

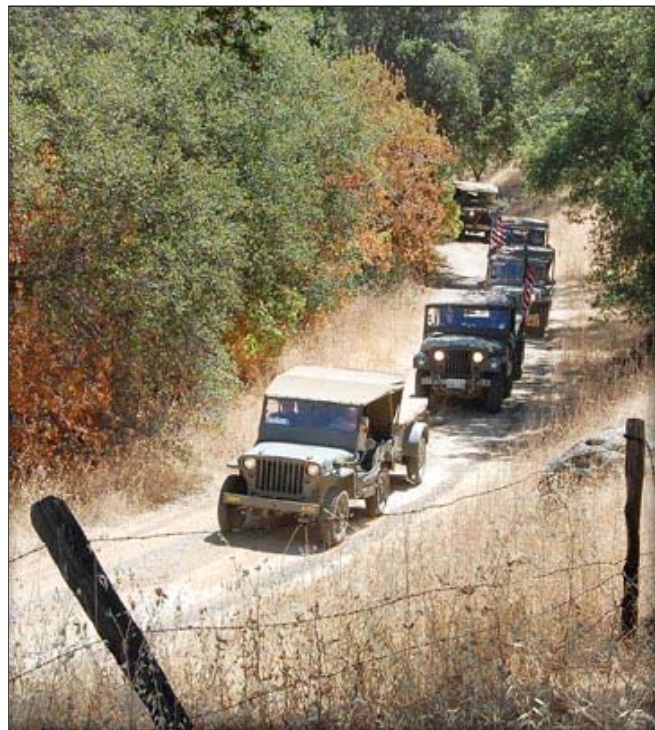
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# Mountain Democrat



## Convoy heads for 'Frisco; convoy experiences original Lincoln concrete firsthand in El Dorado Hills

By Mike Roberts | Mother Lode News | July 09, 2009 13:02



PRISTINE ORIGINAL CONCRETE, "Old Bass Lake Road, most of which has been private and gated for many years, contains a pristine stretch of original Lincoln Highway concrete. On Tuesday the gates were thrown open on the narrow old road for the 2009 Transcontinental Military Convoy. "I'm pretty sure this is the only stretch of original Lincoln concrete we've been on," shouted an enthused John Hille, from Newport News, Va. Mother Lode News photo by Mike Roberts

Veterans, history lovers and just average folks turned out to witness the 2009 Transcontinental Motor Convoy this week and help the Military Vehicle Preservation Association commemorate the 90th anniversary of the grueling 1919 convoy that left an impression on a young officer named Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Ike later cited the convoy as an inspiration for the modern-day interstate highway system he championed as president.

The 2009 edition left the nation's capital on June 13, tracing the original Lincoln Highway route as closely as possible. But they had to wait until El Dorado Hills to drive on the original road.

America's first coast-to-coast road was recently completed in 1919. But the convoy which rode on it soon learned that west of the Mississippi it was complete in name only. They became mired in mud crumbled bridges designed for wagon traffic.

This week 44 authentically restored military vehicles were on display, briefly, in El Dorado County; 37 of which made the entire trip.

The vehicles, all restored to original military condition, averaged 150 to 200 miles per day

at 35 mph. No suspension upgrades, air conditioning or satellite radios were allowed, nor was any weaponry, authentic or not. "We're about the old vehicles, not the weapons," explained MVPA member Lamar Rowland.

A string of Jeeps, trucks, motorcycles and one Army-green Airstream trailer crawled over Echo Summit on Monday morning. An adventurous contingent of about a dozen Jeeps got off Highway 50

at the summit to tackle Johnson's Pass, the old wagon road which later became the Lincoln Highway. Today it provides access to Echo Lake and surrounding summer cabins.

"It was a wild ride up there," said convoy director Jerry Shellswell, whose 1952 M38 A1 Willys Army Jeep suffered vapor lock on the steep grade near the top, as did a couple of his companions. The breakdowns left the balance of the contingent stranded in an awkward spot, leaning into their brake pedals on the 12 percent incline.

One of them was a '42 Dodge command car, the type of oversized Jeep that hauled Patton around the front lines. Its driver, retired Air Force Col. Gaston Barmore, said he finally got to use his "granny."

Col. Barmore wouldn't make his grandmother get out and push, explaining that his "granny" is a super low gear for steep climbs.

Complicating matters for the stranded contingent, the convoy's introduction to El Dorado County wildlife was a couple of irate summer residents with an exaggerated sense of entitlement who chose colorful language to express their displeasure at the overheated old jeeps blocking the road.

They're lucky that Shellswell runs a well disciplined convoy. "I'm really proud of the way our guys reacted up there," he said. "We didn't say or do anything inappropriate."

But they thought about it. "I thought I was gonna have to put her in gear, turn it off and go over there and have some fun," said a strapping and atypically youthful MVPA member who witnessed the incident from a distance.

The convoy was no stranger to vapor lock, battling it frequently during several scorching days in the Midwest. Members quickly resolved the problem on the summit and moved out.

Most of the convoy bunked down at Jenkinson Lake Monday night where a couple hundred locals ooh'ed and ahh'ed at the vintage war machines.

County tourism director Jody Franklin and EID Director George Wheeldon welcomed them to the county. Supervisor Jack Sweeney praised their fortitude and invited them back to the Jeepers Jamboree.

Rescue Catering's Jack and Dorothy Franklin won the weary road warriors over with a stellar tri-tip and grilled chicken barbecue, topped off with homemade Dutch apple pie from their Honey Bear Ranch in Camino. The meal left convoy raving. Members admitted they were tiring of a steady diet of hot dogs and hamburgers across the heartland.

After dinner, Don Chew was fielding questions about the oldest, and by far the most unusual vehicle on the convoy. His 1917 "FWD" was manufactured by the Four Wheel Drive Co. in Clintonville Wis., which built 6,000 of the utility haulers for the U.S., France, England and Russia during WW I. Chew's model is clad in the heavy armor of an ammunition truck.

"This was an essential vehicle for trench warfare," said Chew. "They were targets for German airplane spotters, so they hid them during the day. At night they delivered ammunition, food, mail and supplies to the trenches."

Chew is an avid collector of old military trucks, with a collection of 32 and growing. But until

recently he never had an “FWD.” He spent nine years collecting the parts for the reconstruction, some of which likely came from the three FWDs in the original 1919 convoy, he said.

The armored behemoth manages 12 mph comfortably on its giant solid-rubber tires. That pace was acceptable on the original convoy, but too slow in 2009. It made the trip on a flat-bed trailer this time, but rumbled around campground parking lots on the off-days.

The 1919 convoy reported that the FWD would do 15 mph, but “inflicted bodily harm on the driver by the end of the day,” said Chew.

Chew enjoys showing off the acetylene gas powered headlight, which is fueled by a precise mixture of carbide powder and water. “If you put too much water in it, it blows up,” he grinned.

Lamar Rowland was decked out in fatigues and the 1950s-era square-topped battle dress uniform (BDU) cap he wore in the National Guard in the 1950s. It’s the same type that Fidel Castro adopted shortly thereafter. “That’s why the American military did away with it,” said the jovial Alabaman.

Rowland and his wife Jewel tour in a 1977 Vietnam-era “deuce and a half.” (For you civilians, that’s a two and a half ton supply truck.)

Some were armored and became ammunition carriers. Others had machine guns mounted on the bed and became gun trucks, he said. “Whatever they needed hauled, this truck did it.”

After dinner he was handing out souvenir cans of Spam from the back of his truck, explaining that he’d ended up with five of the 20 cases gifted to the convoy by the Hormel Plant in Fremont, Neb., thus becoming the answer to convoy trivia question, “What happened to all the Spam?”

The convoy broke camp early Tuesday for a breakfast show-and-tell at the El Dorado County Fairgrounds put on by the county Chamber of Commerce and Historical Museum. Placerville Mayor Patty Borelli welcomed the convoy while another couple hundred county residents chatted up the MVPA members and filled up the memory sticks on their cameras.

Local videographer Marilyn Gillham warmed the hearts of convoy members, local veterans and former nurses with her a vintage WW II nurse uniform. “I picked it up in a thrift store and just had to wear it today” she explained.

She didn’t get much video shot, but said that didn’t matter. “They all told me their hospital stories and wanted their picture taken with me,” she said. “I guess that’s what I’m here for today.”

The convoy departed Placerville via Forni Road on the Lincoln Highway route, crossing the 1914 Weber Creek Bridge then winding down Mother Lode Drive and Durock Road, entering El Dorado Hills at Bass Lake Road.

Members of the Clarksville Region Historical Society were camped out with signs and flags, shouting a welcome as they drove past.

Old Bass Lake Road, most of which has been private and gated for many years, contains a pristine stretch of original Lincoln Highway concrete. On Tuesday the gates were thrown open on the narrow old road, and the convoy squeezed through, scratching their paint on the overhanging trees.

“I’m pretty sure this is the only stretch of original Lincoln concrete we’ve been on,” shouted an

enthused John Hille, from Newport News, Va., out the window of his restored truck.

The convoy emerged on Tong Road, then continued along White Rock Road to East Bidwell Street in Folsom, following the Lincoln Highway route south to Stockton for the night, then on to San Francisco on Wednesday.

Most are taking a leisurely drive home. Some have arranged transport for their vehicles and are flying. For more information on the MVPA and the convoy, see [MVPA.org](http://MVPA.org).

Lamar Rowland hails from Samson, Ala. and is proud to sound like it. His lasting impression of the convoy will be the kids waving flags on the curb of the towns they passed through.

“One young ’un had a sign that said ‘Thanks for all you’ve done,’” he said. “I tell you what, this country is alive and well.”

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