

TALES OF A TEXAS-SIZE JAMBOREE

Text by Greg Machado of Jeep Tales.com
Photos by Richard Tinnell



I'm often asked, "Why would you pay \$265.00 per person, **NOT PER JEEP, Per PERSON**, to attend a Jeep Jamboree USA® event when you can wheel at thousands of other venues and events around the country for less money?" Thankfully, there are a few hundred thousand people, with combined memories from a number of successful Jeep Jamboree events going back 50 years, feel the same way that I do.

Moreover, my own wife of over 16 years has considered institutionalizing me on a number of occasions for much the same reason. She asks, "Why would you pay \$30,000.00 plus for a new 2007 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon only to risk tearing it up on the rocks? **Are you crazy?!"**



A vast overlook of only a small portion of Ink Ranch

The answer to both of these questions can be found in the historic Texas Hill Country, just outside the tiny riverfront town of Llano where off-highway enthusiasts from all over the United States gathered for two weekends of "Wheeling Nirvana" in 2007. The place we gravitated to is 1,100 acres known as the Inks Ranch. For a more precise location, the coordinates are: **30°32'53.10"N by 98°48'07.66"W**, and about 1,356 feet above sea level according to the Google Earth™ website. For those of us who have been to the ranch, we simply call this location "Roy's House." It's a gorgeous Ranch-Style home comprised of several buildings and covered patios, backing up to a spectacular freshwater pond and flanked by an enormous granite dome. From the hilltop, the views looking down on this tiny slice of heaven make the discomfort of the 7-mile dusty dirt road ride into the ranch fade away as simply the necessary price of admission.

The Inks Ranch (formerly the Moss Ranch), and the Inks Family name, have had a long and colorful account in more than one chapter of Texas History, extending back to the original Texas Land Grants of 1837. The land was given as partial repayment to family members who fought for independence from Mexico during the Texas Revolution (A more detailed history of the ranch can be heard by listening to the podcast with Roy Inks on the JeepTales.com website entitled "[Inks Ranch History](#)").

In December of 2004, JJUSA decided to part company from the former host venue to the South Texas Jeep Jamboree, the YO Ranch. The decision not to return to the YO Ranch could not have happened

at a more inopportune time. The 22-page, 5-color Jeep Jamboree Guide book for 2005 was about to go to press with a circulation of 50,000, and JJUSA and Tony & Nancy Winkler (The South Texas Jeep Jamboree Coordinators) were faced with the decision to cancel the event all together, or roll the dice on a risky plan "B."

Plan "B" was to change the name to "Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree" and announce in the JJUSA guide book, as well as on the [Jeep Jamboree USA](http://JeepJamboreeUSA.com)



Google Earth™ satellite photo of Inks Ranch

[website](http://JeepJamboreeUSA.com), that it was going to be held somewhere in the San Antonio area even though an alternate venue had not yet been decided on. For the next several weeks, Tony & Nancy's team of dedicated trail guides interviewed and surveyed a number of area ranches, looking for a location that would not disappoint past or future attendees. During the past decade, the YO Ranch had developed a loyal following and the task was to find something that could compare in size,

scope, trail variety and excitement. It was not an easy task as finding a ranch with major acreage whose owners were willing to allow strangers to "wheel" on their private property was quite an undertaking.

I'm not sure of the "how" but I do know the "who." Mr. Ray Karrick, one of the owners of Jeep Masters in Austin, Texas, found the property we would soon be calling home base. He took Tony & Nancy Winkler to the property, and they drove all over the ranch to devise a game plan for the trails. I remember being at what I think was the January 2005 San Antonio Jeep Exclusive meeting where Tony brought in aerial photos of the Inks Ranch. It was difficult to determine

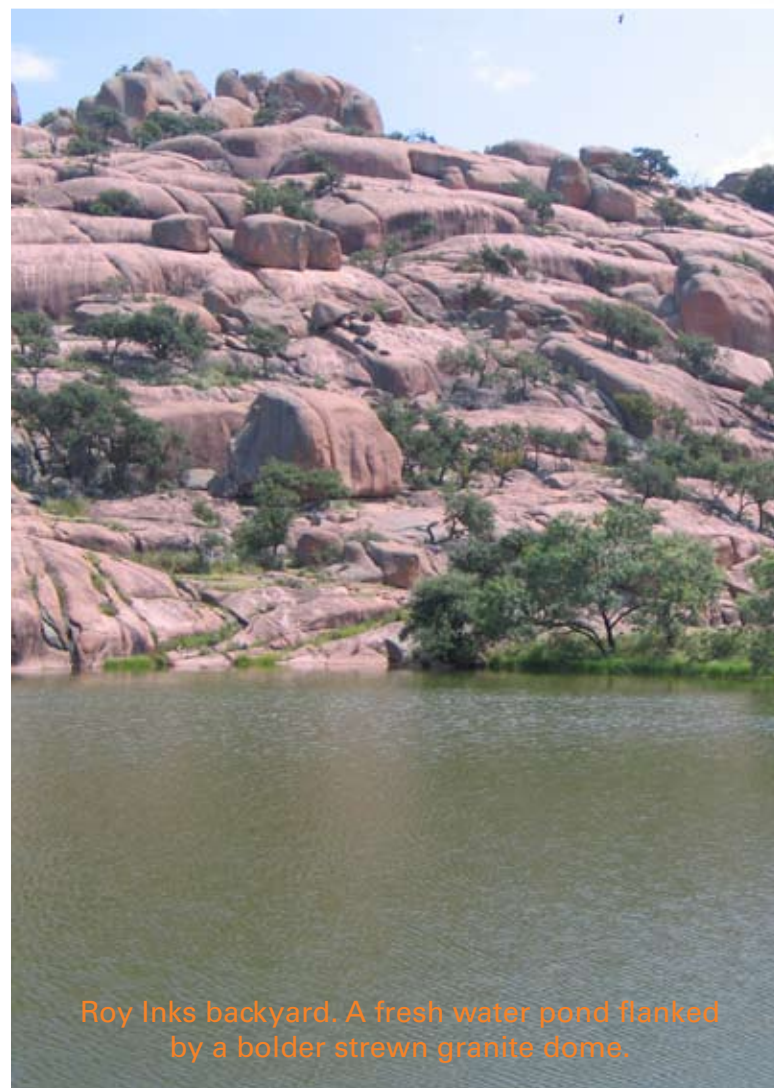
just how high or how much challenge the granite domes would offer us as we viewed the flat photos. The ranch description of only 1,100 acres also left many of us wondering how this new venue could possibly compare to the old ranch.

The San Antonio Jeep Exclusive would have less than 6 weekends to scout, mark, clear and test all of the trails for the 2005 Texas Spur Jamboree. This was not much time to complete such a mammoth task. To make matters even more difficult, Mother Nature threw us a curveball by raining every weekend in February. This made it difficult to mark the trails because the pink Texas Granite is incredibly slick to drive or walk on when it is wet. The weather had forced the trail guides to walk large sections of the path because driving was just too hazardous. Up to the weekend of the event, no one had ever driven the full length of the most arduous trail on the ranch, which we affectionately called "Moab."

Despite all of the twists and turns this event had endured throughout its development, it was the ticket sale results that stood testament to its success. In 2005, the undisclosed location sold out in 49 days. As word of this event spread throughout the off-highway adventure community, Jeep owners were becoming more and more interested in attending this affair. In 2006, the Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree sold out in one month and one day after the tickets had gone on sale, shattering the old record by more than two weeks. A number of past attendees were shocked at how quickly the tickets had sold. In an effort to beat the trend, the Jeep owners who did not want to be left behind for the 2007 Texas Spur were eager to log on and buy tickets early; **REAL EARLY!** Apparently, a lot of folks thought the same thing because the 2007 spring event sold out in an astounding six days! By the morning of December 6th, late registrants had to be put on a waiting list. There were so many people who wanted to attend that JJUSA began to consider a solution to the influx of interest. **Perhaps a second event?**

This brings us to the 1st Fall Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree, added to the 2007 Jamboree schedule as a late entry on the JJUSA website, approximately fourteen weeks before the event. So far there have been only four JJUSA events hosted at the Inks Ranch, and now there are two more events planned for 2008. You might still be wondering why we pay so much money to attend this event, year after year. It's difficult to put a finger on one component, but in my not so humble opinion it's the fact that you get to work with a lot of people who genuinely care about the **paying adventure seeking customer.**

It all starts with Mark A. Smith, the founder of Jeep Jamboree USA and it works its way down through the JJUSA staff, as well as at the local level with a hand-picked Trail Guide staff. Then there is the Inks



Roy Inks backyard. A fresh-water pond flanked by a bolder strewn granite dome.

Family, who allows Jamboree attendees to visit their magnificent ranch home each year. Roy Inks thinks we are all "just a little crazy," he says. There is a fine line between passion and insanity, and most of us straddle that line a bit too closely.

The center stage of this magnificent production is the Inks Ranch itself. As you drive through the Texas Hill Country on your way to the wheeling and camping areas, you will be amazed by views of Texas Wild Flowers. They explode into a vibrant color pallet, ranging from a waving carpet of deep purple patches set off by the Texas Bluebonnet, and contrasted by hints of bright orange from Indian Paintbrush and lightly punctuated with the soft pink of the blossoming hill country Mountain Laurel.

The Ranch has a dozen or so huge granite domes that protrude from the ground like ancient sentinels protecting the center of the ranch. On clear, cool nights (such as what we had during the Fall Texas Spur) the lack of ambient light and clean crisp air revealed a majestic light from millions of stars, and a falling meteorite show that would rival any firework display. The recent torrential rains made our fall outing as green and lush as the area was in the spring, providing plenty of nourishment to the grass for the cattle that wander the ranch freely and always maintain the right of way.

The domes are grouped together in two large masses divided by a riverbed, which winds through the ranch. The riverbed is unusual because it is comprised of billions of pea-sized pink granite gravel that are all offspring of the towering domes on the ranch. As you walk or drive across the riverbed, it's as if you were at the bottom of a giant aquarium with the crunching sound caused by the coarse stone surface, and a little water to lubricate the finish. On my first outing to the ranch three years ago, I sank my previous vehicle, a 2003 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon, to the axles in the river in seconds while trying to attempt a river crossing. The water was waist deep and when I had to recover the tow strap from the add-a-trunk at the rear of the Jeep, I found out just how cold river water can be in February. Aside from the domes, the ranch is covered with several species of native Oak and plenty good old-fashion Mesquite bushes, brought to Texas as a gift from herds of Spanish Goats as they migrated from Mexico in the 1920's.

Now that you have some idea of the lay of the land, I can tell you of the seven named trails on the ranch. All but the most novice groups run their rigs on all of the trails. The guides determine the line each group will use to increase or decrease the level of difficulty for a particular set of obstacles, allowing every driver to test their Jeep and driving skills as close to the edge of the envelope as they wish.

The Trail Names are:

- Moab
- Balancing Rock
- Waterfall Creek
- Watch Mountain
- Homestead
- Hunter's Hill
- Roy's Revenge

Several of the trails have a few side diversions and obstacles you can run if you're feeling overly courageous, though it requires a guide's permission and supervision. Your guides will also make sure you have plenty of time to snap digital photos, and they use the C.B. radio to tell attendees about certain areas of the ranch. Kids seem to enjoy this part of the trip as much as the wheeling. The Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree is truly a family-oriented event. There may even be enough water in the creeks for children to take a quick, cool dip or even hunt for ancient Indian arrowheads.

The official JeepTales.com JK Rubicon made its debut at the Fall Texas Spur, two days before I arrived. My buddy Joseph took my Rubicon and gear on Thursday and set up our campsite. I felt like I owed him since he had just constructed a

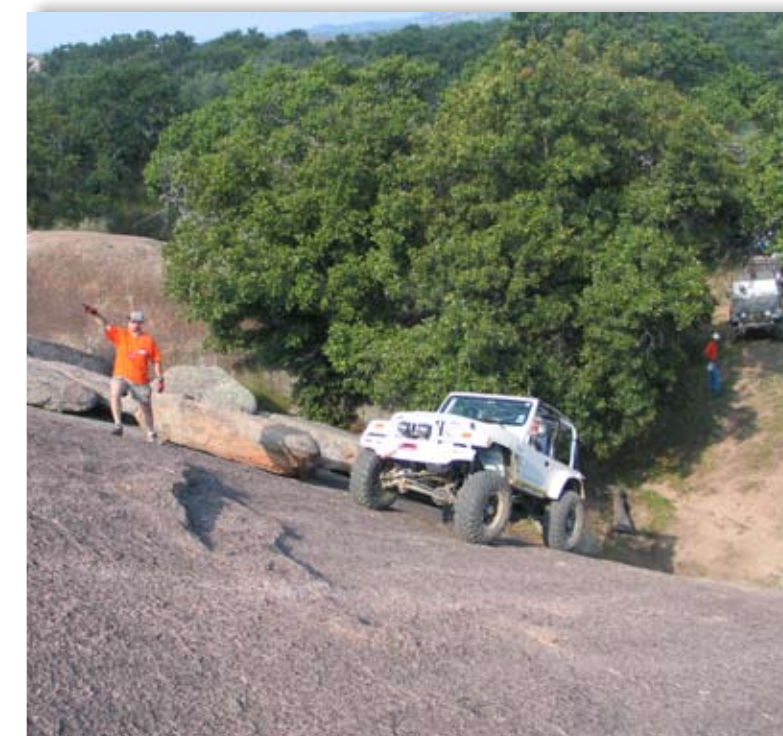
The official Jeep Tales JK



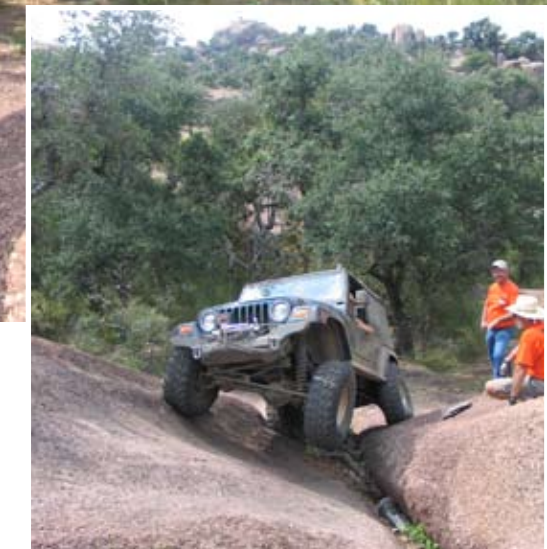
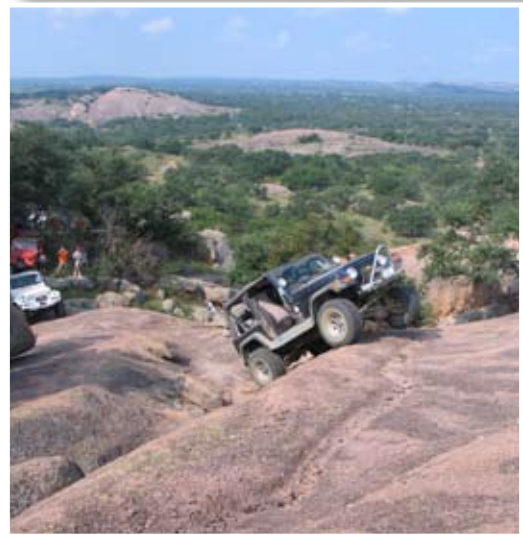
A custom steel console fabricated by JAM's Custom Consoles for the Jeep Tales JK

new custom steel overhead console for my Jeep the week before that is used to hold my CB and a few LED switches in a convenient location. He even added a few bright overhead lights so I can find stuff in my Jeep at night. Joseph is getting ready to start a small custom fabrication business and needed a "Guinea Pig" Jeep to build and test a console for the JK model Wrangler. On Friday morning, Joseph called me and asked if we could take on another passenger. He said the rider, Richard Tinnell, was from JPFreek Adventure Magazine and needed to hitch a ride so he could see what all the fuss was about.

I had visited with JPFreek by email earlier in the year to try to get them into the spring event. Unfortunately, the event was so full that not even the press could get



The 25° uphill climb is only the 1st of many challenges on the "Moab" trail.



Lining up for "Moab's" 2nd challenge. Every Jeep got to catch a little air while spectators got plenty of photos.

Around the next corner the drivers carefully cross "The Crack", a fissure inside the boulders that is 30-40 inches wide.

in! So the JPFreek staffers were in for a treat because our first trail was going to be "Moab," named for its similarities to the famous wheeling destinations in Utah. When you approach the Moab trail, you face a shear 25° granite face dome that runs for several hundred yards until you reach the first left-hand turn. The approach is more difficult when it's wet because it's hard to gain traction on the first 18 – 20 inch "first step" in the soft dirt before the climb. Once you spin off the dirt clogs and/or mud and debris, it's smooth sailing because the pink granite surface offers as much traction as a modern-day highway. I will tell you I have driven the first climb and I have walked it; it is much easier to drive. As we reached the top, Richard and I walked most of Moab so he could snap as many photos as possible. I turned to ask him what he thought of the ranch so far. His answer was "This place is awesome," and we were only 40 minutes into our day.

Once we all cleared the initial entry slope on the Moab trail, spectators, shutterbugs and drivers jumped back into their rides so we could start the more difficult portions of the trail. Although a stock Wrangler can navigate most of the twists and turns of the trail, a small lift kit and some larger tires, as well as more durable front and rear bumpers, come in handy. My JK is equipped with a 2.5" budget boost Tera Flex lift kit, and I've upgraded the tires back to the Goodyear MT/R 285's. I like to air down to about 12psi for added traction. What I'm most thankful for is the Stubby Front [Shrockworks](#) Bumper and Sliders. The short bumper allowed my Jeep a much more aggressive approach angle for the more arduous off-camber climb that would come next.

Spotters and eager photographers positioned themselves along the rock squeeze into a small drop just before the first off-camber climb. Most everyone

The 15 foot climb up the "V" has claimed many license plates, bumpers, and axles, but also makes a hell of a photo

in the group had an opportunity to catch enough air in their Jeep to nab a photo worthy of framing. Just as drivers caught their breath from what was an unnerving maneuver for first timers, the massive pitch caused by the off-camber climb moved into a hard right turn, often a three-point-turn or more. This came in preparation to cross what we call "The Crack," a fissure inside the massive boulders that ranges from 30" to over 40" in width, depending on the line you use to cross. Fortunately, there were spotters everywhere to provide not only driving guidance but also extra off-center ballast in case you begin to tip into the tree or one of the other boulders that flank the passenger-side.

Most of the groups were pretty happy with themselves after they made it this far up the trail and the cliffs; all of which surround the next staging area and offer excellent vantage points for group photographs. For a group of 18-20 Jeeps, this part of the trail takes about 2 – 2.5 hours barring any mechanical mishaps. By now, attendees who were strangers at breakfast had become life long friends, as if they had just had a full weekend at a teambuilding exercise.

For the next 200 yards, there were a few twists and turns that eventually lead to the next off-camber climb into the "V." The "V" is a 15' climb where you use your front passenger tire to move through the first part of the obstacle. The higher you climb the right hand side of the "V," the better look we all get at your under-carriage...and we are all standing above you! The only problem with the "V" is if you come down too hard, you are likely to kiss your driver-side rear bumper corner goodbye. We've torn off more than one set of license plate brackets from TJ's and JK's at this spot over the years. This is where you learn the Jeep colloquialism: "Trail Damage is like a Tattoo but with a much better story."



The variety of challenges in the beautiful and unique terrain of the ,Texas Hill County, Inks Ranch make the two day of the Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree unforgettable and you're sure to leave with plenty of trail tales, new friends, and tons of photos.

If you're going to break a fatigued part of your Jeep, this is where it will happen. We have swapped out a few u-joints and axles more than once at this point, mostly on older rigs. The guides are so quick with this sort of repair you think you are watching a professional pit crew. Fortunately, the ground is level and there are some spectacular views of the ranch from this shelf. If you're feeling a little timid about this climb, there are always drivers or guides to lend a tow strap or winch line for added security.

From there we began our descent. A steep drop-off from a rock ledge that ranged from an easy 20" to a dramatic 45" depending on your line was followed by 300 yards of a maze of boulders, and intricate steps that tested our nerves as well as the low gear of the t-case and brakes. By mid-day, the spectacle of watching the group descend was a great place to

snack and take tons of digital photos for non-drivers. Some of the most dramatic photos we collected from the ranch over the past three years are of drivers exiting Moab. Slider protection comes in handy as you may rub up against a few boulders. So much so, I think we should rename the exit of Moab "THE SOUVENIR SHOP."

I turned to Richard at the bottom of Moab and asked, "I trust this gives you some idea of what the Inks Ranch has to offer?" Richard responded, "Man, what a great place to wheel. I think I've already taken over 70 photos!"

We had the day to run two or three other trails. As we chatted about the history of the ranch and the Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree, we also discussed the event and compared our thoughts collectively.

Over the last three years, I have had the opportunity to visit with hundreds of Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree attendees, and I have yet to meet someone that did not think this trip was worth every penny! So come midnight on December 1st, visit the [JJUSA](http://www.jjusa.com) website and plan your own off-highway memories "Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree USA" style.

If you would like to see some of the over 20,000 photos that were collected from past three years at the Texas Spur Jeep Jamboree, please visit:

<http://www.jeeptales.com>

Photos from other JJUSA events from all over the country are listed under the "Past Events" as well.

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