

## Editorial: ATV riders do damage to a bad cause

Armed riders seen as hoodlums.

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Imagine how history might have turned out if Rosa Parks had been brandishing an automatic weapon when she boarded that bus in Montgomery, Ala., all those years ago.

Instead of being honored for all time as an accidental founder of the American Civil Rights Movement, she almost certainly would have been dismissed as a kook and a hoodlum. The whole movement for which she stands as an inspiration could well have died then and there.

Parks would not only have been forever banned from a seat on the bus, but from the whole of civilized society. And most black people, whether they agreed with her tactics or not, would have suffered greatly for her poor judgment.

The cause of those who carried automatic weapons, protest signs, Don't Tread On Me flags and, worst of all, their own children Saturday on a clearly illegal ATV ride through Recapture Canyon near Blanding does not deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as the Civil Rights Movement.

Except to point out how the tactics of those who demand the right to play with their expensive toys on land that they have absolutely no legal right to traverse are clearly destructive of a goal that was utterly without merit to begin with.

Local and federal law enforcement agencies showed an admirable amount of forbearance by allowing the protest ride to go forward. Any effort to impede the clearly lawless activity, much less arrest those participating in it, would have run far too great a risk of ending in a deadly firefight.

But it is a sad commentary on our times that duly-empowered law enforcement officers were powerless to stop a clearly illegal act for fear of being, if not out-gunned, then out-stupided in terms of putting many innocent people at risk.

Those decisions to let the protesters have their fun and save legal action for another day was the only example of honorable leadership on display in this entire situation.

Those pushing for the illegal ride — specifically San Juan County Commissioner Phil Lyman — are doing irreversible damage to the cause of open access to more of the federally owned land that dominates Utah and much of the West.

In the eyes of most of the American people — and their members of Congress — who really own all that land, Saturday's ride was accurately discerned as a childish snit fit that should only confirm BLM policy to keep such folks out of environmentally or historically sensitive lands.

The only hope these protesters had of winning an ounce of public sympathy would have been for them to have acted in the true spirit of American civil disobedience and gotten themselves thrown in jail. Where they belong.

