



Range Rover Classic

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Range Rover Classic - Conversions

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[Land-Rover Range Rover Classic](#) >

Range Rover Darien Gap

The British Trans-Americas Expedition - 1971 to 1972

(NB also below: "The Trans-Darien Expedition" 1959-1960 & GM Chevrolet Corvaire; "Daring the Darien" 1962)



[1971 Nov. 28. - Anchorage, Alaska](#)



[1972 Jan. 15. - Panama, Rep. de Panama](#)



[1972 Apr. 30. - Bogota, Colombia](#)



[1972 June 10. - Tierra Del Fuego, Chile](#)

The expedition started on the December 3rd 1971 from Anchorage in Alaska and ended at the southern most tip of Terra del Fuego in Southern America, reached by the June 10th 1972. The two Range Rovers was supplied by Rover Ltd Co and crewed with men from the 17th/21st Lancers. The British Trans-Americas expedition was led by Major John Blashford-Snell, who had Blue Nile and Red Sea expedition experiences behind him.

The route was along the 18.000 miles long Pan-American Highway, with 3 months of crossing through the road less part in the Darien Gap isthmus jungle. The Darien Gap or *El Tapon* - "The Stopper" is a severe and swamping rain forest jungle of 250 miles (400 kilometers). Almost impossible to cross with any vehicle.

In this jungle there are no roads, no bridges, no continuous tracks other than those the Indian knows. The whole area is jungle, swamp and rivers, inhabited by a selection of objectionable mammal, reptile and insects. The expedition was supported with extra men from the British Army,



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[S.M.C. Engineering Ltd - UK](#)
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[Symbol Ltd - UK](#)
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the Governments of Panama and Colombia, the Natural History Museum, the Scientific Exploration Society and scientists to study flora and fauna. The expedition was supported by generous sponsor companies in Britain and America. Duckhams supplied the oil. Tirfor and Mayflower supplied hand winches and recovery gear. Marks and Spencer gave the clothing, and the food company Heinz supplied the expedition with no less than 3 tonnes with food.

The Range Rovers with registered number VXC 765K and VXC 868K, were basically standard LHD vehicles intended for export to Switzerland. Actually no parts was strengthened. The only extra protection were heavy duty towing eyes, special bush bars made from 2 front bumpers and petrol tank guard. Engine and transmission, just standard production items, fitted with snorkel exhaust tube possibilities. The Range Rovers had Fairey engine driven capstan winch, extra halogen spot lights, screen pillar swivel lamps, split charge 2 batteries system, 12x16.5in or 7.50x16 Firestone Super All-Traction swamp tyres and removable wing panels for easier access to them.

Roll over bar, two spare wheels on the roof, roof rack, cold climate dampers, hydraulic hoses and clutch plate. Heated rear screen with washer and wiper, rev counter, oil pressure and temperature gauges, two-way wireless radio between the Range Rover's. Single reclining rear seat, built in safe for passport, money etc in one of the vehicles.

The two Range Rover's were flown from RAF Lyneham to Anchorage via Greeland in December 1971. They drew the Alaskan Highway from Anchorage into the Yukon via Whitehorse and Dawson. The average distance a day was 500 miles and the conditions were roads with ice and snow. The travelling company Travelodge was a sponsor and each Travelodge they stayed at were welcoming them with "Travelodge welcomes Trans-Americans".

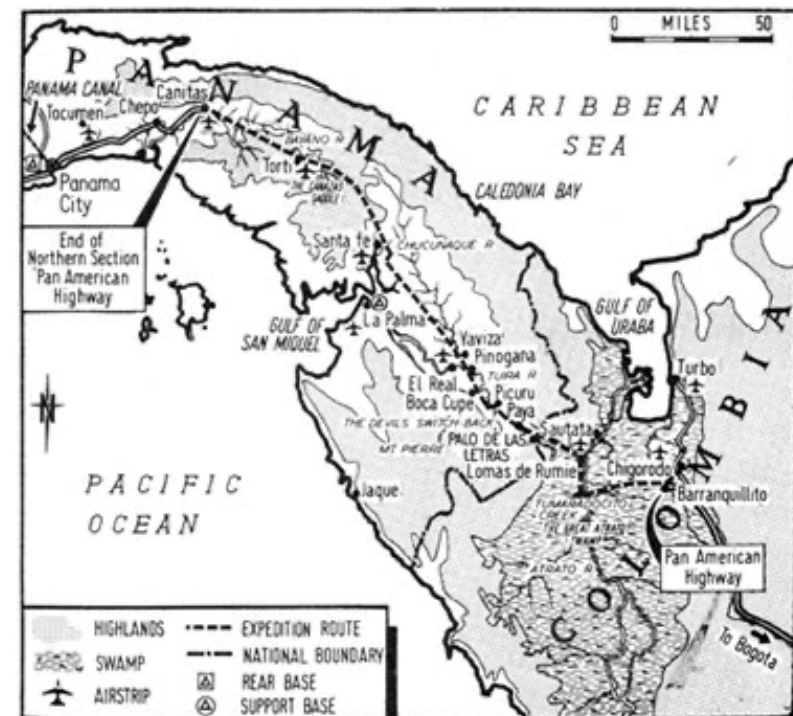
In Canada they nearly lost one of the Rover's as they crashed into one stranded lorry on the slippery frozen tarmac. None in the car was hurt, but the Range Rover needed to be repaired. Gavin Thompson and his crew in the other car, hauled the crashed vehicle via an A-bar to Vancouver in the cold weather. Here they had an extra week delay, waiting for repair parts to be sent from England, then they could straighten and rebuild the Range Rover at the local Leyland dealer. On Dec 23rd they reached San Francisco and arrived Los Angeles on the 24th. Through Mexico and Latin America with press meetings and demonstration for General Somoza, which ordered new Range Rovers for him and his brother the President of Nicaragua, until they reached Panama City on Jan 12th.

In the next days, the rest of the crew arrived and the final preparations where arranged. This year the rain season had been for five weeks longer than normal, leaving the land areas of thick, black, gooey mud. On January 19th they went with the Range Rover's into the jungle.

There were a reconnaissance team to decide the best possible route. Then came the main team which cleared the jungle, then 30 horses to carry the pack. And finally the two Range Rover's which both were driven by Gavin Thompson through the jungle. The first Range Rover were guided by Bob Russell from the Royal Engineers, who walked in front of the vehicles for the whole route, guiding them the right way to drive or wade over rivers. Sergeant Michael Cross walked in front of the second Range Rover.

With each of the vehicles, also walked a crew of eight Royal Engineers who were responsible

for the digging, laying ladders, cutting trees, winching etc to keep the Range Rover's moving through the iungle.



- [Townley Ltd - UK](#)
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Range Rover Classic Special Theme

- [Don Safety Trophy - 1971](#)
- [Range Rover Conversions](#)
- [Range Rover Advertisement](#)
- [Range Rover Camel Trophy](#)
- [Range Rover CKD Assembly](#)

Range Rover Darien Gap

- [Darien Breakthrough](#)
- [Land-Rover Series S1 S2 S3](#)
- [Land Rover Defender](#)

Range Rover Classic by Year

- [Range Rover 1970](#)
- [Range Rover 1971](#)
- [Range Rover 1972](#)
- [Range Rover 1973](#)
- [Range Rover 1974](#)
- [Range Rover 1975](#)
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The speed of the expedition was low, some days only a mile was covered, if they were lucky. The engineers were armed with machetes and power saws, but everywhere the were severe obstacles like huge trees and ruts.

The expedition carried with them solid aluminium ladders which could carry the whole weight of the fully laden Range Rover, but weighted only 100lb each. They were invaluable as bridges in crossing the different obstacles like gullies, ditches, slopes, trees etc. The ladders were also used as platforms on the inflatable Avon rafts to cross rivers and other water obstacles. The rafts were driven by 20 hp Johnson outboard motors or by the vehicles own Fairey capstan winches.

On one occasion they had waded the first vehicle over a small river at the evening before. The second vehicle was to be brought over the next morning. Meanwhile there had been a short, but heavy night rain so the the small river was more fast flowing. They decided to not use the rafts due to the flowing. Gavin was nearly across when the river took the vehicle and pushed them off the course.

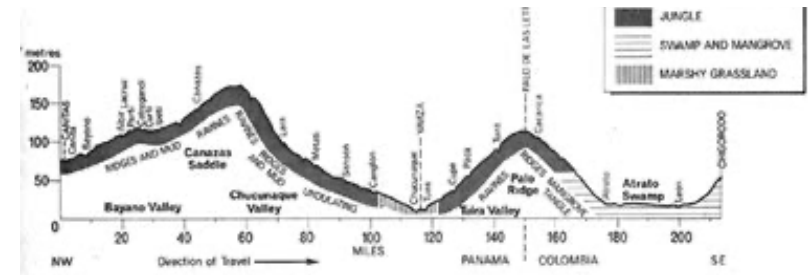
The water went over the bonnet and the engine was rapidly switched off. Now the vehicle was like a dam and the water raised to above the roof height surprisingly fast. After several attempting, the crew managed to fasten a hand driven Tirfor winch to the Range Rover and slowly drew the car out of the wet obstacle. During the drying process where after, there were pumped water out of the cylinders and every oil was changed several times. The Range Rover started and was on the track again !

The expedition had radio contact with the two bases outside the Darien Gap. The Army Air Corps had Beaver aircraft for supply of petrol, mail, supply materials needed in the jungle. The goods were dropped with parachutes from the plane at places market by smoke signal, flares or balloons in the forest. The overall fuel consumption was approximately 1 mpg and the average distance a day through the Darien Gap were only 2 1/2 mile.

The Range Rover's suffered from extreme wear of the rear axle differential, because of the far too heavy loads and nearly 45 degrees of slopes, as well as the impact of the oversized swamp tyres. Much of the heavy load was on the roof with the spare tyres, ladders, rafts and equipment gears, only to give even more strain to the rear axle.

The centre differential could be locked, but with loss of sufficient grip one axle wheel did a fast

spin until grip again was gained, which resulted in even heavier load and wear on the rear axle differential. The big swamp tyres were used from the beginning, but in the deep mud this selection proved to be a mistake. Masses of mud clung to the wheels with much wheel spin as result and with



Land-Rover - Range Rover Expeditions

The Wayback Machine does not have this video archived.



[Range Rover 1990](#)
[Range Rover 1991](#)
[Range Rover 1992](#)
[Range Rover 1993](#)
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[Range Rover 1996](#)

Range Rover Classic US by Year

[Range Rover US 1987](#)
[Range Rover US 1988](#)
[Range Rover US 1989](#)
[Range Rover US 1990](#)
[Range Rover US 1994](#)

Land Rover - Special

[Land Rover-Leyland Group](#)
[Range Rover 1985 Salesman](#)

even bigger impact on the stressed the axles and differential. After 35 miles into the soggy, steamy jungle a rear differential broke and with all the power on the front axle, this unit broke as well. In addition there had been used wrong hypoid gear oil on the axles, which resulted in even harder wear with excessive temperature buildup and even faster axel differential break down, as a result. With one totally broke Range Rover they tried to haul it with the other Range Rover, only to get this vehicle with broken differential, too.

Gavin Thompson was flown out of the jungle to get in contact with Land-Rover Ltd's transmission expert Geoff Miller to explain what and how the differential broke on the Range Rover's. At Solihull in UK the transmission team build up a Range Rover with the same swamp tyres and weight as in the Darien jungle and drove round and round in the Jungle Track at Solihull, until the differential broke. The conclusion was that there were too much weight for the differential to cope with when the big tyres had wheel spin in the mud. Geoff Miller and new differentials were flown in to the Darien jungle. He replaced the broken axles and reduced the total weight pr vehicle, as well as redistributed the weight balance. Off went the swamp tyres and on with the normal cross country ones. For the rest of the expedition there were no more differential problem. The whole session had set the expedition 26 days back according to the plan.

Meanwhile the expedition had bought in a second-hand Land-Rover Series II in Panama and it was used as a pathfinder for tracks through the jungle. The Range Rover's where now back to normal health again and with extra long day sessions, they were able to proceed against the original time schedule, despite even worse terrain ahead.

New trouble hit the expedition when they forced the Devil's Switchback, looked like a saw tooth like terrain with very steep ascents and descents when the small caravan of vehicles proceeded the Pucuru heights against Palo de las Letras at the Panama and Colombian border. The Land-Rover occasionally fell in a ravine and two of the invaluable ladders broke. The misrouting in the severe terrain cost them another extra 10 days delay.

On April 9th, a special event occur when the expedition hit the Colombian border, they found the wrecks of the [Chevrolet Corvairs](#) from [the American expedition in 1962](#) ! The mission with the Chevrolet-led expedition named "Daring the Darien" was to drive 3 Corvairs to the border of South America, and the boundary stone at the border between Panama and Colombia marks the beginning of South America.

The enormous Great Atrato Swamp and river was the last part of the Darien Gap obstacle to overcome and is nearly 60 miles wide. The whole area is as big as Wales. Heading south and then east. This part were mainly forced by rafts. The Atrato svamp lake was weed-choked and machetes and grapnels failed to work. Only solution was to use the the power chain saws to make the obstructions clear and blast a way through the weeds by using a lot of dynamite.

On April the 23rd the expedition reached the river bank which were more of big sponge like islands of floating vegetation, than firm terra, near Barrangquilito. The soft ground were just able to support the weight of the Range Rover's. It was here that the next leg of the Pan-American Highway through South America begins again, after 96 unforgettable days in the 250 mile jungle

of Darien Gap. The British Army and three Rover vehicles had conquered the "*El Tapon*".

On rough and dirty roads they drow down to Medellin. At the British Leyland agent in Bogota, the Range Rove's got a much needed attend and thoroughly service



Range Rover get a much needed extra and thoroughly service.

On May the 13th the expedition started up again further south. The rest of the expedition crew had went home to UK again after a well done expedition. Compared to the severe obstacle of Darien Gap the roads to the Terra del Fuego were more uneventful.

In Quito, Ecuador and Lima, Peru, there were new stops to maintain and service the cars. In Santiago, Chile was new press conference held before they went further to Osorno. On the fast desert roads in Chile they were able to hold a speed of 90-100 mph and covering 800 miles in a day. On four days in Chile the Range Rover's covered 2375 miles! That compared to the speed in the Darien Gap jungle of average 2.5 miles a day!

The expedition had started in winter condition in Alaska and were now hitting winter again. Snow drifts blocked the planned road in Patagonia, so another route via bad roads had to be done. The expedition hit their end at Ushuaia Cape Horn at June 10th.

The mission of The British Trans-Americas Expedition was completed !



swamp tyres that broke down the Range Rover differentials cut-out on the additional front and rear wings in this dramatic scene. Note the exhaust pipe snorkel.

The huge and extra scene.



1971 Dec. 01. - Royal Automobile Club, UK



1971 Dec. 28. - Los Angeles, California, USA



1972 Jan. 04. - Mexico D. F., Mexico



1972 Jan. 10. - San Salvador, El Salvador





[1972 May 18. - Quito, Ecuador](#)



[1972 May 24. - Lima, Peru](#)



[1972 May 29. - Antofagata, Chile](#)

It is so nice to receive all the wonderful emails telling that you get valueable and interesting information about the Range Rover Classic to help you with your project, or just that you visit my site because you have interest or passion for these fantastic Range Rover Classic's.

The interest for Range Rover Classic is really global with visitors last 12 months from more than 180 countries.

If you want to support my work by a donation, I'll be very grateful.

Thanks !



The legendary expedition Range Rovers - VXC 765K and VXC 868K

- the VXC 868K at Gaydon Motor Museum in UK





VXC 868K - still in unrestored condition at Gaydon



Exhibited among other historic British vehicles



Impressive look "British Trans-Americas Expedition"



Original fascia binnacle and steering wheel



Additional instruments and switches for auxiliaries



Communcation radio between the groups in the jungle



Solid rollbar to protect if roll-over happened



Extra seat from Rover P6 with 4-point safety belt

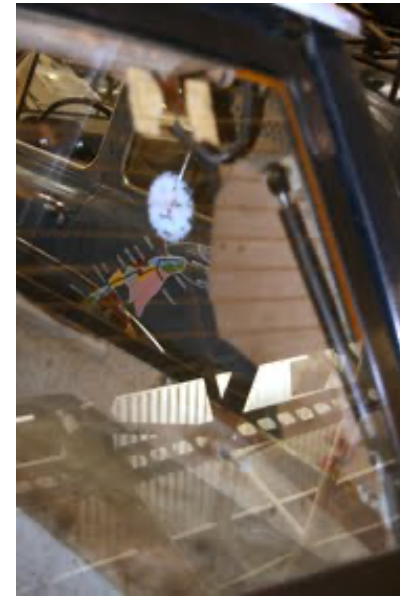


Antenna wire to get contact in the wilderness





Extra solid storage box and rest-bench during long distances. Note the water tank behind driver's seat. Extra storage facility and armrest to the right of the seat



Extra light arrangement at A-post Four-point Britax safety belts The rest-bench and water tank Rear wiper motor arrangement Solid step-bars on the rear door





Strong bush-bar extremely valuable in the jungle



The capstan winch were used every day in Darien



"Tierra del Fuego" the end-point of the expedition



Original "by Land Rover" badge to show the origin



The solid step-bars for easy access to roof-rack



Details of the exhaust snorkel-tube fixings



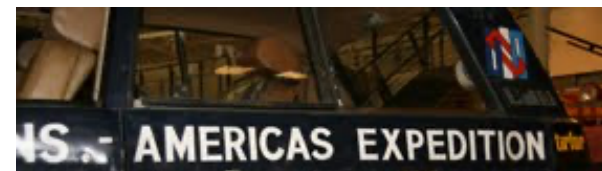
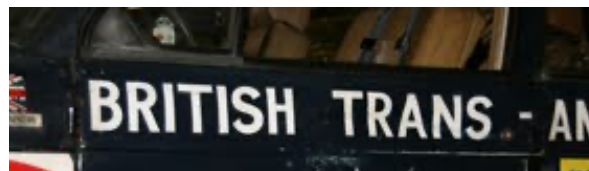
Suffix A scuttle badge and "Union Jack" flag



The Range Rovers had two set of rear wings; one for normal tyres and one with extra cut-outs for swamp tyres



Details of the interchangeable rear wing fixings





The expeditions sponsors:

- Simoniz
- Fairey Winches
- Borg & Beck
- Heinz
- Britax
- Formula One
- Schrader



Sponsors:
- Rover, British Leyland



Sponsors:
- Halfords



Sponsors:
- Viyella (clothing)



Sponsors:
- Holst
- Fred Deely Ltd, Vancouver, Canada
(the BLMC dealer rebuilt the crashed RR)



Sponsors:
- Apaseal
- TraveLodge
- Jacob's
- Lucas
- Gent of Leicester, Siren





Sponsors:
- Duckham (Upper D-post)
- N (?)
- Tirfor (hand-driven winches)



Sponsors:
- Champion



Sponsors:
- Ultramar

- *the VXC 765K at Dunsfold DLR in Surrey, UK*





The VXC 765K Range Rover. Picture is borrowed from Dunsfold DLR

The Range Rover VXC 765K belongs to the [Dunsfold DLR](#) collection in Surrey, UK and is the other Range Rover that completed the British Trans-Americas Expedition in 1972.

Both of the vehicles were extensively modified by Land Rover to cope with the extreme conditions through the expedition. Extra solid roof rack for carrying the aluminium bridging ladders and pontoon rafts, capstan winch, double bumper at the front, extra rear seat, and additional stowage for assorted equipments.

The VXC 765K suffered from severe car accident with a lorry in Canada and were rebuilt there. Both vehicles were fitted with aggressive and huge swamp tyres, which caused excessive differential breakage in the jungle.

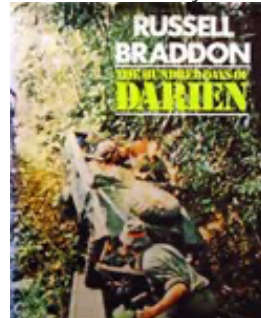
This vehicle was rebuilt in 1974 by the workshop at Land Rover and in 1994 by David Cooper on behalf of the Dunsfold Collection.

The British Trans-Americas Expedition 1971-72 - Literature

1972 The Darien Breakthrough
Official Expedition Brochure



1974 Russell Braddon
The Hundred Days of Darien



1974 John Blashford-Snell
Where the Trails Run Out



1974 John Blashford-Snell
Where the Trails Run Out

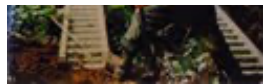


1994 John Blashford-Snell
Something Lost Behind the Ranges





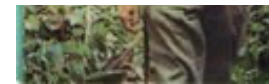
Link to brochure:
1972.844/9.72



William Collins Son & Co Ltd, London
ISBN 0002161508



The Travel Book Club
London, 1975

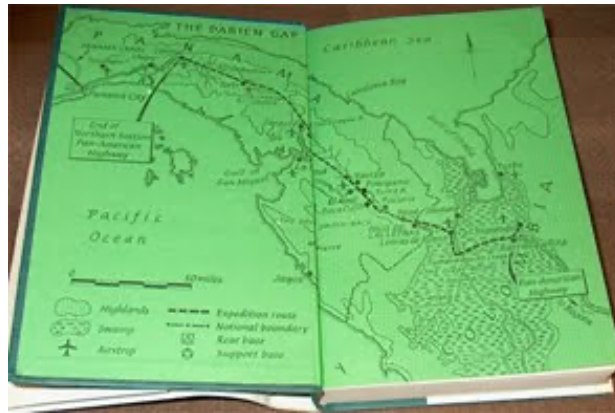


Hutchinson, London
ISBN 0091213606



Harper Collins Publishers, London
ISBN 0002550342

From the book of R. Braddon:



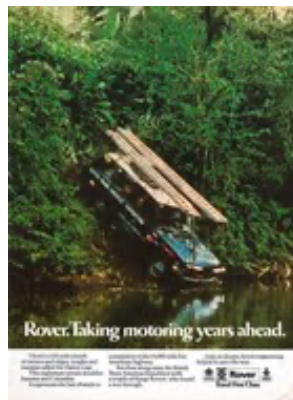
From the book of J. Blashford-Snell:



From the biography of J B S:

The British Trans-Americas Expedition 1971-72 - Adverts

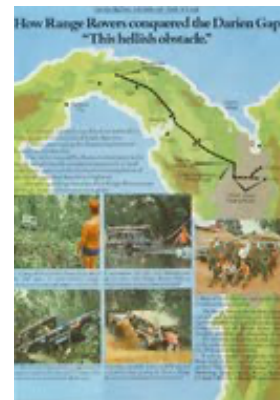
1972 Range Rover
Darien Gap



1972 Range Rover
Darien Gap Jungle



1972 Range Rover
How the RR conquered the Darien Gap



Link to advertisement:
[Range Rover Darien Gap](#)

Link to advertisement:
[Range Rover Darien](#)

Link to advertisement:
[1972 "The Hellish Obstacle"](#)

Automotive Product Group
1972 Trans-Americas



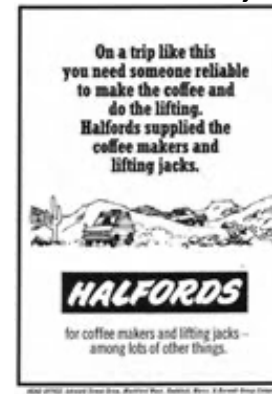
Link to advertisement:
[1972 AP Darien Gap](#)

1972 Burman Steering
Trans-American



Link to advertisement:
[1972 Burman Steering](#)

1972 Halfords
Coffee makers and jacks



Link to advertisement:
[1972 Halfords](#)

1972 Porter Co
Thermoid Clutch



Link to advertisement:
[1972 Porter Co](#)

Other known expeditions:

1960: The Trans-Darien Expedition

Illustration from the 1961 Land-Rover sales brochure



Link to brochure:
[1961 609/D Land-Rover brochure](#)

In 1958, Richard E. Bevir, a former SAS man from UK had written a letter to the International Road Federation in Washington D.C. about the possibility to drive some kind of a vehicle from North America to the South. The answer was that it is completely impossible for any vehicle to "drive" through the road less Darien area of 300 miles from south of the Panama Channel, more exact Chepo through the jungle down to Quibdo, Colombia. The Darien area was also called *El Tapon - 'The Stopper'* and had a gruesome history of murder, treachery and diseases.

So, in 1959 Mr Bevir and his friend Terrence Whitfield a mechanical engineers from Sydney, Australia, planned what came to be, "The Trans-Darien Expedition". They chose the British built Land-Rover 88 Station wagon. The only vehicle rugged and light enough to be able to manage such expedition. The Land Rover was rigged with room for extra jerry cans, a solid winch connected to the power outlet in front of the engine, plus a sturdy roll bar. This turned out to be very necessary preparations.

October 16th 1959, the fully laden Land-Rover started the expedition from Toronto in Canada heading for Chepo in Panama. In Costa Rica, 100 miles south of San Jose they had to manage a road less 135-mile Costa Rica "gap" and Richard and Terry were the first to handle a vehicle through this road less part of the Pan-American Highway in the rain season in December 1959. This was just a foretaste of things to come longer south.

On the Christmas Eve 1959 they arrived Panama City after a very fatiguing journey through the *Severe winching in the Panamanien Darien Jungle in 1960* jungle and damaged roads in the rainy season. In Panama Richard and Terry contacted the

Darien Sub-Committee, an international group of engineers working with the forbidden task of exploring a route for the future Pan-American Highway.

There has been an American dream to have the possibility to take the car and drive the American Continent from the Polar Circle in Alaska to the Polar Circle in Chile. As early as in 1925 the first Pan American Highway Congress met in Buenos Aires and the nations of Americas devoted their vision, their engineering skills and the money to complete the Pan American Highway. One of the mission were to pioneer the plans for a highway through Darién. Still today ([2010](#)) the Pan-American Highway is still a vision.

In 1960 the Highway ended from north at Chepo in Panama and began again 506 miles longer south at Quibdo in Colombia. The Darien or Isthmus of Panama is packed with incredibly dense jungle vegetation, steep hills and uncountable river obstacles.

The Pan American Highway Congress' Sub-Committee sponsored the expedition through the



forbidden Darien with a ANGR9 ("Angry nine") radio transmitter, food and gasoline. The U.S. Army built them a winch anchor after the experiences in "Costa Rica gap" to use in muddy and swampy areas and Richard and Terry were invited to participate Army's "Jungle Warfare Training Center".

So when they were at the end of the preparations, the Sub-committee had contact with an other group, also planning for a expedition through Darien using a Jeep Pickup. So these two groups joined together in the "Trans-Darien Expedition". The Jeep were driven by Amado Araúz, the expedition's cartographer and historian and his wife [Dr. Reina Torres de Araúz](#), one of Panama's *Trans-Darien Expedition route at Darien in 1960 ended Palo de las Letras* distinguished anthropologists to study Indians. Dr. Reina also participated the "British Trans-Americas Expedition", 11 years later in 1971-72, with the Range Rovers.

Kip Ross, from National Geographic, participated from Panama. Otis Imboden, Tennessee, a jungle expert and cameraman, Ilse Abshagen, Germany, correspondent for European newspapers and Wiry Eugenio Ávila, together with nine Panamanian woodsmen with machetes, axes and a power-saw, and guides ready to chop out the track for the next few months, also sponsored by the Sub-Committee, counted the Trans-Darien Expedition members.

Feb. 3rd 1960, the extended "Trans-Darien Expedition" now both scientific and international left Panama City of Chepo heading for the Darien Gap. Right south of Chepo hit the rusty sign: "End of the Pan-American Highway - here begins the Darien Gap". The jungle was like a green wall. From the very beginning they had to use the winch nearly all the time. The ground was so slippery and wet.

March 3rd 1960, they reached the River Ipeti, 67 miles in the jungle. Already 35 log bridges were built. Here they asked for more supplies transported by canoes. At river Ipeti the Indians ordered the expedition to come to their village to have full-scale tribal conference on what they doing and where they go further. As the expedition were halfway in their territory, they were allowed to go on with the expedition.

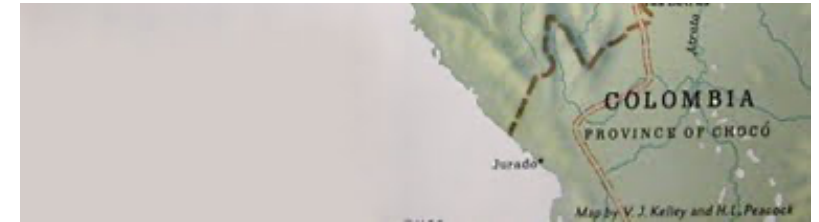
The woodsmen chopped the tracks, bridges built over small ravines and small streams. Ahead of the vehicles outriders walked and held an eye after sharp thorns and hidden holes.

One of the many provisional bridges that had to be built in the jungle

At one occasion at a ravine forcing there had been built a skeleton bridge of palm logs and when the Jeep, at first, were at the middle of the bridge, the logs began to sag and the Jeep tipped slowly over and down in the ditch. No one was injured and the Jeep could be winched up again.

During the April the expedition had been able to manage 105 hard miles. In the beginning of May near the new rain season they were no longer sure their position. According to the Indian guides they should have crossed the River Cue by long and they were lost. The radio generator had fallen off the Jeep and for 5 days Terry tried to fix the generator and he did!

In the village Yaviza and other village at Darien, there had never been a vehicle before, so there were big commotion and people swarmed around the cars. To cross the river Chucunaque and Tuira a flat-bottomed barge were used. After two months since the expedition left Chepo they reached El Real and were welcomed by 800 peoples. El Real had for three centuries been used as a transshipment port for gold from the goldmines around to be shipped to Panama City. Several raids had many times



(Source: National Geographic, March 1961)



vounded the city Ñl Real and their citizens.

South of El Real the terrain started fairly OK, but then they reach the ridges. The land rose and the rainwater had cut out deep ravines. The expedition had short daily distances because every inch of jungle were an obstacle and some of the ridges were of 65 degrees steep downhill or upwards up to 600 feet high. The winches and steel cable were used to surmount the ridges. These maneuvers were quite dangerous, often hanging the weights of the cars in the cable wires directly over the men.

Not a long distance from the border between Panama and Colombia, measured in air line only a few miles there was a serious incident. First they had winched the Jeep up a steep ridge and the Land-Rover was on the way up, hanging in the steel cables and Terry behind the steering wheel. *In the very steep terrain near the border, winching were used constantly* Suddenly a pulley pin snapped and the Land-Rover turned over and tumbled over and over down

70 feet long slope with Terry inside the vehicle. At the bottom the Land-Rover laid at the side and after a minute the door opened and Terry crawled out of the car apparently without injury. What had saved him was the safety straps on the drivers seat and the roll bar. When he tried the starter, the engine fired up again. Amazing!

After this incident Terry got also malaria and were sick for 4 days. Malaria in the warm rain forest is no pleasant experience. They wrapped Terry in his the sleeping bag and strapped him to the front seat. Now the rain season had started again and the whole expedition was soaked to skin for the next 6 weeks. Because of the rain the mosquitos were really eager after blood.

Finally at May 13th 1960, they hitted Palo de las Letras and the border between Panama and Colombia. The border is marked with a concrete monument.

[Richard E. Bevir and Terrence Whitfield with their vehicle the Land-Rover called La Cucaracha Carinosa \(The Affectionate Cockroach\) were the first ever vehicle to drive overland from North to South America,](#) as the Jeep only started from Panama.

The mission of the expedition were to go to Palo de las Letras and the ceremony were held with festivities.



They had 5 miles before reaching River Cacarica where they had planned to build rafts and float the vehicles and the expedition members and supplies 40 miles through the Atrato waterway system. By using the waterway they could reach Quibdo in Colombia where the Pan-American Highway started again.

In 3 days they were at the river Cacaricas banks, but needed one extra week to get suitable balsa logs to build the rafts. To assemble the rafts took another week. Two of the crew member had to be sent to hospital in Quibdo by canoe, because of jungle exhaustion and malaria.

With the vehicles and the supply on the rafts and ready for floating away the rain had stopped only to be stuck on the rocks in the river at a rapid. They had to wait for 2 days before the rain began again. Now they floated almost out of control over the next 12 miles over 40 sets of rapids and 2 hours in whirlpools.

Then again hindered by a huge obstacle of rocks, waterplants and weeds. Another 19 miles *The Trans-Darien at the border between Panama and Colombia* had to be hacked out to bypass the river.

Now it was Richard turn to get malaria.

June 17th 1960, the expedition reached Quibdo, Colombia with a welcome like heroes. A week later they arrived Bogota capital of Colombia and then the official end of their journey. The Land-Rover was really battered, almost to the unrecognizable. The windshield cracked, the roof rack torn off and the body dented and scarred, but the Land-Rover still purred proudly.

From Chepo via Palo de las Letras to Ouibdo the expedition had:

- 134 days to take the 310 miles distance, less than 3 miles a day average
- 180 creeks and rivers crossed
- 125 palm log bridges built
- 3 rafts built
- 90 punctures
- combat malaria, dysentery and jungle exhaustion
- mainly diet of rice, bananas, monkey and lizard



The whole expedition were also managed in the light of that one day the motorists could drive fast and comfortable on the future Pan-American Highway through Darien.
Land-Rover "parked" overnight in a backwater in Atrato watersystem

Rafted

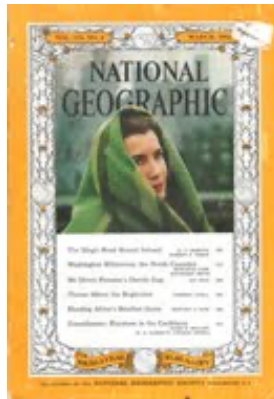


Still today only a dream.....

Sources:

- National Geographic, March 1961
- Autocar, December 1961
- Popular Mechanics, August 1961

Literature:



National Geographic

Bevir and Terrence Whitfield before the Trans-Darien Expedition

March 1961
*"We Drove Panama's
Darién Gap"*
by Kip Ross



Popular Mechanics

August 1961
*"We Built Our Own Road
Trough the Darien Gap"*
by Richard E. Bevir



The Autocar

December 1st 1961
"Linking the Americas"
by Richard E. Bevir



Richard

1962: Daring the Darien Expedition - Chevrolet Corvairs





The [Chevrolet Corvair](#) was a modern car with air-cooled engine

In 1962 - GM - General Motors led an expedition "Daring the Darien" across the Darien Gap with 3 golden Chevrolet Corvairs, supported and a fuel truck as a serious expedition as well as a great PR-stunt for the Corvair model.

The Corvair model were both an advanced new car with a flat 6-cylinder boxer engine in the back of the car, drive on the rear wheel via an advanced swing-axel, and the Corvair was a very hated vehicle because of the many serious accidents there were with Chevrolet Corvairs.

[Ralph Nader](#) led an consumer safety organization looking at the American Car Industry and he wrote a book in 1965 "[Unsafe at any speed](#)", which is often characterized the book about the Corvair, but only one chapter is about the Corvair.

To defend the market's perception of the Chevrolet Corvair, GM did several PR actions like this expedition through Darien in 1962.

The Corvairs had a very impressive suspension system and because the engine were at the rear above the driving wheels, it managed the water well and it did not get stucked so easily as ordinary 2-wheel drive cars with engine in front and driving wheels at rear. The expedition Corvairs were prepared with water proof electrical system, but they had only drive on the rear wheels and they were not equipped with a winch.

The fuel supply truck had both 4-wheel drive and a rigid winch. Because of the huge size and the heavy weight, the truck was a big challenge to get through the jungle.

Local woodmen chopped driveable tracks in the jungle and made bridges over ditches with tree logs.

The films at the right shows in an



In 1990, the wrecks of the [Chevrolet Corvairs still existed](#) at the expedition's ending point

YouTube Video

The Wayback Machine does not have this video archived.

YouTube Video

We have not been able to archive the video associated with this YouTube page.

"UN8"



right shows in an impressive way much of the tremendous hardships there is to cross the jungle in Darien Gap area. The Corvair expedition headed the border between Panama and Colombia at Palo de las Letras.

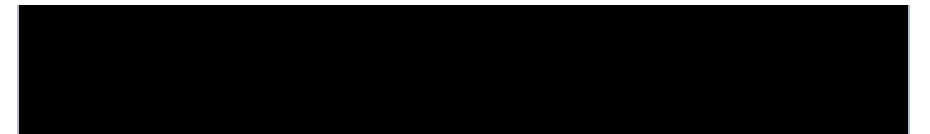
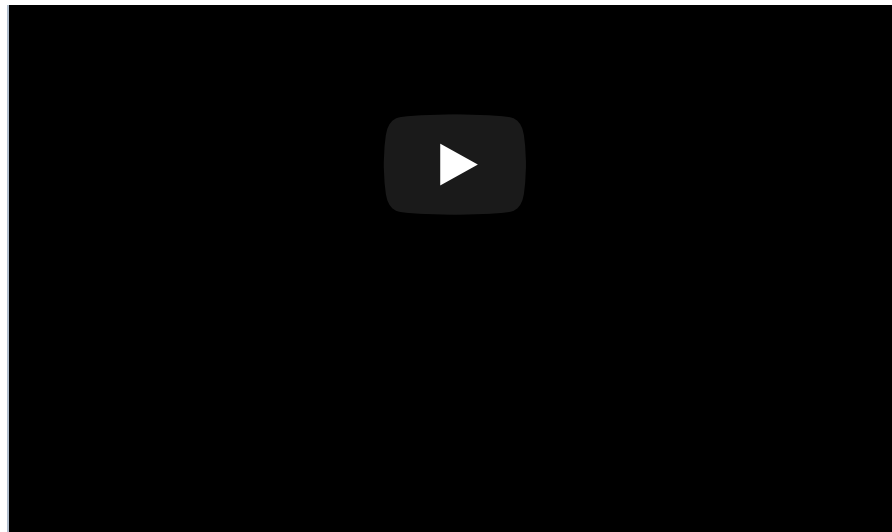
The battered Corvair vehicles with only a few 1000-miles on the odometer were left in the jungle and the British Trans-Americas Expedition found the Corvairs at their expedition in 1972.

In Russell Braddons book "The Hundred Days of Darien" from the British expedition of 1972 one picture shows when they re-discovered the Corvairs near the Panamanien/Colombian border.

Again in 1990, the Corvairs were again pictured as shown above of a group of American Jeep enthusiasts.

Please enjoy these fantastic films.....

Source: [Corvairsation - December 2008](#)



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Subpages (1): [Darien Breakthrough](#)

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