

Leg 3 Day 13 Vietnam

Much further south now the temperatures are hot and humid, making everything feel sticky. Today's plan was simple; pull together the paperwork, go to the border and exit across the bridge into Vietnam. We had been in touch by phone to the leg 4 team which had been waiting for us and had tracked our excellent progress over very difficult terrain.

Best laid plans though; the loss of Defender 2 continued to influence progress. Instead of going direct to the border, we went to the customs department for discussions.

The team had to wait, whilst our interpreter went through the paperwork required. No problems with the four vehicles or ourselves but Defender 2 not being present had to be supported by additional documentation which was requested to be faxed .

We drove back into town, had a bite to eat and reconvened at the hotel.

The whole team have really got patience down to a tee and although we took separate forays into the town for snacks etc and a break, we toughed it out.

If you have got the feelings from the blogs previously that this leg was really tough trying to achieve the schedule, it may come as no surprise that it felt strange to have time to wander around a town, take in the sights, shop for essentials –a complete contrast to our normal frenetic days.

Finally though, a decision was made by the Chinese officials that all 5 vehicles had to exit China together. This meant that there was no alternative but for us to walk into Vietnam and leave the vehicles whilst Defender 2 caught up in a day or so.

Vehicles were shipped back to the Customs offices where we had endured the long delay that morning. Rubbish disposed of, snacks and drinks loaded, off we went.

The Chinese side was very interested in stuff bought especially the present we had bought for Sam – we managed to get everything through but a Lonely Planet guide was confiscated because it is a banned publication. It was difficult to work out why but appeared to be to do with how the maps had been written. Eventually got through and luckily for me given the heat, a lady with her bike assisted me in carrying my bag over to the other side of the bridge.

Fairly straight forward at the Vietnam side because we had the right visas. 15 minute delay and then out we popped the other side to meet up with the leg 4 team. Great to meet up; but the start of the end. In particular letting go of our medical support, Mel. The experiences and challenges that the team had faced together made them one unit and now it was breaking up.

The leg 4 team were really helpful; taking us to their hotel for showers, a change of clothes and then out for a meal.

Interestingly we had the opportunity to compare Vietnamese and Chinese Fried Rice – one is definitely spicier than the other – I'll leave it for you to try yourselves.

During the meal, we shared some experiences and showed some photos of our trip. The keenness of the leg 4 team to experience their own adventure was obvious. Meal over, short respite at the hotel, emotional goodbyes and then onto a minibus for a 13hour drive to Hanoi – I think that I have a bruised rib from all of the bouncing about – vehicle not a patch on the Land Rovers.

Finally arrived at the Sun hotel, where Mrs Moon had offered to look after us whilst we waited to go to the airport.

No need for further info as I am sure that everyone is familiar with an airport. It just leaves me to say



that this journey across China was one that few will experience and with the partially Olympic funded infrastructure being put into place, a lot of the route and terrain will get used less. In closing I want to add that I will forever be in awe / grateful to firstly the small, ever committed leg 3 team that achieved the near impossible against the odds, secondly the Go60 committee for their continued support and finally Land Rover for making such awesome modes of transport.

Leg 3 team signing off;

Pooh, Data, Summer, Kitty, Jimmy, Danger Mouse and Captain + Mr U-Turn