

Let's Have a Drive to the Beach **or Land Rover 1 v Toyota 0**

Picture the scene: You've just finished up another of the wife's lovely roast's, had a brew and your reclining in front of the TV/PC, content in the knowledge that at this particular moment you are entirely happy with your lot. Then the phone rings and a guy you know in the Coastguard is on the other end saying he's been in contact with Peter Bickley and as the closest Rover Rescue members, could you help with a spot of bother down on Dingle Marshes (between Walberswick and Dunwich)? Sound familiar? Possibly not, but it happened to us one Sunday evening, this January.

Charlie Walker and colleague Gary visited the site at Newbourne with their Coastguard Hilux last year with a view to getting their guys some proper offroad driver training; In fact I took them around all the courses in Shed just as a taster. But I digress.

They had been driving along the top of the shingle bank when the rear end of the Hilux suddenly started to slide down the shingle bank and to avoid the chance of a roll over, correctly turned the vehicle downhill.

He'd called up another member of the club, Dave Cormack, who has access through his work with the National Trust to a rather splendid, and possibly the ultimate offroader, in the shape of a Unimog.

As you may or may not realise, trying to drive on wet shingle is a bit like walking on ball bearings...on an ice rink. As soon as a wheel turns, all the shingle just rolls around and traction is the last thing you are going to get! So the Hilux is now down to the axles in wet shingle and what's worse the tide is coming in! Ok you think, that's alright as there's a sea wall of sorts, keeping the water out. In



the words of a certain building society advert: 'it doesn't work like that'. Despite the shingle covered clay bank to one side, the marshes are still tidal and the level rises and drops along with the sea as water percolates through, not to mention high tide, which was around 19:20 which just happened to coincide with our arrival.

Dave had already taken the Moggy down to within a few tens of yards of the stricken Hilux but was not at all happy with the level of water on the lagoons which just happen to butt right up to the bank. At 10 tonnes the Moggy is no lightweight either and with discretion being the better part of valour he decided to beat a retreat to firmer ground.

Anyway, we met up with Dave and the Shingle Street Coastguard in the car park on Dunwich beach and waited for Charlie and Gary to arrive back with the other truck and a BIG coil of rescue line. Funnily enough, upon seeing this coil of rope, Paul and I looked at one another and together said, "What breaking strain is that then?" Great minds think alike, on that one. It transpired that the Hilux was a good mile away along the edge of the marsh where it met the shingle bank, and as previously mentioned the tide was in, giving a very narrow area to drive in places.



After a bit more info on the terrain, water level and location Paul led off through the gate and onto the marsh itself. One of the things in the back of our minds the whole time was making sure not to sacrifice the few assets we had, hence every time the Range Rover hit a big stretch of shingle, I made sure to stay on the hard grass before it: At least like this we were in a safe position to recover it if necessary. Paul romped on across the

marsh with me, the 'Moggy' and the CG truck following carefully along behind. Suddenly the Rangey slewed sideways and ground to a halt, but with a bit of shunting it got rolling again. This happened a couple more times until eventually it wouldn't move at all! Out came the shovels and we dug it out, and got it going again. In the torchlight I was amazed to see the ruts Paul had made were full of water, and I don't mind admitting I was starting to feel a little uneasy about the whole deal. At least we could see the lights on the Hilux now: We'd done a fair old distance from the car park, but still had a way to go. Paul finally got close to the Hilux before sinking in yet again and we had to finally admit that there was no way, with the surface we were on, that we could pull the Hilux back from here. We managed to get the Range Rover back to firmer ground with a bit of digging and lots of right foot and decided to re-assess. We walked the rest of the way with shovels and found the Toyota up to the hubs in pools of water. We even considered driving back to the car park and back out along the top of the shingle bank, but in the dark, with the narrowness and funny angle that caused the problem in the first place, we thought better of it.



It was at this time standing on the top of the bank, that we realised how much water was down there and just how close it really was! You couldn't see it when you are at the same level: No wonder we were struggling, but at least the tide had turned which might or might not help out in time.

Dave kept the Moggy on the hard stuff and while the CG guys started sorting the miles of rope they'd brought, Paul and I did what we do best, (well probably second best if we're honest as we hadn't bothered to make flasks of tea), we started shifting the shingle that was packed in everywhere under and around the Toyota. Eventually we had the ropes rigged and ready to go so the Unimog started taking up the not inconsiderable slack and stretch!

While giving recovery directions on our courses can be demanding enough, imagine doing it when the ends of the rope are getting on for what seemed like half a mile apart! To make things worse, all radio traffic had to go through the Coastguard central control, meaning time lags like you wouldn't believe. Didn't think to take our PMR's which would have been a godsend for this kind of thing, but we live and learn.

So the rope is under strain, the vehicle's wheels are spinning but nothing is happening, well not until with a ping the rope breaks!

We share a look in the darkness: Looks like we were right.

Paul told the driver to turn the wheels to the left to try and get the motor pointing in the right direction but nothing seems to happen. After rejoining the rope a couple more times the CG guys decide to call in their portable winch from Felixstowe and wander off for a cup of tea. We however, decided to keep shovelling and after clearing all the shingle we get the Moggy pulling gently again. With the driver giving gentle revs and Paul and I rocking the motor so hard it was in danger of turning over (which as Paul pointed out would have meant an easier recovery as it would sled along on its roof quite nicely) it actually moved forward out of its premature watery grave. Now we were getting somewhere, and the Moggy continued its gentle tug. Suddenly the Hilux found some grip and raced off across the stones! "Great" we said, "About bl**dy time too"! So it was a shame when it ground to a halt a few hundred yards further on. As we walked up we could see two new problems: In his urgency to 'Get the Hell out of Dodge' the driver had driven over the ropes, and the shingle had built up badly in front of the offside back wheel.

Ok it's wasn't so bad, it just meant some more shovelling...Oh good!

So we cleared the stones yet again and off he went. About a foot, if we're honest. Something's wrong as the offside wheel is locked solid and bulldozing the shingle up in front. Handbrake is off ok, 4wd is in, so what is it? The rope needs rejoining so the CG guys get on to that so Paul and I start shovelling yet again and as I clear around the nearside wheel I can now see the problem.

The rope the truck ran over has wrapped itself around the axle on the nearside and was positioned in such a way that while holding that hand-brake lever off, it had gone around the cable pulling the offside brake on! Thanks to a bit of a cross-axle thing going on, I got right inside the wheel arch and managed to get the rope out. We shovelled a bit more and Paul said, "I reckon I can drive it out you know." After some shunting back and forth, followed by more shovelling the Hilux suddenly surged forward and with the engine on the governors Paul made it to safer ground.

Lot's of smiles all around then as we trudged all the way back to the vehicles with the ropes, shackles and shovels.

Wow, what a night!

The shout came around 18:45 and we got home about 22:15, wet up to the middle but somewhat elated that we didn't quit until we'd got it out.

I don't think I'd shovelled so much since my Dad told me there was a pot of gold in the garden, the time he wanted the cesspit dug out!



A quick phone call to Pete B to let him know we were sorted and had succeeded in our mission and straight into the shower as the clothes had a very strange aroma. Thumbs up for Rover Rescue.

The Noozeteam Unimog & Hilux pictures from Dave Cook

Dave Cormack added:

The Unimog is a U1650 with a 165hp engine, she weights 10 tons (crane alone is 3.5 tons).

I was sinking into the shingle about 2 feet when I tried and I snapped a 7.5 ton tow rope. And had a back window smashed (note the black plastic arco bag) when a tow rope ended up in the cab with me..

