



Badlands Off Road Adventures

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Have you ever found yourself wanting to take your car and drive off into the wilderness? Perhaps you want to go on a grand adventure and drive all the way down to the tip of South America. Or maybe you have small kids and want to enjoy a secluded and private camping spot without needing



to carry all of your gear, plus your child, on your back to find it.

You want to take your car off the beaten path, but without proper training that can be very intimidating. Is your vehicle built for it? How do you properly navigate the terrain and obstacles? What happens if you get a flat tire? How do you get un-stuck? You have questions. Fortunately, I know a man who has answers.



Tom Severin

I was recently lucky enough spend a weekend getting some off-road training with Tom Severin and his team at Badlands Off Road Adventures. Tom is an International 4-Wheel Drive Trainers Association© certified professional 4WD Trainer and a Wilderness First Responder. With

major clients including the Orange County Sheriff's Department, The National Park Service, and the US Marine Corps looking to Tom to train their drivers, I felt confident that he was eminently qualified to teach me how to take my XTerra down some rough terrain. To top it all off, he is an incredibly friendly and easily approachable guy.

Saturday morning I drove myself up to the Hungry Valley State Recreational Vehicle Area outside of Gorman, CA to start my instruction with Badland's "Getting Started Off-Road" driving clinic[3]. Designed specifically for novices, this clinic begins in the classroom where Tom covers the basics of how 4WD vehicles work, their various operating modes, safety, trail etiquette, and of course driving techniques. Tom also inspects each student's personal vehicle to make sure it is capable, and helps you understand the limits it might have due to characteristics like clearance and weight. After a morning of flooding your brain with more knowledge about off-roading than you might expect, the afternoon is spent in practical application on the nearby obstacle course.

Driving up to the course felt very intimidating at first. Tall, steep, rut filled dirt hills to climb (and safely descend;) deep troughs to traverse; boulder-strewn paths to navigate. Let me say, all of my fellow classmates and I started off driving very cautiously. As Tom and his team successfully led us through progressively difficult obstacles however, our confidence rose, and we all started driving more decisively. I, for one, definitely finished the day off feeling much more comfortable about taking my car off-road.



Sunday that confidence was put to the test. For part two of the clinic I drove up to meet the team at Jawbone Station, about twenty minutes north of Mojave, CA. I had the pleasure of re-uniting with some classmates from the previous day, as well as meeting some new friends. After a quick check in, we proceeded into the desert for a morning's practice session on tire placement, picking lines, and recovering stuck vehicles before finally doing what we were all so anxious to do: take our vehicles out on a real trail!

Heading East from Jawbone Station we all drove up a series of trails into the high desert. After all of the instruction we had received, it was time to put our skills to the test. Let me tell you, while Tom and his team do a great job of guiding everyone through the obstacles, this was not a trail for those nervous about scratching their vanity project SUV. The trail they chose isn't the most difficult out there, but it's still a rugged jeep trail chosen for its variety of obstacles for us to experiment on. The rest of the afternoon was spent happily playing follow the leader up steep and narrow ledge trails, using high angle embankments to skirt around boulders, through sand bottomed stream beds, past narrow rock wall squeezes, and down slickrock slabs all while enjoying beautiful views of our rugged surroundings.



This of course is just the beginning, and I can see how people get sucked into this hobby. With fun gadgets and exciting places to travel to that very few people get to see in person, not to mention bragging rights to claim for world-famously difficult trails, the off-roading lifestyle appeals to the adventurous amongst us. Don't worry though; Tom has more advanced classes too.

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