



Epic Off-Road JOURNEY

After 700 days on and off road, a Land Rover Discovery 3 pulled into Sydney. It had been driven 112,000km through 46 countries but still had a long way to go.

Words by Akis Temperidis Photos by Vula Netu and Akis Temperidis



The baby chimps in Cameroun were very welcoming.



Vula tries on traditional neck coils in Asia.



Before we get too far into what became an epic journey, let me introduce the two of us. We are a couple from Greece. A motoring journalist and a dance teacher. We had a dream for many years to travel the world without a return ticket but we never had the money, the time or the guts to take that dream seriously. That pretty much made us, just like everyone else that has a dream but never really makes the sacrifice to follow it.

One day we said to each other, that's it, we have to do it and it has to be now or never. It was not simple to make this wide ranging and rather ambitious dream come true but 23 months later we were in a brand new, fully sponsored Land Rover Discovery 3, departing to, well departing to wherever we wanted pretty much. Our trip had a name and an official site as well. Anyone that wanted to know where we're and what we were up to, could log onto: theworldoffroad.com and we'd come up with a motto as well, 'Explore the earth in 800 days!' Off road, possibly...

We had planned from the start to cross Europe, get to Africa and drive around the African continent for six months. In the end, we spent almost ten months eventually getting back to Greece for a break. That meant 41 border crossings, 58,000km, 45,000 photos, 70 hours of video filming and more than 150 pages of travel stories published in different magazines around the world. In 291 days, we had not put a single scratch on the car or experienced a tyre puncture. (That's it Akis, you're coming on tests with us from now on with that kind of luck Mate. TN)

After that ten-month epic and a two-month break back in Greece, we thought, now we are strong enough to challenge Asia. So we hit the roads of Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Three very hospitable countries, which was somewhat surprising for us given two of these countries' horrific images and portrayal worldwide. Yes,

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FAQ

Where do you service the car?

There are more than 1500 Land Rover official workshops around the world. So far we have serviced our Discovery in Morocco, Senegal, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Thailand.

How do you wash your clothes?

We give them to a laundry or wash them by hand and dry them in the car. This is a picture you'd rather not see!

What do you eat on the road?

Most evenings, Vula cooks. Our menu includes pasta, noodles, rice, eggs, fried vegetables, fruits and Greek salad (tomatoes, olives, onions) with olive oil is a must. In Asia, we cooked less, as the local cuisine is great even at the cheapest stalls. In Australia we discovered barbecues and it was great!

How do you know where you will camp by night?

We don't! We search on our guides and if there is nothing, we try to find a shelter anywhere. In Australia, anywhere means where there is not a 'no camping' sign. We have had no police arrests so far.

Do you carry a gun?

No. People are good and a smile is the best protection from the few bad ones!

The worst moment of your trip?

Akis' brother died in Greece when we were in Kathmandu. In Sumatra our car stalled completely.

The best moment?

Difficult to say. Just take a look at the pictures in this article!



Position reporter. It transmits automatically the real position of the car to a satellite so that you can see where we are on the web.



75W solar panel by Conergy provides 220V electricity through an auxiliary 45A dry type battery and a 500W inverter.



Snorkel, protective sliders and 10mm sump shield.



Thrane Explorer 300 Inmarsat satellite antenna, provides broadband (492kbps) internet connection wherever in the earth (98 percent coverage). Provided by Navarino Telecom-Greece.



Tyres used, Cooper Discoverer STT (245/70-17) in Africa and BF Goodrich 245/75-17 in Asia.

Engine CPU is tuned by Overfinch - for better torque at low revs. It is combined with a TGI air filter.

Car interior: rear seats were. Two customised safe boxes and a 55-litre water tank fitted.

The 4WD

Land Rover Discovery 3 TDV6 S, MY 2007, Tonga green colour, provided by Land Rover Greece (KEDO S.A.) with manual gearbox, coil springs and 17-inch wheels. Technical support by Roverland Gabletsas, Athens, Greece.



Garmin 276C GPS.



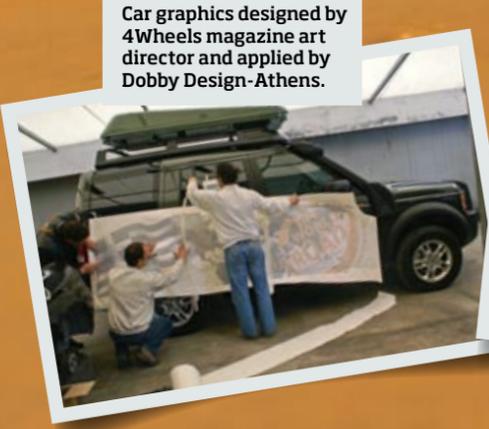
Heavy-duty coil springs by King Springs and custom made shock absorbers by Jam Sport of Greece.



Bullbar with auxiliary headlights.



Warn winch.



Car graphics designed by 4Wheels magazine art director and applied by Dobby Design-Athens.



Roof-rack and headlamp protectors.



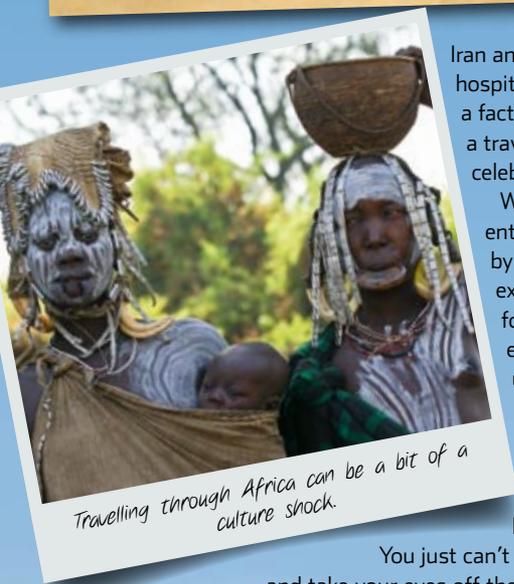
Motorola 9505A Iridium phone. Use costs \$1/minute to landline phones.

How do we survive?

We are not rich, so we have to work on the road. We write articles for different magazines, report on the radio and have our site, www.theworldoffroad.com. This way we earn a salary that permits us to go on exploring. Our daily budget is basic. We spend on average AU\$10 per night for accommodation. Sometimes we bush camp (for free!). In Asia we would stay in basic hotels paying maximum AU\$20 per night for a decent room with air-conditioning, wireless internet and hopefully a toilet and TV.

Food costs us about another AU\$10 per day in cheap food stalls in Asia or in local markets in Africa. In Australia, supermarkets cost us a little bit more but we gain weight here, thanks to the rump steaks! Most of our money is spent on diesel fuel (12.5 litres/100km on average), visas, shipping (like the 30-day shipping from Sydney to LA).

Car repairs cost almost nothing as long as the 'Disco' was under guarantee. Luckily, the engine failure was covered by Land Rover, despite the car having done 102,000km. How do we access cash? From VISA compatible ATMs that are spread everywhere in the world except embargoed countries like Sudan and Iran. In case of emergency, we have \$1000, well hidden in the car. Don't tell this to the burglars in your neighbourhood though!



Travelling through Africa can be a bit of a culture shock.

Iran and Pakistan are some of the most hospitable countries in the world. That's a fact we discovered first hand. As a traveller, they make you feel like a celebrity there.

We then took a deep breath and entered India. We were overwhelmed by this country from our very first experience. India is a challenge for any traveller. Despite our experience, the cultural shock was unavoidable there. It is a tough country to digest. You need a strong stomach, strong eyes, strong ears, a strong nose and a big heart to survive there.

Driving is literally like being in hell.

You just can't snooze – you can't even sneeze and take your eyes off the road for a second. Something will happen for the millisecond you clear your nose – there are so many threats around just about every corner. Communicating with people is tricky. At the beginning it's a love/hate relationship between you and this incredible

melting pot of people, cultures, religions, languages and spices. At the end, India proves to be addictive. I still don't know why.

Next destination was Malaysia. We had to ship the Land Rover there as it was not possible to cross Burma. 'No way', we were told by the Burmese embassy in Delhi. From Kuala Lumpur we did a long roundtrip through Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and back to Thailand and Malaysia. 13,000km in two months across one of the most diverse, historic and cultural places in the world. In the end we could easily distinguish a Vietnamese hot pot from Pad Thai (Thai egg-fried rice) and knew much more about the Khmer Rouge genocide, the Vietnam War, the Laos bombings and the opium trafficking out of the mighty Golden Triangle.

Back to modern Kuala Lumpur we were feeling like we were home as we had to cross the Melaka straights by a wooden vessel and get to Sumatra. What a thrill that was, watching our valuable car hanging from a crane by rotten ropes. For a moment I was sure we would lose it in the sea.

It was on the road to Bandah Aceh – where the tsunami hit in 2004 killing more than 220,000 people – that a 'tsunami' hit the engine of our car. It must have been

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Living the off-road lifestyle



The locals were all very friendly and welcoming.

something like that as there was no other reason to seize. That was like ground zero for our expedition. Where should we take our car? And how?

For how long should we wait for a new engine? And how much would the repair cost? Finally, we decided to carry our Disco back to Kuala Lumpur, the closest place where we could replace the unit.

Towing and loading the car for 1200km was a painful adventure for eight days. After two months of great effort by the people at Land Rover, we were able to start our new engine and travel to Australia. Luckily, the replacement of the engine was covered under warranty by Land Rover, despite our car having more than 100,000km on it. We were told that this was a unique case that should be inspected thoroughly. We are proud that our car will

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possibly make turbo-diesel engines better in some way after our break down.

So, one morning we arrived in Australia by plane and the car came afterwards in a container. We spent the next three months in a completely different lifestyle Down Under. No more noodles, we could have the best rump steak here on a daily basis. No more traffic, the roads were open, long, deserted. (Obviously you didn't drive through Sydney Mate! TN) No more people! Just one roadhouse every 400 to 500km, where the beer was

as cold as anywhere in Sydney.

That was the Outback. A 10,000km trip from Perth, to Broome, to Alice Springs, to Birdsville, to the Great Barrier Reef. What's left from this trip? Thousands of pictures, four destroyed tyres, 43 new friends and four flies in my stomach. Outback flies are a problem for any traveller in this vast country. A real 'pain in the arse', to use an Australian term that we learnt on our trip.

As far as the other myths about the Outback, leave them for the campfire. For sure, if you want to cross the Tanami desert, you have to take it seriously but there is nothing horrific there, just an endless nothing for 1100km. If you want to cross the Simpson Desert, this is even more serious. You need a proper 4WD, the right mental approach and good company as well. You need the right season as well and we didn't have it, so we feel real sorry that we had to circumnavigate the French line dunes and follow the Oodnadatta and Birdsville Track.

For more reasons, we felt sorry that we had to leave Australia but we are hitting the American roads and off-road tracks next. Possibly from LA to Chicago through Route 66 and on to Mexico. Or maybe we will go to Alaska first, we really don't know. This is the way we travel. We are Overlanders, which means we are like rolling stones. So stay tuned to *Overlander* and follow our adventures from now on. For updated info you can also log onto: www.theworldoffroad.com to see where we are in real time! 📷

Next month, Akis and Vula document the first part of their epic journey through Africa. As you can see from these photos, it's a visually spectacular voyage as well as a fantastic story.

