

## Losing Direction: Blind Faith & Technology

JourneyWords

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Why do we let technology tell us what is right?

Would you believe your SatNav even if it told you to drive over a cliff? Think before you answer. On the face of it, probably not. You'd recognise that land was not much in evidence beyond the windscreen, read the warning signs and turn before you plunged. Then maybe check a map or ask directions, find out yourself how to arrive at where you want to be.

Yet weekly in our Devon valley I see people override all natural sensing, logic and gut instinct to follow an 'expert' SatNav system into an accident. Jammed hard up against the dry stone wall of a clearly-signed, clearly slippery four-wheel drive track.

Backwards into stuckness. As in driving, so in life.

Thinking 'short cut' they drive past signs advising 'Farms Only' and keep going. Down the single track lane, down the hill. Keep going as the lane steepens, and the long grass in the middle shows how little it is used. Keep going as it narrows to overhanging walls, one car-width wide. As brambles and ferns graze the paintwork they squeeze on through, unwittingly missing the last turning point.



Past the first 'Unsuitable for Motors' sign as the track, for this is what it is now, turns down to the river. Past the second sign by the narrow stone bridge. Straight past our homemade sign declaring, 'Honestly, it's 4WD from here!' Sharply up the track that winds at right-angles up the other side. Over gravel, mud and washed-down leaves.

They lose momentum. Their confidence fails. Their rev count rises with their adrenalin. They slide back, wedge tight into the wall then perfume the

air with the bitter smell of burning clutch. Realising there may be signs but there's no mobile signal in our valley they march to our door and fume,

'I'm stuck in YOUR lane. AND my mobile won't work.'

'A Public Highway. And yes, I know.'

'Did you see the 'Farms Only' sign at the top of the lane?' Did you see warning signs by the bridge? 'Did you notice how the lane gets narrower, grassier, steeper? '

'Yes. But my SatNav told me to.'

I'm often reminded of my mother asking me as a child 'if your best friend told you to do it you'd stick your head in the oven wouldn't you? Don't you think for yourself?'

Stuck and embarrassed, the drivers become helpless. Lost and without direction. The anger dissipates with the burning rubber smell. We offer tea, telephone, tips and towing. We do not look like experts in branded livery. There's hesitation... and roadside recovery insurance!



We advise that recovery firms take at least two hours to turn up. And then announce they don't have the necessary 4WD vehicles for towing off-road. What they do offer is to give a price for hiring one and the number of the firm who owns it.

Disempowered by their SatNav's failure the drivers feel bewildered and let down. 'But we only did what it told us to.'

As I hand round tea and cake to the refugees we work out a solution. So far, we've always managed to free them with a quad bike, a winch and a very strong oak. Though sometimes their anger is so fierce that we've almost withdrawn our offer to help. We have no obligation. But we do want our post delivered and that's the way it comes.

Mostly people say 'thank you'. And use the opportunity to refresh their senses, dulled by lack of use and over-reliance on technology, in the natural beauty of the valley they have discovered by SatNav serendipity.



Hopefully, it's an awakening. A recognition that their own sensing and reason are vital, relevant and trustworthy. That technology is not a replacement for thinking for yourself and looking where you're going.

And if they're doing this driving, how are they navigating on their journey through life?