

Discourse

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60° North Expedition

Dave Rasdell takes us to the Shetland and Orkney Isles by Land Rover Discovery

The idea of this trip was born whilst watching TV one autumn evening of 2012. Neil Oliver of Coast fame was talking about the archaeology in Orkney and Shetland. I was quite surprised when my wife, Beverley said, "I'd like to go and see that". This was quite unusual as Bev doesn't like boats and we would have to catch a ferry to get there with the Land Rover. I cautiously suggested that we could split the trip into two parts and therefore reduce the time on the ferry. She suggested that we look at a possible route on the map and so our planning started. As we collected information about Shetland & Orkney we discussed our plans with our friends Phil & Charlotte Jackson. Phil had recently bought a Discovery and asked if we would mind if they joined us. We continued to look at our route and eventually we agreed on an itinerary.

We would start from our house, drive up to Glencoe for our first overnight stay then carry on to Thurso the next day and another overnight stay. Then from Scrabster, we would travel to Orkney. We would have a couple of days there and then travel to Shetland. During our first three days there we would be based on Unst, then the second two days in the south of the main Island. Then we would travel back to Orkney for an overnight stay, catch the early ferry back to Scrabster and then drive down to Edinburgh via the Cairnwell Pass. We would then have a couple of days exploring Edinburgh before heading for home.

During our planning we discovered that the 60th Latitude passed through the middle of Shetland; and so it gave us the name for our trip:

We planned to travel in July and August 2013 and in early February booked all ferries, accommodation and campsites etc. In the following months we completed major services on both Discoverys, which included a new cylinder head for my 300Tdi. We also updated the equipment checklists that I had used on previous trips and collected all of the equipment, tools, spares and food required. All of the route details, accommodation, kit lists etc were put into two expedition manuals, one for each Discovery. The weekend before our start date, both Discoverys were loaded and checked and we were ready to start our expedition.



Day 1

Phil and Charlotte arrived at our house about 8.30am and we made a few final checks. We had also had some polo shirts made up with the expedition name on them and so in true explorers' fashion, we posed for some photos at the start of our trip. These duly taken, we climbed aboard

our Discoverys and headed north towards the M6 and Scotland. The run up the M6 and M74 to Glasgow was uneventful and a bit of a slog and we made a couple of stops on the way. Once we got past Glasgow and joined the A82, the scenery started to change and it started to really feel like our adventure had started. About five miles before Glencoe Village, you can turn off the A82 into Glen Etive. About four miles down this road you can find the small bridge where 007 and M stopped the Aston Martin DB5 and stretched their legs on their way to Skyfall Lodge. An opportunity for a photo call? It would have been rude not to...

We then turned back towards the A82 and headed into Glencoe village and our first overnight stop. We booked into our lodgings and then went to the local hostelry for some well-earned food and a few beers.



Day 2

We awoke fairly early and had our breakfast. The view from the dining room of the B&B was straight up the Glencoe valley and the sun was shining. With another great day ahead of us, Phil and I checked over the Land Rovers and then loaded up our overnight luggage. We paid our bill and headed back into the village to fuel up. We then headed towards Fort William and Inverness. Following a short stop at the Commando Me-



morial at Spean Bridge, we pressed on towards Inverness and followed the road along Loch Ness. A short stop in Inverness allowed us to have some lunch and Phil to find the local Currys PC World to collect a camera tripod that he had arranged to collect en-route. We then pressed on towards Thurso on the A9. We arrived at our next B&B late afternoon. The view was pretty good from here. We could see Orkney in the distance, the harbour at Scrabster and the ferries arriving and departing. It was also Beverley's birthday, so when we had booked in and unloaded our overnight gear we headed for the town for some food and a few more beers.

Day 3

We awoke quite early and had our breakfast. We packed and stowed our kit and headed for the ferry terminal at Scrabster. We parked up and watched as the ferry docked and unloaded. We then drove onto the ferry parked up the Land Rovers and



headed for the upper deck. As the ferry pulled out of the port, Scrabster began to fade into the distance. The trip is only about 1.5 hours from Scrabster to Stromness on Orkney and before long the island of Hoy appeared out of the mist. Soon afterwards, the tall column of red sandstone known as the Old Man of Hoy. We continued around the island and soon Stromness on Orkney mainland came into view. We were quickly docked and heading back into the hold to the Land Rovers patiently awaiting our return. We drove off the ferry and headed north towards our first archaeological site, Skara Brae.



Skara Brae is a stone built Neolithic settlement, located on the Bay of Skaill on the west coast of mainland Orkney. On arrival, the weather started to deteriorate and it began to rain. It is an amazing site and is a great example of how communities lived during this period. From here, we continued to the Ring of Brodgar,

which is a Neolithic henge and stone circle about six miles north-east of Stromness on mainland Orkney. By now, the weather began to improve as we headed to our next location to



spend the night. On this occasion, Phil & Charlotte were staying in a B&B, while Bev and I had decided to Camp. .



Day 4

We arose early, showered and cooked breakfast, then headed to meet Phil & Charlotte at their B&B. We would all be staying here on our return from Shetland so it was nice to have a quick look round and meet the owners. We then headed for the South Island across the Churchill Barriers. and another



historical site, "The Tomb of the Eagles". From here we headed back towards Kirkwall, stopping off at the Italian Chapel, constructed by Italian PoWs during WW2 and looking across Scapa Flow, whilst exploring the Churchill Barriers.

We continued through Kirkwall and headed to Maeshowe a spectacular Neolithic chambered cairn built 5,000 years ago. This was our final historical site on Orkney so we headed



back to Kirkwall for something to eat. Fish and Chips in Kirkwall are highly recommended!! We then headed to the Ferry Port just outside Kirkwall and awaited the arrival of the ferry from Lerwick. There was some delay in boarding, but eventually we drove the two Land Rovers onto the car deck got our overnight gear and headed for our cabins and a good nights rest.

Day 5

We arrived in Lerwick at around 7.30am. Once the ferry had docked we collected our overnight bags and headed to the car deck and to the Land Rovers. We left the ferry terminal and drove into Lerwick to find a car park and some breakfast. As we wandered around Lerwick, it seemed vaguely familiar, as we had watched the TV Detective series "Shetland" earlier in the year. We quickly found a cafe offering breakfast and ordered four Full Scottish Breakfasts. This set us up for the day as we would be driving to the far north of Shetland, through Yell and to the North East of Unst to our next accommodation at Saxa Vord. As we drove north, the scenery was stunningly rugged and felt very Scandinavian. We could have easily been driving along a fjord in Norway. The most noticeable thing was the lack of large trees, as apparently the weather can get quite windy. We took two small ferries and eventually we arrived on Unst. Our accommodation here was a self-catering house, part of the old Saxa Vord RAF base. Again we unloaded, made ourselves at home, then headed to the on site restaurant and a few bottles of locally brewed Valhalla Beer.



Day 6

Following breakfast, we set off to explore Unst. Firstly we headed for the most northerly road in the UK that took us over the moors towards the northern coast of the Island. On arrival at this point, the tarmac just stops, and the beach stretches out in front us. Keep going and we would hit the coast of Norway !! .

Next we headed back south towards Haroldswick to see the UK's most northerly Post Office and the Viking Long Ship and replica Long House. We continued to explore the Viking



remains in the Lund & Underhoull areas. . We returned north again heading to the Muckleflugga Shore station and calling in at the Unst Heritage

Centre before returning back to our base. Again we ventured into the local hostelry for our evening meal and a few beers.

Day 7

Following breakfast we packed the Land Rovers and headed south towards our next destination. We crossed from Unst to Yell on the ferry then took the coast road that took us around the rugged east coast of Yell. The weather began to deteriorate and the fog dropped, which made the driving quite challenging as neither Land Rovers fancied rock crawling!!

We crossed to the mainland and headed through Lerwick and onwards to our next stop Levenwick. The plan was for Phil and Charlotte to stay in a B&B, while Bev and I would camp at the local Village Hall campsite. By the time we reached Levenwick, the rain was horizontal and the wind quite strong. We found Phil and Charlottes B&B and the lady invited us all in for a brew. The weather wasn't improving and Bev and I were concerned that we might struggle with the tent and keeping dry. We decided to try and find a B&B and our host rang a local friend who also had a B&B. We were in luck and headed for our accommodation. We met up with Phil and Charlotte later in the evening and headed for the Sumburgh Hotel for our evening meal.



Days 8, 9 & 10

The next three days were spent exploring the south and central parts of the mainland.

Sumburgh Head gave us stunning views, as it is quite a high headland.

At the top is a light house and buildings, which at the time we were there was in mid-restoration.



As the weather improved, we headed to St Ninian's Isle that is connected to the mainland by the largest active tombolo in the UK.



The weather had improve so much that we decided to cook our meal out of the back of the Land Rovers whilst looking over the beach and sea. Bliss.

We then explored further and found a track that took us to what felt like the highest point in Shetland. .

We could see 360 degrees in every direction and we were



above the clouds!! The views were stunning and this alone made the trip here worthwhile.

We also headed for Scalloway and as we drove north on the main road, Bev noticed a small sign both sides of the road. This was a real find as it indicated where the 60th latitude crossed the road. The namesake of our Expedition. On arrival in Scalloway we headed for the museum and the story of the Shetland Bus. This was the nickname of a clan-



destine special operations group that made a permanent link between Shetland and German-occupied Norway from 1941 until the German occupation ended on 8th May 1945. From here we explored the islands of Trondra, Hamnavoe and East Burra. For our final day on Shetland we headed for Lerwick and some souvenirs. We had lunch in a cafe that was featured in a later episode of the Police Drama "Shetland" where the stars of the show sat in the next table to where we were sitting. Another film set visited!! Late afternoon saw us head for the ferry terminal and a 17.30 departure to Kirkwall. As we left Lerwick and it shrank into the distance, we reflected on the stunning landscape and the wonderful people we had met. We arrived in Kirkwall at 23.00 and were at the B&B where Phil and Charlotte had stayed previously.

Day 11

Our Ferry from Stromness let at 11am so we had a slightly later start and headed for the ferry terminal. He had a long drive ahead of us as we intended to be in Edinburgh for early evening. Our arrival in Scrabster greeted us with fog and missed and this would make our progress quite slow. We stopped in Inverness for some lunch and then headed to the



Cairngorms National Park and Braemar and on to the Cairnwell Pass, Scotland's highest road. . As we got to the top of the pass, again the fog came in. But as we dropped down the other

side we dropped below the fog and the continuing stunning scenery reappeared. The road itself was really exciting particularly with a fully loaded Discovery and there were a few hairy moments that got Bev squealing!!

When we reached Perth, we joined the A82 and cruised steadily to Edinburgh and our final stop. Having found our accommodation and unloaded our overnight gear. The day had been a long one with some pretty appalling conditions so we headed into town for a well deserved Curry and, yes, a few well earned beers.

Days 12 &13

Our first day in Edinburgh allowed us to explore the Fringe Festival and take a tour of the underground city followed by a walk down the royal mile. On our second day, we visited Roslyn Chapel. Phil had arranged for us to have a private Masonic Tour. This was much better than the normal tour and gave us significantly more information about the history of the Chapel and its links with the Knights Templar. It was also the site of the final scenes of "The DaVinci Code". .



Day 14

We had a late start had our breakfast and loaded the Land Rovers for the final time. We headed south along the A701 and eventually joined the M74 at Moffat. As we headed towards

home we reflected on the trip and the places we had been. The Land Rovers had run faultlessly throughout the whole trip. On arrival at home we would have travelled 1600 miles door to door. Shetland is a wonderfully wild and rugged place, the people are welcoming and the food excellent and should be on your list of destinations to take your Land Rover.

If anyone is considering a similar trip, our route, accommodation, costs and equipment lists are available.

Dave Rasdell #6952.