



## **Cruising Site Guide.**

### ***Hovercraft Cruising Site – UPHILL SANDS - WESTON BAY***

**IMPORTANT – this information is the result of personal knowledge and personal experience. It is given in good faith but nothing in this document should be taken as an instruction of a firm fact.**

#### **Location:**

Uphill, North Somerset. ST 310 586

#### **Directions:**

M5 Jct 21. Down the dual carriageway into Weston. AT the 4<sup>th</sup> roundabout ( MacDonalDs on the left ) turn Left. Over the railway bridge and continue the full length of the road through the industrial estate to the mini roundabout/T junction. Turn Right into Broadway. Continue to the next roundabout – a big one – and take second exit – straight over - Grange Road towards the Hospital Continue to next roundabout with the tree and turn Right into Uphill Road South. Take the next Left into Uphill Way Continue on this road past the houses on the right, and eventually the boatyard and marina on the left with the sea defence wall. Keep straight on until you reach the beach entrance.

Enter the beach Pay and Display, turn left and head through the posts, past the authorised vehicles only sign. Park up about 50 yards past the caravan park

#### **Ramp/access Description:**

Hard sand in the launch area, turning to sinking mud lower down and soft sand at the top. Check tide height as the entire beach may flood at high spring tides.

Access is almost flat sand and mud flats to the sea which may be over a mile from the parking area at low water.

**There is a launch corridor across the beach to the sea. Operation on the sand or mud flats is not allowed.**



The sea is over there between the land and the sky.... somewhere.

Beach sand is usually firm – the mud is not safe to walk on especially further down the beach and in the River Axe. Don't take your car off hard sand or it will get stuck. YOU CAN NOT walk to the far side of the Axe.

Launch site – Weston Super Mare – North Somerset



Pipeline and posts.

There is a pipeline crossing the beach that you will have to go round at low tide – this is deceptive from seaward. Take care.

### **Charges:**

Use of the facility is by permit only. This is available from Weston Tourist Office. Check for current requirements before you set off . you need : proof of insurance, a minimum PLS2 HCGB Pilots licence, SSR Certificate. **If you don't have these, the office can't issue a permit.** Day and annual permits available.

### **Suitability:**

Coastal cruising craft fully equipped for inshore coastal work. Racing craft, noisy 2 strokes and craft with low freeboard are not suitable for the Bristol Channel.

You can de trailer on the sands. This area is normally quiet but can become extremely busy during Bank Holidays. If it is seriously busy, use common sense . We don't want complaints.

Ensure that you don't annoy other beach users. Do not operate on the beach or run your engines at full power for long periods. Launch and get out onto the water. DO NOT operate on the beach or mudflats.

A HOVERCRAFT CAN PRODUCE A POWERFUL BLAST OF AIR (propwash)– do not spoil other people's day by covering them in sand and exhaust fumes! THAT WILL GET US ALL BANNED.

### **Facilities:**

Launch site – Weston Super Mare – North Somerset

There is an adjacent caravan site and Uphill Marina is nearby. There are pubs and a few shops near the beach but Weston town is a couple of miles North of the site and has everything you could want. Do not access the Marina from the River Axe!

**Access** restrictions and other permissions:

**The Rules:**

- 1. All operators and passengers must wear a life jacket.**
- 2. Other than for the purposes of reaching and returning from the waters edge, operation on the beach is strictly prohibited.**
- 3. When transiting to and from the waters edge on the beach the maximum permitted speed is 7knots (8mph).**
- 4. Operation in the River Axe (to the south of the launch corridor) is strictly prohibited.**
- 5. Users must stay away from the coastline and structures at all times (at least 100 metres) and adhere to the speed limit of 7 knots within a line parallel from Black Rock to the end of the pier and Knightstone Island.**

**In addition to the above, operators should take great care not to disturb feeding or roosting birds on the mudflats or on Brean Down (this entire area is an SSSI - causing disturbance of damage to notified features is a criminal offence!).**

**Hovercraft operators are not permitted to use Knightstone slipway unless in an emergency.**

Permit applicants are required to hold a Hovercraft Club of Great Britain PLS2 or higher operators licence and to have appropriate third party public liability insurance with a minimum value of £2 million. Proof of this will be required with the application and a copy held by the administrators. Proof may also be requested at any time by North Somerset Council officers. All applicants controlling craft must be at least 14 years old.

All Hovercraft owners wishing use the launch facility must purchase a permit, available from Weston-super-Mare Tourist

Information Centre, Beach Lawns, Weston-super-Mare, Somerset  
BS23 1AT.

Tel 01934 888 800     **westontouristinfo@n-somerset**

All craft should have basic safety equipment such as lifejackets, fire extinguisher, paddles and anchor. A communication device should be carried or fitted to allow contact with the coastguard should you be unable to get back to the shore. Craft are required to have a GPS unit to measure speed.

## **Navigational Hazards:**

THE BRISTOL CHANNEL CLAIMS A NUMBER OF LIVES EACH YEAR. THERE IS A 40 FOOT TIDE AND CURRENTS CAN REACH 12 KNOTS IN SOME PLACES. YOU AND THE CRAFT MUST BE PREPARED FOR COASTAL OPERATION WITH SUITABLE SAFETY AND DISTRESS EQUIPMENT. IF YOU ARE NOT SURE OF THE SAFETY AND RELIABILITY OF YOUR CRAFT. DO NOT USE IT AT WESTON.

YOU ARE MOST STRONGLY RECOMMENDED TO OPERATE WITH A BUDDY CRAFT. DO NOT OPERATE ALONE.

THE SEA STATE AT WESTON CAN CHANGE VERY QUICKLY AND THE CHANNEL IS OPEN TO THE ATLANTIC AND SOUTH WESTERLY PREVAILING WINDS. IT CAN QUICKLY BECOME EXTREMELY ROUGH - CHECK THE WEATHER AND DON'T GO OUT IF THERE IS A CHANCE OF SIGNIFICANT DETERIORATION.

YOU ARE CAUTIONED AGAINST ATTEMPTING A CHANNEL CROSSING WITHOUT FULL PREPARATION AND A SUPPORT BOAT.

**Craft must stay at least 100 yards from the beach area and not operate on the beach or mud flats.**

Always be aware of the public. Keep them on our side.

**There is fine sand at Uphill that can easily blow 100 metres from the craft – be EXTREMELY careful not to blow sand over members of the public, particularly when turning or loading onto the trailer.**

We suggest that when driving or reversing trailers, you have an external observer to assist you and give extra safety. Please be considerate and do not obstruct other beach and water users.

**THE ENTIRE COAST IS AN SSSI – PLEASE RESPECT THIS AND OPERATE ACCORDINGLY**

Don't leave valuables on display – thieves will know where you are and that you will take time to get back to your car! Lock your trailer!

If you need to refuel, do so well away from other beach users and ensure the fuel can is sealed and stored safely and out of direct sunlight.

Be aware that hovercraft attract people who won't be aware of how the craft works or safety issues. They may also see the opportunity to steal equipment! Stay with it and don't run the engines unless you are departing or arriving!

When you leave the beach, head directly to the sea. Be aware of the pipeline near the top of the beach – you may have to go round it! Pass to the North of Black Rock. **There are partly submerged stakes and bits of steel bar in the launch corridor that are almost hidden by waves – take care.**

If you see feeding birds other than seagulls, please avoid them. In winter wading birds have a fine balance between food intake and energy use and repeated takeoffs can seriously harm them.

Knightstone slipway and harbour are out of bounds except in an emergency.

Operating in the River Axe is specifically not allowed. If you want to go to the Marina, please walk!

Refer to the map for exclusion zones, but basically keep on the water at all times, however far out it may be, and do not exceed 7 knots inshore of a line Black Rock - Grand Pier Head – Knightstone point.

You are a marine craft and responsible in law for your actions. The Collision Regulations apply to you, but many other water users don't know them. Weston has a large number of tourist boat owners who have little appreciation of boat handling. They generally stay in the area around Knightstone and the Grand Pier, but be prepared and make allowances. If you need to avoid a collision, make your turn early and obvious.

Jet skis, the water skiing club and powerboats also operate in the bay, so be on a constant lookout for high speed craft. At the other end of the scale, be aware of swimmers and people who have walked out onto the flats. Some boats will leave a big wash. Further out in the channel there are large cargo ships.

**Much of the mud in Weston bay is very deep and there is quicksand on the sandbanks. Do not be fooled by hard ground round the craft as the pressure of the hull may force out water. A few steps away from the craft and the ground may give way in a huge area round you. DO NOT GET OUT UNLESS YOU ARE CERTAIN IT IS SAFE. FIRM GROUND NEAR THE CRAFT IS NO INDICATION AS THE HULL PRESSURE DRIES OUT THE SAND!**

The tide comes in at a smart walking pace. Be aware when you leave that the area will look very different when you return. Make sure you have a reference point ( Black Rock is good !) to guide you back.

Launch site – Weston Super Mare – North Somerset

If you stop on the mud flats, the tide may well come in and pass you in a matter of seconds. Also it is very difficult to determine where the mud ends and the water begins. Be aware that mud will have a different amount of drag and may cause the bow to drop and plough in – do not come ashore at high speed!



Ridges and quicksand in mid channel

Your permit gives permission to launch only, the mudflats are an SSSI and it is illegal to operate on them. Mudflats and sand banks are full of gullies, ridges and many metal stakes. They are not a safe place to operate. This also includes the sand banks in mid channel which can have one meter high ridges and are largely quicksand.

The shipwrecks contain a number of dangerous projections, especially the most Northerly vessel which was a block ship and still has the upright iron bars to retain the stone.

There are aircraft wrecks in the area – these are war graves. Look, but respect them and don't touch.

Watch out for anglers on headlands – lines are invisible and can reach a long way out from the shore!

## **Cruising Area:**

This is Hover Heaven on a calm day.

There are historic wrecks in Woodspring Bay, masses of wildlife, off shore sand banks and you can cruise up channel to see Clevedon Pier. Down

Launch site – Weston Super Mare – North Somerset

Channel is Brean and Burnham and beyond Bridgwater. That's the good side.



Historic Wreck – Woodspring Bay

The bad side is that the coast is unforgiving and once out of Weston Bay you are on your own. There is a lot to see, but if you break down or have problems, the tide runs fast, there is a 40 foot rise and fall and the coast is a mixture of jagged rocks, quicksand and sinking mud. The tide is 'in' for a brief period and the rest of the time its mudflats all the way.

To have a chance of seeing anything you must plan for a minimum of two hours running plus a reserve. If you have any concerns about the reliability of your craft, stay in Weston Bay. Better still, stay on dry land.

### **Possible recovery sites with road access:**

Most of the coast could be a recovery site, the problem is getting to the hard sand. The tide runs at over 4 knots in the main channel and three times that higher up the Estuary.

At the Northern end of Weston Bay is Knightstone harbour and slipway. This is not available to us for normal operation but can be used in an emergency. There is trailer access through the gate 3 hours either side of high water but the Rangers hold the key in an emergency.

Launch site – Weston Super Mare – North Somerset





The Clevedon Pill Foreshore

North of Weston there is a private slipway at the Pill, ( NOT Pill village on the River Avon ) at the Northern end of Woodspring Bay. This has a locked barrier but could be used in an emergency although the foreshore is rocky and there are 20 foot deep gullies at low water.



Clevedon Town Slip

There is a public launch facility above half tide at Clevedon but the slipway is awkward and there is no vehicle access although you can push small trailers by hand. There is a 6'6" width restriction between metal posts at the top of the ramp.

There is a good slipway at Portishead Yacht Club which is private with a locked gate.

Launch site – Weston Super Mare – North Somerset

South of Weston if your craft is suitable to round Brean Down, there are miles of sandy beaches and recovery would be possible in many places although it might be extremely awkward.

On all beaches, you would have to wait for the tide and paddle the craft to the high water point.

In all cases, resist the temptation to drive the car down the beach – several vehicles a month are lost because the drivers don't appreciate how soft the sand is.

### ***Other Considerations:***

#### **CONTACTS:**

NSC 01934 634 955 (office hours only)

Ranger Service 07776 170 279

Tourist Information Centre 01934 888 800

In emergency call 999

#### **PENALTIES**

If you do not abide by the rules and regulations the following action will be taken by North Somerset Council and its officials:

**1st Occasion** A verbal warning from North Somerset Council officer.

**2nd Occasion** A written warning from North Somerset Council officer.

**3rd Occasion** Your permit will be revoked and you will be banned.

**This scheme has taken two years and a great deal of work to put in place. Weston was previously lost to Hovercraft use as a direct result of irresponsible operators.**

**WHEN YOU OPERATE, YOU ARE AN  
AMBASSADOR FOR OUR HOBBY –**

**BE SAFE AND HAVE FUN BUT PLEASE ABIDE BY THE RULES !**

**BUSY PERIODS.**

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You should be aware that Weston and Uphill can become extremely busy on hot days in school holidays, bank holiday weekends and in peak season. At weekends the beaches may be heaving with people. Although Uphill is relatively remote, there may still be a number of tourists and other beach users. You are recommended not to operate at times when there are likely to be crowds. **KEEP A WATCH FOR SWIMMERS – launch and get out into the bay do NOT operate close to the shore.**

When using the beach, be aware that your propwash will carry sand and debris over a considerable distance. **MAKE SURE THAT YOU DO NOT BLOW SAND AT PEOPLE OR VEHICLES.**

**IN PARTICULAR OBSERVE THE SPEED LIMIT AND DO NOT USE FULL POWER NEAR THE TOP OF THE BEACH.**

**DO NOT PERFORM HIGH POWER TURNS OR DONUTS ON THE SAND OR MUD FLATS – THESE LOOK SILLY AND ARE LIKELY TO CAUSE BLOWN SAND AND OFFENCE TO ANYONE IN RANGE. THIS SORT OF BEHAVIOUR IS GUARANTEED TO GET YOU BANNED AND BRING ALL OUR HARD WORK TO AN END. IF YOU WANT TO DO THIS SORT OF THING, PLEASE DON'T COME TO WESTON.**

#### **BEACH RANGERS**

**PLEASE ADVISE THE RANGERS ON 07776 170 279 BEFORE YOU LAUNCH.**

**YOU MAY WISH TO PHONE THEM TO CHECK IF THE BEACH IS SUITABLE FOR USE BEFORE LEAVING HOME.**

**TIDE TIMES AND FURTHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT:**

**[www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Leisure/parksandopenspaces/thecoast/beaches.htm](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Leisure/parksandopenspaces/thecoast/beaches.htm)**