

# GREENLANING

**IN GEORGIA**

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RED HILLS  
**ROVER**  
RALLY



**H**ard-core off-road enthusiasts might not like to admit this, but many Land Rovers in the UK bounce along dirt lanes in rather pastoral settings. It's the essence of what British enthusiasts call "greenlaning." The only rooster tail you're likely to see is, well, on the back of a rooster.

There you might travel between the great estates, with their majestic buildings and stunning grounds, that lie just outside the edges of their cities. In a land of high fuel prices, no wonder so many Land Rover events in the home country take place on these private estates.

My very UK moment occurred on Highway 319, just a few short miles outside of Tallahassee, FL. The tangle of busy city intersections opened abruptly into a sudden expanse of serene countryside. The moment felt surreal, causing me to glance back in the mirror to confirm that I'd not simply tuned out the tapering off that typically comes beyond the city limits. Sure enough — rather than the expected signs of exurban sprawl, rows of moss-draped live oaks had appeared instead, quickly followed by tree-covered canopies. They rolled out a

welcome mat, nudging me to exhale and enjoy my surroundings.

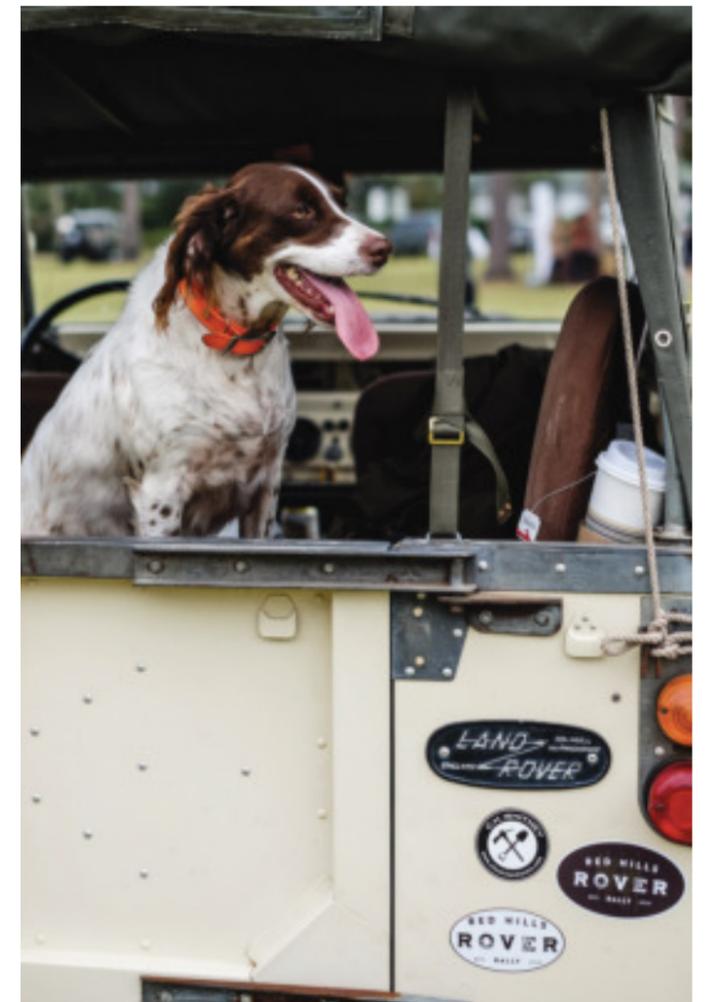
This sudden shift occurred while en route from my coastal Florida home to Thomasville, GA, the site of last November's Red Hills Rover Rally. The rally occurs within the Plantation Wildlife Arts Festival, a 10-day event that's drawn art lovers at the opening of Bobwhite quail season

for 22 years. The warm welcome was no surprise — I'd "had a feeling" about Thomasville from the start — as The Wright Group, the event's main sponsor, had extended courtesies to me long before I'd packed my bags. Fortunately, my early arrival enabled for a day of exploration in Thomasville's historic downtown district. I was smitten; suffice it to say that the city's Victorian architecture delivers the perfect blend of bygone days and contemporary sophistication.

I tore my eyes away from the lovingly-preserved buildings when I spotted "Sandy", a 1964 Series II-A, owned by Thomasville residents Charles and Carol Whitney. I joined them at a cocktail hour at Liam's Restaurant, where I met the rally's creator, Ben McCollum of The Wright Group. Listening to Ben and fellow event planner, Callie Sewell, hint at



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the surprises that were in store for the following day, I couldn't help but pack it in a little early that night in anticipation of it all.

Brandy Kirkham, the Executive Director of the Thomasville Center for the Arts, called the Wildlife Arts Festival one of the premier events in the south for artists of "sporting life art." She also provided the impetus for adding the Land Rover component to the event, working with Ben McCollum of The Wright Group, the presenting sponsor of the Rally. The combination made for a delightful weekend blissfully free of pretention.

Attention to detail was the name of the game for the Red Hills event. Over a breakfast of biscuit sandwiches and coffee, I perused the illustrated trail map and rally check list. Even the registration table in a lush pasture hinted at what would prove a distinctive experience. I felt posh as I roamed about the pasture, eyeing the impressive line-up of handsome and well-tended Land Rovers. I reveled in the sense of community around this matchless place. The well-behaved dogs of Thomasville could be seen happily weaving in and out of the crowd. The kids had the most fun. One young stocking-clad lad hung his head out of his family's Bronze Green Series Rover and exclaimed loudly, "Oh my goodness!" when he spotted the impressive lineup of 68 Land Rovers. Clearly, we have a young enthusiast in the making!

For the greenlane ride, I hopped into a 1988 Range Rover Classic, owned by Joshua Lombardo of Atlanta, GA. As the first wave set off and pulled through the towering gates of the route's largest plantation property, I couldn't help but feel we were traversing sacred ground. The Red Hills Rover Rally boasts something exceedingly unique, and that's the opportunity to step beyond the fence rows of Thomasville's majestic and storied hunting plantations. To go through these gates is to step back in time and to see a side of these historic properties that few will experience.



*Clockwise from top: Impressive Land Rover display; Southern hospitality in action; L-R: Irene Briedis, Millpond Plantation owner and author Lauren Dugger*



*Clockwise top: Ford aka Daniel Boone climbs; Proper hunting Rovers; Classic Series IIA interior; Millpond Plantation; Rally organizer Ben McCollum, The Wright Group*

The reward in this rally didn't rest in a contest of off-roading capabilities or a competition for the most heavily-outfitted rig. Rather, this event was grounded on the views the Land Rovers could afford their passengers. Tranquility and captivating scenery replaced the usual jarring ride and winching. I fully expected a regal hunting scene to play out before us at any moment — perhaps an English foxhound in hot pursuit of its prey, followed by its master on horseback.

While my imagined scenario, didn't manifest itself, something more did at our lunch stop near the drive's end. After winding past multiple estates, admiring the Millpond Plantation quail field and crawling in a row across the dam overlooking its 85-acre lake, the breathtaking main house of its namesake made its appearance. Adding to the sense of wonder was the way the big reveal occurred. After bounding along for an hour and a half and being so engrossed in our surroundings, the path suddenly swept into a series of pronounced curves, limiting visibility ahead. Coming out of the last one, it's tough to imagine that most mouths weren't agape as the main house at Millpond Plantation finally came into our view. The term "story-book setting" feels at once inadequate and yet wholly appropriate, in light of the scene that played out in front of us.

Completed by 1910, Millpond Plantation's California Spanish Revival style stands out from the Classic Revival architecture that dots the southern states. As we parked and made our way across the lawn, as if on cue, the damp cool of the morning — perfect for a jaunt through the woods — gave way to a wash of warm sunshine. In addition to knocking off the chill, it served the delightful purpose of illuminating one of Millpond's most striking features, its central conservatory.



*Above photo: Alicia Osborne*



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Clockwise top: Conservatory of Millpond Plantation; 1969 RHD Dormobile takes "Best of Show"; Hunting Guides and information provided by The Wright Group



Made of large retractable glass roof panels with a dinner bell at its crown, it's bursting with lush foliage. As one of Millpond's owner's, the Sedgewick family, gave me a private tour of the home, my spirit quickened thinking of the stories the walls could tell. Speaking of her great-grandfather who commissioned the home, she shared that he traveled down by private rail car, the private jet of those times. And what a worthy journey to escape the harsh northern winters for this literal playground. Like our beloved Land Rovers, this iconic property has stood the test of time with great grace to become iconic.

I caught up with many of the enthusiasts on the grounds of Millpond. John Mathys moved recently from Wisconsin, drawn to the sporting life in the region. He needed an appropriate vehicle for his outings so he purchased a '94 Range Rover Classic. Ben and Selina Griffin, in their 2016 Range Rover, had quite a lunch spread laid out, with their friends Mike Ketterbaugh and Candace Griffith in their 2010 Range Rover. The Macon, GA friends demonstrated their southern hospitality by inviting me to "sit and stay a spell." Well, I didn't want to be inconsiderate, and the food looked delicious, so I gave into their entreaties.

Larry and Renee Anderly's 1969 Dormobile, a truck that's done some serious globe-trotting, making its way from the UK to Italy and then on to Germany where the Anderlys made it their own, eventually landed at their current residence in Navarre, FL. Larry's face lit is up as he likened the Red Hills rally experience to that of what his family had back in Germany, while exploring with their local touring group there. Photos from their camping expeditions in the Black Forest perfectly showcased the Dormobile's comfortable utility and smart design. With unique features anchored in history, such as leather strap door handles fashioned from World War II artillery shell carriers, it drew admirers throughout the day, earning it "Best in Show."



The rally concluded on the grounds of stunning Pebble Hill Plantation. As the "Afternoon in the Field" event commenced to the strains of bluegrass, the Rovers attracted another round of curious onlookers. Scott Gowan, Tallahassee, FL, had brought his recently-purchased 1983 Land Rover 110 County Station Wagon – handsome with its "go faster" striping. He spoke proudly about acquiring his first Land Rover.

Organizer Ben McCollum reflected, "The driving force behind the event is that this area has so much scenic private land, but not a lot of public access. The Rally lets enthusiasts get off-road to tour them. It offers an inside glimpse to these majestic properties and their vistas. Joshua Lombardo, my driver for the day, summarized it well by noting, "This was completely different than any rally I've

Above clockwise top: Let the greenlaining begin; Proud enthusiast outfitted for the occasion; Commemorative key rings; Tailgating in the sun, on a Range Rover Classic – what more could you ask for?

attended," describing it as the most scenic he's experienced, without heavy wheeling. "The emphasis on history, the land and the sporting culture truly set it apart in a class of its own." //

