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FEATURED

## Rock crawling through dust clouds: NAU 4x4 Club sparks community interest

Megan Troutman Apr 12, 2015



Rock crawling in Moab, Utah. (Photo by Will Carter)

Jeeps, Toyotas and Fords line the trails, preparing to crawl over rocks, conquer hills and straddle crevasses. With a vast number of vehicles and driver experience, the NAU 4x4 club has been tackling off-roading trails around Flagstaff for the past few years.

The 4x4 club started as a group of six friends, but as interest sparked in the off-roading community, the group quickly became an official club on campus. With nearly 200 Facebook members, the 4x4 club corresponds with students from ASU and the UA to plan and participate in off-roading excursions.

When it comes to off-roading, most of the courses are on pre-marked trails. Junior business marketing major Adam Miller has been president of the 4x4 club for a semester and enjoys planning trips and leading runs.

“It’s so much fun,” Miller said. “I’ve always been really involved with the club since my freshman year.”

Most trails involve steep slopes and rock crawling or driving over dusty, rocky terrain with modified four-wheel-drive vehicles. When approaching large obstacles on the trails, students will get out of their vehicles to analyze the course in order to find the best way to overcome the obstacle.

“It’s fun trying to do an obstacle that other people in the group can’t do,” Miller said. “We like to push ourselves to the limit.”

Meetings are held 8 p.m. every Monday at Freddy’s Frozen Custard & Steakburgers to discuss future events. The NAU 4x4 club schedules trail runs every weekend and big trips once a month. Their last big excursion was off-roading in Moab, Utah.

Senior environmental geology major Mike Hartig attended the Moab trip and enjoyed camping and off-roading with the club members. Hartig has been vice president of the NAU 4x4 club since the start of the semester.

“Moab, Utah is sort of the Mecca of the off-road world,” Hartig said. “It’s somewhere you want to take a pilgrimage to once in your life.”

More trips will be planned in the future and are yet to be determined. While the club schedules trips to popular off-roading destinations, they are cautious of the environment and Leave-No-Trace ethics.

“A lot of people think that people who off-road just go out and tear stuff up on the trails, but we won’t go past ‘road closed’ signs and we respect the land,” Miller said. “We don’t try and tear stuff up in order to have fun.”

While this is a common misconception, the NAU 4x4 club is mindful of the trails and keeping the environment safe for other off-roaders.

“We’re actually very protective of the environment,” Hartig said. “We don’t go off the trail, don’t damage it, don’t rip it up and keep it nice. We’re like hikers — we enjoy being out there and staying on designated trails.”

Some trips last longer than others as vehicles tip or have technical difficulties when overcoming obstacles.

“I love going out on the trails,” said sophomore criminal justice major Sarah Mattke. “Sometimes, it doesn’t work out very well with a big group of people because one vehicle takes longer than the other or something will happen or break down, but they’re usually really fun. It’s nice hanging out with other people.”

Mattke joined the club at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. She discovered the club by a small business card pinned beneath the windshield wiper of her Jeep.

“Most people just don’t know about the club,” Mattke said. “Last year, I was invited to join but I never went to the meetings and after that business card on my car, I never heard about them again.”

Even though the club is not very well-known, its members are welcoming of students with or without off-roading vehicles. In fact, most members attend meetings and events not to drive, but sit in the passenger seat while off-roading.

“We have a lot of people that don’t have their own vehicles or drive Civics or something that you wouldn’t normally do stuff with,” Hartig said. “However, you don’t need a vehicle to be part of the club. We actually encourage people who don’t have vehicles to join so they can actually learn what we do.”

Students in the club enjoy learning about off-roading techniques and what to do in dangerous circumstances. Mattke experienced tipping over in her Jeep on one of the more difficult trails.

“I’d have to say the scariest part is probably when one side of your tire drops off so you’re at an angle so you’re sitting there like, ‘OK, I have to do this right otherwise I will be on my side,’” Mattke said.

With a wide range of experienced drivers, the NAU 4x4 club offers trails for people of different skill levels.

“If we are doing something that we think your vehicle can do and you’re intimidated, we’ll definitely not pressure you, but rather try to get you to go anyway in order to get you out of your comfort zone and try new things,” Hartig said. “We don’t let members do things that will hurt them or their vehicle. We try to do something for everybody.”

Prospective members are able to access the Facebook page to request membership or more information about meeting times and trip schedules.

“My favorite part is just the people,” Hartig said. “We can scare new people away pretty quick because we’re a very open and non-filtered group, but once you get used to it, it’s fun. I love the group.”