



VINTAGE PORTUGAL

As with its most famous wine, one taste of this country's fabulous greenlanes will leave you wanting more. Just ask **John Pearson**

PHOTOS: PAT SUMMERS

Portugal never used to be on the radar of most enthusiasts as a destination for a major adventure, but that's changed over the past year or two. Now, many more of us are aware of the delights it offers when deciding where to go with our Land Rovers.

Last year my partner Pat and I joined LRO's Portugal correspondent José Almeida for a memorable drive. The adventure started in the north-east, followed the mountains down the eastern border with Spain, taking in the peaks of the Serra da Estrela range and the Alentejo lowlands, before arriving in Lisbon.

It was a wonderful journey, made even better by travelling with someone whose local knowledge helped us enjoy the best experiences in scenery, culture, cuisine and, of course, Land Rovers. But José reckoned we'd only scratched the surface in terms of what the country can offer – a return trip in my ex-G4 Challenge Defender 110 Td5 had to be made.

So a year later we met him at the border town of Vilar Formoso, and followed his black Td5 90 towards the narrow cobbled streets of our accommodation in the medieval walled village of Castelo Rodrigo.

DAY 1: CASTELO RODRIGO TO PIODÃO

Unusually heavy overnight rain had abated by the next morning, when we climbed aboard a green 1996 300Tdi 110 waiting outside. In it were João Quadrado and Alice Gama from the Faia Brava private nature reserve in the nearby Côa river valley. They are part of the small team that runs the reserve, which since 2000 has been turning abandoned farmland in the rugged landscape back to wilderness.

Their aim is to encourage wildlife to return to the area – and they are achieving a great deal of success with the project, with red and black kites, golden eagles, storks, ravens and various vultures having taken up residence. They've also introduced wild Portuguese Garrano horses, and wild boar are proliferating.

Rather than shutting it off to the public, the reserve welcomes walkers and, even better, 4x4 drivers can get a permit to drive the

reserve's sandy and rocky tracks. José Almeida is an official operator for the site and can arrange driving and camping visits, while other organisations can provide trips for birdwatchers or wildlife spotters. From a hide, you can watch vultures feeding.

João, Alice and their helpers collect and plant seeds, and grow trees in a nursery for planting. Their efforts are having an impact, with regeneration evident all around. There's lots of Spanish broom and several varieties of oak, including cork oak, which when mature is stripped of its bark for bottle cork production. The exposed trunk of stripped trees is initially a vivid red. 'People say it's bleeding,' says João.

I wish we had more time here but we're already behind schedule, so we get on the road and drive through the village of Algodres, stopping to chat with a local man restoring his 1958 Series II in the street, before heading towards the Serra da Estrela mountains, Portugal's highest range.

We continue heading west, climbing to more than 1000 metres (3280ft) on winding, narrow mountain roads before descending to the ancient village of Piodão, which sits in a cradle in the heart of the Serra do Açor range.

DAY 2: PIODÃO TO COIMBRA

The next day's drive starts with a crawl up a series of hairpins to a gravel track that serves a series of wind turbines on the Açor heights. You're not quite on top of the world here, but it's the next best thing, with big views across to the Serra da Estrela range, some 15 miles away.

We enter at 40°14'08.7"N/7°50'16.90"W and run along the spine of the Açor range. At the end of the turbines, the track becomes more challenging, eventually dropping down through woodland rich with oaks and sweet chestnuts.

Heading west in the direction of Vila Nova de Poiares, we drive a series of routes over the next couple of hours – some through woodland and others hugging steep mountainsides – with big views to savour.

At Poiares we meet the commander and assistant commander of the Bombeiros (fire

'We progress through an area that reminds us of African savanna, but with even more jumbles of boulders lobbed into it'



L-R: José Almeida, JP, Alice Gama & João Quadrado



Portugal will rest easy tonight after seeing this



Amazing scenery and the good news is that access is unrestricted



We drove a wide variety of terrain, from steep mountain passes to tracks through dense woodland

PORTUGAL: NEED TO KNOW

■ **Fuel:** Diesel €1.44/litre (£1.16).

■ **Where we stayed:**

Casa da Cisterna, Castelo Rodrigo, from £52.40 (casadacisterna.com).

Casa da Padaria, Piodão, £36.27 (casa-da-padaria.planetaclix.pt).

Pensão Flor de Coimbra, £40 (flordecoimbrahr.com.sapo.pt).

Casa Pinha, Figueira da Foz, £36.27 (booking.com/casa-pinha).

Hotel do Caramulo, from £40.37 for pre-booking (hoteldocaramulo.pt).

Quinta do Lagar da Moira, £40 (quintalagardamoira.com.pt).

■ **Campsites:** campingportugal.org.

■ **Legal rights of way?** The only restrictions are if it's a private track, which will have a barrier across the

entrance, or in areas of fire risk in summer there can be closures.

■ **Which maps?** Military Geographical Institute of Portugal maps are available in 1:25,000, but you'd need 44 to cover our route. I've included GPS grid references for the start points of off-road sections in the main text.

■ **Contacts:**

Faia Brava reserve: atnatureza.org

Clube Land Rover of Portugal: clubelandrover.pt

Coimbra University: uc.pt/informacao

Maritime Museum of Ílhavo: museumaritimo.cm-ilhavo.pt

Landssever group: landssever.blogspot.com

Caramulo motor museum: museu-caramulo.net

Casa de Santar: daosul.com

Longroiva Thermal Health Spa: termasdelongroiva.com.pt

Tracks are well-defined, but some like this are testing



Steep ascents give way to epic vistas across wide areas

FANCY TRYING PORTUGAL?



José Almeida doesn't offer guided tours, but through his dreamlandrover.com company he provides assistance, info, routes, schedules, off-road routes and places to stay and eat. 'I provide the local knowledge you wouldn't otherwise get.'

He will also help with local contacts and, in an emergency, help with medical treatment or vehicle problems.

Prices vary, depending on route and number of people taking part (dreamlandrover.com).

UK companies offering guided Portugal adventures include OneLife (onlifeadventure.co.uk) and Waypoint (waypoint-tours.com).

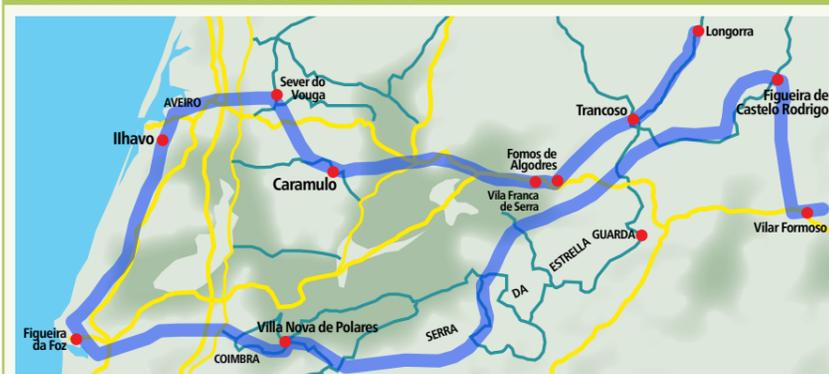


This Series II was being restored in the street



José, John and João Paulo Crespo with João's Series III, I and II (L-R)

JOHN'S ROUTE THROUGH PORTUGAL



My recommended way to get to Spain or Portugal from the UK is via the Brittany Ferries routes from Plymouth/Portsmouth to Bilbao/Santander. The cost of travelling through France is expensive, with fuel, road tolls and accommodation, and

it takes a day longer than by sea. Return UK-Spain fares start from £284 per person (£344 in high season), based on a vehicle plus two people and a cabin. Brittany Ferries also has a number of routes to the French ports of Caen, Cherbourg, St Malo and

Roscof. Book at brittanyferries.com or telephone 0871 244 1400. Brittany Ferries can also arrange accommodation in Spain, with a wide choice of hotels, paradors, cottages and campsites. For details, visit brittanyferries.com/holidays or telephone 0871 244 1444.

brigade), Luis Sousa and Miguel Soares. Throughout Portugal the Bombeiros – who are mainly volunteers – have a tradition of using Land Rovers. The country has a major problem with forest fires during the summer, and Land Rovers provide access to remote areas.

The Poiars brigade's tradition with the marque stretches back a long way – to a 1948 Series I that was one of the first six Land Rovers to be imported into Portugal in October of that year. According to LRO's James Taylor, this is probably the oldest Land Rover fire tender in the world.

The Series I, along with a regularly used diesel Series II and six-cylinder Series III, reside in a museum of historic fire engines. José and I are privileged to drive the Series I; it runs well after clearing its lungs.

DAY 3: COIMBRA TO FIGUEIRA DA FOZ

José has arranged a tour of Coimbra University with one of its guides, Catarina Freire. The university is a fascinating place in a wonderful location, with its distinguished history stretching back to the 16th century. I was especially impressed by the library, which is lavishly decorated with gold leaf and contains 40,000

books from the 16th to 18th centuries. Humidity and temperature are constant to keep the books in good condition, but what I found intriguing is the use of bats to control insects that would otherwise damage the books. The trade-off of having to drape leather covers over the exotic jacaranda wood and gold-leaf tables every night to protect them from bat droppings is thought to be worthwhile.

When we finish the tour, José reveals he has obtained special permission for us to photograph our Defenders in the university's main courtyard. No vehicles have been allowed through the ornate archway and into here for the past 20 years, so we are honoured.

Then we're on the road again, continuing to head towards the coast through the Lower Mondego region. At 40°13'03.3"N/8°29'57.0"W we join a series of tracks through farmland, and it's a maze of maize fields.

The area is also rich with wildlife, and we see lots of storks, egrets, buzzards and other birds of prey. The tracks aren't too testing initially, but become rougher and muddier as we get further west and climb up on to the north bank of the Mondego river, taking us to Figueira da Foz, with its huge sandy beach.

DAY 4: FIGUEIRA DA FOZ TO SEVER DO VOUGA

The day starts with a drive on a short coastal track, starting at 40°11'15.2"N/8°54'18.1"W. After this, we head to the port of Aveiro. Just south of the there we visit the Maritime Museum of Ilhavo, which is devoted to Portugal's once huge fishing industry.

Then we meet João Paulo Crespo, an enthusiast who owns 1211 Land Rovers. Of these, 1208 reside in his amazing model collection. Every variation of Land Rover and Range Rover are here, with models from Corgi, Dinky and Matchbox from the '60s, as well as more recent examples.

The remaining three Land Rovers in João Paulo's collection are a full-size 1956 Series I, 1968 Series II and 1971 Series III. He has lovingly and fastidiously restored these – and they're all a credit to him. So which one is his personal favourite? He's certainly spoiled for choice, but he tells us the Series II hard top is the one he most enjoys driving.

Our journey continues to the town of Sever do Vouga that, as the name suggests, lies on the Vouga river. We're meeting a number of

enthusiasts from the local Landssever group. This relatively new organisation does all of the usual club meets, events and greenlaning trips, but they also use their Land Rovers for the good of the country, having taken part in a Clean Portugal campaign to plant trees and clear rubbish from the countryside.

The group has obtained permission to drive on part of the former railway line from Viséu to Sernada do Vouga. We pass through woodland, which suddenly clears as the world drops away and we're driving across the Vouga gorge on the 100 year-old Poço de Santiago bridge.

Then we turn off the tarmac and clamber up a long, steep climb through a eucalyptus forest, followed by an equally steep drop to the road.

DAY 5: SEVER DO VOUGA TO CARAMULO

After spending a lovely evening with the group, we're back out with them the next morning tackling a variety of woodland tracks. The best one starts at 40°44'45.5"N/8°24'01.2"W and heads through almost jungle-like terrain before dropping down to a river crossing. There's also a testing, steep rocky climb at 40°43'47.0"N/8°23'27.0"W, and we splash

The immaculately coiffured slopes at Quinta da Veiga



An exceedingly fine old vintage, and a vat of port

through a long ford before bidding farewell and driving towards the Serra do Caramulo range. The mountains there are reputed to have exceptional air quality, and in the early 20th century the town was a health resort, with a number of sanitoriums for tuberculosis sufferers.

We're meeting Tiago Patricio-Gouveia, whose family built an art gallery and motor museum in Caramulo after drug developments did away with the need for long stays in sanitoriums. The museum was opened in 1953 and has expanded over the years to include a wide variety of cars. Before the visit we went to lunch with Tiago and his wife Isabel in a 1902 Darracq, a charming step back in time.

DAY 6: CARAMULO TO VILA FRANCA DA SERRA

The Serra do Caramulo mountains have many interesting tracks to drive, but we take a detour to the Dão wine region for a visit to the 17th-century Casa de Santar manor house. With the help of Ana Paula Figueiredo, PR for the wine producing company, we visit the vineyards and cellars before lunch at its Cabriz estate.

Next we drive through more picturesque villages and a couple of soft, rolling tracks on

our way to the village of Vila Franca da Serra, in the foothills of the Serra da Estrela.

DAY 7 – VILA FRANCA DA SERRA TO LONGROIVA

Next morning we drive a series of tracks, the first at 40°32'23.9"N/7°26'46.6" and another at 40°40'48.1"N/7°23'47.6"W. This is a lovely drive on sandy, rocky terrain, with testing climbs on washed-out tracks. 'It was smooth when I recce'd it,' says José, but we're not complaining: it's a great track. We progress through an area that reminds us of African savanna, but with even more jumbles of boulders lobbed into it.

The final track, at 40°56'27.0"N/7°12'35.6"W, leads us down a series of hairpins to Longroiva. José has arranged for us to spend a few hours at the Termas da Longroiva Spa, then there's one final treat in store. This adventure has been a real feast of experiences, with some great drives, interesting people and places, and wonderful food and wine. But at the end of a feast in Portugal it is customary to sample a glass of Port wine...

We drive into a series of sandy tracks through steep, immaculately coiffured terraces of

As he's showing us the fascinating production process, Pedro explains that, as with other Douro region vineyards, the Port is produced on the premises and shipped to Porto for ageing.

Pedro is qualified in agriculture and wine-making, and he's passionate about what he does. As he explains the processes, it's obvious he also needs to be a scientist to ensure everything is perfect.

To produce Port, the red wine is mixed with 20 per cent of a 77 per cent proof distilled wine spirit, which those in the know call 'burning water'. This stops the fermentation process, leaving residual sugar in the wine – which is why Port is sweet.

Pedro takes us over to one of his buildings, where there are several giant stainless steel containers. He gives us a Port glass each and gestures to fill it from one of the containers. 'That's 60 year-old Port wine,' he says, as the almost golden liquid emerges. It's very expensive and I'm concerned the tap might stick or I'll turn it the wrong way and thousands of euros' worth of Port

'Cork oak is stripped of its bark for bottle cork production. The exposed trunk is a vivid red: people say it's bleeding'

grapes stretching across several mountainsides, dropping down to the farm and wine-making buildings at Quinta da Veiga. We're met by manager Pedro Silva, who explains the company produces red and white wines for sale, but its main business is the 850,000 litres of Port wine it produces for the long-established Symington Family group, which has been selling Port since the 17th century. Its well-known brands include Graham's, Cockburn's, Warre's and Dow's.

will end up on the floor. But it doesn't, and I can confirm it tasted wonderful. Cheers, José.

Next issue: John and José join 50 Portuguese 4x4 enthusiasts on a Clube Escape Livre adventure along a well-trodden pilgrimage route from the heart of Portugal to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. **LRO**

