

# Introduction to Beach Driving

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- **GENERAL INFORMATION:**

The following advice is a compilation of techniques gained from forays onto the beaches of Long Beach Island and other similar beaches. Fisherman's Headquarters does not guarantee that the methods and advice offered below will prevent occurrences of "getting stuck".

Reckless driving and lack of common sense can cause a bad situation to turn worse rather quickly. Follow all necessary safety precautions when driving on any beach, as all possible scenarios cannot be covered in this brief introduction. Fisherman's Headquarters is not attempting to answer all questions regarding beach conditions and driving conditions, but only to provide an introduction to driving a 4-wheel drive vehicle on the beach. Drivers are ultimately responsible for their own actions. Drive responsibly and with caution.

Driving on the beach is done with four-wheel drive vehicles known as beach buggies or over-the-sand vehicles, and usually are either standard stock Sport Utility Vehicles or pick-up trucks. By and large, most vehicles require no modification for use on the beach. Standard street radial tires perform very well on the beach, although oversized tires will make driving easier as they distribute weight over a greater surface area. Aggressively studded off-road tires actually do not perform well on the beach, as they have less surface area and do not distribute weight as substantially as street radials.

- **REQUIRED-OR AT LEAST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED-ACCESSORIES:**

- 1) **Beach Access Permits:** With very few exceptions, coastal municipalities or other government agencies require obtaining a permit for beach buggy use. This is the case on Long Beach Island, with driving permitted seasonally the entire length of the island other than Barnegat Light. When going to obtain a permit, remember to bring your driver license, registration, and proof of insurance. Often, it is required that you demonstrate the possession of a number of the safety items below in order to obtain a permit. There is more information on permits, fees, and access points in the appendix at the end of this document.
- 2) **Air Pressure Gauge or Tire Deflator:** Driving on the beach requires dropping the air pressure in your tires in order to get traction on the sand. An analog or digital tire gauge is an absolute necessity, having two of them in case one fails is highly recommended. A tire deflator is a tire gauge combined with a release valve, making it simple to monitor your tire pressure as you deflate tires (instead of alternately pushing the valve pin down and putting the gauge on to get your PSI reading).
- 3) **Tow Strap or Chain:** A tow strap or chain allows for the extraction of vehicles from extreme dig-ins or precarious positions, such as being stuck at a severe angle on an embankment, or being broken down below the high water mark on an incoming tide. Winches are usually of little use on the beach, inasmuch as there is little or nothing to hook them to. Often more than one vehicle will be required to extract a stuck vehicle via tow straps.
- 4) **Jumper Cables:** This is rather self-explanatory, but cables are highly recommended to prevent being stuck below the high water mark. If using 12-volt livewells or other 12-volt accessories, it is often possible to drain your battery really low without noticing.
- 5) **Shovel:** Is required for digging tracks in front of or behind buried tires, or in extreme circumstances, to dig out around a buggy's frame to allow extraction of stuck vehicles without another vehicle's assistance. Folding camp shovels, although small, work very well as they allow locking the shovel at ninety degrees to the handle, acting as a hoe.

- 6) **Wooden Boards:** At least a pair is recommended in order to assist in extracting stuck vehicles (particularly in wet sand) by putting them under your tires. Boards are also required to jack a vehicle on the beach, as the weight of the vehicle must be widely distributed.
  - 7) **Spare Tire & Jack:** You definitely don't want to get caught with a flat on the beach and no solution to your dilemma. A full-sized spare is required.
  - 8) **Can of Fix-a-Flat:** Can be used to inflate a flat tire that is not shredded, and is a much easier solution than changing a tire on the beach, even with the appropriate equipment.
  - 9) **Fire Extinguisher:** A B/C rated fire extinguisher is highly recommended, as it will put out gas, oil, electrical and other fires. The fire department can't help you out too much when you are out on the beach away from the land of pavement.
  - 10) **Flashlight:** Extremely helpful if you are stuck at night, but is just a generally good thing to have with you.
  - 11) **12-Volt Air Compressor or Air Tank:** In the event you deflate your tires down to 10 PSI or less to get out of a jam, allows you to put the pressure back up for the rest of your trip, in order to prevent unnecessary tire wear. Also allows you to fill tires when leaving the beach before re-initiating travel on paved roads, although you will likely not want to wait for a compressor to complete the job, as it takes at least 6 minutes a tire. Most 5 to 7 gallon air tanks will only completely inflate 1 or 2 tires.
  - 12) **Tide Chart:** Either an actual tide chart or knowledge of the tides for the location you are driving. You don't want to leave your parked buggy unattended and come back to find the shorebreak lapping away at your tires (or worse). Also, if there are stretches of beach that are impassable at high tide stages, you want to leave in time to get by them.
  - 13) **Cell Phone:** Allows you to call for emergency assistance and communicate with other anglers.
- **OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT AND ACCESSORIES:**
    - 1) **First Aid Kit With Cutting Pliers:** Often you will be miles away from any medical assistance. The cutting pliers help extract hooks buried into flesh beyond the barb.
    - 2) **Spare Car Battery:** Is ideal if you are running accessories such as a livewell pump or other electronics. If using your main battery and you drain it, allows for you to get off the beach without the assistance of another vehicle.
    - 3) **Basic Tools:** Screwdrivers, wrenches, etc. Comes in handy for any minor emergency vehicle or equipment repair.
    - 4) **Handheld GPS:** Comes in very handy for marking spots scoped out during daylight hours that are not as easily recognizable at night.
    - 5) **CB Radio:** Though their use is not as widespread as it once was, many mobile surf fishermen still communicate via CB.
  - **TACKLE STORAGE ACCESSORIES:**

- 1) **Front Bumper Rod Racks:** Anglers often use aluminum or PVC rod racks for transporting rods. These racks usually mount directly to the bumper or license plate bracket, or can be attached to the vehicle via galvanized or aluminum bar and angle attached to a truck's tow hooks. Such rod racks can also be mounted to a receiver for a trailer hitch. These racks are popular on pick-ups, as coolers are often kept in the bed of the truck.
- 2) **Cooler Racks:** Similar to the rod racks mentioned above, these racks are comprised of a structural frame that holds a cooler as well as rod tubes. Popular accessories include bait boards, rings that hold 5-gallon PVC buckets, and tabs that allow for the securing of the cooler with bungee cords. The racks are usually mounted with kits that allow for the removal of the rack without removing the hardware that bolts to the vehicle's frame. Certain designs will allow the carrying of a livewell.
- 3) **Ski-style Roof Racks:** Allow for carry rods on the roof. These are not as convenient as bumper racks, as access to rods is not as simple. It is imperative that the rod butts face the rear of SUVs so as not to break rod tips when opening the hatchback glass.
- 4) **Interior Rod Racks:** On the ceiling of SUVs offer an alternative to exterior storage, or the storage of extra rods that get infrequent use.

- **TYPES OF SAND FOUND ON LONG BEACH ISLAND:**

- 1) **Dry Sugar Sand:** This is the fin-grained white sand that is found on the dunes, and often all the way down to the high water mark. This type of sand is the hardest to gain traction on, and requires the use of lower tire pressures, as it is not uncommon for vehicles to pack this sand down 5 to 6 inches before it becomes firm enough to offer traction. Drive on it only when necessary.
- 2) **Hard Packed Sugar Sand:** Results from moisture getting into sugar sand, and it drying as the tide recedes. This sand is ideal to drive on, as vehicles sink only slightly into it before gaining traction, or ride right over the top of it. After periods of exceptionally high tides, a section of beach comprised of this type of sand may exist for days all the way up to the dunes. When present, this sand is good for driving.
- 3) **Moist Sand:** Occurs on the receding tide. It is very hard-packed. Vehicles cruise right over the top of it. This is by far the easiest and most favored type of sand to drive on.
- 4) **Wet Sand:** Occurs near the shorebreak. Should be avoided at all costs, as it can act like quicksand, and is very difficult to get out of. If forced to travel in it-do not stop!

- **DRIVING THE BEACH:**

- 1) Before you drive onto the beach, make sure you are at one of the designated access points for the municipality you are driving in. For local driving on Long Beach Island, it is usually ideal to drop your tire pressure down to 20 PSI. Make sure your vehicle is in four-wheel drive mode.
- 2) Travel slowly down sand dunes. Driving fast as you are going down hill can cause the dune's slope to collapse to a degree, and forced the front of your vehicle directly into the sand.

- 3) Make all turns gradually, planning ahead. Whenever you are going to descend or ascend an embankment, try to do so at a 60-degree angle or better, driving parallel to an embankment when on one can bring about the risk of rollover.
- 4) Always stay below posted signs (down in Holgate) and off the dunes.
- 5) Without exception, avoid driving near cliffs in the sand. Coming within even a few feet of a drop-off can collapse a cliff and either bury or roll your vehicle.
- 6) Try not to turn unless you have a fair amount of momentum and speed built up. There is a substantial increase in drag when turning, and your level of traction will decrease. Having a good head of steam will allow you to complete your turn without getting stuck.
- 7) Try to always accelerate and decelerate or brake very gradually. Accelerating too rapidly will cause you to spin your tires and dig your tires into the sand. The softer the sand, the more imperative this is. Same thing when decelerating, too rapid a stop can cause you to dig in.
- 8) When possible, always travel in tracks made by prior buggy drivers. It puts less stress on your vehicle. If you have a buggy with low clearance and the tire ruts are so deep as to force you to drag the bottom of your truck on top of the sand between the tracks, keep one side of your vehicle in the tracks, breaking sand with only the one side of your vehicle.
- 9) Keep your speed at no higher than 15 mph, the speed limit on the beaches of LBI. Traveling between 10 and 15 mph allows you to monitor beach conditions ahead of you and strategize your future path.
- 10) When parking, always try to park on firm sand that is level. It is very important to avoid stopping on uphill soft sand. In areas where the beach is narrow, park parallel to the beach so as not to impede the progress of other buggies. Otherwise, it is helpful to park with the rear or front of the vehicle facing the water to allow easy access to your equipment. One helpful hint is to back up in your tracks a little way when parking, so that you are on packed sand when you pull forward later.
- 11) If you start to spin your tires and get stuck, get off the accelerator, you will only succeed in burying your wheels up to the axle or beyond in a hurry. First, make sure your tires are parallel with your vehicle. You never want to be turning if you start to bog down. If your tires were already straight, or you could not move forward after straightening them out, get the shovel out and dig a rut in front of at least two, if not all four tires. This should allow you to get going again.
- 12) When driving around jetties, make sure to steer well above them, as often there will only be a small amount of sand above the rocks. Getting up near the dunes will ensure safe passage.
- 13) When driving at night, do not shine your lights on the water. Whenever possible, try to travel via your parking lights. Headlights can both blind anglers robbing them of their night vision, as well as spooking fish in the shallows. Those vehicles with the new daytime running lights can deactivate them by depressing the emergency brake one notch.
- 14) When leaving the beach, make sure you are exiting via an approved access point. When climbing a sand dune, especially a steeper one made of soft sugar sand, try to get up a good head of steam and climb it at a 60 to 90 degree angle, without accelerating or decelerating. This will allow for smooth passage. If you do get stuck, back straight down

the dune before turning parallel to the beach. Go a good distance down the beach, turn around and try again, trying to use your own prior tracks, or another vehicles tracks.

- **ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTING BEACH BUGGY ANGLERS:**

- 1) **New Jersey Beach Buggy Association:** A very active group who fights for beach buggy access and coordinates tournaments, courtesy patrols, among other activities. Contact them at [www.njbba.org](http://www.njbba.org).
- 2) **United Mobile Surf Fishermen:** A national organization that coordinates the activities of local beach buggy associations and fights for beach buggy rights on a national scale.

- **LOCAL BEACH BUGGY PERMIT AND ACCESS INFORMATION:**

- 1) **Barnegat Light:** No driving allowed.
- 2) **Harvey Cedars:** Permits are available at the police station (494-3036). The permit is good for the calendar year and costs \$25.00. Beaches are open October through May. Access points are Middlesex, Bergen, and Essex Avenues.
- 3) **Surf City:** Permits are available at the police station (494-1400). The permit is good for the calendar year and costs \$15.00. Beaches are open from the end of September through May. Access points are North 5<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- 4) **Ship Bottom:** Permits are available at the police station (494-1518). The permit is good for the calendar year and costs \$5.00. Beaches are open from October through May. Access points are 5<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup> Streets.
- 5) **Long Beach Township:** The township (for beach buggy purposes) is comprised of Loveladies (south of Barnegat Light), North Beach (between Harvey Cedars and Surf City), the entire length of the island south of the Ship Bottom Border to the northern border of Beach Haven, and then again from the southern Beach Haven Border through Holgate. Permits are available at the police station on 69<sup>th</sup> Street in Brant Beach (361-1000 ext 203 and cost \$50.00, and allow for travel on approximately 15 miles of the island. Permits are good for the calendar year and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if paying by in-state check. Out of state checks and cash are accepted during normal business hours Monday through Friday. The front beaches of the island (as opposed to the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge at Holgate) is open from October through May. The Wildlife Refuge is open from mid-September through mid-April at the discretion of the National Wildlife Service. A special 6-week derby permit is available for use only during the LBI Fall Surf Fishing Tournament that runs from the beginning of October through mid-November at a cost of \$25.00.

Access points are as follows:

-Loveladies:	Coast Avenue
-Brant Beach:	31 <sup>st</sup> , 46 <sup>th</sup> , and 66 <sup>th</sup> Streets
-Beach Haven Crest:	79 <sup>th</sup> and 106 <sup>th</sup> Streets
-Spray Beach:	15 <sup>th</sup> and 34 <sup>th</sup> Streets
-Holgate:	Nelson, Scott and Washington Avenues

- 6) **Beach Haven:** Permits are available at the police station (492-0505). The permit fee is \$10.00 and are good for the calendar year. The beaches are open from mid-September through May. Access points are Taylor, Holyoke, and Nelson Avenues and Centre Street.