

Sahara Safari



PART 1: LOST IN THE DESERT!

ONE EVENING DURING THE EARLY PART of last Autumn the attention of many "natives" of Kent was arrested by an overcrowded, overloaded fifteen year old Landrover hurtling along the London to Newhaven Road.

Anyone following the progress of the Landrover would have noticed the rather puzzled expressions on the faces of those on the left hand side of the road compared to the more knowing looks on the right hand side. You see, the notice on the right hand side of the Landrover, "The City University Africa Expedition" was written in English, but on the left hand side in Arabic. Therefore if any reader happens to hear of the legend that people living on the right hand side of the London to Newhaven road can understand Arabic, the City University Africa Expedition could well be the source of it!

We had left the University at midday, and through the excellent driving and navigational ability of the four members of the expedition, managed to reach Newhaven by nightfall. "We" were Nick Turnbull, Mohammed Watfa (Mo), Patrick Reynolds (Pat), Benjamin the Faithful the Landrover (Benji) and yours truly, Chris Wilson.

Having planned the expedition for nearly a year it was indeed hard to believe that we were finally off. However, we arrived at Dieppe early on the morning of August 26th, and the reality of the situation was driven home when we attempted to explain (in "O"

The City University Africa Expedition photographed in the Spanish Sahara. Left to right, Chris Wilson, Pat Reynolds, Mohammed Watfa and Nick Turnbull.

level French) who we were, and where we were going. Then, leaping into Benji, we set off for Paris, trying to remember to keep to the right hand side of the road, which was rather difficult at the beginning of the journey. In Paris, while Mo and I went off to get a Visa for Mauritania, Pat and Nick took Benji's steering mechanism apart to find out what was knocking. Although several theories were put forward, Benji's steering knock was never located, and he knocked all the way to Senagal and back.

The journey down through France and Spain was punctuated with various incidents which generally revealed our severely limited camping ability, and also revealed certain supernatural powers possessed by Pat. For example, when we crossed into Spain we were faced with the difficulty of buying petrol when no one could speak Spanish. This didn't seem to worry Pat very much however, who simply got out of the Landrover and said, "Fill Her up." The rest of us were sitting in Benji wondering when Pat would realise he was talking to a Spaniard. But to our utter astonishment, the Spaniard meekly did what he was told without hesitation. Pat then paid him, bade him goodnight and thanked him and climbed into Benji and drove us away. After some five minutes of silent admiration, someone ventured to ask Pat how he'd done it. It was only then that Pat realised he had been speaking to a foreigner, and the whole thing began to puzzle him as well. The miracle had convinced the rest of us,