

GOING GLOBAL WITH

OneLife ADVENTURES

Exploring northern England's wildest reaches

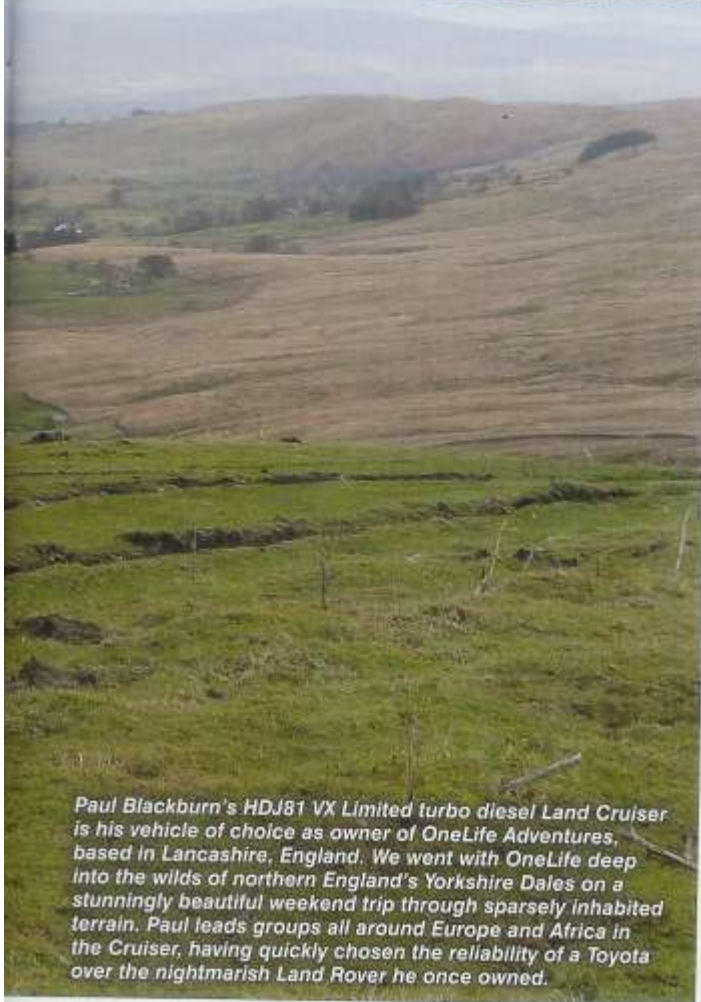
Words & photos by Christopher Liston

Arriving at a water-logged farmer's field in Garsdale late in the evening on a cold February night deep in the Yorkshire Dales of northern England, I did not know quite what to expect from what was billed as a 'UK Yorkshire Explorer' two-day expedition. Anticipating spending a cold, wet and windy weekend with off-roading enthusiasts intent on driving the best the Dales has to offer, I was taken aback by the collective, familial atmosphere in camp. Being offered a toasted marshmallow by one of the children accompanying their parents for the weekend adventure before I had even set foot on the sodden grass of the field in which we would spend the first night came as a surprise, but set the tone perfectly for what was a challenging but highly accessible and communal experience.





A Toyota Prado leads the way along the valley floor of the Lake District fells region, with a snow-dusted ridge a testament to the chilly February temps. A "fell" is local terminology for "hills."



Paul Blackburn's HDJ81 VX Limited turbo diesel Land Cruiser is his vehicle of choice as owner of OneLife Adventures, based in Lancashire, England. We went with OneLife deep into the wilds of northern England's Yorkshire Dales on a stunningly beautiful weekend trip through sparsely inhabited terrain. Paul leads groups all around Europe and Africa in the Cruiser, having quickly chosen the reliability of a Toyota over the nightmarish Land Rover he once owned.

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Unashamedly, Paul Blackburn is a 4WD Toyota man. Having started OneLife Adventure (www.onelifeadventure.co.uk) with his wife Anne in 2004 in a Land Rover, he quickly switched to an HDJ81 VX Limited (4.2L turbo diesel) Land Cruiser. Comfort and speed were an improvement, but the priority was the massively more reliable nature of the Toyota engine and mechanicals. Aesthetics played a major part in the conversion, as well. "Defenders do what Toyotas

do, but they do it ugly," Paul offered sagely from the wheel of his 80-series.

Day 1 began at 09.30 the following morning. It offered opportunities for driving greenlanes through the picturesque Dales of Wensleydale and Swaledale, which provide a number of challenging stretches of trail, and excellent views across breath-taking valleys carved by the movement of long-since departed ice-age glaciers. The first track saw Paul's 80-series lead the caravan of off-road vehicles; mostly Land Cruisers, a



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This is looking down at the town of Swaledale. OneLife Adventures' Paul Blackburn prepares to open a gate and traverse a "greenlane" that few ever get to explore. That's why we joined OneLife—to see the seldom seen!

Defender and a well-worn Discovery, up and along Lady Anne's Highway, across through Hell Gill bridge, and onto a high plateau offering stunning views across the southern end of the Lake District fells. By the way, a "fell" is a hill or other area of high land, especially in northwest England.

Dropping down to the valley floor, Paul led the group along to Wensleydale, a town world-famous for the cheese of the same name made there for centuries, and onto a demanding rock-heavy trail known locally as Dodd's Fell. The first significant test of the weekend came in the shape of a 5-ft rock-step ascent, made all the more challenging by the sharp right turn demanded in the final foot of the climb. Paul offered to spot drivers through, volunteering advice on how best to tackle the rocky incline. Continuing, the group was led along the only stretch of the Pennine Way open to motor vehicles, and onto the undulating Cam High





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Far left: Typical scene of ancient farm buildings, rock walls and a quiet river flowing through the hills. The English veterinarian James Herriot wrote a best selling series of books based on his life and work in this desolate but beautiful region of the United Kingdom.

Left: A snorkelled, "Land Cruiser" bull bar 80-series tackles a steep, rocky step as Paul does spotting near Dodd's Fell. The weather was typical northern England—rainy, meaning obstacles like this were slick and treacherous.

Below: Another well-outfitted 80-series joined the Yorkshire Dales trip, this one nicely done up with South African Hannibal tent and awning, snorkel, TJM bumper and big ol' storage box with Hi-Lift jack.



Our Prado friend guns it though a muddy, loose section of trail.



Left: There are water crossings a-plenty in northern England. With a snorkel, TJM bumper and Superwinch inside, this Prado had no worries doing the Helwith Ford crossing.

Road, a typical example of Roman transport infrastructure. As night fell, the group made their way to a local pub for a well-earned pint, and gathered around the wood-fed hearth to share stories from their first day in the Dales. It had been cold, wet and windy for the majority of the day, but hearts were warm and spirits were high as we reflected together upon a good day's driving.

DEEPER INTO THE MOORS

Day 2 saw a number of technical challenges, crowned by a descent through a deep, water-sliced gully along Skelton Moor whose extreme camber pushed vehicles to 30 degree angles, testing the



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The OneLife HDJ81 negotiates a tricky, off-camber section as the group descends into a valley. Note the campfire cooking grill secured over the spare tire.

nerve of even the hardest drivers. Other highlights included the water crossing at Helwith Ford, and the descent from Fremingham Edge into Swaledale towards the picture-postcard idyll of Reeth, a gorgeous town encased by the majestic and imposing limestone ridges either side of Swaledale. The group was challenged by a number of other features, including mud-filled and waterlogged trenches, steep climbs and a further water crossing at Holgate Ford. The weekend finished with a rolling drive across Longside Moor, and a chance to spot the local grouse population, which provides good sport during the shooting season.

THE GUIDE IS THE KEY

Although all routes used are openly accessible for motorised transit, it takes a great deal of local knowledge and experience to put together a series of roads and tracks to offer drivers diversity, challenge and stunning views. And Paul has it in spades. An encyclopaedia on wheels, Paul knows his stuff, from the current status of the ever-changing access rights of way within the National Park to the fragility of the red squirrel's habitat in upper reaches of the Garsdale valley. His carefully planned routes ensure drivers get the chance to put their vehicles to the test, and bear witness to features unique to this part of rural England, including miles of dry-stone wall ribbons snaking up and down the Dales, and quintessentially English villages and hamlets.

On a personal note, an indispensable part of OneLife Adventure expeditions is the friendly and communal atmosphere they perpetuate, which helps to explain why over 80% of their business comes from returning customers. OneLife is not limited to the UK, with greater challenges offered by their more demanding European and African expeditions, including their 12-day Greece Explorer, new for 2014. Check them out at www.onellifeadventure.co.uk ✓

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