

December 2017 newsletter

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Heavy snow, heavy rain, thundersnow!.

Is it just me or has anybody else noticed that we don't seem to get snow or rain anymore. As someone who regularly checks the weather forecast I keep hearing the words **heavy snow** or **heavy rain**, so it's snowing/raining; well what do you expect, after all it is winter. Then the weather forecasters talk about the depth of the **heavy** snow in 10mm, 15mm or 20mm and almost immediately I'm thinking, what's that in old money, well that's only 4, 6 or iff we're very lucky (in Bucks) 8 ins!. What's the big deal. Give me some real snow, say a foot of snow between my place and Aylesbury and I would be a very happy man and I'm sure a lot of other club members would be too. Just think about it, real 4x4s on the road, no cars and no low slung SUVs/pretend 4x4s. Wouldn't that be brilliant. The nearest I have got to this is when Roger and myself did the Croisiere Blanche in 2005 and I also did it in 2007. On this event there are up to 200 4x4s with snow chains on driving over the mountain tracks for 3 days stopping only to tighten the chains up, take pictures, dig ourselves out and have lunch French style (red wine with every meal). Brilliant fun.

4×4 Response work

There was heavy snow forecast for Sunday 10th (see theirs that word heavy again) for the midlands coming down to Northampton and maybe a bit beyond. Next morning I looked out to see a nice covering of the lovely white stuff. I thought nothing of it till I got a txt message asking for volunteers to help with meals on wheels in Aylesbury. Yippee! time to get my toy out of the garage and do what it does best. Where I live I can either go via the main road all the way to Aylesbury (boring) or I can go by the scenic route. This means when leaving Ickford I go via Shabbington, Long Crendon, Chearsley and Cuddington and then join the Thame to Aylesbury road. At least I can get a feel for what the roads would be like before I even reach Aylesbury. I even managed to do a quick tow job towing a car up the hill to Chearsley. There was quite a bit of snow about and as happened some years ago some cars were struggling to get up the slight gradient to the railway bridge between Aylesbury College and the TA Centre. Eight of us turned up to help. It was generally agreed that the snow had come done further south than forecast so some members where asking why there was so many people out on the roads when it's only a Sunday and were warned about the heavy snow.

After JCC had gone round putting the towing eyes in all the vans it was then decided that we would deliver the meals using our vehicles. I was given the Slough route and after reassuring my passenger that my RR could get up narrow lanes etc we set off. The drive out of Aylesbury was interesting as we were driving over compacted snow while we were still in the town which I thought was unusual and my RR even did a little slide from side to side but I managed to correct it. The route was going to take us to Amersham and then turn right up to Beaconsfield and then towards Slough via Burnham. It really was very scenic with a good covering of snow everywhere. Due to the volume of traffic and that people tend to drive nearer to the centre of the road when it's covered in snow it was just a case of convoy driving till we got just beyond the junction for Chesham on the Missenden bypass. It was here I noticed a lot of brake lights coming on and what looked like the trailer from an artic blocking the road. People were having to take it in turns to drive round the trailer. Then a 101 Land Rover appeared from the other direction and the occupants appeared to want to tow the lorry. As people seemed to be faffing about looking for somewhere to fix the tow rope I joined in and immediately found where the screw in towing eye goes. Even artics have screw in tow points. Although the 101 was in front of me I was doing all the work as even Karen from Apetito noticed that the tow rope between us was slack most of the time. After we (or rather me) towed the lorry to the top of the slight gradient we unhitched him turned round and went on our way.

The rest of the route was more convoy driving till we got to the top of the hill where we slowed down to a crawl so something had happened further ahead. We decided to bypass the holdup by heading to Coleshill and eventually we got back onto the main road. The rest of the route really wasn't too bad with most of main roads being slushy as we got towards the area between Burnham and Slough. It was only the side roads and cul de sacs that had any real snow still left on them due to the lack of traffic. On the way back the Missenden bypass where we pulled the Tesco lorry earlier on was now clear due to the volume of traffic helping to clear the snow. The only problem we had now was a slow over cautious driver in a red Honda who thought it was a good idea to put his hazard warning lights on everytime he came to a "hazard" on the road (a few lumps of snow near a junction etc). This was so irritating even a Volvo driver behind decided he'd had enough and decided to overtake the Honda driver. I got back to Aylesbury just after 4pm and didn't get home till 5pm. Just as I turned the corner into the village I got a txt message asking for more volunteers that evening. After being out all day and not having had much to eat I decided I'd had enough for one day but I did go out Monday evening taking two social workers to the other side of Aylesbury and even going out on Tuesday evening to take a palliative nurse from Stone up to Walters Ash.

I later heard that there were 20 of us out in all and that BCC had sent out a message thanking us for all what we did during the brief spell of heavy snow (there's that word heavy again). I believe we even got a mention on the local radio.

Days Laning in Wilts, Berks & Oxon **26/11/17**

- Sunday dawned bright and clear with a hint of frost , a precursor to a nice, clear day ahead.

Most of the group met up accidentally on the A338 between Frilford and Hungerford, meaning 5 of us turned up in convoy at Burbage shortly before 09.00am.

The first group of 3, Pat, myself Andy (leading) left by 09.30am, with the second group, lead by Paul Stockford 10 minutes later. This gap remained constant all day with the two groups meeting for elevenses and lunch.

We were soon on the first lanes heading down to the northern edge of Salisbury Plain. We had not done most of the lanes for many years. Andy had done some of them only once or twice in his long career of trail biking and 4x4 driving. They were all easy, and not that wet. It was noticeable that many of them were covered in grass in areas where there was a sea of mud some years ago. The only issue was the scratching from the overgrown hedges. This made the theme for the day.

We covered some of the wide open tracks on Salisbury Plain itself, passing (but not challenging) the 'Tank Wash'. It was a pleasant change to drive these roads in the absence of dust. The surface was also slightly soft, so the bumps seemed less harsh.

We continued East towards the Wayfarers track down some pleasantly wooded tracks, where we stopped for lunch in a sheltered spot, before starting the Wayfarers traversing a ridge with magnificent views.

We continued east as far as Newbury, where we turned North to lane parallel to the A34 on its west side. Here Andy, Pat and I were able to reminisce about our days with BUX 4x4 about 15 years ago, when this area was our regular 'go to'. This was pre NERC and some of those lanes are now closed. We drove down 'memory lane', remembering where the 'bomb holes' and impassable

muddy ruts used to be. These lanes are now graded and where it took us only a few minutes to drive a lane, it used to take an hour or more. Those were the days when a winch was the province of only the very richest, and 'waffle boards' were a distant, expensive luxury. The only way to make progress was by continually 'throwing' the most capable vehicle at the obstacle, digging with mattock and spade, and pushing it through. That vehicle then pulled the next vehicle through (with a recovery rope), and so on. Those were the days! The problem now, however, is one of speed. As the surface is now improved, most of the lanes are driven in high box – 1st or 2nd. If you do hit a bump or jump out of a rut, it would be at a (relatively) high speed and things would go wrong very badly, very quickly.

After threading our way through the trees on 'Wibbly Wobbly' lane, we emerged just outside Ilsley at the A34, just as it was getting dark. This was our last lane, so we cleaned our lights, reset our mirrors and said our goodbyes before heading North on the A34.

Thanks, Andy, for a great day's laning and returning to some lanes after a long absence.

Roger T

Editors note

That's it for now, sorry I didn't put in any pictures showing what we had done throughout the year but as we got involved in response work and managed to get a good picture out of it I thought that would be better for the December newsletter.

Also I would like to thank Jonathon in helping me to compile this newsletter as he is the reason there is the picture and Rogers account of the laning trip which we did in late November.