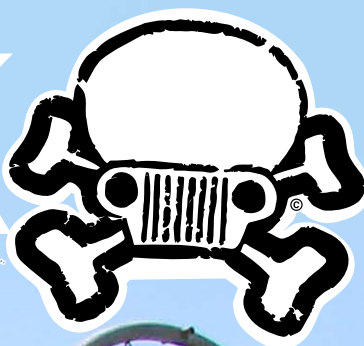


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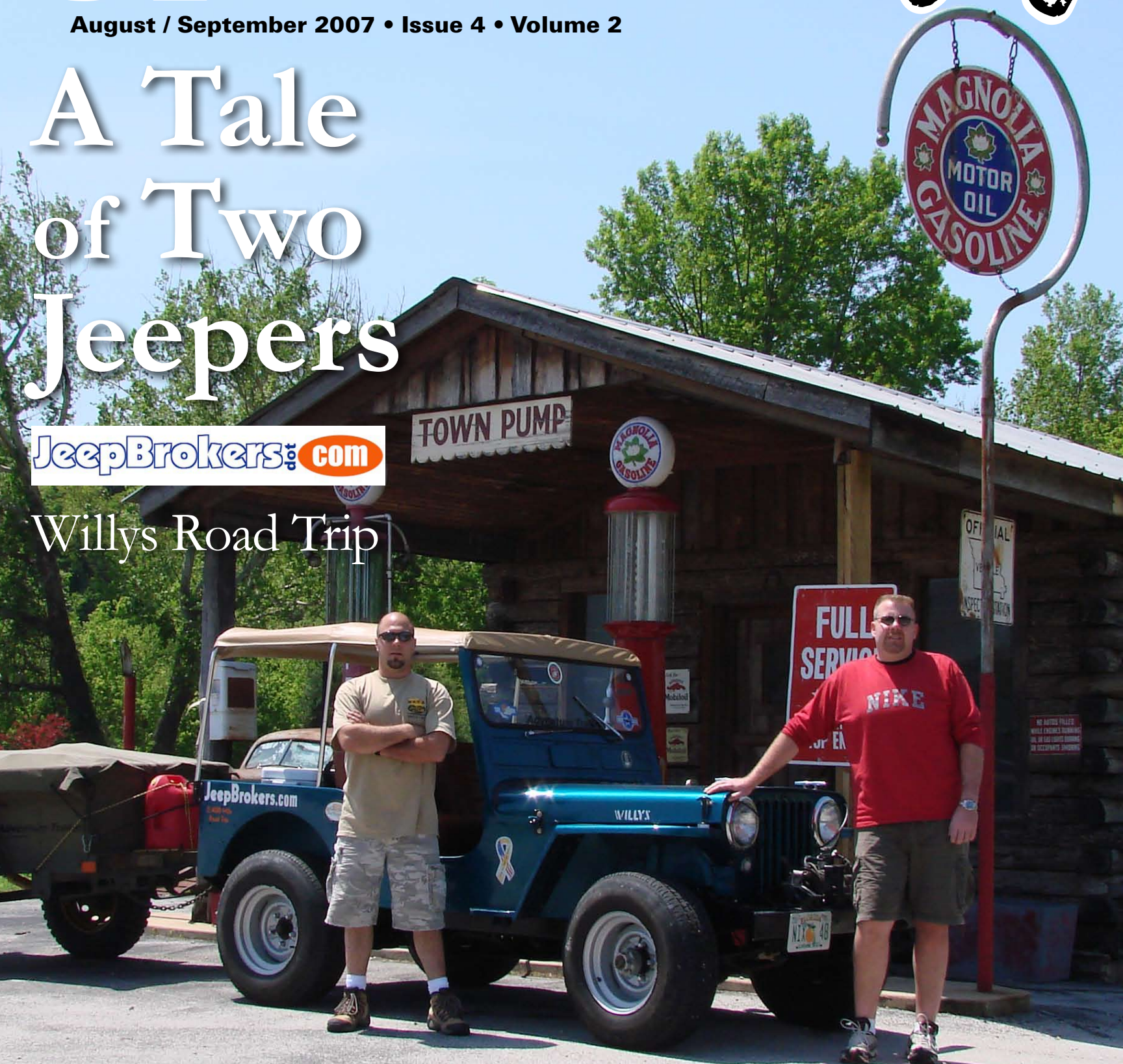


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A Tale of Two Jeepers

JeepBrokers.com

Willys Road Trip



**CIRCUS MEXICUS: ROCK N' ROLL ROAD TRIP • CAVING IN THE WEST
PYRAMID LAKE WITH ADVENTURE TRAILERS • CLIMBING THE CHIMNEY
CIRCLE THE WAGONS: HISTORIC TRAILRUN**

A Tale of Two Jeepers

Text by Frank Ledwell, Editor-in-Chief

Photos by Will Morgan and Vance Crowder of Jeepbrokers.com



At ruins with no brakes, time to wheel our way out

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the stage had been set for what would later become the deadliest conflict in human history. Over 60 million people lost their lives during the Second World War, including nearly 40 million civilians, and while the forces of 'good' prevailed in an Allied victory, the world would never be the same.

During the course of the war in Europe, the U.S. military desired a lightweight reconnaissance vehicle, and bids were solicited in 1940 from a number of auto manufacturers including Bantam, Willys, and Ford Motor Company. Bantam's design caught the eye of the U.S. military, but they lacked the mass production facilities to supply the government. In stepped Willys, a company that had developed a flat-headed four-cylinder engine that had parts that were interchangeable with Ford models of the time. Using mostly Bantam's design, Willys and Ford received contracts to provide the U.S. military with vehicles that would eventually become a symbol for military and civilian off-highway use.

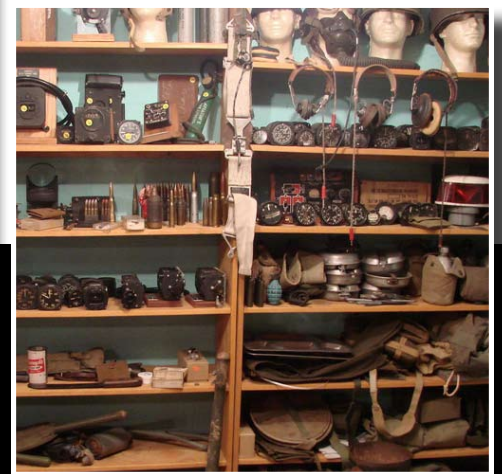
Fast-forward to May of 2007 when a 1948 Willys Jeep vehicle began a 2,147 mile excursion across America. The vehicle was previously owned by Nick Fallier, a World War II veteran who flew 129 missions over the Pacific Ocean between January 1944 and the surrender of Japan in mid-August of 1945. Nick, who earned the rank of Captain during his 12 years in the Army, was dubbed "The Captain of the Clouds" during his service with the 39th Fighter Squadron in the Southwest Pacific. Upon his return to the States, Nick purchased his Willys Jeep vehicle and for nearly 60 years, the vehicle enjoyed the companionship of a dedicated Jeep enthusiast and war veteran before eventually beginning a new chapter in its life with Will Morgan and Vance Crowder, the two-man team from Jeepbrokers.com who, until this trip, had never met each other despite having worked together via the internet for nearly a decade.

The journey began six weeks earlier when the Jeep became available for purchase through a classified posting on Will and Vance's website. Elated at the prospect of owning a one-of-a-kind vehicle, Will and Vance followed-up with the ad posting. Shortly thereafter, the purchase had been completed and the preparation for traveling the south via Georgia and Tennessee was in full swing. The next step included the purchase of an M416 military trailer that would be used to haul the gear and other items necessary for making the return trip back to Arizona. Thanks to the efforts of *Adventure Trailers*, an expedition trailer company based out of California, the trailer was transformed from a box with wheels into a functional add-on that would prove more than road-worthy throughout the course of the trip. From there, it was a matter of finalizing all of the logistics prior to meeting in Florida to join with Nick and the vehicle.



Will & Vance in Tallahassee, Florida

Once in Florida, the Jeepbrokers.com team officially kicked off their Road Trip when they met with Nick at their hotel. After exchanging cordial greetings and talking about their plans, the team headed to Nick's house where they were thrilled to view a war memorabilia collection that rivaled that of most museums. "I've flown every one of those planes", Nick said as he pointed to a collection of a dozen or so model airplanes that rested on a nearby shelf. He then told story after story about an exciting mission or close call that he had in each of those planes before progressing on to another area of his collection.



**(Left top) Nick's house
(Above) Nicks collection
(Left bottom) Just another knick knock in Nick's house**





After a number of other exciting stories and recollections by Nick, the group headed to Cairo, Georgia to view and pick-up the Jeep as it had been stored in a shed there for several years. A subsequent test of the vehicle ensured that this would be a thrilling ride home as Vance, who stands at 6'4", folded himself behind the wheel in an effort to drive the vehicle. The adventure had now begun, and with trailer in tow, the Willys Jeep began its long journey to a new home.

(Above) Road ready in Cairo, Georgia (5/12/07)
(Below left) Last shot before we began the trip



Only 20 miles into the trip, the team noticed that the transfer case in the Jeep had leaked quite a bit of fluid, and this would be a constant reminder that driving a 60-year old vehicle cross-country would not only be a joy but also a frustration at times. They would eventually reach Columbus, Georgia later that day, and a Civil War Naval Museum caught their eye. The next morning, Will and Vance visited the museum for several hours before hitting the road once again en route to Rome, Georgia, their next stop along the way.



Breakfast in Rome, Georgia.
Ran into some fellow Jeeps.

The next morning, under overcast and breezy skies, the team headed north towards Chattanooga, Tennessee for a comfortable day of driving. Along the way, they met two fellow Jeepers, one of which is the owner of a CJ-8 Scrambler and the other, a CJ-7. After chatting for a while, Will and Vance were back on the road and reached Chattanooga at around 12:30pm. Rolling hills and breathtaking views greeted the team, and after a lunch meeting with a client, they were off again en route to Columbia.

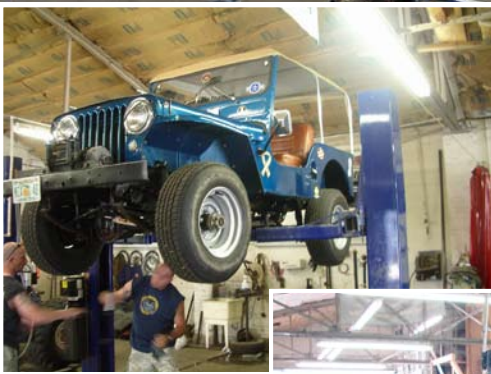


Pulling a night shift in Rome, Georgia.



Hitch troubles in Columbia, Tennessee brought the guys to the Custom Window Tinting Shop where the CWT crew went to work getting the guys, the Jeep, and the trailer back on the road.

Once in Columbia though, it was found that the pintle hitch from the trailer had torn from the frame of the Jeep. Thanks to a local off-road shop, Custom Tinting and Off-Road, the guys were back on the road in no time. Of course, the guys had reached a point where they were both physically and mentally exhausted, with long days on the road and nights that were filled with repairs to the Jeep and journal updates on their website. But on they went, continuing their travels with a zeal that matched that of Lewis and Clark during their legendary travels after the Louisiana Purchase.



Filling the transfer case was becoming a daily ritual, and before leaving Chattanooga the next morning, Will and Vance would spend their time refilling the transfer case with fluid that was so thick that it would require an IV hose and nearly 45 minutes to complete. Coupled with rain and no windshield wipers, the team headed off in less than desirable conditions. "We froze our asses off until 11am when the rain finally stopped," said Vance

Crowder. Not having windows and barely much to cover their heads, the team showed signs of fatigue. Will had even fallen asleep behind the wheel before Vance made it a point to take the reigns. Despite a lack of comfort and conditions that had been less than ideal, they finally arrived in Arkansas with the continuing chagrin of leaks from the transfer case. But alas, another top-off of the t-case and a fine meal at a Mexican restaurant brought to end a long day.



A trip to an Antique Car Museum the following morning was a nice change of pace. With an extensive collection of rare antiques, both Will and Vance agreed that Nick's collection of war memorabilia would have been a fine compliment to the artifacts in the museum. Afterwards, the trip rolled on and continued through the small town of Flippin. Other than a small church that is eloquently named the "Flippin Church of God," this portion of Arkansas didn't appear to have seen much change in 30+ years. The day would end with their arrival in Harrison, AR, which is located only 20 miles from Branson, Missouri.



They had now traveled over 1,000 miles with hopes of making their way through the remainder of Arkansas and through Oklahoma. With only 300 miles, this seemed to be a more than feasible feat. But, as had previously been the case, a slew of issues that began with a number of hills that slowed the vehicle down to nearly a stand-still (Will and Vance both suspected that they wouldn't be home by Christmas, as slow as the vehicle was moving), and continued with a major oil leak just outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma, ensured new frustrations for the two-man team. Fortunately for Will and Vance, what seemed like a major catastrophe with the vehicle turned out to be little more than a small hole in the oil pan, which was caused by a broken spot weld from a skid plate that had been previously welded to the pan. In addition to this, both guys met a gentleman inside a local grocery store who happened to be the inspiration for the movie "Good Morning Vietnam," starring Robin Williams. He also was featured in one of the Benji movies from the 1980's.

"Every day has started with us wondering what we are going to write about because every day begins with us planning to do nothing other than drive all day and sleep all night, which would be a pretty boring story. Luckily (or unluckily depending on how you look at it), every day so far has featured something unplanned or unexpected that has happened to make the day exciting."



Day 10 began with Will and Vance having made it to Enid, OK. As Vance would say: *“Every day has started with us wondering what we are going to write about because every day begins with us planning to do nothing other than drive all day and sleep all night, which would be a pretty boring story. Luckily (or unluckily depending on how you look at it), every day so far has featured something unplanned or unexpected that has happened to make the day exciting.”* Ironically, that particular day would turn out to be relatively uneventful with the only newsworthy item being that they logged mile 1,500 en route to a town named Hooker.

The next morning featured the final stretch of drive in Oklahoma before crossing through north Texas and into New Mexico. Shortly after arriving in New Mexico, Will and Vance passed an old Willys Jeep in a Wal-Mart parking lot. As it turned out, the vehicle was a 1942 model and the gentleman who drove it had inherited it from his grandfather. He still drives the old Jeep around town quite regularly. Not too long after this, they stopped for gas and saw a tow truck in tow with a 1959 Willys Wagon. Will and Vance chatted with the driver for a while before continuing their journey.



By 3:40pm that day, Will and Vance had reached Route 66, where they got their kicks pretty quickly when they approached a curve with a 10 mile per hour speed limit while they were going approximately 30 mph. “Bruce Lee” reflexes and Mario Andretti driving skills saved the crew from wrecking into a concrete tunnel. Shortly thereafter, a rainstorm welcomed the two of them. Fortunately for them, they came across the Route 66 Auto Museum and made a pit stop there to admire all of the classic cars. 140 miles later, they had reached Socorro and were now only several hundred miles from Arizona.

Will and Vance had finally begun their final day of the trip. After refilling the transfer case with another round of fluid, they were back on the road and by mile 2,055, had arrived in Arizona! At that time, however, they realized that they had no brakes, and rolled right past the Arizona sign before turning around to get a photo op. With no brakes and the realization that the clutch had gone out as well, things were looking grim on their last day when luck was again on their side with the arrival of Will's father to join them on their final stretch.



The brakes go out with 150 miles to go.



The trip wouldn't be over without a few more problems.



With a new batch of brake fluid and some tinkering on the clutch, they were back on the road again and by 6pm, they were in Springerville, Arizona for their last tank of gas. 1.75 hours later, they arrived in Snowflake, AZ...their destination!

The trip officially ended the following day with Will and Vance taking the Jeep to the Anasazi Valley to view some Indian ruins. A remote site in the middle of the desert with broken pottery that dates back to approximately 500 A.D., this stretch of desert turned out to be an amazing symbol of American lore and one that Vance found to be truly inspiring.





For Will, the cross-country trip was also one of elation and happiness:

“Heading into this trip, I was filled with excitement, wonder and even some apprehension. But there was no way on this Earth that I was going to miss this opportunity to see and do so many things all in one trip. I was excited to meet Nick Fallier, and my excitement turned into amazement when we did actually get to spend some time with him. I only hope that when I am Nick’s age that I am as sharp and can remember the details of my life experiences as he does...I was equally excited to spend some time with Vance, whom I had communicated with and worked with over several years to share our love of Jeeps with the world, and to create one of the most visited Jeep websites on the internet...This was truly an experience of a lifetime; there is not one mile of road, one hour of the day or even one moment that I would change of this trip...Thanks to all of you that followed along with the story; it kept us excited when we would receive new emails daily and we knew that people were truly enjoying the trip with us.”



Reflecting on the trip that started out with two business partners meeting for the first time, visiting with a World War II hero, and traveling 2,147 miles across the south, Vance would later recall:

“Trying to drive the old Jeep home was an adventure and opportunity that couldn’t be resisted. I vividly remember thinking that driving a stock 60 year old vehicle, which had never been designed for highway driving, more than 2,000 miles across country would either be the best or worst decision of my life. There was no middle ground in this one, it was either going to be a once-in-a-lifetime adventure or the ultimate ‘I told you so’ regret of a lifetime... This trip gave me a very pleasant and positive attitude towards people and society...Last but not least, I got the opportunity to build a solid friendship with Will. Prior to this trip, we had never met and by the end of the trip, I felt as though we had known each other forever.”

For now, their legendary trip had come to an end but their appreciation for life and a newly formed friendship had been ignited. Sixty years earlier, a vehicle had been born in the shadow of a world war. Now, that same vehicle had toured the country, and in the latest chapter of its adventure, that vehicle has truly defined the heritage of America and its heroes who gave their all to ensure a future of freedom for all of us.

UPDATE: The pair has since decided to make the Willys road trip a yearly ritual, with the ultimate goal being to visit all fifty states within a five year timeframe, concluding in Tallahassee, Florida where it all began. Next year’s trip will take place in mid-May and they will be “going coastal” through Nevada, California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and Utah. For more details on the 2008 trip, or to read more about this journey, please visit Will and Vance’s website at:

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