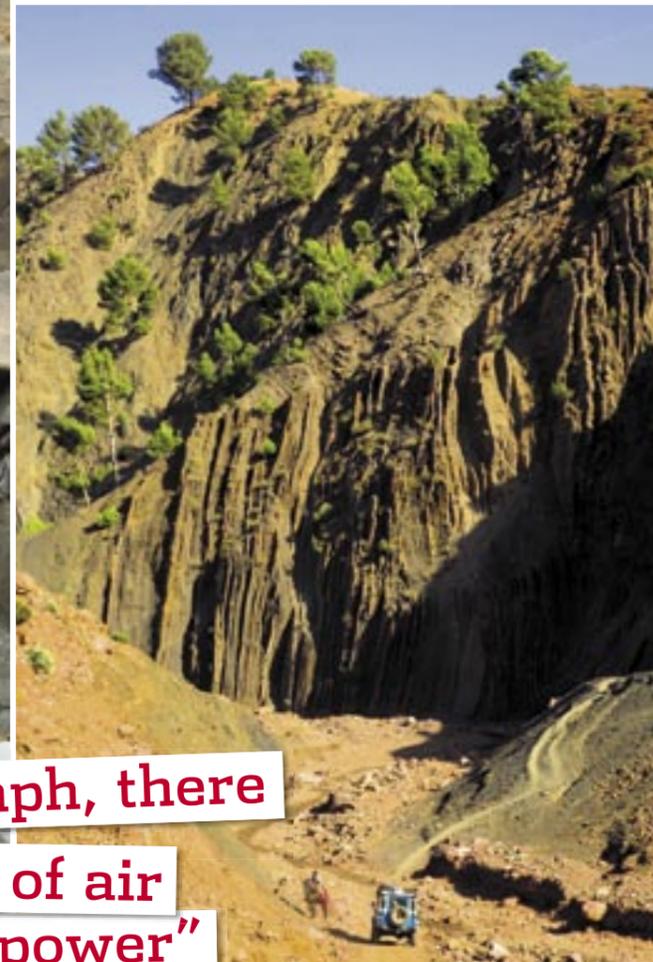


Doc holiday



“Pulling uphill at 75mph, there was a sudden hiss of air and a loss of power”

Doctor Dick Morgan drove his expedition-spec Nissan Patrol to Morocco to provide medical support for an off-road event.

Photos: Dick Morgan

When I received a phone call asking if I would be available to provide medical cover for an event in Marrakech, it proved to be more of an adventure than I had expected. Since 1996, when Land Rover asked me to provide medical support for trips to Oman and Morocco, I have supported a variety of expeditions each year.

In early 2007 I had started looking around for a vehicle to replace my 160,000-mile Range Rover. Unfortunately, the financial implications of a new five-seater Discovery 3 with expedition preparation by Frogs Island 4x4 were comfortably the wrong side of £35,000. An advert in this magazine last August led me instead to buy a Nissan Patrol with less than 2000 miles on the clock from Neil Slown, who had splashed out more than £11,000 on it at Frogs Island. The equipment tally ticked just about every box on my wish-list.

Press reviews were not kind to the Patrol, but it offers rugged engineering with a minimum of electronics. It's also more refined than my Range Rover Classic. Handling on the Old Man Emu shocks and springs is as good as you would expect for a 3.5-ton vehicle, though the 3.0-litre diesel's fuel consumption has proved disappointing, at 21mpg.

BE PREPARED

Preparation for the trip was mainly administrative – having a nearly-new vehicle with a manufacturer's warranty certainly eases the mind. I packed a full set of replacement belts, two air filters, a spare oil filter and fuel filter, diff and gearbox oils, a full set of bulbs and a toolkit. I had to obtain insurance cover from a specialist overland insurer. One of the few left is Campbell Irvine (see info panel) and cover for a four-week period, based on a vehicle value of £35,000, was £716. Unlike

Land Rover, Nissan's warranty breakdown cover doesn't include Europe, so I bought an annual multi-trip RAC policy for £85. Ferry crossings were booked with SpeedFerries for the Channel (£158 return) and FRS for the Tarifa-Tangiers crossing (€320 open return).

A dash-mounted Garmin GPS 276C with latest European mapping handled the navigation, together with Garmin WorldMap software for Morocco. I carry an older Garmin GPS V as back-up. The WorldMap data is rather old now but I discovered a free downloadable Morocco map from Olaf Kahler's website at: www.island-olaf.de/travel/marokko/gps, which provides very accurate mapping with height contours. Michelin's 742 Morocco 1:1000000-scale map is the best general map. More detailed area maps are obtainable from The Map Shop in Upton-on-Severn, Worcestershire. Logon to: www.themapshop.co.uk

Patrol was bought secondhand for £25k



S1 Discovery is owned by Kris Palmer of High Country. Both vehicles feature body lifts and A/T tyres



We finally hit the road at 09:30 on Sunday 23rd September 2007 and drove from Leamington to Dover via the M25, my son Jonathan and I collecting co-driver and old school friend Hugh Morris along the way. Our schedule was tight as we were expected in Marrakech by Wednesday night – a total of 1768 miles in four days.

After the ferry hop to Boulogne, the Patrol impressed on the French autoroute, cruising

comfortably at 80mph despite the tall roofrack and payload. The latest Garmin GPS maps include hotels, restaurants and petrol stations, so finding night stops and fuel was easy. Sunday night we stayed in Le Mans, Monday night in Burgos, Spain, and by Tuesday afternoon we were well south of Madrid. Pulling strongly uphill at 75mph on the Autovia del Sur, there was a sudden hiss of air and a loss of power – but no warning lights on the dash.

Coasting into a parking area we stopped and opened the bonnet. All fluid levels were ok and we couldn't see any disconnected hoses. A call to the RAC European centre resulted in a breakdown truck collecting us and taking us to the nearest Nissan dealer at Linares. Unlike in the UK, no attempt is made to fix the vehicle by side of the road. The procedure is known by ambulance crews as 'scoop and run'. Sitting in the

Trip costs

Insurance: Accident, fire and theft for Morocco – £716 (Campbell Irvine)
European Breakdown Cover: RAC Annual Multi-trip (member discount) – £85
Ferries: SpeedFerries Dover-Calais return – £158, FRS Tarifa-Tangiers open return – €321, P&O Calais-Dover single – £92

FRANCE (€1 = approx. 77p)

Tolls (total return)	€139.60
Fuel	€395.40
Hotels	€303.90
Food	€160

SPAIN

Tolls	€88.24
Fuel	€241.79
Hotels	€167.10
Food	€173

MOROCCO (1 dirham = approx. 7p)

Tolls	MAD 288
Fuel	MAD 3460
Hotels	MAD 675.40
Food	MAD 1980



Meeting local children en route to an old French mine in the mountains near Azgour

recovery cab at 5:30pm en route to the garage, our prospects of being in Tarifa that night seemed to fade with the dusk.

However, we had reckoned without the Spanish siesta. Arriving just before 18:00, the garage was still open and we met three generations of the Cordoba family working there. An old black and white photograph of the garage in the 1960s with a Series Land Rover on the forecourt had pride of place in the office. Manuel Cordoba fixed the disconnected intercooler hose while Adolfo told us of his own off-road trips to Morocco. We were back on the road within an hour, finally arriving at the port of Tarifa at 23:00.

After experiencing bad signposting and congested traffic in Algeciras the previous year, we decided to cross Tarifa to Tangiers this time rather than Algeciras to Ceuta. Tarifa is a delightful little town and the ferry only takes light vehicles. We boarded the first ferry of the day at 09:00 for the 35-minute crossing, collecting our internet-reserved tickets at the port office. Reading Chris Scott's excellent *Sahara Overland* book reminded us of the border and customs procedures we faced on landing.

In the event, it was much less hassle than the Ceuta border because there was no public access to the customs area. Parting with €15 saw

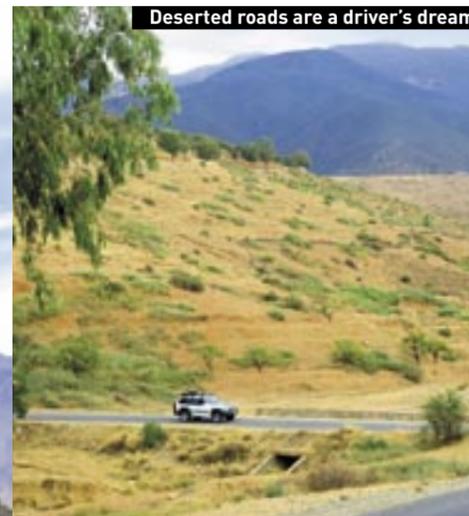
the necessary paperwork completed within 40 minutes. The motorway starts just south of Tangiers and runs all the way to Marrakech, skirting Rabat and Casablanca. Traffic is light and the tolls modest, but there are hazards. Villages cut in half by the road mean pedestrians walk recklessly across. Police set up radar guns on tripods in the central reservation, so drivers are advised to observe the 120km/h limit carefully. After the UK's crowded roads it was a pleasure to drive and savour the scenery on the 350-mile run to Marrakech, where our friends Matthew and Gail Low welcomed us. Resident in Morocco for nearly 20 years, the whole

family speak Arabic and the local Berber dialect. Matthew's company, High Country organises the activities for which I was providing medical cover.

A VIEW TO A THRILL

In this particular High Country event, teams named after Bond films would compete to gain points. Activities included off-road driving, quad biking and camel racing. Fortunately, fellow British doctor Chris Lambert

Deserted roads are a driver's dream



Care was needed over sharp rocks



Kat Palmer gets the Discovery cross-axled



and I had no medical incidents to attend, and our only 'rescues' were to recover a Toyota Land Cruiser with a broken transmission from the off-road course, and change a wheel on another customer vehicle stuck on steep rocky terrain. Camel racing finished the day and it was generally deemed a great success. In fact, the only casualty was the plug on the end of my Garmin GPS power lead, which self-destructed.

With the medical work complete, two trips were planned. The first was to explore an area south-west of Marrakech near Azgour, where we would drive up a riverbed and look at an old French mine in the mountains. The second trip was east of Marrakech to explore pistes near Demnat. Leading the first trip was High Country's Kris Palmer and his wife Kat in their highly-modified Discovery. The riverbed provided some of

the most challenging driving I have experienced and the Patrol acquitted itself well. The only criticism in such rocky terrain is that the low-box ratios could be lower still. The oversize tyres meant having to slip the clutch on occasion and we even had to winch the bellied-out Discovery.

The track to the mine topped out at around 3000m and we were confronted with clouds swirling upwards towards us from the valley below. After two



Nissan built by Frogs Island 4x4



Dick has owned Land Rovers in the past but was impressed by the Patrol's off-road ability

Resources

- www.campbellirvine.com Campbell Irvine, specialist overland insurers.
- www.speedferries.com SpeedFerries, fast and cheap channel ferry crossings.
- www.rac.co.uk RAC European Breakdown cover, single- or multi-trip available.
- www.frs.es FRS ferry from Tarifa to Tangiers. No big lorries – cars and vans only.
- www.frogsisland4x4.com Eddie Priscott's specialist 4x4 preparation company.
- www.garmin.co.uk Garmin, GPS hardware and software systems.
- www.island-olaf.de/travel/marokko/gps Free Morocco base map compatible with Garmin GPS units, downloadable from Olaf Kahler's website.
- www.themapshop.co.uk Map shop in Upton-on-Severn. Very helpful staff and a good map selection.
- www.highcountry.co.uk Matthew Low's Marrakech-based activity company.
- www.acrossmaroc.org Moroccan-registered charity involved in setting up 'Redouane' centre in Marrakech to provide support for special needs children and their families.
- www.campanile.com Europe-wide hotel chain with online booking and reasonable prices.
- www.lookwhatwefound.co.uk Gourmet food packs that don't need refrigeration and are not dehydrated – just heat and eat
- www.caranex.co.uk Lightweight tent that fits on the back of a vehicle – pitches in five minutes.



'UN-spec' white paint looks very cool, as does the matt-black bonnet



Spec: Nissan Patrol Trek

- ➔ ARB full-length expedition roof rack, with jerrycan holder and two working lamps
- ➔ Warn 9.5 XP winch in discreet custom mounting behind front bumper
- ➔ Full Old Man Emu suspension upgrade with castor correction kit
- ➔ ASFIR steering rack and gearbox underbody protection plates
- ➔ BFG M/T oversize (285x75 R16) tyres with two additional wheels and tyres
- ➔ Long Ranger replacement fuel tank – 150-litre capacity
- ➔ ARB air locker front diff, with tyre inflation line for underbonnet compressor
- ➔ Rear locking diff (standard on Patrol – together with electronic disconnecting rear anti-roll bar for improved axle articulation off-road)
- ➔ Twin Optima batteries (1x red, 1x yellow) with Piranha management system
- ➔ Pair of IPF weather-sealed driving lights with wiring loom and relays
- ➔ African Outback heavy-duty drawer system in cargo area, sliding fridge mount
- ➔ Engel 40-litre fridge (mains or 12V), quick-release plate, wired to aux. battery
- ➔ Heavy-duty towbar with electrics and a ball and pin tow hook
- ➔ Window tinting for side-window glass behind B-pillar
- ➔ Nissan luggage guard bolted to original fixing points in the boot

nights under canvas we returned to Marrakech to prepare for the trip to the east.

Taking the road through Ait Ourir, we camped by the dam at Barrage Ait Adel before following a piste along the Tessaout river valley. The scenery was spectacular, but the driving less technically challenging than the previous trip. This would be good walking territory, with opportunities for rock climbing. Our last night in the wild produced a wonderful sunset and next day we returned to Marrakech via Imi-N-Ifri, where there is a natural rock arch. A quick swim in the river beneath amused some of the locals, who then joined in.

Our open-return FRS ferry ticket meant we could be flexible on our crossing, but we decided to drive back to the outskirts of Tangiers to get the first boat of the day. Soon we were back on Spanish soil, heading for an overnight stop at Elche. Skirting Barcelona and crossing the Pyrenees near Andorra, we arrived at Boulogne to prepare for an early ferry crossing.

The next day the Patrol wouldn't start. The glow plug warning light on the dash stayed resolutely on and repeated cranking failed to produce a single spark of life. For the second time we were thrown on the mercies of the RAC. They advised us that the only ferry company that would accept a

recovered vehicle was P&O, so I had to buy a single £92 ticket and be towed on and off their Calais-Dover boat. Apparently the ECU/immobiliser was faulty and had to be replaced with a new unit from Japan, so it was three weeks before I was reunited with the Patrol. My trusty steed hasn't missed a beat since. ■



Loose intercooler hose left the Nissan stranded

