

E. H. Row and Joseph Lowrey go

July 14, 1948.

The Motor

LLAND ROVING

An Expedition into Wales with
Rover's New All-purpose
Vehicle



CLIMBING UP.—On the first section of the Monks' Way, where the old road clambers up out of the Elan Valley.

TWM SION CATTI was a Welshman. He lived in a cave near Llandovery and was, more or less, the Robin Hood of those parts. If he and his cave hadn't crept into the conversation the Ordnance maps would not have been brought out and, if they hadn't, Row and Lowrey wouldn't have spotted the dotted line straggling across the mountains between Rhayder and Ffair Rhos marked "Ancient Road."

Now, as readers of "The Motor" of rather more than six months' standing may have realized, Messrs. Row and Lowrey have a weakness for ancient roads—the more ancient the road, the greater the weakness—and this one seemed to have all the makings. There was one section where the water-splashes came thick and fast and several points on the map where the contours, even at one inch to the mile, clustered so closely that you could barely get a pin between them. Additionally, should this way prove so ancient as to be completely decayed, there were plenty of other dotted lines in the neighbourhood which seemed to offer possibilities of some decidedly interesting "off-the-road" motoring. And, of course, apart from all this, there was Twm Sion Catti's cave, where, it was said by those who knew, one might even see a buzzard.

To attempt this sort of trip in an orthodox car was, quite obviously, out of the question unless (a) there was plenty of time to spare, and (b) plenty of surplus energy ditto. Accordingly, overtures were made to the Rover Co. with a view to borrowing one of the new Land Rovers, which has drive to all four wheels and a transfer box providing a useful set of low ratios. The sugges-

tion appealed to them but, just to make sure that there should be no misapprehension about the capabilities of the car, we were given a demonstration run over their local demonstration circuit. Any misapprehensions were effectively removed. As a precaution, however, it was decided that a length of rope and a driving pulley for the power take-off be included for bollarding the car out if we did get it stuck.

Llandovery was chosen as the focal point for the expedition because, not only was it convenient to the selected area, but it was not far from the venue for a subsidiary project, namely, an assault upon a hill near Brechfa which enjoys the name of "Dunlop's Dividend" and had, according to the records, never been climbed clean by a four-wheeled, self-propelled vehicle.

Convenient Arrangement

A lovely June evening was happening as, in company with photographer Ross, we wended our way through the traffic-packed streets of Birmingham, three-abreast on individual seats, and westwards out on to the open road at a cruising speed around the 50-mark with the speedometer flicking up occasionally to over 60.

On trips of this sort there is a lot to be said for this three-abreast seating, because the navigator can stay put and give directions to the driver easily, while the photographer-cum-gate-opener can nip in and out smartly whenever occasion demands.

Early dinner at the "Royal Oak" at Leominster was a most satisfying affair, and by 9.30 p.m. the Land Rover was tucked away in its garage at Llandovery and we were enjoying our beer inside the Castle Hotel—our chosen rendezvous. And not such a bad choice, either, with, amongst other things, adequate and up-to-date plumbing altogether above the general standard of small, country-town hotels.

The following morning, there being all the signs of a beautiful day in prospect, the Rover was completely stripped of its all-weather equipment excepting the

CHARGING THROUGH.—Preliminary reconnaissance plus an abundance of enterprise saw the Land Rover through the earlier marshy spots.





BLEAK HOUSE.— Little wonder that this farmhouse in the Towy valley is deserted when one studies the sort of going that leads down to it.

tubular hood stays, which were left on to provide additional hand-holds.

The "ancient road," known locally as the Monks' Way, leads off the old Rhayder-Devil's Bridge road just above the northernmost lake of the Elan Valley, its line being clearly defined in the form of a wide ditch reaching upwards across the flank of Esgair Rhiwlan. A guide book, written some years ago for cyclists, recommends that he who would take this way should leave his machine and proceed either afoot or on horseback.

With Lowrey at the wheel and taking our cue from what we had seen at the Rover works, we climbed the bank leading off the metalled road and started our clamber up the ditch, almost immediately to come to a standstill with spinning wheels through (a) using too low a gear and (b) showing insufficient enterprise.

The Rover transmission layout incorporates a free-wheel in the drive to the front axle, so that although the drive is permanently to all four wheels, front-wheel scrubbing is obviated. It is, however, possible, by pulling on a small ring, to lock the free-wheel when the lower ratios are in use, the lock automatically coming out of operation when the high ratios are again engaged. This device was brought into use to get us out of the slippery patch in reverse and then, in low third and showing considerably greater enterprise, we continued the ascent.

Sinking in the Ooze

A further wet-looking patch was investigated on foot, Row having in the meantime recalled reading somewhere or another that horses had been known to disappear in Welsh bogs. Having come to the conclusion that this wasn't a bog within the meaning of the act, the obstacle was attacked with encouraging success and such ease that, when the next patch of reeds appeared, we didn't even bother to prospect but, to the accompaniment of warlike whoops, charged it flat-out. This time it was a real bog, albeit not quite a bottomless



one, and the Rover sank to its chassis. Our bollarding plans came to naught because there was nothing around which to fasten the rope. The jack handle was tried as an anchor, but encountered solid rock about 9 ins. below the surface. There was nothing for it but to secure outside assistance, so while Lowrey and Ross hatched schemes which included draining the bog, Row set off on foot to a farm which could be seen on the opposite side of the lake.

Of that walk, apart from recording the fact that it was a very hot day, the less said the better. Needless to relate, there was no horse. The farmer did, however, point out another farm not a mile from where we were stuck, back on the other side of the lake but hidden from



PIN-POINTING.—A halt for photography gave an opportunity for making an exact check on navigation. The scene is half way down the Towy valley at a point where the going was reasonable.

the bog by a fold in the hills. It was a very exhausted Row who finally staggered back to the Rover with five hearty Welsh farmers to help us out.

Lowrey in the meantime had managed, with the aid of the much-bent jack handle, to lower the level of the bog by about 6 ins., find a sufficiently solid bottom to bear a jack raised on wood and stones, and move the car a good foot nearer terra-firma. With seven on the tow-rope the operation was soon complete.

Two hours' solid soaking had left the brakes completely ineffectual, but this was only discovered when taking the helpers back to their farm, sheer down the grassy hillside. Fortunately, engine compression in low second was more than adequate to hold the car.

TIGHT FIT.—Tribute to the Rover suspension is paid by this photograph in which Lowrey uses his camera over a rocky section where there was only just room to get through.

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Local knowledge revealed that farther along the Monks' Way bigger and better bogs would be our portion, also that this farm was the last one for 10 miles. Three good hours had already been wasted so, with regrets, we turned towards the south and other tracks.

Forsaking the main road again at New-bridge-on-Wye and taking the by-ways to Abergwesyn, we struck off along the track towards Tregaron and then, in two or three miles, left down the valley of the Towy. There is nothing in this first stretch which could not be done by an ordinary car, and anyone caring to try it will be rewarded with some rather fine scenery. The track down the Towy is, however, a different kettle of fish. A farmer whose opinion we sought as to the possibilities of getting through obviously thought we were quite mad even to try, although he had an obviously well-used Jeep standing by the garden gate.

Having been thwarted in one enterprise, we were in no mood to fail in another through faintheartedness, and down the valley we went, finding nothing to delay our going except a narrowness of the way which at one point resulted in an argument between the centre cross-member and a solid chunk of Wales. Wales lost.

Perilous Procedure

We were now nearly down to the point where Twm Sion Catti had his hide-out, and the alternative of going straight to it or making a detour which led over a fine conglomeration of contours presented itself. Honour demanded that we choose the latter.

Local intelligence reported that only one car had ever tried even the early stages of this route, and that one had turned over; that even if we reached the bottom of the valley alive we couldn't get across the river and that, if we did, there was no road up the other side. So we set off, while intelligence moved to a vantage point from which to watch the ghastly consequences.

To the right of a narrow footpath the hillside rose almost sheer; to the left it dropped equally sharply down to the river quite enough hundreds of feet below, and it became immediately obvious that the only thing

INCHES TO SPARE.—It was a tricky business getting around this corner with nothing but a lot of space on the outside and no parachute! (Inset) Pacing out the overall width prior to the descent.



to do was for one to walk ahead indicating to the driver where to put the near side wheels. As an added precaution, the doors of the Land Rover, which can be lifted off their hinges from the fully open position, were removed and put in the back, thus, as the Road Tests say, "providing easy egress."

In this fashion, and probably to the secret disappointment of our solitary onlooker, we reached the bottom. What is more, after preliminary reconnaissance, we crossed the river (the Rover, incidentally, is rather good at this sort of thing). There was even a rudimentary track up through the woods on the other side. Once again lack of enterprise was our undoing, Row this time being the guilty party, worrying too much about the relative spaces between the trees and the width of the car and too little about pressing on regardless. Subsequent investigation proved that the trees would eventually have won anyway, so turning on the hillside, which canted the Rover over at an alarming angle, back we came, through the river again and up the opposite side which, in this direction, seemed far less terrifying.

All that remained was to find Twm Sion Catti's cave, but they must have moved it since the map was made—at any rate, although we took to our feet and scrambled about like mountain goats, we couldn't find it. Nor did we see any buzzards.

(To be continued.)



UP IN THE WOODS.—When it became impossible to get through the wood for trees, the Rover had to be turned around on a steep and loamy slope, which would have been impossible without four-wheel drive.

ANY MORE FOR THE "SKYLARK"?—Return trip across the Towy river through the previously marked channel which avoided large and slippery boulders.

