



**To Hel & Back**

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and



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

**AS WE** relaxed on the shore of Lake Malawi last month, lapping up the tranquillity while mapping our route south to meet Carl's girlfriend in Jo-burg, we found ourselves at a crossroads. With just over 3,500 miles to cover in two weeks, should we take the shortest and safest route to SA, or seize the opportunity to visit Zimbabwe?

*The one cloudy day we had by the shores of Lake Malawi.*

After checking the current political climate with Zimbo friends back home and inquiring as to diesel availability with fellow overlanders, we decided to depart from the original plans and take in Zimbabwe, accepting the increased mileage as part of the adventure.

The deciding factor in our deviation was the offer of accommodation from our friend Heath's parents who live just outside Harare, offering us a safe, cheap and friendly place to stay. So, with plans altered, we sought out the Mozambique embassy in the Malawian capital Lilongwe, to apply for a multiple entry visa, as cutting through Moz was the fastest route to Zim.

After waiting all morning at the Mozambique embassy in Lilongwe, cooking noodles in the road outside and watching films on the laptop, we finally received our multiple entry visas and set off.

#### farewell Malawi

We left Malawi behind having enjoyed our few days by the lake. It is visibly poorer than its neighbours, but tourism is still prominent with the main Malawian attraction centred around taking time out to sit on the beaches and devour as many of the huge, freshly caught fish as possible.

As we headed for the Mozambique border, we slowed to wave at an approaching overland truck. To our immediate delight, we realised that it belonged to a couple of Dutch friends, Frank and Nicole, who we had first met in Aswan in Egypt, then again in Khartoum, having last seen them in Gondar.

After a quick catch up at the side of the road, we made straight for the border and made up the hard miles through the interior. Over the bridge spanning the Zambezi in Tete, we took our first glance at this wide mama of a river. Uniquely for East Africa, the roadworks being carried out on the bridge were not run by Chinese companies.

After blasting through the northwestern land outcrop of Mozambique, we completed our paperwork at the Zimbabwe border, neatly sidestepped the police chief's request for Fanta and made tracks to Harare.

#### distance to Hel: 2,688 miles

We were welcomed by Mike and Elidah, who instantly made us feel at home. We had a whole roster of questions for the pair of them, born and bred in Zimbabwe, and we fired questions back and forth until gone 1am, both of them just as interested in our stories from the road as we were of theirs about Zimbabwe.

And what stories theirs were. We could only imagine the sense of loneliness and despair that one must feel when platoons of strangers arrive at your house intent on taking it over and it becomes agonisingly apparent

that the very people you want to turn to, the police, are the ones trying to relive you of your property.

All of the surrounding houses grow vegetables, keep chickens and some even rear cattle. This self sustaining lifestyle was the only reason that many of these people still had something to eat during the recent food shortages, when inflation reached 1000's of percent and cholera was rife in the centre of Harare.

The stories we heard from Elidah and Mike, as well as their neighbours, were incredible. What many of the aggressors appeared to forget was that these 'whites' were actually second or third generation Zimbabweans, thus they didn't have another country to move to. People we met had gone through the most horrific experiences of intimidation and violence, as they were forced to flee their properties, taking only what they could carry.

For a more informed view on this mixed-up country, we strongly recommend looking up our hostess's latest book, comprising some of her family's stories from the last 30 years spent living in Zimbabwe. Entitled, *Let's Make A Plan*, this frank yet uproariously funny account of life in Africa is available now on Amazon, →

# PIONEERING SPIRIT

The boys' curiosity gets the better of them as they journey from Malawi, through Mozambique and into Zimbabwe to learn more about the troubled state

Words and Photos by: Carl James and Tom Picton





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It becomes agonisingly apparent that the very people you are turning to for help are the ones in the wrong



the added benefit of keeping the mosquitoes at bay.

A couple of days later we pulled in to Maputo City, after a rain soaked drive in the dark. We aimed for the city centre in order to meet Decio, a friend of our fellow Landy lover and erstwhile overlanding companion, Joel 'The Baron' Le Baron.

Decio put us up at his house for a couple of nights and proved an exceptional host/tour guide/drinking partner/translator throughout our time in Maputo. We took in the old Portuguese fort and huge train station built by the same erectors as the Eiffel tower, the tracks' main purpose having once been to transport goods from British colonies in Zimbabwe to port.

**into South Africa**

After heartfelt thanks to Decio and his lovely family we headed not south but west, moving inland towards the border with SA. After stopping to brim the fuel tank and jerrys with cheap diesel, we arrived at the border at lunch. Here we were met with organisation, queues and lots of South Africans in shiny white Hilux pick-ups.

Before we knew it we were through, in South Africa for the first time in our lives. For much of the last two years South Africa was some far off land, a place marking halfway and

**Left**

The safari crew of Shaggy, Carl, Tash and Tom.

**Above**

The Landy rolls into a Malawian village.

**Right**

Trying to stop stuff rattling around in the wind.



by Elidah Craster.

Eager to show their guests the real Zimbabwe and not just the unfortunate side which we regularly hear about on the BBC, Mike and Elidah organised for us all to go on a game drive through the grounds of a local farm free of charge.

**animal safari**

Here we helped the very friendly ranger to feed various animals, perched in the back of a 110 pickup, which was riddled with bodywork punctures from one of the reserve's resident Rhinos. We were just feet from sable, kudu, giraffes, zebras and, in true Zimbo style, the beers were coming out of a trusty Coleman coolbox by 9.30am. The real treat, however, was saved for last. As she chomped down feed pellets right beside the 110, we leant out and stroked the head of a fully grown White Rhino.

We were reluctant to leave

Zimbabwe after such a great few days, but our schedule meant we had to make tracks. We admit that, as we only stayed with white Zimbabweans, we sadly only saw one side of Zimbo life. Unlike other countries on our travels, we missed out on spending time with the less fortunate side of the population.

After saying our goodbyes, we took the road east out of Zimbabwe, back into Mozambique and headed to Beira, and the Indian Ocean. Stopping off in Beira was itself a last minute change of plan, as we had learnt that an old school friend of ours was working there.

Tired by the long 413 mile drive, we rolled in to be met by our mate Sam Litchfield, who took us out for a cracking seafood dinner and a few beers by the beach. All too soon, it was time to leave Beira and head south, bush camping along the way and routinely assembling our 'chastity-enhancing' nets, which have



a significant achievement to reach in itself. Yet approximately 12,000 miles and five-and-a-half months later here we were in the Rainbow nation, our lovely old Landy having taken us every inch of the way (bar three unavoidable ferry journeys).

Some fairly major chassis repairs in Nairobi and a handful of oil seals and electric switches aside, the Defender has been faultless, a testament to Land Rover's design and the impressive array of third party modified parts available for Landys. We certainly completed a lot of work back at home before we left, but my word, it's paid off as the trip hasn't been dominated by car troubles thus far.

**well-earned credit**

To pick just a few examples, our Allisport intercooler still delivers the extra grunt needed to haul three tonnes past smoking African trucks on a daily basis and, after sitting in them for six months, the Exmoor trim seats are still as comfortable as ever. Our long life K&N filter is as good as new, though some thanks must go to the Bearmach snorkel we were kindly given by the Challenger 4x4 guys.

On a day to day basis the Waeco Fridge has proved more of a necessity than a luxury and hasn't missed a beat, and neither has any of the Antares electrical gear. It's expense aside, the battery monitor is a wonderful gadget which has allowed us to instantly see where we stand with power usage and storage. Of equal importance to everyday 'live-ability', our strong Plastor boxes aren't showing any wear and make packing/emptying the truck bearable. Good, affordable alternatives to →



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at the small garden fence was a huge hyena.

Moments like that make a safari and bring people back and back; you stand there marvelling at nature at it's finest, while trying to ignore the tightening in your stomach from fear as you know you are far closer than you should ever be to one of these creatures. We hurriedly moved ourselves indoors and polished off the remainder of the red wine to cap a fine day in Kruger.

After two more days in Kruger it was time to head back to Pretoria and here, eventually, we found we had been awarded our Angolan visas. This had taken a lot of work and talking, but we had them. Heading directly south for the final time on this trip we struck out for Durban, driving into the night following our late departure resulting from the Angolans working on 'African time', more akin to 'Inshallah' than anything Rolex could sympathise with.

After settling in at Dave and Jane's in Durban our first port of call was

to visit the Peitermaritzberg Land Rover Experience, after a kind invitation from the guys at Eastnor Castle. Here we met the incredibly experienced Andrew Brown, who runs the centre, the Defender Trophy and a whole host of other LR related fun events. We joined a group doing some basic training and were quickly reminded of the LRE practices, many of which we use on a daily basis, but some of which we had forgotten. Many of these crucial small details such as bringing the clutch up to make certain the car is in gear before switching off on a hill, or allowing the car to stall on a failed hill ascent are there because these are lessons learned in the field where accidents have happened.

We were then handed the keys to a 2010 Defender and followed the group round a challenging course which immediately took us down a very steep, rutted section, which the Defender walked down on tickover, needing next to no input on the steering, the lovely tight new Puma engine not allowing it to run away



The shiny, comfortable Range Rover shows it still has what it takes to conquer the LRE course.

at all. Next up were 15 continuous, opposing potholes, demonstrating full axle articulation and causing the truck to roll on two wheels.

After this, it was to the side slope, where the Experience have had many people roll their trucks, a direct result of not listening to the instructions. Tash took the wheel for this section and, following the advice to the letter, safely negotiated the side slope, Carl just remembering to do up his seat belt before he fell out of the window.

Amazingly, Andrew even offered to get our car serviced for free at a local garage, but unfortunately our schedule didn't allow us any more time in Durban. This was just another example of people's generosity associated with Land Rover. Some people mock referring to fellow owners as part of a 'brotherhood' but the willingness to help out fellow enthusiasts has been touching.

Two weeks on from when we entered SA, the speedo ticks over to 15,000miles and we approach the half-way point of this circumnavigation of Africa. Here we are in Cape Town, a city which wouldn't be out of place in Europe, bar the climate. We're round the other side of the world, and we've driven here in our Land Rover. Ciao for now.

LRM

You stand there marvelling at nature at its finest, while trying to ignore the fear in your stomach

the fashionable Wulf gear.

The BF Goodrich All-terrain tyres from Watling tyres still have more life in them than an overly cautious housecat and we've not had one flat thus far. Likewise, our Comma gasket maker has sealed everything and anything. Finally, without any hyperbole, our combination of Britpart front and Bearnach rear springs, coupled with Koni shocks still makes the car feel indisputably smoother than any other Landy we've ever been in.

We would like to express our thanks once again to all of those who have helped us get here. Support, advice and sponsorship has come from all over and without it we simply wouldn't be here. Listing 'thankyous' may not be as riveting as stories from deepest darkest Africa, but the generosity of companies and individuals who have helped us has been eye opening.

What we have experienced at home and on the road has been incredibly humbling and something we both have learned from. Thank

Our day out at Land Rover Experience South Africa was great fun.



you to all of you who have helped us and continue to do so, many of which are listed on the friends page of our website.

Thank you also to the many fellow Landy lovers who have donated to the two charities which we are supporting. Looking to the future, to those of you who have followed our progress with interest, we would like to ask whether you could spare a few pounds to donate online, as we roll past our 15,000th mile in Africa?

**distance from Hel: 1,451 miles**

Once into SA, we headed for Pretoria, both of us quiet in the car and slightly dumfounded that we had driven this far. The following day Carl reluctantly collected his girlfriend Tash, whom he had been enjoying six months' break from.. Joking aside, after an emotional reunion we then started ticking off our huge list of

tourist sights.

In the first couple of days we visited local monkey and cheetah sanctuaries, enjoying the opportunity to view these animals up close and learn more about them before we tried to spot them in the wild. Also, completing a favour for a friend, we can tell you Kate that TJ will love his new home.

Heading into Kruger we saw the big five animals by 10.30am, and had an amazing first ever day on safari which was well and truly capped off by a night drive back to the camp after our friend's car had broken down. This lead us to spot our fourth Leopard, six hyenas and then had the road blocked by 100 buffalo uninterested in moving. Eventually we got home and setup the Brai (barbecue) when suddenly just two metres away, sniffing away

