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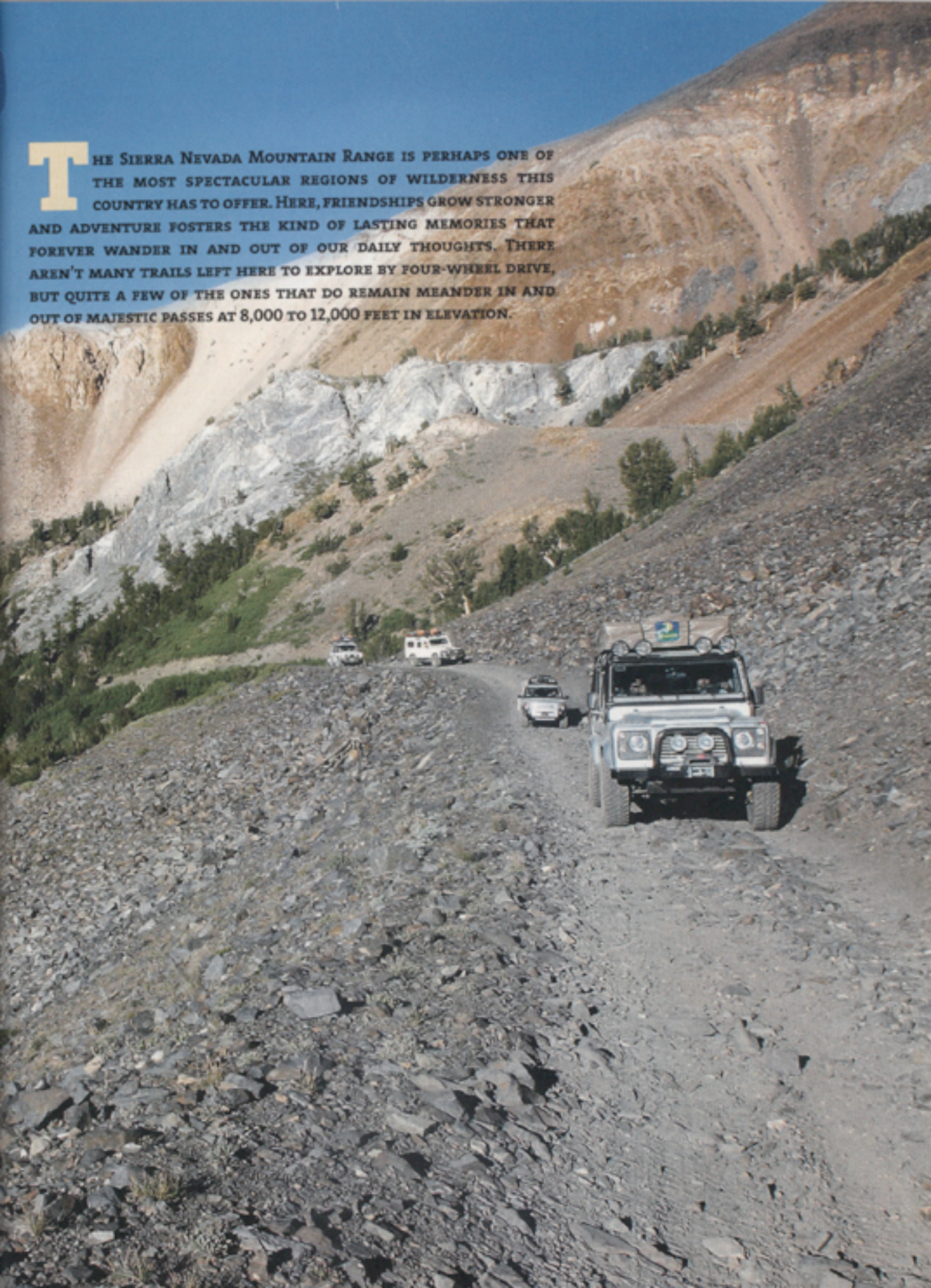
IN SEARCH OF THE GOLDENS

On the Trail With Rover Accessories

BY KEVIN MCNULTY

PHOTOGRAPHY: KEVIN MCNULTY

THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAIN RANGE IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR REGIONS OF WILDERNESS THIS COUNTRY HAS TO OFFER. HERE, FRIENDSHIPS GROW STRONGER AND ADVENTURE FOSTERS THE KIND OF LASTING MEMORIES THAT FOREVER WANDER IN AND OUT OF OUR DAILY THOUGHTS. THERE AREN'T MANY TRAILS LEFT HERE TO EXPLORE BY FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE, BUT QUITE A FEW OF THE ONES THAT DO REMAIN MEANDER IN AND OUT OF MAJESTIC PASSES AT 8,000 TO 12,000 FEET IN ELEVATION.





Our group gathered together and prepared to depart from the Hi-Desert floor.



Solitude.



The crew of this awesome Sierras adventure.



The Rovers raced up the eastern side of the Sierras. The elevation at this point is about 8,000 feet.



Brett Camot's very nicely equipped Defender 110.



Along the trail at any given time we could find the Outdoor Channel film crew hard at work.

The Sierras stretch almost 400 miles along California's eastern border and proved to be a formidable and almost impenetrable barrier to early, westward-bound settlers. This range of mountains started forming a few hundred million years ago and has been shaped and molded by Earth's violent geophysical forces, glaciers, and extreme weather ever since.

You can find some of this country's most treasured jewels in the Sierras: Yosemite National Park, Sequoia National Park, Kings Canyon National Park, and the Rubicon Trail. Mount Whitney can also be found here; at 14,496 feet, it is the highest peak in the continental U.S. Lake Tahoe is also located in the Sierras, and it is the second deepest lake in the U.S. at 1,645 feet. The mountains, hills, passes, and valleys are as rich with Old West history and folklore as they are beauty. If you haven't had the chance to explore this region of the country, I highly recommend a visit.

It's always a pleasure to hit the trail with Charles D'Andrade. Charles is the owner of Rover Accessories in Lawndale, California. His shop caters to high-end vehicles, custom modifications, and the sporting lifestyle. The man is a true trail professional — he grew up wheeling in the jungles of Guyana in South America, so he definitely knows his way around a 4x4 and on the trail. It had been about two years since our last adventure with

Charles, so we were anxious to ride along with him once again.

As avid outdoorsmen, we share the same quest for adventure. We live, breathe, and eat four-wheeling, especially when it's mixed in with other endeavors like fly-fishing, hiking, exploring, and whatever else we may find at trail's end. I assume this is why a vast majority of us own a 4x4 — not just to enjoy the four-wheeling aspect of the sport but to get us somewhere to partake in other activities. This particular adventure was about wheeling majestic trails of the High Sierras, some of which rise straight off the desert floor and climb 8,000 to 9,000 feet in just a few short miles. This trip was not just about taking in the sights on some very fun trails, we were in search of a rare species of fish, California's golden trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss aguabonita*).

Along for the ride was the crew from the Outdoor Channel's *Four Wheeler* TV. This adventure will air in the show's 2006 season. I will post the date and time on our website (www.4wdandsportutility.com) once the show is finalized.

Our journey started in the small town of Bishop, California. This quaint little farming community sits on the eastern slopes of the Sierras. The town is a portal of sorts to literally thousands of square miles of vacationland. At this point, Charles handed out trip itineraries, maps, and made



Charles D'Andrade's amazing Defender 90 is to the left of Brett's 110. The vehicle was custom-built by Charles for fly-fishing expeditions, hence its name the "Fly-fisher."



The lone Jeep on the journey was our Project Grand Caddy. As you can see, it was forced to camp by itself.



All the luxuries of a fine restaurant. Charles cooks a mean steak.



After a long day on the trail, the producer of *Four Wheeler TV*, Larry Saavedra, gets ready to hit the bunk. This is a room with a view!

introductions to those meeting for the first time.

From Bishop it was off to the trailhead about 45 minutes away. This trail (like most in this region) starts at elevation in desolate desert and then switchbacks its way up the Sierras' slopes. In a short while, we found ourselves at approximately 10,000 feet. The dry, dusty trail quickly gave way to high alpine meadows. The trail was by no means difficult to negotiate, but the high altitude significantly taxed the performance of the vehicles. Our destination was located inside the boundary of the John Muir Wilderness. The scenery is astounding. Visitors flock to nearby areas like Yosemite by the millions each year. Ansel Adams created some of his greatest photographic works in this area.

Charles and his crew were driving Land Rovers, including the new LR3. At first glance, the LR3 looks just like any other luxury vehicle driven by the average high-maintenance soccer mom. You wouldn't think the vehicle performs as well as it does off-highway, but with its advanced electronics and traction control, the Rover performed flawlessly, even while towing a cumbersome utility trailer packed with all the gear for the adventure.

Also included in this convoy of Rovers were a couple of well-built Discoverys and a few of my personal favorites, Defender 90s and 110s. One of the Discoverys circumnavigated the world across South America, Australia, and Asia. The vehicle was still running strong. I was the odd man out with my Grand Cherokee, which, I might add, performed as well as the LR3.

Nestled in the trees at the end of the trail was the perfect secluded campsite that would be our basecamp for the next few days and nights. From here, we would hike to higher elevations to fly-fish the alpine lakes for golden

trout. The water in the lakes here is clear emerald green — so clear, in fact, that you can look out almost 100 yards and see every object on the lake's floor with your naked eye.

The trout are elusive and probably very small to the typical fisherman. Due to the small amount of nutrients in the water and the effects of the winter freeze, these fish rarely grow to be over 12 inches in length. The state record is a mere 10 pounds! But if you consider the grandeur of the terrain and the astounding scenery, it makes the catch comparable to the largest fish ever. We found they weren't so elusive and actually were quite abundant. It was common to catch a golden every cast.

With all adventures, at least for me, they end all too quickly. I only wish that time on the trail moved as slowly as the anticipation leading up to the event. Leaving the trail and one's friends is almost disheartening. After the four-day adventure it was back to the city and back to the grind.

This wilderness is a very fragile environment, not meant to be destroyed by reckless four-wheelers looking for extreme challenges. The wheeling here is really very mild compared to that in other parts of the country. If you visit the Sierras, please respect the environment and be responsible. Doing this will preserve our right and the right of future generations to enjoy these lands by four-wheel drive. This is why I am not pinpointing the exact location of the trip. If you're serious about a trip on this trail, e-mail me and we'll talk about it. Your other option is to check with the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service.

The trails are there, and you can find them, but they are very limited and are being shut down as quickly as the seasons come and go. Please respect our lands and wheel responsibly. Pack out what you pack in. **4WD**