



To Hel & Back

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raising money for



and



40 countries, 30,000 miles, 2 continents, 1 trip!

A LITTLE over a month ago we sat around a table at our friend Wim's Holland House in Addis, making plans for the route south. In order to avoid the horrendous Kenyan road south of Moyale, we elected to take the off-road route along the east coast of Lake Turkana.

After two weeks in Addis, on the main road out of town at the traffic lights, we found ourselves level with another car containing a farenji (westerner). We promptly lightheartedly harangued him, demanding that he 'give us one pen' as is the local culture. Much to our surprise, he smiled and promptly produced a biro. Thus, we are now the proud owners of our very own Hilton Hotel pen.

We reached Debre Zeit and, thanks to Friew, the local Link Ethiopia worker, we were invited to stay in a local compound free of charge. While the resident family was incredibly kind and hospitable, the same could not be said for the dog which repeatedly tried to bite Carl. It was only subdued in its attacks by forceful kicks to the nose. Best not tell Carl's girlfriend – who works for the RSPCA – about this bit.

Travelling onwards towards Lake Turkana, we had our first prolonged experiences of African gravel roads

Main

After a week on the dirt around Lake Turkana, everything was covered in dust.

Opposite from top

Tom and Carl celebrate as they cross the equator. A Tdi lump makes for a perfectly adequate hob to cook dinner on.

which shake everything to pieces and leave the entirety of the back covered in a layer of fine dust. Our faces too were covered, but this is what we signed up for, so we can't complain. We figured this is what travelling must have been like 'in the old days': very noisy, tiring and dirty work.

Amazingly, despite it being the rainy season, we didn't see a drop of water as we pressed on to Arba Minch but evidence was everywhere of the destruction from the recent deluge. Despite no fresh rain we still had to negotiate several river crossings and had the bow-wave above the bonnet for the first time on our trip.

Once we arrived in Arba Minch, we decided to visit Nechtar National Park. Immediately upon entering the park the road degenerated into the most amazing bush track, our first challenging off-road adventure in the Landy. It took us back to our time at Land Rover Experience's Eastnor Castle.

The car was faultless, despite being made to work very hard through deep ruts, thick mud, steep hills and lots of very rocky ascents/descents. We found ourselves constantly chopping and changing between riding on the roofrack, front wing, rear ladder and passenger

seat enjoying the ride, smiles rarely leaving our faces and cameras not being given a second's rest.

Throughout the day we saw baboons, warthogs, zebra, eagles, hippos and finally camped at one of the viewpoints, overlooking a steep 500m descent to the huge lake Chomo.

The only negative point was the presence of hundreds of Tutsi flies. Tough, aggressive little buggers, they can survive the first whack with a Bradt guide book.

heading south in convoy

After a hugely enjoyable couple of days in the park, we met our friends from Addis: Joel the Canadian in his 110, and Rian and Stephani in their Toyota. We continued south in convoy, all destined for Nairobi.

We passed the non-descript border town of Omorate and headed down the 'border road', a small sand track off the main Omorate gravel road. After a couple of hours of twists and turns, crossing deep dry riverbeds and arid expanses, we arrived at a seemingly random concrete block which the GPS



confirmed was the border marker.

No fences, no signs, just a concrete block from which point on we were in Kenya and should now be driving on the left. As this is a recognised 'open border' point, we now needed to get our immigration stamps sorted in Nairobi.

After another couple of hours driving through the occasional tribal village, we arrived at the shores of Turkana. Heading to the beach for lunch, we decided to stop for the day, so promptly shooed the goats and cows out of the way and got into the lake for a relaxing swim/wash/cool down.

Chatting to one of the local tribesmen, we investigated the possibility of buying one of his goats. So it was, for the sum total of £20 between the five of us, we purchased Robert the goat.

The local chaps then helped kill and skin him, their only requested payment being the internal organs, head and skin. This left us with roughly 12 kilos of fresh goat meat, which was sliced and diced ready for packing in the Waeco fridge. As the sun set, a fire was lit to roast a leg and we reflected on a brilliant overlanding day.

Going south, the roads got rougher and rougher. We tip-toed through boulder fields, unable to get out of low range and exceed 15mph. Our diesel stocks were beginning to run low, water was pretty much empty, food supplies were scarce and money was tight. Despite the amazingly scenic photos and glitzy appearance of trips such as ours, these are the everyday issues of overlanding.

in the capital

After five consecutive days of constant driving, we skirted Mt Kenya and reached the outskirts of Nairobi. We hit tarmac and pressed on with smiles planted firmly on our faces with the car, ears and bums all given some relief from the hard roads. Smashing into rocks for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and she stills drives dead straight.

In our haste to get to Nairobi, we nearly overlooked another small milestone, namely the Equator. Here we were, standing in the centre of the earth, in an old car which we had driven from England. We tried to take it in, a big achievement but we both knew we had a long way to go.

We spent the first few days in →

This month the boys find their chassis is cracked, have a visit from the Kenyan President, buy a goat and reach the Equator.

Words and Photos by: Carl James and Tom Picton. Additional Photography by Joel Le Baron

KENYAN CAPERS



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We decided to inspect the truck. To our horror, we found the rear crossmember welds had cracked on both sides

Nairobi catching up with our friend and host Georgina, who teaches at Stahare Boys School. After a couple of days of paperwork, sorting out immigration and eating ourselves back up to our normal body weights, we headed over to the Jungle Junction campsite, to see friends and the most overland trucks we have seen in one place at one time.

Flash bits of kit were on display on some overland trucks, but the most impressive was another fairly old Defender 110. A Dutch couple, travelling north, had rebuilt their entire car from the chassis-up after rolling it over three times at 40mph in Tanzania. After 5,000 Euros and a six-week delay they were back on the road, keeping the dream alive. Very impressive stuff.



a cracking revelation

After the horrendous roads of Turkana (and since we were in the Land Rover haven that is Nairobi) we decided to bring forward our next major service. First up on the service

Main

Making a splash in Nairobi.

Above

The garage we found kindly agreed to perform the welds for free.

we inspected the underside of the truck. To our horror, we found the rear crossmember welds had cracked, on both sides.

This was a major issue, not simply because it meant we needed to get the chassis re-welded

but because some of the fuel tank fittings had been almost permanently fixed in place in a desperate (but successful) attempt to stop it leaking, literally the day before we left the UK.

Mindful of looming major repairs

we continued with the service items and re-tightened the newly loose roof, cleaned all breathers, re-greased and generally re-oiled everything. Suffice to say 'routine' maintenance following a tough off-road excursion is very different to regular on-road techniques.

Two full days were spent going from garage to garage, getting quotes for welding, both of us aware we needed to get someone good but that it also had to be affordable. Frustrated by mixed advice on how best to complete the job, we sent out an emergency email to some of the people who have helped us get thus far. We would like to say a massive thanks to the Foleys, Devon 4x4, Matt Neale, BetterPreparedVehicles and Yoda Lovejoy for the prompt replies.

Amazingly, at the last garage we tried, the owner of a local truck repair company (an ex-professional hunter and race-winning racing driver) decreed that he loved the adventure we were completing and immediately offered to do the work for free.

We got down to the workshop the following day and started stripping the car. We had the use

of a hydraulic ramp and a clean workshop environment, making everything that bit easier after the months of lying on the tarmac back home.

some devilish repairs

The next day we continued stripping back the car as the welders wanted more room to work. Thankfully we had changed the brake lines to Hel Braided Hoses so we didn't need to split the system, but simply undid the hose clips and unbolted the calipers, leaving them free of the axle.

Once the trailing arms were unbolted, we enlisted the help of four of the workshop boys and lifted the axle out. We were left slightly dumfounded at actually having removed our rear axle for the first time, but also at having done it in the middle of Nairobi.

The chaps then set about cutting two-foot-long plates to weld along the chassis rails as well as other various strengthening brackets for the rear floor.

Welding finished, a truly manic day followed, as the axle was heaved back into position and we began to bolt everything back on. With some



help, everything bar the exhaust and tank was put back by 5pm.

We rolled off the ramp, left the workshop and just managed to pull out onto the main road when the engine died, leaving us stranded in the fast-lane. We made it home, although not without the old 300Tdi dying a couple more times.

Once home, we blew out all fuel lines, tightened all connections and fitted the new fuel filter which was due. Hey presto there was a

Above

Carl received some very attentive help with the welding from the friendly mechanic.

great big lump of dirt blocking the line.

living dangerously

That weekend the school celebrated its founder's day and its most famous patron arrived to join the party. The Kenyan President decreed that the rest of the school was, as always, most impressive. Sadly, he missed out on the guided tour of the *To Hel And Back* truck, so we will endeavour to drive her over to the palace at a later date. If only he would return our calls.

As Joel was set to leave on Sunday, we headed into town and played pool until 3am, interspersed with some dancing. Yet again, Tom was accosted by a prostitute (honestly, I have no bloody idea why it's always me - T) who did not take kindly to Carl photographing the happy couple, but somehow we all made it out alive.

Joel left, planning to put the pedal to the metal (well, as much as one can in a Defender) and make the 2,500 miles to SA in eight days, as he had a tight schedule. We waved him off, declining to tell him about the enormous phallus drawn on his



Aquarius rear wheelcover in the dust. He'll find out soon enough.

Landy fixed, we removed our mechanics' dress and grabbed the cameras, hats and sun cream to fit in with the tourists. First stop on the agenda was the Nairobi Giraffe Centre. Here we saw these amazing animals up close from a gantry, feeding them by hand and even receiving a kiss if you kept the food between your lips. Amazingly gentle animals, though they were partial to a small headbutt if you stood there for too long without feeding them.

While he was there Carl did spot a rare big tall thing with a ginger beard wandering around wanting food and giving out kisses: rumours that this was Tom are presently unfounded.

From the giraffes, it was on to the elephants. The Elephant Sanctuary rescues babies from all manner of situations which would have undoubtedly led to their demise were it not for human intervention. It was

We removed our mechanics' dress and the grabbed cameras and sun cream to fit in with the tourists

Below

Tom flexes his muscles as the Salisbury comes out. Robert the goat is diced on the shore of Lake Turkana. We arrived in Arba Minch and camped looking over the huge Lake Chomo.

great to see the little fellas bumbling around, charging into each other, spraying each other with water and throwing mud everywhere, adorable little things and a lovely centre doing good work to support the East African Elephant population.

Further to our sightseeing soirées, we also had a couple of minor jobs on the car we had forgotten about. The Modification Hit-List comprised of adding proper speaker wire to the rear speakers (so that we are now rocking again with surround sound), mounting a passenger grab-handle and installing twin front windscreen jets. Exciting stuff.

Before we left we also wanted to top up the left swivel pin housing with liquid grease, as we've had a consistent leak since the UK and it must be running low now. However in order to access the 'fill level' plug, the steering bumpstop bolt had to be removed. This snapped.

The following morning, we started drilling and carefully inserted a stud extractor. This snapped. In fact, half of the extractor had remained in the bolt. Carl then attempted to drill out what remained of the stud. It quickly became apparent that the stud extractor constitutes sterner stuff than the drill bits: so no progress.

Luckily, a small length of stud was

sticking out on the other side of the steering arm but, to get access, the wheel, hub, bearings, callipers and discs had to come off.

So, with cap in hand, we once more went back again to City Panel Beaters and asked that they weld a new bolt head onto what remained of the stud. Thankfully with our new Allmakes 4x4 callipers, the trauma of splitting the braking system was minimal, so we had the old bolt out and the whole sorry mess sorted in one afternoon.

We've now been on the road for just over four months, (127 days to be precise) and the total mileage of the trip so far is 7,600 miles. The sums show that during our trip around Lake Turkana, our fuel consumption registered 19mpg. A little low, but not too bad considering we were fully loaded and off-road. During that period of self sufficiency and carrying all our own fuel, we completed a total of 666 miles – a coincidence that it's 666 on the road to Hel?

We're ready to press on but, unfortunately, we have discovered that Tom's camera is damaged so for now we are sitting tight, waiting for a new lens from the UK to arrive, before pressing on to Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania.

LRM

