



Lothersdale Off Road Day Sunday 7th November 2021



After a week of unsettled weather, Sunday dawned optimistically with high cloud, a watery sun and no rain forecast. The Yorkshire 4 x 4 Family Club members arrived at Lothersdale, from their various parts of Yorkshire to a small farm gate, high out on the hill from Crosshills, where our day of off-roading was to be held. Fighting to open the gate – it had the added security of a large boulder in front of it – we drove into a field of cows, who nonchalantly acknowledged us before continuing to chew their grass. We followed the track up to another gate – equally hard to open, the cows definitely wouldn't be escaping - and into another large field, full of bomb holes, rough tracks, rocks and boulders, muddy areas and a large water filled crater. We had arrived.



As the off-road entrance wasn't particularly noticeable (until the banners arrived), and we had a few new members trying out Lothersdale for the first time, we decided to park on a vantage point to watch out for people arriving. One Land Rover sailed past and we dismissed it as just a passing vehicle, but a few minutes later, we got a call from him, saying he couldn't find the entrance. From our viewpoint, we spotted him coming back down the road and was able to tell him when to turn in. He was immensely grateful.

Once the banners were hung on the stone wall at the entrance, we headed towards the back of the field, probably the highest point of the whole site. Despite the relative warm spell, the wind was howling a hoolie and there was nothing to stop it except a dry stone wall and us. Lothersdale seems to have its own unique weather – it's always very windy and never particularly warm, even in high summer. We've learnt to come prepared. More vehicles appeared as we parked up, said hello to each other and caught up in general. There were quite a few new faces which was great for our little Club. We decided not to put

up the Club gazebo, fearing it would take off and be in Keighley before you could say 4x4 and decided the best option was to huddle behind the dry stone wall (with convenient through stones to sit on) or your vehicle. As we chatted to everybody, the vehicles were scrutinised and checked and a few members went out to check out the terrain.

The sun was trying its best to peep out behind the clouds, which brightened the day. However, heavy coats, gloves and woolley hats were making an appearance. A course was set out with numbered garden canes, the little yellow markers securely taped down so they didn't get whisked away in the breeze. More 4x4's and their owners arrived and were welcomed to our Club. There was quite a collection of vehicles and it looked impressive.

After a quick welcome and reminder of rules, people jumped into their vehicles and headed off for a play. The top half of the field is mainly rough grassland, with rutted tracks heading downwards towards the valley. The farmer had sporadically dumped piles of stone and soil around the field, which posed some challenges. In the other direction, heading back to the main road, the field was a lot rougher with a deep central pit to climb in and out of and being on a slope, the tracks were interesting to negotiate. Splitting both sections was a churned up muddy patch, adjacent to a large water filled crater that nobody really wanted to venture into.



After a recce, people returned back to base, had a warming cuppa and headed off again and that how the day panned out. Some people hanging out, others off to challenge themselves. The views up here are stunning, looking up the Aire valley towards Keighley and beyond, with towns and villages connected by roads and rail, industry and residential abutting each other – it would be the perfect geography lesson - and all of it surrounded by moorland, distant stone towers and viewpoints. It was a wild beauty, but still in touch with civilisation.

After lunch, we decided to play on the little course that had been set up. We decided not to make it a timed challenge, but using our skills to negotiate the canes without stopping on the course. Landys, Rangers and a Hilux queued up to have a go, with a tricky bend to get round without touching or missing the canes.



After half an hour of going one way, a couple of the drivers decided to drive the other way round to see if that was equally challenging. So that started another round. With everybody wandering off after exhausting all possibilities on the course, another driver in a Land Rover decided to actually drive backwards round the course, which he did

quite successfully, though he did have an assistant telling him which way to go. Another chap decided to go solo and did rather well, though several canes were taken out and laid forlornly in the mud, their little numbered markers flapping weakly in the wind.

The tracks were getting quite tricky as numerous vehicles turned the soft ground into sludge – vehicles struggled for grip and fishtailed up slopes and hills. The ruts were getting deeper and hidden stones and boulders scraped the undersides. The water filled crater proved irresistible to one young member in a raised Discovery, who took great delight in wallowing in

it. He was quite happy and took the resulting mud splats up the side of his vehicle as a badge of honour. We all sighed in resignation and left him to it.

The afternoon wore on and people were starting to head off home after a splendid day of off-roading. There were only a few of us, when we noticed a Landy in distress near the water crater. On closer inspection, we found out that his front wheel hub had sheared off and the whole wheel was hanging off at an angle. Of course, this catastrophe had happened in the muddiest part of the whole area, as it would. We gathered round, proffering jacks and tools while the owner made a phone call – he could get a spare hub, which was fortunate as there was no way we could tow him back on the road which involved a muddy sloping track and the cow field. We couldn't see an AA or RAC man relishing the thought of coming up to us either.



There was a lengthy wait for the delivery of the part. We watched as the hub was taken off, munching the last of the food and sipping cups of tea. The wind still howled, but by this time we had so many layers of clothing on, we didn't feel it. The sun was sinking in the sky when the new hub appeared and within half an hour, the Land Rover was back on four wheels. We packed up our stuff and prepared to leave, watching in trepidation as a Ford Ranger and elderly Land Rover briefly got stuck in the gloop, both drivers successfully re-emerging after a bit of a battle. It had been a successful day with only one tow rope being used earlier in the day!

The light was beginning to fade as we finally shut the farm gate by the road. There was talk of calling the AA man to take the wounded Landy back home, so a few people parked up on the roadside, while others bade their farewells and headed off into the deepening gloom. It had been a fantastic day, the weather good, the company excellent and great to see so many new faces. Lovely comments appeared later on our Facebook page. Sadly Lotherdale was our last gymkhana of the year, but roll on 2022!



L Future 4 x 4 rescuer in training L