

THE F-ROAD

by Peter E. Fenton

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Rob Hanson had lost track of the number of times he'd boarded and disembarked from a plane. He was an adventure travel writer and his work had taken him to parts of the world that no sane person would dare to venture. Over the years he'd travelled both poles on foot, canoed the full length of the Amazon River and summited Everest. With each trip he took more risks, which he wrote about in his books. His next adventure was to cross the Sahara — first east to west, then north to south, all in one year. In between the large treks, he took freelance writing jobs to pay the bills. Today he was travelling to Iceland where the scenery was so mysterious that people said it was like being on another planet.

Rob's best friend, Karen, had found him the perfect guide to make his trip work. She'd been dating a guy named Einar who was visiting from Iceland. His brother, Kristján, led off-road tours of the more remote parts of the country, and according to Einar, he was single...and gay.

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Rob's plan was to be in and out in two weeks with a camera full of pictures and a notebook loaded with stories. He retrieved his bag from the luggage carousel — a battered old seventy-five litre backpack which contained everything he would need. He went through passport control and entered the pick-up area of the airport. It was only a few moments before he saw a sign that said "Robert Hanson." The sign was held by a

stunningly handsome man with a mane of blond hair that fell to his shoulders. Rob signalled a quick hello.

“Hi, I’m Rob Hanson. You must be Einar’s brother.”

The man leaned his head towards Rob ever-so-slightly as his deep blue eyes locked him in his gaze. “Nice to meet you! I’m Kristján.” He shook Rob’s hand with a firm grip. At six-foot-two he towered above Rob. Kristján wore a tight pull-over and his sleeves were rolled up revealing his muscular forearms, dusted with blond hair. The rest of the shirt barely held together under the strain of his large biceps and bulging chest.

“Follow me,” Kristján said.

Rob didn’t need to be asked twice.

Kristján led Rob to a grey 4x4. It looked a bit worse for wear.

“So, you’re looking for an off-road overview tour, right?”

“Yeah. Then we’ll head back for a more detailed survey of any areas that look interesting.”

“Good. I know the perfect place to start.” They got into the vehicle and Kristján drove east towards Selfoss, then along the ring road and cut east up highway 26. Eventually the pavement ended. “This is where the fun begins. Welcome to your first F-Road.”

“Why do they call it an F-Road?”

“It stands for *ffalla* – Icelandic for ‘mountain’. Inexperienced tourists think it stands for ‘Fucked!’, because that’s how they feel when they see the narrow roads, the potholes, the rocks and the drop offs ... not to mention the rivers they have to cross that don’t have bridges.” With that Kristján smiled and accelerated quickly along the rutted track in front of them. Rob let out a howl of excitement.

“Mount Trölladyngja – The Trolls Volcano,” Kristján called out, pointing to a mountain to their right. It’s the largest shield volcano in the country. It’s ten kilometres wide with a one hundred metre deep crater.”

“This is amazing,” Rob said.

Rob pulled out his camera and started shooting.

“Do you want me to stop?”

“No. Keep going. This is great.”

It wasn’t long before Rob was staring out at a lunar landscape. It was so desolate, so barren. A world of grey and brown rocks and sand. Kristján slowed to a stop and turned off the truck. They were engulfed in silence.

“You’re looking at the Ódádahraun, our largest lava field and the largest desert in Europe.”

“It’s beautiful.”

“I’ve spent days wandering it. You’ll never feel more at peace than out there. Just

you and the wind. When we come back, if we head out there, we can take the trail to Askja which is...there." He pointed to a mountain in the distance. "Although it's a bit touristy, the rim walk of the crater is amazing. The crater lake is a giant hot tub. You'll get spectacular shots."

"You had me at hot tub."

"If you're into those, I have a place in mind. How does a natural spa and lunch sound?"

"You're the driver," Rob said, then smiled.

Thirty minutes further along the road, Kristján pulled off. He got his pack out of the back of the truck. "Grab a towel. I've got the food."

They made their way on foot along a faint path that led around to the south side of a volcano that Kristján assured him was extinct. There, in what looked like a small amphitheatre overlooking the lava fields, was a beautiful pool. Steam rose from the surface into the cool air. Rob had seen hot pools before, but never one so isolated and idyllic.

"Why is this place not crawling with tourists?"

Kristján laughed. "Who knows? Maybe it's ultimate proof that there is a god, and that they don't like tourists. Now, lunch first, then we soak. I'm starving."

He pulled out some packaged sandwiches and handed one to Rob. "I hope you like

meat.”

Rob noticed a bit of a smile on his face.

“I love meat.”

They ate in silence, only broken by the cries of birds overhead. Rob could feel his heart-rate slowing as peace filled his body. He took a few more photos. The quiet was broken by Kristján.

“Time for a swim.” he said.

Rob saw Kristján start to strip down, and he didn’t stop until he was naked. The man wasn’t shy. He had no need to be. Rob guessed he would weigh in at 190 pounds. Every muscle was clearly defined. Like Rob’s, his chest was covered in a fine dusting of hair, only golden, not dark. His abdomen was hairless, all except a trail that led down from his navel to the golden patch above his uncut cock which, Rob thought, looked slightly engorged. His long blond hair blew in the cold breeze—the cold air that was undoubtedly causing his nipples to perk and his scrotum to hug his groin.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m getting in where it’s warm.”

Kristján eased himself into the pool and swam around slowly, settling down at the edge. Rob quickly stripped out of his clothes. He may not have been as tall as Kristján, but, muscle for muscle, he was an even match for the Iclander. Rob lowered himself into the hot pool and sat facing the Nordic god. He stared at his perfectly formed chest

and shoulders. Why had he not noticed the sexy stubble of his beard before? Dappled with water droplets, it glistened in the sunlight. Kristján was smiling at him. His face was an almost perfect picture. Stubbled beard, gently sun-kissed skin, and dark blue eyes over-arched by dark blond eyebrows. Rob's heart raced. His cock hardened. Rob wanted to make a move, but they still had two weeks to go. If they fucked now and things became awkward, it would make the rest of the trip difficult. And he had a story to write. Rob quickly got out of the pool and got dressed.

Kristján said, "Where are you going?"

Rob paused. "If we're going to see everything, we should get moving. What's next?"

Kristján frowned and said, "If that's what you want." He got out of the pool and slowly towelled off. "I thought we'd head off to the campsite I've chosen, get things set up and then we can check out a waterfall I've always wanted to see."

"Sounds good." Rob said as he thought *I wonder how many tents he packed?*

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They eventually left the F-Road, crossing a rocky plateau, and rounded a high mound of lava rock out of sight from the road.

"This is a campsite I like to use. It'll give us privacy."

They quickly unpacked the truck. Kristján had only brought one tent, a large geodesic dome where they laid out their sleeping pads and bags. Once they were done,

Kristján said "Shall we go?"

They got back into the truck and headed back up the F-Road.

"We're heading for the waterfall?"

"Yes. I heard about it from a friend of mine. I've never been there before, but she said it's spectacular. I have the directions from her right here." He fumbled with a folded piece of paper in his right hand.

"Here. Let me help you." Rob reached over and took it from him, unfolding it and reading out the instructions. "It says to take the path three kilometres past the junction of 26 and 208, the one we just passed. It should be just ahead on the left."

"Okay. That must be it," Kristján said, and turned off.

They bumped their way along what Rob felt was more of a track than a road. He held on as they followed it up a very steep incline.

"Does the girl who gave you these instructions actually like you?" Rob joked.

"I'm beginning to wonder. She was my brother's ex-girlfriend. I think the relationship ended amicably," Kristján said, turning towards Rob with a smile. Rob laughed.

The track dipped down sharply. Ahead they saw that they would have to cross a river.

"Don't worry. It's quite normal. Most F-Roads have river crossings. That's why we

drive high-clearance trucks.”

“Are you sure? It looks pretty deep and fast.”

“Welcome to the highlands.”

Kristján edged forward, and entered the water.

“You take these slow and steady. You never know if there will be loose or slippery rock underneath. Rob noticed Kristján white-knuckling the steering wheel, constantly adjusting as the water pressed against the wheels. They’d made it halfway across when, all of a sudden, the wheels beneath the 4x4 lost their grip. The front of the truck tipped and then went below the water, but somehow the cab kept the vehicle afloat. It was like a boat being driven downstream.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” Kristján cursed. Rob watched as he turned the steering wheel sharply to the right and gunned the engine. He was trying to use the tires as both propeller and rudder in the hope that they would snag something and it would propel them to the shore. But the engine quickly died and they found themselves headed towards a set of rapids, at the end of which, the truck flipped onto Rob’s side.

Miraculously, the windows held.

The heavy vehicle couldn’t withstand the pressure of the water and the 4x4 was carried further downstream, bouncing along the river bed. Unlike the water from the hot springs, this was icy cold. The edges around the passenger door began to leak. The

driver's door remained above water. Rob knew there were not many options. They could stay with the vehicle until it grounded out, and hope that they didn't freeze or drown, or get out and try not to be swept away in the current.

"If we're going to do anything we have to do it now." Kristján yelled.

Rob said, "If we can get out we'll have a better chance of making it to dry land."

Rob could see that the Kristján was uncertain of his next move. Rob looked at the door and realized the vehicle was old enough for what he had in mind. He yelled, "You have to get the door open all the way."

Kristján understood. He tore off the inner door panel, then pulled away at the securing straps inside. Then he opened the door and started to slide it off its mooring pins. His muscles bulged and strained as he struggled with the door before he succeeded in removing it entirely. He threw it clear, then swung out, clinging to the side of the truck.

The 4x4 lurched as it started to slide further downstream, and they could both see that, not far away, the water became choppy and the rocks that the water was swirling around were razor sharp.

Rob yelled, "We need to hurry."

Kristján took a hold of Rob's arms. The two men's muscles worked as a powerful machine. Rob pushed with all his strength with his legs and Kristján pulled with all of

his might while he balanced on the truck's frame as it bounced closer to the rocks.

Rob yelled, "Jump."

They both launched away from the vehicle and for a brief moment Rob thought that this was the end. But somehow Kristján had managed to jump to the river's edge where the water was calmer and, somehow, he had managed to get a hold of the end of Rob's leg, slowly hauling him in to safety. They got out of the water and watched from the shore as the 4x4 was swept away and smashed into pieces on the sharp rocks downstream.

As they sat on the riverbank catching their breath, Rob said, "I hope you have insurance."

"I'm afraid we have bigger things to worry about. It's getting cold."

"How far do you think we are from the camp?"

"It isn't far. Possibly a 30 minute walk."

They stood and Kristján stumbled, grasping at his ankle. Only then did they notice the blood.

"Let me get this," Rob said, helping Kristján sit down. Rob quickly removed one of his boots, then his long hiking sock which he bound Kristján's ankle with. "That should hold until we get back."

They started out, Kristján limping.

“If you need support, hold onto me.”

Although the distance wasn't far, the walk took longer than expected and by the time they reached the camp, Kristján was shivering uncontrollably.

Rob said, “Take off your clothes.”

Kristján said, “I don't think this is the time.”

“Hypothermia,” Rob barked. “Take off your clothes. And I'll take off mine. We'll have to get into a sleeping bag and share body warmth.”

Kristján said, “If you think so.”

They stripped naked, and got inside the tent.

At first they were both too cold to acknowledge their bodies were touching, but as the warmth came back into their bones, they began to notice one another.

Kristján closed his eyes then leaned forward and they kissed — first gently, then with increasing passion. Rob grabbed at Kristján's chest, pressing his full body against Kristján's. Kristján's arms pulled him in even more tightly, his right hand sliding down his back, cupping his ass. He pulled his face away from Rob's and looked him in the eyes. Without saying anything, Rob knew what he was asking. He nodded then closed his eyes as his brain was filled with sensations of both pain and ecstasy.

Afterwards, they lie there bathed in a sweaty euphoria. It was impossible to know how long they remained silent before Rob rolled to face him. They stared into each

other's eyes before the quiet of the moment was broken as the two of them began to laugh, their bodies convulsing with pleasure as they let go of one another.

Rob smiled. "So how do we get back to Reykjavik? We've lost everything but a tent, two sleeping bags and our wet clothes."

Kristján thought about it and said, "We'll worry about that later. Right now I'm still feeling a bit cold. Perhaps you could continue to warm me up?"