

Moving

Elizabeth Shove

I had booked LR22 for the weekend. My plan was to head towards Port Stanley and then turn off into the rough. It was a bit cold for camping, but I had good equipment, and I was looking forward to getting out of the contractors' huts for a couple of nights. I love the independence of these solo adventures and for a day or two, my time is my own. It's not that I dislike my colleagues, but I prefer my own company. We are thrown together on site, living away from home for months on end. Everyone knows their job, and I respect their expertise, but I'm not part of their world, nor am I part of the camaraderie they share.

On a whim, I decided to take a short cut. Why drive all the way round on the gravel road when I had the use of a Landrover? There was a track that would cut off the corner and save me two miles at least. I can tell you now, that was a mistake.

We'd not gone far, LR22 and I, when she lurched to the left. Not knowing the terrain I had stuck to the obvious route but in a flash all forward movement ceased. The ground level and the floor level of the Landrover virtually coincided. I got out into the ankle-deep ooze: maybe I could back her out. I climbed into the driver's seat and put her in reverse. No good. If anything, the floor just got closer to the ground.

We carry long planks of wood in case we get stuck and if I jacked her up a bit, I should be able to get the timbers under the wheels. But when I went to fetch the planks, they weren't there. I should have checked before I set off. I'd look stupid if I had to walk back to the huts for help. I could hear them now 'Do you remember when John got LR22 stuck in the mud less than half a mile from home! And no timbers with him either.' But what else could I do. With four strong men we should get her out. No problem.

When I opened the hut door, Alan was making tea and chatting to Phil. Dave and Mike were sitting in the red plastic chairs. Phil turned round. 'We thought you'd gone off for the week-end?'

'Well the thing is, the Landrover fell into a hole and I can't get her out. Any chance you could give me a hand, I just need a bit of a push. It shouldn't take long'. Alan laughed. 'What do you mean, she fell into a hole .. who was driving?' All of them liked a challenge and if it was at my expense so much the better. 'Where are you?' Alan asked. I replied: 'Just up by the perimeter fence on the track that cuts across on the north side'. 'OK, wait there'.

I waited while the four of them put on their jackets and boots. I found some timbers in the back of another Landrover parked up in the yard, and we set off. As we approached, we could see LR22 leaning at an awkward angle. There was more laughter. 'That's quite some hole' said Alan. Phil was a bit more serious. 'This isn't as easy as you said. We can try pushing, but the ground is soft. There is nothing much to bite on to. We might need another vehicle and maybe a winch.'

'Ach no', said Alan, 'we can push her out. If we all come round the front and push, and if John has her in reverse, I reckon we can do it.' Mike went round the side to take another look. The mud came up to the front axle. It didn't look good. 'I think Phil is right', said Mike. 'We can't do this on our own.'

Dave had been quiet up to now. He was probably the most thoughtful of the four. 'What if we dug a track through the soft ground on the left, then she'd have a bit more grip. You've got a shovel in

there haven't you?' I climbed into the back and went through all the stuff: 'I'm sure I've got one somewhere'. 'Never mind', said Phil, 'I'll run back to the huts'.

We stood around, waiting for Phil. After a while he returned with a shovel and with Richard and Pete, as well. They were senior engineers, just out for a week or two. 'Hi there John, we heard you'd had a spot of bother with the Landy!' Richard, who always had his camera with him, stood back to take a picture of the scene.



Phil handed Mike the shovel and he began to dig. 'Watch she doesn't roll', said Dave. Phil looked askance. 'There's no way she's going to roll with the suction on the other wheels. Like I said, we need another Landrover to tow her out'. Alan stood by with his hands in his pockets. 'We can't do that - it's Saturday and the keys are in the office. Everything will be shut until Monday. I'm sure we can push her out, especially now we've got Richard and Pete to help as well'.

'No way!' said Pete. 'Richard is wearing his best wellies He can't get them muddy.' Richard laughed. But it was a tricky situation: should they dig, should they wait for Monday, or should they all try to push?

Dave and I went round to check on the trench. Mike was sweating and swearing under his breath. The mud just kept flowing back. Dave said 'It's no good we are going to need some matting as well. I might be wrong, but I think we've got some behind the bins at the back of the metal shed. No point digging any more Mike, let's go back and see what we can find.'

It was another forty minutes before Dave and Mike came back and by that time everyone was cold. It wasn't fun anymore, but no one walked away. They were in it together. When the matting was in place behind the back wheels everyone came round to the front. The mud tugged at their boots. It had started to drizzle. Alan was now in charge. 'When I say 'go' push as hard as you can'. 'Ready', ... and he looked up at me for the signal, 'Ready, go'.

They pushed. LR22 moved, just an inch or two, but she moved. 'Yes!' yelled Alan. 'She's moving' 'Keep pushing'. The back tyres began to grip, and the timbers sank, but they held. 'Yes!'. The mud

sprayed everywhere until the front wheel found solid ground. There was a huge cheer as I reversed onto the main track.

Elated and splattered with filth, the men trudged back to the huts. I turned LR22 around and headed back to the safety of the gravel track. OK, so it was raining now, but it might clear up later. I knew I'd be the butt of their jokes, but never mind that, I was free. I set off on the open road. The weekend still lay ahead.