

# UNITED STATES

## of Revival

### OVERLANDING THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

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There has never been a more meaningful time to make the journey the primary goal, the reason itself. In the face of news cycles that sensationalize without regard for national sanity, the silence and geological gravitas of the Grand Canyon never lies. This is the golden age of overlanding possibilities.

Eager to pull the ripcord on your first overlanding trip, but unsure if it suits your style? Meet the Black Series HQ19, the travel trailer cool enough to host drivers Sam Bird and Daniel Abt in between Formula One heats. Indeed, this off-road headquarters is worthy of an Alpinestars Retreat; imagine five Black Series campers circling a central firepit like Silicon Age stagecoaches. Motorsport executives and rising athletes mingling over single malts and toasted marshmallows; Black Series sure knows how to spark joy.

Eight days, three states, 1200 Miles; off-road and off the grid, never once connecting to shore power. My husband Douglas and I depart from our home in Orange County, with a final destination atop Zion National Park. The HQ19 proved both beauty and a beast. Beauty

mode had us sleeping on a queen bed, adorned with a sensual black quilted leather headboard. Beast mode had us climbing 8,000 feet to Kolob Reservoir, Utah. The key to the trailer's peak performance is chassis and clearance. Built like an M4 Sherman blazing the battle of El Alamein, the HQ19's tank-like suspension chewed up challenging terrain changes like chowder. Venturing anywhere the beefed-up Toyota Tundra towed it, the trailer handled adversity like a champ.

The HQ19's finest hour of horizontal hedonism isn't even in the bedroom, chic as it may be. It all lies in the slide-out exterior cooking station. On the culinary front, this camper trailer is a chef's dream. Scarred from surviving on cereal and sandwiches from 80s family camping? Think again. Black Series is a far cry from surviving on basic "one pot" rations. The HQ19 is designed to thrive in gourmet splendor, from Big Sur to Sequoia. This European style gas range is sophisticated enough to finesse a silky Hollandaise, surrounded by Joshua Trees, the way we did on the first leg of our trip. Eggs Benny and beyond; sky's the limit with this sweet set-up.

These days, the value of a shift in scenery cannot be overstated. To avoid crowds in National Park campgrounds, I turn to Grand Canyon backcountry options on Hipcamp, a booking app offering up a national network of campsites on private land. Think Airbnb for rural and recreational landowners. Jay-Z's Marcy Venture Partners and Will Smith's Dreamers VC have invested in Hipcamp (Series B raise of \$25 million led by Andreessen Horowitz, at a valuation of \$127 million). Scrolling through options, Sköll Base Camp South Rim had me at hello. The site looked to have ample real estate for the HQ19's considerable length of 26 feet.

On arrival, host Heidi Kaiser emerges from the pinyon pines like a vision, wearing a flowing floral caftan, reminiscent of Jane Birkin in her boho years. The hushed topography of her land fans out like a lotus of relaxation—an idyllic antidote to caffeine and carbon monoxide. Kaiser has artfully set up hammocks, picnic areas, reading tents, and sculptural vignettes, giving her campsite a deep sense of place. As Douglas sets up the onboard awning, I prep our well-traveled Swissmar fondue set for the first night on South Rim. As gruyere melts and mingles with Sauvignon Blanc over open flame, my heart melts at the sight of the Milky Way. We're camped at the heart of an IDA International Dark Sky Community, and stargazing couldn't be more spectacular.



Waking up in HQ19's high finesse interior feels surreal at first. The wilderness beyond our trailer door looms untamed; yet this bedroom couture looks fit for Brady and Bundchen at Burning Man. High gloss timber enamel cabinetry and marine-grade genuine leather lend elegance, while a gorgeous chrome-clad bathroom suite with full shower is well laid out, offering ample storage. The dizzily equipped stainless steel kitchen rivals most urban starter condos—a full size fridge, stovetop, oven, microwave.

After two nights of gracious hospitality, we study the route to Zion, a steep, winding dirt road to put the HQ19 to the ascent test. A design born of the Australian outback and made in Los Angeles, the Black Series vibe has me reminiscing on *Mad Max Fury Road* premiere trips to Sydney. Kolob Campground is Hipcamp's heavyweight champ in Utah. Navigating three hairpin turns proves thrilling; we pull into the camp's private gated area on the shores of Kolob Reservoir wearing a patina of red dust we're secretly proud of. Adjacent to Kolob Reservoir's boat ramp, the campground includes four acres of private shoreline.



may intimidate; but 15 minutes in, I can conjure my intrepid eight-year-old niece clipping in beside me, interpreting rungs with her signature sass.

Chris Peterson's vision for this iron architecture essentially enables me to trek into the beloved Smithsonian dioramas of my childhood. I stand on the ledge of a Mountain Lion habitat, witnessing the predator's sweeping view into the canyon below; my spine tingles wildly. The sheer drama of the rock face is stupefying, sienna and slate tones stain the flat mineral face like avant garde art.

Gingerly at first, then clicking carabiners like a gunslinger at sundown, I traverse through ponderosa pines to an eagle's view of a rather dramatic waterfall. Doug murmurs under a canopy of Aspens, "You haven't been this lit up since Kachina Peak." Somewhere along the steel line, I release from the civilian grid and all its rules, tuning into a rhythm and cadence I haven't felt since my last powder trip. Welcome to Jedi Camp, Zion style. Guide Matt Behling is Obi Wan Kenobi, I am Young Skywalker. Ah, the hubris that comes with hanging at California Condor cruising altitude with a fearless heart (the critically endangered vulture has been spotted here).

Coming down from Angels on high, we indulge in a quick, ceremonial dip in the lake. High octane athletes exhale, there's a

Giantex washing machine onboard the HQ19, cleverly hidden in the bathroom vanity. Spinning my swimsuit in this futuristic box reminds me of the Four Seasons Scottsdale spa, where a water extractor unit fits right in. How wild, doing laundry next door to an elk breeding ground.

Later by the campfire, John's brother Richie regales us with tales of Blake family reunions over traditional wood fired pizza in the woods. The hand mortared artisanal oven holds pride of place on the family's personal campsite near their Hipcamp, built by local scout troop leaders in appreciation for the use of their land. Richie's warm conviviality draws me in; he wells with pride as he describes his son Logan's acceptance to his alma mater, the United States Merchant Marine Academy. I get teary as he describes coaching a high school wrestling prodigy all the way to West Point.

The next morning, Richie's wrestling acumen came in handy with the trailer hitch. Our only hiccup with the HQ19 was getting used to the specialized off-road style hitch. Leveraging his anaconda arms and torpedo calves, our host tackled the hitch onto the 4 tonne HQ19 like Rams' defensive ace Aaron Donald on his 75th career sack. Talk about a heart pounding send off we won't soon forget. Get your overland adventure on the books; nothing hits the reset button quite like a week off the grid. ✈



An ideal base to bask in the multisport paradise of Greater Zion, I was at first drawn to photos of Kolob Camp's watersports. What really reeled me in? Camper reviews of a Renaissance man of a Hipcamp host named John Blake. Kolob Campground has been in the Blake family for 80 years; John's grandfather reserved this beloved parcel from 4,000 working acres as the family's recreational haven. The residue of this emotional footprint runs deep here, even casual visitors feel it. With upbeat smiles and stories, one senses this clan is genuinely keen to share this exceptional wonderland with those who appreciate it. The Blake family embodies Hipcamp's cultural shift in cultivating kinship via outdoor enthusiasm.

At Kolob, seasoned adrenaline junkies find every flavor of adventure—slickrock mountain biking, red rock canyoneering, ice diving, kayaking, paddle boarding, and trout fishing. Case in point, Red Bull Rampage has been hosted 20 miles from where we're camped. Mountain biking's truest test of skill and mental toughness, this invitation-only freeride competition has evolved over 18 years to become the sport's most coveted title.

The brain trust behind the larger Kolob lifestyle campus—John Blake, Ian Crowe, and Chris Peterson—are guided by a spirited, sovereign sense of land and legacy. Adventurers at heart, kinship and

creativity inspires their collaborative fraternity. Akin to an Alpine A-Team, each member brings a unique and invaluable specialty. These landowners see a mindful way forward for the region, slowing the footprint to sensitive areas while broadening the reach where it makes sense.

For the first time in generations, travelers-in-the-know can relish in Kolob Mountain's literal hidden gems, long obscured by private property. Level up your climbing wall game with the very recent debut of Peterson's Angels Leading Ledgewalk. This guided hike via ferrata gives hikers monumental, otherwise impossible views of a dramatic canyon cut by Kolob Creek. Via ferrata translates to "iron path" in Italian; hikers climb or descend metal rungs while hooked to safety cables by two lanyards.

With the soft launch of the Ledgewalk and a future mountain bike trail in development, the survivalist ambition of 2020 meets the values of the 1950s—solid, sound, business building fundamentals. Matt Behling, the human hammer behind the iron rungs (try categorizing that LinkedIn), suits us up in climbing harnesses outside Kolob General Store. We hop in a baller Kawasaki recreational vehicle for the Ledgewalk trailhead, a 10-minute thrill ride in itself. We hike north and clip into our first cable. At first glance, the snafu of steel

