out that yes they could do it. Drummond is a destination and they are

an experienced guide corp. Drummond has the facilities to do it – everything is centrally located – we have a centrally located hotel, we have a place for people to get warm, a big enough place for the catering and the meals, and it's an easy place to get people in and out if there was an emergency. It's an ideal location they just had to prove they could do it. So Olmstead's crew mocked it up and did it, and now it's for real."

The event was limited to sixty vehicles and 122 people, including 11 children, participated. They came from ten

different states – FL, IL, IN, MI, NC, OH, PA, TX, UT, and WI. Approximately twenty-five had never been to Drummond before. And for approximately ten people this was their first Jamboree experience.

There were

twenty-one trail guides with 117 years combined guiding experience, six of whom had specialized in winter/snow driving.

Frank and Lisa Stone drove their two-door JK on a 4200 mile odyssey to snowy Drummond Island from the slippery-rock desert of Utah to win the "farthest traveled" award.



by Justyna Bachula

They said, “When we left Utah it was 50 degrees, we don’t wheel in the mountains in Utah, so this is our first winter/snow driving experience.”

Jeep Jamborees are definitely family-friendly events. Chester & Justyna Bachula brought their adorable daughters, 2 year-old Elena and 4 year-old Dalia, in their lifted 4 door JK all the way from the Chicago suburbs. The two girls are Jeep Jamboree USA veterans, as they have both attended 4 jamboree events including a summer jamboree event on Drummond Island.

When asked about her favorite part of the event, 4 year-old Dalia answered, “I like the bumpy parts the best.”

Justyna maintains a family Jeep travel blog on Facebook –

search “Jeepravelfamily” in the Facebook search box.

Thursday night was registration but something extra special happened. Mary Beth and Jim were a couple who each brought their own Jeeps to the event. On Thursday night, Jim proposed to Mary Beth who said “Yes!” without hesitation.

Pam Johnson of the Drummond Island Tourism Association said that this event was anticipated to bring a minimum of \$50,000 to the island’s businesses. This is a huge amount of money to be injected at a very economically quiet time of year. Participants stayed at various locations around the island. And three meals a day were part of their registration fee, which was obtained from Wazz’s Party Plus and Pins Restaurant.

Mike Olmstead, the Drummond Island Tourism Association (DITA) and the Drummond Snow-groomers worked with the Michigan DNR to determine the best trails for the event to use that would impact the snowmobile trails the least. The approximate amount of snowmobile trails that were used was only about four miles of the entire eighty mile snowmobile trail system.

The Jamboree is a fully guided event and participants can not go anywhere they want, they have to stay with their group and on designated trails. Some 30 miles of trail were scouted and prepped by the trail guides prior to the event. The day prior to the event signage provided by DITA was posted, which would then be removed right after the jamboree. Some short portions of available trails were left un-touched, to be broken by attendees. In some instances, with approximately 23” of fresh snow, this trail breaking proved to be too much for even the stoutest rigs. In these cases pre-approved alternate trails were used.

The pack of sixty vehicles was split into four groups of fifteen. Olmstead explained, “Each group has a mix of large tire, medium tire, stock tire jeeps to help break the snow, break the trail so that people who don’t have a Jeep that’s built quite as large will not be struggling all day.”

“The difference between winter Jeeping and summer Jeeping to me,” Olmstead continued, “is the difference between football and baseball. They are two...



...entirely different animals. In the summer we group the big Jeeps together because they use the more difficult trails and we put the stock vehicles together because we have easy trails for them. We put the middle level Jeeps together and they use the trails that are kind of in the middle. In the winter Jamboree because of the snow, the groups... ..are all homogenous. I have the same number of little Jeeps, mid-sized Jeeps and big Jeeps in each group, because the big Jeeps can help the little Jeeps get through the snow.”

Jeep Jamboree USA uses a 1 to 10 scale to rate difficulty. With 1 being the easiest trails and tens being the hardest; a 10 is reserved for the famous Rubicon Trail.

“Traditionally you don’t see a lot of ones or twos as Jamborees,” explained Loewenhagen. “A one is classified as a dirt road, a forest service road, something like that. Most Jamborees are a three up and are arranged on average three to seven or three to eight. There’s something for everyone whether you have a brand new Jeep or have a big built rig.”

He continued, “With snow it’s hard to rate it. With all the snow we have, while a obstacle may be a three, the snow is going to make these trails difficult. So it’s hard to rate a snow event. There’s something here though for everyone from a stock Jeep all the way up to a built Jeep.”

Mike Olmstead has been coming to the area as long as he can remember. He has strong family ties to both DeTour Village and Drummond Island as his great-grandfather Bob Smith was born on Drummond and lived near Johnstown, his grandmother Sarah “Ellen” Smith was born in 1897 on Drummond, his grandfather was born in DeTour in 1887, and his father was born in DeTour in 1925. “I still have quite a few relatives in DeTour,” Olmstead said.

This is approximately Olmstead’s 32nd event with Jeep Jamboree.

“I started in 1993,” said Olmstead about getting involved with Jeep Jamboree. “I had been four-wheeling for a few years. Then my wife saw the first Drummond Jamboree even though I had been coming up here all my life we didn’t know where any of the trails were. We decided to sign up for the second annual Jeep Jamboree to find out where the trails were and come back on our own. So we did that. I worked for Chrysler and I borrowed an XJ Cherokee from the pool and we were able to get up here and we had a blast. We came back a couple time and then we came back for the third Jamboree and borrowed a Grand Cherokee from an executive that I worked with. We had so much fun that

we said ‘Yeah we’re buying a Jeep.’

“I wrote Mark Smith about my experiences and said ‘If you need any trail guides, I’ll volunteer.’”

The local event coordinator Bobby Lake contacted him and his first year guiding was in the mid ‘90s. He got more and more involved and eventually got the local coordinator’s position when Bobby Lake was killed in a traffic accident on his way home from a Drummond two weeks prior to the 2005 Drummond event.

“The allure of being out in the winter is doing something that most people think we’re crazy for doing,” said Olmstead. “But the payback for us doing it is when you’re out there you see scenery that you never going to see unless you are out there doing it (Jeeping). And that is the allure of four-wheeling anyway; I get to go see things that mom and the kids are never going to see in a minivan.”

Jeep Jamboree USA paid to have the Drummond groomers association re-groom any snowmobile trails that were impacted by the event. According to the groomers association there was very little impact on the snowmobile trails. All evidence was erased by the snow groomer overnight Saturday/Sunday morning; less than twelve hours from the end of the event the snowmobile trails were back to normal.

Even though the temperatures spent a lot of time in the single digits and below zero folks seemed to have a great time. Father/son team Mike and Mike from Philadelphia, PA said this was their 6th event. They drove their 2 door JK 15 hours from Philly. Both Mikes had some winter/snow wheeling experience under their belts back home in PA, but had never driven in snow as deep as was found at the Drummond Island...





Photos by Chris Taylor

...event. Their home wheeling grounds are Coal Mine, PA where Rasuch Creek Off-Road Park and Anthracite Outdoor Adventure Area trail systems are. They said they had a blast on the challenging Drummond trails as they took turns at the wheel.

“We have done a lot of wheeling in the snow but never in snow this deep.”

Loewenhagen was asked if there will be winter/snow events be held elsewhere in the future.

“This was the first for the company; we wanted to see how... ..this one came off. Assuming that everything goes swimmingly well, and with the way Mike plans, I don't see why it wouldn't, it will likely be a repeat event here.”

“Drummond Island is always very accommodating to the Jeep community,” said Loewenhagen. “Drummond goes above and beyond – banners to welcome the Jeepers and specials during the time we're here. We were at Sune's this morning and we couldn't find tea. The lady working there took us around the story showing us where everything was. It was great old fashioned service.”

To learn more about Jeep Jamboree USA see www.jeeppamboreeusa.com
General information email: jeeppam@jeeppam.com

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