

# HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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## National and Special Event Rallies

WBCCI offers two special types of Rallies that may often be overlooked by newer members, but that are interesting and enjoyable: National Rallies and Special Event Rallies. The two rally types are so closely related, that I will discuss them together in this article.



Balloon Fiesta National Rally

By the current definitions, these two types of rallies are hosted by WBCCI Units or Regions but are open to all club members. They most commonly center around some sort of event or celebration that is of national, regional, or local interest. They may vary from a few dozen to a couple hundred participating Airstreams.

These rallies may have been offered to unit members for a year or two or more before being “opened” to all WBCCI members, so knowing exactly when they became “national” can sometimes be hard to define. Many are or were offered annually for years or even decades, though some have been one-time events. In some cases, the rally name, hosting unit, or camping location may have changed over the years, but the FUN has remained constant!

Unit Rallies focusing on “special events” began as soon as the club was formed, and some were quickly opened to club members outside the hosting Unit. In 1963 the need was identified to better advertise these rallies to “all WBCCI members” and by 1965 several existing “special event” rallies were being formally identified as National Rallies. To further support the development of these rallies, a Special Events Standing Committee was created in 1972 and it was renamed the National & Special Events Standing Committee in 1993.

National Rallies were first listed in the 1965 Membership Directory. The annual Membership Directory listings are sometimes not 100% complete due to the early submission deadline, but a review of them indicates a diverse range of National Rallies (and later Special Event Rallies) that the

club has offered over the years. From the four official National Rallies listed in 1965, the offerings soon grew to almost a dozen National Rallies before Special Event Rallies were added in the 1982 Directory. Combined, between 20 and 30 National/Special Event Rallies were listed each year from 1982 into the early 2000s before the number began declining somewhat.

Now let’s move on to some specifics. The first “national” mention of special event rallies occurred in the November 1958 edition of the Caravanner newspaper when upcoming Northwestern Unit Rallies centered around an Apple Blossom Festival, a Rose Festival, and the Seattle Sea Fair were listed for May, June, and August of 1959, though it appears that these rallies were mainly intended for unit members.

WBCCI Headquarters organized a Mardi Gras Rally in February 1961. This was the first official WBCCI National Rally. The Gulf States Unit took over responsibility for this rally in 1962 and it ran annually until hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 2005. This rally returned in 2009 and ran thru 2015.

The Mid-Atlantic Unit offered a Unit Rally centered on the Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival in Front Royal, Virginia in April 1960. They repeated the rally in April 1961, but invited all WBCCI members to attend, making it WBCCI’s second National Rally. The 1961 rally was the first unit sponsored rally to have lead-up stories and a reservation form in the Caravanner newspaper. This rally skipped 1962 but was repeated annually from 1963 thru 1997.



Airstreamers enter the Round-Up

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The Oregon Unit offered a rally centered on the Pendleton Round-Up Rodeo in September 1961. In a short story in the August 1961 edition of the Caravanner, they invited all WBCCI members to attend, making this the third National Rally. This rally was repeated in 1962, but not in 1963. It returned in 1964 as an annual event and is still running today, making it the longest running WBCCI National Rally overall. This rally is centered around one of the 10 best rodeos in the USA, but there's much more to see and do, including visiting the Pendleton Woolen Mills.

The California Unit began offering the Hobo Rally at Lost Lake near Blythe, California in February 1963. Though attended by members from outside the California Unit from the start, it did not formally attain National Rally status until many years later. This Rally ran annually thru 2014.



The Land-O-Lakes Chapter of the Ohio Unit (later the Land-O-Lakes Unit) offered a rally centered around the Swiss Festival in Sugarcreek, Ohio in September 1963 and it has been held annually ever since making it WBCCI's longest continuously running National Rally, although it has been hosted by the Appalachian Unit of West Virginia in recent years. This rally is held in the heart of Amish country in eastern Ohio and a fun aspect of this rally is the chance to meet the Amish, visit their homes and businesses, and maybe even get a chance to ride in one of their buggies. You'll even get bean soup made in camp in large cast iron pots over an open fire.



I could go on, but space and research time prevents complete coverage of every National and Special Event Rally that WBCCI has ever offered, and there have been many dozens of different National and Special Event Rallies over the years. Here is a partial list, in the order of introduction, of some of the more popular National and Special Event Rallies that ran for at least a decade (although some of the rallies may have skipped a year or two here and there):

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| • Pendleton Round-Up: 1961-Current             | Pendleton, OR                              |
| • Hobo Rally: 1963/82-2014                     | Blythe, CA                                 |
| • Swiss Festival: 1963-Current                 | Sugarcreek, OH                             |
| • Orange Show: 1964/69-1981                    | San Bernardino, CA                         |
| • Antelope: 1965-2017                          | Medicine Bow, WY                           |
| • Kentucky Derby: 1968/69-2002                 | Shelbyville, KY                            |
| • Indianapolis 500: 1969/70-2005               | Indianapolis, IN                           |
| • Natchez Pilgrimage: 1971/75-2012             | Natchez, MS (later Vidalia, LA)            |
| • Grand Ole Opry: 1978-1992                    | Nashville, TN                              |
| • Potlatch & Salmon: 1980-2015                 | Lacey, WA                                  |
| • Pageant of Lights: 1982-1993                 | North Ft. Myers, FL                        |
| • Manitoba Stampede: 1982-1995                 | Morris, MB, Canada                         |
| • Ukrainian Festival: 1982-2001                | Dauphin, MB, Canada                        |
| • Lamb Festival: 1982-2002                     | Turner, OR (later Silverton, OR)           |
| • Balloon Fiesta: 1982-Current                 | Albuquerque, NM                            |
| • Experimental Aircraft: 1983-1997             | Oshkosh, WI                                |
| • Mining & Manufacturing: 1983-96              | Cadiz, OH                                  |
| • Autumn Leaf (WA): 1983-2010                  | Leavenworth, WA                            |
| • Athens Old Time Fiddlers: 1984-Current       | Athens, AL                                 |
| • Easter Festival: 1984-2011                   | St. Augustine, FL                          |
| • Rod & Reel (Fishing): 1985-2000              | Various Cities, MI                         |
| • Autumn Leaf (PA): 1987-2008                  | Limestone, PA                              |
| • Statue of Liberty: 1987-2003                 | Jersey City, NJ                            |
| • Fiesta De Santa Fe: 1988-2013                | Santa Fe, NM                               |
| • Rose Parade: 1989-Current                    | Pasadena, CA                               |
| • Victorian Days: 1991-2014                    | Cape May, NJ                               |
| • Holland Tulip Time: 1993-2004                | Hudsonville, MI                            |
| • San Antonio Fiesta: 1995-2014                | Various cities near San Antonio, TX        |
| • Branson Musicland: 1997-2009                 | Branson, MO                                |
| • Galax Old Fiddlers' Convention: 2002-Current | Galax, VA                                  |
| • Sun Valley Jazz Festival: 2004-Current       | Ketchum, ID                                |
| • Storytelling Festival: 2007-Current          | Gray, TN later Jonesborough, TN)           |
| • Mardi Gras: 1961-2015                        | New Orleans, LA                            |
| • Apple Blossom Festival: 1960/61-1997         | Front Royal, VA (later other cities in VA) |

Note that if two starting years are listed, the first is when the Rally began as a Unit Rally and the second is when it began as a National Rally, as best I can tell.

At the time of this writing, here are the National and Special Event Rallies planned for 2019:

- Canopener – Jan 3-6 Santa Rosa Beach, FL
- Streamin' on the Harbor – Feb 28-Mar 3 Georgetown, SC
- Airstreams on Mainstreet – Apr 4-7 Havana, FL
- Pets and Paws – Apr 12-14 Provincetown, MA
- Texas Vintage Airstream Round-Up – May 2-5 Mineola, TX
- NY City Base Camp – Jun 6-9 Jersey City, NJ
- Galax Old Fiddlers' Convention – Aug 4-10 Galax, VA



Fiddling in Camp at Galax

- Around the World Folklorama – Aug 7-14 Winnipeg, MB, Canada
- Pendleton Round-Up – Sep 9-15 Pendleton, OR
- Swiss Festival – Sep 21-29 Sugarcreek, OH
- Athens Old Time Fiddlers – Oct 1-6 Athens, AL
- Storytelling Festival – Oct 2-6 Jonesborough, TN
- Balloon Fiesta – Oct 4-8 Albuquerque, NM



- Columbus Day/Canadian Thanksgiving – Oct 11-14 Bristol, VT
- Sun Valley Jazz & Music Festival – Oct 15-20 Ketchum, ID
- Texas Country Air – Oct 24-27 Brownwood, TX
- Rose Parade – Dec 28-Jan 1 Pasadena, CA

For more information on these rallies and to look for late additions, check out the National and Special Event Rally listings in the Blue Beret and on the WBCCI website.

WBCCI now advertises National and Special Event Rallies as “Bucket List” events, which is fitting as they may take you to events that you always wanted to attend but never did for some reason. Many members attend these rallies over and over again as they are “great fun” and often evolve over the years to offer different tours and activities making each instance a unique one. All the important arrangements are made FOR YOU! If you have not already done so, sign up and attend a National or Special Event Rally, or two, or three. You'll have fun and make some new friends in the process.

#### How Can You Help?

Researching this article showed me how underemphasized and underappreciated National and Special Event Rallies are within WBCCI. While they can be some of the club's most enjoyable activities, they are rarely covered in Blue Beret articles and photos and are sometimes missing in the event listings in the annual Membership Directory (a shame, given the amount of work that goes in to planning and hosting these events!). In reviewing 30+ years of Blue Beret magazines for this article, very few of the 20+ National and Special Event Rallies offered most years ever got a follow-up story talking about rally highlights or showing off rally activities in photos.

If you are involved with putting on a National or Special Event Rally, or even if you were an attendee that had a good time, submit an article about it (or even just a photo or two) to the Blue Beret editor.

More importantly, if you have never attended a National or Special Event Rally, do so. Maybe even offer to help. Some of these rallies are going away because of a lack of workers. Or if you are slightly more ambitious, contact the current National and Special Event Standing Committee Chairman, Kathi Mitchell, WBCCI #1100, and talk about restarting one of the past National or Special Event Rallies or even creating a new one.