



To Hel & Back

THIS IS officially the first on-the-road write-up of the trip, and it's only four months behind schedule, so big pats on the back for us.

After all of the setbacks and minor frustrations, we are more eager than anyone to get going and start travelling south, but unfortunately our sensibilities got in the way and we had to give the car the mini-expedition and shakedown that we had always promised ourselves.

We spent the two weeks after our one week Christmas holiday trying to improve the brakes. While they worked, they were definitely not as good as they should have been and there was too much pedal travel. As the snow came down and the temperature plummeted, so did our enthusiasm for bleeding, re-bleeding and changing the brake components one by one until the problem was

Below:

The 110 successfully completed its practice expedition in North Wales. Next stop Europe on the long road to Die Hel.

found. However, it was the only way.

A few months ago, we had sought an emergency fix to get us home from our friend TJ Nicholson over at Better Prepared Vehicles after our calliper bleed nipples stripped the threads and refused to seal (and no, we hadn't over-tightened them). As previously reported, a few mates of TJ's tapped out our old callipers with larger threads as a remedy.

a quick bodge job

While this was a great 'get us home' fix, the new threads still didn't feel great and we were wary of re-bleeding the system in case the non-standard nipples slipped leaving us with no spares and unable to tap out any larger. As we couldn't leave for Africa with a braking system that wasn't completely serviceable, we elected to change the front calipers.

This was an expensive business but David over at Allmakes helped us out and we bought a pair of Allmakes aftermarket callipers, which were soon winging themselves towards To Hel And Back HQ.

inflating the problem

While we have learnt a lot recently, we felt that the best way to 'brake the back' of the stopping issue was to seek the help of our local friendly mechanics when refitting the new callipers. Unfortunately, having swapped the callipers over, we found we couldn't get a firm pedal.

No matter we thought, we simply hadn't removed all of the air from system. So we re-bled and re-bled, using different techniques from building up pressure before opening the nipple to jacking alternate ends of the car up to try and free the

ROAD TO HEL

After months of delays and extra tinkering time, Tom and Carl can finally declare the 110 ready and capable. Africa now beckons.

Words and Photos by: Tom Picton and Carl James



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supposed elusive air pocket.

Nothing worked, so we employed an Ezi-Bleed, first at the recommended 25 psi from the spare tyre and then at the not-so-recommended 45 psi. The master cylinder reservoir bowed out under the pressure and we checked every single seal and join for leaks. As we weren't losing fluid, we turned our attentions to the master cylinder, suspecting a seal failure.

A quick swap of the master changed little, so after all of this faffing around we did what we should have done in the first place: we checked the new callipers. While the front right was fine, swapping the front left immediately gave us a solid pedal. There must have been an internal seal failure.

So, feeling a bit sheepish about the fact that we should have checked the only new parts on the system a few days ago, we organised a replacement calliper. More testing, more bleeding, more swearing. No luck.

the smell of success

We now stank of brake fluid. We had used over ten litres of the stuff and had spilt more on our hands than we cared to think about. While underneath, Carl caught a face-full of the foul fluid when the hose popped off the bleed nipple and spent the next hour washing it out of his eyes and mouth. Tom, not to be outdone,

unscrewed the reservoir cap without first releasing the pressure from the spare tyre. The resultant blast of Dot 4 and soaked trousers served as a potent reminder to concentrate on the task and not to get sidetracked by the boredom of bleeding.

We eventually discovered the calliper was only extending on one side. This was occurring to the extent that the disc brake was bending under the pressure.

All wheel bearings and hub fittings were immediately checked to see if they were loose, and we tried, without success, to free up the outer

Above right:

Our Christmas view of the lovely Koni shocks and impressive Britpart springs

Bottom inset:

After all our braking issues, a failed ignition switch delayed us further.

pistons, only for us to conclude that the second replacement calliper was also faulty.

We explained the problems to the ever-understanding guys at Allmakes and decided to upgrade to using Lockheed callipers which are slightly dearer, in the hope that the extra expense would count towards higher quality. Thankfully, the guys at Allmakes sorted us out with a pair of Lockheed callipers in no time at all and with these now on the car, the system was bled for (hopefully) the last time. Finally, after all the bleedin' bleeding, success!

Carl caught a face-full of the foul fluid when the hose popped off



some field experience

Late on Tuesday we hit the motorway destined for North Wales and Carl's girlfriend Tash's house. Within a few minutes of being on the motorway we soon discovered the top cruising speed that the Defender could comfortably muster: a solid 60 mph. While she will go higher, the engine has to work noticeably harder and rattling starts. So it was decided, in order to be mechanically sympathetic we shall head to Hel at no more than 60mph.

After a huge breakfast (thanks Tash) we headed into Bangor to catch up with old friends, taking the scenic route and crossing over the windswept scrub that makes up the Denbigh moors. After taking a few small tracks off the main road we soon had the Land Rover in





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its natural environment: perched halfway up a 45 degree incline with the towball firmly dug into the moss.

With our moment of immaturity over, we stocked up in that well known expedition store Tesco before finding a quiet spot on the banks of the Menai straits where we struck camp and cooked our evening meal in 30 minutes flat. Not the fastest but a good baseline from which to improve. With our fajitas eaten and our wine consumed, a local canoeist wandered past pointing out that the tide was on its way in and would submerge the entire area we were currently camped on within a few hours.

a watery end

Naturally, being committed 'Safety First' proponents, we had checked the tides before going within 50 miles of the sea but we must have got it wrong this time. A speedy packup was implemented and we shot back to friends Alice and Ben's in Bangor doublequick.

With the first few meals now having been cooked on the Coleman stove and an acceptable cup of tea been



Above:
The Defender chugs its way through the Welsh lanes.

Below:
Carl gets distracted by his girlfriend at the vital moment during this manoeuvre.

brewed, we are happy we can survive on the road. All seems to be ok and our set-up of kit in the storage cupboards works for now, though time will tell whether everything is tied down adequately. While we don't feel we have been excessive, we wish we had less kit to carry.

Thursday led us to investigate the local countryside further with the prospect of more interesting photos while also catching up with more old friends. After a flying visit to the Bangor Sport Science department we shot off to see our old mate Elliot and were treated to a guided tour of the DMM Climbing factory.

We left late that night with a useful assortment of rope, carabineers and other DMM goodies from Elliot and headed up the Snowdon road into the driving rain and the nocturnal black heart of Wales. The Landy chugged its way up the hill and the value of the two huge Hella spotlights piercing the enveloping gloom suddenly became apparent.

Driving with them in the dark appears to be slightly addictive: standard LR full beam just feels inadequate now. We have also found them to be the definitive answer to

muppets who leave their full-beam on for oncoming traffic.

a taste of Welsh Africa

As we wanted to ensure that this practice trip was as close to the real thing as possible, we packed the Landy with all of our expedition kit, including the bonnet-mounted spare wheel. While it isn't as unmanageable as some have suggested, it does certainly take some getting used to. Visibility is impaired and the off-side flank is now totally obscured for the driver. Due to the width, a bit of educated guesswork has to be employed while driving through the more congested streets.

Unfortunately, with all the spares and tools we're low on space so some of our lighter but bulkier kit has hit the roof. Big thanks to Frank over at Lyon UK for helping us out with a couple of waterproof Ortlieb duffle bags, now housing our Backup Bogroll stockpile among other things.

We left North Wales and headed to Carl's relatives in Ludlow, stopping on the newly extended driveway. It takes a certain type of person to allow two unwashed men to turn up and smack a fully-kitted overland-ready Landy

A canoeist wandered past and told us that our entire campsite would be flooded



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on their new drive, thanks Mike and Marilyn.

We went through the now familiar camp set-up routine and got our heads down for a good night's sleep following a hearty bowl of pasta and Jamie's finest pesto. We awoke bleary eyed to settling snow on Friday and drove through the white fields with Cardiff the destination.

En-route to South Wales we passed the Brightwells auction site, which reminded us of the various vehicles we had decided not to bid on all those months ago when we felt a higher initial vehicle outlay was out of our budget. With the knowledge we now have we kick ourselves as we appreciate how well kitted they were, that they probably had genuine mileage and would have been reasonably well looked after.

However while those 110s would have required less work (which means we may have made our intended leaving date) and our wallets may have survived slightly better, on the flip side we wouldn't

have learned half as much. As we all know one of the harsh realities of life is you can't shortcut your way to experience. While it grates us to think of all those days lying in the snow bleeding the brakes, looking back they were worth it.

some auction approval

For those of you toying with the idea of an overland trip, if you are experienced with Land Rovers we would say get down the auctions as there are bargains to be had and you will save yourself from nasty surprises later on. And for those of you as green as we were when we started this project, you could do a lot worse than buy a complete heap privately and learn the ropes as you complete every job the damn thing needs.

We progressed onwards to the West Country and set-up camp Friday night on another of Carl's aunt and uncle's driveways.

An early start Saturday saw us set off to get over to Weston Super



Above main:
The awning helps provide some much needed shelter. The Menai straights bridge. Tom, Carl and Tash stand aloft on the 110.

Mare to meet Matt Neal, Land Rover super-mechanic and all round lovely guy. Matt gave the car a once over, highlighting a few small issues we hadn't previously noticed and confirming our fears that the rear springs were of insufficient poundage, as the Landy was sagging more than a paper bag full of porridge.

Far more interesting however was the mini 4x4 Matt has built for his son Tom, a real up and coming off-roader. Aged three, Tom was outside driving across bridged Tracmats six foot in the air and a few years on and he's now flying around in Matt's latest creation, a twin battery driven buggy with two forward gears and reverse. The attention to detail was just unbelievable – check out the snorkel, steering guard, towball and winch in the pictures. We both know what we want for Christmas now.

Following an incredibly enlightening and entertaining morning with Matt we shot down the M5 to see fellow **LRM** contributor →



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David Lovejoy. Unbeknown to us as Land Rover newbies, David is somewhat of an off-road god in Land Rover terms.

Having travelled London to Cape Town too many times to mention, experience of overlanding through South America, rallying in Russia and an ex-Land Rover Experience instructor, he really knows his stuff. We spent the evening discussing what kit works and what doesn't. In addition to his overland background David is also a LANTRA qualified winch instructor so ran over a few more points about winching and using the hi-lift jack.

It was great to know that the info

Above:
Which would you take to Africa?

Below:
Tarmac will be a luxury not afforded to us in Africa.

we were being given wasn't from a forum keyboard warrior but rather a level headed guy who has been there and done it – many times.

well-sorted G4 kit

Luckily, David informed us that his farmer friend had an area of hard free-standing (no giggling at the back) for us to camp on that night. We set-up in record time as there was a thick frost. The G4 kit donated by Land Rover is working out a treat, although in this weather we have felt the need to employ a silk sleeping bag liner and, although we

station as we rigged up a bodge-job after both rear sidelights lights gave up. The newly installed LED lights in the rear were temporarily disconnected to provide the rear lights with permanent power and so save us a roadside interview with the plod.

We completed almost 1,000 miles in five days with thankfully few issues, burning through almost a litre of oil and a few tanks of diesel in the process. A big thank you must go to all of the people we saw, especially Matt, David and their respective partners for helping us out big time.

We completed 1,000 miles in five days, burning through one litre of oil

sleep well in the G4 sleeping bags (strangulation cord and hoods done up tight), we were amazed to wake up and find the tent water bottle frozen solid. If we can sleep in those conditions here, we should be alright in Africa.

We spent Sunday morning running through some of our recovery gear with David, before setting off for Buckinghamshire that evening. Late on Sunday we arrived home, following an hour's delay in a service

We now find ourselves with a long list of small jobs that need completing following the practice, the biggest of which is to replace the rear springs and renew the drive flange seal on the front diff which had developed a leak. While not difficult jobs these are time consuming and with a bit more paperwork still to be completed we are booking a ferry for three week's time. A manageable timescale, but allowing no time for slacking. **LRM**

