

Go Home

Seth Price

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Breakfast On The Verandah - African Style

by Ed Heltshe

The monkeys took our bananas...

The British took our beer...

African pilot Jim Seton-Rodgers took first place.

Balloon racing in Zimbabwe confirmed for me the south central African republic's self proclaimed status as "Africa's Paradise." Together with fellow pilots, Susan and Peter Stamats of Cedar Rapids, Iowa in a Flamboyant Balloons 105 generously provided by the legendary Terry Adams of Johannesburg South Africa, I had the opportunity to really experience both the geographical wonders of Zimbabwe and the equally remarkable hospitality of the local inhabitants.

By rights, nobody was supposed to be obsessing over our goal in the 1995 First Great Zimbabwe Long Jump. Governed by only two rules, "Rule one: Any person found taking the event seriously will be disqualified. Rule two: Don't forget rule one," the objective was to fly as far as possible in three flights during a 36 hour period.

From a field across the street from the Sheraton Hotel in Harare, Zimbabwe's capitol city, our first launch got off to a slow start. Unlike the previous two mornings when we had to tie off to our chase truck, the surface winds were calm. Initially, 21 balloons drifted slowly in various directions at low altitude. As we ascended into the clear sky, we could see our reflection in the high-rise hotel's bronze mirrored window glass.

Then two balloons rose rapidly to above 7,000 feet and broke away. The first was flown by local pilot Jim Seton-Rodgers, the second by Tom Sage. Nobody thought Jim was serious. Everyone thought Tom was.

I worked hard to keep the event's two rules foremost in my mind but, with the colorful balloons of at least a half dozen different countries ascending all around us, it was tough not to get a little competitive. I chose to follow Jim. I'd listened to his strategy the night before, and it made sense to me. He planned to fly for about two hours and then hook up with an ultralight. The ultralight pilot would let him know when the thermals started to pick up and it was time to land.

By the time we got to altitude, four balloons ahead of us and two or three behind looked like Long Jump contenders. Our flight took us north north west out from Harare over farm fields, orange groves and numerous villages of mud huts with grass thatched roofs toward Jumbo and Concession.

On cue, Jim's ultralight appeared. I told my team that I would land when he did. By that time, two of the other balloons previously ahead of us had already set down (without tipping their baskets over) Jim flew on for about another half hour and I kept him in sight. I hoped to go on following him when he took off later in the day for the second leg.

We landed in what seemed to be the middle of nowhere and suddenly we found ourselves surrounded by about 200 Africans. At first, all we could see was their heads and especially their eyes peering out of the high grass. The expressions on their faces said they must have thought we dropped in from

outer space, but soon, they were helping us to pack up the balloon. Not long after, we were met by the chase crew which was supplied to us by our local corporate sponsor, Swift Transportation Co., a general freight company based in Harare.

We marked the spot on our map and sought out the local watering hole for a bite to eat, and then refueled. When we returned that afternoon, it was very windy. The first and second place balloons were unable to take off, but a farmer showed us to a field that was better sheltered from the strongest gusts. We had a hot launch and continued briskly until near dark when, using our burners for landing lights, we came down on the 20,000 acre farm of Colin and Nancy Waddel.

The Waddels offered us African hospitality on a grand scale. They took our balloon to their house, fed us, and offered us lodging in a cottage by their nearby game park, a fenced compound from which we watched zebras, giraffes and lots of other critters. The British team sponsored by The MetalSales Group had also landed on the Waddel farm, and, after making themselves very much at home in our beer cooler for quite a while, spent the night in the main farm house.

At about six the next morning, we inflated and took off with our hostess Nancy Waddel in the basket with us. The Brits were right behind us with her husband Colin in their basket. Susan flew first for about 45 minutes in winds at about 25 mph. Then it was Pete's turn. He has a tendency to fly low, so we enjoyed the sights and sounds of Africa. First, we passed over a small herd of zebra, then some condu, and a couple of bush bucks. They spooked and ran like heifers do back home.

Next, we approached a range of low mountains, part of the Great Dyke near Caesar's mine, and I suggested that Pete climb a bit to avoid the curl on the other side. From the basket, we could hear a sound like a train or like running water. Train? Water? "It's a bloody hurricane, " exclaimed Nancy.

She was right! The six-foot-tall grass was laid flat against the ground below us. The trees were twisting and bending in the rising wind. I hadn't flown in that much wind since our trip across Iowa two years earlier. I was glad I hadn't brought my GPS-I didn't want to know how fast we were going! I couldn't wait for Pete's turn to be over. When I took the helm, I planned to land as quickly as possible.

Having logged 40 or 50 miles already, we put down about 8:30 a.m. on a farm nestled among rocky hills. I dragged the basket through some trees to slow us before we settled into a plowed field. Frances Tuke, the lady of the manor, had watched the whole operation through binoculars. She came over from her house which was about a quarter mile away, and asked us if we were *still* in one piece. And couldn't we, "use a spot of tea then?"

We adjourned to her verandah. Tea soon became a formal breakfast with linen napkins and many courses of excellent food. Eggs. Bacon. Fresh squeezed orange juice. Fried Tomatoes. Home made bread. Papaya. We ate in a splendid setting which reminded me of Longwood Gardens, an exquisite horticultural showplace not far from my Conestoga, Pennsylvania home.

Our chase crew caught up with us about half an hour after we landed and was duly ushered in to dine with us. After breakfast, our hostess gave us a tour of her gardens. They were striking in their beauty and variety. It was a great end to our long jump.

And what of the winner, Jim Seton-Rodgers? On the second morning, he set off alone before the sunrise, reportedly at 3:30 a.m. and, with suspected strong disregard for both rules number one and two, flew about 170 kilometers to the Karoi area. Funny about that though. He missed the fine breakfast we enjoyed on the Tuke's verandah and on that basis alone, we kind of considered ourselves as the real winners.

<http://www.cristytrembly.com/saudi.html>

Saudi Arabia

by [Cristy Trembly](#)

I can't believe I just got back 2 weeks ago from Saudi Arabia. It is the most interesting, and confusing place I have ever visited. It is an extremely modern, rich country, but with many ideas that we would find restrictive. It was a privilege for me to be on a Smithsonian trip, which was costly but the only way a single woman like myself could even consider going. I have wanted to go, and twice have been able to look across to Saudi Arabia, but it is like a million miles away as you just cannot go there. Getting to Saudi Arabia isn't easy-it is 5+ hrs. to New York from here then another 13+ hrs. to Jeddah, then another hour and a half to Riyadh, so you leave California at 9 am on Thursday and arrive in Riyadh at 8 pm on Friday! It is incredible how far it is. Not only that, to get our visas, we only got our passports a day before our trip though they had our passports 2 months. Going on this Smithsonian tour, it was unusual for me because I like to go places on my own, but of course in Saudi that's impossible, and you get so many extra things, like waiting at JFK Airport in the executive lounge until our flight, so that was great. We got to meet the other people in our group, which was really interesting because they have been to the most incredible countries, some to Uzbekistan, Iraq, North Korea, West Africa, really exotic places I would like to go someday! It's nice to be with people who love travelling to strange places and don't think I am weird! To understand Saudi Arabia, you need a few basic facts:

It is as large as the United States east of the Mississippi, or most of Western Europe. So the various regions are almost like different countries, in culture and levels of conservatism.

I. You cannot get a visa for tourism there, it doesn't exist.

II. You cannot travel there independently, fly in, rent a car, do what you want. You must have a sponsor, a job, a reason to go there.

III. Now if you happen to be a woman, it is even more restrictive. Women cannot drive, stay in a hotel without a mahram's permission, in some towns cannot walk alone on the street.

IV. To clarify, a mahram is a male relative like a brother, husband, or father.

V. All facilities are separate, every office, restaurant, building, for singles (men) and families (women and families.) In some historic sites, museums, and so on, they have posted hours for families, and some for men only. In some, women can go alone, but in some, it is written, "women without mahram prohibited." The McDonalds are separated into 2 counters, 2 dining rooms, our group was always separated by a wall or screen as we were mixed male and female.

VI. Jobs are separate, so with the thousands of well-educated Saudi women, there are women's hospitals, banks, schools, universities and so on, so women do have

employment opportunities, and it is growing, but not every field is open to women, so it is very restrictive. Saudi women do manage it, though, as most have a driver to take them wherever they want to go, and they are making their own businesses, especially at home. Women do own Internet businesses, because they don't have to relate to men except by phone, and work in government offices with meetings by videoconference or phone.

VII. Even when there is no official, posted separation, it is pervasive. In a shopping mall, women will sit in one area and men will sit on the opposite side; in an airport waiting area, it is posted to separate, but our group, being mixed, would sit in a separate area. If one woman sat down, no man would sit in the entire row. Even more amazing, on the airplane, if Saudia mistakenly puts a man next to an unrelated woman, he won't sit next to her. The flight attendants are quite adept at moving the people around to keep the men and women separate. Even in the hotels, a man will not get on an elevator with a woman, and the men and women in our group were separated on different floors—one for men, one for woman, and one for couples.

VIII. There are no movie theatres, and no record stores. No recreation centers or places where people get together. Swimming pools and health clubs in hotels are usually restricted to men, and occasionally there will be a separate time for women.

IX. And crucially, women must wear a black long dress, sort of like a judge's robe, called an abaya. You must always cover your hair with a scarf, no you don't have to cover your face. Saudi women often cover their faces except for

their eyes, and in other Islamic countries, you will see women in colorful abayas, and colorful scarves, the only color allowed is black, but we did buy some abayas with a little colored embroidery or design on the buttons, but it is still black. Every woman, whether Saudi, foreign, Muslim or not, must absolutely wear the abaya under her clothes when she goes out. No exceptions. When we went to a beach, we lifted our abayas up to maybe knee level to put our feet in the water, but that was it. We got used to wearing it, as it's like a coat with snaps down the front, and was made of light material, but in the hot areas it was still very hot, and climbing up and down the steps in an archaeological ruin is not easy in an abaya!

From Smithsonian we have a tour leader, Lauren, who is a typical Washington bureaucrat, always checking the embassy situation and security and rift valley fever and malaria (no danger, believe me!), we are as different as 2 people can be, I am used to getting shows on the air, get it done, don't ask questions or go through channels, just do it, take care of it, see the hill, take the hill, that is how I am, where I could imagine she would only go in an organized tour with every possible ramification explored in the most cautious way, I just get on the plane and go but I am fully studied and prepared! We also had a study leader, Gwenn, who is a PhD specialist in Saudi Affairs, she even lived in Saudi Arabia for a year. She has written books about the economy and the people, and gave us several lectures on the country, deeper than even all the research and reading I have done to prepare for the trip. You know me, preparation is the most important thing on a trip like this! We also had a naturalist guide and leader, Barbara, who is from Montana and lives a few blocks from Yellowstone, how cool is that!!

She was very nice and kept us organized in a very nice way and was very sympathetic to our concerns and questions and all the things we wanted to do. I would highly recommend the trip, though, and they took great care of us. You can find them online at <http://smithsonianstudytours.si.edu/>.

Saudia is a very modern airline, no alcohol of course but since I don't drink so that's OK, and lots of individual video channels and movies and great food. They also have a prayer room on the plane and an arrow on the TV screen always showing where Mecca is. People were amazed on the plane, they had never heard of tourists going, in fact we are only the 3rd tourist group to ever visit the Kingdom. They didn't open anything in Customs, which I thought they would, I had heard stories about it so I didn't even bring my Good Housekeeping magazines to read for fear there might be a bra ad or something and they would take it. Any "suggestive" photos or religious things that are not Islamic, of course alcohol or pork, all that is forbidden, even cough syrup with alcohol. But we got through it , and I can't believe we are really here. When we drove in to town, seeing road signs for Saudi cities was incredible, that means we are really here. They are in English and Arabic, and I am trying to practice my reading all the time. They have huge 8-lane freeways and ultra modern dramatic buildings, most built since 1970. The oil boon was incredible, so in 30 years the country has gone from dirt roads, few stores and little contact with the outside world to a technological giant, modern hospitals and shopping malls and a major oil producer. We got to the hotel and ate a little bit and most importantly, got our abayas and scarves which we will be required to wear all the time. It's very warm outside, about

95 (36C), but not humid. I am lucky that I didn't have to pay the single supplement for the trip, too, as my assigned roommate didn't come on the trip so I get to be alone without having to pay extra! I am really happy about that, since I can use the time and the room to organize my stuff and watch Arabic TV without bothering anyone.

I have been nervous through all this as I have been working on a plan to stay an extra day to go to Mecca, I am fascinated and called to go and see it, and since I have come 8500 miles I need to go the last 40 to get there. I had been emailing with Smithsonian about this from the beginning and talked to them personally since April, and was working with another tour guy in Jeddah to make it happen, he said it would be easy but as of my arrival in Saudi I didn't have any confirmations so I was nervous. However one must learn that everything works on InshAllah, or God Willing, because if you are supposed to do it, you will, so I have to be patient. Smithsonian didn't forbid me to do it but they are very structured and not wanting to make any changes, but if I am turned over from them to another person, I won't be a woman alone, and if I release them from liability and the Saudi guy thinks it is fine, then I cannot understand the problem, This is the continuing saga of trying to get things done here, with the bureaucracy and not being independent to do what you want. My visa is valid and they have all the paperwork but I am not sure, day by day if I can do anything. I spoke to Barbara and Gwenn who see no problem, and to Lauren who is absolutely against it. I had some sleepless hours worrying about it but figured if it is supposed to work out, it will.

The next day we got up and started our sightseeing of the capital city, Riyadh. The founder of modern Saudi Arabia, King Abdul Aziz, brought the two sides together there, as well as his ancestor who brought the religious leaders together with his tribe, which is why the religious leaders and the royal family have a close alliance, even today. They have a check and balance system which lets the royal family rule, but always consulting with the religious leaders on important decisions.

I tried to call my friend Joseph, he is the one from Lebanon but is now working in Riyadh, so I tried all the numbers I had but couldn't reach him. With my limited Arabic I don't really understand what they are saying on the phone, is he just "not here" or does he not live there, I don't know. So I am feeling tired and upset about that and then the phone rang, and it was Joseph! I had written him in April that I was planning to be in Riyadh on this date and sent 2 copies of the letter to him in case one got lost. For all the modern things in Saudi, I have found the mail to be very, very slow. We're getting together tomorrow which will be great.

We saw the downtown area, with the main square which is also called "Chop Chop Square" as that is where they do the public executions after Friday prayers. They don't do it often, but their law is very literal, "eye for an eye" and their constitution is the Islamic Sharia. We visited the old market with carpets, teapots, frankincense and myrrh, spices, lots of things, and the Masmak Fortress where Abdul Aziz unified the Kingdom in 1902. In fact, last year was the 100th Anniversary of modern Saudi Arabia. You may wonder why, since it isn't 100 years yet, but Saudi goes by the Islamic Calendar, called the Hegira so their year has 354 days, 11

less than ours, so it is 100 years Hegira. Everything is so modern but still very different as you can tell. While at the fortress they have a sign that "women without mahram are prohibited" so unaccompanied women couldn't visit even during the family hours. Riyadh is much more conservative than Jeddah or Eastern Province. King Abdul Aziz lived here until his death in 1953 and was a simple, religious man who unified the Bedouins and the city people and brought the country together. His sons have ruled ever since, as the succession passes from brother to brother. Of course the brothers are all getting older, so they will make the grandsons eligible for the throne, but there are many, many grandsons so it will be interesting to see in the future how they choose the future kings. We usually spend lunchtime at the hotel in a screened-off area and always great buffets with more food than I need! One thing I have noticed is that there is only Pepsi, almost no Coca Cola. We then have some free time at the hotel as everyplace is closed in the early afternoon, for lunch and also for prayer times. There are 5 prayers a day and in Saudi it is the law that you must close. So afterwards we visited Diraiyah, the old capital, where the al-Saud family took control of the country and made peace with the religious leaders, so it's an old town, now being restored, with buildings that were homes and offices of the people back then. It was first settled in 1446. We also got to see a video crew taping a television historical drama which was great, they had a Betacam and track and it all looked very familiar to me!

I got together with Joseph, we took his car to McDonalds so I could get tray liners. They have 2 sections, one for singles (men) and one for families so we could sit there; there are 2 counters, 2 dining rooms, and Filipino guys working at the

counters. Afterwards we went to a big shopping mall to walk around and see what is in the stores. Since I was properly covered and with him I had no problems. He told me not to worry about the religious police, they aren't out during the week in the malls and they wouldn't bother us, though they can ask any couple for their marriage certificate on demand under penalty of arrest. So I was more free than I thought, I didn't think he and I could go anywhere at all, but of course I could never go to his home or even just sit in the hotel and talk, that would be forbidden, but the mall or McDonalds was fine.

We also went to the grocery store, I love to do that to see how much a chicken is or milk or whatever and he was "absolutely astonished" that I could read a lot of the labels in Arabic. I told him I would, and I told him I would visit him in Saudi, and here I am! He just couldn't believe it, I admit it, I can't believe it!

The next day we visited the Diplomatic Quarter, an area where embassies are located, and also beautiful homes and a special guest house for diplomats called the Qasr Tuwaig-Qasr means castle and it is a beautiful restored building. They have reception rooms and an outdoor garden with this stunning painted glass canopy of sea life which was amazing, and a basketball court, swimming pool and tennis courts, but of course only for men. They also have extra security because a Saudia plane was hijacked last night and is not in Iraq, it was someone who worked at the Jeddah airport who hijacked the plane, and a Prince was on the plane too! So very few flags were flying at the embassies, but we looked at the fancy houses, saw one of the homes King Fah'd built before he was King, a half-size replica of

the White House, but he didn't live there as it didn't seem right for the King to live in a copy of the White House, so he gave it to a nephew Prince Salman. It was behind a wall but we could see the top and take pictures from the bus. That is the luxurious thing on a Smithsonian tour, they know where everything is, it is easy, we can arrive exactly when something is open and there is a special guide waiting for us, it is really convenient. Of course as a woman, it would be impossible anyway.

We also went to the National Museum, which is incredible, has interactive displays and video screens and RF headsets in different languages so as you walk around with an earphone you can hear about the exhibit. It is also interesting, because the earliest history is in a dark room, then you go up the stairs and with the beginning of Islam you go into the light, literally it gets brighter! They have exhibits on Jesus and Moses and the prophets, which Islam believes in, artifacts from various ruins around Saudi, an entire area with replicas of the holy mosques in Medina and Mecca (they spell it Makkah but you know it as Mecca better)

And Hajj displays, it was just incredible. The only problem is that we don't have enough time to see everything, it is a superb museum. We also visited the Murabba Palace where King Abdul Aziz had his offices and meeting rooms, and modern things like a 1940s radio which was great! This is when there was nothing modern in Saudi, a really tribal lifestyle, and they only had airplane flights since the mid 1940s. There are also photos of his meetings with Roosevelt and Churchill and making oil deals in the early 1940s, and his personal mosque. In fact, Roosevelt gave him a DC-3 in

1942 which was the beginning of Saudia Airlines. Here in Saudi there is a mosque on every corner and to hear the calls to prayer is just wonderful, magical. We also ate at a traditional Saudi restaurant on the floor with great food, all kinds, amazing types of bread, vegetables, we even tried camel meat which was OK but a little strong for me!

Then we flew to Dhahran, which is in the Eastern Province, so we are near Kuwait and Bahrain here. At the airport, the women go through a separate screening with Saudi security ladies in short-sleeved uniforms, but we are behind 2 levels of curtains in a room with big signs near the curtains, "no men allowed." This has also happened in other countries, but every time we are screened in a Saudi airport the women are separated. On the domestic flights they always have a prayer to protect us on the loudspeaker at the beginning of the trip, and always the arrow pointing to Mecca on the TV screen, and of course we always wear our abayas and scarves on the plane. Since 1985 there is a causeway, a long bridge linking Bahrain and Saudi. In fact, scud missiles landed in this area during the 1991 Gulf War. When I was in Bahrain in 1984, I was it being built and got a photo through the fence, dreaming of visiting Saudi, and now here I am, looking over at Bahrain, it is incredible! They say it is easy to get a visa to go over there but you cannot get back into Saudi if you go to Bahrain! Saudi people go, of course, as easily as we cross into Mexico, some people live in Bahrain and commute or vice versa. For this reason, Eastern Province is much more modern and more liberal, so we don't have to wear our scarves as often but we always wear our abayas, there is never a place so liberal that we don't need our abayas! In fact, when we went to the beach to put our feet in the water, we still had

to wear our abayas and just pull them up above our ankles! Many people also like to live in Bahrain because it is much more liberal than anywhere in Saudi, they permit alcohol and have movie theatres and music on the radio and women can drive! It is also very modern, and you don't have to wear an abaya (of course you must dress conservatively but black abayas not required!) I would like to go back there and see how it has changed in 15 years.

We are very lucky to have wonderful Saudi guides with us on the entire trip-there is a new Ministry of Tourism and the Prince in charge of it is the Saudi astronaut that flew in the Space Shuttle. I guess he has been further away than anybody!! Our Saudi guides are great, one is Sa'ad, in his 40s, his family is Bedouin and they are from Al Jouf, he's married to an American woman from Louisiana and he went to college in Arizona. They live half the year in Saudi when he is working here and the rest in the States, so he knows both sides very well and can explain it all to us. Our other guide is young, he is training, his name is Samer and he is from Jeddah, his parents were killed in a car accident and he is very sweet. It is interesting to talk to a young Saudi guy, he loves to wear traditional clothes and he looks like the cover of a desert brochure! His father was in the religious police, so he knows about strictly following Islam but he also loves Britney Spears!

It is much more humid here, over 100 degrees (40C) and so we are really warm all the time. They have a new airport in Jubail in the northern area then we drove to Al Khobar to the Meridien Hotel which was absolutely stunning. This is a major date-producing area and the center for Saudi Aramco, the huge oil company and ultramodern interactive museum

on the oil industry in Saudi. They have incredible exhibits that appeal from junior high students to advanced scientists, with displays and a booth where you go in and with video and motion, it takes you down into an oil well where you can see it being mined, so it looks real out your "window", of course it is just a video screen but it is very real! It is too bad that every 4th grade class can't go there, it is so interesting and educational and well-done. The public relations person met us and took us around, she is a Saudi woman and covered her hair and was in a long skirt and jacket but not an abaya. Her husband works on the compound at the hospital and her father worked for Aramco so they have always lived on the compound. There are many, many Americans who work there, in fact on the compound only, within the gates, women can drive! They have a Wendy's hamburgers and a school and everything, and a golf course made from oil and sand, with different colors for the greens, fairways etc. The golf club was the only place we ever saw any kind of shirts for sale with Saudi Arabia on them and we bought out the store. We also saw the famous pump #7, the first place oil was drilled from in 1938, which of course started the entire Saudi economy. There is a famous petroleum university here, and we saw Tornado jets flying over from the Air Force base nearby. There are a lot of American soldiers in Saudi.

We also got to spend the day with an American lady who married a Saudi and moved here 17 years ago. She has learned to manage the restrictions with the benefits, and shared her life with us, from sending her daughters to Saudi school contrasted with the American school she teaches in. The girls dress in their abayas for Saudi school then go to Girl Scouts afterwards, so they really do have both worlds.

We saw a bunch of schoolgirls going home for lunch, black ones for elementary school, gray for junior high and brown for high school, and you have to start covering your face after your first period, so if you start at 10 or 11 you don't tell because you'll be relegated to the veil that much sooner. There are no income taxes but fees are increasing for residence permits, drivers licenses etc.

There's a beautiful Corniche, 150 km long with stores and hotels and you can walk along it, even as a woman! They have a great bookstore where we all bought a lot of books and a very nice mall with abayas in one store and a Body Shop and Warner Brothers store next door! It is another of the Saudi contradictions, the blending of modern vs. traditional. In the same way, Saudi TV has 2 channels and they are news on what the royal family is doing, prayer time, Qu'ran readings, and interview shows with men, and maybe some kind of drama series, but now people have satellite dishes so CNN, MTV, and everything in between is available. There is still some control, for example European TV commercials where they show a woman in the shower (in the States the glass would be foggy, not so in Europe!), they make the video fuzzy on the soap commercial, but there is a lot more freedom than I thought. Many people have fences around their satellite dishes because the religious police used to throw rocks at them. We had a barbecue lunch at a date farm, they just hang off the trees. We went to an upscale store called Arab Heritage with beautiful clothes and furniture and all sorts of things, I bought a couple little cloth dolls which were girls but only their eyes show, they are quite unique and not too expensive, but of course everything else I saw that I wanted was at least \$800 so I left it all there!!

I also got to actually go to the post office to buy stamps, people don't understand that when you are a stamp collector it is fun to look so I wanted to see for myself, but a woman cannot go to the post office, Joseph said in his 35 years he had never, ever seen a woman in a post office, so one of the guys from the group who also collected stamps wanted to go, they looked at us strangely but knew we were foreigners so they gave him stamps, I let him talk in our fractured Arabic then we divided up the goodies at the hotel. Still, though, there are only about 5 kinds of stamps, everything is metered, so it is very tough, and in our other attempts at the post office we also never found more than 5 kinds, usually about the same, whether it be the airport or a small town! I would get tired of not being able to do things myself, but Sabrina has a driver who does things and of course drives her and the kids everywhere, so she doesn't feel restricted. She is also very independent so has learned to adapt, I think in some ways I could, in some ways not, like I could only work at an all-female TV channel, so I would have to start one!

After this, we flew to Al Jouf via Riyadh, but we didn't have to wait in the airport, they arranged for us to go to the camel market to see the different kinds of camels and how they can cost thousands of dollars, we also went past the farms of some royalty, had a very nice lunch then back on the plane. Al Jouf is in the far north of the country, almost to Jordan or Iraq which is just 200 km away (125 miles)! There is also an air base in Al Jouf with planes that patrol the neighboring area, so I hear. It is hard to imagine how big Saudi is and how you can be bordering Bahrain in the morning and Jordan in the afternoon. We were going to stay

in the hotel there, but they had a problem and it was full so the Prince offered to have us stay at his compound. Of course we had to be separated, couples, single men, single women, so we were in 3 separate buildings. Of course we walked all around and took pictures everywhere. We were supposed to have a meeting with him but he cancelled, oh well! We had a house for we 3 women, separate bedrooms but a living room and 2 bathrooms and a dressing room and full kitchen, we were living very well! I preferred it to the hotel anyway-we ate at the hotel but I enjoyed staying in the compound.

Here it is much cooler and we are relieved, the guys just don't understand how hot it is! In the evening we went over to Sa'ad's family home, which is a huge tent compound, not like our tents, I mean gorgeous with beautiful carpets and TV and VCR and air conditioning. They brought all sorts of food for us and it was great. It was like a dream, sitting on pillows on the floor in a Bedouin tent, really incredible, drinking tea. His sisters didn't mind for us to take pictures of them, which was great as we are strictly prohibited from photographing Saudi women, you just don't do it, even another woman! The family has a lot of land in this area, all around us, and the women make carpets and I took pictures, even with her face fully covered she can see through it to weave these rugs, I can't believe it! I looked through one of the veils and you can see through it but I am glad we don't have to do that!

The highlight of this area is an archeological site, Domat al Jandal. It looks like Arizona or New Mexico, very Southwestern USA, and cooler. There are ruins called

Rajajil, which are standing stones something like Stonehenge. No one knows what they are for but have markings traced back to 4000 BC. Domat al Jandal is a town with houses and a tower and old ruins from various periods, some from Nabatean (about 100BC-100AD) and some even older, it is said Ishmael stayed here, the colors and the rocks are just beautiful. We had a local archeologist walk around with us, and of course walking up and down in our abayas is even slower, he patiently waited for us and I remarked, "it is not easy in an abaya" and he said he had never thought of that before. We also visited Masjid Umar, the mosque built by Umar, the Second Caliph, basically the second leader after Mohamed's death, built in about 638 AD. Just incredible, and we were particularly fortunate as it is still in use but we could visit since there is no one there praying, otherwise it is absolutely forbidden to take photos in a mosque.

We also visited the Al-Jouf Water Factory, with clean bathrooms and to see how they bottle the water. I was amazed and we could see how they puff up the bottles which start as little tubes and how they check the water-we could stand very close and watch everything, much more than you could here where they worry about liability and lawsuits! We met the guys who work there who were fascinated by us, I could speak to one who is a Tunisian and we could speak French and he explained it all to me and I told the others. Most of the guys here were from other Arab countries, our bus driver is from Syria so I was able to tell him I had been there and it was nice, of course my sentences sound like a 3 year old but I am trying!

We also visited a falcon training place, the guys have falcons for sport and hunting and just showing off, the way British guys have dogs I guess, but falconry is a very Arab guy thing, so it was cool to see them.

We also visited some Nabatean wells and other areas, to the shops there, I got a cute little teapot very cheaply, but there are no tourist things to buy as they don't have tourists. So no t-shirts and very few postcards, we are truly pioneers. This morning I drank some mango juice that didn't agree with me, I think because it was on an empty stomach as I had drunk mango juice every day in Saudi, but it was really bothering me. I am so frustrated as every day we are sightseeing from 8 am to 9 pm or so and there are fantastic things to see and do everywhere and I cannot do anything, I can barely hold anything down. This was a lucky day for me, though, as they had a lot of First Class tickets which they rotated among the group, and today I got to fly up front! So I can be all the more chic as I get ill in the First Class bathroom! They change some of the flights around which is hard for us because our tour plans are dependent on being at the airport at a certain time and seeing things on a schedule. We didn't know if we would fly to Medina directly, or even through Riyadh, no one knew, but when we got in the air it was non-stop to Medina. I am really upset because I am in the holy city of Medina and my stomach feels terrible, I am hot and faint and feel nasty.

Samer said he would take me into town, there are some places I want to see, but I feel terrible. He had shopping to do in town and said I could come along. I have to get the strength to go; I ate some rice and tried not to be sick, I took Pepto, Roloids, Ginger, we had a very nice doctor and

he gave me some medicine but I felt awful, and he was so nice, I just cried because people were so nice and I felt terrible.

Anyway, I prayed for the strength to go and I made it, we took a taxi and went very fast to the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, which is second only to Mecca in importance and beauty. I have seen it on TV so many times and seen it in books but to see it at night, it is all lit up and just incredible, the most amazing thing. I was just stunned, so I sat outside, I went inside and prayed, it was very difficult, he told me to take my camera but not my video camera, keep it in my bag and not even attempt a photo unless he was with me and asked a policeman, as if I got in trouble I can't speak Arabic to get out of trouble, well that is true. There are ladies on the women's side fully covered in abayas but with patches on their shoulders, very serious women to keep you from doing anything wrong (like a picture!) So I was very careful, of course there is no time to see anything and many of the places inside are closed off. It is also not open 24 hrs. like the mosque in Mecca so you cannot just go and stay at any hour. So I walked around, then he came back and we walked around the outside, I have to be careful because of course I don't know where is OK and where is forbidden. I also noticed a sign for a parking lot, it was marked "women only" which was strange to me since women can't drive, but the drivers must wait in their cars down below for the women to come, that is the only thing I can figure.

Seeing the Prophet's Mosque was incredible, but it was just like a taste, there was so little time, and I only saw a small part. Afterwards, we went over to the market and bought

some things, after all I am in Medina, I had to buy some things to take home, it is unbelievable! He was such a gentleman, he got water for me from the holy well which they bring up and he said if I prayed and drank it, it would help my stomach, which I did, and I actually felt a little better, but it was hot and I had to be even more covered than usual to be there. He always made sure I had a place to sit and carried my stuff when he went into a store, I was just sitting outside looking at everything, totally in awe.

So we finished and then got a taxi for an hour, it was only \$20, no problem, and drove around and he held my camera out the window and took a lot of photos, then we went to the Qiblatain Mosque, just outside, it means 2 Qiblas, Qibla is the word for the direction of Mecca, so when you see a Qibla in a mosque you know which way to pray. So originally people prayed towards Jerusalem, but Mohamed got a message from God that they should pray to the black stone in Mecca so Mohamed came in when people were praying, he waited until they were done and said, God has told me we should pray in another direction, so they moved the other way and prayed that way too. If you put an -tain on the end of a word it means 2, therefore Qiblatain is 2 directions. It is very famous-I also saw the Hejaz Railroad Station, from the Lawrence of Arabia times, there are rail lines from Damascus to Mecca, and were used in the early 1900s. Of course Medina was a big stop on the road for the pilgrimage. The city is incredible, with modern shopping malls, we needed to buy some film for one of the guys in the group, I went to a grocery store in the mall, here I am in Medina in a mall buying film, as I write this I have to pinch myself! It is impossible to believe it. We also passed the cemetery where many members of Mohamed's family

are supposed to be buried, but it is dark and we can't see, also the graves have no markings, but I was there anyway! There is a beautiful waterfall along the road, it is so beautiful here, I wish I had more time. We got home about 11 pm and I didn't feel well but I got into bed after getting myself organized, as we must be up at 4:45 am tomorrow to go to Madain Salah, which is why everyone else got hours of extra sleep but I was out running around and sick to boot, but when will I get to Medina again? I cannot believe I am here!!

Of course it was 4:45 am all too soon but this is a highlight of our trip, a full day excursion to Madain Salah, which is a Nabatean ruin that is very similar to Petra, Jordan, and not that far from Petra as the crow flies, about 4 hrs. by car. I am sure you have seen Petra, the rose-colored rock and the buildings carved into the rock, well this is quite similar but not the same rock so not rose colored, but orange, and not as large. It is about 3 hrs. away from Medina and is really in the middle of nowhere. We took the bus up to the ruins and had a picnic lunch at the Hejaz RR station up here, which has an old rail car inside. We ate on the ground, they work very hard to give us box lunches with sandwiches and fruit and drinks, I am taking it very easy on the food because my stomach is a long way from normal, but I am on Cloud Nine from my visit to Medina downtown, and thank God I made it!

The mountains around here are so red, it is really amazing to see it They are happy I got to Medina and so are thinking of how to get me to Mecca-I think all have figured out this is very important to me, so Lauren said she would explain to the other people when we get to Jeddah that I have to go

home on time but they will arrange for Samer or one of the people in his office to take me, even if I have to miss seeing some things in Jeddah which I said was fine, whatever they can do. My bottom line is to get there and not look like a dufus to the people in Jeddah because I just feel awful about it, and all the work, but if she can pull this off so much the better.

So we look at everything, took some very famous photos from the ruins that I hope will look like the postcards, then stopped in Al Ula on the way back. There is a new hotel there people want to look at, which was very nice with a gorgeous view of the ruins. Of course then you don't go to Medina, which would be devastating as far as I am concerned. But it might be nice to overnight here after you have been to Medina because you are a long way back. If one had a lot of time, you could visit several ruins in a car, like from Al Jouf to Taima, Tabuk, Madain Salah then end up in Medina, drop the car, but oops we can't do that so we have to fly! I don't think there are any hotels in the other places either, so this will all happen in time. After all, things are changing at a fast pace, slavery was only abolished in 1962, though the servants stayed on with their families, and no one ever believed there would be tourists from western countries, if it ever happened, people thought it would only be from Islamic countries.

When we got home to Medina again we had all slept on the bus and I went right to bed, about 10 pm after getting my suitcase together (we never have time to unpack them, we just get some clothes out and throw on our abayas), and off to the airport to go to Jeddah. Samer is from Jeddah and he says it is the best place, everyone says so as it has had the

most cosmopolitan influence, having the port on the Red Sea and being the port of entry for the Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) they have seen foreign people and many ideas for 1400 years. It was pretty cool in the airport to see the pilgrims who make the Umrah or lesser pilgrimage which you can do any time of year, the men wear a special type of clothing and you have to put it on before you get to Mecca, so there are a lot of guys in these clothes waiting for their airplanes, and people from every country, a large Malaysian group also going on the Umrah and you can feel the difference.

So we flew to Jeddah and had lunch at this gorgeous restaurant overlooking the sea, with huge windows, it reminded me of the Punta Morro Hotel in Ensenada, right on the water with a fabulous view. It is very, very hot and humid, but Jeddah is a gorgeous place, with beautiful sculptures at each traffic circle, and a fantastic Corniche with a sea view everywhere and beautiful stores and everything so modern I cannot believe it. And you can walk here, even the women! This is great! I am still not feeling well, just small food which is better for me anyway, ha ha, I have never looked at fabulous buffet food and just went, no, not really interested, just a couple of bites! We stayed at the Inter Continental which is right next to the sea, and a McDonalds right across the parking lot, yippee! I asked if it was OK to go, they said yes, I thought maybe I need something familiar, not that I eat there at home but sometimes your stomach just needs something plain, not fancy. So I got a hamburger, I walked in by myself which the Filipino guys behind the counter were pretty amused by, I asked if it is OK to be there, I looked carefully for the family door, a couple guys saw me walk in like I was

mentally ill but the guys inside said, oh no Madam, you are very welcome, do you come from America? Duh, even in our abayas we don't look like we come from around here. I took my burger back to the hotel though, it was a little too weird to try and eat it there even in the family section upstairs. Jeddah is also the first place where we saw Americans in the hotels and people doing business there.

Then we went to see old Jeddah which is being restored. Like many cities, buildings are often torn down for progress, but they are working very hard to restore this part of the city, which dates back to 1487. There are many beautiful buildings, the old market which is the shopper's mecca; you know, I think how often we use the word Mecca, or Wall Street being the financial mecca, or the Empire State Building being a tourist mecca, we use this expression all the time and now we see where it comes from, the center of the thing, which of course comes from the holy city of Mecca. We bought a lot of stuff in the market in Jeddah, this is the ultimate shopping and dealing place, I am pretty good at bargaining and my Arabic numbers are excellent. We toured the Nassif House which is 300 years old and being restored, in fact King Abdul Aziz lived here at one time, there is wood furniture in the style of Damascus that we saw the originals when we were there, friends of the people we stayed with in Damascus you may remember. We had a beautiful dinner on the roof of the Nassif House, overlooking the city, positively amazing. So Samer comes to me and said, we have someone to take you to Mecca, right after dinner you will go. Of course I am ready right now but I have no control over this so I must wait, I ate a little but I am not hungry and also anxious!

We got back to the hotel about 10 pm and we haven't gone anywhere, but not to worry, it will all happen, we will call you. So they did, one of the guys, very cute, Essam, looks like David Cassidy, he got me at the hotel and took me to his house where we would pick up his wife, since we are not supposed to go places unaccompanied as I am a single female. I imagined his wife as serious all dressed in black, we walked in, she was in jeans and a flannel-type shirt, hi, come in, have some tea, they have a baby about 18 months old playing on the floor watching music videos, a kitten is eating in the kitchen, getting food on the floor, just a normal family. I feel I should be more dressed up but I don't have any better clothes to wear so I have to think God likes me just the same.

I was so blessed to be able to see Mecca for myself, and only 45 mins. from Jeddah. I had seen it on TV for years and it is the place where all Muslims point to when they pray, the black stone of Abraham and Ishmael. It is huge, and has been expanded several times. 2 million people come there every year at Hajj time and it was still crowded even at midnight on a normal weekday, but it was just thrilling to see the hills where Hagar was looking for water for her child Ishmael and ran between the 2 hills and then a well sprang up, now called the Zamzam well and still providing water today (Genesis 21). I drank the water there and brought some home and to share with friends, it was amazing. I can never describe how long I had read and researched about this place and how exciting it was to actually see it. The black stone was smaller than I thought,

but it was because the mosque surrounding it was so incredibly huge. There is a display with a footprint of Abraham, and I will always remember how the black cloth smelled, it is finely embroidered and has the smell of incense and the touch of it, just overwhelming and unforgettable. The colors are beautiful, the ceilings, the spots where there is air conditioning (even at night it is 90 degrees and warm inside, parts have a roof and parts are open). No matter how prepared I was, reading about every part and everything, I was just stunned and overwhelmed and forgot everything, I was just staring at it! I wanted to sit there for 2 hours and just look at it, try to soak it up, but we didn't have much time, so we had to leave and go back to Jeddah. It was part of the contradiction too that as we walked out of the Holy Mosque, that was just overwhelming, and in front is the Hilton Hotel and a Burger King! At the checkpoint there is a gas station and a McDonalds! It is really amazing, there are definitely no words to describe it, on every level. I had resigned myself that if I was supposed to see it, I would, and God provided!

After that, I didn't need to do anything else, in fact we were there until about 3 am, so the next day I was so tired, doing all these extra things while the Smithsonian people were sleeping! Of course it was worth it, I can sleep at home! We flew to the south of Saudi, to Abha, about 6000 feet and cool and green. I had to stay awake, I don't want to miss anything! The hotel was the most elegant we had stayed in, written up in Leading Hotels of the World, the Abha Palace, gorgeous, allied with Dallas' Mansion at Turtle Creek so you have some idea. I had like a suite inside, fantastic view and definitely the world that I would like to become accustomed to! They had tons of cable TV channels, with Arabic news,

CNN and ESPN and a pretty racy music video channel from Europe, especially by Saudi standards. Another contradiction, no record stores but you can get videos on satellite, so Saudi TV was really boring by comparison.

We met Raed, our guide in Abha, who was very handsome and looks like Gregory Harrison with a mustache! He was very helpful. Abha is the base for the Asir National Park, the first area they are trying to develop for tourism, mostly from other Arab countries. They have a cable car into the canyon and a nice market and another large town called Khamis Mushayt with an American base with Tornados and F-15s. We were in the market and saw some women in abayas next to us bartering with prices in Arabic and then said in a perfect American accent, "I think we got a good deal" so we didn't know them and I asked, "where are you from" and they were as amazed as me! Their husbands worked at the base at Khamis and they couldn't believe we were tourists! We saw a beautiful artists' colony with traditional architecture and fantastic paintings and murals and Arabic calligraphy, I wish I could have afforded some of it!

We also visited a small village, Al Sooda, with traditional dancers and a museum that was 500 years old. We are at the highest point in Saudi, 10,000 feet (3100m), such contrasts around the different areas of the country! These people were really fascinated with us, as we were with them, and we felt like we were in a National Geographic special. The experiences we had were just amazing, seeing the children, watching the dancers, it was great. We are

only about 100 miles from the Yemen border here, of course Saudi borders almost all the countries in the region so it is frustrating that we can't visit any of them!

We have to go home now, though, so we flew back to Jeddah for a wonderful dinner at a very posh country club and then left Jeddah at 2 am for New York, arrived at 7 am and cleared customs then got on my flight to LA, arrived home at 2 pm, not too bad! I was able to sleep about 8 hours, it is incredible how you could fly so far but still be home in a day. It was an incredible experience, though and absolutely fantastic. I would recommend this trip to anyone who wants to see an entirely different culture blending with an ultra-modern society, it was just fantastic!

<http://www.vagabonding.com/travelogue/000086.html>

A Cremation in Kathmandu

This is the closest I've ever been to a dead body, I thought as I sat on a bench on the banks of the Bagmati, a holy river near Kathmandu which, like the Ganges in Varanasi, is a popular place for cremations. Swathed in a white sheet with a square of golden cloth covering its head and shoulders, a corpse lay atop a stretcher on the ground less than seven yards from my feet.

Unlike the other cremations taking place on the ghats, which drew large groups of family and friends, just three men were gathered for this funeral; they sat on a bench directly next to mine. Surprisingly, one of them turned and hit me up with the old "Hello, where are you from?" bit. From the beginning, though, it was clear that the guy was after nothing more than a chat.

Head Constable Shankar RawalHis name was Shankar Rawal, Head Constable for the Kathmandu Police. He had spiky black hair, a thick moustache, and was dressed in a black and maroon tracksuit. He'd come with his brother and nephew to cremate a friend. Clearly in a reflective mood, Rawal quickly dispensed with surface banter.

"So many people miss the purpose of life," he said. "They seek material things: gold, cars, money, houses. But these things don't bring satisfaction. The Buddha said, 'Satisfaction is not certain, but death is certain.'" Rawal nodded toward the corpse. "My friend didn't know what was important in life. He was just about to turn thirty."

"That's my age," I interrupted.

"Mine too," Rawal said. He carried on: "He lost his mind over a woman, and it consumed him. First he began to drink. A little, then a lot. Then he began to use drugs." Rawal pantomimed a syringe against his forearm. "His family disowned him. He slept on the street. He was a burden on society."

A Hindu who quoted Buddha and the Bible, Rawal went on to assert his belief in a single God that different religions call by various names.

"Although we have different skin colors and different religions... Although you call yourself an American and I call myself a Nepali, our blood is still red, we're all the same underneath. We..."

Rawal's friends interrupted him. It was time to prepare the body.

I asked Rawal if he'd like me to leave. "No," he replied. "Stay if you like."

The three friends unwrapped the white sheet that covered the body. Inside, the naked corpse was encased in a sheet of thick clear plastic. The friends opened the plastic and

set about rubbing the body with a mixture of powder and water drawn from the holy river.

The frail brown body was malleable, and the friends manipulated it gently, moistening every bit of skin with their bare hands. The dead man's flesh hung loosely upon his small frame. A stitched-up seam ran the vertical length of his chest; there had been an autopsy. I glimpsed the lines of a crude tattoo on his right shoulder.

Somehow, that tattoo was the saddest thing I'd ever seen.

The three friends set about their work with grave expressions, but nobody wept. They handled the corpse with tenderness and also a sort of nonchalance. Rawal's brother uncovered the head and carefully massaged the powder and water onto his deceased friend's face.

Preparations complete, the men rewrapped the body in the white sheet and carried it on the stretcher to the waiting funeral pyre. They made three clockwise revolutions around the pile of logs before placing their friend atop. The nephew took a torch from a fire burning nearby and made several circumambulations around the corpse.

Cremation Ghats on the Bagmati
As the sheet caught fire, Rawal laid loose bundles of thatch atop the pyre. The thatch fueled the blaze and obscured the body's form once the sheet burned away.

Thick yellow smoke poured off the pyre as the flames gained momentum. The friends stepped back and watched as a man who worked at the ghats shoved smaller sticks into strategic locations.

Rawal returned to his seat on the bench and watched the pyre burn. "Now we wait for three hours," he told me. His face was expressionless as he looked toward the fire.

"Are you feeling sad?" I asked after a short while.

"A little," he replied. "He was a bad man, and he caused many people pain. But it's still sad to see someone go. Especially after all the little dramas."

Looking at me, Rawal motioned with his head toward the clear afternoon sky and said, "Now, for him, comes the greatest drama of them all."

<http://home.earthlink.net/~ryan-silva/Site/>

Trip to Iraq, January 2003

A view of the Tigris River from my hotel room

Last fall, 30,000 academics signed a petition opposing the apparently impending war with Iraq. In response, the University of Baghdad invited signatories to the petition to visit Baghdad to learn more. Thirty-two people, myself included, accepted the invitation and traveled to Baghdad on January 11. We traveled using our own funds so as to maintain the independence of our group. We do not support the government of Iraq but traveled with the hope of learning more about and showing support for Iraqi people.

Before leaving, I had some concerns. Frustration over U.S. foreign policy might translate into aggression from Iraqis. A crisis might occur and make it difficult to leave. The significance of the trip could be twisted by the media both in Iraq and the US, to opposite ends. And it seemed likely that the trip would be so closely managed by the Iraqi government that genuine interaction with Iraqis would be difficult or impossible.

Upon arrival, though these concerns did not melt away, I had the sense that it had been right to face my fears. The Iraq I saw is filled with ordinary people trying to live ordinary lives - students eager to practice their English, shopkeepers anxious to sell souvenirs, professors excited about the opportunity to exchange academic ideas and children curious to interact with foreign visitors. Yet overshadowing this ordinariness is a deep sadness and frustration, as foreign soldiers and bombs gather around a nation weary from years of war, sanctions and international isolation.

Our hosts were eager to show off their cultural heritage - a heritage shared by all human beings as Iraq is the "cradle of civilization". We were taken to the ruins of Babylon, the Baghdad Museum, mosques and other historical sites. I was struck by how much stood to be lost to war.

Iraq has been and should be a prosperous country, with fertile land fed by the Tigris and Euphrates, an abundance of oil and a populace that places a high value on education. Since the end of the 1991 Gulf War, sanctions imposed on Iraq have resulted in deaths from malnutrition and disease as well as economic devastation and the isolation of ordinary Iraqis. Iraq's health care system, once among the best in the Middle East, now struggles to cope with even easily curable diseases. The formerly impressive educational system, lacking access to international journals, conferences, and academic exchange, now lags behind. The sanctions, intended to weaken Saddam Hussein and impair his ability to remilitarize, have directed his people's anger toward the US rather than his own regime. Our attempts to marginalize and weaken Saddam Hussein have weakened and demoralized Iraq's 24 million people, but seem not to have affected the regime much.

We knew that the Iraqi government had an interest in controlling what we saw and heard and we were under no illusions that we were interacting with a representative cross-section of Iraq's diverse population. Our hosts were primarily university professors, administrators and students, a number of whom had been educated in the United States. However, we learned more than just the government line on the current situation. We witnessed some discomfort about the heavy-handedness of the official message being presented to us and heard about Iraqis' desire to be accepted members of the international community.

I heard repeatedly from Iraqis that they genuinely like America and Americans, and I was warmly greeted by everyone I met. Nevertheless, the Iraqis I talked to do not trust the United States' expressed desire to "liberate" them. They were adamant that they could not accept change imposed by a foreign power. If attacked, they would be forced to defend their land against the US, which they believe is more interested in their oil than in their human rights.

This attitude came as no surprise based on experiences that I have had studying and working in other parts of the Middle East for more than four

years. The history of colonialism by the British and French is still fresh in the minds of most Arabs I have met and they are deeply distrustful of foreign intervention into their countries. Though many Americans perceive a difference between former imperialist actions of European powers and current US policy, we cannot ignore that millions of people in the Middle East do not accept this distinction.

On January 17, the *Washington Post* reported that postwar plans already drawn up by the Administration state that following a US invasion, "Iraqis relegated to advisory roles in the immediate postwar period would gradually be given a greater role, but they would not regain control of their country for a year or more...". It seems singularly unwise, from a security perspective, for the US to put itself in the position of militarily occupying an Arab country, especially for such an extended period. Of special concern is the fact that Iraq contains many Islamic holy sites and is close to Islam's most sacred places of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. The attacks of September 11 illustrated vividly that it does not take weapons of mass destruction to cause havoc; a relatively small group of enraged and determined individuals with modest resources can have a devastating impact. A preemptive strike on Iraq would also set a dangerous precedent encouraging other countries to take preemptive actions against their enemies.

In October 2002 letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee, CIA Director George Tenet stated that the likelihood of Saddam Hussein launching an unprovoked attack on the US is low but that, if cornered, he would become much more dangerous. A firm and consistent policy of containment and deterrence is an option that can enhance global security without destabilizing the region or creating even more implacable enemies. It is not a viable or sustainable foreign policy to invade every country that has oppressive leadership and dangerous weapons.

I believe that Saddam Hussein's regime is brutal one and Iraqis deserve a better future. But to be legitimate and to endure, change must come from within. We can support internal change through engagement with Iraq in which great international influence can be brought to bear. We must ease the sanctions and isolation that Iraqis have experienced for twelve years to end the unintended effect of strengthening Saddam Hussein's regime and weakening average Iraqis. At the same time, we must pursue an

arms control policy that reflects the needs and interests of all countries in the Middle East.

At the conclusion of our trip, our group prepared a [joint statement](#) outlining our position and recommendations on Iraq as informed by our trip and previous knowledge of the region. We encourage others to distribute the statement and to use it as a starting point for discussion.

There is still time to act to try to stop a war and I urge others to do so. I have provided information below to assist those who want to learn more about Iraq and/or to speak out against a war.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and to think about these issues. Feel free to pass on this information to anyone who may be interested. This website only scratches the surface of very complex issues. I would be happy to share more about my experiences and to hear others' viewpoints.

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7/4. Every day I wake up with the fear that the beauty I see today won't top the beauty I saw yesterday, and every day I am amazed....

Everyday I wake up with the fear that my body will not be able to handle the power of Israel, and everyday I obtain an immense amount of strength....

Every new day I wonder how these wonders are possible, and then I remember g-d and where I am. I am home. Meira

7/4. This is my first 4th of July that I won't be celebrating in the U.S. I can remember last year I was at a huge party with all of my friends. Now that I think about it I miss my friends so much. I have never had to make new friends, I've always had the same friends from elementary school. The first days of this trip were so awesome and fun, things to remember, to tell my friends when I get back home, but how I get the feeling of not being "cool" or good enough. I have tried to talk to other people, but I don't think all of you realize how intimidated I am by you. It's not going to kill you to talk or sit next to other people that are not in our "group." I'm sorry if that sounds bad. I only want to have fun on this trip, and be able to look back on it and say it was worth it all, to spend a summer away from my friends, family,

home, my room, what I know as mine. I hate bus rides. And I wish that one counselor (that shall remain nameless) would stop having favorites, or just stop showing it so much. I would just like to say that we do pay attention when people talk, even if we are not looking at the person we are paying attention. At first it wasn't helping to make my trip any better, but I'm not going to let that bother e and that's about all I have to say. Thanks for reading.

7/5. After a long discussion questioning our abilities to pay attention and follow directions we set for a new day. Memories of last night linger in the backs of our head as we strive for camper perfection. As a "we forgive you present" our counselors brought us pretzels and boker tov drawings as we set off for our new adventure.

I like this place! As we drive along, the fruitless, dried out desert becomes the most valuable thing in the world. Each piece of gravel that is placed under us as burning pavement shows the sweat of a fellow, Jew? Arab? It doesn't matter, but he is my friend. He has paged the way for a group of brats from around the world to find themselves. This fellow is strong; I am weak...but I am learning the secrets to thick states of life, and love. I belong here (at least for another 4 weeks.).

7/5. We just went to the Israeli and Lebanese border. Our guide was the security guard of the kibbutz and he had emigrated to Israel from New York 30 years ago. He told us a story about how some Lebanese "freedom fighters" took hostages 20 years ago in a building that we were sitting right next to. Most of the people they took hostage were between the ages of 6 months to 1 year old. Eventually all 5 of the "freedom fighters" were killed during the raid of the house, but not before they managed to kill one of the babies with the butt of their rifle, because it had cried too much. Someone who can kill a bay like that isn't a Freedom Fighter, they are a murderer.

Hooray for Israel. As I sit here on the bus to lunch, with my hat on my lap and a girl on my arm, I am content. And cold. The girl on my arm insists on keeping the AC vent open. Her foot is asleep. My left arm is numb with the

combo of weight and subzero temperatures. The girl likes stomping her feet. Poor girl. The girl has crazy eyes. They are a lovely shade of green with bits of yellow flowing through them like lightning. The girl prods and nudges me. "Write more," she says. "No! I will not!" My hand is tired. And this journal is upside down.

Happy Birthday to Ashley (in 17 days) 17 in 17, ha! Today we went to some old city that was very beautiful but the best part was lunch and learning about the Druz religion which is very interesting. Lunch was by far the best meal we've had the entire trip. Ok, so now we're all going to the family weekend. I'm going to rest and eat McDonalds and that about it. Ok, bye!

7/6. Before this trip started, I was upset about the social scene because only one person I was close with was coming to Israel with me. Now that it's a little over a week into the trip, though, and we're all going to visit family or friends for the weekend, I'm upset because I'm going to be away from the other campers for more than a day. Somehow everyone managed to become amazingly close to people they'd never met until this trip in only a week, and still have 4 to go. I've lost the timid attitude I began with and I'm having the time of my life out here. I wish everyone could go through such an awesome experience.

7/6 Group 2. I think it's kind of funny how we're more excited about getting to do laundry more than anything right now! I know I definitely am!

I truly believe that this trip came at the right time. I really needed to be away from home now! I feel like I'm surrounded with the right laid back, serious, funny, great people here! I honestly wouldn't change anything about the people. The program's been fun especially for me - confronting fears - being underground. I don't know if being underground in the cave will permanently change me, but I know that I felt safe with these people.

Israel has been "the bomb diggity" so far. I've seen beauty, destruction, and learned about our history and that of our country. We've been rushing

around, maybe too much... but I think we have to if we want to see it all.
Tova

We went to Tzfat, the city of the Kaballah. I learned a lot about light blue, my favorite color, which Tzfat is painted. The sky looks blue but when you grab it there's nothing there. The ocean looks blue, but when you grab it, it's see through. This is like G-d, G-d is everywhere but can't be seen and isn't tangible. Tzfat is painted light blue to be protected by G-d from evil. It was so interesting. Emily Berkman.

Since I was used to waking up early, I woke up at 8 in the morning today even though I am tired. It is so Americanized here. They have MTV, VH1, and who wants to be a millionaire with Hebrew questions. The values are in shekels though. Anyway, everyone here tries to copy the American styles. It is kinda funny. The cantalope is yellow and people here eat chocolate on their bread for breakfast like everyday. There are these giant chicken nugget like things that are everywhere. They are good. Every meal at the places the trip had us go to has corn.

Israel is sort of like the United States, just it is much more beautiful and everyone prefers to speak Hebrew to English. No, I have not seen any terrorists! The media makes a big deal of everything in America. It is not so violent. Just in certain areas by some of the borders it is violent. It is hot here. Jerusalem's weather is like Danville's but everywhere else it is hotter than I have been to. The Mediterranean Sea is gorgeous and hiking in 2000 year old water caves built under the old city of Jerusalem was the scariest and most amazing thing I have ever done!!! The Wailing Wall was interesting and it's cool to see all the name brands here with Hebrew writing. I bought a Hebrew CocaCola shirt.

By the way, the music here is the same. From Eminem to the Backstreet Boys, they listen to the same stuff as us but they have some good Israeli singers, too! Anyway, I am staying in this cute little community with only 300 families for the weekend. This was our free weekend to visit family, friends, or chill at discos in Tel Aviv. Since we are going to go to discos in

Tel Aviv later, I thought it would be cool to see what living in an Israeli home is like. Well, it is similar to living in an American home. Anyway, I have seen the Lebanese border and the Jordanian border from about 20 ft away. In fact where I am staying now is on the border territory claimed from the 6 day war.

Yesterday I ate in a Muslim restaurant! They have good food! If you ever go to a Muslim restaurant eat the thing that sorta looks like pizza!! We have had discussions with people who live in the Golan Heights. They have a democratic government in Israel. Right now about 70% of the people think we should give up the beautiful Golan Heights to Syria with the 18000 Jews living there who will have to move if that happens. They feel that it is worth it because it may bring about peace with Syria. Personally, I am not so sure if it is worth it because Syria does not even want this land for any reason other than it is land and they just want more land for more power. I think that they would just see Israel as weak and keep trying to get more territory. Israel needs this land because Israel has a drought and the Golan Heights contains 30% of the countries water! Everyone agrees though that if it would ensure peace, they would give up the beautiful Golan Heights. I just hope that if Israel gives up the Golan Heights, that there is finally peace between the two countries!

There is not really that much of a war between the two countries, when they say peace they mean kind of like the US and Russia, like they want people to be able to communicate freely and be able to visit both countries and if Israelis could go through Syria, they would not have to fly over the Mediterranean to get to Europe, but they could drive! Anyway, as they say, 2 Jews:3 opinions. Jerusalem used to be a part of Rome so eating in an ancient Roman restaurant was great! We wore togas and everything! e-mail from Katie

I am here on a Kibbutz. I got roomed with Ashleigh Ordin and an Israeli girl who is 16. They have internet access and a lot of free time here so I might check my e-mail a lot here! Tel Aviv was nice. I just arrived on the Kibbutz.

I saw the place where Rabin was shot yesterday. That was very sad. I even saw the place where the Israeli Declaration of Independence was signed! That was interesting, but we were tired. I got a henna tattoo in Tel Aviv. Don't worry Mom, it only lasts two weeks or so and it was painted on. It is stars around my ankle. Israel is very beautiful. We went to a beach on Sunday that looks like a Hawaiian beach, but they have a jellyfish problem right now, so a lot of people got stung by jellyfish. It was on the Mediterranean. There are about 20 other people from the trip on this Kibbutz since we were divided into six groups. The trip has been very fun and this week has been extremely important in Israel.

By the way, I survived a week in the Israeli army, the Gadna!! It was soooo hard! We worked 17 hours per day!! We woke up at 5 AM and went to bed around 11PM! We shot M16s and you guys better be nice to me because it turns out I have extremely good aim. ;) We are by the Sea of Galilee here. It is very pretty. We have been here before, but being on a Kibbutz is very different than being on a hostel. Today I went to the West Bank! For those of you who don't know, this is a land with many Arabs and Jews that is not part of Israel or Palestine, but under Israeli military control. This week Ehud Barak, Bill Clinton, and Arafat are deciding on a peace agreement in Camp David so everyone here is very anxious to hear the results!!

The kibbutz is really nice. The girl I am staying with likes the same kind of music as me and has a Nick Carter poster on her wall. She speaks English, as do most people here. I met this really nice girl named Julie, but unfortunately she will never be in my group. I'm sad that I will not be in Tel Aviv again, but the Kibbutz seems very cool! Talk to everyone later and e-mail me!~Katie

We went to a disco the first night we got on the kibbutz, it's really cool, we are in a gated kibbutz and it is nice and the people are very friendly and they have a very, very nice swimming pool. We hiked to the sea of Galilee which is gorgeous. We slept outside at a waterslide park on the beach!! I didn't get much sleep but we got to go on the waterslides this morning. Now I'm back on the kibbutz...talk to everyone later! e-mail from Katie

<http://www.bootsnall.com/travelogues/andrea/14.shtml>

By [Andrea & Dale Johnson](#)

Krazy Kuta

"TRANSPORT? MASSAGE? BRAID YOUR HAIR? SARONG? TOE RING? PINEAPPLE? HASHISH?"

The endless barrage of hawkers accosted us while we walked down the street attempting to dodge them, puddles, and the screeching motor scooters that zoomed by perilously close. Welcome to Indonesia and it's most popular tourist destination, **Kuta Beach**.

Travellers have a love/hate relationship with this city of sin. Backpacker facilities are plentiful and cheap - rooms average only US\$4.50 a night, tasty wood oven pizzas and a large Bintang beer cost just a buck each. The rupee has remained devalued since the Asian economic crisis - the average Indonesian worker earns only US\$25 a month. It's a place that encourages excesses; buying too much from the hundreds of surf, handicraft, and silver shops that line every street; eating and partying 'til sunrise at the packed restaurants, bars, and clubs; surfing too long at the easily accessible, consistent beach breaks that are polluted with sewage that eventually makes everyone sick.

Yet in the middle of this chaos, pieces of traditional Balinese culture still survive. Every morning Hindus place offering baskets of food, incense, and flowers at the entrance to their shops, homes, and in shrines that are a familiar sight at every corner. Women still walk along traffic-clogged streets carrying baskets of fruit on their heads to bring to the market or a ceremony. Even at our hotel we enjoyed an interesting contrast watching the owners perform an elaborate anniversary ceremony in the courtyard while backpackers continued to wander through in their swimsuits carrying surfboards.

An essential art Indonesians have mastered is bargaining. Westerners are constantly targeted and usually quoted prices 10 times higher for 'tourists' than locals. Unscrupulous 'authorized' moneychangers are everywhere. We noticed the tip off to possible rip-off when finding posted exchange

rates that seemed too good to be true. On two separate occasions we were entertained by these sneaky characters. Our first attempt to change US\$100 (which equals \$1,130,000 rupees) was an example of short-changing. Upon careful counting we noticed the agent kept adding small bills to the pile, insisting to keep a small amount of our money for himself for 'good luck'. Finally we were disgusted and exited to find another moneychanger, shouting in the street, "This guy's a thief!" The second character was much sneakier. He quickly entered an amount on his calculator showing the total while handing over the rupees. Had we not been suspicious we could have easily overlooked that his calculator didn't work correctly and he 'miscalculated' the amount by 90,000 rupees in his favor. We learned to always count our cash before leaving since 'honest' little mistakes seem to happen frequently in Bali.

Another tourist rip off is the long arm of the law, which is always reaching out palm turned up! Bali police set up roadblocks and target tourists in rentals cars and motor scooters. We had been lucky enough to avoid them for a month until getting nabbed by one of their street corner outposts. We were ushered into an outhouse-sized office and informed of our violations. No international driver's license (fine \$50,000 rupees), impeding traffic - we stopped at a red light, getting in the way of those running it! (fine \$30,000 rupees), and running a red light because we stopped after the painted line (fine \$40,000 rupees). We now owed \$120,000 rupees in fines which were payable in front of a judge at the city courthouse...OR the helpful police could take care of our fine for us (wink, wink) if we would just give them the money.

Fortunately, before we had entered the office I quickly removed all but \$51,000 rupees from my pocket and hid it. During our interrogation we convinced the police that this was all the money we had and plea bargained our fine down to 'coincidentally' \$51,000 rupees. As I reached for our cash and held it up high enough for anyone passing by to see, they excitedly pushed my hand down out of view, which I quickly lifted up again just for the fun of it. Putting on our helmets and thanking the officers for their help we hopped on our scooter and rode off laughing about our 'bribery in Bali' experience. Something anyone visiting Bali can also be guaranteed to experience is genuinely friendly, helpful, and honest people, unfortunately it just takes some work find them.

Our real reason for basing ourselves in Kuta was to escape on daily surf safari adventures. Thirty years ago Kuta beach was 'discovered' as a

surfers' Mecca; now it's overwhelmed with tourists, traffic, and hawkers, a paradise lost. After reuniting with Jay, he showed us a secret route that would eventually escape the busy streets and police by taking dirt paths through plantations and cow pastures, ending up at surf spots with names like Balangan, Nyang Nyang, Padang Padang, Impossible, Ulu Watu, and Dreamland. More often than not the surf was on a shallow reef break or too big for beginners like Andrea and I, so we relaxed on the beach watching Jay rip it up. On smaller surf days at sandy beach breaks we managed to catch a few waves of our own.

Another easy day trip from Kuta (although we recommend spending at least four days) is **Ubud**, the 'cultural center' of Bali. Stepping off the bus in Ubud we were promptly greeted with a variety of accommodation and transport options. I stood guard over our stuff while Andrea and Jay went with a friendly local to check out his home stay. The Tutick house was small (3 rooms), situated in a garden setting away from street noise, clean, included a full breakfast, and best of all had hot showers - ooh yeah!

Rice paddies

Ubud is known for having the best prices and selection on traditional handicrafts, and nearby Celuk for sterling silver. Jay needed to purchase sarongs and jewellery for his enterprising business and Andrea jumped at the chance to act as a shopping consultant. Being outnumbered, I reluctantly tagged along and fortunately found that Ubud offered much more than just shopping. We spent a day on our scooters riding around the nearby volcano and marvelling at the beautifully terraced rice paddies that are still cultivated by hand. In the evenings we enjoyed the varied nightlife, and splurged on an expensive dinner (US\$15) that rivalled many of our favorite restaurants at home in Portland. We also had the opportunity to see a traditional Balinese dance show at the palace temple that was both strange and interesting, with ornate costumes and complex movements that we would have needed an interpreter to understand.

Indonesian dancers

To our surprise Ubud even had a jazz club with live music so we checked it out and had a great time listening to the energetic band. Although known as a tourist town, Ubud didn't have that over-run atmosphere we dread, and was a refreshing change of pace.

If you really want to get away from it all, head to the **Gili Islands** just off the mainland on **Lombok**. Leaving at 5 am, we caught Kuta sleeping while waiting for our transport. The partiers had staggered to bed, motor scooters hadn't started their daily assault, and the tourists shops were closed - even the hotel staff was fast asleep on the floor in front of the reception.

Our trip to **Gili Air** was a 14-hour journey the cheap way (or a 3 hour jaunt if you have extra cash). Our itinerary included a local bus, slow ferry, another local bus and ended with an ocean-drenching small boat. Arriving on Gili Air just after sunset, we raced to find accommodation before dark, which we discovered wasn't easy. Locals kept saying "island full, no rooms". Walking the sandy trail nearly around the island we found a very rustic thatched hut that was probably the last room available so we kicked out the mice and moved in. Tired, grumpy, and hungry we collapsed in the heat and tried to sleep. The rooster alarm clock awoke us early so we had breakfast and decided to search for better accommodations, hoping that some people had checked out. Luckily we found a newly constructed bungalow and we were the first people to stay in it.

Relaxing in the Gili Islands

The three Gili Islands, Taranga (party island), Meno (solitude island), and Air (a mix of both) are void of any vehicles except horse drawn carts, thus offering us the quiet slow pace we needed. Andrea and I spent our days sneaking into the nearby expensive hotel pool (rooms US\$28 per night), laying in our hammock, recovering from a bout of Bali belly, reading,

talking, writing stories, and watching sunsets from the unique individual eating platforms.

People may wonder why would we need to relax since we're travelling for 14 months. Fun as it's been, travelling cheaply, doing our own planning, and trying to stay healthy takes work. Recharged after eight days we moved on, using the same transport method in reverse. Our total round trip transport cost was US\$18 dollars for two. I guess we got exactly what we paid for and more.

Reflections on the Terrorist Attacks

At first it was hard to believe that the pictures of the World Trade Center burning were on the news, not just scenes from another action-thriller movie that typically plays on the televisions at every bar, restaurant and hotel on Phi Phi Island to attract tourists. But on the evening of September 11th, 2001, in Southern Thailand (it was the morning of Sept. 11th in America), everyone stopped what they were doing and watched the news in amazement.

Dale and I happened to walk into a cyber-cafe shortly after the W.T.C. was hit; the local news was playing live footage from NYC and our Thai friends tried to explain what had happened by translating the commentary into English. Of course initially nothing made sense to us. "A plane hit the W.T.C? What do you mean it wasn't an accident? Four planes were hijacked? Terrorists are attacking America?!" we questioned. Only after seeing footage of the plane striking the second tower, an image that is now burned into all our minds, did we begin to understand the magnitude of the situation.

Shock turned into panic for me when the Thais began to ask me if my family was ok. I suddenly remembered that my parents were scheduled to fly to Toronto that week, and I couldn't recall what date their flight was or if it had a stopover in NYC. Who would have thought the tables would be turned, that my parents - who worry about something happening to us while travelling abroad - could in fact be the ones more in danger?

Frantically I emailed my parent's business, and thankfully Lisa, their office manager, replied almost immediately that my parents were ok (their flight wasn't until Sept. 13th). A few hours later, after watching the English

version of CNN, I was able to talk to my Mom on our cell phone. I don't know what I would have done without the modern conveniences of email, cell phone, and 24/7 CNN.

In the aftermath of this disaster, family and friends have been emailing us asking many difficult questions. "What is it like experiencing these events abroad - are we safe?" is the most common inquiry. Like we imagine everyone at home, we've been glued to the television for several hours each day. We've been uplifted by stories of heroism and devastated by pictures of destruction.

We saw footage from countries around the world playing the National Anthem and observing a moment of silence, which brought tears to our eyes. The President's address, Tribute to Heroes music telethon, and memorial service at Yankee Stadium has been deeply moving for us as Americans, but also for the local Thai Buddhists and Muslims, and fellow Jewish and Hindu travelers that have been watching TV alongside us.

Being abroad during the terrorist attacks has exposed us to a wider scope of their effects. People of different nationalities and backgrounds have been united instead of divided by this tragedy in a common wish for peace. Everyone we've been in contact with has been compassionate and thoughtful towards us and we feel as safe, if not safer, here than at home.

The last time we heard shocking news about America during our travels abroad was after the November 2000 Presidential election. "You have no President!" the French in Bora Bora mocked, translating the French Polynesia news report. We were embarrassed with this news, just as we were embarrassed by the stereotypes of the "Ugly American" - loud, insensitive, impatient, and overly materialistic. At that time we were glad to be away from home and to have escaped the 'rat race' of our past hectic lives. Now more than ever we miss those we love at home, are generally proud of our fellow Americans reaction to the attacks, and are happy to be from a country that encourages and defends freedom.

So will we change our plans to continue travelling and return home as friends and family have asked? We will alter our travel plans when necessary in order to remain as safe as possible. Not long ago, in June 2001, we left the Philippines after a Muslim terrorist group kidnapped three Americans and 17 Filipinos from a ritzy resort at a nearby island. Even though we doubted a similar terrorist attack at our popular budget

backpacker island (not as much potential for ransom \$), we felt no need to take unnecessary risks.

It's interesting how people from countries that are constantly exposed to strife react to this situation in their daily lives. In a Manila cyber-café we watched speechless as five teenagers screamed and shouted in glee while playing an interactive video game fighting terrorists. Most Israeli travelers we've met (both men and women) have just finished their three year mandatory military service and will continue to serve in the military for one month a year until the age of 45. Until recently, our generation of Americans had been sheltered from widespread acts of terrorism hitting home. Sadly, the reality is that there is nowhere in the world completely safe from terrorism.

The most profoundly simple yet complex question we are often asked is "Why do you travel?" During the course of our journey the meaning and purpose of our travelling has continued to evolve. Admittedly we aren't on a global crusade to save the environment or to educate and improve the lives of the disadvantaged, although we admire the Peace Corp volunteers we've met who work hard for these causes. Our reasons are more simple - to escape our daily routines at home and try a different way of life, to spend more quality time together, and to hopefully become better individuals from our experiences.

When we told others about our plans to travel for 14 months, many people told us "You're living our dream". Older generations said they wished that they had the same opportunities to travel when they were young and admired our resolve to turn our dream into reality.

As many travel writers, such as Rick Steves, advocate "Travelling expands horizons and deepens understanding of other cultures...if more people traveled the world would be a better place". Certainly we've had the chance to see many different cultures including a wide variety of Muslim people in Indonesia and Malaysia. Beforehand, our only exposure to the Islamic religion was from reading select passages of strict doctrine and seeing footage of extremist Muslim groups on the news; now we know that Muslims are as diverse a group as Christians.

Probably the most surprising thing we've encountered during our travels has been the random acts of kindness from strangers. We began our trip wary of trusting anyone, suspicious that those who were kind were just

trying to take advantage of us somehow. On the contrary, we've been invited as welcome guests into the homes of people who had recently been strangers and discovered that travel in general seems to bring out the best in everyone.

While we understand why many Americans have recently cancelled their plans to travel on vacation, and that many people worldwide are afraid to fly on airplanes, it's unfortunate that the travel industry has to suffer the consequences of the terrorist attacks. Our thoughts are often of those we love at home and we are concerned not only for our own safety but for the safety of those at home as well; however, we have no plans to return immediately home.

In the book *[Travelers' Tales Thailand](#)*, author Steven Newman, who was attacked and nearly killed by bandits during his solo walk around the world, best sums up our feeling in the following passage:

"But I know that quitting anything because of fear somehow did not seem 'right'.

To give up now would have been proof of how terrible the world is to those so eager

To condemn it."

<http://mywebpages.comcast.net/travelsaround2/haiti/haitijournal.htm>

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Haiti Journal

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NEW Missions Trip to Haiti

April 6 to April 13, 2002

Genesis 12:2,3 I will bless you and ... all the families of the earth will be blessed through you.

NEW Missions
PO Box 2727
Orlando, FL 32802
(407) 240-4058
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A GREAT BOOK: A Stubborn Hope – George and Jeanne DeTellis (Charlie's parents)

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About me: My job is a technical writer. Writing is an obsession that I have had to live with all my life. I started journaling in the 6th grade. I limit myself to journaling only on trips now. It's my way of sharing the experience with everyone else on the trip so they can enjoy the trip by reading about it again. It's also for others who plan to go on a similar trip. Haiti is my 74th country. I travel while I'm (relatively) young so the journals and pictures will be my rocking chair memories.

Dedication - This log is dedicated to NEW Missions, to Dan for arranging this trip, and to all my dear friends that I met in Haiti. I have good memories of meeting all of you on the beach, at the shops, in the youth meeting, women's meetings, and in church. God bless everyone:

Yves, (Shawn) Charles, Michael, Peter, Lamartine, Bertha, Miralande, Michelle & baby, Mitrise, Mary, Achlie, Joseph, Erlanne, Christie, Nika, Tina, Mimi, Yolene, John, Isaiah and brother Jacques, Michelin, Jaquel, Junior, Davidson, Mike, Roobens, Louise, Olan, Elepha, Anastasia, Flore, Frandy, Anastasie and Dimi Petit Homme, Dixon, Danicha, Antoinette, and Piereline.

What to bring

Refer to the www.newmissions.org Web Site for lists of things that they need and things that people need. I also observed that Haitians would like it if you brought them:

- * Hair ribbons, barrettes, pony tail holders, and nail polish for the girls.
- * Underwear for boys.

- * Wire or string, beads – to make jewelry: necklaces, bracelets.
- * Paint – for decorating their sparse quarters.
- * French-English dictionary.
- * Wood/leather carving tools
- * Cordless iron (Antique charcoal type)
- * Closed shoes and socks. The kids must have closed shoe(s) to go to school.

Veronique asked a boy on the beach why he wasn't in school and he said it was because he didn't have any shoes. Evidently one shoe is OK. A girl was wearing one shoe and a sock, and one flip-flop. It looked odd but it was enough to get her in school.

- * Evaporated milk.
- * Can opener (not electric - duh)
- * Inner tubes for bicycles or tire repair kits and air pump.
- * Batteries and flashlights.
- * Clocks or radio that doesn't need batteries or electricity.
- * Cooking spices
- * Bible in Creole language
- * US one dollar and five dollar bills. No big denominations. Give the poorest people Haitian money if possible. It's not easy for them to change US money.
- * A small screwdriver for glasses or some wire to repair glasses. On the extra pair of glasses that I brought, the bag was shaken so much that the screw shook loose.
- * If you bring stuff to leave here in this country, seems like a duffel bag is easier for them to balance on their head than a suitcase. Louise left a suitcase that had wheels. I saw the pregnant mother of her sponsored child walking outside the Mission with the case balanced on her head!

What to pack

- * Two 70-pound hard-sided (not cloth) suitcases of donations. I bought the suitcases for \$3 each at a thrift store. Duct tape them shut because they really get knocked around. The 5-pound (cardboard) container of peanut butter in one case crushed onto some clothes. Put all food in plastic bags. No glass.
- * Buy all your clothes at a thrift store and leave them there.
- * Pack everything you need to live for 2-7 days in your carry –on bag. That way you are guaranteed to have an enjoyable trip even if your bags get lost.
- * Work gloves
- * If you're going to paint - something to clean paint off your skin. (We used kerosene)

- * Bandana to wipe sweat, a hat for the sun. Make sure it fits good – it'll blow off when you ride in the back of trucks.
- * On luggage tags – put your work address. Don't ever give out your home address or phone. They are always looking for a contact in the U.S.
- * Water cleaner pills
- * Ear plugs – no matter how soundly you sleep. Unless you enjoy hearing roosters ALL night.
- * If you're good at skits, storytelling, or puppets, then bring those. Haitians love any form of entertainment. Make it simple because it will be translated into Creole.

TIPS

- * Drink lots of water, but: stop drinking it after dinner so hopefully you won't have to get up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom.
- * Bring spray sunscreen. It is so much easier to apply over the bug poison on your skin and you'll need it if you get your hair braided. Braiding costs \$5 in Haiti (it's 1 US\$ per braid, or about \$US100 (Jamaica) or 200 (Turks and Caicos) to have your whole head done in other countries.
- * Beware if you wear (finger or toe) nail polish. I don't wear it, but I am told that the bug spray affects it.
- * When you arrive in Haiti you fill out immigration form and a yellow form. They take the immigration form in customs. Don't lose the yellow paper. You need it to exit the country when you leave.

OUR SCHEDULE

April 6 to April 13, 2002

Saturday

Afternoon Arrive at Airport

Evening Dinner Spaghetti with meatballs and fresh mangos.

7 p.m. Orientation and Greeting

9:30 p.m. Generator off

Sunday

7 am Breakfast French toast with great homemade syrup

7:30 am Morning devotion

8:30 am Leave for church at Masson
12 p.m. Lunch Baked chicken with a very good sauce.
3:30 pm Preparation for week meeting. Hair braiding at 1 so, preparation was moved to 3:30
4 pm Swimming
5:30 pm Dinner Ham and cheese (from Wisconsin) sandwiches. Chocolate cake.
Dishes: Jim, Jolene, Barb
7 pm Haitian culture and Creole class
9 pm Generator off

Monday

7 am Breakfast Cereal and fresh fruit, and hard boiled eggs
7:30 am Morning devotion Speaker: Cliff
8:30 am Mission tour
9:30 Sort and bundle supplies, office and clinic tasks, or paint school benches I did office work.
12 pm Lunch beets and cucumber –tomato salad banana bread
1 pm Village ministry walk up the river - do skits
5:30 pm Dinner Macaroni and (yummy Wisconsin) cheese. Fresh fruit salad. Cinnamon bread dessert.
Dishes: Dan & Emily
7 pm History of Haiti
9 pm Generator off

Tuesday

7 am Breakfast Pancakes
7:30 am Morning devotion Shawn Budovic
8:30 am School physicals and ministry at Signeau School (all day) pack lunch. I painted school benches.
12 pm Lunch Fried Red Snapper, yams, rice and bean gravy.
1 pm Continue with morning ministries
4:30 pm Shops open
5:30 pm Dinner Dinner was beef stir fry, rice, brownies

Dishes: Cliff and Tina

7 pm Youth group
9 pm Generator off

Wednesday

7 am Breakfast
7:30 am Morning devotion Mary Budovic
8:30 am Market visit in Leogane / High School tour / Chapel service Speaker: Cliff
12 pm Lunch Tuna fish sandwiches
1 pm Gifts for children

1:30 pm Village ministry
3:30 pm Lasalle Women's Meeting Speaker: Laura
5:30 pm Dinner Ham and (Wisconsin) cheese sandwiches, lettuce, mayo. Fresh mango juice punch. Creme Brulee for dessert.

Dishes: Adam and Tiffany
7 pm Worship at Bord Mer Speaker: Dan
9 pm Generator off

Thursday

7 am Breakfast
7:30 am Morning devotion Rachel DeTellis
8:30 am School physicals in Signeau (AM only). Cement pour at Bord Mer
School Ministry -- Birey I tried to help with cement
12 pm Lunch with sponsored children Rice and beans and that great "sauce" and fried chicken.
1:30 pm Cement work continues or free time
3:30 pm Women's meeting in Neply Speaker: Tiffany
4:30 Shops open I kept shops open till 6.
5:30 pm Dinner Pizza, salad, coconut bars.

Dishes: Suzanna
7 pm Movie night
9 pm Generator off

Friday

7 am Breakfast Pancakes
7:30 am Morning devotion Dan Merrefield
8:30 am Village or school ministry. Finish bench painting or clinic tasks. School physicals in Signeau (AM only) I did school physicals. There was also a boat ride this morning.
12 pm Lunch
1 pm Free time
4 pm Shops open Barter day
5:30 pm Dinner Hamburgers, BBQ beans, great potatoes.

Dishes: Laura
7 pm Worship
9:30 pm Generator off

Saturday

5 am Breakfast Cereal
Morning Return to airport

Currency

Haitian currency is the gourdes, pronounced "good". Exchange rate is 26 gourdes per one US dollar.

5 gde equals 1 Haitian dollar, so: 100 gourdes = \$H20 = \$US4

Exchange rate was 23.761 (in 2001), 22.524 (2000), 17.965 (1999), 16.505 (1998), 17.311 (1997), 15.093 (1996)

Saturday

Our plane left at 8:45 am from Atlanta so we had to be at the airport at 6. Uugh. I'm not a morning person. The Groff's were so gracious to invite Laura and I to spend the night and Kirsten drove us to the airport. So there we stood in curbside check-in with our huge heavy suitcases for 20 minutes and come to find out that you had to stand in the LONG line inside for International travel. Yeow. We were starting to run short on time considering the LONG security line to get into the concourse. Well, we made it just fine. I met some nice nurses and doctors headed to Haiti also. We stopped in Miami, then on to our final destination. I had a good feeling about this trip.

Arrive in the airport and Shawn from NEW Missions rounded up everybody with matching T-shirts. We waltzed through customs. Some of our suitcases were put in our bus and others we left sitting on the curb outside the airport. Dan seemed calm about the people in charge of getting them to the Mission and sure enough, they made it just fine.

I have found that the most anxious part of every trip is getting there with your luggage. I didn't journal anything until we were in the bus driving to the Mission in Haiti. I started with:

"Driving through Port au Prince right now. I can't stand it, I have to write. "

What inspired me to start writing was a man in the gas station. The bus pulled into the station and stopped. I looked out my window, and sitting on the ground is this guy trying to repair the inner tube of his bicycle. He grabbed the tube around the hole and he was tying string tight around the hole so maybe air wouldn't leak out. It made a bump in the inner tube. He had lots of bumps.

Driving along looking at this country, I have to say that this is the poorest place that I have ever seen, and I've seen a few places in my life time... There is tons of gravel and piles of deteriorated, falling apart buildings. People live in and on rubble. The quality of the streets is awful. And yes, Dan, they should call the county to patch up some of the potholes. If only it was that easy. Nothing is easy in this country. Dan said that some streets get so bad that they dig deep ditches so no one can travel on the street. I makes government notice the bad situation so maybe they will do something to fix it.

Seems like other places that I've been to have always had some degree of acknowledgement that tourists bring money, so they make places where tourists can go. This country has not, or rather does not, have the resources, to accommodate the tourists. I'm sure they know that if they had a nice market, a bus load might stop and spend some money. They don't seem to even have the capacity to provide for themselves, much less, provide for tourists. I'm sure there places hidden away from "all this" where people with money can enjoy the good life. There's certainly no good life here.

The bus pauses in traffic and I finally see the first sign of entrepreneurs preying on us – a guy is selling water in plastic bags. It's the Culligan man! There's about one cup in each bag. It looks cold – quite a feat in this environment.

All I see is rubble-laden grimy streets. I look closely at the debris and I see flattened plastic bottles and shoe soles. These people have lost their souls (soles)!

We are traveling on BJJ Dessalines street. There are utility poles lining the streets giving the appearance that nights are bright and bustling.

A tattered sign says "Sur Internet" It means "on Internet". It hangs on a shack. Yes, a cyber café in a shack. More signs:

Chateau Funeraire and Morgue

Cyber cafe

Le Fournesol

Traitmend de Text

Photographie

Photocopie Plastification

3+2 bank

Lots of "Pharmacie" and "Clinique" medical signs. These signs are painted on buildings that are very secure with locked doors. There is a small window where you buy the prescriptions. If you go to a hospital here, someone must bring you food and medicine. Family members have to get the prescription from the doctor, then go fill it and give it to the patient.

We've been on this bus an hour. We're in Carrefours now – the outskirts of Port au Prince. I've seen very few bicycles so far. I just saw the first motor bike.

I can't compare this place to anywhere else. It's on it's own and in a different league. In a whole new category of economic despair.

There a sign that says "Gressier". Maybe that's another town. We are leaving the city and driving along the ocean. The water looks nice. There are people swimming (bathing?) too. Very pleasant temperature today. Maybe 85.

Every part of this country that I see is overtaken by poorness. There are many of incomplete structures that at one time I'm sure had hopes of grandeur. But no, they stand deserted, baking in the sun, and forgotten. It was not meant to be. There are many shacks around that people resort to living in instead. Bunches of banana trees, then another incomplete structure. There is an occasional cow tied to a stake in the ground. There is a constant smell of charcoal burning.

The despair, I hope I find hope too.

We arrive at NEW Missions and what a contrast. What a wonderful contrast. It looks incredibly comfortable. There are five of us girls in this building with one bathroom with shower and water that we can drink! I can brush my teeth in the sink! What luxury! Each bed has a mosquito net.

Dinner bell rang. I'm starving. We had spaghetti with meatballs and fresh mangos. Delicious.

After dinner we had an orientation meeting led by Charlie.

NEW Missions people: Charlie and Rachel with Nathan, Jeremy, Carita (means "My Love" in Italian. Also Shawn and Mary with Shawn, Ryan, and Ashley (about 13)

Our groups:

Wisconsin: Cliff, Derrick, and Tina. Jolene, Barb and Jim.

Virginia: Adam and Tiffany

Canada: Madeline and Veronique

Georgia: Dan and Emily. Louise, Stevie, and Christi (9). Laura and me (Suzanna).

14 people visiting. Nice small group. They can handle 40 at time here.

Haiti is a "hard core battlefield".

The Leogane Plane is about 5 miles by 10 miles big. There are beautiful mountains hovering high over us, not far away. The NEW Missions ministry continues to grow throughout the plane.

Haiti is a "5th world country". OK, this is something I've never understood is this ranking label. So I assume United States is a 1st world country. There are many other "2nd world countries". Then there are "3rd world" and here is a "5th world" ? Charlie explained that Haiti does not have the resources and even if it did have, the country dose not have the capacity to organize the resources to their benefit. That is a problem.

In Haiti there is "crisis management". But, Charlie said "you can take the situation and take the bad out of it". We are all servants.

5 Haitian dollars equals one U.S. dollar. When Charlie first came here, it was equal.

GREAT BOOK: A Stubborn Hope – George and Jeanne DeTellis (Charlie's parents)

Taxes: There is Federal withholding tax and 6 percent Social Security tax. Charlie matches another 6 percent.

Haitians can own land. There is no property tax.

Transportation: Mitsubishi Jeep, Mercedes Jeep (maybe 10 in the country). Pay \$30,000 for a work truck, \$40,000 for a Land Cruiser.

Diesel gas is \$US1.20 a gallon.

Syrians control the grocery stores .

I heard that to get married, a man must offer the girl a roof, a bed, and a table.

In the city, 10 percent are infected with AIDS, in the country only 5 percent.

I drank a lot of water at dinner. I hope it goes through me before I go to sleep cause getting up at night with a flashlight with this skeeter ("mosquito" for you Northerners) net will be difficult. The generator is on till 9:30 tonight. It goes off at 9 every other night.

Sunday

Note to self: Be reverent and humble before God and others. I can really learn from this experience and these people an. Emily and Christi sparkle. I can see it in their eyes.

I have such a different feeling here. This is a nice first morning. The earplugs didn't cover up the roosters crowing. Why are they up so early? I think they started at 2 a.m., then they stop. Just as you are dozing off to sleep again, they start crowing again. They stop around 6:30 when you're getting up. Go figure. I put on a skirt, slip and top. I sure never thought I'd be doing this.

Breakfast is at 7 a.m. We had French toast with great homemade syrup made with their brown sugar and vanilla extract. I remember Saturday mornings when we were little, Dad would make a big pot of homemade syrup and pancakes. I digress.

Morning devotion by Cliff.

Louise is our appointed "choir director". She led us in a couple songs.

Proverbs 3:15. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't lean on my understanding. Acknowledge Him always. He will make my path straight.

8:30 load up in the truck to go to morning church services at Masson. It was about 3 miles away. We were in the back of a "dancing" truck. All of us pile in the back - we squished Christi on the end and she almost bounced off a couple times. We drove through the local village of Neply. They called out for candy as we drove by. Little children were waving and yelling. Little boys with no shorts on (oh my).

Church was an experience. We arrived on "Haitian time". Not many people have clocks here, so everyone arrives around the time it's supposed to start. A man was preaching up front. A lady escorted our group in and directed us to some benches on the right. On the left were lots and lots of children. With a couple of adults. All the adults were on the right.

Our group had to go up to the front. I really felt welcome there. They weren't trying to make us uncomfortable by doing that. I got the feeling they were interested in these odd people visiting their service. Louise led us in a song (in English). Then they wanted us to introduce ourselves and say something. OK, now I was uncomfortable. Cliff was first. He was great. Then Laura, who said everything that I wanted to say so I just said something like I was glad that they let us worship with them. We finally got to sit down.

Charlie gave the sermon. He mentioned Phil 2:8 to humble yourself. I felt that this morning. It was the first thing I wrote today. The whole service was a special time to share with them. To be there and worship the same God in different languages.

Lunch was baked chicken with a very good sauce.

After lunch Louise made appointments at the "salon" to get her hair done. The "Salon d'Michelle" was outside the fence on the beach under the tree. Michelle and Nika and others were braiding hair. Louise, Christi, Laura, Ashley and Veronique got their hair braided. It did look so much cooler. Now they need the spray sunscreen - so the scalp doesn't get burnt.

The beach is very nice. The water looked nice and many people from our group went swimming. There were very few shells. The beach was mostly pebbles and black sand. There are white sand beaches in Haiti also.

We had a 3:30 meeting with Rachel (Charlie's wife). She wanted to get an idea of what we wanted to do. We signed up for Monday and Tuesday events. I was the last person to get the sign-up sheets. I signed up for office work on Monday morning. The clinic, sorting donated supplies, and painting were already full.

The only thing left for Tuesday was helping in the school. That was the only thing that I knew I definitely did not want to do. That's why I had such an uncomfortable, no, bad experience in the Dominican Republic. I knew that I could not stand up in front of a bunch of kids and entertain them. I did not want to be forced into that situation again. I may be ready to do it later, but no now. So I didn't sign up for anything Tuesday.

Rachel had written some skits that she read to us. We were all pretty shy, and didn't appear to want to participate. But we did a quick rehearsal to get an idea of the message. Arnold was going to translate the message to our audience (audience being anyone that wanted to watch).

Sunday dinner was ham and cheese (from Wisconsin) sandwiches. Chocolate cake.

Monday

Up with the roosters again. I might get used to them. Rooster would be good for lunch.... Mmmm...

Breakfast was cereal and fresh fruit, and hard boiled eggs. The milk is powdered milk, but they add some almond extract so it's really not that bad.

Morning devotion by Jim.

John 10 1-10. The story of the shepherd.

I learning that Grilling out is "Frying out".

8:30 meet for a tour of the mission complex. His house was built in 1983. It was multi-purpose building: clinic, school, missionary housing. Charlie and Rachael live there now with their three children: Nathan, Jeremy, and Corita. Shawn and Mary also live on the compound with their kids Shawn, Ryan, and (Princess) Ashley - I write that cause she explained that her heritage is in Lithuania. There is a castle from her royal Budovic family there. I told her that I had been to Vilnius and it's a beautiful city. Anyway. The other full time missionaries Scott and Tania with Tarin, Morgan and Tia were away in the states.

Before the house was built, they lived in tents. There were 15 tents and they had to bring water in from other wells. They spent \$US 3000 to drill a well to 105 feet and it didn't work. Just mud and yuk. Then they prayed and Mennonites drilled another well 180 feet down. They hit sand then rock (good sign), then fresh drinking water that gushed up. Now they have plenty of fresh water - the sustenance (along with Jesus) of life. There are about 5 or 6 other Artesian wells on the Leogane plane.

The well supplies water for the whole mission compound. We can fill our water bottle from the tap and take a shower every night! Such luxury.

Charlie walked us over to the school buildings and the warehouse. This huge building is usually full of food, but not this year. Last year they would normally have 8000-10,000 sacks. Today there was one pallet of beans, one pallet of rice and one pallet of oil.

The mission serves about 4000 hot meals a day. They are really struggling to get food this year. The U.S. has cut all supplies to Haiti. Some political move which only hurts the people. Charlie was working on some contacts in Europe and Canada that could help supply some food. He has to buy all the food now.

After the tour, we went off to do the tasks that we signed up for yesterday. I signed up for office work on Monday morning. Emily and I sorted the NEW Mission letters to the kids. There were about a thousand that we put in numerical order. Then we copied (wrote) names from printed cards to what looked like a school roll call. Some "different" names that we were writing:

Torcolsky, Mackenson, Glishmith, Bedler, Gavel, Widlande, Rwidleine, Richarleson, Perterline, Yslande, Wiolmarlie, ijuelisone, Elange Love, Chyline, Woodjiny, Ymmaculeuse Zizi, Voinel, Olbichou, Passiondinio, and Frannenestha.

Other people did things like sorting the donated items, bundling them into packs. 112 of them. Ashley and Stevie sorted through the files to organize the information on the kids who were and were not in the organization anymore. Others painted benches. These were school benches that they built. Picnic table style but with seats only on one side.

Lunch was the best fried Red Snapper, yams, rice and bean gravy.

At 1, no 1:30 we piled into the truck for a "mission walk". Charlie drove 2 miles to a place where we could drive down into the river bed, then he drove about 5 miles up

the "river" as we bounced around in back. The river bed was about 50 yards wide and the water at the widest was 6 feet wide, sometimes only a slow trickle. Not deep at all, in fact he drove through the deepest water with no trouble. So here we are winding our way back and forth across this river bed along this "road". We reach the "dam." It may have held back water at one time, it was all stones and trickle of water now. There were beautiful mountains about a mile away. So we stop the truck and 18 of us pile out. That's when Charlie told us that the truck gets stuck easily.

We walked on the dirt road/path where people live. Charlie stops to talk to people. As short-term missionaries, we are there to support Charlie. We are there to support him. We seemed out of place, but welcomed. People there hadn't seen a group like that before, that's for sure.

Charlie stopped at a small booth where a man was sitting. He was selling lottery numbers. He was not a Christian because he thought what he was doing may be thought of as bad in God's eyes. Charlie explained to him that it didn't matter, he could still accept the Lord and still be saved. We passed a very ramshackled building. It had a sign – It was an Anglican Church. Tattered chairs (they could sure use some wood glue). There were many Christians in the village already. A crowd started gathering and Charlie suggested that we perform the skit that Rachel showed us the day before. Perform! No way! How embarrassing. OK, put that aside and just go with it. Have fun.

I stepped in to be the person that handed out money to try to get into heaven. I sure never thought I'd be doing that! Christi was the "gatekeeper" who wouldn't let me in heaven. Cliff played a great Jesus and Tina was the star of the show with her performance. The people loved the skits. We made them laugh. Arnold explained to them in Creole what we were doing and the meaning behind it. It went over well. I was surprised.

After the "show" we walked further down the road. In the middle of nowhere, there was a lady selling soda. Charlie paid \$H10 (~\$US2) and we got a couple bottles of cold Coca Cola, and some Haitian soda. How in the world did she transport those glass bottles to this remote place and they were cold. Amazing.

We found our way back to the river through peoples "yards". They sure do keep their dirt clean and tidy around their houses. I saw the smallest baby goat, maybe 12 inches high. We walked through corn and cane fields. We passed a man on a horse. We ended up about half a mile from the truck so we walked up the river bed, over the dam to the truck. Driving back over the dam was fun. The truck tilted some and we let out a little yell, but we were fine.

We got back at 5:30 for a dinner: beef stir fry, rice, brownies (yummy)

7 pm evening time. Louise had prepared some songs for us to sing, but instead Adam brought the guitar and started playing and singing. I didn't know most of the songs so I just listened.

Charlie gave us a short lesson the History of Haiti.

- * Haiti means "mountains" or "high country".
- * Haitians won their independence (from the French) in 1804. New years Day is their independence day.
- * There are violent fighting throughout the country. Napoleon sent 40,000 men to try to get Haiti back. Half died. When their ship was arriving, Haitians burned the town so they didn't have any place to live to survive when they landed. After their independence, they "removed" the white people everywhere in the country.
- * Government is one of the main problems in Haiti. It is not representative of the people.
- * About 20 percent are Christian.
- * The devil appears to have control over some parts of Haiti.
- * 50 percent of the children are not able to go to school.
- * The average Haitian woman has six children.
- * 50,000 Haitians are allowed into the United States every year. There is an eight year wait but you can only get in if you have a connection with a family in the U.S.
- * Land in Haiti costs more for foreigners. Lease a parcel of land for \$US60 for maybe 3 years. The cost really depends on the person.

Also see the end of this journal for more very interesting FACTS and STATS on Haiti.

Tuesday

Morning devotion by Shawn.

John 3:16-17 God so loved the world that he sent his only son.

Matt 28: 19-20 Go and make disciples of all the nations.

"Jesus does not send the equipped. He equips those who go."

After the devotion, we went off to do our assigned tasks. I got my work gloves, sweat bandana and helped paint the school benches. They used red paint yesterday. We had yellow (jeune) and green paint today. You have to get in awkward positions to paint so it gets all over your clothes and skin. I'm so glad I packed work gloves. If you weren't careful, you could get covered in paint. They were building the benches faster than we could paint them.

We took a break for lunch - Tuna fishes sandwiches.

After lunch, back to more painting. We were working in the warehouse which was supposed to be full of food. The kitchen was next door. A black man came over and we talked some. He was teaching me some Creole words and I was teaching him English words. I was painting while we talked. I had him point out places where I missed and I would say "mesi" (thank you in Creole) then immediately paint the missed spot. I'm sure that was the first time that he could direct a white girl. At least it gave him a story to tell later. Like here I am telling the story to you.

At 4:30 the shops opened. A "shop" is a blanket or tarp spread over the dirt and covered with whatever items they can sell. NEW Missions has done a good job policing the shops. Dan said when he first came here the shops were out of hand. They had them set up all the time and constant yelling at you to come to their shop. It was such a turn off and they didn't understand that. It's still a horrifying experience to be surrounded by yelling people. They are so desperate to sell, desperate for the money. I think it was Scott, before Shawn, who explains to them (the "shopkeepers") the rules that that will help them sell more.

Be courteous. Don't crowd or harass us, or pull us and if we walk away they have to let us go. It's a very disconcerting process/ situation. There are NO tourists here in this country. [Charlie said the country has the wrong name.] They have no idea how to get us to buy. If they are courteous and kind, then maybe we'll buy.

I really don't need anything, but I can't look at it like that. If I buy something, then they can eat for a month. It may be, no, it probably is the only money they get, until the next missionaries arrive here. Many said they go all the way to Port-au-Prince (P-au-P) to buy this stuff to sell to us. There were a lot of trinket boxes, small square, round, medium size that say Haiti on top. Since there are no tourists, there's no one to buy this stuff so they make very few souvenirs, so there's not much selection of items to choose from.

I bought a rock from Charles for 5, no 6 dollars. Now here's the story. Sunday on the beach he told me he could scratch my name in a stone. I expressed some interest and he ran away and brought back a pen and index card. I wrote SUZANNA. He wrote \$5. I said OK. Come to find out that I should NOT have done that. Big oops.

NEW Missions does not want us to buy anything outside of official shop hours. Tues, Thurs, Fri 4:30 to 5:30. The rules are set up so they don't skip school to set up shop.

So Monday morning when we were doing the tour of the mission complex and Charles finds me. It's a nice rock but I told him that I can't buy it till shops open Tues at 4:30. I asked him to scratch HAITI on the back for an extra dollar. He used a razor blade. They need some other carving tools to make these souvenirs for us.

At official "shop time" Shawn, Mary, and Dan escorted us outside the gate to the shops. If they harassed any of us, Shawn asked us to all agree to leave immediately.

Charles escorted me over to his shop immediately. I paid him for my rock, then he really wanted me to buy something else. Now that's a tough one. There are so many people there selling and you want to help as many as possible. I had already bought something from him, so I wanted to move on and look at other shops. I ended up just looking and not buying anything else. It is always a somewhat unnerving experience that I have endured in many a third world country and everybody handles it differently. I remember those little boys in Cambodia last December – they force you to take something in your hand, then they wouldn't take it back – they were required to bring money home.

Victoria made the mistake of mentioning that she wanted a tea set. Pandemonium set in. Six sets emerged out of nowhere. She was crowded and squished with people shouting and yelling prices at her. It was getting out of hand. Shawn observed until he determined that Victoria needed some help to get out of there. She didn't buy any. Their selling tactics backfired and they didn't sell anything. Maybe Thursday she'll get one if things are calmer on the shop-front.

After shopping, dinner. Macaroni and (yummy Wisconsin) cheese. They had a fabulous FRESH fruit salad. We have a different dessert every lunch and dinner. Cinnamon bread this time. The banana bread is delish too. I also love the beets and cucumber –tomato salad.

Tuesday night. 7 p.m. I'm sitting here under the mango tree. The generator is running and the lights are on. There is a youth meeting going on in the Dining hall. "Youth" meaning High School, which means any age. They are singing in English and in Creole praising Jesus. They are not allowed to talk about their shops at all (but Nika did ask me for my necklace...)

After they finished their games, I joined them for the Bible Study. Each person was called to the front one at a time to recite the verse they had memorized week.

Galations 5:22-23 The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Then they were given another verse to learn for next week. They also had some homework (on paper) to help them interpret a verse. They also read and discussed these verses:

Deu 6:5-6 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

Luke 6:46 Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.

[Mike had to stand up and talk about this verse. He gets it. The love of God comes from his heart.]

I sat across from Nika. She had a small book written in Creole: Istwa Jezi - The Story of Jesus. As I turned the pages and tried to read the stories, Nika told me in English what was written in the book. I was impressed. Here are some of the stories:

Senk Milmoun Manje [Lik 9:1-2, 10-17] When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to head the sick. ...Jesus feeds the 5000.

Nonm Rich la [Lik 18:18-30] The Rich Ruler.

Mat 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Lasin Senya a [Lik 22:7-20] The Last Supper.

Pasyon e Mo [Lik 23:26, 32-34,39-47] The crucifixion and Jesus' death.

Rezireksyon an [Lik 24:1-12] The resurrection.

Gran Komisyon an [Lik 24:36-56] Jesus appears to the disciples.

Phi 3:10 - I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering becoming like him in his death and so somehow to attain the resurrection from the dead.

Wednesday

Mary did the morning devotion.

Phil 2:1-7 Be like -minded like Jesus. Have the same love, be one in the spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

You should have Jesus' attitude.

This morning we are going to the Market and to the school. I hope we don't get too harassed at the market. The shops last night were enough of a turn-off. We are going to drive to an overview of the Leogane Plane - the plane is 10 miles by 5 miles.

We all loaded up in the back of the truck and headed to the Leogane Market. It was located in "the city". Very old dilapidated buildings. We parked the truck and arranged to meet back in an hour.

There were many practical items in this market (nothing for tourists). Food, beans, rice, canned items, evaporated milk, chickens, some meat. wash basin, dishes, soap, toothpaste, a couple places were selling water. I saw one man with a 6 inch square chunk of ice in a shiny clean metal container with about 20 gallons of water. He was selling ice water.

We walked around looking horribly out of place. Nobody paid much attention to us because they knew they didn't really have much that we wanted to buy. A man tried

to follow us around begging. We turned the corner and Emily made comment "That lady was sitting on that same corner last year."

Martha (our translator) helped some people in our group purchase food for their sponsored children that they would see tomorrow. Approximate prices were about \$H8 for about 10 pounds of rice, \$H16 for about 10 pounds of beans.

I found a store across from the market that had "Rhum" (Rum). Madeline said it was not the good kind though. Some coconut rum would be good. They can't export it. Cocoa would be good too, but she couldn't find any of that either.

Charlie drove the truck up the streets crowded with vendors selling their wares, then onto a side street and we stopped at a very unassuming cement building. Martha went inside and came out with a box of about 20 pounds of frozen chicken. She later told me it was \$H114.

Next on the schedule was the Chapel Service at the High School at 11 a.m. Cliff (such a brave soul) volunteered to speak. I wonder if he knew what he was getting himself in to. We brought a small generator, long extension cords, a huge speaker, microphone and public address system, but they could never get it working.

It was huge building. There were about 10 people per bench (more squished onto some benches) There are about 30 benches per side, 2 sides so about 60 benches, so over 600 people. Looks like High School children. Pink tops and gray pleated skirts and pants. Here we were squished onto the front two benches.

Cliff got up to speak. Arnold translated. He told a story of a fighter.

Romans 8:31-37 If God is for us, who can be against us?

Cliff proclaims: "Victory is ours through Christ who loved us."

"Jesus is a winner!" and they shout back "Amen!"

Nothing can separate us from His Love.

Let God help us fight our fights here.

I thought it was a very effective, appropriate message. But it was such a big room. There was a lot of talking but many did listen. Many are looking at us. An occasional bell signal didn't seem to affect the noise, no talking. I see why these people are accustomed to yelling.

It feels like about 80 degrees in here. I felt a breeze through the "window". A window is cinder blocks with a decorative pattern.

After the service, back to the Mission for lunch.

At 3:30 we walked to the village of Lasalle for a Women's Meeting. Go outside the mission gate, turn left into the corn field and walk on the dirt path. The path veers right, go a little further and turn left at the tree. Walk a little further and you come up on the village. There is a 4-room school house building with the church next to it. Rachel explained that they try to maintain the inside of the buildings more than the outside. They can lock the building and keep the inside nice. Inside the church was painted with a few bible pictures and verses taped to the wall.

It was about a half hour walk. Other people on the worn path too. Eight of us women here, about 20 women from the village.

Lots of singing and praying, then we stood and introduced ourselves. Rachel translated. I think I'm getting used to this now because I finally got up enough nerve to say something more than just Hi. I can't really remember what I said, something about worshipping the same God. They said "Amen" back to it. After I sat down, I felt a huge rush of the Holy Spirit move through my whole body. What a powerful blessing of a feeling.

Laura volunteered to speak at this meeting. Last night she prepared how she was going to present her testimony and message. You have to remember that this is very different country from our country. What you say and how you say it could be very different for it to be meaningful. For example,

You can't say saying something like "I did not go to church because I was too young to drive to church". They couldn't relate. You'd have to change it to say "I did not go to church when I was young because I was too young to travel the distance by myself".

Laura did a great job of communicating her message with Rachel translating. She said to "Remember each day not to do things my way – but to follow His way." Amen.

After the women's meeting, we walked back to the mission a different way – towards the beach. Children ran up along side us. They walk beside you, then take your

hand. I had two girls and Laura had a girl and (naked) boy. We just walked along holding hands smiling at each other. She did finally get up enough nerve to ask me for a dollar.

When we got to the beach, we said goodbye to them. The tide was up so we got our feet wet in the surf. Wet shoes and sox and the bottom of my skirt. Oh yeah, I love these long skirts that we have to wear. They are a lot more comfortable than pants. I bought this one at the thrift store, and I intended on leaving it, but I really like it so it may come back with me to Atlanta. I think I'll do a lot more shopping at those thrift stores.

It was about a mile walk on the beach. There was a beautiful sunset. We got back at 6. Church started at 6:30. Dinner was ham and (Wisconsin) cheese sandwiches, lettuce, mayo. Fresh mango juice punch. Creme Brulee for dessert. I LOVE creme brulee.

We ate dinner fast, I washed my face, put on dry shoes and we were off for a 5 minute walk to church.

They had a small generator running so the building was dark except for the lights at the front. The PA system worked and they sang and sang and sang loud with lots and lots of energy. About 100 people were there.

We had to go to the front and introduce ourselves. We also sang a song. That was .. oh how shall I say, pitiful. Louise taught us a song in Creole that we sang. I think we were all a little intimidated by the setting so we didn't have half the energy that they have when they sing. They were gracious and clapped in appreciation and we stumbled back to our seats in the dark back of the room.

I am getting used to "being on parade" now. It is not often that they get to worship with other believers. It's quite an enlightening experience.

Dan did the sermon. He had quite a message with a captive audience that waited to hear the next part of the story. I had a little girl sleeping in my lap. She was sweet. After the service, she introduced me to her mom. The baby was shy.

Walking back after the service we noticed the black sky with millions of stars. It reminded me of that night we saw the Milky Way in New Zealand. Except this time I had Charles beside me, hounding me again, trying to solicit his shop and wanting to sell me rocks with my mother's or friend's names. I was in awe of the sky. I exclaimed to him how beautiful the stars were! I wanted to admire the sky and the beautiful night and he kept at it with "you want this" or "you want that" and "I can make you this" or whatever. I didn't want to hear it. I told him that back in my home we can't see

the stars. He didn't understand that. He didn't know how lucky he was to see a sky like that every night. Well, I might have offended him, at least he acted hurt, but enough was enough. No more with the shop talk. I wanted to enjoy the evening.

I took a (cold) shower, journaled, then sleep. Such a happy, tired body. Wonderful sleep for a couple hours until Mr. Rooster decides that you don't need to sleep any more.

Thursday

Rachel did the morning devotion. She talked about "Responses."

God answers and things can change.

Math 15:21. The faith of the Canaanite woman.

Son of David - a term they used to acknowledge the Messiah. You must acknowledge who He is and who you are.

Verse 24 "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel" - a test to see if the woman is genuine.

"In the midst of discouragement, faith will find encouragement"

Hold onto your faith and God will help you. Man and money alone can't keep changing things. A lot has been poured into this country and it is difficult to see the effect . We need God too.

Heb 11:1 - Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

"God allows things in our lives because he wants to see our response."

"Life is 10 percent what happens to us, and 90 percent how we respond to it."

Thursday morning, some people went off to the school. No thanks for me. I was ready for more physical work - the cement pour. This place is right on the beach so

the buildings sink down. They need to pour more cement on a sidewalk that had sunk about 6 inches. It was in an awkward place, but Shawn figured out how to use the tractor to transport the cement and he strategically position it to pour over the 6-foot tall fence. There were plenty of Haitian men there to help, and we tried to offer our services.

There was a recipe of a bag of cement with buckets of sand and gravel to heave into the cement mixer. We were filling the buckets with one pitiful shovel-ful of sand at a time. Later that afternoon, after some of us (me) petered out, a Haitian man filled sand bucket in 5 seconds all by himself. He laid the bucket down on its side and shoved it against the sand pile, then he used the shovel to push the sand in the bucket. As he watch our laborious method, I'm sure he was thinking to himself that he could teach us a thing or two. Yup, we can all learn from each other.

Lunch was with your sponsored child (if you had one). Many people were really looking forward to this all week. On Monday, you give the mission your sponsored child's number. The Mission notifies the family to bring the child to the Mission for lunch on Thursday. If you have brought gifts for someone else's child, the child is supposed to come on Wednesday so you can give them the presents (toys, food, money). At one time, the mission allowed sponsors to mail money to the children. It got too dangerous for the mission to handle all that cash and a pastor even got robbed, so they stopped that practice. You have to give gifts in person now.

It's well worth the trip to Haiti to see the children. We just jump on an airplane, but some of the children walk for many hours to attend this special meeting with their sponsor. Louise was beside herself with excitement when her boy came to visit. She had brought lots of gifts. She put them in a travel case with wheels. 20 pounds of rice would be easier to transport on wheels, rather than carrying it. Well, I saw the pregnant mother of her sponsored child walking outside the Mission with the case balanced on her head! These people never cease to amaze me.

Lunch was fabulous fried chicken, rice and beans and that great Haitian "sauce". One sponsored boy ate so much his tummy really poked out. What a special time. I thought about the girl that I sponsor in Saigon. I was so saddened by what we (America) had done to that country. It is unbelievable to imagine and to see the atrocities that these people endure every day. I am thankful that these organizations provide a way for us to help in our own small way, one child at a time.

Thursday 3:30, no 3:50 - we left for a walk to another women's meeting . This one is close in the village of Neply. It was by the basketball court. Louise said this court was poured in August last year when she was here. The meeting is out in the open . Children were playing all around. They brought out chairs for us to sit in. I moved mine back so I wasn't sitting in front center of all the group. They sing and sing in

Creole, then the woman in charge prays and prays and prays. Many many fast words pouring out praising God. So passionate. Then every person in the group started praying out loud for a couple of minutes. Like speaking in tongues all around us.

A cool breeze blows my hair. It feels like about 78 degrees. So nice. It has not rained all week. Shops open today at 4:30, hopefully we'll be done so I can give these shop people some money.

Bible reading Acts 5:1-5 Anania's sold land, but kept some money for himself. He died, his wife dies. "Great fear seized the whole church" Wow. Like when people sell their land here, 75 percent of the time they sell it because they have to pay the voodoo god...

More singing. We have to introduce ourselves and say something. Then more singing. There is a LOUD argument going on behind us - a man and woman yelling and yelling at each other. Shouting. Quite distracting, but others don't seem to notice. Nothing keeps them from praising God.

Tiffany volunteered to speak at this meeting.

Pro 31:10 - The wife of noble character.

Women can gain wisdom by consulting the Lord in their decisions. Amen.

Allow the Lord to control our tongue and our words.

Give us our earned rewards to bring praise at the city gate.

1 Pet 3 : 1-6 - Wives and husbands.

She did a good job and prepared well. After the women's meeting, we were walking back and the shops were still open. I shopped till 6! I had no idea it was so late. Shawn and Mary stayed the whole time to look out for me. Thank you! I do appreciate their help.

Dinner was Pizza, salad, and coconut bars.

7 p.m. movie night. We saw "Left Behind". That really left me with a memorable impression of what it's all about. Quite a movie. Charlie made the BEST popcorn that

I have ever tasted. It was far better than any \$5 movie theater popcorn drenched with fatty oil.

Friday

Pancakes for breakfast. I ate with Nathan. He is a very lovable boy. He has nonstop energy like the Energiser bunny. He keeps going and going and going.

Dan did the morning devotion.

Math 13:45 - The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

If you open something up, you may find something of value inside.

It may be hidden.

You may have to really look for it.

But the affect may be that you give up everything you have to get it.

The state of your heart must be such that you are ready to receive it also.

What do you do with it when you have it?

We should give it away.

That morning, the mission arranged a boat ride with a local man. Doesn't that sound like a fun experience to go on a Haitian boat? Many people paid \$US5 each for the ride. I can't believe I didn't do the boat. I like the beach, I love the ocean. What I did instead surprised me. I volunteered to help with the clinic and give physicals at the school. They had one more morning of work to finish seeing all the kids.

They did the clinic all day on Tuesday. They saw 213 kids. On Thursday it was only in the morning and now they needed help this morning to see about 150 more kids. Tiffany and Laura helped the Haitian nurses before. Laura was going in the boat, so they needed another volunteer. It was actually quite a fun experience.

Groups of about 30 kids came out to the covered area where we were working. Martha gave them their information sheet, Adam did their height and weight, Emily

did their pulse, I did their temperature, then sent them to Tiffany or the other nurse for the rest of the checkup. They listened to their heart and did an overall look with some questions, then the kids got some vitamins.

I was amazed at one very small boy whose stat sheet said he was 11 years old. Between groups, the kids would sit on the other side of the table from me. They were very well behaved. On Tuesday Louise and Christi entertained them by painting finger nails. That would have been a good idea. The kids would touch my skin and pull on my hair. They weren't rude. They were just curious. We were there from about 9 to 12:30.

Lunch, then the afternoon was free time (finally!) . What a busy, busy week. Charlie had given me a copy of his mothers' book: A Stubborn Hope by Jeanne DeTellis. I started reading it on Wednesday and finished it Friday. I couldn't put it down. Amazing stories about her life and how she was called to Haiti.

Shops open at 4 p.m. today. It was time to bring everything that you wanted to get rid of and barter for items. I got a necklace for 2 skirts and a dollar. (I figured out later that I bought the skirts for \$US3 each, so you may get a better deal by just giving them money.) I gave a dress to (pregnant) Christi. I knelt beside an older lady. I didn't want anything from her shop but I did give her a couple dollars. I was down to two shirts and one dollar that I exchanged for something. I made sure to get something from Mike. I even brought him some batteries. That was a good experience.

The locals knew this was our last day at the mission so they were being a little more insistent with the begging. I couldn't help wondering what more they expected. They walk beside you and demand:

"Give me shoes"

"Give me shirt"

"Give me flashlight"

"Give me batteries"

It may help if they learn how to ask nicely and say "Please give me some shoes". It was a similar situation in Vietnam. Our guide tried to explain to me that there is no

word in the Vietnamese language that meant "please". I wonder if there is a Creole word for "please".

Dinner was hamburgers, BBQ beans (like they make in the South) great potatoes.

7 pm Worship in the Dining Hall. Adam leads us on guitar. Charlie shares a message.

Is this all worth it?

1 Cor 3:8 -Each one will get their reward according to their labor.

Each one will get wages worthy of the work.

God will equip us and provide for us.

Math 16:24 - Deny things so you can pick up the cross and follow Jesus.

Luk 14:12-13 - Our good works are repaid at the resurrection.

Don't jump into just any good thing. You should follow God's calling.

Set your mind on things above.

The next focus at NEW Missions is generators and PA equipment for churches and schools.

Distribute passports tonight. We leave at 5:30 a.m. tomorrow.

Saturday

Breakfast cereal and coffee at 5 a.m. Uugh. 5:30 a.m. load up the truck and leave. :-)

Leaving NEW Missions.

The sun is rising over the corn field. Chickens and goats scatter as the bus rolls by. Many people from the village of Neplly are on the edge of the road waving goodbye. I'm going to miss this place.

I'm sure they see our big, full suitcases on top of the bus. We're on a "tour" bus. The seats are padded so the bumps don't feel as big. Shawn and Mary are in the truck behind us. Good thing because a suitcase fell off!

As the children wave goodbye, you can see a sense of disappointment in their faces knowing that people who bring good things to their community are leaving. I feel sad. I'm glad NEW Missions is here to minister and help these people. I'm glad George and Jeanne stayed through the time of crisis and stayed when they were repeatedly told to leave. They stayed and continued to help and they knew the people that they were helping would protect them.. It's a good thing. NEW Missions has been here 20 years!

We just passed a sign on the highway "Douana". I guess it's the name of a town. I'll have to look it up on a map.

All along the roadside, there are people with their wares waiting to be picked up by the bus. One lady had a huge basket of tomatoes on her head. I saw a 4by4foot crate of chickens. White feathers were poking out all over the crate.

On the side of the road there are numerous big piles of burnt cars and tires. They were road blocks. The kind that Jeanne told about driving through in her book.

Conditions here in the city are definitely worse than in the country. There is NO water in the occasional river beds that we drive over. So far, so good. We're moving, slow, but moving. Traffic is heavy, but we have not stopped yet... We're dodging people all over the road and other vehicles, and burning piles of debris. It's two lanes in each direction, but people park in the right lane, so you have to drive in the left lane. There are often cement barriers to separate the opposing directions. An official car drove in our direction on the other side of the barrier against oncoming traffic. I guess you're allowed, if you are somebody special.

I've been noticing the license plates. They say Prive or Taxi. There was a Toyota Land Cruiser beside us on the road. License is "00010 Prive" The Prive plates are usually a letter and four numbers. He must be some high-up government official who go the tenth license plate.

I saw a sign that said "Telco Haiti: www.makanaky.com". I was impressed that a business in this country had a Web site. It sure doesn't seem like a very effective way to disseminate information here, if you ask me. Some stats on this country claimed 3 Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and 6,000 Internet users in the year 2000. Well, I tried the URL when I got home and got the message:

Unable to open www.makanaky.com/. Cannot locate the Internet server or proxy service.

I don't think I've seen a single traffic light yet! There are traffic circles at "big" intersections. Madeline saw some traffic lights and she said she saw three garbage trucks! Garbage trucks?!? There is garbage EVERYWHERE, but I guess they need to start somewhere to haul it somewhere else.

I had a very nice conversation with Madeline on the bus.

She is from Canada, but her parents were born in Haiti. A friend came to pick her up at the mission and they went to the Montana Hotel. She said it was a 5-star property. I actually found it listed on the Internet.

Montana Hotel, Port au Prince 509-257-1920

No rates listed, but another hotel, Villa Creole Hotel in P-au-P is \$US105 for a standard double, \$US180 for the Ambassador (sic) Suite.

Madeline said they ate at Pietio Ville. All of the people who ate there were either white or mulatto. Very wealthy diplomats and government officials. Politician and lawyers. A very elite group. It was located at the top of a protected hill.

Maybe they want to keep this division of the very rich and the very poor. As long as the poor never see how good some others have it, they will keep functioning and existing at the level they are accustomed to. They are different levels of poor too. Madeline see hope in their face.

She feel totally at ease here. Very comfortable walking around. She knows the language too.

Madeline and Veronique are coming back this summer. A week at NEW Missions, and week in P-au-P.

Madeline said they called her "beige woman" or "yellow woman" "Jeune Madam" because of the color of her skin. She is lighter than most.

Madeline is a nurse. Since she spoke Creole, she volunteered to help the mission teach some health classes. Two afternoons she taught women about proper hygiene and nutrition.

The oldest worn out tires are proudly displayed at the roadside for sale. There is a woman sweeping dirt, another splashing water on the ground to keep the dust down. I saw a man lean over and pick something up from a road-side pile, then he put it in his mouth. Now I have seen true hunger.

So much debris everywhere. The people with shops – I look into their faces and I don't see pride like I saw in faces of the shopkeepers in Hanoi. Here I see struggle. Yearning to succeed with what they have.

The most apparent thing I see on their faces is questions. When they see us (white people) slowly roll by in the bus I can see they are wondering

Where were we in their country?

Why were we in their country?

Where are we going?

What is it like there?

We passed a sign showing the new paper money in the country:

Nouveaux Billets

Nouvo Papye Iajan

A Tap-Tap – is a truck for public transport.

Christi learned that a lot of Haitians have never seen a white child (like her - long blonde hair and very blue eyes). The other children here are dark skinned with dark hair and eyes. Her nick name is Ti Blan. It means small white. Pronounced "Tee Blah"

We use Toilet paper - they use stones or banana leaves :(

Sugar cane is \$US1 for one stalk. Stevie, Veronique, Shawn had machetes trying to take the outside of the cane stalk off. It's not that good. It 's like sweet wood. Children in the country chew on all time to supplement their one meal a day. I saw a lot of bad teeth.

We arrived at the airport around 7:45 a.m. I did see two traffic lights. "Air d'Ayiti" is Air Haiti. We're on American Airlines. Now this is secure airport. Here's the drill:

Stand in line to enter airport. Show passport and ticket. X-ray all bags. Random searches pulled out of line.

Stand in line to get boarding pass. Show passport, ticket. Random searches pulled out of line.

Pay \$31US exit fee, show passport, boarding pass.

Stand in line to get passport stamped. They take the yellow paper. X-ray carry on bags.

Go upstairs, shop. Rum is cheap (\$US2.50 a bottle), but remember it's illegal for minors to have it in the U.S.

Go downstairs, stand in line to get to departure gate. Show passport and boarding pass. Exit gate, show boarding pass, X-ray carry on bags. Random searches pulled out of the line. Walk on tarmac, show boarding pass, get on the plane.

10 a.m. and we're on the plane. Flight to Miami is 1 hour 32 minutes. It's 78 in Miami.

We're leaving. I have a feeling I'll be back though.

Louise is coming back in August and Dan is coming back in July. He is going to Cap-Haitien. What a coincidence that my brother, Paul and his wife Stefanie are going to the Evangelical Free church in Cap-Haitien and exactly the same time that Dan is going to be there. God's plan in action.

Here's another true parallel. OK, maybe I get this writer and travel obsession from my father. This excerpt is from a letter that my father wrote to his father on March 6, 1962. We were living in Bogota, Colombia where dad worked for the Rockefeller Foundation to help farmers. Sad thing is, it still applies to Haiti in 2002.

Sometimes when I get to worrying about my problems, all I have to do is look around and I can see people with real problems. There is such a large number of poor people here it is hard to imagine. And I mean people that don't have shoes for their kids, or even a roof over their heads. The cardboard from all of our furniture packing is now the roof and sides of a house of a poor squatter family that lives in a field not too far from our house. I gave them some hay and it is now their bed, and they consider themselves lucky. Some of the farmers haven't progressed a bit since the day's of Christ. It almost looked like a scene out of the Bible. In one field, they were cultivating and planting corn with a team of oxen and a wooden plow to scratch the dusty dry soil and plant their corn. There was a little boy about 7 years old following along behind the plow with his sack of corn, planting it and then stepping on it with his bare foot to cover the seed up. The dirt was dry and hard and it will be a miracle if any of it comes up. If one-third of the corn comes up, they think this is good and then the production is so low that it is hardly worthwhile for them to plant it. One family I visited got their water by hauling it almost two miles in gasoline tins from the dirty river. They used this water to drink, cook and wash their clothes in.

Letter dated March 1, 1963. Dad wrote this to his parents. He was 39 years old with a wife and 3 kids living in a foreign country. *(I had to add this for my dad and my sister who worry about me and my brother traveling to someplace that appears to not be safe. You should see the Consular report on Haiti....)*

I realize that you must be worried about us, especially with all the news in the paper about Colombia. But honestly there isn't anything to worry about. If something starts to happen, they have enough U.S. Air Force planes parked out here at the airport to get the Americans to Panama if necessary. But the thing is, that I don't think it will be

necessary. Now, there is a good possibility that you will hear about the government falling here and the military taking over things. This is pretty well expected. But this will be the army and not the communists, But is and when you read about this , don't worry. We'll just stay home a few days and then I'll go back to work as usual. But if we need to, I'm prepared to live here in the house for more than a month if necessary.

I love this adventurous life that God had allowed me to enjoy. I am so fortunate to know His presence in my life and experience things with His blessing. I pray He reveals more escapades for me to explore and write about.

If you want to visit Haiti and a have a similar NEW Missions experience, contact:

NEW Missions

PO Box 2727

Orlando, FL 32802

(407) 240-4058

email: info@newmissions.org

Web Site: www.newmissions.org

Dan Merrefield also does a newsletter featuring Haitian information. Contact him at dan@merrefield.com.

HAITI FACTS and STATS

Found at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ha.html>

Religions: Roman Catholic 80%, Protestant 16% (Baptist 10%, Pentecostal 4%, Adventist 1%, other 1%), none 1%, other 3% (1982) note: roughly one-half of the population also practices Voodoo

Languages: French (official), Creole (official)

Background

One of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. Over three decades of dictatorship followed by military rule ended in 1990 when Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE was elected president. Most of his term was usurped by a military takeover, but he was able to return to office in 1994 and oversee the installation of a close associate to the presidency in 1996. ARISTIDE won a second term as president in 2000, and took office early the following year.

Geography

Location: Caribbean, western one-third of the island of Hispaniola, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, west of the Dominican Republic

Map references: Central America and the Caribbean

Area: land: 27,560 sq km , water: 190 sq km

Area - comparative: slightly smaller than Maryland

Land boundaries: total: 275 km , border countries: Dominican Republic 275 km , Coastline: 1,771 km

Climate: tropical; semiarid where mountains in east cut off trade winds

Terrain: mostly rough and mountainous

Elevation extremes: lowest point: Caribbean Sea 0 m , highest point: Chaîne de la Selle 2,680 m

Natural resources: bauxite, copper, calcium carbonate, gold, marble, hydropower

Land use: arable land: 20%, permanent crops:13%, permanent pastures:18%, forests and woodland:5%, other:44% (1993 est.),Irrigated land: 750 sq km (1993 est.)

Natural hazards: lies in the middle of the hurricane belt and subject to severe storms from June to October; occasional flooding and earthquakes; periodic droughts

Environment - current issues: extensive deforestation (much of the remaining forested land is being cleared for agriculture and used as fuel); soil erosion; inadequate supplies of potable water

People

Population: 6,964,549

note: estimates for this country explicitly take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected (July 2001 est.)

Age structure: 0-14 years: 40.31% (male 1,421,945; female 1,385,580)

15-64 years: 55.52% (male 1,869,323; female 1,997,246)

65 years and over: 4.17% (male 140,556; female 149,899) (2001 est.)

Population growth rate: 1.4% (2001 est.)
Birth rate: 31.68 births/1,000 population (2001 est.)
Death rate: 15 deaths/1,000 population (2001 est.)
Net migration rate: -2.64 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2001 est.)
Sex ratio: at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female , under 15 years: 1.03 male(s)/female , 15-64 years: 0.94 male(s)/female , 65 years and over: 0.94 male(s)/female , total population: 0.97 male(s)/female (2001 est.)
Infant mortality rate: 95.23 deaths/1,000 live births (2001 est.)
Life expectancy at birth: total population: 49.38 years
Total fertility rate: 4.4 children born/woman (2001 est.)
HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate: 5.17% (1999 est.) , HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS: 210,000 (1999 est.) , HIV/AIDS - deaths: 23,000 (1999 est.)
Nationality: Haitian(s)
Ethnic groups: black 95%, mulatto and white 5%
Religions: Roman Catholic 80%, Protestant 16% (Baptist 10%, Pentecostal 4%, Adventist 1%, other 1%), none 1%, other 3% (1982) . note: roughly one-half of the population also practices Voodoo
Languages: French (official), Creole (official)
Literacy: definition: age 15 and over can read and write, total population: 45% , male: 48%, female: 42.2% (1995)

Government

Country name: conventional long form: Republic of Haiti , conventional short form: Haiti

local long form: Republique d'Haiti

local short form: Haiti

Government type: elected government

Capital: Port-au-Prince

Administrative divisions: 9 departments (departements, singular - departement);

Artibonite, Centre, Grand'Anse, Nord, Nord-Est, Nord-Ouest, Ouest, Sud, Sud-Est

Independence: 1 January 1804 (from France) . National holiday: Independence Day, 1 January (1804)

Constitution: approved March 1987; suspended June 1988, with most articles reinstated March 1989; in October 1991, government claimed to be observing the constitution; return to constitutional rule, October 1994

Legal system: based on Roman civil law system; accepts compulsory ICJ jurisdiction

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal

Executive branch: chief of state: President Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE (since 7 February 2001)

head of government: Prime Minister Jean-Marie CHERESTAL (since 9 February 2001)

cabinet: Cabinet chosen by the prime minister in consultation with the president

elections: president elected by popular vote for a five-year term; election last held 26 November 2000 (next to be held NA 2005); prime minister appointed by the president, ratified by the Congress

election results: Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE elected president; percent of vote - Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE 92%

Legislative branch: bicameral National Assembly or Assemblée Nationale consists of the Senate (27 seats; members serve six-year terms; one-third elected every two years) and the Chamber of Deputies (83 seats; members are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms)

elections: Senate - last held for two-thirds of seats 21 May 2000, with runoffs on 9 July boycotted by the opposition; about eight seats still disputed; election for remaining one-third held on 26 November 2000 (next to be held NA 2002); Chamber of Deputies - last held 21 May 2000, with runoffs on 30 July boycotted by the opposition; one vacant seat rerun 26 November 2000 (next election NA 2004)

election results: Senate - percent of vote by party - NA%; seats by party - FL 26, independent 1; Chamber of Deputies - percent of vote by party - NA%; seats by party - FL 73, OPL 1, other minor parties and independents 9

Judicial branch: Supreme Court or Cour de Cassation

Political parties and leaders: See the web site. Acronyms are:

ALAH, RDNP, ESPACE, OPL, and MOCHRENA, KONAKOM, PANPRA, PDCH, PADEM, FL [Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE], MDN, MRN, MIDH, MOP, FNCD, MOCHRENA, and OPL.

Political pressure groups and leaders: Autonomous Haitian Workers or CATH; Confederation of Haitian Workers or CTH; Federation of Workers Trade Unions or FOS; National Popular Assembly or APN; Papaye Peasants Movement or MPP; Popular Organizations Gathering Power or PROP; Roman Catholic Church

International organization participation: ACCT, ACP, Caricom (observer), CCC, ECLAC, FAO, G-77, IADB, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICRM, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, IMO, Intelsat, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ITU, LAES, OAS, OPANAL, OPCW (signatory), PCA, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WCL, WFTU, WHO, WIPO, WMO, WToO, WTrO

Diplomatic representation in the US: chief of mission: Ambassador (vacant); Charge d'Affaires Louis Harold JOSEPH . chancery: 2311 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008 . telephone: [1] (202) 332-4090 FAX: [1] (202) 745-7215 consulate(s) general: Boston, Chicago, Miami, New York, and San Juan (Puerto Rico)

Diplomatic representation from the US: chief of mission: Ambassador Brian Dean CURRAN . embassy: 5 Harry S Truman Boulevard, Port-au-Prince . mailing address: P. O. Box 1761, Port-au-Prince . telephone: [509] 222-0354, 222-0269, 222-0200, 223-0327 . FAX: [509] 23-1641

Flag description: two equal horizontal bands of blue (top) and red with a centered white rectangle bearing the coat of arms, which contains a palm tree flanked by flags and two cannons above a scroll bearing the motto L'UNION FAIT LA FORCE (Union Makes Strength)

Economy

Economy - overview: About 80% of the population lives in abject poverty. Nearly 70% of all Haitians depend on the agriculture sector, which consists mainly of small-scale subsistence farming and employs about two-thirds of the economically active work force. The country has experienced little job creation since the former President PREVAL took office in February 1996, although the informal economy is growing. Following legislative elections in May 2000, fraught with irregularities, international donors - including the US and EU - suspended almost all aid to Haiti. This destabilized the Haitian currency, the gourde, and, combined with a 40% fuel price hike in September, caused widespread price increases. Prices appear to have leveled off in January 2001.

GDP: purchasing power parity - \$12.7 billion (2000 est.)

GDP - real growth rate: 1.2% (2000 est.)

GDP - per capita: purchasing power parity - \$1,800 (2000 est.)

GDP - composition by sector: agriculture: 32% , industry: 20% , services: 48% (1999 est.)

Population below poverty line: 80% (1998 est.)

Household income or consumption by percentage share: lowest 10%: NA% , highest 10%: NA%

Inflation rate (consumer prices): 19% (2000 est.)

Labor force: 3.6 million (1995) note: shortage of skilled labor, unskilled labor abundant (1998)

Labor force - by occupation: agriculture 66%, services 25%, industry 9%

Unemployment rate: widespread unemployment and underemployment; more than two-thirds of the labor force do not have formal jobs (1999)

Budget: revenues: \$317 million

expenditures: \$362 million, including capital expenditures of \$84 million (FY99/00 est.)

Industries: sugar refining, flour milling, textiles, cement, tourism, light assembly industries based on imported parts

Industrial production growth rate: 0.6% (1997 est.)

Electricity - production: 672 million kWh (1999)

Electricity - production by source: fossil fuel: 52.83% , hydro: 47.17% , nuclear: 0% , other: 0% (1999)

Electricity - consumption: 625 million kWh (1999) , exports: 0 kWh (1999) , imports: 0 kWh (1999)

Agriculture - products: coffee, mangoes, sugarcane, rice, corn, sorghum; wood

Exports: \$186 million (f.o.b., 1999) , coffee, oils, mangoes
Imports: \$1.2 billion (c.i.f., 1999) , food, machinery and transport equipment, fuels, raw materials
Debt - external: \$1 billion (1998 est.)
Economic aid - recipient: \$730.6 million (1995)
Currency: gourde (HTG) .Exchange rates: gourdes per US dollar - 23.761 (January 2001), 22.524 (2000), 17.965 (1999), 16.505 (1998), 17.311 (1997), 15.093 (1996)

Communications

Telephones - main lines in use: 60,000 (1997)
Telephones - mobile cellular: 0 (1995)
Telephone system: general assessment: domestic facilities barely adequate; international facilities slightly better
Radio broadcast stations: AM 41, FM 26, shortwave 0 (1999)
Radios: 415,000 (1997)
Television broadcast stations: 2 (plus a cable TV service) (1997)
Televisions: 38,000 (1997)
Internet Service Providers (ISPs): 3 (2000)
Internet users: 6,000 (2000)

Transportation

Railways: total: 40 km note: privately owned industrial line; closed in early 1990s (2001)
Highways: total: 4,160 km , paved: 1,011 km , unpaved: 3,149 km (1996)
Waterways: NEGL; less than 100 km navigable
Ports and harbors: Cap-Haitien, Gonaives, Jacmel, Jeremie, Les Cayes, Miragoane, Port-au-Prince, Port-de-Paix, Saint-Marc
Merchant marine: none (2000 est.)
Airports: 13 (2000 est.)

Airports - with paved runways: total: 3
2,438 to 3,047 m: 1
914 to 1,523 m: 2 (2000 est.)
Airports - with unpaved runways: total: 10
914 to 1,523 m: 2
under 914 m: 8 (2000 est.)

Military

Military branches: Haitian National Police (HNP) note: the regular Haitian Army, Navy, and Air Force have been demobilized but still exist on paper until constitutionally abolished

Military manpower - military age: 18 years of age . availability: males age 15-49: 1,635,253 (2001 est.)

fit for military service: males age 15-49: 888,305 (2001 est.) , reaching military age annually: males: 87,049 (2001 est.)

Military expenditures - dollar figure: \$NA; note - mainly for police and security activities

Transnational Issues

Disputes - international: claims US-administered Navassa Island

Illicit drugs: major Caribbean transshipment point for cocaine en route to the US and Europe; vulnerable to money laundering

SONGS

Jesus, name above all names

Jezi, non'w anwo tout non

Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord

Bon sove mwen, Gloriye Segne

Emmanuel; God is with us

Emanuel; Bondye avek nou

Blessed redeemer, living word.

Redampite beni, Parol vivan.

=====

Se pa Puisans

Se pa pouvwa

Se pa Lespri di Ie Segne x2

Montay yo va deplase

Montay yo va deplase-e

Montay yo va deplase

Se pa Lespri di le Segne.

I have decided to follow Jesus

Mwen te decide pou suiv le Senye, Mwen te decide pou suiv le Senye,
Mwen te decide pou suiv le Senye, Mwen p'ap tounin, Mwen p'ap tounin

Mwen p'ap tounin, Mwen p'ap tounin, non non, Mwen p'ap tounin
Mwen p'ap tounin, Mwen p'ap tounin, non non, Mwen p'ap tounin

Lord I Lift Your Name on High

Segne, Mwen Leve non Ou

Lord, I lift you name on high

Segne, mwen leve non ou

Lord, I love to sing your raises

Segne, mwen konton louve ou

I'm so glad you're in my life

Mwen konton ou nan lavi mwen

I'm so glad you came to save us

Mwen konton ou te vin sove mwen

You came from heaven to earth - To show the way

Ou sot nan syel vin sou la te - Pou montrem chemen ou

From the earth to the cross - My debt to pay

Sot sou late al sou kwa - Pou peye det pechem

From the cross to the grave - From the grave to the sky

Sot sou kwa ale nan tonb - Sot non tonb monte nan syel

Lord, I lift your name on high.

Segne, mwen leve non ou.

Creole or "Kweyol" Language

Creole is to French, as emoticons are to English.

If you have caught onto reading emoticons, and you know a little French, then you may be able to figure out Creole. For example:

"Cn u by me sm lunch I 4gt mny" means "Can you buy me some lunch? I forgot my money"

"pls wk me if he sez nethng important" means "Please wake me if he says anything important".

"wsp" is "What's up", and "xInt" is "Excellent"

Creole	French	English
Bon jou	Bonjour	Good morning

Bon swa (Bon swe) Bonsoir Good afternoon or evening
Mesi Merci Thank you
Ye Hier Yesterday

Web sights for learning Creole

[Http://www.delphis.dm/creole.htm](http://www.delphis.dm/creole.htm)

<http://www.travland.com/languages/cgi-bin/landchoice.cgi>

THE END!

http://www.stbpoa.com/viajantes/saara/default_ing.asp

Our travel to Southern Algeria in the Sahara (26 December 2001-14 January 2002)

In 2001 Anh-Minh and I finally set our mind on a first visit to the desert. The idea was not prompted by a long standing dream to fulfil or a sudden metaphysical urge as friends and relatives often relate the desert to. It was a compromise.

I had been dreaming to visit North of Algeria for 10 years. Half of my family had once lived and died there. From France, more than anywhere else, Algeria is seen as the most dangerous place on earth. Result of a complicated relation with what had once been part of the French territory? "From Cherbourg to Tamanrasset" was the scale De Gaulle used to measure France's "grandeur" to. Today, Algeria's 2,381,741 km² could easily hold 4 France. 84% is desert and probably 85% in a couple of years as the desert is gaining despite the green belt, sort of ecological Hadrien's wall that the government maintain to stop it. Terrorism and raising discontent of an increasing population are also two of the ogres that the country faces. In 1992 Algeria became bloody Algeria in the media and eventually in people's mind. A country out of bound; an image that seems to serve both governments but not the two people relationship. I got fed up with that simplistic reality, fed up waiting for better condition. I was mature to land to Algiers with a low profile and alone.

My wife did not want to stay on the shore and give up an opportunity to make interesting photos. She had visited many countries on her own (Iran was her last) and had converted me to using the web to prepare mine. To her big surprise almost no information was available on tourism in Algeria. Reliable posts had even deserted her favourite forums. We were at a loss. Encouragement came from catalogues of French tour operators. Algeria was back after several years of interruption with its best asset: the

desert. Its lovers had never stop flying over despite dramatic official warnings. But on their own, knowing from experience. Touaregs had become their friends and the desert their home. Touareg society in the Far South had been preserved from the problems that stormed the North of the country. It had even sheltered Algerians who ran away from the north. Tamanrasset is as far from Algiers and its perils as Paris is from Algiers: 2,000 km South from the capital.

The irruption of the Algerian desert in magazines was an invitation to new visitors and an irresistible temptation for amateur photographs. We would travel together and stop over to Algiers on the way. Two internet correspondents in Algeria would drive 120 km to welcome us there and showed us around the city. We contacted directly a local travel agency in Tamanrasset. Akar-Akar, Mr Zounga's agency, helped us to design a route for a three-week trip in a four-wheel drive car only for the two of us. We would be accompanied by Azoum, our Targui guide and driver and Meriam, the cook. This is minimum and compulsory equipage to travel in the desert whatever your are going on foot, camels, donkeys or cars. It cost us \$2,600 plus the flight on Air Algeria.

When you ask experienced travellers what desert they see as best, you often get the Sahara for reply. In Algeria the Sahara is the desert in its full variety: dunes, rocks, mountains often mingle to create hypnotic landscapes coming from another planet or another time. Water is scarcer than anywhere else in the Sahara: no salty lakes reminiscent of the ancient ocean like in Libya; only a couple of guelta, trickles of water spurring from deep gorges and watched as if they were gold mines. We set off on a trip in the history of the earth without knowing whether we were witnessing the past or the future of our planet. From the once luxuriant tropical vegetation, elephants and giraffes remain engraved in stone; ancient populations have left drawings and paintings of their pastoral life; utensils and weapons unveiled by winds are found scattered on ordinary sand fields; milestones, heads of arrows, pieces of pottery, ostrich shell like any ordinary stone are forbidden to collect.

Our route first whirled around Tamanrasset, a passage between equatorial and north Africa. We drove through the Hoggar mountains and reached Assekrem its summit at 2,600 m, a place famous for the sunsets and sunrises over giant sugar-loaf mountains. People spend the night there in a refuge and climb the last slope at night expecting the rising sun as if it were a resurrection. A couple of priests live there permanently. The Hoggar is the remains of violent and huge volcanic activity that literally turned the earth inside out. Black round pebble mountains are next to bunches of brown-orange totem-like shape mountains with enormous teeth that seems to have pierced the crust over night, leaving blue and red gritty veins open.

We then headed South towards the Niger border in an area where rocks meet sand and takes creeping anthropomorphic shapes. It is like walking in the middle of petrified Jurassic park, with giant mushrooms, fragile needles and other strange shapes in the remote that attract you like sirens. The sand makes distance longer and more difficult than you wish. We easily lost marks and eventually turned back. Dunes are the long awaited features. They are like naked bodies, really sensual when the sun falls down. At first we were a bit intimidated and reluctant to alter their spotless skin with our footprints. Finally you feel like taken off your shoes and the rest comes naturally... We walked along the fragile edge line, leaving behind us the constant moving body reshaping itself. One side of the dune is always softer than the other. We dug our feet in the sand to find some coolness. Sleeping in the dunes might be a freezing experience as they become quickly cold at night. I am not even talking of winds of sand that make the targui, its camel and stones melt in a common cry. We took a look around on the most aesthetic curves and let us roll down the slope.

We started a long pendulum route eastward and spent New Year Eve in Tahaggart "castle", a line of rocks cast on our way in the middle of a boring flat desolated land. It was like an apparition: high walls and towers besieged by dunes. The falling sun revealed breaches, donjons and loopholes. The moon rising on the opposite cast shapes of the last petrified defender. We could not help a thrill, doubtful that Tahaggart had never been built by an ancient civilisation, a lost world that we were rediscovering.

We usually stopped at 5 pm at the latest after we found a natural good shelter for the night. We gave a hand at the installation of the camp and started our own discovery of the site while Meriem cooked the dinner and Azoum prepared tea and controlled the car. The air is so dry that nothing smells, neither us nor the quarter of a mouton that bumped along in the rear of the car. We had fresh vegetables and fruits during ten days. We slept out under the stars every day. I was counting shooting stars since I had hardly seen any in Paris for years. Temperature in the evening was around 8 degrees against 25 during the day. In winter there is no need to fear snakes and scorpions; they are asleep. We lit up a fire and told each other stories. The glittering on the car was the only light in the night tens of kilometres around.

We also experienced long crossing of flat boring land with huge heaps of stones naturally gathered by size. We were half asleep. The car must have looked like an ant that desperately looked for its track home. We actually did not realised the situation. We trusted our driver blindly. Once we emerged onto a flat sea of sand. Azoum was making his own track. All natural landmarks were imperceptibly vanishing on the horizon and was replaced by a ring of heat mist as far as we could see. It was really like flying on a disk of land. We had the vivid feeling to be really in the middle of nowhere. It lasted ten minutes and that was one of the most striking experience in our life.

After ten days on our own we reached the first foothills of the Tassili N'Ajjer near the Libyan border and the town of Djanet. We were often asked where we came from by other guides. "You made it with a single car?!", they asked. They looked at us suspiciously, mumbled that we were crazy and turned their back at us. We carried on several days in the tassili, the famous Tadrart with its intricate landscape of yellow and salmon dunes, and its maze of stones with impressive arches. We came across a Swiss-German woman of 75 years old who had been walking for a month with a camel and two touareg guides older than her and with whom she could hardly communicate!

Although it was the peak season for tourism, we hardly met tourists on the road and in the most famous places of the Sahara we visited. We always had the feeling to be the first to print our footsteps on the spot. There is no sign to show the direction of spots worth seeing, no road, no equipped rest area, nothing but the rough nature, a set of rules of bonne conduite, a reliable and friendly touareg companions and the liberty that such a gigantic nature allows.

We ended our trip on foot with other companions and donkeys. We strolled on the high plateau of Tamrit in search of the rupestral paintings and the fossil cypress trees, a site classified World Heritage Patrimony and reserve of the biosphere by UNESCO.

<http://africa.dreamers1.com/Africa-16.htm>

Newsletter #16 11-April-2000

Libya

Greetings,

We've covered a lot of distance since you last heard from us. We crossed into Libya at Ras Ajdir. Border formalities took a couple of hours and we bush camped on the Mediterranean near the town of Zuara. Before we crossed the border, we celebrated Max's 73rd birthday with a fruitcake Kienny had baked for the occasion.

On Thursday we asked about the price of fuel and were told that diesel was cheaper than water! At US\$0.05 per litre, it cost us \$9 to fill our 180L fuel tank!! After gleefully paying for the fuel, we visited the Roman ruins at Sabratak, on the coast about 100Km west of Tripoli. The ruins are claimed by some to be the "most beautiful in the world". The town was founded by the Phoenicians as a port and is the source of some of the best known mosaics in the world. We spent several hours walking through the amphitheater, admiring the artistry of the Herculean Temple, and puzzling the plumbing of the Oceanus Baths and the public Latrines! The city was destroyed in 647AD. We missed going to the museum as it was closed for the Feast of Abraham – the day the Muslims celebrate the day Abraham sacrificed the lamb provided by God in place of his son.

We bypassed Tripoli and camped off the road that night just before Leptis Magna [according to the GPS, at 32 degrees, 41 minutes N and 14 degrees, 5 minutes E] amongst some pine trees. It was a delightful spot with ample firewood. During the night we had a very light shower, the first rain since leaving Australia.

It's hard to escape feeling at home as many of the roads are lined with eucalyptus trees. We have also seen a number of plantations of eucalyptus trees as well as a lot of wattle trees in blossom. We've seen these Australian trees in all the countries we've travelled through.

Yesterday we spent most of the day exploring the expansive ruins of Leptis Magna. One of the beauties of Libya is the lack of tourists and therefore the lack of restrictions in such places as Leptis Magna. We had the freedom to explore the ruins to our hearts contents. The ancient town of Leptis Magna was so big, the ruins are so awesome, that it is hard to take it all in. Max and Sheila have visited numerous ruins throughout Europe and reckon the sites we have seen in Libya and Tunisia are far more impressive. One of the guidebooks says that Leptis Magna is the "best Roman site in the Mediterranean".

The two Roman ruins we've seen in Libya are just so impressive they have to be seen to be appreciated. We don't have the words to describe them. After spending most of the day here, we ended up camping at the same pine tree campsite we stayed at the previous night. The nights in Africa have been cool and the days very pleasant. When we woke up this morning there was not a cloud in the sky, but it was the coldest we've had in Africa (8 degrees C) yet the day has turned out to be the warmest we've had (low 20's).

Today Saturday 18 March we arrived in Tripoli, the capital of Libya. As we've not had a shower since leaving Tunis, we had no choice but to spend a night in a hotel. We are staying at the Bab El Madinah, on the Mediterranean in the centre of town within walking distance from the old fort and markets. In the past, hotels in Libya have been very expensive. However, since the currency has been devalued, prices are now very reasonable. It cost us US\$20 for a double room overlooking the Mediterranean with secure parking. We changed money on the black market before entering Libya, but found the official rate at the banks in Tripoli to

be similar [1.9 Libyan dinar to 1 US\$]. We have found the prices in Libya and Tunisia to be very cheap, especially compared to European prices.

We are sending this email from an Internet cafe in Tripoli. It is very large and has in the order of two dozen computers in a modern office. It cost only US\$2.50 per hour. In Tunis and Marseille it was difficult to type because the keyboards were not in English, where as here in Tripoli the keyboards are in English. We are constantly amazed by the number of Africans using the Internet.

Despite its reputation, Libya is an extremely safe place. In the four days we've been here, we have only seen guns twice -- one soldier at the entrance of an army base and two policemen at the entrance to a museum. We saw far more guns in Italy and Tunisia than we have seen here. The locals have been extremely friendly and many of them speak very good English. Everyone we've met has been very keen for foreigners to realise that Libya is a safe and beautiful country to visit -- which is certainly our experience. All the officials we've met have also been friendly and courteous. About the only criticism we have of the country is that it needs an anti-litter campaign.

After leaving Tripoli, we headed southwest to Ghadames via Yfren and Nalut along a good bitumen highway. About 100 km out of Tripoli, the highway climbed to the top of a mountain range that extends from the coast just east of Tripoli all the way to Tunisia. On leaving Tripoli, the countryside was green and populated, but eventually gave way to desolate desert country the closer we got to Ghadames. At Nalut we went to the immigration office to have our passports stamped. As the forms were all in Arabic, a local who was in the office renewing his passport invited us into his home for a cup of tea while he filled in the forms for us. This has been typical of the friendship shown to us by the people of Libya.

In Ghadames we visited the old town which is now on the World Heritage list. It was fascinating to walk through the narrow alleyways and the multi-

storied mud-brick houses. Contained within the wall of the old town were numerous date palms and small farming plots, with plentiful water supplied from the vast artesian basin. It was only recently that everyone was relocated into modern housing surrounding the old town. We spent a couple of days in Ghadames, made all the more delightful by spending time with three local guys who befriended us.

We left Ghadames for Ghat along the Algerian border with our permit and compulsory guide. Ali was a Tuareg tribesman who grew up travelling the old trade route with his father back in the camel days. We spent four days covering the 720 km, some of which passed through Algeria. The countryside was diverse. Some areas were flat, while others were undulating plains of gravel or sand. There were several mountain ranges, numerous "wadis" (dry creek beds) that often widened out into plains. But best of all was the sand dune country! One night we spent camped inside Algeria on top of the tallest sand dune we could find (about 175 metres high). Along the way we saw some rock carvings, a salt lake, a small oasis lined with palm trees that is being overtaken by a large sand dune, a large petrified tree, and a number of Algerian oil fields clearly visible from the Libyan side of the border.

We reached the bitumen again just before Ghat where we spent two nights in a campground where we were able to enjoy hot showers and restaurant meals within sight of the Akakus mountain escarpment. The day before we arrived in Ghat, we had broken the main front leaf spring, so our first task was to get this welded. Does the OME (Old Man Emu) heavy duty leaf spring warranty cover two years on African roads? In Ghat we strolled through the old mud-brick town and climbed the hill for a look at the fort the Italians built during the war, stocked up with fresh fruit and vegies, topped up the water and fuel tanks, and got our permit to travel through the World Heritage Akakus mountains.

Continuing on with Ali as our compulsory guide, we spent five days winding our way through the ever changing and absolutely stunning scenery of the Akakus mountains, pausing on numerous occasions to look at rock carvings and paintings, some of which are reputed to date back 10,000 years. Words are not enough to describe the beauty of the Akakus region with its sand dunes back-dropped by rugged mountains and bizarre rock formations.

It was sad when we set foot back on the bitumen and said goodbye to Ali who had been our guide, friend and companion for the past eleven days. From Serdeles we headed north east to a campground just outside Germa. After having a shower, stocking up with fresh supplies, and lowering the tyre pressure, we headed north into the "sand sea" dune country to visit the picture postcard Dune Lakes. The drive was a real buzz and a lot of fun for the driver (Geoff) but a bit stressful for his passengers! It was all that you imagine of the Sahara. Driving in a Saharan sand sea is very different from driving in Australian deserts. As a whole the sane dunes are much firmer, irregular, taller and vast!

We first stopped at the Mandara oasis where we strolled around the lake and enjoyed lunch under the shade of a eucalyptus tree overlooking the lake, fringed by palm trees. As is typical of Africa, where ever people have lived in Libya, you find an abundance of Australian eucalyptus or gum trees. Palm trees look nice, but for firewood and shade, you can't beat our trees! After lunch we drove to the oasis of Um el Ma, where we camped for the night. This lake is called the "Mother of the Waters", although we think it would have been better called the "Mother of Flies"! The afternoon sun was very hot, but the view of the lake with the reflection of the palm trees against the setting sun was fabulous. The spring fed lake is 200 metres long and 50 metres at its widest point and is the prettiest of all the lakes. We were tempted to go for a swim, but as the water was salty, we didn't relish the thought of sleeping with crackly skin.

The next day we continued over the sand dunes to the Gabrun oasis, the biggest of the lakes. We had a relaxing afternoon strolling through the old abandoned village and having a snooze under the eucalyptus trees. The village was most interesting, considering the people had moved out only ten years ago. During the day the clouds built up, and as we were sitting down for tea, it began to rain... well, a few drops fell out of the sky. We later heard that Ghat had had two days of rain.

On leaving the next morning the temperature skyrocketed, reaching 38 degrees, blown in by strong winds. The drive back to Germa gave us our first taste of a sand storm. The surface of the dunes was awash with billowing sand and navigation was difficult due to the reduced visibility and the fact that the tracks were being quickly obliterated. Back at the campground, we enjoyed a lengthy shower, removing the sand from our eyes, ears, hair and beard...

The next day, in spite of the heat, we spent the morning driving in air conditioned comfort to Wadi Mathendous. This is a relatively small dry creek bed in the middle of a plain covered with black basalt boulders that is home to a 200 metre long fantastic gallery of 10,000 year old rock carvings. Despite the 41 degree heat, we spent an hour and a half viewing the many engravings before heading back once again to the campground near Germa.

We woke the next day to much cooler temperatures and set off for Waw en Namus, some 600 km to the south east. We left the bitumen at Timsah, reduced the tyre pressure and travelled through the Timsah Sands. We then followed a formed dirt road that was so corrugated that we made our own track across the plain. The final 150 km was bush tracks across gravel and sandy plains. This area was the most desolate we have travelled through. Apart from a few trees in one wadi, we saw no signs of vegetation until we reached the top of the volcanic rim of the Waw en Namus crater and looked down upon three lakes rimmed with tall reeds and palm trees. After driving around the 11 km rim, we had a most enjoyable time exploring the depths of the crater on foot. On the way back we had a most unusual sensation

crossing the Timsah Sands. The surface was totally obscured by blowing sand, giving us the feeling of floating in mid air with the engine racing itself, always rising higher as though we were about to take off. Between the end of Troopy's white bonnet and the grey sky was nothing but the pale yellow colour of the blowing sand. It was only an occasional blade of grass or marker pole that gave any sense of orientation or speed.

It was with great sadness that we hit the bitumen and realised that our time in the Sahara was at an end. We drove back to Tripoli via Sebha, Hun and Sirte and camped on the Mediterranean Sea. We have had a fantastic month in Libya. It has met and indeed exceeded our every expectation. The people are so very friendly, the vastness of the desert is awesome, the sand dune country is out of this world, and the country is so safe and secure. It's unfortunate that Libya has such an undeserved reputation.

From here we head back to Tunisia where we have another week before catching the ferry to Sicily and our flight back to Australia. We're really enjoying travelling with Max and Sheila, and we have all kept well, no doubt in part due to Sheila's good cooking. It has been a magnificent trip.

Best Wishes from Tripoli,

[Geoff Kingsmill and John Sandefur](#)

<http://www.travelhead.com/trip/journal/panama3/>

...and yet more Panama and

Colombia

April 30th

Subject: Rick steals quarters from panhandlers

Current Location - Panama City, Panama

Local Currency - Balboa (B\$1 = US\$1) (uses US bills and coins)

Language - Spanish

Temperature - 90ish & muggy. Hot. Real hot.

Song defining this leg of the trip - Lifetime Party - Cecilio and Kapono

So I finally left Bocas after 3 weeks. That's the longest I stayed in one place on my trip so far. My last night in the city, I walked around and actually began to think I was going to miss this place. I had somewhat of a routine set up now. I was a regular at my cafe for lunch and the lady behind the counter knew me and smiled when I came in. But alas it was time to leave.

I couldn't find anyone to buy my surfboard, so I decided to take it with me on the chance I might be able to use it on the Pacific side of Panama, which would take a fair bit of effort to get to, according to the maps I had. But I needed a way to carry it, I had no bag. Well, I had bought a hammock to use at the hotel, so I got some string and rope, tied the hammock around the board, tied the ends together

with rope, put the rope over my shoulder, and viola - instant board bag. It worked. It looked ghetto, but it worked. As I was testing out my new contraption, a girl at the hotel asked me what I was doing that for, and I told her I was traveling with it because I couldn't find anyone to buy it. She made an offer and the world's coolest board bag never even got to make its maiden voyage.

Unfortunately, the waves really died out while I was in Bocas. I only really got to use the board a few times, and the waves weren't even that great. Part of the reason I wanted to take the board to the Pacific side, but in the end, it was too much trouble, and the last minute offer swayed me out of it.

Someone had told me that flights to Panama City from Bocas were only \$50, and half that if you had a student ID, which I do. They also told me that flights to David, where I wanted to go were \$30. Assuming the 50% discount still applied, I figured I would take a \$15 plane ride rather than the \$3 ferry and \$8 bus. I don't really know why I ended up deciding that, I just did. I had done the entire Central America leg overland, and now I was taking a plane just to avoid a short 4 hour trip. Well, it turned out there was no 50% discount, but I took the flight anyway. On top of that, each passenger gets a 25lb bag limit, which the guy told me I was over. No big deal, I can't be that much over. How about 28 pounds over. That's a whopping 53 pounds that I have been lugging through Central America, not including the 5 pound day pack. Crikeys.

Anyway, despite feeling like a cheater for getting on a plane, I loved the trip. I got to see Bocas from the air, and after studying property maps for 3 weeks, I knew each island, down to the little ones, even the one I was going to get. It looked cool.

45 minutes later, I was in David, and then took the 45 minute ride to Boquete. Boquete is a cool little mountain town near the border of Costa Rica. Its a lot cooler temperature wise, which is nice after being in Bocas. It actually reminded me of a Panamanian Aspen. I checked in to a random pension (all cheaper hotels here in Central America are called either pensions, hostals, or hospedajes) and went to email some friends from Bocas, Lisa and Jasmine, who I planned to meet up with. Turned out they were in the room right across from me, same pension.

We grabbed a bite to eat, and I told them about my extra charges with the 53lb bag. They were dumbfounded. They told me we would go back to the hotel and go through every single thing I had and they would tell me what to send home. So, the evening was spent going through Ricks belongings, and getting rid of about 10lbs of stuff.

The next day in Boquete was spent taking a tour of a Coffee plantation. Panama makes some of the worlds best coffee, ranking #3 worldwide. The plantatiom that we visited was incredible. It took 3 hours and went over every phase from planting to packaging. The factory was built in 1913, and in 1970 they were still using the same original equipment which was powered off a water wheel. The only reason they changed in 1970 was because the water stopped, and they had to find a new way to get power, and took it as a good time to re-do the whole place.

After the coffee plant tour, we decided to hike out to the hotsprings in the area. The hotsrpings were about a 30 minute taxi ride, followed by an hour hike. It was pouring rain when we went, but

that actually made it more interesting. Hiking through a rainforest-like area while its raining is sort of cool. The hotsprings were neat as well, and we stayed for a couple hours.

The next day we made the trek to Panama City...by bus let me add. :-) I really like Panama City. Of all the major cities I have seen in Central America, its my favorite. Its clean, its modern, and its fun. I think Panama city is ideally suited to visitors of my age for one simple reason: we grew up with Frogger. Frogger, for those who dont know, was a video game in the early 80's where the point of the game was to direct a frog across 16 lanes of traffic to the other side. Same goes here. There are 4 lane streets with no traffic lights, meaning there is no where that the traffic stops. You just pick a point along the street, try to gauge where there is a gap at each lane and run for it. Sometimes you can cross two lanes, stand in the middle of the road while cars drive by at 35mph inches from you, and wait to cross the next two.

Another crazy thing about Panama City, at least in the district that I am in, is that they seem to be trying to make it look like Times Square, NYC. Huge signs have gone up all along the road. One of them was a globe that had to be 10-12 feet in diameter with the words "ELECTRONICS WORLD" orbiting the globe. I figured this would be a good place to see if they could fix my computer, but I couldnt find it. I asked the lady behind the counter of a small kiosk-sized place selling walkmans and cell phones where Electronics World was. She looked surprised that I would ask and informed me this was Electronics World. The sign was bigger than the store. I found several places that were just the same.

I checked in to the hostel here in Panama City (the only one in the whole city). The hostel is pretty cool. Abdiel, the owner, bought a penthouse apartment built in the 60s, and turned it in to a hostel. Its interesting, seeing all the signs of opulescense left over, like the pink marble bathroom with a biday (sp?). Definitely the first hostel I have been in with one of those. And it has a great view too. However, the elevator broke the other day, and a penthouse apartment becomes that much less cool when you have to take the stairs to the top.

Anyway, a few of us from the hostel went out my first night to walk around the old town part of Panama city, despite the fact that as it was Sunday most places would be closed. As we reached a park overlooking the bay and the city, I gazed and it really felt like I had reached the end of Central America. My mind flashed back to crossing the border at Tijuana, and what a long strange trip it had been.

My next day was spent doing errands, and meeting up later with Lisa and Jasmine for drinks on the Causeway. The Causeway is a long highway that stretches over the bay, and joins up a couple small islands that have bars and resturants on them. We stayed for a few beers, then caught a taxi to head home. This is when things get strange.

Jasmine sits in the front, I sit in the back and so does Lisa. We get to a red light. Its hot, so all windows are open wide. This guy who looks like he is completely strung out on some sort of drugs, comes up to the rear window on Lisa's side of the car shaking his McDonalds cup with some change in it, obviously wanting us to put in more change. Lisa, being polite, simply says no. He looks at me, being a smart ass, I say "no thanks, i'm not thirsty". I said it real

patronizingly. I guess it was the part of me that was sick of being begged off of for months on end, now had a little jab at the panhandler. He kept shaking the cup, thinking I didn't understand, but I just kept telling him I wasn't thirsty, but thank you oh so much for offering. So he pulls out a quarter to show me that's what he wants, when lo and behold he drops it. In the car. He reaches inside the door reaching around on the floor, practically under Lisa's feet trying to find it. Light goes green. Cab starts to go. You have never seen a look of sheer terror and panic as you have on the face of a panhandler realizing that HIS quarter is about to drive off. Realizing that the driver of the cab knows nothing about the immense severity of this situation, he runs and flings himself on the hood, one hand clenched on a wiper, the other clenched on the driver's door, drugged out face pressed firmly against the front windshield screaming various pleas at full volume, along with little bits of spittle. The driver, unphased, keeps driving. If we cross the intersection to the other side, we get on the freeway. The panhandler is screaming that he wants his quarter, the cab driver not knowing that he dropped one, thinking he just wants OUR quarter, is telling him to get off, or hang on at 60mph, slowly inching across the intersection, heading for the freeway, panhandler screaming, people looking on. I'm just sitting in the back watching this surreal drama play out in front of me, knowing that in some twisted way, I actually caused it. What would happen if we drove on the freeway, and he fell off? Worse yet, what if he didn't fall off? The image of a taxi driving down the freeway at full speed with a screaming panhandler attached firmly to the hood went through my mind. I could only laugh. So I decide to give him a new quarter to end this situation. I reach in my pocket and can only find a 50c piece. Fine. Let him make a quarter on the deal. We're stopped now mid-intersection, and traffic behind is angry and honking. The panhandler slithers off the hood like a snake making sure to keep two hands on the car in the event we try to drive off and fool him. He slithers over and I hand him the 50c

piece. Then he says "ok, now I want to find MY quarter" and puts the top half of his body in through the window and begins to reach over me, trying to see if he can find it. I push his sweaty head back out from whence it came and said "GET OUT!"

I got back to the hostel and a group of us decided to go out to celebrate the last night of the guys from Norway. These were the guys I had met in Bocas who had sailed around the world. Their 21-month adventure was ending the next morning, so we had to go out and celebrate.

While waiting to go out, the movie "Blow" was playing in the living room. This is the movie where Johnny Depp plays a guy who gets involved in trafficking. I watched the scene where he is in Columbia, and after a few minutes, realized that I had grown so used to seeing people with machine guns, that that part of the scene didn't register with me until several minutes in to it. I can actually remember watching that movie in LA, seeing the same scene, and thinking that those guys were added for effect. Now, I realize machine guns are just a way of life down here. In fact, the other day while shopping, a black sport bike pulled up to one of the shopping centers. It was a high-powered sportbike, painted completely black, except for the "Policia Nacional de Panama" logos on it, two guys in army greens riding it, with bulletproof vests on the outside of their uniforms, and full-face black motorcycle helmets with the glass piece tinted with silver-mirror tint. They had full size machine guns, and a small arsenal on their belts. They looked like some futuristic cop from the movie The Terminator, and I was about to run out of harms way thinking they had been called in to this mall to fight someone or something, possibly a visitor from the future here to steal some cell phones. Nope, just going to work, guarding the mall.

Anyway, our night out was a blast. It started at a hookah bar for drinks, which is an indian style resturant where you can order a hookah, which is an indian smoking device. The device is filled with flavored coals which have a fruity aroma to them. It is then smoked through the device and out a tube which is passed around the table. If it was supposed to make you feel lightheaded or anything else, it didnt. It was just supposed to taste good, and used as a social thing as it is in India. So we enjoyed our hookah and beers and headed out to the next place.

The next place was a karaoke bar. I figured it would be kind of dead. No, quite the contrary. It was jammed to the walls. And the people singing...looked like they were on star search. There was a monitor with the words, like most karaoke places have, but it was clear it wasnt needed. These people werent looking at the monitors, they were looking around the audience, singing like real performers, and sounding like professional recording stars. This was not amature night. A couple hours of karaoke gave way to some good DJing, and we stayed until about 4am.

The next day while I nursed a wicked hangover (I cant remember the last time I drank like that, it must have bee....wait I can, it was 2 weeks ago. Nevermind) I went to see about my laptop. Turns out it can be fixed and would be done that afternoon.

I took the rest of the day to do some shopping with a guy named David from the hostel. We went out looking for a new backpack for me, but were unsucessful. However, I found a really cool patch for my bag that said "Policia Natoinal de Panama". I wanted it. The guy said he wasnt allowed to sell it to civilians. I pleaded, telling him it would never be shown in this country. I would sew it on after I left. He said he could only sell it to policemen, but if I wanted to find a policeman and have him come in and buy it for me, I could. Of

course, if forgot about that... I'm in the land of payoffs, anything is possible! I searched around for a policeman to bribe to buy me a patch, but couldnt find one. I am thinking of going back for another try.

We caught a bus back to the hostel. I have to give the award for the best busses in Central America to Panama City, hands down. The busses here are painted incredibly, most of them airbrushed with amazing designs. Like the rest of Central America, Jesus is the theme for the paintings. However, unlike the rest of Central America, it is not required that Jesus be the theme. On one bus, there was a mural of someone resembling Xena, the warrior princess, on the hood, on another bus a picture of Hulk Hogan flexing a bicep on the back door, with his name painted below, as if there was any doubt who that bicep belonged to. The rest of the bus is then decorated in glitter tape, and other various stickers, and the use of an excessive amount of lights is encouraged. These cone shaped lights about 3 inches round and 4 inches tall adorn the entire sides of some busses, some have 6 on the hood, or a few around the door, and some more here and there. And they dont stop on the outside. The bus that David and I got in to to come home, was more like stepping in to a disco rather than a bus. Red diamond pattern vinyl lined the inside of the bus, even on the ceiling. Furry animals stuck to all parts of the windows and rails. Railings painted or covered in colored tape. All sorts of different colored lights inside. This was classic! I had to take a photo. When the flash went off, the already festive crowd, got even more so, and turned around to see who took the picture. One of the girls in the front said "no, the picture needs to have ME in it". I said Ok, and got out the camera. She turned around, sat practically on the drivers shoulder and I took the photo. The photos came out good, but the flash sort of kills the atmosphere, as it lights everything up.

I spent last night working on my photos, which I hope to upload today.

I have also got a plan for where to go next. Its a surprise.

Take care,

-Ricardo

May 4th

Subject: Señor Ixchel, meet Señor Juan Valdez

Current Location - Cartagena, Colombia

Local Currency - Peso (2800p = \$1us)

Language - Spanish

Temperature - 90ish & muggy. Hot. Really really hot.

Song defining this leg of the trip - Three Strange Days -

School of Fish

Man, this city is so amazing, so sexy, so everything, that I want to write about it now, but I shant. I will go in chronological order. :)

Which takes us back to Panama City. Panama City being as big as it was, I decided to use it as a place to get a few things that I might need, and of course a few that I might not. Shopping in Panama City is a bit strange for tourists. Other Central American countries are like this, but Panama was the worst: As a tourist walking in, you are instantly locked in the cross-hairs of the storepeople. They make no

secret of the fact they are following you. In fact, they walk less than one pace behind you. If you stop and pick something up, they grab it from you, and ask what size you need. Even if you are simply browsing, and felt the need to feel the material. After a little while, I started having fun with this and would literally run around the store, get about 10 feet ahead of them, then crouch behind a rack of clothes and keep running in a squatted position only to pop up somewhere else, have them come towards me and we would repeat the drill. I'd like to say that they found it as funny as I did, but they didn't. They didn't seem to be annoyed with it either. It was their job to follow me by a foot, and they were simply going to do it. I was just trying to point out how silly that was, but they didn't get it. And they had the "overhead cams" on their side. Most stores in the US and the rest of the world have small tinted bubbles on the ceiling, which contain security cameras. These cameras are then operated by people in a room, looking for shoplifters. Well, in Panama City, these cams are simply replaced by people atop ladders. They stand above the store floor and just watch the people.

The other crazy thing about Panama City stores, is that you can walk down a street with 30 stores, and only find 2 types of stores. 15 stores are selling the identical clothes, the other 15 are selling the identical electrical items. You can even find 2 of the exact same store on the same block, same name and floor layout and all.

My second to last day in Panama, I decided to head out and see the canal museum and canal. I expected to just see the canal, gaze in awe for a couple minutes, then leave. But instead I stayed for 2 hours, watching the Miraflores locks move these huge ships up and down 54 feet in the span of

20 short minutes. The locks were built back 1913 with the rest of the canal, back when no ships were that big. Today, boat builders use the lock size as a limit to the largest a ship can be built, knowing that any larger would prohibit them from passing the canal. So, you have these enormous locks, filled with a ship that is literally a foot to the wall on either side, and just about reaches end to end. Computer controlled trains with cables to the ship ensure that the boat moves along evenly, not banging off the walls. The observation area is only a few meters away, so you're standing the shadows of these monstrous ships, and watching them lower right in front of you. Yeah, I was impressed.

I had planned on taking care of some other errands my last day there, but that happened to be May 1. This is the day the rest of the world celebrates Labor day, and everything is closed. I guess we Americans just like to be difficult, and had to pick another day.

Later on that night, we found the hatch to the roof of the building of the hostel open, and decided to go up to check it out. It was amazing. We had a 360 degree view of the city, and from what I could see, we looked to be in the exact center. I celebrated my last night in Central America on the rooftop of a hostel in a high-rise, overlooking the city of Panama City. I wouldnt have had it any other way. I had one of those moments when all the conversation becomes background static, and you stare out at all around you and just smile feeling blessed to be alive to enjoy a moment like this.

After a hour long fiasco trying to mail my package the next day, I headed out for the airport. Gal, an Isralie guy also headed to Cartagena and I shared a taxi with another person headed to the airport. Gal had found a direct flight, whereas mine had a 4 hour layover in Bogota. I hate layovers.

I guess I should elaborate on what made me decide to come to Colombia. Flights to Europe were \$900, flights to Australia were \$2600, and flights to Quito, Equador were \$260. For an extra \$30 I could stop by Cartagena. So that had a lot to do with it. But I also dont know if I will get to come back to this part of the planet anytime soon. Who knows where I will end up when this crazy adventure is all over. I was here and close now, and knew that if I skipped South America entirely, I would regret it, even moreso than if I raced through it. Which is the plan. Cross the continent in a short 2 months, and be in Europe in time for Running of the Bulls (July 6) and a freinds wedding in Italy (July 13th).

But why Colombia? Isnt it dangerous? Maybe a little, but with an extra measure of caution, its reasonably safe. By the time I had gotten to Panama, I had met a couple people who had been here, and said it was fine, provided you keep your wits about you. I think that gave it even more of a mystique to me, and made me want to see it even more. Colombia also brings a different breed of traveler. Its hard to pin down the difference, but in a word, I guess you could say travelers here are just a bit more intense.

When I was boarding my flight, the check-in attendant asked me "How is your last name pronounced, Mr Ixchel?".

Excuse me? Turns out, when I handed my student ID to the lady at the travel agent so she could copy my name, she thought my last name was the name of the school where I studied Spanish, Ixchel, and my first name being Rickertjames. Señor Rickertjames Ixchel. Normally, even the slightest spelling error on a ticket in the US will cause a posse of rent-a-cops and airport officials to come running to rectify the situation. Here its no problem. I would have given my drivers licence to the lady at the travel agency, but I destroyed it while using it to scrape surfboard wax off my board in Bocas, which I thought was a rather piognant statement, using what was once my defining piece of identification to scrape surfboard wax.

Anyhoot.... my layover in Bogota turned out to be a bit of a blessing. Because my flight from Panama was international, and my flight to Cartagena was domestic, I had to change terminals, and effectively exit the airport and pass customs. However, my bag transferred directly. That meant I was outside the airport without the burden of my backpack, free to wander. Right on.

I struck up a deal with a cabbie to take me around the city for 3 hours. You cant get much of a feel for a city in 3 hours. Its about the same as looking at a series of postcards. But Bogota is an amazing, beautiful and modern city. The presidential palaces are in the center of the city, unchanged for 200 some years, and same with the churches, nessed right in with the skyscrapers. A horse drawn wagon is a perfectly acceptable means of getting around the city streets, amid busses and motorcycles in a city about as congested as New York city. The motorcyclists on the other hand, all have death wishes. They weave through traffic

without the slightest care in the world, and often share a lane with a car or bus, just millimeters from it. Their only saving grace is that they are all required to wear orange vests with their licence plate number sewed on it in reflective tape.

I got in to Cartagena at 7:30 at night. I never like getting in to cities at night, its just a little disorientating. I don't think I was mentally prepared for it either. Part of me just assumed that it would be just like one of any number of cities I visited in Central America. It wasnt. The streets were filled with people, and the traffic just drives right through them slowly, occasionaly nudging someone. Its like a little party in the streets, but without the festiveness, if that makes sense.

I got to my hotel, settled in, and met up with Gal. We ended up heading out to a boxing match he had heard about earlier in the day. It was part of the Central American games. Basically, the same athletes these countries send to the olympics, they send to these games, as its just as (if not more) important to them. To be the best athlete against their rival neighboring countries. Basically, countries from Central America, Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and for some reason Canada are invited. Canada is a little north to be considered Central American, isnt it? Anyway, the matches were amazing. Some really good competition.

Afterwards, we headed out to a bar down by the waterfront, outside the wall. The city of Cartagena is basically divided by the city outside the wall, and inside the wall. Back in the days when the Spanish occupied Colombia, they used Cartagena as a port to transport gems from the new world back to Spain, and as such, a protective wall was built around the city in the 1500s. After the city was attacked and plundered, the wall was made even bigger. Its an amazing thing to behold. An entire city surrounded by a massive wall about 10 stories tall, probably 100 meters thick, and lined with cannons and massive elaborate watchtowers. Eventually, as the city grew, and things calmed down, the city grew outside the wall too.

We didnt stay at the bar long, as Friday isnt really the night people go out in Cartagena, as much as Saturday is.

I spent Saturday walking around the city with some friends. In the afternoon, I headed back to my hotel and after a quick nap to beat the afternoon heat, I headed out to grab a bite to eat. My friends were at another hotel, so I just headed down my street, and went in to the first place I saw. I grabbed a table near the door and waited for my food. All of a sudden, I heard angry shouting in the street. I looked out, and there were two men having an argument. Everyone was watching, and so was I. One guy takes out a knife, and starts waiving it at the guy in a taunting manner. The other guy just kept shouting at him, despite the fact he was one knife short of being this guys equal, possibly because he had what appeared to be the crowd behind him. Things kept getting heated. There is something slightly unnerving about being the only tourist around in a situation like this. As a caucasian, one really sticks out here. To the point where I

am stared at most places I go. I am usually with other people, so I feel somewhat safe. But now, what went from just a half a block walk to the eatery nearest my hotel was now putting me in front of a fight on the streets of Cartagena, clearly out of my place. The thought of actually running back to the hotel at that moment did cross my mind, but I really dont think there was much danger at all, and might have drawn some unecessary attention to the scaredy-cat tourist guy sprinting off. In fact, the lady sitting just outside the resturant selling lottery tickets didnt really even pay the situation that much mind. As the guy with the knife walked off, he gave me a second look, but just the way everyone else here does. I pretended to be as uninterested as the rest of the folks around. But it did send a small squirt of adrenaline to the old ticker. :)

That night, I met up with Gal, some other friends and a local guy we had met named Carlos. Carlos knew of a bar having a party which he thought would be pretty good. And it was. This bar was atop the wall. Possibly one of the most amazing settings I have ever seen for a bar. High above the old city, on the corner of the wall, facing the Atlantic Ocean. You sit there with your drinks, leaning on a cannon which has been there for 300 some years, while the DJ puts on his show from the DJ booth inside one of the old watchtowers above the dance floor. It was amazing. The party was put on by a group called CreamUK. Cream is probably one of the most well known clubs/promoters in the world. Most of their clubs are in the UK and Ibiza, Spain. However, in this outdoor club atop the historic wall of Cartagena, they have some of the best DJs in the world. In fact, one of my favorite

DJs ever, Paul Van Dyk, is coming in July. We headed to an afterparty once the place shut down, but by 4:30am, we were all ready to call it a night.

Which takes us to today. Carlos is coming by at some point, and we're going to head out to the beach. My flight leaves for Quito on Tuesday, but I really wish I had longer here. This city is so amazing, so exotic, I really wish I could stay.

I also have to recind my award for the best busses, from Panama, now to Colombia. Columbia has the most incredible busses, but its the parties inside them that really does it. About 10% of the busses you see, will have something that really does resemble a disco inside it. Strobe lights, mirrors, faux fur, disco balls, fuzzy animals, LOTS of dancing lights, and blaring music. Usually, the outsides are similarly adorned, with lots of flashing lights. It looks like a ride at a fair, you know the ones painted with speckled paint and having a lightbulb on every possible surface. Yeah, thats about it.

Ok, I have really been on far too long. Hope all is well with you,

-Ricardo

May 8th

Subject: Mas Español, por favor.

Current Location - Quito, Equador (Quito starts on next webpage)

Local Currency - Dollar (\$1e = \$1us) Uses US bills

Language - Spanish

Temperature - 70ish & cool.

Song defining this leg of the trip - All Star - Smashmouth

Ahh, Cartagena. Where else is the big bushy moustache so in style. Where else can men go to a club wearing an all white cotton outfit, shirt unbuttoned, white shoes to match, and be really cool. Yeah, there was something magical about that city.

I ended up heading out to one of the beaches in Cartagena with Carlos, Gal and a couple other guys from the hostel. Carlos was one of the nicer people I had met on my travels. He loved to talk about his country, he loved to show you interesting things, introduce you to all of his friends. To say that he would give you the shirt off if his back is not a lie. I mentioned at one point that I liked the shirt he was wearing, and he said he'd be happy to trade it for any shirt I wanted, as it would be easy for him to get another one.

And the rest of the crew I met were great people. It was nice to meet a bunch of males to head out with. I have enjoyed meeting and traveling with everyone that I went through Central America with, but for the most part, they were females or couples. Its good to get together with a good group of guys for some serious king-kong style chest pounding and crude joke swapping. :)

The entire time I was in Cartagena, I saw a total of 8 westerners. 6 I knew, the other 2 I passed on the street and heard them speaking english. The majority of the people who travel there know good spanish, and because there are so few travelers, none of the locals really speak much

english, except for Carlos who teaches it. So, through meeting his friends, and hanging with travelers speaking Spanish, my Spanish improved more in 4 days in Cartagena, than I'd say it did in the average month in Central America where the safety of English speaking hostels never forced me to learn. It was sort of like a drug. I started really thirsting for more. I told Carlos that I now planned to study at least another week while in Ecuador. Quito is as jam-packed with language schools as Antigua was. Carlos offered to teach me for a day if I wanted to come to his school, but it never worked out.

There is a bit of a catch 22 when it comes to visiting a place like Cartagena for the budget traveler. Its not really the kind of city you want to walk alone in, so you want to meet people. The people you want to meet are backpackers. Backpackers are budget travelers. Budget hotels are always smack in the worst part of town. So, in order to get the safety of a group, you need to place yourself in the bad part of town.

I went shopping in the old part of town (the good part) and was looking for a patch to sew on to my bag. I have one in every country so far. As much as I could gather, there was only one shop that sold patches. I found it, and sure enough, they sold patches. American flags, American military badges, American FD or PD badges. Nothing that had anything to do with Colombia. Nothing.

Gal and I went out to a bar in the old city my last night there. Being a tourist makes you a bit of an attraction, and meeting people is inevitable. For the fist time since learing Spanish, I had someone I was talking to tell me that my

Spanish was good. I thought about all the times I told someone their English was good, and they denied it, just as I did, but I remembered how it made them smile, as it just made me.

I really thought about changing my flight to stay longer. In the end, I knew I needed to get going, and the cost to change the flight was about the cost of the flight.

Colombia probably has the strictest airport security I have ever seen. My checked luggage was searched piece by piece, as was everyone's. No fuss about the underwear this time. After that, there were 4 separate checkpoints you had to pass.

<http://www.talesofasia.com/rs-10-afghanistan-not.htm>

readers' submissions

I wasn't going to Afghanistan

by Christine Dimmock

September 2003

If I wasn't going to Afghanistan, what, then, am I doing wet to the waist, squatting beside an Afghan woman in a burqa on the flat rounded stones of a riverbed at dusk, somewhere in the Hindu Kush. The sun is quickly disappearing, a few solitary men can be seen kneeling in the half dark on improvised mats for evening prayer and the impious sounds of klaxon horns echo around the valley as an endless procession of luridly decorated trucks churns its way around the bend preceded by dusty headlight beams at crazy angles.

I share some naan bread with the woman. It's a comforting, gesture. In Dari, she leaves me in no doubt of her opinion of our taxi driver who has stalled the Corolla in river water deep enough to cover the seats. I wonder if my backpack is now floating in the boot. At the second attempt, a passing truck pulls the taxi from the water. I mentally toss around the options of how one would go about sleeping the night here. It doesn't bear thinking about. So I turn my attention to Gordon Sharpless, the reason I'm here in the first place.

Normally I go to Cambodia or Laos or Vietnam. I adore giggly Cambodians, electric green rice fields and ponds of pink waterlilies - but on reading Gordon's account of his visit to Afghanistan, I became obsessed. I read about a country of friendly people emerging from a long period of war, a country just like Cambodia in UNTAC times. Afghanistan is right next to Pakistan and Kashmir - some of the world's most dangerous places. I like to travel alone and women don't do that in Afghanistan. Friends said quizzically "Afghanistan? What's there? There was some doubt about whether I could get travel insurance. I booked the ticket anyway.

So now I'm here, heading for Mazar E Sharif via the alternate route, because in September, the Salang Tunnel is completely closed for the finishing touches to its

refurbishment by the Turkish Government. It's a marathon journey. The road is unsurfaced and narrow, clinging precariously to mountainsides and used by hundreds of trucks, along with the Corolla taxis and Hi-Ace vans. There are monumental log-jams of vehicles which the Afghans patiently unravel. Vans drive into ditches and several trucks have overturned on hairpin bends. Fine choking dust permeates all.

We leave Kabul at 8am and spend the daylight hours following the detour west instead of driving north. My companions in the back seat are the Afghan woman and her twenty-something son who speaks a little English. At one point, the traffic jam is so bad that I'm invited to walk down the road and socialise with their relatives in a nearby field. This means I get to sit with a group of colourful, unveiled Hazara women and their children. They all want to be photographed. I wave smugly to the occupants of two large white UN Land Rovers. They're not supposed to leave their vehicles. Personally, I'm certain that security is better in my field.

The taxi stops for lunch at a chaikana in a stunning location beside a river. Men sit cross-legged on the carpet while food and chai is placed on a strip of plastic in front of them. They look out over the river. The Afghan woman and I are ushered into a room with high fabric walls. We can't see out and the men can't see in. Previously at chaikanas I've been treated as an honorary man and I can't believe that at the most beautiful one of all, I've been locked away. Resigned, I wave my camera hopefully at the Afghan woman. She obligingly folds back her burqa and carefully ties a pretty white headscarf in its place, posing with poise and dignity. Her lined face shows strength and determination. I've captured the story of a life in a snapshot - a life I can only guess at despite my intellectual knowledge. I decline the offer to share the cooked chicken she and her son have brought with them for the long journey.

But back to the river, dusk and the broken down taxi in the Hindu Kush. Vehicles can somehow be fixed anywhere in Afghanistan and so it transpires. We pile back into the sodden seats and drive off. Water swirls around our feet. My companions unceremoniously pull the headrests out of the front seats and sit on them. I sit on the plastic garbage bag I use to keep my camera dry. It's dark now and the son goes to sleep on his mother's bosom. The mother goes to sleep on me, the front seat passenger reclines his seat into what was left of my personal space and closes his eyes. I notice the taxi driver checking out my reactions with a wry smile. No problem is my travel motto. No problem, no @\$% problem.

After a claustrophobic half-hour, I burst out "You can't all lie on me. Get off. I'm not strong enough to support the lot of you". The woman and her son grudgingly readjust their sleeping positions, the front seat passenger ignores me, and 5 minutes later,

everyone falls back against me again. How many hours? How many hours can I possibly put up with this? This is their life.

Because the interior of the taxi is saturated, condensation covers all the windows and the driver peers through a small oval he has dried on the windscreen with the sleeve of his shalwaar kameez. I assume responsibility as the only other person in the vehicle awake, although it's unclear what difference this makes, because mercifully, I can't see the road. The sound of rushing water reminds me there's still a sheer drop on one side or the other. It's like driving across the surface of the moon without a map. All I can see through the small oval are clouds of dust, blinding truck headlights, giant boulders and menacing mountainside silhouettes. The ubiquitous abandoned Russian tanks are out there as well - enduring monuments to futility.

In the dark, late at night, we stop at a couple of checkpoints. Who or what is being checked and whether or not money is changing hands is unclear. I wonder whether this is a dangerous time to be a foreign woman travelling alone and huddle anonymously in my corner.

Mercifully, unexpectedly, we stop for the night. I can't believe my luck knowing that often the vehicles continue on with the same driver at the wheel for 19 hours or more. Stiff, wet and cold, I stagger to a room above a chaikana with the Afghan woman and her son. Hot green tea appears along with two thin mattresses and a pillow. Luxury! I ask for my backpack from the boot of the taxi but for some unknown reason, I can't have it. Now I'm determined to go to the toilet. The son pretends he doesn't understand, but after a session with the phrase book, he gives in and we all troop downstairs and across the road to two unsavoury rooms with hessian bags for doors. My knees obligingly hold out long enough to prevent a disaster, the mud floor doesn't collapse into the pit, I don't drop my torch down the hole or step in anything revolting. No problem. Blissful sleep beckons.

Back upstairs, I take off my headscarf, wind it around my freezing feet and sleep on the carpet with the mattress on top of me as a blanket. The Afghans have kindly insisted I have the only pillow. During the night, two small groups of men attempt to enter the room (presumably to sleep). The son doesn't even stir, but the mother sends them packing in no uncertain terms, though the room could sleep about 50 people.

Long before dawn I am gently awoken and herded back into the wet taxi. When the sun rises, we're out of the mountains on a sealed road approaching the steppes. The taxi stops. Afghans never tell you about changes to your travel plans until they happen. This taxi is going to Kunduz, not Mazar E Sharif, so I need to change to a new taxi here.

Ah. No problem. I am seated in the front seat of the new taxi, because of course, a woman can't sit next to the young Afghan men in the back. After stopping to change a disintegrating tyre, we settle in to enjoy the long drive across open steppe country. It's different - different in a beautiful way. They stop to buy me a bag of grapes, carefully washed three times in water from the nearest irrigation ditch. At the next stop, Kholm, the road to Ruske (Russia) is pointed out to me. One of the young men goes into a roadside stall and returns with a bottle of vodka which they unveil with cheeky smiles. (Alcohol deprived foreigners take note).

Our next stop is for more fruit. Real fruit - peaches bursting with flavour and juice, miniature pears and best of all, figs. The figs come packaged in an appealing way nestled inside what looks like a solid wreath made from fresh leafy branches. As we drive, I delve inside pulling out more and more figs to share.

Arriving in Mazar, the three young men quickly disappear and we circumnavigate the Shrine of Hazarat Ali looking for my hotel. The taxi driver stops to ask an ISAF soldier parked in a jeep. In perfect English, he answers "I don't speak English". After a second drive around the shrine, we discover he was parked right next to the hotel, which has an unmarked entrance in an alley. Relaxing at last in my room, I pull out another fig and wonder just what I've been putting in my mouth. This fig is adorned with a large white bird dropping. I spend the next two days confined to bed.

At the hotel, I'm reunited with some younger English friends who made the marathon road trip a couple of days earlier. My principal activity in Mazar revolves around getting back to Kabul by plane. None of us wants to tackle that road, those drivers, the trucks and all that dust again so soon. As all the internal flights in Afghanistan are fully booked, getting a seat requires patience and perseverance. In fact, I only get one because Tim sacrifices his reservation for me. (Two days later I meet him in Chicken Street and learn that he went to visit the Turks, did some fast talking and was allowed to travel through the Salang Tunnel in a jeep with an escort).

At the Mazar airport, we wait for an interminable time, first inside and later outside. Eventually the reason for the delay becomes apparent as a dark grey Hercules lands, disgorging some uniformed men who are quickly driven away in waiting vehicles. The highlight of the day is watching the Hercules take off again because it banks at an impossible angle with the nearby mountains as a spectacular backdrop. A week later, safe at home, I learn that a girls' school was torched and there was fighting between the men of rival warlords just north of Mazar while I was there. Security is a relative word in Afghanistan - relative to whether or not one encounters a problem!!

Footnote: Information for women travellers

Travelling as a middle aged woman in Asia is usually a liberating experience. In Afghanistan, I was treated as a third gender and looked after. In cities, I walked freely alone around bazaars and public areas, although I passed on the alleyways. In Kabul when I headed off to walk up the hill which can be seen from the front of the Mustafa Hotel, two Afghan men advised me against it, so I turned back. When I sat in the taxi for the marathon journey to Mazar, several people came along to make sure I knew what I was letting myself in for.

"The toilet" remains a challenge on the road. Afghan women just don't go. I learned that an interrogatory cough is used to enquire whether the toilet is occupied or not and a loud cough indicates that it is. The sudden appearance of an Afghan man still fiddling with the pants of his shalwaar kameez indicates that he's realised a woman is inexplicably approaching. On one occasion I was constantly urged to hurry up, but the taxi wasn't ready to leave - they just wanted to get the woman out of the toilet.

A friendly smile and good manners were always appreciated, since the Afghans themselves indulge in warm and prolonged greeting rituals with friends and family. An exaggerated refusal to make eye contact accounted for the odd individual who would walk persistently beside me. When I stopped in the street for some reason - usually to photograph something specific - a crowd of men would quickly form necessitating some rapid photographic work and a moving on. Otherwise they may have decided that I was not just an entertaining foreigner, but, in fact "Nine parts of desire".

On one occasion I had the experience of walking along a busy Kabul street with a confident, modern young Afghan woman who wore a headscarf but no burqa. I was used to being stared at, but the intensity and nature of the staring undergone by this woman left me in no doubt as to why the majority of the female population still cover up completely. This may well apply to young Western women walking alone as I didn't actually see any - except in Chicken Street!

<http://www.geocities.com/ribbits42/mali.html>

Day 1 - Departing USA

My boss and I thought we had prepared appropriately for someone to cover my duties while I was away and got a lady very well suited (open, warm, all that). Of course, she was so awesome she got herself another job the afternoon before she was supposed to start temping with us so the day of my trip I was back at the office training another guy (who incidentally only temped one day until **he** had to move on to other things and had to train *someone else*).

My flight headed out at 7:20 pm so Jean and I were at the airport at 3:15 pm. Yep, that "3 hours in advance" was *really* necessary--check-in took all of 3 minutes. And a very uneventful and mostly-boring flight got me to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire 3 hours late at 10:30 pm Saturday, January 26. Being on a full 747 made waiting for luggage (in my case, a 3 kilogram empty cat carrier for Susan's kitty, Njimba, in Gabon) 45 minutes.

I do need to add that if you have the chance to fly over the Sahara in a window seat in the daytime, I highly recommend it. Around 5:30 pm the shores of Sudan came into view and the beautiful white Alps and winter fields of Europe became a dark brown expanse south of the Mediterranean. Watching from above, the dark brown gradually became lighter and lighter; the fertile lands marked by geometric patterns showed themselves only randomly; what were large rivers became silty river beds; and evidence of civilization only represented by a few thin dirt roads that shot out in one unwavering direction.

From above I could see so many different dune formations: lines and lines then funny bubbles of sand then finger-like pockmarks over flatlands; ripples the size of cliffs; ripples so reticulated they resembled tripe (stomach lining of cows). Then suddenly, circular crops with a line extending from

the center like a radius. Three of them, how bizarre! And remnants of rectangular houses. And we're still in Algeria, what an enormous country!

Day 2 - Arrival in Côte d'Ivoire

Having been forewarned that Côte d'Ivoire is having some post-*coup* issues, we were a little nervous about *gendarmie* attitudes towards two American women. Susan was able to spend all morning in Abidjan and felt it was pretty safe. So we opted to get a **good** view of Côte d'Ivoire by taking a bus north through the middle to Bamako, Mali. Good idea if you're not claustrophobic.

Day 4 - Travelling Across Côte d'Ivoire

Two long days of *gendarmie* stops (23 in all) later, we found ourselves at the border in Pogo, Côte d'Ivoire. Out of these 23 stops, the *gendarmes* entered the bus 21 times. You can imagine how much time that takes. And it's usually the same people who were pulled off for having insufficient paperwork (they were lost yesterday; burned in a fire; taking the bus to Mali to redo the papers... you name it, someone probably had that excuse).

* The man sitting next to us was constantly being pulled for only having a photocopy. Susan finally pried him and he said he didn't trust the police and felt it smarter to leave the original at home and take a photocopy, even though he would get stopped more often.

* Another guy looked about 30 and was showing his school ID. Some *gendarmies* let it slide, others pulled him off and tried to get a bribe off him.

* We met a Liberian woman who was very nice but seemed to be rusty on her French and I don't believe she had all her papers so was pulled off almost every time. Susan and I guess that she was running away from the war. She had brought a small stash of gold nuggets/dust to sell--that's the reason she gave for being in Côte d'Ivoire. I think it was more complicated than that. She said to cross the Liberia/Côte d'Ivoire border, the *gendarmes* took 1/2 her gold as a bribe.

* Another man was complaining that they made him strip to his underwear because they didn't believe he had no money to pay his bribe, and they were right--I think they ended up finding the money in his socks?

* Susan and I were only pulled off twice. Once to be *dragged* (hit on) and the other time we weren't quite sure, maybe just a random collection of passports? Neither posed problems and we definitely weren't the people holding up the bus in the end. I have to add that I felt a definite contempt from some of the ladies that we were treated so well. One of the ladies even said "Serra vous le prochain" (It'll be you next) after she had spent 20 minutes getting her papers back from the gendarmes. She was right, the next stop we were pulled off. I certainly missed the comradery we had on bush taxis in Gabon.

With 8 hours to kill until the next bus came, we tried to rehydrate ourselves with 2 1.75 liter bottles, then spent 100 CFA (10 cents?) for bucket baths. I had originally opted to save 25 CFA and go for the 1/2 bucket but then the idea of washing my hair was just too tempting. This was our first time we had to pay to use water(25 CFA for plastic teapot, 75 for 1/2 bucket, 100 for bucket), but I tell you it was worth it after 18 hours in a hot dusty bus.

Pogo is a pretty town. Just south of the Mali/Côte d'Ivoire a couple kilometres there was some evidence of border-activities (bus stations, transport trucks) it was really a typical sleepy town and we were very happy to take a break from the road to watch the world slowly turn in Pogo. After a short sweaty nap in the shade I headed out to find Susan who had wandered off, not being able to sleep in the heat. Being different comes in handy quite frequently and I soon passed a teenager who asked if I was looking for my sister. Must have stuck out in the crowd. Soon found her exploring the village and joined up with my camera.

We found graineries grouped between their houses. These clay/sand-slabbed cylindrical structures were removed from the ground by logs and/or large rocks; each was accessible by a small padlocked window near the straw-

covered roof. Met a group of girls who were selling mandarines (**mandarin-bé**). Susan tried to strike up a conversation but fell onto the same problem. They spoke their dialect, not French, so we were left with the old faithful--gesturing wildly--to determine what they were carrying on their heads. Follow this link to my [grainery photos](#).

Having rehydrated ourselves sufficiently and feeling dustily-clean (did you know you can feel that way?) after the bucket baths, we headed back to the bus area and heard someone call out "Vous voulez une boisson?" (Do you want a drink). If I were alone I wouldn't have even answered, my typical response to strange men offering drinks, but feeling the support of Susan with me and realizing we hadn't had a beer for two days, we joined them. It was very nice but I was hesitant to be drinking too near our time of departure. The worst feeling is having to pee and not being able to get off the bus.

I originally was seated next to a very devout older Muslim who would be spending the entire trip fingering his prayer necklace and mumbling the verses. That would have made for a very tiring night and, although he was very courteous and made sure no part of his body or clothing touched me, I felt it had something to do with me being either American or female or both. Fortunately Susan had a seat next to her and I was able to move on our first stop. I think I had the best seat. Susan controlled the window so we actually had air coming in and I could prop my feet up on the spare tire and excess baggage. Well, unlike our past experiences, the bus took off when it was scheduled to and, sleeping most of the night, we arrived at 6 am south of Bamako at Sogoniko, the main bus area for trips heading east in the interior of Mali. Boy, were we happy to have arrived in Mali finally!

Travelogue

Karakoram Highway

1994

Erik Futtrup

E-mail:

Erik Futtrup,

Summary:

A trip along the Karakoram Highway in northern Pakistan. The road goes through some of the most spectacular areas in the world, and the people are among the friendliest I have ever met. Not many tourists have come here yet, even though it is not that difficult to get here. I met quite a few travelers who had come through China. I spend about 5-10\$ per day.

Guide books:

"Karakoram Highway - the high road to China. A Travel Survival Kit". May 1993. Hereafter referred to as the TSK. I also brought the Pakistan Travel Survival kit, but it was not that necessary, though it had some good trekking maps of these areas. [Note: New editions of this book is available]

Costs:

1US\$ = 30.1rs = 6.25DKR

Flights: Copenhagen-Muscat-Karachi-Islamabad: 1000\$,

Islamabad-Gilgit-Islamabad: 77\$

Rooms: 50-290rs (most of them could hold two)

Bread: 2rs, Dinner: 30-100rs, Coca Cola: 5-10rs (cold)

1 1/2l Bottle Water: 20rs

Friday 16. September - Aarhus-Copenhagen (Denmark) I got my master's degree in Computer Science and Math at Aarhus University Tuesday morning; got a job 12pm (starting from 3.october), and bought the ticket to Pakistan in the afternoon. Today I got my passport back with the visa (it took 3 days). In the evening, I took my backpack on my shoulders and my trekking boots on my feet, and walked to the place where my graduation party was held. I have some very good friends who gave the party, and after a great evening with good food and fun with the friends, they followed me to the night train to Copenhagen.

Saturday 17. September - Copenhagen-Frankfurt-Doha-Muscat Not much else happened, but flying, waiting, standing in line, etc. It reminded me of the Terry Pratchett definition of an airport: a place where people hurry up and wait.

I flew with Gulf Air, and we even got a menu-card before dinner! That was kind of nice.

Sunday 18. September - Muscat-Karachi-Islamabad Amazing that I actually caught all the flights! I even got out of International Karachi, and into Domestic without being trapped by the 1000 touts/taxi-drivers - and with my luggage. Only problem was that I forgot that they are crazy about batteries here, so those I had just bought in Muscat airport were confiscated :-(Changed 50\$ - rate 1\$=30.1rs=6.25DKR

Was totally dead on the second flight to Islamabad, and it really made my day that I didn't get on the Gilgit flight! While asking what to do at the information, a taxi driver agreed to drive me to the PIA flight office 'in town', where I was directed to (I'm sure he would have been willing to drive me to anyplace in Pakistan). You have to have your name on a list made the day before the flight and I'm not sure that you can get on it 'from back home'. When we got to his cab, I automatically reached for the safety belt, which was not there. The driver gave me a BIG smile, and said slowly while shaking his head: "In Pakistan - no safety belts :-)". There was no problem

having my ticket changed for the next morning. I get off next door at the Paradise Inn (275rs for a single room). Buy the obligatory Pakistani dress (a shalwar quamiz), which is baggy trousers (15 sized to big) tied with a string, and a shirt which reached below the knees. Great in the heat, and it is easy to hide your pouches below.

The hotel restaurant had made arrangements for 100 on the roof, and the 3 cooks and two waiters were ready for ... me. Well, I just wanted a soup, and to go to bed... (I felt a bit sorry for them).

Monday 19. September - Islamabad-Gilgit Up at 5.30am, on my way at 6; a taxi to the airport (60rs), no problem with the flight this time. They had put in an extra plane, so two flights were scheduled for Gilgit. Met two girls who had been traveling 6 months in Pakistan and India. Glad I missed the flight yesterday; it is perhaps the most fantastic, adventurous, fascinating, incredible experience I have ever had. Couldn't believe that the mountains just kept getting bigger and higher for more than an hour. Around Nanga Prabat (8126m), we were flying BELOW the mountains and looking up at them! If you have seen the movie '7 years in Tibet', it is the mountain they are climbing at the start. Great flight - don't miss it for the 17 hour drive instead. Be sure to have a window seat - on the right side. Met a British couple going to visit friend around Gilgit. Some foreign girls had actually bought veils, which might be a good idea. The 3 of us had decided us for the Hunza Inn, and a nice surprise was that the first persons we met outside the airport, were hotel staff from the Hunza Inn, so we got a free ride there. Good service. Got a single room for 100rs. Several trekking places wanted me to go on 2-300\$ treks - for just a few days. Checked for White Water River Rafting. :- (Needed at least 4 people. 25\$ for a half day trip. Could have been fun. In the afternoon I went on a trip from 11am to 4pm. (The Kargah Buddha & Kargah Nala, mentioned p.144 in TSK) Took a 3rs bus to Kargah, an easy walk to the Buddha carved in the rocks. Well, I couldn't see it until some friendly people showed where it was. Walked on the high road to Napur and down to Gilgit. The road cruises at 1440m. Gilgit is at about 1200m. Very nice and pleasant walk. Nice view of the peaks around the valley and of the Rakaposhi (at 7790m).

Tuesday 20. September - Gilgit-Sost (or Sust) I was told to be at the bus stand at 7.30 for the 8.00 bus to Sost. Well, I had time for breakfast first; to buy stamps (11rs to Denmark), before the bus finally left at 10am. I guess it wasn't too bad. Only 100rs for the trip to the last town before the Chinese border.

How can I keep being amazed like this? Then the fantastic scenery started... I had thought Gilgit was amazing, but it is NOTHING compared to the views in the Hunza valley (or the fabled Shangri-la, as some say). Had thought the flight was the most beautiful experience of my life - but no - the bus trip kept on astonishing me. I don't know what adjectives to use! Picture yourself at 1500m, looking straight up at 6-7000m high 'things' (mountain peaks) - that is 6 kilometers, for your information! I felt ashamed of myself to ever had sighed at Zion, Bryce, Grand Canyon, the Rundetaarn, the Eiffel tower, CN-Tower - all less than 1km. Or like the highest place in Denmark, Himmelbjerget, which is 150m - that is 1/40 the height of this! Well, I don't have words to describe these wonders of the world, and unfortunately the pictures are not good at it either.

Close to Karimabad, a truck had turned over just 5 minutes before we arrived as the first persons. The truck hanged out over the rim - 400m straight down! The driver was all right, but imagine the experience: Hanging over the edge with your head down, and the truck over you! He looked a bit shocked though. We had to shovel a lot of dirt and rocks (the overturning was because of a landslide) before getting on. A bus full of tourists arrived which didn't make things better (10 Americans with video-cameras).

One of the most spectacular sights: The Rakaposhi (7790m) from Ghulmet, Ultar Peak & Bubulimating (the Razor sharp rock) from between Altit and Ahmedabad where you really can see the steep side of the mountain (from 2000m up at 7400m).

From now on it started getting colder. In Sost, I got a room at the Khunjerab View Hotel (everybody with the TSK had filled the Mountain Refuge Hotel) for 125rs. Went to find out how to get up to the Khunjerab pass to China for the next day. I had seen a lot of tourists at the Refuge, and went into the dining hall to ask whether any of them were going. I had luck; a Belgian couple had rented a jeep for the next day, and I was welcome to join them! Got dinner back at my hotel. Met 3 people who had just arrived from China. It was very interesting to hear their stories; it seems everything is much more expensive, and people are much more unfriendly in China. I'm glad I'm only traveling in Pakistan. The ride from Kashgar had been pretty interesting; taking lot of pictures in the mountains of wild flocks of camels, horses, yaks, sheep and cows. Wow! It was Miguel from Spain, and Lynn & Matthew from England (had worked 2 years in Hong Kong).

Wednesday 21. September - Sost-Khunjerab Pass-Sost

Strange, I don't know what Pakistani women look like - and I've been here for more than half a week! I've seen a few on the road above Gilgit, and in the Cliff-town of Sost, and they are real colorful with make-up and beautiful dresses. All for their husbands (and other women). When I looked around in the Bazaars and in the town streets: Men only! Also, when a western couple spoke with a male Pakistani, and the woman asks and comments, it is easy to see that the Pakistani is a bit uncomfortable. I think the western woman should bear that in mind, and let the male do the talking :-). Some of the people I met had asked many times for permission to take their picture - and had always gotten an No for an answer.

Met with the Belgian couple (they were 60-years old 'travelers') at their hostel, and had breakfast with them. TSK-Update: MountainRefuge Hotel: It seems every foreigner goes there first (everybody have the TSK) - and it isn't so great as the book says - they serve really bad food (according to the people who stayed there).

Started in our jeep at 8.45. The pass is 80 km from Sost, and there are no villages or towns on the way. No problem at the check-post. They didn't keep our passports like the TSK mentions. The first rock slide was 10

minutes up the road. The first part along the Hunza river is in the very narrow gorges, and goes up kilometers; very beautiful - and a bit dangerous. While we were waiting to have the road cleared, we spoke with the post-man who were going to China every day with the mail. It turned out he were going even in the winter! Amazing, there must be just as many rock-slides in the winter - in addition to the snow. That is service!

The stretch is 80 km, which took about 3 hours. The last 18 km is gaining 2 km of altitude, and you end up in the plains in 4730m. The air is clean, thin, and cold, and you feel great! You are in the same height as the mountain peaks north and south, and the plain is grassy with yaks and sheep. We walked from the Pakistani post and well into China - I went up a slope and took a picture of my altimeter at 4800m. I was going for 4880m which I thought was the height of Mt.Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe, but didn't get over 4800m. Well, I found out when I got back that Mt.Blanc is 'only' 4807m, so, HURRAH! I have been up just as high! Got very exhausted of running the last stretch, but what can you expect when you are this high? Nothing uncomfortable, though.

We met the bus coming from China, and a couple of Americans were out taking pictures. The woman asked if we were going to China? No, we were just up to see the pass. Hallelujah! she exclaimed. It must have been bad...

You don't have the same grandiose feeling as looking up 8 km high mountains, but it has it's own special beauty up here, and it is a must to come here. It is brownish-yellow (it looks like the mountains have lots of iron ores) and grassy, and the snow is very close. The sky is the very special 'mountain deep blue'(TM). Going down is a bit faster (2 1/2 hours). There is road maintenance most of the way - it is a fantastic job they are doing, trying to keep the road clear. A couple of other landslides had happened since we had come up, and we had to wait a while, while bulldozers were clearing the road. The road has actually more heavy traffic than I had expected. On the way down we might have passed 15 vehicles (excluding those working on the road). 4 busses, and most of the rest were Chinese lorries with trailers.

When we got back, our driver complained that we were 3, and the Belgian couple had said they would only be two. He had gotten 1000rs for 3 yesterday. We settled for 50rs more than the agreed price of 800rs. It is OK for 160km in a jeep, I think, 270rs per person. Glad I didn't take the bus - they go at half the speed, and you don't stop to take pictures.

Went for a walk (in Sost) up to the village, which is on a cliff, so you can't see it from the KKH. Very nice walk; even saw a couple of women there, and one of them even said 'Good afternoon'.

Postcard writing, and a good talk with Lynn and Matthew. They had been working in Hong Kong for two years as a buyer and a lawyer, and had just gotten married a year ago. Been traveling many places. This time they were going for a year: China, Pakistan, India - and then to South America.

At 6.30, a whole bunch came from the Mountain Refuge to have dinner here - instead of the dreadful food from their hotel, as they put it. There is only one dish here at the Khunerab hotel - chicken curry with cabbage and potatoes - but it is great. It is also really cozy. No electricity in the towns (their generator has been down for 14 days), so it is good old oil lamps. The Belgium couple came too, and also a Dutch guy who cycled up to the Pass - we met him 18 km from the top. He started at 5.40am and had gotten to the pass around 1pm. Got a lift back though.

Thursday 22. September - Sost-Passu

My plan was now to work my way back to Gilgit, a bit slower. Together with Matthew, Lynn and the two Belgians we took the Suzuki the Belgians had ordered (we passed their hotel at just the right time :-). We paid 300rs all together for the trip which took 45minutes. We had heard of a new place - the Village Guesthouse, and we all went there. The others got the two doubles; I took the dorm (50rs), which turned out to be right in the dining room. The two next to arrive (a Danish girl and a British guy) also took the dorm.

The two-suspension bridges-tour was highly recommended, and I went on my way immediately. The tour: (map, page. 106, TSK): Passu-Zarabad-the two bridges - 3 hours from the second bridge-Hussaini-Borit lake - 1/2 hour Borit Lake-Passu - after 2 hours I had 20+ pictures left, but they only lasted to Borit Lake.. so very beautiful.

First: along the river to the first bridge was like 10m over the river on a footpath on a hillside, 1/2-1m wide. Then the bridge came into view! Wow! Just like those in Romancing the Stone and Indiana Jones. The bridge spans 150-200m over the river. It is made of cables with planks every 30cm. That was cool! Crossed the plateau through the Zarabad village. Strange, didn't see a soul there... Walking on a ledge to the next (even cooler) "bridge" was fun too. A wind had started blowing, and the ledge is quite high - like 100m or so, over the river, straight down. Wasn't dangerous anywhere, though. Around a bend, I eyed the bridge: half of it was gone! Great, I thought; then I'll have to swing along it! But no, when I got closer, there was another one right next to it... which was ok. Just when I had crossed, a hunter came along, and I got a nice picture of him, like the one on the cover of TSK. By the way; the woman on the cover is living here in Passu, our guest house owner says. It's a great picture since the women don't let you take photographs of them - I guess John King didn't ask for permission :-). The background mountain-peaks were beautiful here in the afternoon sunlight. The hunter showed me through Hussaini to the path to Borit lake. It goes up very steeply 150-200m before you reach the lake - which isn't anything special. When I got to Borit, 3 small boys wanted to guide me (perhaps 7-8 years old). I said I would pay them 1rs. They wanted 100rs - I laughed and continued on. 30 they yelled. No. After some time they came after me and told me another direction. I said 10. One of them said 15. I said 10 - OK. they followed me to the top; pointed down. Talked for a bit, and he got his 10rs. When I got 50m down, the path ended in a hole. Of course the boys had led me in the wrong directions... Well, I had 2 1/2 hours before sunset, so I continued north across a rocky landscape and scrambled up a ridge. Here I luckily found the path again, the Passu Gar trail. There was a great view of the glacier - there are lots of glaciers here, by the way. 4 glaciers in Pakistan are more than 20 km - this one was one of them. All white ice.

Nice walk down - 300-350m loss of altitude. The trail isn't easily seen from the KKH.

Was a bit tired when I returned; my stomach had been taken over by terrorists - they were demanding milk tea. Several other travelers had arrived; we were like 12 travelers here. All but me and the Belgians were 'long time travelers' (1/2 - 3 years on the road) and had come from China. It was a nice, very instructive evening. Everybody had a lot of travel info to share. It is invaluable. An interesting thing is that several of them had been to Tibet; it seems to be just a money problem, and getting in from the right direction (best to fly in, worst to come from the west (Kashgar)). Later two more joined us; they had been on a 4 day trek with a guide/porter for 1500rs - a 21 year old student. It was a rock bottom price, it seemed. The shepherds were packing up at the upper summer pastures, and were on their way back to the lower villages at 3000m.

Trip info: Passu 2600m; Elevation gained: 790m in 6 hours.

Friday 23. September - Passu-Karimabad

Trip: Passu Gar to Passu Glacier.

Good walk up to the Passu Gar (from 2600m to 3250m). Actually, it is the first time I've been close to a real Glacier. I was a bit tired from yesterday's walk, so it took 2 1/2 hours to climb up. The last stretch was really hard. The glacier is like 20 km long, and this area is filled with them. The last climb was quite hard, and I got exhausted in the thin air. Not that it was a problem, and the lunch above the glacier was quite nice. I had brought some apples and chocolate biscuits and a bottle of water. This picture at the start is taken here.

Got back, and went to the road. Miguel had waited 2 hours this morning, but the morning bus had had a breakdown, and didn't arrive. Also it was Friday (the Muslim holiday), so there weren't many vehicles on the road. But I had hardly taken off my backpack before I got a lift from two young Pakistanis in a pick-up truck. This was at about 2.30pm. After a couple of stops (by

friends places?), we got to Ganesh around 4pm. A jeep gave me a lift (for free) and put me off at the New Hunza Tourist Hotel. Very basic, but 80rs for a double was OK. Got at very needed shower - freezing of course. The place even had electricity at nights. It had its own generator. North of Hunza valley: No electricity, no hot water, no chocolate (just so you can be prepared). Never had a Mars-bar tasted this good! Karimabad seems to be a bit of a tourist-magnet. No wonder; the village is neat, and from below (from the KKH), it is 6 km straight up to Ultar Peak (7388m) and the 'razor'-peak (Bubulimating, 6000m). It is a fantastic sight. It seems the village has just a bit too many tourist shops, but I've spend so little money up till now that I might go for a look for gifts tomorrow.

Dinner was OK - first a good soup; rice, potatoes & spinach and a purple something for desert.

Glacier trip: Time: 5 hours. Max. height: 3250m.

Saturday 24. September - Karimabad

People I meet are all very impressed by my Avocet Vertech altimeter watch and all want to have one. Well, it is very useful (has altimeter, weather forecast, thermometer, how much you climb up and down a day, etc.). Took a morning nap, and slept till 8.30. Had decided to take an easy walk today; my legs were still a bit sore from the previous days hikes. Here in Karimabad there are some neat things. Bought some nice Lapis Lazuli saucer (2 pieces for 450rs) and some other small things. Took a walk to the Baltit forth - which was practically a building ground and the Mir's house (the Hunza King). After lunch I took a walk down through Ganesh. When I came to the KKH, people were shouting to me from all sides. I was just standing there, not understanding their problem (and language). A big explosion sounded, and I saw rock's come flying close by. They had tried to blow up a big rock in the middle of a hole. It seemed that they didn't succeed in cracking it. Walked east along the KKH, past the big bridge over the Hunza river, up to what is called the 'Sacred Rocks'. It is just some big rocks with carvings of animals and stuff. Supposed to be pretty old. Well, my reason for coming here was to take pictures of Ultar Peak. There is a

great view from here, up from the river, past the Altit fort, and way up at the peaks - one of the most impressive sights in the world. On my way, I kept looking at the peaks. It is just indescribable. Took a lot of pictures though it is impossible to squeeze it into 15x10cm. Found some rock crystals in a crack in the rocks. Got a lift back by a Suzuki (2rs).

Took a walk through Mominabad to Altit. All these villages are on a very steep grassy slope. Very fertile. Greeted a lot of people with the usual 'hello', 'salaam' and 'good afternoon' on the way to the Altit fort. Found a nice stone shop. I was just looking at the window, and soon invited in for tea. Two business men were having tea with the owner. Pakistan had much more stones than I had realized. Even Emerald and Ruby mines around. One of the mines had just found a lot of Peridot too. He shoved me a quite big green specimen - at least 20ct. I think their problem is that they can't cut them here in Pakistan. A good place for buyers of uncut stones, I think. Well, the Altit fort was closed, and I went back. Stood below a bridge (perhaps 100m up) and admired the view of the peaks above. The clouds had just cleared up there and the sun lighted them up. Had a cup of coffee back in town with the Danish girl I met in Islamabad. It was not just 6 months in India and Pakistan, but 5 years she had been traveling.

Sunday 25. September - Karimabad

Day trip to Ultar Glacier

Was on my way at 8.45. The one thing everybody is supposed to do, is to climb up to the pastures just below the Ultar Peak & Bubulimating. I started with a 30 minutes detour - beautiful view over the Hunza valley and the Rakaposhi though! A bright, shiny morning, good views in all directions. One thing the maps in TSK doesn't show is that the path goes up very steep, all the way up through the ravine. I reached the shepherd's huts at 11.45 - in about 2 1/2 hours. The ascent is from 2400m to 3300m. I was given a good piece of advice by a Pakistani: "Just keep left", which is quite useful. It is quite easy to find the path though. You walk up through a deep ravine, and somewhere up, the path was 'broken', and you would have to do a little bit of climbing on the cliff-wall. Water from one of the water channels was pouring out, and washing the dirt out. Wow! Here I found a pocketful of

garnet crystals (a red gem); even some nice ones. It is the first time I find gems myself, though they are worth nothing. They were there just for the picking. The pastures are quite photogenic; peaks all round. Met a Spanish guy from my hotel; he was going on up to Hon. He had been part way up the other day, so he knew the paths. Well, why not try. I wasn't really tired yet. So, up we went. Your bear right toward a waterfall (left of the glacier), which is real pretty (had rainbows, 30m drop, etc.), and cling to a stone wall up to a ravine to the north west. It was just mud! Climbed up for two hours, and it seemed to be only half way... No path, just mud, a steam, and rubble falling down. It should be the best view over Hunza valley up at Hon. Well, next time. My friend continued further up; I went down (30 minutes to the pasture). Around the huts, two parties had camped. Looked quite cozy. You hear the glacier booming once a while. It looks like a big white waterfall coming vertically down several hundred meters from Ultar Peak. The climb down was OK; found some more garnets. In Karimabad, I went to a shop where I had asked yesterday for a woven vest, Hunza style. It was made by the shop owners brother, just yesterday. 220rs. Also bought a Hunza-style hat for 50rs. On the way, I met John whom I saw walking from hotel to hotel. Strange, it seemed that all the cheaper rooms were taken. My hotel was full too, so we shared my room. 16 people for dinner this evening. Pretty interesting hearing about people traveling in China for 6 months; many had been to Tibet, Iran, Burma, Yemen, and other out of the way places. Glacier trip: Karimabad (2400m) - Shepherds Huts (3300m) - towards Hon (3770m). Time: 8 1/2 hours.

Monday 26. September - Karimabad-Ghulmet Lousy day. Well, the weather was OK and it was easy to get on a minibus to Ghulmet (5rs), and on to Aliabad (3rs), but then it got harder. Finally I got a lift to nearby Hasanabad, and walked on. Got a lift from a jeep, and passed the spot where we had waited for the turned over truck a week ago. Well, I could not spot it! The road had been cleared and paved! Amazing. After a detour to Minapin to pick up the drivers wife and kid, I got off at Sikandarabad, because I had noticed it had pretty nice views here. Well, only problem: No places to stay here and no 'Snow white hotel' as the TSK mentions. I followed a guy BACK the road (I had now changed my mind for Chalt

further towards Gilgit) and further back on a tractor (free) - and... further walk back. He said there would be accommodations around. Well, I stopped at a place to have a soda (and biscuit). It was just opposite the Muslim Folk Party headquarters - or something - in the middle of nowhere. It seemed from all the posters to be election time soon. Well, I was coming to the point where I was a bit sour, and NOT in the mood of talking with the dozens of kids crowding around (why didn't they have more tourists around here, so they could have their interest satisfied? :-). At two o'clock (after waiting 1 1/2 hours), I was desperate to pay ANYBODY a lot of money (even 100rs) to get me to somewhere (Ghulmet or Chalt), but there was just nobody to pay. Finally a bus passed, going back east, so I jumped in, and got off in Ghulmet. Got a "room" at Rakaposhi Mountain Hotel (which) it isn't yet: a 'depot' room, no window (just a hole) and lots of cements sacks. 120rs! Well, I had no other options, and I was so tired I didn't bother to haggle. Well, the only good things was it had a nice view of the Rakaposhi (7790m) from the altitude of the road (2100m) though it seems just like a hill - it's the problem with most mountains here; you cannot grasp the size of them, unless you can spot something to compare the sizes with, like a village up the mountain. OK a few other good things: a cool coke, hot milk tea when the sun was setting, and great food too: Baked bread and potatoes in a sauce. Yummy.

Tuesday 27. September - Ghulmet-Gilgit

Up early; kind of glad to get out of here. Give them 200rs, and hurry down to the road, and get on a bus immediately (7.15pm). The bus is ok; except for the usual Pakistani music. What am I supposed to answer to the usual question: "You like Pakistani music, Yes ??" at the same time as they turn up the volume? It is just not my kind of music... Arrive in Gilgit at 9.15am - the trip cost 30rs. Stop in at the PIA office, just when they opened the door at 9.30am. Well, they can't help me with the Islamabad flight until tomorrow. You have to come here the day before departure to reconfirm the ticket. Walk towards the Hunza Inn, but decide to try the Chinese Lodge, next door just for a change. The second room I am shown is all right (the toilet seat is not missing, as in the first one). Ok, 100rs for a double with bath. Spend most of the afternoon in town, shopping, and drinking tea. At

one tea-shop, I am invited inside for tea and some greasy cookies (just baked), and have a good talk with several people about my country and theirs. They spoke pretty well English, so we got beyond the usual exchange of name and country. At 6.30pm I ask "what about my dinner". Yes, Sir he answers. "What time?", I try again, and points to my watch and mouth. "Ah, Kitchen is closed! Sorry." Great, why do they always answer "yes sir" to whatever they don't understand! Argh! One has to remember not to ask yes/no questions. Walk to the next door PTDC- restaurant; but dinner was not until 7pm, and it looked just a little to fancy for me. Continue to the Mir's Lodge. Beautiful place with tinted windows and a moved lawn. I have a filling meal for 100rs. How can that pay the cooks and two waiters? OK, another couple shows up later...

Wednesday 28. September - Gilgit

I'm a bit worried about my flight to Islamabad; I am to confirm my ticket today, and get it back at 2pm. I have already checked the other options - which is actually only one option: a 15-17 hours bus to Rawalpindi. Which I would rather avoid. I have to be there Friday, 3pm, to catch all my connecting flights... Well, I get in the line in front of the PIA office. We 4 foreigners are waved through for special treatment. The 3 others, wanting to get a ticket for tomorrow, leaves unhappy; nothing for 2 months. They will have to check every morning for free seats. I guess they'll have a chance when they get first in the queue every morning. They take my ticket, which I can pick up at 2 hopefully. I had prepared several speeches like "I have a lot of connecting flights; I'm a tourist..". Luckily I won't have to use them. It is interesting that I can get on a flight 5 days after I have bought it in Denmark, but everything is sold out when you get here?! I guess a good piece of advice is to buy it from home... A strap on my daypack is broken, and I visit a tailor who sews it on again - he didn't want anything for his bother! Amazing, considering I look like a tourist...

I end up in a tea-shop, where I get delicious, spicy milk tea. Which I had read about in the TSK. I realizes that this very place is 'the best tea in town'-shop. The Haidry Tea Shop. Well, the price has gone up from 1rs to 2rs per glass of milk tea. No wonder with that amount of ginger and cardamom they

put in... I try some of the different "dishes" available from the vendors; the delicious pizza-style-baked bread (2rs), roasted corn (2rs), a plate of switched cubes of liver with onions and stuff (5rs). I also visit my tea-friend from yesterday and try some spicy meat-cake things, which actually tastes OK. Hang around until 2, where I joyfully receive my ticket with a confirmation for the first flight for the 8.30am flight tomorrow. I think it will be possible; the weather is fine, and the air pressure is still going up (another nice function of my watch).

Whatdoyouknow - meet my Swedish friends again (met them in Passu, Karimabad and here). They are on the way to the police to 'become residents', which one will have to when staying here more than 30 days.

Walk east of town - nothing happening here, though. A quiet afternoon in the garden, with a good book. Quietly advise a tourist coming in, to try next door 'Hunza Inn' instead of here. He appreciated my piece of advice.

Dinner again at the Mir's house: An excellent rice-vegetable chicken dish, and a spicy mutton mixture. They don't actually make their dishes too spicy here, even though I asked for it. Best meal I have had here yet. It is funny, when I come to think about it; I don't think a woman has done any cooking for me during my visit. At all the guest houses, it has always been the (male) owner, or male, hired cook who has been doing the cooking.... What do the females do here, except pushing cows, bearing children and wearing colorful dresses? I just wonder. They get the front seat in busses, and always look away from you. O yes, I saw some very funny postcards: 5 Pakistani women, all veiled up, not even their eyes were showing - looked exactly like ghosts in white dresses - could have been the Monty Python group dressed up.

Thursday 29. September - Gilgit-Islamabad/Rawalpindi

Was the first one at the gate at 7am, and was a bit surprised about it. Some more people lined up later, and the check-in opened at 7.30. First through the whole system: x-ray of everything, weight of baggage, seat: window on the left - "of course", the man replied. Tags to the hand baggage. Stamps on

tags. Scanning of hand baggage, search through everything in hand baggage. Clip of tags on hand baggage... 1 person to each job. Again, a fantastic flight. I don't know if I just have seen too many mountains with snow by now to really be able to appreciate it. Still, I caught myself in awe with open mouth a couple of times: Great view of the Rakaposhi, and those white fluffy things hanging around Nanga Prabat; the KKH going through the valleys... I felt like a little boy during takeoff - and a little scared: a 600m runway! It's just so short. And you barely get off the ground before the end of it. I should never have picked up the newspaper: 650 dead in a ferry accident between Finland and Estonia... Somebody I know? It is the first news I have had in 10 days.

Phew! So very hot in Islamabad. Get a young Taxi-driver - who don't speak English (only a few do, it seems). 60rs to Rajar Bazaar. But the boy could not read a map, even though I told him he was going the right way. At a point he asked a passer-by about the hotel (Masriq) I wanted to go to, and found out it was on the City Saddar Road. Oh, Saddar Bazaar, he thought and turned back. After a detour to Saddar, we got back to Rajar... I was following on my TSK-map, so I knew he was going the wrong way, he obviously could not read and did not understand my map. Well. The hotel was full; the nearby 7 Brothers hotel only had a couple of doubles left at 200rs (no discount), but the New Palace Hotel had a single for 100rs. The room was OK. I only had planned to go and take a look at the supposedly biggest mosque in Asia: the Shah Faisal mosque in Islamabad. A taxi (80rs) didn't take long. Islamabad is quite different from Rawalpindi; the change occurs quite suddenly - long straight streets; big mansions, big gardens. I thought the mosque looked bigger from the outside - a four minaret version. Free to get in. Well, I didn't think it was that big - seen from the inside. In the middle of the mosque hangs a big globe of lights - it looks like the lights are woven into a big grid. Nice feature. From a distance it looks quite nice white, clean, and all marble, but when you look in the corners, it needs repair already. Walked a couple of blocks, passing the big villas - wonder if Benashir lives here?

Decided to take the Intercity bus back. That way I got to see most of Islamabad since the bus goes through in a half circle from NW to SW. 10rs. Took some time though. When back in Rajar Bazaar, I decided to look around. It was actually a tip from a fellow traveler at a dinner discussion: most had had bad memories about 'Pindi - but he had said Rajar was the most intriguing bazaar he had ever seen, and he had been many places in Africa and Asia. And now, I think he may be right - it is much more interesting than the bigger Saddar Bazaar (where I was 1 1/2 weeks ago) - and it is BIG here! It's like a labyrinth with shops in every corner of the maze - and like dungeons and dragons, it is on several levels - underground and on ground. And you can get everything I won't go into details. It is divided with streets of special kinds of goods. One street had perhaps 50 or 80 jeweler shops on it - they seemed exactly the same, with the same kind of jewelry in the windows... You can walk around here forever. Didn't buy much though, just half a kilo of Almonds.

A big rally stopped all traffic for a few hours. All the busses had gone. The people had the whole Rajah square - in the middle, the leader with microphone and big speakers, and people all around. In the news, they said the opposition failed in gathering many people to their rally. Well, I thought there was many people - and hundreds of policemen wearing the full set of armor, shields, guns and everything phew, everything dissolved quietly.

During a nice dinner at the hotel, they showed cuts on TV from the 3 Indiana Jones films, which had just arrived here. It was great; it showed all the beginnings, all the points of the movies - all the surprising exposures of the double agents and the whole ending! Great, you won't even have to see the films after this, at least, nothing can come as a surprise. Well, I'm glad I had seen them. The Bazaar was still busy until 8pm where they were packing up. Must have been a long day. Wonder if they are open tomorrow, Friday.

Friday 30. September - Islamabad-Muscat

Spend the morning looking around in the Bazaar once again; many places are open today, and the streets are filled as usual. Take a taxi to the airport, and catch all my flights: Islamabad - Karachi - Muscat

Saturday 1. October - Copenhagen

Muscat-Frankfurt-Copenhagen. Arrive in Copenhagen at 11am. Train to Aarhus; back for afternoon coffee. Brewed. A great trip; somany big impressions. The mountains are burned into my retina for the rest of my life. Actually, I want to go to see the K2 some time. You can make a trekking tour to one of the most remote places in the world in about 30 days, forth and back...

Congo by rschuh23

What a story

Jan 03 '01

Author's Product Rating

Pros

wonderful people

Cons

traveling home

Full Review

It was a day that i thought that would never happen to me a day in my life. When i first woke up i took a shower and i started to hear these animal sounds it was my older sister with this recorder saying how would you like to take a trip to Congo. I said it would be wonderful. The only thing is that we had to leave in two days. So i got everything done in those two days so we could go. The Plane trip all started with a delay for four hours i thought to myself "why did i want to go to congo". Then i relized why, I wanted to go because of all the culture the animals i could see and i love gorillas. Finally we stared landing in congo what a sight it was from the airplane pretty animals running in the open country. All the wonderful waterfalls and the brown grass. Finally we got out of the airplane and what friendly people were there to greet us. Like they were family to us. We went and found a guide so we could safari and see all the animals at first. That was the most terrific thing i have ever saw seeing the animals up that close. After the safari we went into town to see what kind of suvaneers we could take back from our trip. While we were shopping we started to talk to some of the natives, it was great we talk about there culture and there and my family. We talked so much that one family invited us to have dinner with them. They were sweet. We looked at pictures that i have brought of my family. Talked about hunting, fishing, and house work. Then the time came when the trip was over it was hard to say good-bye. It felt like a second home to me. Finally we left and ended up back home. Boy, was my eyes surprized to see the differents between Congo and the United States. I told my sister thank you and i said i hope we can have other trips like this. It was the best time i have had. Just remember that if you go to another country and dont know what is happening just read the signs and obey them cause it is your best chance of survival.

Recommended

Yes

<http://www.chirundu.com/diary/kariba1999.htm>

Trip

The Kariba Trip

(27 February - 3 March 1999)

27 Feb 1999 - The day of our trip to Kariba had arrived and as Sharon is slowly becoming used to, I was so excited about the holiday that like a small child on Christmas eve I was just unable to get to sleep! I eventually got Sharon out of bed at 3:00am and we were on the road with a few sandwiches for pad kos by 3:30am.

We had initially planned to spend our last holiday in Zimbabwe (before going to London) in Chirundu, but because there was still a lot of rain falling throughout the country (we were afraid that our little Sunny wouldn't make it through the mud at Chirundu) and both myself and Sharon had recently done some work for The Cutty Sark Hotel in Kariba and so we were given very favourable rates of stay, this trip would be of the luxurious type, where we would have a bath every day, and more importantly - air conditioning in our room!

360 kilometers down the road and we would be in Kariba, as we passed Charles Prince airport and the last few residential houses, it was still dark and I had a good feeling in my heart, I couldn't wait for the sun to rise and to get that first sight of Kariba's blue waters from the heights. Sharon wrapped in a blanket drifted off to sleep and because the road was quiet except for the occasional truck and bus returning from Zambia I had to be careful not to let my mind wander too far. As we climbed the Great Dyke, alone in my thoughts, I remembered all the times I had ridden out there on my bike, where just before Banket there was a small strip road that would take you to Mhangura, past Murial Mine (The Muragambedzi trip) and then on to Mazoe and back to Harare on the Mazoe Road. A 200km ride one that I would do once a week in the height of my training before I left for the Hanson tour in South Africa. It all seemed like a life time ago, I was now a different person, a person that found driving 200 kilometers in a car a long journey!

Mist covered the road like a blanket between Banket and Chinoyi and already the old men with their "worms for sale" signs (in "Gokwe bold Italic!") and little fires to keep them warm sat beside the road, for in this part of the world it is not the early bird that catches the worm, but the early worm seller who catches the early fisherman! We would not stop this time for this was not going to be a fishing trip, the tigers for now could breathe easy! At first light in Karoi we re-fueled and as I have done since a young boy wondered why Karoi has a witch as its emblem? Just as we got going again we were really fortunate to see a serval cat dart into the bush, we chattered excitedly and wondered what other animals we would see on the road. As we got

closer to the Makuti turn off I explained to Sharon that you ALWAYS see an elephant here, it was not to be this time but we discussed that how on our Chirundu Trip we had stopped on the escarpment overlooking the Zambezi valley for a pee break and heard in the bush the loud roar of a lion - it was a short stop!.

After Makuti you are almost there and with your eyes peeled to the bush (and not the road!) looking for animals the time passes quickly. Sharon alerted me to a Bateleur Eagle, we stopped and reversed the car and sat for a while to observe this most majestic bird perched on a tree top. Later on we also stopped at "the old Baobab" for a photo and a brief explanation of how many times over the years this tree had been the site of the "Whiteheads" pee break! Shortly before Kariba we were surprised to see a pack of hyena's right next to the road, I thought it was a bit unusual to see them out in the open during the day but we enjoyed the spectral none the less.

We checked into the Cutty Sark, with Sharon completing all the formalities and then took our bags to our room. For the next few days we would have nothing to do but enjoy the views, swim in the pool and savour the moments, for in the back of both our minds was the realisation that we would not be able to enjoy 'Africa' again for a long long time. During the day it was unbearably hot, almost like a sauna and it was very tempting to spend all your time in your room with the air conditioning on! So right from the outset we decided to restrict our walks in the bush to the early mornings and late evenings and spend the heat of the day lazing by the pool enjoying ice cold Castles and the wonderful view of the lake. One afternoon I made a list of all the birds that we were able to identify during our stay:

After our first breakfast at the Cutty Sark we decided that from then on we would try all the other hotels in Kariba for our meals, not that it was bad, we just wanted better! We had a very pleasant lunch and dinner at the "Breezers" Sitting in a rondavel overlooking the harbour and the lake, it brought back many memories of my childhood swimming and playing in the warm water of the pool and the many times we had visited the lake. I had never seen the lake so full and what made it more striking was the jetty at the breezers that usually had nothing but sand below it, now stretched out into the lake and had a young boy sitting at the end of it fishing. Sharon spotted a legavon in the harbour whilst we were waiting for our toasted ham and cheese sandwiches, we watched it for a while climbing over the water lilly's and then he submerged into the harbour and disappeared.

The first morning we woke up before sunrise and went for a walk, the air was still cool as we headed off the dirt road and onto an overgrown path. This for me is always the best time of the day the stillness of the lake and the first few chirps as the birds begin to wake. As we got close to the lake we noticed alot of buffalo spoor and unmistakable smell of their "fresh" droppings. I became slightly nervous and highly

alert as this was far too early in the morning to come across a grumpy buffalo! There was a family of hippos wallowing in the water nearby and we climbed a rock near the waters edge to watch them and witness the sunrise, this was paradise and I wanted the moment to last forever.

This was definitely going to be a lazy, cultured holiday but I think it is exactly what we wanted. One morning we went and had a really good breakfast at Carribea bay hotel and that night had an enjoyable meal at the Breezers. We didnt see much game on this trip, but there was a herd of ele's in the area and we saw them often, I almost drove into one on the way back from our meal at the Breezers.

<http://www.desmoinesumc.org/liberiamissiontrip/>

Volunteer in Mission Liberia, 2001

Des Moines UMC member, **Marcy Sides**, shares the story of her mission work in Liberia...

"How long has it been since you had to live without electricity or had to draw water from a river or well for bathing or doing dishes? A team of Methodist Volunteers in Mission of South King County and the Pacific Northwest Conference did just that. This April we set out for Buchanan, Liberia. This small area is about a three hour drive south of Monrovia on a pot-hole filled dirt road.

"This is where we lived with the people of Buchanan, without electricity, running water or any communication with the 'outside world.' The people of Buchanan have lived without these everyday conveniences for years, since the Civil War battered Liberia beginning in 1989. The civil unrest continues to this day.

"Our Mission was to help the Liberians of Buchanan-Grand Bassa County restore Ada Ann Wright Methodist School, which was destroyed by bombing during the civil war. We were there to mainly let these wonderful, hard-working people know that they are in our prayers and that we care.

Money was raised to purchase needed materials for the construction project, which was the rebuilding of the school. A new roof was put on, and we scraped moss off walls so the stucco would adhere to the existing cinder blocks. All work was done manually.

"I went to Liberia with NO expectation of receiving anything, other than the satisfaction of knowing I had gone and served the Lord in a manner that was pleasing to Him. But the many gifts I received were truly overwhelming.

"The first of my gifts was the warmth, love, support and prayers of the congregation of the Des Moines United Methodist Church. I was given such encouragement and words of affirmation that this mission of Goodwill was not only worthwhile but a must!

"The second gift was totally unexpected. This came from the wonderful people of Liberia. Everyone--from the workers at the construction site to the members of the Ada Ann Wright United Methodist Church, to the Missioners of Hope and The United Methodist Missionaries. These people shared freely their language, customs and culture with our team members. We were able to return home with a better understanding of their world and the life they are building. The most unexpected gift was a blessing we received from the people of Liberia--the construction workers, church people, community members and the children. They collectively revealed to us the Spirit of the Lord. These Christians are the most hope-filled individuals that I have had the pleasure of meeting, despite the hardships (in our perception) they endure daily. They see God's hand in everything. They are constantly praising God for the abundance of his blessings--these praises were from men that had no shoes and were willing to toil in the overwhelming heat and humidity in exchange for a noontime meal! I was constantly inspired by the presence of the Lord in the lives of these people. What a precious gift this inspiration was.

"My third gift was the building of life lasting friendships with the other team members. Reverend David and Marian Zaske of Federal Way; Martha Alexander from Bremerton; Janet Hayes of Oak Harbor; and Eleanor Duckworth of Pomeroy. Each of these dedicated Christians have different talents and life experiences that were shared with me and everyone they met. My life has been richly blessed by sharing this experience with them.

"Even though our mission trip was only two weeks in length, the memories and warm feelings I have for the people of Liberia and for my fellow team members will last a lifetime.

<http://ipminc.biz/im/issue3/innerspace3.htm>

A Letter From Nigeria

by Louise Simpson

Hello again,

The intensity level of my trip has just increased to an unbelievable height. I feel like I'm in a parallel universe. But what better way to deal with it than to write it down.

On Thursday morning I left Abuja (the capital) with an old family friend Kole. He had invited me on a trip to northern Nigeria with the end destination being his home village Macina. He told me that he had to go and visit and pay his respects for a wedding. On the drive there we passed through all the major cities of northern Nigeria. Starting in Abuja (political city), we traveled through Zaria (intellectual city) and finally, Kano (commercial city). After arriving in Kano with six hours travel time behind us we went further east and north. The roads were long and the scenery didn't change much. It was all green farmland. As I looked around, all I saw was poverty. I bought some water to have for myself in the village and gave a disabled boy who offered to carry it about 25 cents and he thanked me as if I had given him a million dollars. By the time we left the town it was about 5pm and unbearably hot. The heat from the Sahara desert was keeping a blanket of heat tucked nicely around the car. From then on there was no road.

After 2 hours on a dirt path and passing a village every half hour or so we reached Macina just as the sun was setting. The first thing I had to do was get over my shock. Literally, the village was comprised of mud huts with palm treetops, a mosque and the Emirs house. It was tiny; 100-200 people might be an exaggeration. After we set up in the guest house, one little building with two mattresses, Kole took me to meet

the Emir. The Emir is the religious leader of the town. He was very interested in why I chose to come to Nigeria. On the way back to the guest house I happened to look up and for the first time since I had been here I saw the stars! It was beautiful.

In the morning Kole had to go off with the men to the mosque for one of the many parts of the wedding, which I couldn't attend, so I was escorted to his brother's house where the three wives made me feel so welcome. Because they didn't speak English and I didn't speak their language, I just sat there and smiled. I ate breakfast with them and we tried some basic communication. They taught me the local greeting (which I found out later was how you greet a king). The greeting consisted of slowly clapping your hands together about 3 times and then raising your fist. For the rest of the morning I just watched in awe of these women. They worked so well together and relied on each other so much. Between them, there were about about eight kids, who all gave me a lot of attention.

I had to keep myself covered from head to foot, despite the blazing heat. (I think one of the reasons I was so welcomed is because I went to effort of doing this). Just I was about expire there was a great commotion. More women in the village had come with gifts for the wedding. Most of them brought a pyramid of 3 pots. I have never seen so many in one place! This time I knew how to greet them. At one point it felt like I was sitting with about 6 generations of women. How beautiful and empowering is that!

When Kole came to get me he said he worried that I might have felt out of place. When I told him the contrary, he looked relieved. When I left the women (which to be quite honest I didn't really want to do) the group expressed their goodbyes to me. Then the three wives walked me to Koles' car. For the first time I was actually able to say something to them (through translation from Kole). He told me they were very happy to meet me and hoped I would come back.

Before driving away, Kole stopped to say hi to some family. I was standing outside of the car when a woman came up to me, holding her baby. Her baby either had the measles or the chicken pox and she was asking me if I could help. Without being able to communicate with her all I could do was shake my head, which I know she didn't understand. I felt so completely helpless.

As I come away from this situation - which was both the best and worst of my life - I have to realize not only how lucky we are but also that there are some things you cannot change by yourself. Do you want to know what Macina's biggest problem was? Water. It's the rainy season, but there hadn't been much rain. The well wasn't filling up. This means that in the dry season there will probably be a drought. I can't even comprehend this.

Anyway this has been my longest rambling so far and I must stop, as my fingers are getting sore.

Louise

Louise Simpson is a poet and environmental activist from Toronto, Ontario. She spent several months in Nigeria last year, and this is a letter from her travelogue. avidhands@hotmail.com

□

Young Escher's Pencil Box

mixed media
by Dale Copeland

The Big Game

Mixed media by Dale Copeland

www.outofsight.co.nz

Lebanon by Anonymous:

<http://home.t-online.de/home/inesbz/index/libanon-eng.htm>

Lebanon - what do the most people think of when they hear this name? They think of war, bombs, attacks. How many people have asked us to be crazy or weary of life after they heard we go to Beirut? I didn't count them.

The media designed in the last few years an image of this country that nowadays doesn't correspond with the one that once existed before. The Lebanon makes only headlines in our press with negative news. Only a few report about the reconstruction and the beauty of the country. About its people, their sincerity, warmth and hospitality as well as their confidence and optimism. They impressed me in the same as their kind way always to show us that we are welcome everywhere.

I invite you on my website to become acquainted with another side of this country as the one we know from the news and I'd like to encourage to get an own idea of it and its people.

We visited the Lebanon 1999 for the first time. Three years later, in 2002, we started off a new journey...

Lebanon 16.10.-22.10.1999

In brief

Certainly, some will ask themselves: why the three just had the idea to travel to the Lebanon? Well, already in the year before, during the International Tourism Fair in Berlin, that is the worlds largest one, this country attracted our attention. Investigations in guide books and in the internet only strengthened the wish to visit this country, particularly since it is not on the list of the package holiday makers.

And so we decided, Beate and Ines, both in the middle of the thirties, and Gitti, at her early forties, to spend unforgettable holidays in the Lebanon. And you see, we succeeded.

We paid around 350 US\$ per ticket for the flight by the Romanian Airline Tarom from Berlin via Bucharest to Beirut and return. And per email I booked our hotel in Beirut, the "Mayflower". It is situated in a side street of the Rue Hamra, that even was that one famous shopping street before the war. A triple with breakfast was 73 US\$, this is about 45,- DEM per person.

The exchange rate for prices, which can be found in the following text, is about 1.000 LBP = 0,67 US\$ (as of October '99).

Saturday 16.10.1999 Departure

Sunday 17.10.1999 Beirut

The departure of the small Turboprop ATR-42 of the Romanian Airline Tarom from Berlin-Schoenefeld to Bucharest-Otopeni is on time. At the Romanian capital we will be waiting for our connecting flight to Beirut, scheduled for 10.00 p.m. Nearly one hour earlier, at 5.45 p.m., we arrive in Bucharest. We are astonished at the airport and the Tarom, too. Everything is clean and tidy. Also the Boeing 737 to Beirut takes off as scheduled and we reach our destination punctually.

Even the landing approach to the International Airport Beirut is an adventure. What a pity, that we arrive at night. Only a few meters above the houses we glide into direction of the runway. What a terrific view of the city.

After we've bought our visa stamp for 17 US\$, we want to take our luggage. What a surprise, my case is not here with. Actually, it isn't a surprise at all. Because the lady at the Check-in at the airport in Berlin had forgotten to fix the label to my case. Above all, we asked her several times whether there is all o. k. now with my luggage. "Of course", she confirmed.

Although we were joking again and again that my case is standing all alone at the left-luggage office at the Airport in Berlin, nobody of us had thought that it will really happen.

Then starts the whole ritual with taking the personal data and facts. I am really hopping mad. Michel, one of the airport staff, offers his sympathy. Of course, it isn't his fault, least of all. He will send a fax to Berlin and one

to Bucharest, immediately. He consoles, the case arrives certainly with the next plane. So, I leave the Airport of Beirut without any luggage.

Our driver already waits with a sign, where is written on "Mrs. Ines G. ", in front of the airport building. The first impressions of the town pass by, always with my case in my thoughts. Will I ever see it again?

After our arrival at the hotel we have a shower and afterwards we drop exhausted into the bed. Meanwhile it is 3.00 a.m. When the breakfast is over one of the hotel staff says to my delight that I can pick up my case from the airport. A miracle happened! Certainly, it has been found in the night, he says.

For 30 US\$ (there and back) we go by taxi to the airport. I am quite confident, but unfortunately, I get disappointed. I have to go to several offices in different floors until I hear that my case comes with the next plane of Taron on Tuesday night. So, the earliest to pick it up is on Wednesday morning. Great. Any hope dwindles still in these holiday to wear my own clothes. We have no other choice to make the best of this started day.

Then we decide to explore Beirut by foot. We walk along the Corniche, the costal road, intend to visit the Pigeon Grotte, the landmark of the town. We want to spend some time at a small lonely beach that is situated at the steep coast opposite the grotte. By a boat we are ferried over. I decide to give up sun and beach because it is only to reach by large stones in the water. No, I don't want to lose more things (remember my case). After all I perhaps fall into the water together with my camera. It was not surprising because the streak of luck I have recently.

Gitti and Beate are really glad to be back. The lonely beach sooner turns out to be a prison. The both can't escape from there without a boat. And this also know the men who conquer the beach with their own boats, e. g. boards, tyers, to watch the European women.

On the way back to the hotel we stop at a Internet Café. From there I can call to Germany for a fair price, one minute for 1,50 US\$. That's o.k. In the evening we intend to look for a driver who could bring us to Baalbek tomorrow. Because the prices vary between 125 US\$ and 65 US\$, we aren't sure anymore, what to do. Suddenly, a Lebanese, about our age, approaches and speaks with us in German. He writes down in

Arabic the places of de-parture of the collecting taxis which go to Baalbek and tells us the maximum prices according to the routes. In the case we hadn't come across him, or better said he hadn't come across us, who knows what we had paid for the trip.

Lebanon 16.10.-22.10.1999

Monday, 18.10.1999 Baalbek

We walk to the Rue Hamra to take a taxi to Siad. From there the collecting taxis go to the Bekka Plain where we intend to our trip today. The first taxi is too expensive. The second driver agrees a bit grumpy to our offer of 5.000 LBP. But on the way he tells us about his town. We pass bombarded buildings. Inside live people. It is to see by the clothes which hung on the balconies for drying. And on the way to Baalbek we get to see many tent houses inhabited by refugees. Arrived in Siad, we look out for the collecting taxis. Not a minute goes by and a cluster of taxi drivers forms around us (taxis should not be mixed up with collecting taxis which have about the size of a minibus and shout where they go to). Everybody is ready to take us to Baalbek. "...Yes, for only 50 US\$ we take you there and back..." and "...there are no collecting taxis from here to Baalbek..." First we want to look around. On the opposite side we see a Hyundai minibus. Right through the hooting cars we force our way to the other side of the road. "Baalbek?". The driver nods in approval, we get on, wave the left taxi drivers a good-bye and... we are on the way to Baalbek.

Steeper and steeper we wind up the street to the hills, in the back the skyline of Beirut. A breathtaking sight.

On the way we see many check points and soldiers, Lebanese and Syrian ones, military police, tanks, air defence... and among them are the before mentioned tent houses of the refugees.

Arrived in Baalbek, named by the Greeks as Heliopolis, the driver insists on taking us directly to the entrance of the Roman ruins. To the 3.000 LBP per person for the fare we give him a tip of 1 US\$ and he is happy about the bakshish.

The admission fee for the impressive temples is 10.000 LBP. Lebanese, French and German scientists restored here in the last century. Now, there is an excellent feeling of how the construction looked in ancient days. To see is the Temple of the Jupiter, the Bacchus and the Venus. The second one is in best condition.

We meet only a few foreign tourists. Maybe, it is different from the summer months, we don't know. But then we meet a group of German tourists. What a pity, we had can follow to listen a bit if they had been here one hour sooner.

We leave the ruins. Beate wants a photo together with a camel, at all costs! Some are closed to the exit. But now the owner claims 3 US\$ although we were assured to make a free snap. With 1 US\$ the deal is perfect. As quickly as possible we set off to reach the centre of the town. And here is true Orient, with dark small alleys. This is not the right thing for Gitti. The same she feels when we eat something at a snack bar. But the dishes are really yummy.

In the end we decide to go back on the way to Beirut. Zahle, a town mainly inhabited by Christians, is on our way and we stop here for a while.

Then we sit again in a collecting taxi. Somewhere in Beirut we get off. A kind taxi driver, knowing three words English and three words French, tries to explain how much he loves Germany. Certainly, he knows somebody who has a brother or an uncle in Germany or somebody who even has been in Germany.

We stroll a bit along the Rue Hamra, buy a few postcards. For dinner we go again to the Raouche District. We decide to stop of at the sidewalk café in that I had some food on the previous day when the other both relaxed at their "lonely" beach. Because here we can eat delicious Lebanese food. In addition we can choose from the different things. A piece from there and a piece from here... roasted skewers, salads, vegetables. We can choose like at a buffet.

Lebanon 16.10.-22.10.1999

Tuesday, 19.10.1999 Jeitta Grottes - Beirut

Today we want to go to the Jeitta Grotte, but how can we get there? After the breakfast we first go to Corniche, the coastal road. From there it is said to be departed busses or collecting taxis to the Jeitta Grottes. Of course, everyone has to go in direction we want to go, too! Questions like "how much?" and "where do you go to?" are answered by nodding the head and inviting to get aboard. Sure, everybody wants to help us (and perhaps wants to make a bit money, too) but we'd like to arrive the grotte still today and wouldn't like to go to an anywhere.

At last, there is someone who can help us. An elder couple knowing a very good English. We shall go to Dora (speak: Daura) first and from there we shall take another taxi. When we tell that we are from Germany the man is really pleased about. Once again someone who loves our country. He tells us that his daughter is studying in L. A. But he hates the United States esp. all the dirt and trash that comes over from there, he says. We are caught in a gigantic traffic jam. Countless vehicles roll along the road. That won't take long and two lanes become three, than four... Everyone wants to be the first. Approximately, half an hour we spend in the slow-moving traffic until we reach the end of the jam, a traffic circle. Now it goes on again with more speed.

A few discussions on the price follow. For 10.000 LBP we are taken on immediate way to the grotte. This is service. Again we don't know if the price is too high or not. For 16.500 LBP the Jeitta Grottes can be visitd. They are said to be one of most beautiful on the earth. I must say, I have never seen more beautiful ones! It is possible to go to the entrance of the Upper Gallery either by a cable railway or by a little train.

Then everybody has to lock cameras and camcorders in for that purpose designated safe boxes. It is not allowed to take pictures in the grottes! Unfortunately. I've bought a 400-film for it.

The Grottes are of a stunning beauty. We feel like putting into a fairyland. Actually, it can't be described, it should have been seen. The Lower Gallery is to reach by foot or by the little train again. Down there it is a bit cool and it is advisable to wear a jacket or a pullover. This breathtaking cave is discovered by a boat. Like a dream.

We think about how we can go back to the town. The only problem is that the main road is about 4 kms away from here. Uphill. A Taxi is waiting for us at the exit. You are in the deal with 20.000 LBP, the driver says. Come on, it is a bit too much, baby. We had thought of about 15.000 LBP. And I could swear it is still generous. The driver refuses our counteroffer. As you want, then we go by foot to the main road. After we walked about 200 m it seems he has changed his mind, as it was to be expected. He follows us and takes us to Dora. At the traffic junction of that district begins right away Bourj Hammoud, the Armenian district. We´d like to go shopping here. Store by store full of with gold, watches, shoes...

But before we start shopping we want to find anything eatable. Because we are in the Armenian district the kitchen in the restaurant is Armenian, too. In a snack bar, behind the counter are large number of glasses arranged. Their contents: sausage from Poppenburg made in Germany. But of course, we prefer local food. We choose "Sourjok". A kind of Hot Dog with Armenian sausage. Its colouring remembers to cloted blood and its main constituent seems to be garlic. But delicious!

We ask where it is possible to buy fashionable clothes. "Ajax Street" is the number one for it, it is said. And really, there was not too much promised. Store by store with clothes and shoes. It is everybodys own fault who doesn´t find here anything to buy.

For the rest of the day up to the darkness we stroll through the stores, once more we buy anything here and try on anything there. A phenomenon we watch here for the first time is that in the shops we are shadowed by at every turn. We are not yet really inside the store there is already a shop-assistant clinging to us like a leech. Well, I think in Germany we had left the store again. But here it seems to be usual because we notice in each store. Besides, they don´t like it very much when the customer goes without any goods to buy. But maybe, we only imagine things.

We decide without making a detour to go to the Raouche district to have dinner in our favourite local, "Ali Barbar". Because here we are served by our individual requests. Sitting on a table out of the restaurant, near to the road, we suddenly hear a thunderous rumbling that becomes louder. Firstly, we don´t trust our eyes. A tank with an about ten men crew comes down the street. Ali, the son of the restaurant owner, explains that every night at about 8.00 p.m. the tank comes along, turns around and

comes back . Hurry up! Where is my camera? That is worth taking a snap of. But no, it is strictly forbidden to take pictures of the army and all military things. We´ve got an idea. Beate is placed on the roadside and when the tank comes back I push the release as if I was taking a photo of her. All the people in the restaurant look horrified at us. Sure, nobody before has dared to do so. But in the end all our excitement was in vain. Because it was to dark there hasn´t become a photo of it.

Lebanon 16.10.-22.10.1999

Wednesday, 20.10.1999 Jounieh - Beirut

In the morning, Ali is with his car as prearranged at the hotel. First we want to go to a post office to send our postcards to Germany. Afterwards we intend to go to the airport. In the meanwhile my case is supposed to be there, after all. I am really excited. If it is really here arrived by the Tarom, from Berlin via Bucharest to Beirut. Terrible pictures buzz in my mind: how a few Romanian airport employees fall upon my slashed case and share with each other my belongings. No, these are mean thoughts. As mentioned before, we had pleasant impressions of the Bucharest Airport.

Fadl, Alis cousin, works at the airport and when we arrive there he is informed by handy about our coming. He can be very helpful for us. We run from one office to the other, hurry from one floor to the other because here we get an approval and there we get a needed signature. It is said I get my case with a hundred percent reliability. I will just believe when I have seen it. Even on Sunday morning I came here full of optimism but then I was bitterly disappointed. So, we will wait for.

I meet old acquaintances, Michel, it was he who had took the loss of my case. A handshake to welcome. Another one asks: "Do you remember me?". Yes, of course, he was on duty in this office on Sunday here, too. Meanwhile, I know the half of the airport staff of the International Airport Beirut. Well, it seems to have all papers now and we leave the gigantic

office block again. Fadl was really a big help. I think without him we had spent several hours for the search of the respective offices.

Now, only Fadl and I are allowed to go further. We enter the arrival lounge. Not possible without an approval. And there it is, finally! I recognize it, it is my own case, yes, it is. In fact, it has managed to be here before the return flight. In the end I have to go through the customs. Opening the case, unpacking, searching, but I don't care all! The main thing is I got it back.

The other both just hardly believe. After the event they they confess that they had lost faith but didn't want to discourage me. At last, we can enjoy the day and the nice weather because today sun and beach are announced.

Ali takes us to Jounieh, a place not far from Beirut, that nowadays counts about 350.000 inhabitants with its suburbs Kaslik and Maameltein. There stand closely packed houses and hotels designed as concrete blocks and surrounded by gardens, swimming pools, restaurants, tennis courts. Ali has a chalet here as second home. The beach is small but quiet and almost deserted. It is low season in Lebanon and even the restaurant is closed.

So, we relax for a few hours in the sun and have a bath in the warm water of the Mediterranean Sea. Ali has to be back in his father's restaurant in the late afternoon and so we start at 3.00 p.m. Because the everyday traffic jams in Beirut we need about one hour to go to the inner city.

We have still time up to the evening and we stroll a bit down the Rue Hamra, buy a few things more.

Tomorrow is our last day and we plan to go far to the south. We want to get up at 6.00 a.m. and so we decided not to go to bed late. That means we leave at 10.00 p.m.

Before we can catch a taxi a grey Mercedes 300 SL stops close to us. We are invited to "Friday's", an American styled restaurant about 50 m from here. Actually, we want to go to bed. But o.k., persuaded. Khaled and Mohammed are amusing fellows and we have a lot of fun. They take us to the hotel, say good-bye and "nice to meet you". This is a matter that we like very much on the Lebanese man. They are not importunate. As soon as a woman shows that she is only interested in a talk and in nothing more, they accept it, immediately. No advances are made anymore. They

show although in a honest way that it is nice to have met each other. In the meantime it is midnight. Tomorrow gets an exhausting day followed by a same exhausting night.

Lebanon 16.10.-22.10.1999

Thursday, 21.10.1999 Tyrus - Saida

In the morning at 6.00 o'clock the telephone rings, we are woken. After we have paid the bill for our room we leave our luggage in the departure lounge. This night, better said, early next morning goes our plane to Bucharest. At about midnight we'll pick up our cases from here again. But before we go on a trip to the south, close to the Israeli borderline.

This time we have to go to the Kola district. From there goes busses via Saida to Tyrus (Arabic: Sour). Just when we are sitting in the cab we notice whom we are going with. Military music comes from a tape, pictures of Khomeni on the front pane and he wears black clothes. He is the first Lebanese who hardly speaks with us. The other drivers proudly talked about their town and even if it was by hands and feet. But we arrive safe at Kola. Just a few seconds later we are in the bus to Saide, for 750 LBP.

On the way increase the number of the check points, we see tanks and other vehicles of the army on the roadside.

In Saida we change for a collecting taxi. On the way back we intend to stop here. To ask for the town Tyrus it should be used its Arabic name: Sour. Nobody knows what to do with the name Tyrus. Arrived in Sour, we ask our way to the first ruins. And there addresses us once again a young man. He introduces himself as Hassan, he is shiit and just finished his studies of political sciences. He has been watching us for a while before he came over.

We visit two different ancient places. The admission fee is 5.000 LBP each. We think the construction situated close to the beach is not as impressive as the one inside the town. But maybe we are demanding since we saw Baalbek. But the visit was worth even because the little pub that is there, face due to the sea. We can only reach it by climbing down a

wall by a wooden ladder. We have never entered a restaurant on such a way. It is a different way! The coffee served real Turkish and to welcome special guests the owner lights the water pipe. And as you see, he has been to Germany, too. In Hamburg.

In the background we can hear the booming of airplanes. It is the Israeli Air Force means Hassan, the Shiit. They can be heard every day. Well, it is time to continue. We have a still a full programm for the rest of the day. On the other side we can leave the pub normal by foot. Immediately, we are offered the transfer to the other ancient ruins at the inner city. By an Mercedes, as old as the hills, that has hardly air in tyres we rock across the streets of Sour. From the entrance we see that this place is more extensive and in a better condition. The most impressive is the Roman triumphal arch and the Hippodrom.

On the way back to the bus station we walk through the streets of the town. A car of the UN-forces with soldiers from the Fidschi Islands passes by, they sound the horn and twave to us. People look at us everywhere. Sure, three European women travelling alone aren't seen here every day. We are friendly asked to take a picture here or there together with them. We feel happy.

Hassan put us in a collecting taxi and still means "perhaps, we meet each other again anywhere in Germany" and again we are on the road to Saida. We sit back on the last row of seats and a young man has no choice and has to sit down between us. All seats are taken. Beate reads a few words to us from the guidebook. Among other things, that in Saida there is the largest Palestinian refugee camp of the whole Lebanon. Suddenly our fellow asks: "...what did she say about Palestineans....?" I translate for him. He responds "...I am a Palestinean..." Together with his brothers he has a jeweller's store in the Old Town of Saida. And he offers to show us the way to the sights of the town. We accept with thanks. There is always someone accompanying us and who tells us about his town and his beautiful country. Afterwards Khaled, so is his name, introduces us to his brothers and shows the store. Gitti finds her longed for Rado-watch. Exactly the one that she even had selected in Beirut. But there it was an original. Because this one is a copy it is to afford for 33 US\$. After closing the deal we get a coffee at the expense of the house as it belongs to the Arabic business life.

Khaled and his elder brother Mohammed guide us through the cramped lanes of the Old Town which are mostly roofed. They show us the places where to buy the most delicious sweet things. We pass by the fish market that is easily to smell.

At the fort of the crusader times Mohammed says goog-bye because he has to go back to the store. But Khaled will accompany us.

The landmark of Saida was built by the crusaders as fortress in the years 1227/28. From the fort you have a wonderful view overlooking the whole town, the port and the surrounding hills. Since things are not as extravagant restored as here in Germany you have the chance to see them like they were in the past. And again we feel to have stepped back in those days.

In the near Government Resthouse we invite Khaled for a coffee. We read in a guidebook that stopping off here is a good idea because "...by the way, for reasonable prices because subsidized..."

Unfortunately, we can't certify. Nowhere we have paid a more expensive bill. For one coke, one orange juice and two coffees we had to pay 12 US\$! Khaled takes us to the bus station where the collecting taxis to Beirut start. And bye!

Again we get into a gigantic traffic jam. But because our driver rides the car as if he was mad, we are faster than most of the other ones. Finally, one more short cut through the narrowest side streets of Beirut. They are equipped with deep potholes. We are thrown back and forth. The disastrous driving we are a bit worried about our health. We are really glad to have stopped and we are still as fit as a fiddle. From Dora, where we are now, we know the way to the Raouche.

The rest of the night we are going to spend in our favourite local. For a last time enjoying the Lebanese Kitchen.

Fadl, who helped me through the tangle of the airport offices to get my case as quickly as possible, comes to our table and sit down. We chat about this and that, the adventures we had in the last days in the country, talk about cars and Germany...

Of course, he will take us to the airport. Nothing makes change his mind, nor the fact that we have already booked our transfer. Then just let the driver bring the luggage to the airport. O.k., we are persuaded. We think

that it is nice of him because with a detour he shows some more interesting things of the town. At the airport he hand over us to his friend George. Fadl says good bye.

Lebanon 16.10.-22.10.1999

Friday, 22.10.1999 Return flight

But before checking-in our luggage we want to make ready for Germany. That means taking off the summer clothes and put on warm shirts and jackets.

After the check-in we are in the transit lounge waiting for our plane to Bucharest. We are a bit sad about departing today and one more think about our eventful time. We ´d like to stay a bit longer but in Germany the daily routine is calling. Terrible.

About twenty passengers are inside the Boing 737 who fly with us to Romania. The turbulences during the flight don ´t bother us too much. But it is enough to make us sick when we see the weather in Bucharest. Rain and fog with +3°C. Is it to prepare for Germany? How will the weather be there? We have enough time, about four hours, to think about it. Our plan to Berlin is expected at 9.00 a.m. The turboprop of the Taron is in time.

After almost three hours we arrive Berlin. Sunshine, a few thin clouds and +8°C give as a better feeling.

#9 - Sudan

Sally deFina - 21 August 2001

By the time we reached Gondar in Ethiopia, we had heard so many awful stories about the road between Ethiopia and Sudan in Addis that we were dreading the trip. Our first story came from a Polish couple that we met on the street in Addis Ababa. We listened in awe as they told us of their week-long trip through the border area from Sudan to Ethiopia.

"We started off hitching a ride in a Land Rover....but after one day we turned back to Gedaref because we got stuck too many times and the driver decided to wait to make the trip." The couple then hitched a ride on a lorry with twenty or so other people, and proceeded to get stuck about three times over the course of two days. On the third morning, they woke up to rain, so the lorry driver decided he was not going to continue. Since the border was supposedly 11 kilometers away, they decided to put on their backpacks and hike the rest of the way. After hiking in mud up to their knees for about 10 hours, they finally reached the border - exhausted.

"Do you think we will be able to make it in our Land Rover?" we asked. "Not a chance" came the reply. "The ruts that the trucks make through the mud are way too wide for a Land Rover....you'll get stuck for sure." Crap. Frantically, we sat down with our maps and Lonely Planet Guide to see if we could find our way around this area. Unfortunately, all roads to Eritrea were closed due to the war. We could get to Djibouti from Ethiopia, but according to LP, renewed rebel activity in the north made the travel on the road between Djibouti and Eritrea "inadvisable". Additionally, getting Max on a boat in Djibouti to sail around Eritrea to Egypt was nearly impossible. The only way around Sudan appeared to be to backtrack to Kenya and ship Max to Egypt. Our prospects did not look good.

Luckily, we met a Dutch couple in the Hilton who had just passed from Sudan to Ethiopia in their Land Rover Ambulance. They were in the Hilton for the same reason we were - to try and get money by paying for guests with our credit cards and receiving cash in return. The fact that they were able to push their way through the mud of Sudan offered us hope, but their story was distressing nevertheless....

"How long did it take you to get through?" we asked.

"Oh, about a week."

"How many times did you get stuck?"

"Oh, about twenty times....but it was kind of fun! Eventually someone came along and pulled us out when we were really stuck. One day we went only 40 kilometers the entire day!" Their enthusiasm did little to lighten our spirits. Jeff turned to us with a worried look on his face and said, "We need sand ladders". "Sand ladders? What the heck are they?" Well, when a car gets up to its door in mud you dig under a wheel and place this metal ramp called a "sand ladder" under the wheel so you can just drive on out. It sounded too good to be true, but if Jeff needed some peace of mind then sand mats were what we would buy. So we went off to the market in Addis to find some cheap ones. After finally finding some (and using \$100 of our precious cash to buy them), and picking up Viktor (our first hitchhiker) in our Addis hotel, we set off to see some sights of Ethiopia and try our luck at the Sudan crossing.

In Gondar, we were greeted with good news from two Swiss boys who had just come across the border in their Toyota Land Cruiser. They took only three days to cross, and got stuck only three times. "How did you do it?" we asked incredulously. Apparently there had been no rain for two days before they crossed, and they went in a convoy with four other cars. They were locals that knew when to go off-roading to avoid the points when the main road was unpassable. This was good news.

After a week trying to avoid the endless squeals of "money, money, money, money," from children, and searching in vain for a hot shower and

good food (anything but spaghetti, omelet, fish "cutelet", or Ethiopian injera) we were ready to go.

"Jeff - GET ME OUT OF ETHIOPIA!" I exclaimed.

"Ok - lets go tomorrow." Hooraaaaaay!

We picked up another hitchhiker called Mark from Philadelphia, and we were off.

The road in Ethiopia to the border was spotty. There were many deep patches of mud, but Jeff managed to plow through to the border without getting stuck once. After camping at the border, hiding our electronic equipment and going through the bureaucracy of Sudanese customs, and having a wonderful breakfast of Sudanese fuul (finally real food!) we set off for what was reportably the "bad" part of the crossing.

Our day consisted of stopping the Land Rover every few kilometers so that Jeff could evaluate the passable route through the mud, then Jeff backing up and running at the chosen path at full speed for momentum. Needless to say, the ride was not an enjoyable one. More often than not, all of us disembarked (save Jeff) and walked through the mud to make the truck lighter - and because staying in the truck would have tossed us around like salad. By the end of the day, the inside of the truck looked like a tornado had hit it. All of our possessions were thrown about the truck and there was mud everywhere (inside the truck, on our clothes, in our ears..) We had lost a headlight, dented the carriage underneath, and managed to pick up a squeak in our front right wheel, but we had made it through to Gedaref in one piece and managed to get stuck only twice. The first time, we were pulled out by the local villagers and our tow rope, and the second time by a large truck and our tow rope. We also pulled out to large lorries with our tow rope. We didn't use our sand ladders once. Oh well.

In Gedaref, we were greeted with true Sudanese hospitality - a Land Rover Discovery started trailing us in town and flashing its lights at us.

Tentatively, we pulled over. Two guys jumped out of the Discovery with cameras and wanted to take our picture. "Hi - we are Land Rover dealers in Khartoum. How can we assist you?". "Well we are going to Khartoum".

"Stay in Gedaref and we will drive with you to Khartoum tomorrow. We will pay for the hotel." Wow. Yassir and Mohammed took us to their hotel, fed us dinner, took us to the police to register the next morning, drove us the 5 hours to Khartoum, took us to Yassir's home, fed us again, drove around helping us to find a hotel, then took Jeff to the Land Rover repair shop the next day (to fix Max's undercarriage).

Everyone in Sudan is absolutely wonderful. Everyone wants to help us. People let us use their phones - free of charge. People give us soft drinks - free. People ask us - "First time to Sudan? Welcome". We have people cheering us as they drive next to us in our Land Rover! We have Middle Eastern food - Shawerma and Hummous and grilled meats! Everyone is soooo nice! And this is totally contrary to the warnings we received from our embassies in Ethiopia ("we strongly advise you not to go there"). Life is good! There is just one problem - money. We can't get any (no credit cards and no Western Union).

Crap. We count our money.....just enough to last one week. So, we have to get to Egypt in a hurry. Too bad, because Sudan is really starting to grow on me.

<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~mert1182/trip2.html>

SEARCHING FOR A BIHAC ADVENTURES IN CROATIA AND BOSNIA- HERZEGOVINA

by JOSH CHAFETZ, 17th Grade

(Click on photos to see them enlarged)

View of the Split harbor from the cathedral belltower.

Jason, with part of Dubrovnik's old city in the background.

Jason and Jackie, atop the old city's walls in Dubrovnik.

Jason, Jackie, and me inside Dubrovnik's old city.

A view of Dubrovnik's old city from a boat on the way to the island.

The new, temporary bridge in Mostar, with what's left of the *Stari Most* behind it.

The problem, unanticipated at the time, with writing my travelogue of the [Spain and Morocco trip](#) was that it created an expectation of a similar dispatch from future trips. So, despite a looming Qualifying Exam and other assorted boogeymen, here you are. Enjoy. ...

This time, we started off at a slightly more reasonable hour. Jackie Newmyer, Jason Wasfy and I met at the Queen's Lane bus stop at 6:50 am (I said a *more* reasonable hour, not a reasonable one) in order to get to Gatwick for our 10:45 am flight to Zagreb. We were fortunate enough to have, as our bus driver, the most dour man I have ever met. He harumphed at us for not knowing which terminal our flight left from (hey, he goes to the airport for a living -- isn't knowing things like that *his* job?), and our relationship went downhill from there. Still, we managed to disembark at the right terminal just before 9 am, get checked in, and have some breakfast. (I, in a fit of patriotism -- and continuing my habit of having disgustingly large breakfasts at airports -- had the American breakfast: pancakes, sausages, eggs, potatoes, coffee, juice, and possibly a few other things that I've since blocked from memory).

The vast majority of the flight itself was relatively uneventful. Until the end. When the plane was maybe a minute from landing, we suddenly hit turbulence. Normally, turbulence doesn't scare me, but when you're close enough to the ground that one good bump could send you into said ground, it suddenly takes on a somewhat scarier dimension. From where I was sitting, I could see that the wings are gently flapping -- not something I particularly needed to see. Then, when we were about 20 seconds from landing, the plane suddenly got pushed down, hard. The pilot then gunned the engine, and we touched down just after getting over the edge of the

runway. I've never heard a pilot sound so relieved as when he came over the loudspeaker and gave the "Welcome to Zagreb" spiel.

The first thing we noticed about Zagreb was that it was significantly colder than Oxford, and just as cloudy. We cheered ourselves with the thought that the coast was sure to have completely different weather patterns. After we went through passport control, got our bags, and withdrew some kuna from the airport ATM, we got on a bus which took us to the Zagreb bus station. As we were passing through the outskirts of the city, I got my first first-hand taste of Communist architecture, in the form of massive block apartments. It blew me away because it so perfectly meshed with everything I understand Communism to have been: oppressive, dehumanizing, monolithic, conformist, and ugly. But it was also interesting to look at the new buildings -- if anything, they were flashier than what you would normally see in the States. The new buildings used a lot of glass, a lot of shiny metallic surfaces, a lot of bright colors, and almost no visible concrete. It was interesting to see them working so hard architecturally to produce an antidote to their past.

According to our map, the bus station was within a few blocks of the train station, which was where we wanted to be. This was manifestly untrue. After walking around for 20 minutes or so, we flagged down some guys roughly our age in a car and asked them where the train station was (we think they stopped because they thought Jackie was cute, but we're not sure). After trying to explain to us how to get there for a few minutes, they finally just told us to get in the car and they'd drive us there. We took them up on the offer because (a) it was cold outside, (b) there were three of us and only two of them, and (c) they had stuffed animals in their car -- people with stuffed animals in their car just don't kidnap hitchhikers. (Okay, this last piece of reasoning, which was my own, was roundly mocked by Jackie and Jason. But, hey, they got in the car, too!)

Anyway, they very nicely drove us to the train station, where we proceeded to spend a ridiculously long amount of time trying to find the ticket counter. You would think that it would be relatively easy to find the ticket counter in a train station. Half an hour later, we finally found one, and a few minutes after that, we had reserved a sleeping compartment for the overnight train to Split, a town roughly halfway down the Dalmatian Coast. As we were buying our tickets and leaving our luggage in storage, it started snowing outside (!!), and as we were walking out of the building, my shoelace broke.

Now, this wasn't exactly a major tragedy, but it was something of an annoyance, as it meant that one of my shoes was now flopping off my foot every time I took a step. But what made it especially annoying was this: the Croatians are more obsessed with footwear than any people on this planet. I infer this from the fact that roughly one out of every three storefronts in every Croatian town we visited was a shoestore (fans of Douglas Adams will recognize that this puts the Croatians well beyond the Shoe Event Horizon). But have I mentioned yet that we arrived on Palm Sunday? So, shoes flopping off my feet, I walked past closed shoe store after closed shoe store after closed shoe store. Sigh.

But we didn't walk around *too* long, because, as mentioned above, it was damned cold out (especially given that we were dressed for what we hoped would be the much nicer weather along the coast). After buying the best sausages we'd ever had from a stand near the center of town (and, no, I do not want to know what was in the sausage, thank you very much), we settled into a nice, warm cafe and got some coffee. Before we left the cafe, Jackie and I had to go to the bathroom, which is when we discovered that Croatia works on what might be called a "pay as you go" system. The women who clean the bathrooms sit outside and take money as you go in. The usual cost is between 2 and 4 kuna (between 25 and 50 cents). Unfortunately, neither of us had any small change on us, and we weren't about to leave her with a 200 kuna note. She very kindly let us use the bathrooms anyway, and we came back and paid her after getting the change

from our cafe bill. You would think that the lesson of this incident -- keep some small change on you at all times -- would be one that we would only have to learn once. And yet somehow, throughout the trip, we never seemed to have change on us when we needed it.

After leaving the cafe, we went to Zagreb's beautiful cathedral, where we saw about half an hour of a truly beautiful and wonderful Palm Sunday service. Listening to the service in Croatian made me think of what listening to Catholic services must have been like before Vatican II. In some ways, there's something more mystical, more powerful, about knowing that holy words are being spoken when you cannot understand them. It leaves you alone with your thoughts while simultaneously sanctifying those thoughts and turning them towards the divine.

In any case, upon leaving the cathedral, we found a nice place to have dinner, including our first taste of Croatian wine. The vineyards, which are everywhere along the coast, make pretty good red wine (the best is the Dingac), and in Croatia, it's incredibly cheap.

After dinner, we headed back to the train station for our overnight to Split. When we awoke in the morning, the sun was shining in through the curtains of our cabin, and we pulled back the curtains to see a perfectly clear, blue sky above and a perfectly clear, blue Adriatic below. The train was stopped. We knew that Split was the last stop, and we thought that it was also the first stop on the Adriatic, so we slowly pulled our stuff together. We were just about to get off the train when it started pulling away. Split was, in fact, not the first stop on the Adriatic, and we still had about another hour to go. Oops. As the train went along, we opened the windows, and felt the wonderful, warm, fresh, sea air on our faces. After spending months in England, it was heaven.

We arrived in Split about 7 am, and, after trying several hotels that were closed (high season doesn't begin until summer), we finally found one that

was open and checked in. There was a Budget car rental agency in our hotel, and we decided to arrange to rent a car in Split for Friday (it was then Monday morning). The idea was that we would spend a couple of days in Split, then take a bus or ferry to Dubrovnik, spend a couple of days there, then come back to Split, pick up the car, and drive back to Zagreb, stopping along the way at Plitvice Lakes National Park. None of us can drive a manual transmission, but they promised they would have an automatic waiting for us on Friday morning.

After securing the car and (finally!) getting me some shoelaces, we went for a walk around the old city. Much of Split's old city was built on the former fortress and summer residence of the Roman Emperor Diocletian (c. AD 243-316). The cathedral, especially, is interesting: it was originally Diocletian's mausoleum (Diocletian, by the way, was a violent persecutor of Christians). It was later converted to a Catholic cathedral, the oldest cathedral in the world, in fact. It is guarded by a couple of granite Egyptian sphinxes which date to around 15 BC. It also has a really cool belltower that we climbed (for 5 kuna). From the top, we had an amazing view of both the city and the Adriatic. The water along the Dalmatian Coast is the clearest, bluest water I've ever seen, and that comes across even more when you're looking down on it from great height.

The rest of the old city wasn't that special -- most of what was once Diocletian's palace has been built over and isn't really recognizable as being an ancient site. So after we saw the cathedral, we headed back to our hotel for a nap. After a nice, relaxing nap, we headed off in search of a place for dinner. We had a specific place in mind from one of our guidebooks, and it looked to be about 20 minutes away. So, naturally, an hour and many backtrackings later, we still hadn't found the place. But we knew we were close. So we decided to celebrate by stopping in at a bar and getting a drink. The place we chose was an absurd Brazilian-themed bar that looked like it catered exclusively to tourists. But it did have an incredible view of the sea, so we went in. After several minutes of pouring over the extensive mixed drinks menu, we had finally figured out what we wanted. The waiter,

noticing that we looked ready to order, came over and informed us that their bartender wasn't on duty yet, so we couldn't have any of the things we wanted. But if we wanted a shot of something straight, that he could do. Why he hadn't seen fit to inform us of this fact upon presenting us with the extensive mixed drinks menu is anyone's guess. In any case, after Jason decided against having a shot of Jack Daniel's, we left and continued our restaurant search.

We finally found the place a few minutes later, and it was really great. They brought the available fresh fish, on ice, over to our table, we picked one, and they grilled it for us. It was incredible -- we were to enjoy much Adriatic seafood in the coming days. After dinner, we decided to go home by cab, and the cabbie ripped us off more flagrantly than I ever imagined possible. He took us on the grand tour of Split, including one stretch where we went through a *long* tunnel underwater. Now, I know for a fact that we did not have to cross any water in getting to the restaurant, which makes me suspect that the tunnel route, scenic though it was (it also managed to pass through several of Split's nicer suburbs, despite the fact that both our hotel and the restaurant were centrally located), was unnecessary. For what I'd like to think were altruistic reasons, we decided not to argue over the fare.

The next day, we decided to take a ferry to the near-by island of Hvar (pronounced "Hwar"). As Jason reminded us *numerous* times on the 2-hour ferry ride, Hvar was named by *Traveller* magazine as one of the ten most beautiful islands in the world. Once the ferry landed, there were two possible ways to go: towards Stari Grad (the old town) or towards Hvar Town. We wanted to go to Hvar Town, but the only bus for the next hour went to Stari Grad. So we hopped on the bus. And missed the stop for Stari Grad. So we got off at a charming but tiny town a few stops later, and decided to walk the 5 km back to Stari Grad, which I think turned out to be a wonderful idea. The interior of the island was gorgeous, and the lavender growing by the side of the road produced an incredible smell (which must be even stronger in the Spring). We finally made it back to Stari Grad, where we walked around for a bit and then settled in to a cafe for a nice

relaxing soft drink. And we almost missed our bus back to the ferry. (This was after we asked the waitress to call us a taxi back to the ferry. She called what seemed to be the only taxi driver operating on the island (hey, it was off-season), who said, in her words, that "he doesn't want to pick you up because he's on the other side of the island.")

But we did catch the bus, and the ferry ride back was quite amusing. We were sitting in the observation deck a few tables away from an American girl who had just graduated from Georgetown and was traveling the Balkans alone. While on Hvar, she had apparently managed to pick up two 30-something men from Split. These guys were so sketchy that it was absurd -- as if they were playing a game to see which of them could be more a caricature of sketchiness. They told her they were rock musicians. They told her they would be happy to show her around Split. And when one of them said something to the other in Croatian and she asked what he had said, the reply was: "He, uh-hh. Well, he said you are very be-yoo-ti-ful." Jason, Jackie, and I almost fell off our chairs laughing. We didn't get much reading done on that ferry ride (have I mentioned yet that the entire trip, Jackie was reading Saul Bellow and David Miller, Jason was reading John Rawls, and I was reading Michael Sandel? A bunch of nerds, we are ...)

We had hoped to take the ferry from Split to Dubrovnik, but it only runs two days a week in off-season, and neither of those days was convenient. So, the next morning, we hopped on a bus for the 4 and a half ("five! it was five!", Jackie insists in anguished memory) hour bus ride to Dubrovnik. The bus was not only sold out, but it sold standing room, as well. I actually enjoyed the ride -- the whole thing was along the coast, and it was stunningly gorgeous. Jason didn't enjoy the ride so much. Jackie abhorred it. She insisted that she would rather walk back to Split than take that bus again.

By the time we arrived at Dubrovnik and got settled in to our hotel, it was already after dark, but from the bus ride in we could tell it was a beautiful

city. At our hotel, we had our first experience with The No Lady. She was the desk clerk at our hotel, and had an annoying habit of telling us "no," when what she actually meant was "yes." "Do you have a room for three people for two nights?" "No. [long pause] We have only an apartment for three people for two nights." "If we decide to, would it be possible to extend it for a third night?" "No. [pause] Maybe if someone cancels." Confused, but grateful, we headed up to our room and settled in. That night, we had dinner in to the old, walled city (I had a dish consisting of many small fried whole fish, which were delicious but disgusted Jackie and Jason no end).

The next day, we asked at the front desk if there was an internet cafe nearby. "No," we were told. "There's one right down the street." After checking our email (the problem with Croatian keyboards is that they are deceptively similar to English keyboards, except the z and the y are switched. So, unlike with, say, Arabic keyboards (see the [Morocco travelogue](#)), you think you can type quickly, but then you end up typing things like "mz friends are verz biyarre"), we explored the old city, beginning by walking around the perimeter of the whole thing on top of the walls. This was an incredible walk. It not only gave a wonderful view of both the old city and the sea (the old city is right on the water), but it also gave a sense of just how compact the old city is -- the entire perimeter tour was just under 2 km. The place is also a labyrinth -- tiny back alleys lead to more alleys which lead to more alleys, still, and yet, somehow, you're never more than a few hundred meters from where you started. Jason's new mantra, which he repeated many, many, *many* times over the next few days, was, "You guys! This is so charming, don't you think?"

It was also interesting to see the rebuilding. Dubrovnik is surrounded by hills, and in 1991, the Yugoslav army shelled it from those hills. Today, there is almost no sign left of the shelling -- a very few buildings in the old city are still without roofs, but those are all in the process of being repaired. From looking at the rest of the city, you would never know.

Deciding we'd had all the beauty (and charm) we could handle for one day, we decided to go on a tour of every single car rental office in Dubrovnik. Okay, that's not quite true. What we really decided is this: because we didn't want to take the bus back (and Jackie would have missed our flight home if she'd walked), and because the ferry wasn't an option, we wanted to rent a car in Dubrovnik, cancel our reservation in Split, and drive the car from Dubrovnik to Zagreb. But, again, we needed an automatic transmission, and there are apparently only 4 of those in all of Croatia (okay, I made that number up, but that's certainly how it seemed). Finally, after several hours of going from one car rental place to another, we convinced the people at Budget to bring the car we were going to get in Split to Dubrovnik for us.

As we were walking back triumphantly from Budget, we ran into Wes Moore, Luke Bronin, and Sara Galvan (all in my Rhodes class) on the street. This wasn't quite as random as it sounds -- we knew they were in town and had been trying to meet up with them. We agreed to meet that night for dinner. In the interim, they made some new friends -- a family of Americans who had just moved to Zagreb and were traveling the country. They had two kids roughly our age, the older of whom is coming to Oxford next year. Very small world. So the 8 of us -- Luke, Wes, Sara, Jackie, Jason, our two new friends, and I -- had a very nice dinner at a pizza place near our hotel.

The next morning, we asked if there had been a cancelation which would allow us to stay in the hotel one more night. The woman at the desk (not The No Lady) looked confused. She explained to us that we were already signed up to stay another night in the hotel. At this point, having figured out The No Lady's game, we were no longer surprised. So, we headed off to try to explore the religious sites of the old city -- the synagogue (the second oldest Sephardic synagogue in Europe, although it is no longer active), the mosque, the cathedral, and the Church of St. Blasius. And every single one of them except for the church was closed. Sigh. But the church was quite pretty. After that, we decided to take a boat out to Lokrum, the beautiful and

uninhabited island in the city's old harbor. Luke, Wes, and Sara had been there the day before, and they said it was a fun place. We traipsed around the island for a couple of hours, adding to our suntans/burns (bear in mind, we've been living in England since September ... we're not used to this whole sun thing).

We went to bed early that night, in order to pick up our car at 8 am the next morning. We had decided to go back to Zagreb via Bosnia-Herzegovina for three reasons: (1) it's the most direct route, (2) my parents, who had spent time in the Balkans before the wars, recommended that we see Mostar, and (3) Jason wanted to impress women by telling them he'd been in Bosnia. So we drove along the coast until we reached the turn for Mostar, and then headed inland into Bosnia.

The war damage in Bosnia is much more extensive than it is in Croatia. Everywhere, we could see utterly destroyed shells of buildings, and our guidebooks warned us not to venture off of roads because of landmines. We came to Mostar about lunchtime. On almost every block there was at least one destroyed building with a sign in both English and Bosnian that read, "ATTENTION! DANGEROUS RUIN. Access to the ruin and vehicle parking forbidden!" Mostar's name comes from *Mostari*, meaning the keepers of the *Stari Most*, the Old Bridge. The bridge was built in the 16th century, when the city was under Ottoman rule, and it was destroyed in fighting in 1993. It was so completely destroyed that, unless you knew it was supposed to be there, you never would have guessed.

Even so, Mostar remains a charming place. The old town (once you find it - we got lost once or twice or six times) is packed with craftsmen making and selling their wares, one of whom insisted on showing me pictures of all of his friends and relatives who had emigrated to America. He spoke almost no English, but his rapture on the subject of America was eloquent in itself. The SFOR peacekeepers were ubiquitous and heavily armed, but seemed completely at ease, sitting in the cafes and talking with the locals. I got the

feeling that this was a place desperate to move on from its past and that it truly saw American pluralism as a beacon.

We ate lunch in a cafe overlooking where the bridge used to be (it has been replaced with a temporary wooden bridge which gives just a little with each step. Very comforting). After lunch, we got back on the road, and I was driving. Not too long after we left Mostar, we came to Jablanica, where the road splits. One part headed towards Sarajevo, and the other towards Bihac. We wanted to go towards Bihac. Now, the thing you have to appreciate about Bihac is that it is pronounced almost exactly as BEE-yatch. (For those of you over thirty, BEE-yatch is a vogue way of pronouncing a certain derogatory word.) So, since I was driving and Jason was navigating, it was his job to roll down the window and say politely to passers-by, "Excuse me. Bihac?" Jason had to do this several times, because the first few people we stopped didn't speak any English at all. So by the time some nice person told us how to get on the road to Bihac, they were probably wondering why we were all laughing so hard.

One of the important things to know about Bosnia is that it's rather mountainous, which means that the roads are one-lane in each direction, and the curves are frequent enough that one very rarely gets a chance to pass. So, naturally, soon after pulling out of Jablanica, we got stuck behind a tourist bus which had the words "Jerry Trade" written in big letters across the back. We were stuck behind it for about 40 minutes (going about 60 km/hr) before I finally passed.

Soon after that, we came to a small town, and the highway split. I accidentally took the branch that went through town, rather than the branch that went around. No big deal, we thought, they'll surely meet up on the other side of town. It turns out that this was, in fact, the case. But what we hadn't counted on was the fact that, before they met up again, we would have to drive up a mountain on a rock road. I call it a rock road because calling it a "dirt road" would imply a far smoother ride than we actually had.

This road consisted of rocks about the size of a human head (only sharper), sticking out of the ground to various degrees. I suspect the vast majority of the road's traffic consists of goats. We would occasionally pass people on the road (now we're going about 15 km/hr, by the way), and they would turn and stare at us with a look that said, "Why are these idiots driving on our goat path?" Finally, Jason -- for some reason, Jason always gets stuck with these tasks -- got out of the car and asked if the goat path would take us to Bihac. When they stopped laughing at us, they told us that it would. So, after another half hour or so, we finally get to the top of the mountain, where we meet up with the highway. Relieved to be back on the open road again, I gun it. Fifteen minutes later, looming ahead, I see big red letters that read, "Jerry Trade."

We finally pass the bus again, about half an hour and much cursing later. We soon get out of the mountains, and are driving through plains. Here, the devastation of the war is even more evident. Houses in the middle of nowhere have been completely bombed out. Even the houses that are still inhabited sport countless holes. At one point, we drive past a refugee camp - - the sign calls it a Center for Relocated Persons, or something like that -- as if euphemisms could possibly be of any comfort to its inhabitants. Even with the atrocities over, it seems that so many buildings have been destroyed as to force people to continue living in the camps.

After a while, we stop for gas, and Jason takes the wheel again. Pretty soon we pass into the Republica Srpska (Bosnia is a federal state, divided into the Muslim-Croat Federation and the Republic Srpska, which, as the name suggests, is Serb dominated). At the border crossing, we see the Jerry Trade bus, off to the side. We rejoice as we speed past.

The problem with being in Srpska is that Serbian uses a Cyrillic alphabet, and our map is printed in a Roman alphabet. This made reading roadsigns *tons* of fun. Luckily, we're only passing through a finger of Srpska, and we pass back into Muslim-Croat territory pretty quickly, having successfully

navigated despite the Cyrillic road signs. After several more hours and another mountain range, we finally arrive in Bihac, with appropriately immature banter about its name. Bihac is only about 20 km from the Croatian border, but we managed to get lost again, including a trip down a dirt road. When we finally did figure out where the turn for Croatia was, we realized what the problem had been: there was no sign. For some reason, a border town had decided that a sign pointing to the border simply wasn't necessary. Bizarre.

So we get to the border and pull up to the booth. The nice man looks at our passports, stamps them, and waves us through. Jason drives away. As he's picking up speed, we hear someone yell something, and Jason suddenly slams on the breaks, puts the car in reverse, and backs up to the *second* booth, which is, apparently, the customs booth. This booth has the lights off, and it seems to me we could be excused for thinking that it had nothing to do with us. But I guess it's good we went back -- I wouldn't want to be arrested as an illegal immigrant into Croatia. Anyway, the guy at the second booth is now peeved at us, so he takes his time studying our passports. Then he makes us open the trunk, and he cursorily looks through Jason's bag, just to show that he can. *Now* we can go on our way.

It's now about 7:30 pm, which means we've given up on our hope of seeing Plitvice Lakes National Park (which closes at 7:00), so I drive the last couple of hours to Zagreb, with a stop in between for dinner. Our car is due at 8 am the next morning, so we decide to see if we can return it that night and sleep in the next morning. We stop at the Zagreb airport on the way into Zagreb, but they're closed. So we decide to drive to the Sheraton, where the other Budget office is located. Driving in Zagreb is an interesting experience for several reasons. First, we have no map of the city, and, it being 11:00 PM the night before Easter Sunday, there is no one around to sell us one. Second, central Zagreb has a trolley system, and I've never driven in a street with trolleys. Apparently, the way it works is that the trolleys *going both ways* stay on the right side of the street, and cars stay on the left. I found this out because I was on the right side of the street and

found trolleys coming at me from both directions. A collision was only narrowly avoided.

We finally made it to the Sheraton, and, although that office was closed, too, the hotel concierge took the keys and assured us that he would give them to the Budget office the next morning. Since I haven't yet heard about Jason's credit card being charged for the price of a car, I assume he kept his word. We found a somewhat cheaper hotel nearby and went right to sleep.

The next morning, we had Easter brunch at the Sheraton and then headed off to the airport. We checked in, looked around the duty-free shops, and then went to the cafe for some drinks. About 50 minutes before our flight, we leisurely headed towards our gate, at which point the airline employee said, "Are you going to London?" "Yes." "Run!" Then she got on her walkie-talkie and told them *not* to take our bags off the plane. It seems that March 31 (Easter Sunday) was the day that Europeans change to daylight saving time. We were, in fact, 10 minutes late for our flight, not 50 minutes early. Fortunately, the plane was still there, our luggage was still on it, and the animus of the other passengers was short-lived.

So, we made it back just fine. And now, it's time to study for our Qualifying Exam. Where's my copy of Sandel, again? ...

Jackie and Jason on the charming island of Hvar.

Jason, me, and the Adriatic, in Dubrovnik.

Jackie and Jason, on the Dubrovnik old city walls, overlooking the old harbor, with the island in the background.

A look out over Dubrovnik's old city, with the island in the background.

Jackie and Jason, in front of one of Mostar's many bombed out buildings (or "dangerous ruins" as the signs call them).

A mosque in Mostar, overlooking the river.

An SFOR (international peacekeeping) bus at the Zagreb airport.

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<http://www.virtualtourist.com/m/3c3eb/f9b/>

Trip to Somalia

by **Adam911** - last update: Jul 3, 2003

[Send Picture as a PostCard.](#)

Calmadow, Sanaag, Puntland

Exotic Land

Hello,

I went to Northern Somalia(Somaliland/Puntland) in Summer 2000. Travelled by plane from New York to Addis Ababa on Ethiopian Airlines, then took a flight from Addis Ababa to Hargeisa. Daallo Airlines now has flights from Amsterdam/Paris/London to the Horn of Africa. After arriving to my arrival I stayed at Local Hotels in Hargeisa. I also travelled by Rental Car to The cities of Berbera(nice beaches), Amoud, and Burao which were all very beautiful cities. I also took a flight to Calmadow in Sanaag Region, Which is known for its beautiful green mountains and beautiful scenery. I also travelled to the port city of Bosaso in the North East, which was a bustling commercial city now, Galkacyo, and LaasCanood. All and all a very incredible trip. I expect to be returning in 2003 for a longer stay. I would suggest against going to Southern Somalia because it is still too dangerous for tourists. But I would recommend going to Northern Somalia for an adventurous venture. Good Luck to All!

Included is a picture of Calmadow Region.

<http://www.sue-jeri.demon.co.uk/angola.htm>

ANGOLA - A LAND OF UNEXPLORED ANGLING POTENTIALS

SOUTH ANGOLA - FLAMINGO LODGE

FLAMINGO LODGE 70km South of Namib, Angola, is surrounded by dunes and rock outcrops, and the warm waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Flamingo Lodge is owned by Rico Sako (a former South African now permanently resident in Angola) and all trips can be arranged solely through Sense of Africa.

Flying into Windhoek, capital of Namibia via Air Namibia, the only airline to fly direct (via Frankfurt) takes some 10 hours, we opted to drive to Walvis Bay. This enabled us to experience some of the most amazing desert landscapes to be found. The flat savannah land, high mountains to the rolling dunes of the Namib desert.

To break our journey, we spent one night at the Sossusvlei Lodge, at the edge of Namib desert.

Flying from Walvis Bay International to Namib in Angola, and then onward to Flamingo Lodge by 4x4. The low level flight with Wings over Africa in a Cessna 210, takes you along a coastal route of unimaginable magnitude and spectacular scenery.

The thundering surf of the breaking rollers foaming onto the beach, high dunes of the Skeleton Coast, flocks of vibrating pink Flamingos feeding in the lagoons, seals and cormorants all diving and darting after bait fish shoaling just yards from the hot sands of the desert. Hammerhead Sharks cruising the shallows of the shore line in Tigres Bay, turtles heading to the shore to lay their eggs and dolphins leaping.

The boarder between Namibia and Angola is the Kunene River a small oasis of lush green vegetation in the arid desert. Seeing Crocodiles swimming and herds of Oryx on the islands gives you some idea of the diversity of the wild life in this region. At the Kunene River there is another Lodge and excellent fishing at the river mouth and shore line for large Kob (80kg+).

Next stop the small airport just south of Namib, passing through immigration was no problem as Sense of Africa had made all the necessary arrangements in Namibia for our visas. Passports are returned to you once you leave Angola.

On landing we were introduced to Eddie and driven via 4x4 Land Cruiser, some 70km south over high sided sand dunes and rocky outcrops or the dry river bed of the Flamingo River. Shortly you round a headland and catch first sight of the Lodge, our home for the next 4 days. We had the bungalow in the far right of the picture above, and woke every morning to the sound of the gentle surf, wondering whether it would be a day afloat or ashore.

All the Lodge bungalows have hot and cold running water, shower and toilet facilities and sleep 4 people. We had a bungalow to ourselves, and there was more than enough room for 4 anglers. The Lodge has 240 volt electricity via a generator, and this provides all light in the evenings. The out of the way nature of the Lodge doesn't mean that it is without facilities; the kitchen area is a marvel with fridges, freezer, gas cookers and an informal dining room; all in the communal bungalow - complete with a bar.

Unpack, change and an hour later you are fishing. Beach fishing species include Kob - this is Jeri fighting a good Kob in the surf. Garrick, Blue Fish and various sharks, including large Copper Sharks, (Bronzies to the locals) which can go in excess of 300lb. Anglers are known to catch up to 8 a day of these powerful masters of the ocean.

Jaco Visser with 38lb Kob

Jeri Drake with Blue Fish

Boat fishing is in its infancy and we trolled from a 18ft rhib just beyond the breakers, or you can anchor and fish with baits. The sport is hectic with Blue fish, Blacktail,

Garrick and Kob to name but just a few. Anchor for sharks and you are now in for some serious arm bending experience.

Sue with Dusky Grouper

Flamingo Lodge is surrounded by a high sandstone spit which forms a sheltered bay of warm sea. The lodge provides an ideal base for exploring the areas both north and south, and is accessed by 4x4 Toyota Landcruisers driven across dunes, dried river beds and the beach. The fishing zone from the shore is basically where the desert meets the Atlantic Ocean, and the general area of operations is 25 miles in either direction. Shore fishing marks were determined by water colour and presence of huge bait shoals of large Mullet. Our guide and Lodge Manager during our stay was Eddie, we never did get his surname; and he excelled in both these capacities.

The shoreline provides ready access to a wide range of species which are sought with either static baits or lures, they are so close that fly fishing from the shore is a very viable proposition. The Lodge provides all shore and boat angling tackle, though you would have to bring your own fly fishing tackle and lures. For dedicated shore anglers we would suggest some practice before your trip with long rods (14ft) and reels in the 'low' position, as this is the type of tackle provided. For those venturing to the shore that cannot cast well (like us), Eddie will cast for you - most embarrassing.

Jako Visser fighting Kob Jeri with small Kob The local landmark to 'Kob country'

For the more dedicated boat angler the biggest problem is getting away from the 'back line'! Such is the abundance of species and fish, that this is a very real problem. The Lodge has three boats and in settled periods the 22ft catamaran is kept on a mooring in the bay in front of the Lodge, accessed by the smaller rhib launched through the surf. During our stay the weather was not quite as settled, and we used the larger rhib (18ft) for our trip along the 'back line'. The larger rhib is also used for the fly fishing folk going afloat, wishing better access to the predators in the 'back line', like Blue Fish and Garrick. The potential of the offshore waters is barely scratched, and we would certainly recommend anybody interested in exploratory angling to

take this opportunity. We will be returning to sample some of the blue water fishing off Flamingo Lodge.

During our stay we were offered by Rico Sako a trip out north of Namib, and this involved the rhib being towed along the dry river bed and main road (tarmac) some 60 miles to his house in the town. Following breakfast we launched in the bay in which the town is situated and headed north along a coastline that hasn't seen any angling for 30 years. The small amount of artisanal fishing will never make an impact on the vast schools of fish that we found during our short trip that day. We were now heading into almost totally virgin waters for the salt water sea angler. Crystal clear waters so alive and unexploited that we were almost at a loss of what to try first. Rico suggested that a suitable starting point would be to rig with large Rapalas and take it from there - he must have had inside information, as not 5 minutes after we started trolling Sue was into the first of very many fish that day. We had barely travelled 20 minutes up this rugged coastline, just 200 yards from the cliffs and we had sampled 5 different species from large 20lb Dusky Perch to 10lb Blue Fish.

Rico followed the shoreline for some 14 miles north the landscape was replaced by high sided canyons leading to beaches and coves of golden sand, and high rocky outcrops protruding over virgin waters. Here we started to experiment a little, trolling 6" and 8" rapalas, (deep running), 4" Halkos (mid water) and 5" Shatani lures (surface running) we caught some 14 different species in 4 hours. During this brief half day afloat we had over 45 fish, and most were into double figures; all within 600 yards of the shore! And that was under conditions that our hosts declared to being poor!!!

Large quantities of bait fish, Mullet could be seen shoaling along the surf line and rolling in the backs of the breakers, seeing these from the boat is an amazing site, especially as some of the shoals probably numbered 5,000 fish. The quantity of bait fish and other fish species in the area is due to the nutrient rich waters coming up from the south, which are cool, meeting the warmer tropical waters off Angola. At one location, the term 'Wreck fishing' took on a whole new meaning! The wreck on the beach coincided with small ribbon of reef and another huge concentration of Mullet. This

particular mark saw all three rods keel over, as Blue Fish virtually jumped in the boat, and it was here that we caught our Puffer Fish. On rounding the next headland further schools of Mullet were being shadowed by Atlantic Bonito, in numbers that caused problems with them being foul hooked in the tail. Fighting these small but feisty Tunas when hooked in the tail certainly led to some entertaining angling.

Lunch was to be on a secluded golden sanded bay, after having beached the rhib, surrounded by huge overhanging canyon cliffs. Just on arrival in the bay, and trolling along the backline, Sue's lure started to pop out of the water; symptomatic of weed on the hook. This was followed by a very acrobatic strike from a Garrick (Leerfish). To say that the fish was strong would be an understatement! This species of surf dweller certainly could fight. 20 minutes later the 18lb beast was in the boat, and destined for the barbeque. During this stop over the shore anglers of our crew (Jako and Rico) tried their hand at spinning for Garrick. Lunch had, we re-launched the rhib to take us back down the coast to the retrieve point. It was an experience to be believed. Boat fishing at the present time in Angola is a completely hands-on experience, you all help to launch the rhib through the surf counting the incoming swell to ensure a smooth take off.

A quick spin around the most northern headland of our trip and Jako hooked into a small Amberjack, and following the troll back across the bay, Kob and Pargo were hooked and landed. The majority of the fish were kept, as they are prime supplement to the local diet; the fish were never wasted.

The winds increase in the afternoons in Angola and this reduces the amount of time on the water. The rhib was retrieved in a much larger bay and was then towed through the rocky canyons and gorges back to Namib. This was a driving experience as at times the road was only as wide as the Land Cruiser and trailer, which almost sheer drops on one side and the high canyon walls on the other, through tight and narrow twists and turns before reaching the main tarmac road.

Night fishing is also prolific providing Guitar Sharks - Jako Visser with his night caught Sand Shark from the beach. At Flamingo Lodge, once the sun sets and you fish just yards from your bunaglow the Land Cruiser head lights are all you need to be able to play your fish through the surf, and for the crew to follow you should you hook up to a big one.

Serious boat fishing has not really taken place at Flamingo Lodge, although they do have 22ft ski boat available. There is the potential offshore of large Yellow Fin Tuna, Sailfish and possibly Marlin together with Broadbill Swordfish. A whole new era of sea angling is awaiting to be opened.

Rico Sako has plans for two others Lodges within Angola, one at the Kwanza River some 50km south of Luanda and the other at the Longa River 80km from Porto Biome. Potential here is for world record Tarpon, as they have not been fished for for some 20 years or more and are expecting fish well over 200lb+ from either the boat or shore. Threadfin and Kingfish are also both available. The potential of this under exploited land is tremendous, and requires an adventurous type of angler to develop the region.

All trips to Angola are available through Sense of Africa

There has been no trouble in Angola since 1978 and we found that there is no crime rate. In the 5 days that we stayed at Flamingo Lodge we only saw one gun, which was being carried by a local policeman walking along the beach from Tombua to Namib (some 130km) to collect water!

It is advisable to take tropical diseases measures and the best times to go to Angola are between October and March, so the next time you want to spend Christmas on the beach catching, try Angola, and have one of the best angling experiences of a life time.

[Home Page](#)

[Go to Namibia](#)

UK Angler's Sharks
visitors since 19.12.01.

Kenya by Labonniecuisine:

<http://www.epinions.com/trvl-review-543A-51EDD4-39132A78-prod2>

Safari Packing Tips

May 05 '00 (Updated May 05 '00)

Author's Product Rating

Pros

This should make it easier

Cons

??

Full Review

When we decided to take our children to Kenya on a safari, the most daunting task for me was packing. Even though I had the suggested packing list from the tour company, it was still an overwhelming task. Since returning, I have compiled a packing list that I believe works for a 2 week safari to Africa. This following list is what I recommend for each person:

- 3 pair of long pants (khaki colored ones)
- 2 pair of shorts
- 3 long sleeve T-shirts
- 4 short sleeve T-shirts
- 2 polar-tec type sweat shirts
- 1 pair of tennis shoes just for the game drives
- 1 pair of other everyday shoes
- 1 pair of nicer shoes for dinner
- 1 bathing suit (only the kids put theirs on)
- 2 nicer outfits for dinner (The LL Bean travel clothes would be perfect for women, and for

men, just a nice pair of khaki pants and a polo type shirt.)

1 back pack

1 fanny pack

Kleenex (Small packets for the obvious and when you might not find toilet paper.)

Bags of hard candy (It gets very dusty on the game drives and although they supply bottled water, there is NO PLACE to go to the bathroom, if you catch my drift)

packets of anti-bacterial wet wipes

camera with zoom lens

lots of film (we brought 48 rolls for the family and actually used 30)

extra camera batteries

small pair of binoculars

Sunscreen

30% deet insect repellent

Cipro (Very important! Have your MD prescribe it for traveler's diarrhea)

Dramamine (Those roads are rough!)

Shower thongs

A flashlight

Safari hat (If your tour company doesn't give you one, you can buy a great one there.)

In case you are wondering, we did have our laundry done at some of the game lodges along the way. It's best to do that when you are spending at least 2 nights someplace. It was not that expensive and they

did a very nice job!

We visited a Masai School so brought pens and pencils to leave for the children. They were very well received, except I think that they could use books more. They want them in English, so any kind of young reader "chapter" book would be what I will bring when I go back. Used ones are fine.

Also, when we visited one of the villages, my boys left their athletic shoes with the host elder to give to the children that could use them. We noticed that more than half of the kids didn't have any shoes.

As hard as this is, please do not give in to children begging. You will see this everywhere in the cities and towns. It accomplishes nothing except encourages them to beg more! It's heart breaking, but you just have to resist. There are many ways to make a difference in Africa and this is not one of them.

My last piece of advice, if you find that you have to go through Nairobi, is be very careful there! Nairobi is not like the rest of Kenya, and there is much crime. Keep your car windows closed, no matter how hot it is and your doors locked as you ride through town. Two people that we met had things stolen right out of their vehicle as they were slowed in traffic. Someone just reached right in the window and poof.....purse gone! A kid had his baseball cap taken right off his head, too.

I hope that this will help you with the packing dilemma. For us, this trip was a life changing experience and we can't wait to return. Now, I'll have a little less to be worried about and I hope you will too. Do have a safe and wonderful safari.....

Labonnecuisine

Yemen by Tim:

<http://www.al-bab.com/yemen/trav/morris.htm>

GOING TO EXTREMES

Despite official warnings, [TIM MORRIS](#) took his family to Yemen for a holiday. They not only survived but came back impressed by Yemeni hospitality.

GRANDPARENTS were aghast when we said we were taking our children (aged six, nine and 11) on holiday to Yemen. They recalled the deaths of the four tourists in December 1998 and pointed to the stark Foreign Office advice that this remote corner of Arabia is as dangerous as Somalia, Afghanistan or Chechnya.

Remembering the four years we had spent in Yemen in the early 1980s, we were sure no harm awaited us. Nevertheless, in search of reassurance, I emailed an acquaintance in Sana'a but failed to get a reply. Eventually, the reason became apparent - she had been kidnapped.

Fortunately, as with other "traditional" Yemeni kidnappings, all was speedily resolved. "Hostages" generally enjoy the hospitality offered them, call home on satellite phones and usually receive a parting gift. The tribesmen from the fringes of the Empty Quarter who carry out these publicity stunts get the clinic, school or whatever else they feel the central government has been remiss in supplying.

The children's surprise at the large number of armed soldiers at Sana'a airport gave way to astonishment as we drove into the medieval old city. A lone passer-by, delayed on his way to bed after the all-night bustle of Ramadan, insisted on accompanying us to the door.

We rang the bell and, far above us, our host pulled the cord that shot the bolt of his ancient wooden door.

Downing rucksacks, the children raced up the narrow staircase of the eight-storey house, relishing the breathlessness induced by the rarefied air. Three pleasantly disorienting days followed as jet-lag, the 7,500ft altitude, the rhythm of Ramadan and the thrill of the unknown convinced the children that a week was passing.

Losing ourselves in the labyrinth of the suq, we were stunned to find everything so affordable, £1 buying 260 rials compared with only 10 in the 1980s. The boys were soon cheaply kitted out in colourful sarongs and curved daggers, our daughter in a skirt, leggings and headcloth.

Passers-by were delighted to see tourists once more. Abandoning the warnings of "stranger danger" preached by British schools, the children soon got used to being patted. My partner marvelled at her ability to move at ease through the streets of a capital city at 2am. Our welfare seemed to concern the whole world. We could not stop to buy without strangers intervening to make doubly sure we were not being overcharged.

The rigours of fasting seemed not to dent the geniality of the swarming crowds. After the sunset meal, their exuberance was infectious, their curiosity even more pressing. Invitations to come and chew qat, the favoured recreational drug of most highland Yemenis, were rebuffed with difficulty. Our younger son was grabbed by a man keen to teach him to dance. Within seconds, the road was blocked by a circle of swirling dancers, daggers flashing.

In the suq, we were accosted by a stern man, whose bearing, expensive dagger and clean clothes showed him to be a tribesman of some rank. "Would we like to be kidnapped?" he asked. He could get his tribe to do the deed and would split the profits with us. It began the first of many discussions about the solitary fatal terrorist incident which has destroyed the tourist industry.

Some 84,000 tourists visited Yemen in 1997; fewer than a tenth of that number came in 1999. A developed tourist infrastructure (a hundred local

tourist agencies, comfortable hotels in major towns, a much-improved road and air network) stands idle. We did not meet a single tourist for the first two of our three weeks in Yemen.

Dogs dozed in the shuttered doorway of the main tourist-information office in Sana'a. Disturbed from his own Ramadan slumbers, the man in charge rallied a smile and a prayer for better times as he opened up.

WE FLEW from Sana'a to Hadramawt, not risking the overland route through the ancient city of Marib and across the dunes of the Empty Quarter. Here the writ of the tribes carries more weight than that of the government, and travellers to these remote parts are advised to pay £200 for a group of Bedouins to drive ahead and alert would-be brigands that the travellers are locally vouched for.

We descended from the plateau into the claustrophobic world of the 200km canyon of Wadi Hadramawt. In Sayyun's best hotel, air-conditioned doubles with satellite TV cost only £10-£15 a night. In Tarim, we stayed in an ornate former palace, built entirely of mud (except for the swimming pool). In Shibam, "the Manhattan of Arabia", one of three Unesco World Heritage Sites in Yemen, we wandered among the tower-houses, dodging goats and chatting to souvenir-shop owners desperate for a return to better times.

Leaving the sealed roads, we entered the side wadi of Daw'an, fabled for its honey, the acumen of its businessmen and the grandiose mansions with which they proclaim their success.

Then in one memorable day, we drove, perched on the roof-rack of our Landcruiser, from the Hadramawt to the Indian Ocean, crossing 300km of cold, stony steppe. The day ended in a fine hotel overlooking the sweeping bay of Mukalla and conversations with men eager to practise English and reminisce about the "paradise" of pre-Marxist British rule.

The long drive from Mukalla to Aden had its distractions: a school of dolphins leisurely cruising along the shore; climbing to the rim of an extinct volcano; chasing massive crabs along a deserted beach. Most exciting was the VIP treatment from the Yemeni army. In this area, where tourists were killed in 1998, the government takes no chances. For hundreds of kilometres, we were escorted by a succession of groups of armed men. The total premium paid to many soldiers for this additional travel insurance, negotiated in instalments at each check-point, was £15.

In the time-warp of Aden, we stayed in Crater, our hotel next to the Hurricane Cinema, from which we ventured to eat ridiculously cheap fish. Struggling to get back on its feet in the aftermath of the 1994 "war of secession", Aden is surely set to rival Goa and Mombasa as a winter-holiday destination. Its imposing physical presence, its perfect coves and beaches, the excitement of the balmy nights made it hard to leave.

Christmas Day saw us chatting with the operator of a camel-driven sesame oil mill before putting the Landcruiser to its sternest test as we scaled the terraced slopes of Jabal Hufash. Sitting under a bush for a festive lunch, my daughter spotted a partridge perched in a prickly pear tree.

The children were made much of in the mountain-top community of Manakha, poised on top of the pass linking Sana'a to the sea. The Hajjara Tourist Hotel provided riveting entertainment, waiters and cooks nightly metamorphosing into mesmeric dancers, singers and drummers. We tottered on donkeys over the mountains to a pilgrimage centre for a schismatic group of Ismailis.

A final surprise lay in store. I looked round and my daughter had disappeared. Minutes passed before she re-emerged from a house wearing a veiled headdress. She could not be parted from it.

I was photographing her when a bearded man berated me for my lack of respect for Islam. Did I not know that Yemeni women should not be

photographed? On realising she was my daughter, he slunk away, stricken with embarrassment, to the amusement of bystanders.

As the millennium dawned, the children braced themselves against the 3,000m chill of Yemen's highest town. New Year, as with Christmas, went blissfully unremarked by a people confident in the strength of their ancient culture and determined to overcome obstacles and build a self-reliant, and increasingly democratic, state.

<http://216.239.57.104/search?q=cache:jCNkDbjHQ5kJ:www.playbacknet.org/interplay/Previousissues/April%252003/Burundi%2520journal.pdf+journal+burundi&hl=en&ie=UTF-8>

Page 1

Burundi Journal

By Jonathan Fox

10 March 2003. Departure day minus one—making last calls, transferring phone

numbers into my pocket organizer, trying to decide whether to take my mobile phone

(will it work in Africa?), sending a last email to my colleague, Karin, in Switzerland.

Friends have urged me not to go because of the danger there. I have not been swayed.

Nor am I intimidated by those who argue for staying at home because of the perilous world situation.

But I am worried about the news that we will be holding the training in Ngozi, a

provincial town close to the Rwandan border. A year and a half ago I worked in

Bujumbura, the capital, which is protected by the army. I know nothing of Ngozi, but I

know the rebel groups operate from the hills.

At Heathrow Airport Karin and I meet up, take a cappuccino before the long flight to

Africa. Her playback group is at the same moment sitting in a Zurich restaurant after

their rehearsal; by telephone Karin and her colleagues exchange fond last words. We

are off to teach as part of the School of Playback Theatre's Libra Project.

The clouds break to reveal the green hills, a swath of Lake Tanganyika. The air on the

tarmac is tropical. We see banana trees, hear a magpie's liquid call. In the jeep, I tell the chic office manager, Nadine, in French (the colonial language of **Burundi**), that I am happy to be back. She answers, "Why?" I am suddenly nonplussed, not sure how to respond.

A day later in Ngozi, a one-road bustling town, we stand on a hotel terrace looking out over a lush valley. In the foreground people walk along the red-dirt road with loads on their heads. A few bicycles go by, even fewer vehicles. A solid fence, with a heavy gate that locks at night, secures the hotel. Inside the flowers are beautifully kept by three gardeners.

Pulcherine, one of my students from the initial training in '01, greets me. "Our prayers are answered," she says, enfolding me in her arms. Later, when I question the members of the Tubiyage Theatre

Association I am impressed to hear how much they have done. "Many playback theatre performances," they say. "How many?" I ask. They are not sure. I ask Michel Ange, the leader, for a list.

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Their questions are those of experienced playbackers. They tell me that their problem is too many audience members wanting to tell. That is the best kind of problem, I say.

They tell me a story: In a performance a widower told about his struggle to raise his kids alone and his subsequently inviting a woman to live with them, even though she was not his wife and the arrangement was not sanctioned by the authorities. Seeing the

story enacted, he broke down. How he cried! the students say. Afterwards, an audience member, who happened to be the civil administrator responsible, stood up and said he did not realize how difficult life had been for the teller and his family, and if he would come to the office, the administrator would fix everything at once. The actors tell me that they usually perform Forum Theatre (Theatre of the Oppressed) for the first half, and playback theatre for the second. But they gently complain about the time needed to prepare the pieces for the Forum Theatre, and admit that not infrequently their choices miss with the audience. Playback theatre, they say, by definition, always meets the interests of the audience. We start the work, 27 students in a cement room. Many faces at the windows looking in at us. Noise from all sides. In the training there are two main subgroups: the experienced students from Bujumbura, most of them university educated and with acting backgrounds; and students from the Ngozi region, who have received a one-week training from Michel Ange. Most of these students do not speak French, and so we translate everything from French to Kirundi. The sponsoring organization supplies lunch, plentiful helpings of rice, beans, fried bananas, with some meat. The meal is a necessary component of the training. Outside the fence, hungry eyes watch us eat. I am embarrassed. Each day one student or another arranges for a few to be called in and given the leftovers. How kind they are to those with less than they; and how different from our attitude in the West.

On the second day, with our encouragement, Vital brings his guitar. He plays it proudly, but it is so old and with strings so stretched that it cannot be tuned. He has brought it from his village, a two-hour walk away. We stop each day at four in the afternoon so that he and others can get home safely before dark. During the long evenings we sit with the students, talk among ourselves, look out from our terrace at the rice-covered valley. Karin serves me slices of papaya and pineapple she has bought at the market. It is peaceful in Ngozi. Time moves like the people on the road, one slow step at a time. At night among friends, there is almost always the singing of long, freely improvised call-and-response songs. In the first nights, sleepless from time change and excitement, I lay awake fearing the pop of rebel guns. Thoughts of **Burundi**'s long civil war, called "la crise" by the inhabitants, mix with images of American soldiers pointing weapons towards Baghdad. The nighttime closes in on me.

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During our playback practice, the stories in the whole group feature love and marriage, but when we set exercises in small groups, we can see much violent action. It is in a group of four that Bernard* tells his story of trying to escape to Rwanda during a particular difficult period, but being attacked by Burundian soldiers, who beat him so badly he was left for dead.

I work with the experienced actors on portraying violence, urging them to slow down and not fall into the almost slap-stick mode that is their habit. I also give them theory about how playback can transform traumatic memory into narrative memory, crucial to the healing process.

On my own at night I dream of war. At dawn, roosters, then the sun rising over the valley.

We have to move workspaces, make many adjustments. I do not know if I will ever get my list of Tubiyage performances: Michel Ange has said that he will type it up for me, but the office does not have much equipment, and after the first training, when I had tried to maintain email communication with Michel Ange, my messages from the US had bounced back.

We arrange four performances for the students: at the university; in a village hall; at the local office of CARE, one of the sponsoring NGO's; and for a small group of women attached to a women's center. This last performance is an effort to create an intimate enough setting for the students to tackle serious stories.

The intimate performance takes place on the day the US invades Iraq. I am very upset. The first two thirds of the performance follows a classic pattern of tellers recounting their everyday stories: two mothers tell proud stories about the birth and raising of their children. Then one of our students, sitting in the audience, raises his hand urgently. He is called Baptiste. His story is about the death of his mother when he was 12.

I am moved, for here is the red thread operating at its most profound: after the mother's perspective, a story from a child; after stories of endurance and joy, a story of great loss.

I am also moved because I am feeling at this moment that playback theatre can be a source of good in the world, opposing violence and war.

But the actors do Baptiste's

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story as a tableau, avoiding its tragedy. They are afraid, I think. Baptiste is polite and does not express disappointment. The next teller tells a long tale about war, betrayal, and forgiveness, but it is hard to make sense of, because by not fulfilling Baptiste's story, the red thread is broken.

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Name changed for privacy.

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The next day, in the performance at CARE headquarters, Baptiste is again in the audience; again he becomes the teller, and with the same story. Again, the actors — a different set, who had not been present the day before — chose to do it as a tableau. This time Baptiste looks crestfallen.

We are coming to the end. The actors have completed their performances, marking the challenge and excitement of the first time for the Ngozi group, and the chance for feedback for the experienced group.

All that remains is evaluation and our last lunch together. And before that a final

morning's work. I keep thinking of Baptiste. I invite him to tell his story once more. We

coach the actors on how to do it. They perform courageously. The audience response is unexpected, however. About fifteen seconds into the interview, some people begin to cry. After two minutes, two have left the room. There is such distress that after the enactment I suggest a kind of transformation. It is not for the teller; Baptiste, finally, has that look of relaxation that comes after one has really seen one's story portrayed well. Rather the transformation ("Tell us about a happy moment between you and your mother, any moment you remember.") is for the audience. We also do a series of fluid sculptures. Many different feelings are expressed, including "I never feel a thing, including now."

I have given Baptiste during the interview my big bandana handkerchief to wipe his eyes. When the whole process is over, he returns it to me, but I push his hand back. "Keep it," I say, "on behalf of Tubiyage. Call it le Mouchoir des Larmes [handkerchief of tears], and lend it to the tellers when they tell their stories."

Michel Ange comes to me on the last day with a printed list of Tubiyage performances. The total is 72. We are all amazed. The audiences are students, staffs, the public at large. Many NGO's have hired them, including CARE, Search for Common Ground, the Norwegian Refugee Council.

The answer to Nadine's question, Why be happy to return to **Burundi**? is now clear to me. Of course I am glad to return just to learn this news about playback theatre. The

idea of playback theatre in Africa, especially devoted to tasks of reconciliation, had seemed “experimental” up to the time of this trip. But this list speaks of great promise for it. Furthermore, one is always glad to see again the lovely people one has once farewelled forever. Finally, I am glad to find myself again in the slow pace and human scale of traditional culture. It is a most complicated subject, of course. We cannot turn our backs on modernity. But the soul cries out for more singing and more walking, nonetheless.

Karin and I will board our plane back to Nairobi, London, and our separate countries with many questions. In a county with so many wounds and such an urge to tell, can playback actors hold the ritual event? What kind of performance is best for a place like **Burundi**, so factionalized by ethnicity and loss? In a world of limited time and money,

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exactly what support do the playback teams need? These are questions, of course, facing not only the Tubiyage actors, but playback theatre actors everywhere. On the last evening, we say our good-byes. This time, with so much playback success behind us, we are not so afraid of never seeing each other again. So many handshakes, so many hugs. In the tumult, Baptiste approaches me. He says it soft and quick. “I’ll try to keep it well,” he says, “our Mouchoir des Larmes.”

The School of Playback Theatre is accepting donations to support its Libra

*Project work, such as training groups like Tubiyage in **Burundi** and increasing access to playback resources around the world. Donations may be made by credit card or direct transfer. Please email the School at <mailto:playbackschool@hvi.net> for instructions on how you can help.*

<http://www.travelchat.be/iran.html>

Salam - Welcome to Iran !

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Iran. The country is not on most people's wish-list. Generally, people are put off by the very appearance of the country : it's ruled by bearded, turbaned Ayatollahs and Muslim clerics who are totally intolerant of anything even vaguely Western. Women travellers loathe having to cover up from head to toe and comply with the respective law; the wearing of a headscarf or chador is compulsory.

Iran is not a place one heads to for a holiday on the beach, but it has several other things to offer. There are good skiing, trekking and climbing opportunities and a good selection of sights often associated with the Middle East : fascinating old mosques, fairytale palaces, ancient cities and labyrinthine bazaars.

Still, having been there now, I can only say: never before was I so glad to be out of a country ! I even returned a week earlier than planned. Iran really got under my skin. From the moment I arrived in the land, I was seriously cheated. People didn't respect bargained prices and when I refused to pay their ridiculously high quotes, I was met with verbal aggression and a couple of times even with the physical kind. Many of the taxi drivers and people in the hotel business were rude and completely dishonest. I had expected things to improve once I was out of the capital. They didn't. On the contrary, the dishonest were joined by beggars. The country is not unsafe, but there is a constant feeling of being unwanted. Although exaggerated, the Western viewpoints towards the country sadly are partially true. Many have extreme visions; the intolerance level is pretty high. At one time in a mosque, I thought a cat was being chased off, but no, it was me ! I also met truly friendly people, but unfortunately they were a minority.

Add to the above the enormous air pollution, which - especially in Tehran - is so high it's downright dangerous. Also add the long distances between points of interest, the usually boring landscape (in the interior), the total

lack of colour and cheer and the fact that even the most famous of sights didn't manage to excite me, and you have a country which doesn't hold a lot of attraction. After all the positive reports by fellow travellers, I couldn't believe I didn't like it, but sorry, there was no way the place could 'catch' me. But, please, by all means go and see for yourself. Perhaps it was just me in this case, and am I doing wrong to the country and its people (which is not at all my intention !).

