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To: wohlersbob1@gmail.com

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Thank you for signing up to receive my newsletters. I hope you've found the previous editions informative and helpful for your vehicle- supported adventures. I trust you will enjoy this month's newsletter. If you have comments, please email me: [Bob.Wohlers@discoveroffroading.com](mailto:Bob.Wohlers@discoveroffroading.com). You can access, download, and read previous newsletters on my website by clicking [HERE](#). Look through the

Newsletter Reference for a topic that may interest you, or download them all!

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## **Remote, Solo, and International**

**The Most Challenging Context for  
Vehicle Supported Adventurers**





Years ago, when revising the curriculum for my Introduction to 4WD course, I felt

compelled to invent a memorable context that would explain to my students the most challenging situation for any off roader. I wanted this challenging context to work for recreational enthusiasts and at-work employees since over the last eighteen years I've had the privilege to teach safe off-roading to both groups. Why did I feel it was important to identify a situation (context) that I felt was the most challenging when off-roading? Simply put, I wanted my students to focus on the individual adventures they planned when beginning to research and organize an off-road excursion. I thought that by using a defined context of their adventure this would help them choose the best vehicle, accessories, survival gear, communication equipment, and a thoughtful research plan. If I could identify for my students the absolute most challenging off-road situation possible, they might attempt to:

- Eliminate possible challenges from their adventure (i.e. "Hey let's get other vehicles to go with us.") or,
- Expand their preparation (i.e. "Perhaps we should get a winch if we are traveling remote and solo." Or "Let's pick a different route avoiding the civil war raging in this/that country.").

Let's examine and define the three parts of what I feel make up the most challenging context possible when exploring or working off-road. The three components are Remote, Solo, and International (RSI).

## Remote

Most off-roaders and outdoor adventurers seek to journey to and/or through remote regions. Remote can mean distance from urban centers, hidden away areas, secluded destinations, areas beyond modern technologies, and out-of-the-way regions. One North American off-roader I had the pleasure to explore with defined remote as being the farthest distance from a Starbucks. Sounds almost comical but think about his statement. There's some truth in humor. The Remote component of the RSI context should give any mature and thoughtful off-roader pause when planning and prepping for an off-road adventure.

## Solo

Let's now add a second component to the RSI context – exploring Solo. Solo means you have no other vehicles with you when you explore remotely off-road. You may have passengers in your vehicle, but vehicle-wise, you are alone. Often it is wonderful to have passengers on an off-road adventure with you, even if

there's no other vehicles along on the trip. However, passengers can be both a blessing and a curse should problems arise, and you are Remote and Solo. Mature and experienced passengers can help in certain situations, but children and pets can be a liability and a responsibility. Think carefully when exploring remote and solo with passengers you absolutely must look after. Don't avoid taking passengers that rely on you for safety and security, just consider the consequences should events cause you difficulties when Remote and Solo. Plan your excursion more carefully.

Think about the Remote and Solo situation for a few minutes. Should you have an unrepairable vehicle malfunction you may be walking out – especially if you can't communicate remotely to secure assistance from afar. (And in today's world, I must ask, "Why don't you have a satellite emergency communicator with you when Remote and Solo?") What if you get stuck in compression terrain (sand, snow, mud) and you are solo? Because no other vehicles are with you, the option of kinetic energy recovery is out. You will have to rely on airing down tires, your shovel, traction boards, and perhaps a winch. (Why do you think companies like WARN use to call them "self-recovery winches?") Adding the solo component to being remote and you may have a real problem on your hands. A Remote and Solo context can and has resulted in the worst case scenario of all – death.

## International

As if Remote and Solo off-roading wasn't challenging enough, now add the notion of not being in your home country. Perhaps the country you are in is a poor third-world nation without much infrastructure for such things as potable water, expert vehicle repair, repair parts, etc. Imagine the country you are traveling though has an increase in disease vectors (i.e. mosquitos carrying malaria sporozoites). Do you speak the local language? Are all your naturalization and legal papers in order? The International component of the RSI context has many angles that can elevate concerns for safety, security, the need for certain accessories, robust planning, and touring carefulness.

It may sound as if I'm advocating for you to stay within the borders of your home country rather than off-roading internationally. Not at all. I am a strong proponent of adventure. Adventure can be elevated when venturing into different countries and cultures. The purpose of this newsletter is NOT to provide you with reasons to avoid off-roading beyond your comfort zone. True adventure means taking the road less traveled – especially beyond the borders of your home country.

What I'm describing by defining RSI is that when you take an off-road journey that embraces all three parts of this context you need to be a mature and thoughtful adventurer. This is especially true if you have those that love you back home or you are taking people along on the journey that you may be principally responsible for.

## War Stories and Conclusion

The following are a couple of personal examples of when things "went south" for me in the remote backcountry when solo and at times international. No doubt many of you have similar experiences. I'd love to hear your stories around a campfire.

**Remote and Solo.** One of my earliest solo excursions into the Death Valley area took me to the remote San Lucas Canyon area, just below and east of the old mining town of Cerro Gordo. I made this trip in my new-to-me unmodified 1986 CJ-7. While driving along this relatively untraveled trail, about twenty miles from Highway 190, my one-month old Optima Battery experienced an internal short and died (now you know why I only use Odyssey Batteries). As a somewhat new off-roader I did not have any emergency communication equipment (HAM radio would have been all I could have had at this time in history and my analog cell phone had no service), no on-board backup 12-volt battery, little water, food, and a pathetic survival bug-out-bag in the middle of September. Hot to be sure. What did I do? Being young and inexperienced, I started to walk out to the highway since I'd not seen a vehicle all day. Checking my cell phone occasionally, I finally got a signal that enabled me to call out to John Miller's Towing in Lone Pine, California. Being only a few miles from the Jeep I walked back to my vehicle to wait for Miller's tow truck to arrive and give me the most expensive jump-start ever. Obviously, I followed the tow truck back to Lone Pine to purchase a new battery for my Jeep at the local Napa store.

Yes, I learned many lessons on this adventure. A few years later, this incident helped me recognize the value of a newly invented product by Global Star – the satellite emergency communicator called SPOT. Because of this Death Valley experience, I was an early purchaser of the first generation SPOT satellite messenger.

**Remote, Solo, and International.** The year was 1982 and I was working as General Manager of a scuba resort on the island of Cozumel, Mexico off the

Yucatan Peninsula. On the island I had a California licensed 4WD Toyota truck. Every six months the truck had to be taken out of Mexico to legally reestablish the vehicle's residency in Mexico (believe me the Mexican police on the island audited the vehicle often). The nearest country to exit from my location in Mexico was Belize. To re-tag my vehicle I occasionally took some holiday to escape my work on the island and head off to Belize. I became intimate with the landscape of Belize, especially the rainforests in the mountains west of Dangriga. On my off-road excursions in Belize, I was most certainly Remote, Solo, and International. Adding to this challenging context, I was a relatively uninformed off-roader. I was, as we shall say politely, "young and dumb." As a fit thirty-year old I certainly believed I was relatively bulletproof. Ha. Not.

On one excursion into the Belizean highlands during the summer rainy season, I blew out two tires on the truck. Both sidewall punctures were probably due to mud hidden sharp bamboo shoots or sharp rocks. When you have two disabled tires out of five total, you are most assuredly stuck.

Even on well-traveled Belizean rainforest 4WD trails, the mud is epic during the rainy season. The mud is so unbelievable that the howler monkeys in the trees laugh at you when you get stuck, which is every five feet or so. I learned about "real" mud in Belize. Besides trying to travel through the Belizean rainforests in August, here's a short list of my other major mistakes (yes, there are more):

- Not telling anyone where I was going. Even my employees at the dive resort on Cozumel didn't know specifically where I had headed. Nor my family or friends.
- Not being intimate with my vehicle's features – pros and cons. (Open differentials, non-mud tires, no winch, etc.)
- Venturing a long way from an urban center and busy paved highways.
- Being rather ignorant about the Belizean wildlife and possible dangers.
- Not knowing how to repair my tire's sidewall tears.
- Not having a spare tire carcass (a tire with no rim) besides my full spare tire.
- Not having the right tools and supplies to repair damaged tires. I didn't have a portable compressor, tire irons, internal tire patches, a way to break the tire beads off the rims, and etc.
- Not having mud boots, only flip flops. Sheer stupidity on my part. I could never have walked in the mud for miles with my flip flops. Every time I took a step in the deep mud goo I left a flip flop behind. To solve the problem, I made a pair of knee-high "boots" from some rope, zip ties, and sheets of DuPont Hypalon I had in the truck to repair my Zodiac Inflatable left in Cozumel.
- Ignoring the need for a well-stocked bug-out-bag.



- Basically, being a complete ignoramus. I was infinitely more careful with my scuba diving habits and protocols than my off-roading procedures. Shame on me.

Yep, once again I lived through this misjudged and ill planned excursion and learned many lessons. The lesson here is: "Don't be me." Avoid learning lessons through the "school of hard knocks." It's not my intent to over dramatize this off-road excursion in Belize, but I was lucky to make it out alive. Rescuing my stuck Toyota? That's another story.

**Conclusion.** If you are relatively new to off-roading in remote areas, avoid going solo. I encourage you to go with others that are more experienced. Learn from them. Take 4WD courses from a professional trainer. Read all you can about problem solving, navigating through the backcountry, emergency communications, survival, and wilderness first aid. Gather the accessories and tools needed to solve problems in the remote backcountry. When problems arise, use the STOPA protocol: Stop, Think, Observe, Plan, then Act. Don't get frustrated and don't lose hope. Develop a will to live. Work methodically through your problems, one at a time.

In the movie *The Martian*, probably one of the best fictional survival stories of all time, astronaut Mark Watney (played by actor Matt Damon) famously says when he realizes he is stranded on Mars:

"In the face of overwhelming odds, I'm left with only one option...

I'm going to have to science the shit out of this."

"You just begin. You do the math. You solve one problem, and you solve the next one, and the next. And if you solve enough problems, you get to come home."

To put in perspective any off-roading challenge you may have when Remote, Solo, and International, consider Mark Watney's unique context. He was RSOP – Remote, Solo, and Off Planet. I doubt that any problem we might face off-road on THIS planet could be as bad. If he can make it home considering his dire situation, so can we. Drive safely. Accelerate your learning and upgrade your skills. Live Long to Wander.

## Upcoming Death Valley Overland Tour - Only Two Spots Left! (Don't Venture Out Solo!)







Death Valley is iconic, fabulously scenic and remote. Three days and three nights of overlanding exploring the largest National Park in the lower 48 States. Over 80-percent of this beautiful park can't be seen from the pavement – you have to venture off-road. Off-Road Safety Academy takes you to the best sights. Sand dunes, canyons, hot springs, playas, craters, mines, and high-altitude trails are all part of this adventure tour. This tour visits Saline Valley, Hunter Mountain, Hidden Valley, Tea Kettle Junction, Racetrack, and Ubehebe Crater.

This is an overlanding-style tour for 4WD vehicles only. You must be self-contained and self-reliant as we camp at a different remote location each night.

**Cost: \$650.00 per vehicle. Bring as many passengers as you have legal seat belts.**

Click [HERE](#) to learn more and sign up.

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## Off-Road Safety Academy's Upcoming 4WD Adventure Courses



The upcoming June Introduction to 4WD course is sold out, but there is a waitlist. If you wish to be on the waitlist, please send your contact information to me by email.

The June 22-23 Total Approach to Getting Unstuck course has two spots left. For details about this course and to sign up, click [HERE](#).



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