

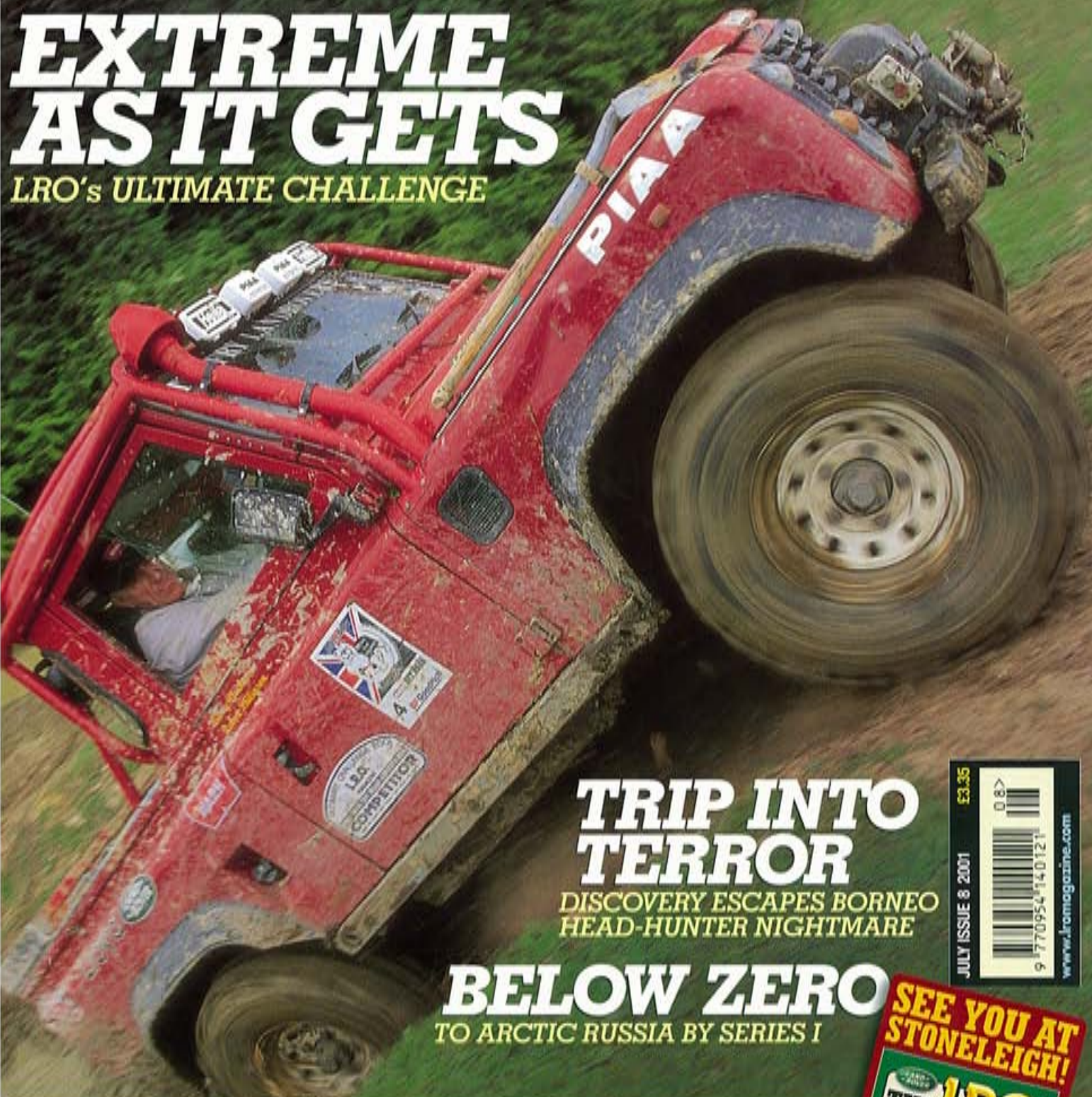
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JULY ISSUE 8 2001
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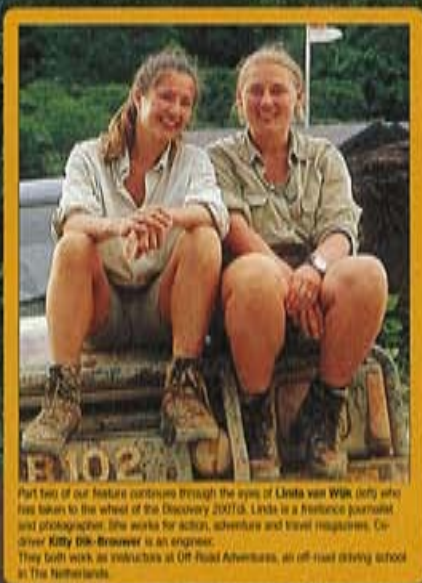
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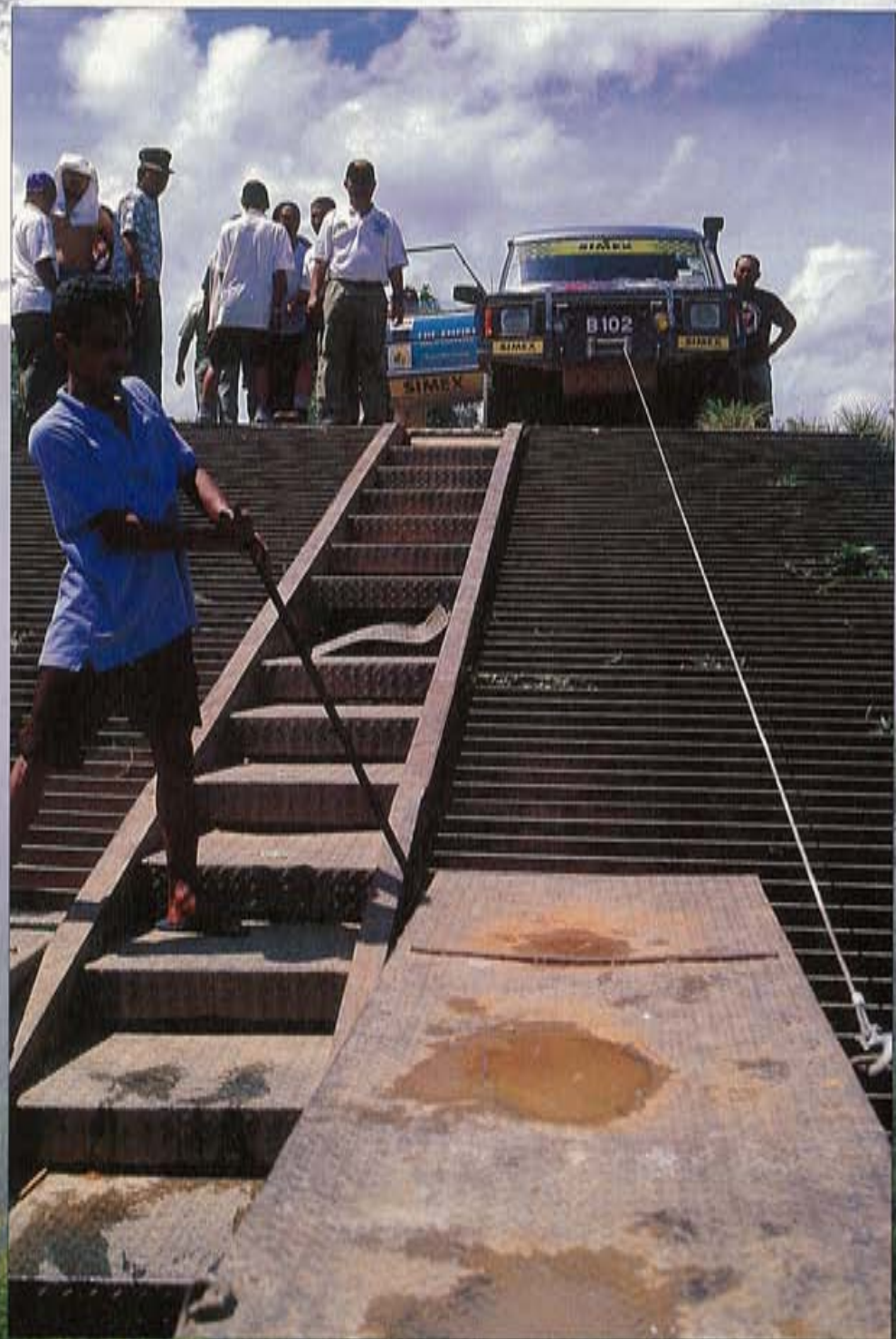
Part two of our feature continues through the eyes of Linda van Wijk, lady who has taken to the wheel of the Discovery 2007D. Linda is a freelance journalist and photographer. She works for action, adventure and travel magazines. Co-driver Kelly Die-Brouwer is an engineer. They both work as instructors at Off-Road Adventures, an off-road driving school in The Netherlands.

What started out as a fun expedition to cross Borneo has turned out to be a journey into a nightmare. The Dayaks are chopping the heads off the Madurese in the Kalimantan jungle, and that's exactly where we are – we're driving through a warzone. Welcome to the Brunei 4WD International Challenge...

Wild men of Borneo

Part two





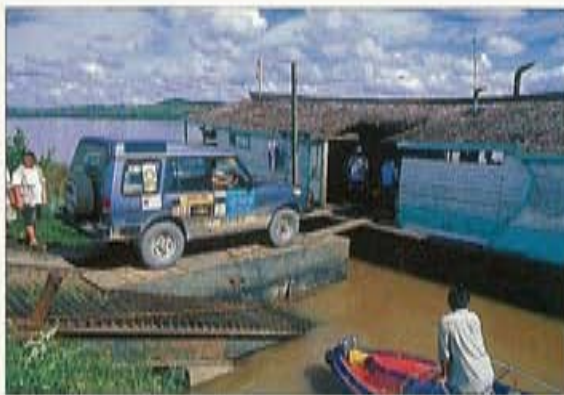
The adventure has started. LRO's Dave and Fiona have left Borneo, leaving us in the very capable hands of the 200Tdi Discovery. We've just crossed over the Kalimantan border and our convoy is stuck. A putrid, kilometre-wide river is our obstacle and, typically, the ferry to get us across has broken down. On the other side of the river, the off-road stretch lies ahead of us.

"The solution," expedition leader Ibrahim Damit tells us, "is to use this boat instead of the ferry," and he points to the wooden houseboat behind him. But that's not all. We have to saw through the middle of it to make a vehicle fit.

Our Disco leads the operation at

the shore, winching two pontoons to allow vehicles to drive on to the houseboat. We're the first to find out whether the houseboat is strong enough to take a vehicle. The crowd holds its breath as the Disco drives – in first gear low-box – on to the deck. For a moment it seems the boat is bending over sideways, and the nose of the Disco can already smell the coffee-coloured water. But the vessel rights itself and the crowd shouts with excitement as the first vehicle is ready for shipment. By the time we're across the river it's late afternoon. Heavy thunder and rain continues throughout the night, as does the operation of getting the other vehicles over. By four o'clock in the morning, all the vehicles are at the

Above: Disco winch power hoists pontoons in place, ready for the vehicles' ascent onto a rickety houseboat for the river crossing



Above: the vehicles go in one by one, Noah's Ark style. Right: traversing the pontoons requires some skillful driving. Bottom: ferrying the convoy across the river takes all night



other side. We start moving at five.

Several years ago I completed a similar journey in Borneo. Back then, the north to south crossing was off-road all the way. The small ferries we used to traverse the many rivers have

since been replaced by bridges and there are just 500 kilometres of off-road driving left. The muddy orange roads are cut through the jungle by logging companies who have eaten their way right to the centre of Borneo. My guess is that, in another five years, you'll be able to drive the length of Borneo on tarmac.

According to the expedition's official program we should drive from south to north through Sulawesi, on to Sabah and end up in Brunei to complete the circumnavigation of Borneo. But, when I ask Ibrahim to draw the route on my map of South East Asia, I'm told of some changes to the schedule. The convoy will now take a different ferry, merely touching Sulawesi, and go back the same way – through Kalimantan and Sarawak. This means that the name of the event – The TransSulawesi – is no longer applicable, and my reason for joining the expedition – to travel through Sulawesi – will not happen.

From the beginning of this expedition there was a lack of information: there have been no briefings, we only hear about itinerary changes at the last minute and when the convoy comes to a halt, nobody knows why and for how long. Time management is also a problem. From the first day onwards, we have stopped several times during the day. This wastes up to six hours of driving time, and also means we have to drive during the night to catch up.

The rain has done its job – the track



Expedition leader Ibrahim Damit is determined to lead the convoy to the end of the route – even if it does mean crossing a warzone

is as muddy as it can be and there's no way of avoiding the huge holes. At last everyone is smiling. After a week of city driving, this off-road fun is just what the doctor ordered. We discuss our strategy with one of the officials, Hamdan, who shares our vehicle – we want to do as much driving as possible. Our Discovery is not prepared for tough terrain and the winch has no modifications at all. Even the tyres are standard. Kitty and I, both used to driving Defenders,



A fish and chip supper Brunei-style: locals load their scooters with river fish at the Tayan market





Left: Kitty looks on as the Discovery fights its way through the thick mire



are pleasantly surprised by the way the Disco dances through the mud. It's when we go uphill that we miss some power. A 300Tdi would be perfect for this trip.

Second gear high is no longer working. To get round this, we decide to use third and fourth gear low, to maintain speed but also to go slowly enough to keep the vehicle in one piece. This, in combination with the diff lock, seems to cope well with the slippery hill tracks, deep mud and potholes.

Of course, all the men are waiting for the girls' vehicle to get bogged down. Luckily, the only one to get stuck, while driving our Disco, is

Inset: Kitty gets set for winning. With over 500km of gruelling off-road terrain to cover, this was a regular procedure. Below: idyllic picnic spot; not so tranquil come nightfall



ADVENTURE

Hamdan. Kitty jumps into the mud to release the winch cable, hook it up to a vehicle and signal him out of the sticky clay. With the sun beating down, the mud is dry by noon, and all the vehicles are left coated with an orange-brown layer.

That afternoon we enter the Dayak area. The place is shrouded in animosity. The Dayaks' goal is to chase all Madurese off the island: out of Kalimantan. And this is what they've been doing, by chopping the heads off more than 450 Madurese and burning their wooden houses.

The Madurese came to Kalimantan in the 60s, placed here by the Indonesian government as part of a relocation project, to create harmony among the Indonesian population. The Madurese were given land, started to farm and became relatively wealthy. The Dayaks believe that the land is theirs, hence the hostility towards the Madurese.

We thought things had calmed down and the Madurese had been evacuated. But thousands of them had fled into the jungle. The Dayaks are hunting there at night; hundreds of their warriors are brought in by the truckload. They kill Madurese men, women and children but only cut the heads off their male victims, and then take them home as a trophy.

In one particular village we stop at

Below: we tentatively drive through the small villages



Left: he could be a Dayak warrior or a local hunter. We don't stick around to find out. Above: rotting pig has been dumped in the bushes. Below: the convoy called upon the services of a military escort when travelling through some of the most dangerous areas





Abandoned Series vehicle is left to nature

some of the competitors spot Dayaks in warrior outfit at the side of the roads. They wear headbands, carry spears and knives, and have tattoos on their arms to show how many scalps they've collected. The next day it looks like Ibrahim is slowing the convoy down on purpose. We only drive 100 kilometres on gravel roads. Again we don't get any information. What's going on?

In the evening we try passing through another Dayak village. The road is blocked with a makeshift barrier – wooden poles held up with a couple of oil drums. A group of Dayaks stand beside it, hiding their knives in their sleeves. We have to fuel up in one of these villages. The Dayaks don't smile. The women are watching us and we all stay in our vehicles. You can feel the tension in the air. At the beginning of the next village there's another roadblock. A group of men armed with knives and spears are watching our every move.

Kitty and I start wondering why we're not following the official program. Is it because 20 cars and



Kitty and Discovery take a break at one of the many police stops along the route

two sponsors backed out just before the start of the expedition, due to the mass murder in Kalimantan? That means less money to spend and probably the reason why we skip hotels and sleep in our vehicles every night. And why has the route changed so often? Why do the participants refuse to stop to help the locals that are stuck in the mud? Whenever I ask Ibrahim a question he doesn't want to answer, he smiles and walks away without saying anything. Most participants are afraid. One says: "I put my faith in Ibrahim's hands." Another replies: "If Allah wants us to live, we live." That's when I really get scared.

Ibrahim announces that he's leaving with a couple of vehicles who haven't got fuelled up yet. I grab the VHF radio and suggest staying together in convoy, driving through this dangerous area as quickly as possible. The officials are angry with me. They reckon most participants don't realise it's dangerous here. Come on, everybody knows, I talk to Ibrahim. He admits that we are driving through a warzone. I ask him to backtrack and abort the expedition. But we drive on regardless.

As night falls, we see groups of Dayaks entering the jungle with their burning torches. Shivers run down my spine when we hear sickening screams. Hamdan places branches around the vehicle in case he falls asleep and the Dayaks attack. We are stuck between two tribes at war. Ibrahim tells us not to worry, saying that the fighting is between the Dayaks and the Madurese and that they won't harm us. But in a war, hostile situations can escalate.

I cannot sleep. Today we'll be entering the red area. That's where the real trouble is. During the day the situation doesn't seem so bad but, when night falls and the hunting starts, Kitty and I really feel threatened. We stop to fill up with fuel, wash, eat and relax. I talk to some of the participants and find out that all officials are army officers or ex-army officers. That explains a lot. They seem to like driving through a warzone, enjoying the tension of being in a dangerous place.

I also discover that Ibrahim was advised to abort the expedition before it had even started. He had assured me that everything was fine. Kitty and I decide that enough is enough. But how do you step out of an expedition when you're surrounded by trouble?

We look at the map. Palangkan Bun is the next town with an airport. We pack our bags while Hamdan is driving. At the junction to Palangkan Bun, a military escort is waiting for the convoy. The convoy wants to turn



Above: fuelling up the Discovery, by any available means

right and go through three more villages where the war is raging: Sampit, Palangkaraya and Banjarmasin. We want to go left. Ibrahim says Palangkan Bun is the worst place to go at the moment. It is closed off completely by the military to prevent the truckloads of Dayak warriors entering the area. Madurese houses are burned down every night. They expect a provocation.

A police stop at the next junction provides an opportunity for us to ask about flights. Today's flights are full, but they can arrange two tickets for tomorrow. We have to choose between carrying on with the convoy and the military escort, or leaving with the Indonesian policemen who don't speak a word of English, hoping they will arrange the tickets and there will be a safe place to sleep. We take the chance, put our rucksacks into the police truck and say our goodbyes to the convoy.

In the hotel at Palangkan Bun we meet an American journalist and an English photographer. Their stories make us realise that the situation is far more serious than we first thought. We made the right decision and flew out the next day.

It turns out that the convoy went on at the same easy-going pace, driving through Sampit, touching Sulawesi and stopping for a welcome ceremony in Palangkaraya.

But their big surprise was yet to come. Following the ceremony, the convoy had to follow the same route back: through Kalimantan and the warzone. Another three people stepped out of the expedition.

The Brunei 4x4 International Challenge 2001 was a little *too* challenging for many of us... **TRC**