

## OHV / OFF-ROADING



According to a June 2005 report on the latest National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, California has 4.35 million off-highway vehicle (OHV) users. With a dramatic increase in the number of participants over the last five years, off-roading has become one of the fastest growing forms of recreation. As a result, public land managers, recreation planners, OHV dealers, and legislators have scrambled to update policies, establish boundaries that respect other types of recreation, protect private property rights, implement practical guidelines for safety, and promote a massive education effort for newcomers to the sport. This has not been easy, and many conflicts have arisen that have yet to be resolved.

It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the sport. OHVs allow the average Californian's love affair with wheels to achieve the wind-blown freedom that is no longer possible on our gridlocked highways. The acronym OHV spans a wide variety of vehicles that are fun to tow behind an RV. No pavement is required, so there's no waiting around for CalTrans. But before you rush to join the hordes of OHVers in the desert, you'll need some background knowledge.

Vehicles allowed in off-highway recreation areas are those legally certified for sale by the California Air Resources Board, and properly identified or registered in California. Vehicles must have an approved muffler, brakes and spark arrester. Vehicles operated at night must use both headlights and taillights. Allowable OHVs include three-wheel and four-wheel (quads) all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), dirt

bikes, dual-sport motorcycles, four-wheel-drive pickup trucks and Jeeps, sport utility vehicles (SUVs), go-carts, dune buggies and sand rails. In this short summary, all of these vehicles will be classed together. However, in the field, they fulfill different niches; many user groups sponsor events for just one type of vehicle (e.g., Jeep tours or rail races).

Riding is done within vehicle recreation areas and on approved routes. Areas classified for "open" or cross-country recreation also allow RV and tent camping almost anywhere within the riding area or quite close to it. Open areas are the sites of organized races such as Motocross and events like the popular poker runs.

Partly because of the breadth of vehicle design, the routes on public lands are now assigned special designations to reflect differences in usage. Many riders will notice that signage and access to specific vehicle classes may change as management plans are updated. For example, some routes may allow ATVs and motor bikes, but not four-wheel-drive vehicles. The BLM posts "Closed Area" signs to control or prevent soil erosion, degradation of wildlife and cultural sites, and safety hazards (like open mine-shafts). Each BLM field office has detailed information on the many "open" and "limited" OHV areas it manages, including the areas that permit hunting, target practice, camping, and campfires. Special designations will ultimately result in greater access for riders, as the needs for law enforcement or emergency staffing and the protection of natural resources are more explicitly defined.

### ABOVE

A caravan of off-roaders from the 29 Palms Tactical Training and Exercise Control Group (TTECG) who are known throughout the Marine Corps as the "Coyotes."

PHOTO BY MARC LACLAIR

## PERSONAL PROFILE

### Marc LaClair

LIEUTENANT COLONEL, 29 PALMS MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Marc is a man who knows how to weave together the various loves of his life. Eleven years ago, Marc's battalion was called to deploy on short notice. Knowing he wanted to marry his fiancé before leaving, he drove his 1986 4x4 Jeep to Las Vegas and tied the knot in a drive-through wedding chapel. Today, he is still exploring the desert in that Jeep as well as a 1970 Ford Bronco.

His wife Lisa often joins Marc with friends and families on 4x4 caravans. They use local maps and GPS units on routes such as ones leading to the Dale Mining District on BLM land northeast of Joshua Tree National Park. They follow designated routes on the maps, they don't trespass onto protected desert, and they only drive unmodified, street-legal 4x4s. Marc wants to remind everyone to be prepared for emergencies lest you wind up cold, stranded, and wearing nothing more than a T-shirt and shorts with few options to call for help. He speaks from experience.

Conscientious off-roaders like Marc are more the norm than the exception in the desert. He enjoys the natural beauty of the desert. "I can see things you would never be able to experience otherwise," he says.



[HTTP://WWW.NPCA.ORG / DESERT\\_RECREATION / OFF\\_ROADING.PDF](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/off_road.pdf)



#### **ABOVE**

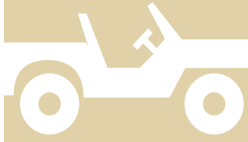
Johnson Valley is a popular OHV area for camping and hiking

PHOTO BY HOWARD GROSS

#### **LEFT**

El Mirage Dry Lake hums with activity on most weekends

PHOTO BY D.A. DEMEO



## OHV / OFF-ROADING CONTINUED



### ABOVE

Tracks near the Mojave Road signify that route's popularity with 4WD off-roaders

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

In the Mojave National Preserve and Death Valley National Park, the National Park Service allows thousands of miles of challenging four-wheel-drive routes and camping options. Joshua Tree National Park also offers routes, but without camping. Within all these park units, four-wheel-drive vehicles must stay on the designated routes; ATV use is prohibited in order to protect the fragile desert. Check with published sources or stop by the park visitors' center to learn more.

The Southern California Timing Association is the granddaddy of organized off-road racing in the California desert. Its member clubs have been pursuing "land speed racing" on the El Mirage dry lake bed for more than 50 years. Working together with the Friends of El Mirage, the SCTA-BNI hosts cleanups, inspects the dry lake bed for damage, cooperates with the BLM, and serves as a role model for other users.

As with all human exploits, off-roading includes a small percentage of people who push the limits of reasonable behavior. Irresponsible and lawless riding has prompted the passage of several regulations to curb noise, litter, and accidents, and protect private property. All riders need to be aware of these laws, which are routinely listed in agency publications and web sites. Classes and printed materials are available for new and old riders alike. "A Guide to California Off-Road Adventures," a brochure published by the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division of California State Parks, summarizes the rules, and maps the key facilities for OHV statewide. For more information, contact local user groups or OHV dealers throughout southern California.

Responsible riding will help maintain access to routes; irresponsible riding will likely result in closures. Responsible riding includes adherence to the voluntary program called Tread Lightly, which includes five key points:

- Travel and recreate with minimum impact
- Respect the environment and the rights of others
- Educate yourself plan and prepare before you go
- Allow for future use of the outdoors, by leaving it better than you found it
- Discover the rewards of responsible recreation

Following these guidelines will not detract from an enjoyable ride. Good riders pull over and stop their engine if they encounter hikers or equestrian riders on a multiple-use route. In areas of the desert that are identified as Critical Habitat, responsible riders watch out for the slow moving desert tortoise and keep their distance. Respectful riders use a propylene-glycol-based antifreeze/coolant in their touring and recreation vehicles, leading to minimal impacts on both the wildlife and the environment, in the case of a leak. As the BLM literature states, "Please help... protect our desert wildlife, and their fragile desert environment."

*Books and Online Resources for Off-Roading can be found at [http://www.npca.org/desert\\_recreation/off\\_roadning.pdf](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/off_roadning.pdf) and on pages 47–48 of this report.*



**LEFT**

ATV rider at Imperial Sand Dunes

BLM/PHOTO BY KEVIN MARTY

**BELOW LEFT**

Family camping near El Mirage Dry Lake

PHOTO BY D.A. DEMEO

**BELOW RIGHT**

Off-roaders pause to explore area  
near Dale Mining District

PHOTO BY MARC LACLAIR

[HTTP://WWW.NPCA.ORG / DESERT\\_RECREATION / OFF\\_ROADING.PDF](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/off_roadng.pdf)



# OHV / OFF-ROADING BOOKS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

## SUGGESTED BOOKS:

*Southern California SUV Trails: Volume I, The Western Mojave Desert*, Roger and Loris Mitchell, Track and Trail Publications, 2004

*Death Valley SUV Trails: A Guide to 46 Interesting Four-Wheeling Excursions in the Death Valley Country*, Roger Mitchell, Track and Trail Publications, 2001

*Guide to Southern California Backroads and 4-Wheel Drive Trails: Easy, Moderate, Difficult Backcountry Driving Adventures*, Charles A. Wells, Funtreks Inc., 2003

*Benchmark California Road and Recreation Atlas*, Stuart Allan, Benchmark Maps, 2005

## WEB SITES:

Air Resources Board Emission Regulations for OHV (<http://www.arb.ca.gov/msprog/offroad/ofhwymc.htm?PF=Y>)

American Sand Association, Inc. (<http://www.americansandassociation.org>)

Bureau of Land Management (<http://www.blm.gov/ohv>)

### CALIFORNIA'S OHV RIDING AREAS

([http://www.all-offroad.com/DirtBikes/Where2Go/California\\_Riding\\_Areas.html](http://www.all-offroad.com/DirtBikes/Where2Go/California_Riding_Areas.html))

(<http://www.recreation.gov/offhighway.cfm?myActivity=offhighwayvehicle>)

(<http://www.4x4wire.com/trail/report/ca/parks>)

California State Parks (<http://ohv.parks.ca.gov>)

Friends of El Mirage (<http://www.elmirage.org>)

National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, June 2005 report ([http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/OHV\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/OHV_final_report.pdf))

### THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TIMING ASSOCIATION

(<http://www.scta-bni.org>)

(<http://www.ca.blm.gov/barstow/mirage.html>)

United Desert Gateway (<http://www.uniteddesertgateway.org>)

