



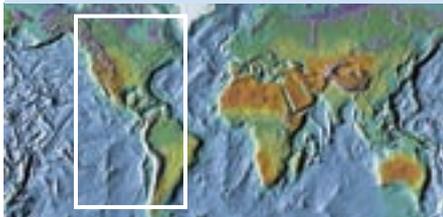
Looking out on the Torres del Paine, a set of giant granite monoliths in Chile

Land Rovers around the world

LOCATION North and South America

DRIVERS Jo and David Latham

Vehicle Defender 110



Conquering

In 2004, Jo and David Latham began a mammoth despite now both being in their 70s. Words and

Spending Christmas in England was making us restless. The excitement of previous overland expeditions was lingering, and before long Jo and myself were wondering where we could take our faithful Land Rover 110 in the upcoming few years.

With the entire globe before us the decision was, predictably, hard to make. I was interested in venturing into Central and South America, while Jo harboured a desire to explore Alaska, Canada and the US. The result was less predictable: we decided to do it all. The decision, which was taken surprisingly quickly and amicably, was to cover the vast American continent, from top to bottom.

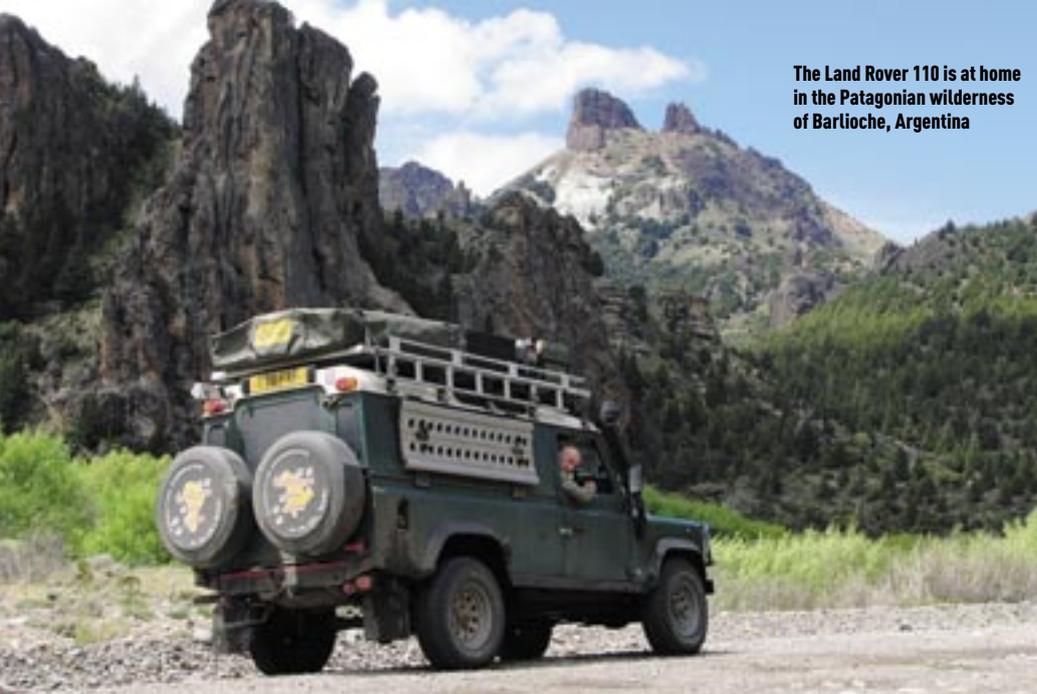
The shopping list we drew up before we set off was almost as ambitious as the trip itself. We received invaluable help from Eezi-Awn, a South African tent and roof

furniture company, with a large roof tent and awning; from Patriot with a super new lightweight roof rack; from Ashcroft Transmissions, who helped to make sure the drive train was in good order; and from National Luna, who supplied our fridge and internal lights. We didn't skimp on the preparations as the trip – from Canada to Prudhoe Bay, in Alaska, and then all the way down to Ushuaia, in Argentina's Tierra del Fuego – is a massive one to undertake.

By May 2004, just five months after we'd started to get itchy feet, we were ready to travel. We bode farewell to our 110, putting it in a container at Tilbury to ship to Nova Scotia, and headed to Canada.

The start of something special

The trip didn't start well. In such an ambitious and long expedition hiccups are to be expected. But we ran into problems



The Land Rover 110 is at home in the Patagonian wilderness of Bariloche, Argentina



In retirement the pair has explored the world in their Land Rover, conquering Africa and now the Americas



The Old Faithful Geyser erupts in Yellowstone National Park



A comprehensive camping kit is essential on the immense 70,000 mile journey



Part of the enormous Perito Moreno glacier in southern Argentina

the Americas

27-month trek from Canada to Argentina – Photos: Jo and David Latham

before we'd even put our keys in the ignition. Having arrived in Canada a fortnight after waving goodbye to the 110, we were told that it'd been taken away for secret inspection. We'd not been invited, and we were not amused.

We were told a week later that we could have our Land Rover back but, on arriving to pick it up, we found the inside was in chaos. For some unknown reason they'd strip-searched it from top to bottom.

Having spent a short time in Quebec, we began the first of our many long journeys. By the time we'd reached Calgary, having traversed the prairies, we'd totalled nearly 3000 miles. En route across the vast plains we'd had the opportunity to meet farmers from this mammoth grain growing area, who'd regaled us with tales of their experiences. We also visited the nearby Rocky Mountains. They are truly majestic,



Sequoia National Park in California is home to the world's largest type of tree: the General Sherman

and we were lucky not to encounter many visitors. It was a beautiful isolation.

It was a long trip north into Alaska, and one that took us through spectacular countryside. A seaplane into the magnificent Nahanni National Park was the only way of accessing the Virginia Falls. Flying low over the dramatic gorges and mountains left us with a wonderful impression of how wild Canada is.

Top of the world

Continuing north, we headed into Alaska and, further on, we undertook the 1200-mile round trip up to Prudhoe Bay, the world's most northerly point that can be accessed by road. The 24-hour sunshine was staggering, as was the surprisingly warm weather. We even got to paddle in the Arctic Ocean. Up there the ferocious mosquitoes are a truly terrifying size, making the most of their long, cold hibernation to save up energy reserves to massacre their human prey.

Nobody should visit Alaska without spending a few days in the Denali National ▶▶



Off-roading in the spectacular Monument Valley, Utah



Only hardy animals survive in the arctic tundra



Meeting other Land Rovers in a national park



The epic journey took in San Francisco on the way to Mexico

US IMMIGRATION COULDN'T BELIEVE WE WERE TRAVELLING WITHOUT "PACKING

Park under the shadows of majestic Mount Denali (also known as Mount McKinley). Wildlife abounds, with grizzly and brown bears, moose, elk, caribou and wolves. We managed to put all of our deluxe camping gear to the test, spending the night sleeping well inside the park.

Our farewell to Canada came in Vancouver after heading down the west coast. The immigration officer we encountered in the US was amazed when we told him that we were travelling into Central and South America and not 'packing a gun'. To him, we were 'the strangest folks I've ever seen in all my life!'

Our time in the US was fantastic, made by its easy-going, friendly people and its wonderful scenery. The only downside was that we gradually ran into colder weather as winter approached. Our route took us through Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada and finally into California en route to Mexico. And we couldn't resist visiting Las Vegas on the way. Sadly, we didn't make our fortune, but we did get to see a totally surreal place with some extraordinary architecture. It really is a once in a lifetime place to travel to.

We were pleased to leave the crowded Los Angeles area and disappear into Mexico

soon after Christmas. Once there, we made our way down the Baja Peninsula to indulge in its warmer weather before crossing back into mainland Mexico to visit the Copper Canyon, where many American visitors put their 4x4s on trains to avoid travelling on narrow roads.

Latin legs

Mexico is a country of great contrasts, with sleepy rural villages and bustling towns and cities. In Mexico's second largest city, Guadalajara, we had some problems with our rear drive shaft. We found great help and support there from Dave and Carmen

The 110 took on enormous individual journeys, like the 3000-mile trip across Canada to the Rockies



Ponchos and wide-brimmed hats are optional at a celebration in Pátzcuaro, Mexico



The steady foot of the Land Rover is reassuring in scaling the high Andes, here at 16,000ft





Deep in the jungle in southern Brazil

A GUN". TO ONE, WE WERE "THE STRANGEST FOLKS I'VE EVER SEEN IN ALL MY LIFE!"

Betts, who owned and ran a huge spare parts centre with their son. We were shocked and saddened to hear that last Christmas both Dave and Carmen had been murdered in their house, where we had stayed with them for several happy nights.

We journeyed south through Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and then into Panama. The countries in Central America are poor, but their colourful cultures and traditions are a wonderful window into their history. We were warned about drugs, guns and knives but we were never threatened and felt safe throughout this part of our journey.

The north coast of Panama is a truly beautiful area, particularly the Bocas del Toro islands where we spent a few days. The Panama Canal is also a must see, as it's a truly amazing feat of engineering. From here we shipped the Land Rover to Cartagena, in Columbia.

We arrived in the bright colonial town to be met by Paul Gallie and his wife Gloria. They are veterans of previous expeditions of ours, having met us in Gambia, west Africa. As overland expedition addicts, we are lucky to count Paul, a Welshman with vast experience in the shipping industry, as a friend.

We've often been asked whether or not it was safe in Colombia. It's a beautiful country with very friendly people and, as always, if one takes certain sensible precautions and listens to advice from the local people then there should be no more risk than anywhere else in the world.

Next up was the small, compact country of Ecuador, which we'd visited several years ago on our way to the Galapagos Islands. We took the opportunity to head for the Amazon and went 50 miles downriver from Coca to stay a few days at a lodge owned by the local Sani tribe, a fantastic and totally unique experience.

Violent-looking terrain is a feature of the northern Argentinian landscape



A rainbow breaks over the Iguazu Falls, an enormous collection of waterfalls at the Brazilian border with Argentina



The Land Rover gets tarted up in Copacabana, Bolivia, as part of traditional good-luck rituals





Mayan ruins in Palenque, Mexico, provide a window to an ancient civilisation



New year was spent on the Baja peninsula with another expeditionary Land Rover crew



Jesus keeps watch over Rio de Janeiro



The surface of the vast expanse of Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia, is made almost completely of salt

Having conquered the Incan splendours of Peru we made our way into the Altiplano of Bolivia. Bolivia is a country of extreme natural beauty, with vast salt plains, tropical jungle and high-altitude towns in the roof of the world. We drove across Salar de Uyuni, the salt flats that run for thousands of kilometres, and then down into the Atacama Desert in Chile, home to geysers and bubbling mud holes.

The end of the world

Making our way south to Santiago, the capital of Chile, our front drive shaft caused us problems, but, luckily, the city is blessed with a very professional Land Rover garage. It was soon evident that Chile was the most affluent country we'd encountered since leaving the US.

Chile is memorable for its stunning coastline, excellent wines and the beauty of the Andes. We continued our journey south and, after the odd excursion into Argentina, we crossed to the Island of Chiloe. By

the time we were back on the mainland, making the thin east to west crossing into Argentina, our target of spending Christmas 2006 in Ushuaia was not too far away. And so we set our target for Tierra del Fuego: the end of the world.

We were able to book our passage home when we arrived in Buenos Aires in the new year, giving ourselves another 20 weeks to look at northern Argentina, the Bolivian lowlands, Brazil and Uruguay. For future reference, this is not long enough.

Eastern Bolivia, with its interesting history of the Jesuit settlements, was hot and sometimes very wet, but we managed our way across difficult roads into the Pantanal on the Bolivian border with Brazil. The Pantanal, which spends six months under water and six months dry, is home to 650 species of birds, many mammals and varied plant life.

We drove 2500 miles across Brazil's vast country, marvelling at its ability to be virtually self-sufficient while still

maintaining a healthy export industry in soya beans, cars, meat and many more goods that are produced on its diverse land.

Visiting Rio is a must, taking in the statue of Christ, Sugarloaf Mountain, and the beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema. The shantytowns, *favelas*, are an eye-opener to the crushing poverty of the continent.

All too soon we were back in Buenos Aires, but before we boarded our homebound ship we still had a little time to enjoy the impromptu street tango shows and to appreciate the exceptionally high quality of the leather goods.

We had clocked up close to 70,000 miles during our travels. Not only had the Land Rover survived the journey well, but, as an added bonus, we were still talking to each other too.

Not long after our return, we began to get restless once more. Soon our world tour will continue with a trip to New Zealand in the same Land Rover. At 70 years young, if we can do it, so can you. **LRW**