

# LAND ROVER

Cyril Mischler follows a couple's three-year expedition across the Americas – and they're still going

Words: Cyril Mischler Photos: Patricia Fehr

## The Great escape



Exceptional vehicles driven by exceptional people" ran a Land Rover ad years ago. Every now and then I run into individuals who more than live up to the slogan. Just a few months ago, in Guatemala, Central America, I had the privilege of meeting two such individuals – Patricia Fehr and German de Cordoba, an Argentinian couple who, together with their Labrador, are currently driving across the Americas in their 1999 Defender 110 Tdi on an extraordinary adventure.

Just over 10 years ago, Patricia and German, who both hail from San Nicolás, Argentina, decided that their lives were in desperate need of change. At the time they were living a typical urban life in one of the largest, most cosmopolitan cities in Latin America: Buenos Aires. Tired of the rat race, they began planning their "great escape" to drive through the Americas from south to north, one village at a time, to discover for themselves the landscapes, people and traditions that make up the Latin American identity.



The odyssey would be called "Amunches", which means "travellers" in the old Mapuche tongue of Patagonia. The journey they would embark on would take a year and a half.

So, what he intends to show, above all else, is that the world is not such a dangerous place after all. Daniel also hopes to raise funds for two charities he's passionate about; MSF and AwaRE. MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières) is the leading non governmental organisation for emergency medical aid. Meanwhile, AwaRE (Aquatic World Responsibility and Education) is committed to the

conservation and preservation of the aquatic environment and its resources, a prime concern being the world's fast-disappearing coral reefs.



To keep up to date with the progress of the Lone Wolf Transglobal Expedition, check out [www.lonewolftransglobal.com](http://www.lonewolftransglobal.com). If you'd like to make a donation to either of the two charities that the expedition is supporting, please log on to [www.justgiving.com/wolftransglobal/](http://www.justgiving.com/wolftransglobal/) or [www.justgiving.com/wolfaware/](http://www.justgiving.com/wolfaware/)

### Achieving a dream

The couple started painstakingly organising the trip, but years went by until they finally worked their way towards achieving their dream. The biggest problem hit in 2001, when Argentina was rocked by the worst financial crisis the country has known in a modern times, and Patricia and German had no choice but to cancel the project. Picking themselves up with determination, they tried an alternative plan. Now that their budget disappeared into thin air, new ways of financing Amunches had to be achieved. Sponsor had to join in for the project to be saved, so the pair managed to attract companies such as Land Rover, Royal Dutch Shell, Bridgestone and Telefónica who responded to their calls – the trip was back on.



### ARGENTINA



In March 2003, Patricia and German finally leave San Nicolas to travel northwest through Argentina towards Bolivia and the Andes. The white Defender 110 Tdi is equipped with all the necessary expedition items: a Maggiolina Autohome; roof top tent; snorkel; ARB front bar with a WARN 10,000lb winch; satellite telephone; bicycle; canoe; surfboards; and heavy-

duty set of Old Man Emu springs and shock absorbers to deal with all the added weight. Liveried in banners and flags from the sponsors and countries they will drive through, the 110 certainly looks the part.

## BOLIVIA



The couple gradually leave the fertile Argentinian pampas and reach the arid foothills of the mighty Andes. From here they find their way up the desolate cordillera, driving on endless dirt roads, slowly gaining elevation until finally crossing a pass at an altitude of 4600m near Potosi, Bolivia. After reaching La Paz, at 3700m, the highest capital city in the world, the intrepid explorers make their way to Lake Titicaca where they meet the amazing Uro people who live on floating islands made out of straw.

Legend has it that the ancestors of the mighty Incas, who later conquered most of South America, emerged from deep within these waters.

So far the Defender 110 has been the perfect vehicle for the trip. Its sheer strength is more than enough for the rugged, high altitude, long-range travelling the Argentinians have

embarked on.

## PERU



Patricia and German's next destination, Peru, is as breathtaking as they had expected.

Adventuring to ever more isolated places around the inhospitable, high altitude altiplano of the Andes, they explore mystical places such as Machu Picchu, the city of Cusco and the Nazca lines. Finally on reaching the Pacific for the first time in the trek, the pair take a few weeks' holiday in Lima, the capital of Peru and the surf Mecca of South America – a welcome break after their high altitude wanderings of the past four months.



## EQUADOR

After six months' travel, Patricia and German find themselves bang on the equator in Quito, Ecuador. As they sit astride both halves of the globe, one thing is clear: their trip is going to take longer than the 18 months they had previously planned on. The road has become their true home. Patricia is ever more absorbed by her photographic essay. They now want, more than anything, to really get to know the exotic places and people that cross their path.

## COLOMBIA



The next stage is Colombia, a country full of clichés – some real and some exaggerated – about the dangers of rebel guerrillas, warring drug lords and rampant violence. On the other hand, the two also know that Colombia is a beautiful country, well known for the friendliness and hospitality of its people. From deserts to snow-capped mountain ranges, tropical jungles to Caribbean beaches, they have to explore it all. They

are not to be disappointed. They live among the Wayuu people of the arid north where “chivos”, or goats, are used as currency to buy and sell everything, including women. It is also in Colombia that Patricia and German meet their beloved Labrador. The little puppy, appropriately named “Colombia” by the couple, is to be the new crew member thanks to another sponsor: ProPlan, the pet food maker.



Further on, the expedition goes deep into the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, home to the highest coastal mountain range on the planet. The mountains climb from sea level to 5776m at Colon Peak in the space of barely a few kilometres. Once driving inland from the beach, the Defender quickly climbs into the rainforest where the winch really comes in handy to help get up the muddy mountain paths. Here they spend some time among the Kogi people, an ethnic group hidden from the modern world and that continues to live by the traditional ways of ancestors.

The Sierra is also located in one of the most troubled areas in the world where armed rebels, the army and paramilitary groups are all mixed up in an intricate and bloody conflict where the local crop, the coca leaf (and its lucrative by-product-cocaine) is the prize everyone hankers for. Colombia has been fantastic but the trek as to continue. They have spent a total of eight adventure-packed months in the country and new horizons await further north.



## PANAMA



In order to get to Panama from South America there are two options: fly or sail. The Darien Gap, as the swamps and jungles between Colombia and Panama are called, is impassable by vehicle. Here the Pan-American Highway is interrupted for about 200 kilometres. Only a few expeditions have attempted the crossing over the years, even less have succeeded. Amunches and their Defender have to settle for a less extreme means of conquering

the gap: sea travel in a commercial container from Colombia to Panama City, via the famous Panama Canal.

Once in Panama outback, and with the rainy season in full swing, the 110's snorkel proves an invaluable asset. Amid torrential downpours, most paths are submerged in water and often the Land Rover is the only vehicle around able to proceed.



## GUATEMALA



The expedition continue through the small countries of Central America: Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and finally Guatemala, where I meet Patricia, German and Colombia as they travel through the colonial town of Antigua. Central America has been rewarding for the expedition, as momentum around Project Amunches is building. The white Defender 110 and its team are in local newspapers and magazines, and they split their time between presenting their project in events organised by their sponsor and discovering Guatemala. They go climbing

active volcanoes, visit old colonial cities and learn about the colourful Mayan communities that make up the bulk of Guatemala's population.

## A NEW WORLD



The Defender is currently getting a comprehensive service by Land Rover Latin America and will soon be ready to go further north to Mexico before entering a complete new world for Patricia and German:: North America and the Anglo-Saxon culture, its first world infrastructures and the English language, a new challenge the couple are really looking forward to. After more than three years on the Latin American road, the Argentinians are now impatient to step into that new, exciting phase of their trek to Alaska. They will be greatly missed by the new friends they've made. Exceptional people in an exceptional vehicle.

