

MACMILLAN. CANCER SUPPORT



2010 Mac4x4 with Charlie Webster

FRIDAY 05 MARCH: This year we arrived at Britpart at our 'due time' and were pleased not to be amongst the last to arrive (like last year). We duly booked in, convinced the scrutineers we had all equipment was on board without having to unpack it all and then waited. We knew we would have to wait; the entry this year was open to 90 cars so it was no surprise, though it did give plenty of time to chat to the other competitors, so the time flew by.

Drivers Briefing was full of the normal stuff; keep the shiny side up, enjoy ourselves, remember why we are here and then a departure from the normal speech- 'don't assume the car in front is going the same was as you'.

The mystery was explained on the start line, odd numbers on the left, and evens on the right, different clues!!

Our start time arrived, the marshals handed us our instruction sheet and wished us all the best, Alun quickly scanned through the sheet and we left our traditional Britpart Start point. After turning left onto the A49 then just before Craven Arms turned right, we were onto the smaller back roads we would spend most of the weekend on.



The instruction sheet needed to be used in conjunction with the Phillips Navigator Map book, careful wording of the clues and directions (some quite misleading) meaning we were never 100% sure we were on the right road. All weekend we were passing crews going the other way, sometimes correctly but more often because they or we had done a U turn!



We arrived at Radnor Forest via a selection of back lanes (some visited more than once) and having failed to answer more than one or two of the clues. Maybe we missed them, more likely we were on the wrong road. It became clear it was going to be a long weekend.

Radnor Forest Stage was excellent; the weekends first taste of forest roads and to our surprise deep snow in quite a few sections of the forest, to make it even more interesting. The task was to spot and record code boards, these sections of number plates had been 'placed' around the stage by marshals. Traditionally one of these boards is placed prominently after a junction so you know you are going the right way,

the rest hidden. Not on this event, you could go some considerable distance without finding a board, definitely shaking any navigational confidence.

The stage was timed, Alun calculated where the end of the forest track was and we judged our speed to this, fast enough to make our time slow enough to spot the boards. Great Plan, would have worked if the 'end control' had been at the end of the stage, the words from the drivers briefing 'don't assume' ringing in our ears. We set off for the real 'end of stage' 6 miles away at the services in Penybont.

We had a sandwich and cuppa as we swapped stories with the others, some like us had missed the 'stage end point' so arrived late. Our allocated re-start time came and as we left service the start marshal handed us our next set of instructions- plot a route and spot some clues.



It very quickly became apparent that plotting and spotting was not going to happen at the same time at night, especially when we would be taking more 'back roads' and mountain passes. We stopped and plotted the route; this took us via Rhayadar, Cwmystyth and Devil's Bridge to our overnight stop in Aberystwyth. Driving back roads and mountain passes at night is great; especially as the driver you can rarely see the drops. Mind you it's not always easy to see which way the road goes either. We spotted most of the clues on this section, and the road!

The directions led us to a nice Hotel in Aberystwyth; we then camped on the football field behind it. Despite having enough food for a small army, a combination of tiredness and cold swayed the decision-we went to McDonalds to eat.

SATURDAY 06 MARCH: After a cold night (-4) we woke refreshed, cooked ourselves a large breakfast, can anything be better than bacon and eggs by the corner flag.

We normally start at one minute intervals, being car 26 we start at '26 mins past the hour' but today we started in reverse number order; this gave the competitors with high numbers the chance to be 'first on road' and me now with nearly an hour to go, plenty of time for another cuppa and chat. We discovered at this point that our honoured guest driver Charlie Webster was so cold in the night that she had a run round the field at 3.30am to get warm. A quick check established that Charlie had been loaned 'summer camping gear'! I went to my car for some of my 'spare gear', only to find on my return Charlie had been loaned enough stuff to start a shop.



A quick drive down the A44 saw us enter Hafren forest; probably better known to the rally boys as Sweet lamb. This section required us to plot grid references onto the map, and then work out the best route through the forest in order to visit all the waypoints, marking down the code boards as we went. Sounds simple, but not every forest road is marked on the map and not every forest road drivable, as some discovered. The road conditions in this and the next forest varied dramatically: forest road, forest road with snow, deep snow and the favourite deep snow with big drop at side of the road.



Lunchtime was a quick sandwich and a look around the Bowler Nemesis and the Milner R5's being tested.

The afternoon's stage saw us in the Esgair Ychion Forest. The format was very similar, the marshal handed us a section of a map, we plotted a route and recorded code boards along the way to prove we had found and followed the route. Again the forest route proved difficult in places, deep snow in places the sun did not get too, the logging in other areas had created deep ruts and mud.

Here we had a number of navigational moments, a few of the Map reference craftily fell on 'Y' junctions and this made navigation difficult. On one such junction and after some debate we took the right turn of the 'Y' junction though after a few hundred yards we met another competitor coming the other way. He informed us this was the wrong road, he had 'met a marshal' that told him it was 'the wrong road'. Working on this information, we tuned round and took the 'left' turning of the 'Y' Junction. Alun did say at the time the map did not show this 'left road' a through road, as it had a few hundred yards of the 'middle' missing. Missing road- that's nothing to a Land Rover.



Alun was right and as the forest road came to an end, one or two brave souls continued on what was once a road but even these had to turn back after a few hundred yards. It was not just that the road was missing; forest machinery had churned what was there to deep muddy slush. It now appeared almost the entire event was now down a dead end, some patiently waited and turned in the turning circle, others got in the way by performing multi point turnings in the narrow road. Laurel and Hardy would have been proud. Once turned around we took our original road, and then took the next 'Y' junction left to find ourselves back on route (the 'Y' right was the blocked road described by the other competitor).

We left the forest and followed a pristine tarmac road that dropped to the river; I recognised it as one of the areas we had previously marshalled and guessed we would be crossing the river to re enter the forest. No problem as the river ran very wide and very shallow, no more than a trickle and I had previously crossed it in a road car. On crossing the river, I could not believe how deep it became in one section- we got through in our Land Rover, but I would have had no chance in a road car!

It transpires that when the event photographer and section marshal arrived and they noticed a demolished dam slightly downstream of the crossing. Realising more water would make a better photo they promptly stripped to underpants and rebuilt the dam. I cannot imagine how cold the water was. Or the depth of the crossing with that extra water in it! A simple run followed to the end of the stage, still trying to spot these boards and stay on the road.



Upon handing in our sheets the marshals instructions are 'back to base and make ready for the night section'.



Back at base, small groups of people surrounded certain cars offering help, advice and parts. Some competitors had taken some 'less used' roads as one way of phrasing it, and had paid the price in damage. At this point we could say the AA men earned their pay, but as they were here as support without pay it can only be said that if they had not been there, a number of competitors' events would have ended there. F1 pit crews, molly coddled amateurs, AA man, head torch on, repairing Land Rover in the middle of a football field- now there's a mechanic.

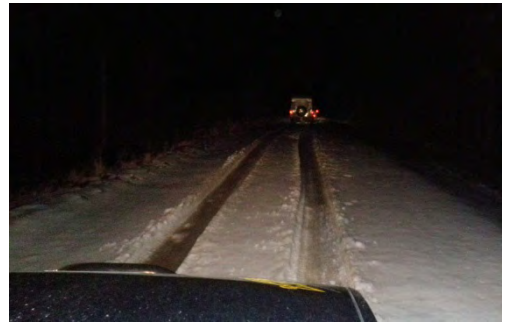
We did wonder where all the parts came from- we like most competitors carry a few parts, but things like water pumps and power steering hoses? The AA men had a secret weapon- actually more of a hot Line to Britpart, they called them and Britpart sent a man in a van. One of the biggest parts centres was kept open to support the event, Absolute stars.

Come the 8pm start time everybody is ready to go. The route to the night section took us back through Devils Bridge, the request from the organisers 'don't use main beam in Devils Bridge as its frightening the locals' we waited for the punch line. But no apparently somebody had genuinely complained the car lights are too bright. Make your own punch line.

On Leaving Aberystwyth we took the A44 until Foel Wyddon then turned off into the Paraid Fynydd forest. Again following a route plotted by Alun (in the car), again looking for the sections of control boards. We did at this point

comment on the strange positioning of some of them and assumed it was to stop the car headlights reflecting on them.

On leaving the forest we were presented with one of the weirdest, spookiest and wonderful views. Through the darkness and mist we could see other competitor's car headlights lighting up a wind farm, and with the service road snaking from one windmill to another, each was getting lit up in turn as the cars followed the road. Then add to it the unexpected dull thud, thud, thud, noise of the wind farm. If you could have photographed it you would have made a fortune.



We crossed the moorland and entered Potarfynach forest, still clue hunting, we kept meeting competitors coming the other way, a cheery wave as we inched past each other on the forest roads occasionally made very interesting due to snow or big drops off the road. We began to wonder if we had gone the wrong way, but all our map reference matched. Then the penny dropped—we are car 26 an even number, all the cars coming towards us are odd numbers, the field had been split up. The odd positioning of the boards was so the cars could see them from both directions. We completed the stage, handed in our paperwork to a marshal who looked like he would have preferred to keep warm by burning it (but still accepted it with a smile). As requested, we tip toed through Devils Bridge on the way back to our Aberystwyth camp.

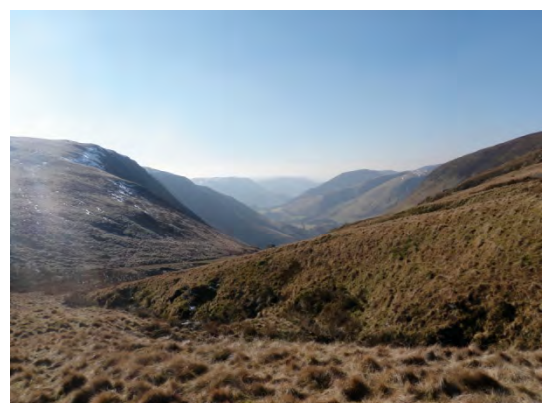
Back at camp it's cold, we go for a late night brew with a nip of scotch. Having drunk the brew we move on to just the scotch, swapping the day's stories with the other competitors. About the same time as the drink ran out we decided it was too cold and went to bed.

SUNDAY 07 MARCH: As normal on these events I woke to the sound of a Land Rover engine running. Being as warm as toast in my tent I could not understand why I could hear so many engines, unzipping the tent answered the question. It had been -6 overnight apparently, and it felt the same the morning. Those sleeping in cars had ice on the inside of the windows, those in the 'summer tents' also had ice on the inside.



You know it's cold when you have to put the gas bottle near the cooking flame to ensure an even flame, We did debate going to McDonalds for breakfast, but being foolish, sorry should read hardy, we cooked again. I lit the Ghillie kettle to ensure we had a decent hot cup of tea to start the day and hot water for our flasks, not to mention a fire to keep our hands warm. Breakfast was slightly hurried as the football pitch was needed, once packed we all moved over to the start area and waited instructions. One of the officials came round asking if anybody could move the Land Rover parked in the goal mouth. You could see the comment coming a mile off, 'that's not just a Land Rover in the goal mouth, it's a Defender'. The bloke clearly did not know 'Defender' is the name for a Land Rover, so the joke that went so far over his head it could have brought aircraft down.

The format on Sunday was simple, plot out the 'way points' and follow the route, finding as many clues as you could, a treasure hunt of sorts. This section took us north and we settled down for a gentle drive back to the Hotel. Like everything else over the weekend we were wrong. The section took us through Tal-y-bont towards the ancient capital of Wales (one of the clues) Machynlleth, via Aberangle and then we turned at Dynas – Mawddwy taking one of my favourite roads leading to Lake Vyrnwy. We barely touched Lake Vyrnwy when we turned off heading for Bala. A quick time check and we guessed at a run round



the Bala off road centre as they have been strong supporters of Macmillan cancer support over the years.

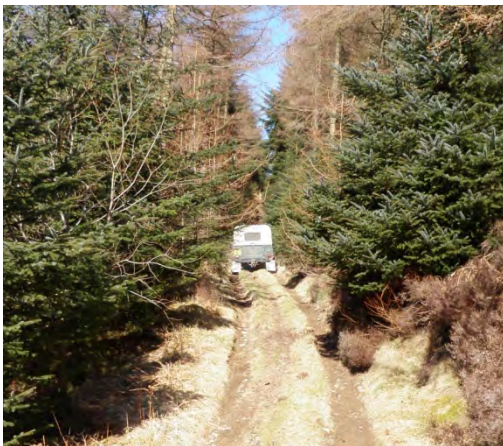
Wrong again, the marshal at the checkpoint just north of Lake Vyrnwy directed us off road, we set off with words like 'take care', 'deep snow', 'ice', 'stay in the tracks', ringing in our ears. The track rose to over 2,000 feet and at every bend the view just got more awe inspiring. Do not let anybody tell you they have seen fantastic views until they have stood there on a clear crisp March morning, it literally takes your breath away.



A quick stop to recover another competitor from a deep snow drift and we continue along this magical track, eventually dropping into the Penllyn Forest. As we entered the forest we found the road was washed out, the deep ditch on the right imitating a huge magnet as we crept down the remaining sections of road, a couple of 'moments' later and we are back onto 'proper' forest roads. It's at this point we remember 'this is a code board section', and we should have been looking for them. We stop at a quiet section of the forest for a comfort break, it's at this point we spot four code boards. We guessed the set up marshals must have stopped for the same reason.

Back in the car Alun points out we have a reference point further down this forest road, then another reference point on another forest road a few hundred yards away and uphill. It must be a mistake as there is no connecting road. Wrong again, there was a connecting track- well, track is possibly a little over zealous description, it was more like driving uphill through a hedge.

We watch as another competitor Derek tackles the hill. Around half way up Derek stops to let his navigator Peter out of the car to take photos. Much to our surprise Derek then continues up the hill to the top. Alun and I reach the same conclusion after seeing this- 'show off!'



Our turn, low range selected, diff lock engaged and off we go, only to be nearly smacked in the face with a branch. I forgot to close the window. We scramble our way to the top, again commenting on Derek's stop go on the track. At the top we congratulated Derek on his hill climbing skills when he admitted; the car had stopped going forward. Peter had got out to 'spot him' reversing back down the hill, Derek had to try and go forward to straighten the car up for the manoeuvre when the car just found some grip so he carried on up the hill.. We of course told him his secret was safe with us.

Once out of the Forest we headed for the last map point Bala, here we handed in our sheets in and collected the last set of instructions. This last section took the form of a simple navigation exercise, passing through Llandrillo, Corwen and then the long climb up the horseshoe pass to the finish at the summits ponderosa cafe. On approaching the summit the marshals waved us into a lay-by, 'Problems' or 'another section' we thought, but no-it was simply too busy round the cafe with motorbikes to have it as a finish point. So that was it, all over in a lay-by just short of the summit. Having handed in our final check sheet we had 'time in hand' so we joined Derek, Peter and some other competitors for a drink and snack on the moor opposite the café. Admittedly, I don't think I have ever seen so many motorbikes.

The final night Dinner was again at the Royal Daresbury Hotel, Warrington. A great meal, short speeches, Charlie found a skirt for the prize giving (mind you, so did Bill) and the now famous charity auction. This is the only auction where most items sell for more than the retail value, it's for charity is the cry.

We would like to thank Charlie Webster for the support she gave the event, every inch the Celebrity and Lady, always with a smile and cheery word.



My grateful thanks to; Richard Egger insurance, Octopus Publishing Group, Phillips Navigator Great Britain, Go Ape, V Festival, PreVent Natural Insect Repellent, Ghille kettles, www.offthetrial.co.uk, Volvo Cars, Clayton Car Contracts, Mac for the signs, Alun for not directing me over a drop, Lynn for putting up with me, friends and family for their support (and money). This support enabled me to make a contribution to the expected £100,000 total sponsorship. This support in turn will make somebody's life a little easier at their time of need.

Please help us support Macmillan Cancer Support (Registered Charity No No 261017). It's one of those things in life- it's better to care for Macmillan cancer support than have Macmillan cancer support care for you.

Any goods, services or cheques can be sent to Clayton Car Contracts, Staffordshire House, Beverley Close, Penkrige, Staffordshire ST19 5SS 01785 716133 or 0783 83 76800

Also please supply any 'stickers' or other promotional items you wish to be displayed to the same address. All costs for this event are paid by Sean Flynn, Clayton Car Contracts and Alun Beardmore all donations go 100% directly to Macmillan Cancer Support.

With thanks,

Sean & Alun

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