

This is a fresh and previously un-published trip exclusive to weekenduae.com

This easy sand trip will take us to the eastern desert of the UAE within easy reach of Dubai, where between Madam and Dhaid there is a well-known mountain shaped like a horse's saddle. This route shows you the easy way to get around and up across the saddle. And yes, you will need a 4×4 vehicle, but you will not need to bash it.

On the way, we will stop at some recent archeological discoveries, that have been carefully preserved and reconstructed by the Directorate of Antiquities, Sharjah.



It seems impossible, but if you know where to pass you too can sit in the saddle of Jebel Maleiha. Getting in close to the rock without getting bogged down in the approach will enable most 4x4 vehicles to get up to see some spectacular views. More caution and technique is required on the way down, and more on that later.

I was blown away by the transformation of the Ford Explorer from, well, boxy old-tech econo-SUV that didn't quite catch cool and seemed to suffer from a lukewarm reputation to what I was driving - complete evolution!

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Most new models come with a minor facelift, not so the Fords I've driven so far: the American brand has taken the challenge of financial woes three years ago and flipped it into opportunity to leap-frog ahead. Very impressed with the new Explorer!

The vehicle has been totally re-invented, as shown here:

Getting up and over Maleiha might have been hard in the old Explorer, but the new one has sufficient power and traction to make it easily.



The Ford Explorer had power and poise, and the off-road capabilities have much improved, with a Terrain Management System similar to SUVs in much higher price brackets. The 3.5L V6 engine outputs 290HP and is matched to a 6-speed transmission.

Download the KML file for your GPS by clicking [here](#).

Once downloaded, you can import the file into your GPS device by using [GPSbabel](#) to convert it to a format your GPS device likes, and then take it on the road with you; or double-click that file and it will open automatically in Google Earth if you have that installed (all adventurers should! [Google Earth](#)).

View [Jebel Maleiha](#) in a larger map



The Maleiha Tomb, our first stop as we drive north from Madam roundabout, is testimony to the ancient civilization that lived where the red sand dunes meet the stark mountains as far in the past as the third millennium BC.



The reconstructed village is closed on Friday morning, but otherwise makes for a very interesting stop-over before we deflate the tyres for the sand tracks.

So, how do we get up - and down again!

The up part requires you following the GPS track I provide. It will take you around to the north of the housing developments and around sneakily on a nice and easy sand track. If you were to gallop across the dunes aiming directly for Jebel Maleiha you would take quite some time, as it is against the grain of the desert. So, we take the easy way in.

That will take you close to the rocky part and around to the back of the jebel (means 'mountain' in Arabic, by the way). There you will see the sharp climb up to the saddle, and the sand is well churned up by inexperienced drivers trying the climb by brute force. You can, too, if you like - nothing wrong with a little brute force at appropriate times!

Otherwise, deflate your tyres as low as possible, even down to 12 psi if your vehicle is a light-weight, and perhaps a little under-powered. And then instead of a straight climb, try to maneuver up as high as possible to the right before starting the climb proper. In other words, plan a zig-zag route up.



Jebel Maleiha is the instantly recognizable sand mountain with the saddle shape. In the same area, to the south, are Fossil Rock and Camel Rock, but as this is an easy drive, we will not be visiting them this time; instead we will focus on getting up high to get a falcon's eye view of the area.

Always careful with the descent! Engage LO gearing, and foot off the brake to simply allow the car to drive itself down in a straight line. If you start slipping sideways, tap the accelerator lightly to pull yourself straight again.

Please make sure you read the [Disclaimer](#) and plan your trips with due care.