

Vermont Overland Rally and Workshop – 2013, Rockingham, Vermont

Overland Experts has been providing off road driver training for the Vermont Overland Rally and Workshop since it started in 2010 – hosted at the Lillie Brook Farm in Rockingham, Vermont. This year's theme – "Taste of Vermont".

One of the many reasons that OEX continues to support this event is certainly because of the people - participants travel from around the country and Canada to meet up with like-minded overlanders to learn and develop their driving skills, talk about past and future travels over the bonfire each night and discover the local countryside during peak fall foliage in beautiful Vermont.

The Vermont Overland Rally and Workshop is an ideal size that allows the attendees to enjoy the intimate scale of all the elements that create such a successful event – training, various types of workshops and fireside discussions over their latest adventure. The event will always be limited to no more than 100 vehicles.

But what makes the Overland Rally and Workshop truly unique to other off road events is that it isn't focused on just the event itself, but rather the venue, off-site trails and supporting the local community as well – from the host property Lillie Brook Farm to the hundreds of miles of beautiful Class IV (unmaintained public roads/trails) roads that string across the state.

Upon arrival I am greeted once again by Peter Vollers – founder of Vermont Expedition and organizer of the Vermont Overland Rally and Workshop. I quickly check in on this crisp Friday morning and begin to set up the OEX site where I'll be showing off some of our gear and demonstrating recovery gear and recovery situations throughout the long weekend.

It doesn't take long to see many familiar faces from years past. It's clear that this event is growing each year as repeat participants are seen each year, while fresh faces are added with each year as well. The large open field adjacent to the farm house and old stone walls bordering the trail network and camping area are filling up. Dozens of groups had arrived the night before to set up, but many people start to trickle in through the early to mid-morning. Each morning fresh made breakfast items are made and served by Justin Lillie – one of the farms owner, the host of the event and the individual that has put a lot of time and effort into creating the trail network adjacent to his farm.

Soon Peter is gathering the group of participants and going over the schedule of the day's events and activities. I am set to provide a 2-hour recovery lecture mid-morning and a 2-hour trail ride shortly after lunch. Other activities will include trail rides through a network of Class IV roads, dual-sport motorcycle trail riding and various seminars ranging from disc brake conversions to diesel motor swaps are available on-site by seasoned experts.

Throughout the weekend I also meet up with various vendors I happen to see around the country at other events which include MAXTRAX, Rovers North, OK4WD and ExOfficio to name a few.

Meals here are not to be missed. Justin has prepared burgers for dinner the first night from meat from his heard of grass fed Scottish Highland cattle. It doesn't get more local or fresh. Soon afterward wood for the bonfire for that night is staged and assembled and once the sun has set the fire is set for the evening.

The trails adjacent to the camping area, which are open to the group throughout the weekend range from relatively easy to quite technical and tight – depending on the vehicle you are driving. There is even a new section of mountain bike trails that wrap around the off-road trails that make up roughly 60 acres.

The first group that I take up on the trails on Friday is a pretty good size – about 12 vehicles in total – ranging from stock Jeep Wranglers to heavily modified 60 and 80 series Toyota Land Cruisers. We've spent a few hours going over recovery items, reviewing safety items and trail convoy rules. It's important that everyone has a basic understanding of recovery distances, vehicle order and pre-rigging vehicles before we actually get on to the trails. This saves a tremendous amount of time on the trail and reduces the potential for any safety concerns.

I was lucky enough to get some help this year from Michael Hussy. Michael is one of the American's from the winning team from the Camel Trophy event in 1993. Not only did he provide some great insight that related to his achievement, but he's quite knowledgeable as you can imagine when it comes to vehicle preparedness and recovery.

Our trail ride starts and continues throughout the network that has been growing since the Vermont Overland Rally and Workshop have been established many years ago. It's nice to see that with each year new trails develop allowing for unexpected recoveries and situations along the way. For much of the time after the event the trails are not used, which allows vegetation to regenerate and minimize the amount of erosion that is critical in avoiding.

The trail ride ends several hours later without much drama, but with a few recoveries needed where we were able to implement some techniques we had gone over earlier in the morning.

The next day starts the same and again with recovery and driving lectures for those that opted for different activities the previous day along with plenty of other great options for others.

The event winds down on Sunday with a competition trails course set up on the trails. A trials course is essential where a person drives their vehicles through a prescribed route whereas they are penalized for backing up, touching trees with the body of the vehicle and touching any marked areas. It's a skill based competition in being able to really know the abilities of your vehicle and as we say "the four corners" as well.

The weather cooperated, some great meals were served, local areas were explored and off road vehicles of all types were tested. The event was clearly a success for the participants, as well as, the event organizers and sponsors.

Thanks for Peter Vollers, volunteers and vendors that help put on a great event.

I'm very much looking forward to next year.