

Girls camping – all about mud and water

By Kathryn Reed

BIG BEND – Stuck Jeep. Bucket boy. Naked boy. Tarp woman. Burney Falls. Hot springs. Fall foliage. Rain. Rainbow. Friends.



It's good to be with friends at times like this.

Photo/Pamala Valentine

Just another typical girls' camping weekend.

With our annual camping trip being pushed from September to November, we moved the sleeping to indoors at my sister's in Redding. Roughing-it it was not. Comfy bed, long hot showers, full size kitchen, real food, a fire at the flick of a switch – I could get used to this type of camping.

Day 1 started with rain, so we nixed the idea of hiking. Instead, the four of us piled into my Wrangler in search of natural hot springs.

Heading east on Highway 299 from Redding I was reminded of the

drive to Sierraville from Truckee – pines and oaks intermixed, open space, natural beauty.

Fall is clearly in the air on this first Friday of November. As the rain descends, it delivers a freshness – almost infusing life into the dying oak leaves that are long past their vibrant yellow and now much closer to brown.

A series of small towns I've never heard of roll by on this two-lane road.

We opt to pass our turnoff and head for Burney Falls – a place only Pam had been to.

What a sight.

Water tumbles 129-feet from multiple crevices in the volcanic rock. It's hard to know where to look because it's not just one waterfall. One hundred million gallons cascade down the falls each day.

All of this beauty is part of McArthur-Burney Falls Memorial State Park in the Cascade Mountains. It's on Highway 89, just off Highway 299.

Burney Creek is formed by underground springs. It gets larger as the falls approach. The creek empties into Britton Lake, which is partly inside the state park.

We check out the campground, which is empty except for the deer, just in case we return to real camping one year.

A rainbow appears as we drive, with one end being at a major logging operation – a different pot of gold I suppose.

We continue down Highway 299 toward the town of Big Bend. Our guidebook leads us to a hot springs resort that isn't open. We go to the next one. Turning onto the dirt road, we descend a bit. I'm hoping no one is coming in the other direction.

Zigzagging between rocks and washed out ruts we hit a plateau. I steer us into a pit of mud. We're not moving. The Jeep is in 4-low. Time to pile out – all but the driver.

It moves.

Back in go Pam, Darla and Sue. We carry on a little farther until we reach the edge of Kosk Creek.

We toast to having made it. We chat about the tarp next to us that we presume is where naked boy (the guy in the hot spring) is calling home. That was until we heard rustling and eventually saw tarp woman.

Bucket boy beat us to the springs once naked boy and his friend left. We learned to like bucket boy because as a regular he knew to bring a bucket to cool off the springs with creek water.

Sitting on the edge of the creek that leads to the Pit River, the hot springs and surrounding area have a fascinating history that we learn from bucket boy. We learn how the Indians lived on the land. (We passed a Native American cemetery on the way down.)

We learn about the excellent fly fishing, the popularity of this remote hot springs, the planned development of the closed resort, how high school students are bused to Redding.

We soak in the information as our muscles relax.

Soon it is time to leave. We want to test my 4-wheeling prowess, such as it is, in daylight. I bypass the hole I created coming down and was making good progress until the back end started sliding uphill and the front end spun like a stationary bike.

Finally, the Jeep just didn't move.

Out went the passengers.

This time it took a bit more maneuvering to make it through all of the muck. The slick incline tested me as I jostled to solid ground. The steely look in my eyes proved to my passengers this wasn't the type of mud bath I wanted to stay overnight in.

All loaded up, we headed back to our campsite with its indoor plumbing, easy to light fire and flannel sheets.

A perfect camping trip.

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