

## Pine Barrens Off-Road Excursion IV • November 12, 2017

By Peter Schneider & Bob Shore

On November 12, **Paul Miller Porsche** sponsored the SCCA Northern New Jersey Region's fourth **Pine Barrens Off-Road Excursion**. This year's event motto as noted on the t-shirts was **WE'RE OFF THE MAP**, and truly we were. The event is designed to provide members with Cayenne's, Macan's, SUV's, Jeeps or Pickup Trucks a small sample of an 'off-road adventure,' without putting the vehicles or occupants at risk.

This year's event not only visited Brendan T. Byrne State Forest but included sand trails in Wharton State Forest and a short halfway break at the Wharton Visitor Center and Museum. Both of these New Jersey State Parks are within The Pinelands National Reserve in southern New Jersey; this 1.1 million acres reserve is the largest open space on the eastern seaboard between Boston, MA and Richmond VA.

As in 2015 and 2016, Bob and I started working on the event in February, obtaining Special Use Permits for the trails in the State Forests, laying out the route and reserving space at the Lakehurst Community Center for registration/breakfast and the Pemberton Recreation Center for lunch. Last minute complications associated with Lakehurst Township, required us to move the start to the Pemberton Recreation Center, which greatly improved event logistics. Several trails that we were able to get permits for in February ended up to be unusable, due to a closure of a small narrow bridge we used in 2015 and restrictions imposed over the summer by the State Forest to limit exposure by motor vehicles to environmentally sensitive areas. Not everyone that uses the State Forests play by the rules. While Wharton State Forest originally had over 500 miles of 'drivable' trails, overuse by 'off-road' vehicles with oversized tires and ATV club creating unauthorized new paths in the forest have caused a lengthy permit process and heavy fines for those that venture off the approved routes. Sand roads that we used in 2015 were now off limits in 2017.

We started the morning of the event with registration and a light breakfast at the Recreation Center in Country Lakes Estates, Brown Mills, just a short drive from Whitesbog Village, which was our first stop on the day's event.

Each of the 42 vehicles participating in the trek was provided with a bound set of route instructions with turn-by-turn instructions for the 90-mile course. The 111 route instructions provided mileage to the hundredth, delta mileage (distance between instructions), notification of the official speed limits and a written description of each turn intended to make sure everyone stayed on-course and did not wander off and get lost, or stuck in many of the waterholes in the forest. **Rudy & Nancy Samsel** ran 'sweep' just in case, but were never called to action and arranged for the breakfast spread. **Dom Miliano**, in addition to coordinating with the sponsor and running 'Car 1' in a **Paul Miller Porsche** Cayenne, ran the final route check three days before the event, to make sure Bob and I did not do anything silly along the route.

After the nine-mile tour of the cranberry bogs of Whitesbog Village, which is where in 1910, Elizabeth White, a New Jersey agricultural specialist collaborated with Frederick Vernon Coville to develop and commercialize a cultivated blueberry bush. Under this partnership, Elizabeth would solicit locals to gather wild bushes with large berries, and Coville would apply his research in an attempt to hybridize and propagate them. By 1916, they had cultivated and produced a blueberry crop ready for sale and created the entirely new business of propagating and selling blueberry bushes. Eventually, at its peak of production, Whitesbog would cultivate 90 acres of blueberries.

While Whitesbog Village is now part of Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, a large part of it is still used to grow cranberries, managed by decedents of Elizabeth White. Joe Darlington (5th Generation) and his wife, Brenda Conner have complementary skills and are continuing to make history on the Joseph J. White farm, bringing many innovations to the cultural practices.

As a typical company town of its time, Whitesbog Village was home not only to Elizabeth White but a number of the company's workers as well. In fact, 41 workers and their families lived in rented homes in the Village. There was also a general store and post office, a schoolhouse, a paymaster's office, as well as a cranberry processing facilities. Among these facilities were a packing-and-storage warehouse where cranberries were cleaned, sorted, and stored. A barrel factory, where coopers built and repaired cranberry barrels, as well as a barrel storage warehouse, where the cranberry barrels were stored until needed. There was a water tower used as a look-out for forest fires (and to fight these fires as well) and to observe the surrounding bogs. Most of these buildings still stand in the Village.

Whitesbog Village is maintained by the NJ Division of Parks & Forest, in association with the Whitesbog Preservation Trust which is a private nonprofit, 501 (c) 3 corporation, dedicated to the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of Historic Whitesbog Village.

On this year's route, we were able to incorporate a visit to the barrel factory to listen to a 'Whitesbog Blueberry Jam' session by the **Accidental Jug Band**. **Ken McClaren**, who plays the five-string banjo arranged for the Jam session to start earlier so we could stop by and enjoy their music. While this extended our stay at the Village and required that we shorten the time at Wharton Visitor Center and Museum, it was well worth the change in plans, to experience a truly unique American art form. Those interested stopped by the Whitesbog General Store to shop for local crafts and gifts.

After leaving the Village, we drove a short distance to the first of two sand pits that we explored on the event. While this year we avoided pulling anyone out of the pond in the center of the pit, everyone got a good taste of deep sand and back road adventure while staying under the watchful eyes of the organizing committee and provided great photo opportunities for the event's Facebook Page ([www.facebook.com/NNJRPCAPBE/](http://www.facebook.com/NNJRPCAPBE/)). We extended our time in this sand pit as most participants chose to take advantage of the hills and rugged terrain, before heading off to Wharton State Forest.

The trip from the first sand pit to the Wharton Visitor Center and Museum, was a quick thirty-minute drive passing through Chatsworth, NJ the unofficial capital of the Pine Barrens and home of the Ocean Spray Cooperative's New Jersey Collection Center. Part of this section of the route included a straight as an arrow five-mile section of sand trail known locally as Washington Turnpike. We even interrupted the filming of a TV commercial at Godfrey Bridge Campgrounds.

After a short stop the Visitor Center, we entered the heart of Wharton State Forest, along Penn Swamp Road, Quaker Bridge Road, Lower Forge Road and Bulldozer Road. While some of these trails were used back in the '80s and 90s for competitive Time-Speed-Distance rallying on events like **Not Quite Pro**, **Jersey Bounce**, **Born To Run**, and the **The Pine Barren Express**, we have not used them on **Paul Miller Porsche Off-Road Excursion** until this year. Over the years, some portions of these trails have deteriorated to the point that speeds more than 5 MPH are not advised, they are perfect for the **Excursion**. Wide enough to avoid any scratches to your paint, but with enough challenges to keep it interesting.

While in Wharton State Forest we included a two-mile section of Carranza Road, named after the 'Lindbergh of Mexico', Emilio Carranza Rodriguez, who will be forever bound to a patch of forest. In 1928, Emilio Carranza Rodriguez was 22 years old and a hotshot hero of Mexican aviation. He had planned a grueling test of endurance flight from New York City to Mexico City. Carranza delayed his

departure for three days because of bad weather, and then abruptly flew off on the evening of July 12, 1928, in a wild thunderstorm. Rumor has it that he was forced to leave on orders from a jealous Mexican General, whose telegram to Carranza was reportedly later found in the aviator's pocket. "Leave immediately," it read, "or the quality of your manhood will be in doubt." Carranza only got about 50 miles south before his flight ended in the Pine Barrens of southern New Jersey, a vast stretch of pine trees and sand.

With a full morning of touring behind us, a catered lunch started at 2 pm, after everyone was checked in, we kept the tradition started by **Murray and Akami Kane** by drawing Car Numbers for door prizes. This year, we had Valenzano True Blueberry Wine, Jersey Devil Port, and Jersey Devil Honey Wine. We had several products from Pine Barrens Native Fruits, CDs from Accidental Jug Band, and *Lines on the Pines* songs by **Paul Evans Pederson**, who was featured in Anthony Bourdain *Parts Unknown: New Jersey* on the Travel Channel. Paul's songs focus on the local legends and sights of the Pine Barrens.

After lunch we headed over to the second sand pit of the event owned by Pine Barrens Native Fruits, this is located on 50 acres adjacent to their Cranberry Farm for about 90 minutes of free formatted play. Pine Barrens Native Fruits is owned and operated by the five generations of decedents of the White family and has been in continues operations for over 160 years.

Since the main sand pit is relative flat, vehicles can get up to speed and maneuver in such a way to produce rooster tails of sand, at times obscuring the vehicles from view. A short video of **Dom Miliano** driving the Paul Miller Porsche Cayenne can be found on the event Facebook Page and MMR Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/motorsportsresources/videos/1605123736197682/>). Accompanying us once again this year was **David Darlington**, son of Joseph Darlington owner of Pine Barrens Native Fruits/J.J. White Farm, who provided assistance as needed during the event and seems to enjoy watching us have fun in the sand pits and along the trails on which he grew up on.

While on this year's event we had to turn down seven teams which wanted to register at the last minute, due to limitations at the Pemberton Recreation Center in Country Lakes Estates. We have reserved a larger facility for 2018 that can accommodate 60 teams or 120 individuals; we are already planning the route, and the design for '**Off The Beaten Path**' themed T-Shirts.

Once again, we would like to thank **Paul Miller Porsche** for their support and sponsorship, which has made the event possible since its inception in 2013. Thank you to my wife **Joanne Schneider** for all the administrative support and the membership of **Raritan Valley Sports Car Club** for their intimate knowledge of the Pine Barrens and creation of the Tulip Diagrams and Instructions used in the Route Book.