

Overlanding in a galaxy far, far away

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PHOTOS BY WILLIAM DORÉE



That galaxy far, far away isn't that far at all. It is in Death Valley National Park, where, in 1977, a young George Lucas directed one of the most iconic science-fiction movies of all time, *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*. It's also where we spent five incredible days overlanding with our Off Grid Trailer, powered by our spec'd-out Ford F-150 pickup. Our goal was to find the picturesque locations where some of the movie's most iconic scenes were filmed. Stargazing the Milky Way with the naked eye was an absolute bonus.

The adventure began driving through a dry lakebed and entering the Old Spanish trail road that leads to Sperry Wash. It's here we found ourselves in a pickle of galactic proportions, stuck in a v-gap. Thanks to the kindness of fellow overlanders and our new Warn winch on the F-150, we pulled the truck and trailer out in a blink of an eye, and without damage.

After some hairy twists and turns, we made it to Dumont Dunes, where we set up camp for the night. We had driven 400 miles from our home to the campsite. Thank goodness, setting up our trailer is fast and easy. We were tucked inside for the night, before the gushing, howling winds picked up. In the morning, we packed up, with coffee in hand, ready to face Sperry Wash. It's a route that will test your off-road nerves with river crossings, rolls, and an endless rocky road leading to grand sand dunes. From there, it was

smooth sailing to the park's entrance.

We made a quick stop in Furnace Creek, where Park Rangers were extremely helpful and gave us loads of useful information. Stop in for a park map and a *Star Wars* film location guide. There is no wild camping inside the park. But that's okay. Our ranger was instrumental in helping us find a lovely campground.

Before overlanding purists clutch at their pearls and bracelets and shake their collective heads, saying "no, no, no, that's not overlanding," be aware of this: The campsites at the park are secluded with natural

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surroundings. This campsite is a first come, first served campground at an elevation of 1,800 feet. It's nestled in desert mountains with geological features and is very close to Ubehebe Crater. It's a perfect campsite for adventures in the northern part of the park. Each site has an immaculately clean and level fire grate and picnic table.

Another bonus is the cost for an overnight stay at a park-operated campsite is a very affordable \$14. A private campsite such as Panamint Springs charges \$33 per night, but showers are included with the site fee.

With route information in hand and programmed in our Garmin tablet, we unhitched our Off Grid Trailer and safely left it at the Texas Spring camp. At that point, we headed out to find the first filming site on our list, Artists Palette. It was the location for the R2D2 solo trek.

Our next site visit was to the Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes. The location of Tatooine Dunes, we walked among the grains where R2D2 and C3PO landed their escape pod after fleeing from Darth Vader. And last on our list was Desolation Canyon, where we took a small hike up the canyon to the scene of *A New Hope's* Tusken Raider Attack. There are other sites, but they came with length restrictions of 25 feet or less.

We arrived back at camp just in time for dinner. It was also the time the wind picked up. When using an outdoor mini kitchen, take care starting your gas stove on a win-

dy day. We managed to make it work, and a delicious Salisbury steak dinner with gravy and peas was the result. It was delicious as it was comforting, but it wasn't a night until we joined our fellow camp mates for a desert of ice cream sandwiches and adult beverages.

Once the winds calmed down; it was time to light a campfire and share our epic adventures with fellow campers. As the fire dimmed, we took in the entire scene. As we gazed in awe, looking starward, a certain theme song played in my head. Maybe it wasn't so long ago, in a galaxy far, far away ... ■

