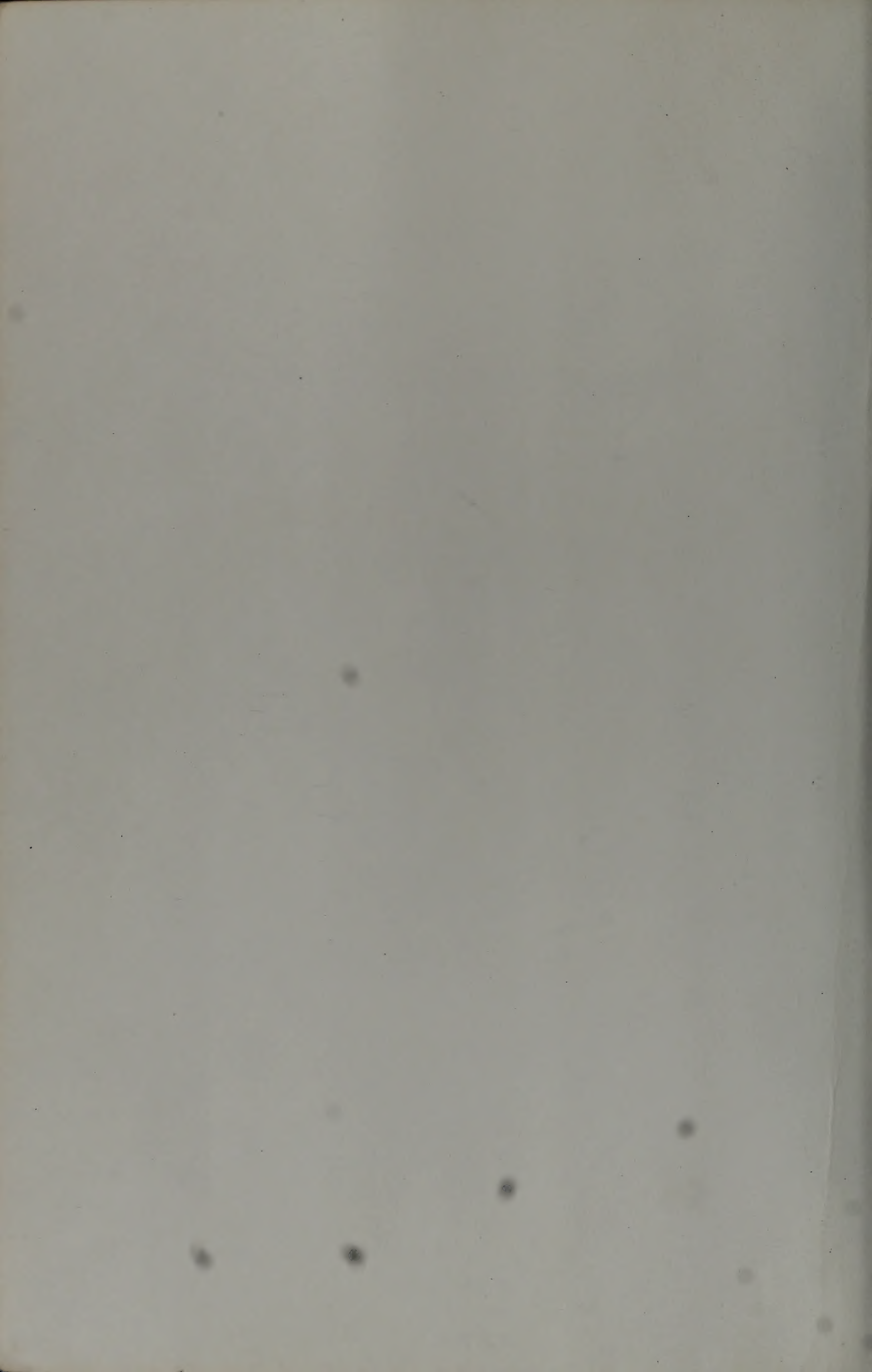
A HITCHHIKER'S
GUIDE TO
AFRICA
AND
ARABIA
David Hatcher Childress



A HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO AFRICA AND ARABIA

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David Hatcher Childress

Chicago Review Press
CHICAGO

I would like to dedicate this book to "The Builder" and his Teachers. I thank you for Your love, guidance, and inspiration.

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I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experiences.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU,
A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers

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A HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO AFRICA AND ARABIA

hitch-hike *(hich-hik) v.i.; to hike with the help of lifts in vehicles*
hike *(hik) v.i.; to travel on foot with equipment on back*
vehicle *(ve-[h]i-kl) h.j.; any kind of carriage or conveyance (lit. or fig.)*

WEBSTER'S

AFRICA

1 · HITCHHIKING IN AFRICA AND ARABIA: A TRAVELER'S BAG OF TRICKS

The journey of a thousand miles,
Begins with a single step.

LAO TZU

AFRICA, FOR GENERATIONS, has been seen through a web of mystery and confusion. "The Dark Continent", it has been viewed as an inhospitable land of wild animals, horrible diseases and unfriendly natives. The second largest continent, with 20% of the earth's land mass, it still today is largely unknown.

Arabia, too, is thought to be too remote and strange for a tourist, a land of trackless deserts and Bedouin tribes moving from one oasis to another. Now emerge the oil towers and cities of steel in the eastern desert, and with them a new fear of Arab domination of the world.

In the winter of 1978 I arrived, ragged and tired, at the doorstep of Arabia and Africa, with a few dollars in my pocket and a strong determination to hitchhike through what seemed like a last frontier to the modern nomad. Having just spent a year and a half in the Far East—India, Nepal, Afghanistan and Iran—I was confident in my abilities to earn my way, survive and commune with the people of Africa and Arabia. I also had the distinct feeling that time was running out for this part of the world. Tensions were mounting all over the Middle East and Africa. It seemed that it could be soon that these areas would be involved in a violent struggle for redetermining the power structure in Africa and Arabia, if not the entire world.

I wasn't particularly knowledgeable about Arabia and Africa. I grew up in the mountains of Colorado and Montana and spent a great deal of time back-packing in the Rockies as a kid, and so felt comfortable with a pack on my back. I also felt fine about tossing my sleeping bag down on the ground and sleeping anywhere. I never really had very much money to travel with, but I found on my travels in the Far East that money wasn't nearly as important as I thought it was. I could travel in Africa and Arabia for a year on four or five hundred dollars, I figured, and I would work whenever I could, making enough money

to get me back on the road for a few months, heading for the next country where I thought I might be able to find work. I didn't have any special skills, but determination makes up for a lot. And I was a confident and experienced hitchhiker.

For traveling around in Africa and Arabia, hitchhiking is where it's at. In most areas of Africa, it is literally the only form of transportation! Unless you are traveling overland through the continent in your own vehicle, you will have to hitchhike at some time or another.

Public transportation is sorely lacking over most of Africa and Arabia. The buses and trains that do exist are often so incredibly

crowded that even the shortest ride is almost unbearable. Therefore, arranging rides on the many trucks plying their cargo throughout Africa and Arabia is the best way to get from one place to another. You will often have to pay for rides, just as the locals do, and these can be rather expensive in some countries, perhaps $20 or $30 to go less than a hundred miles. Still, by hitchhiking, camping out, and eating in road stalls or buying fruit in markets, you can travel through Africa on a few dollars a day. A good budget I think is five dollars a day; on some days you'll spend more, on some days less.

Hitchhiking is an art, a science, a meditation, a form of expression, a matter of concentration. Hitchhiking is not being in a hurry—a time to reflect on your life and court your own destiny. There is nothing like standing at some crossroads in some desert, a range of majestic mountains in the distance, with your bag at your feet and the sight of a lonely truck in the distance coming toward you, a cloud of dust streaming behind it. The heartbeat quickens, the mind races, will they stop? Who are they? Where are they going?

Hitchhiking is walking the fine line between fate and free will. I have come to believe that there is no such thing as a coincidence; we are all linked by our actions and thoughts. As one hitchhiker once said to me in the wilds of Sudan as we waited for a truck, "by using mental attraction, we're creating our own rides. We should think of the kind of ride we want and attract it into our environment."

There is a special technique for hitchhiking which has been perfected by intrepid travelers of Africa and Arabia. As soon as the driver can see you, begin waving at him, a friendly, sweeping wave. As he gets closer to you, point down at the ground in front of you with your whole arm. None of this holding-your-thumb-out-and-suppressing-a-yawn stuff common to hitchhikers in America and Europe. No sirree. In Asia and Africa, hitchhiking is done with a huge wave of the arm. Using your whole arm in sweeping motions, point down the road in the direction that you are going. Motion downward to indicate that you want the vehicle to stop. Another motion that works well is waving both arms above your head and jumping up and down wildly. This often gets the driver's attention. It really is important to exaggerate all your actions, as your life may actually depend on your catching this ride. It may be the only vehicle for several days, and you might be running out of food and water.

The last movement in hitchhiking in Africa and Arabia is to wave in a friendly and earnest manner as the vehicle is passing you by. Not everyone is going to give you a ride, after all, and there is no point in feeling nasty about it. Often he will stop when he wasn't going to just because you were so friendly to him.

This technique will work well all over Africa, Arabia, Asia and even in the Americas, but since getting out of major cities is always difficult, take a taxi or local bus out of town to get started. The other alternative to standing on the road and hitchhiking is to arrange your ride in the market before you go. In smaller towns, it's simple enough to go downtown and ask any trucks you happen to see if they're going to a particular place, and when. Would they take you? How much would they charge? And most important, how long will it take them to go there? Often these truck drivers plan to hang out in some tiny village for a week and see their relatives.

Traveling about Africa is really utilizing whatever form of transportation is available. Usually, if there is a train or steamer along a river or lake, you will end up taking this, buying a second or third class ticket, and then getting a lift from a truck on to the next town. It is often possible to get lifts in private planes around central Africa, since there is a lot of missionary activity there. Company planes flying around empty will occasionally take you with them if you ask. Just hang out at a small local airport and ask a pilot, usually a European, if he'll give you a lift.

The steamers, trains and busses that ply between major towns are usually so crowded that they defy description. On one train that I took, it was difficult to find a place to sit on the roof of the train, let alone inside. Second or first class does have reserved seats and sometimes even bunks, but this can often be as expensive as flying. Hitchhiking means traveling by whatever mode of transportation is available, most expedient, cheapest and most comfortable. Trucks, in general, are faster and more comfortable than a third class train. Remember, too, that it costs extra, generally, to sit up front with the driver, where you have a seat. Most people choose to sit or stand in the back of the truck with the cargo, whatever that may be. If the bus or truck that you are riding on happens to break down, and the driver says it will take three or four days to fix it, you are free to grab your luggage and catch the next truck that comes along. It is helpful to have negotiated a price

for your ride, and to have arranged to pay for it at the end. Many trucks never make it to their destination, and it can sometimes be difficult to get a refund out of these guys. Agree on some timetable with a truck driver, if you like, especially if you are going for a pretty long distance.

There is such a lack of transportation in most of Africa, that every car and truck doubles as a taxi or bus. You will often be expected to pay and fares are sometimes standardized. You can bargain, but in some areas, where the lack of transportation is so severe that there may be a truck only every few weeks, the driver realises that he has you over a barrel and may charge some outrageous price, knowing you don't really have a choice.

Hitchhiking in Arabia is slightly different. With a smaller population and more private vehicles, it is faster and easier. The same rules or techniques apply, but, in many areas, hitchhiking is uncommon, simply because there are hardly any travelers in these countries, and people are therefore surprised to see you when they pick you up. Public transportation is a great deal better in most Arabian countries than in Africa, and not as crowded. It is considerably more expensive, however. The currency in Arabian countries is so inflated because of the oil exports, that everything, except gasoline, is expensive. Many cars double as share-taxis, picking up passengers along the road and dropping them off as they go. Their fares are reasonable by their standards, but likely to be out of line to the average hitchhiker, perhaps $10-$15 to the next town 30 miles away, quite a bit when you're trying to get by on $5 a day. Busses, when available, are cheaper. Still, there is no need to take any public transportation, as it is possible to get free lifts if you make it clear that you cannot pay, and are only taking free rides. Because Arabia is so expensive, it is important to keep costs down. You will need your five dollars or so a day budgeted money for other things like food and hotels.

Southern Africa is much like Arabia, in that there are many private vehicles and public transportation is expensive. Here hitchhiking is easy and fairly common, and at least you won't have people expecting you to pay as they will assume that if you are hitchhiking you can't afford to take a train or bus. In Southern Africa, too, you can use that old trick of making a sign for yourself saying where you are going. In other African countries this would be entirely unnecessary, but in

Southern Africa, this can influence people favorably. A sign that indicates that you are a foreigner, such as "Montana to Capetown", will greatly influence your chances of getting a ride.

Also worth noting is hitchhiking on steamers and yachts along the coasts of Africa and Arabia. All Arabian countries have ports and so do all African countries on the coast. Even in some of the landlocked African countries you can hitch: on the inland lakes of Malawi, Tanganyika and Victoria, for example. To get a lift on a yacht, go down to the local yacht club at the port, or if there isn't one, to the most luxurious hotel-restaurant nearest the docks. Here there will often be a bulletin board where yacht skippers ask for crew members and where you can put up your own note. Failing this, ask at the reception desk if there are any yachts now in the harbor, and then go and talk with the captain directly. Yachts are often looking for more crew members and you can easily get on a ship bound up or down the east African coast, or even over to Sri Lanka and Australia.

Tramp steamers are also a possibility, and they have an atmosphere all their own. Go aboard the ship and talk with the captain; he may be hopping down the coastline and would take you on as deck passage for a small price, or let you swab the deck for your fare. Freighters like this are constantly plying the waters of the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and the west coast of Africa.

The hitchhiker's equipment is simple and light. Keeping the bulk of your bag and its weight down are very important. There is always the tendency to bring more than you need, "just in case", but you may find yourself walking all day to a border, so make sure you can comfortably carry your pack on your back for some distance.

My back pack was an internal frame bag that was shaped like one long cylinder, enabling me to use it as a foot sack in case I had to bivouak in the rain or cold somewhere. In my pack, which I called my "Bag of Tricks", I carried:

1 sleeping bag, down-filled and warm so I could climb Mt Kilimanjaro in comfort. On hot steamy nights, I just slept on top of it. The warmer the bag, the better. You can cool off easily by unzipping it if you're too warm. Remember, deserts can be freezing cold at night.

1 mosquito net, light nylon, which is a must!

1 ground sheet cum poncho to use under my bag, as a makeshift tent, or as a poncho if it rained, made of ripstop nylon!

1 large plastic water bottle and water purification tablets, iodine preferably though chlorine would do.

1 light weight, aluminum cooking pot and a spoon.

1 Swiss Army knife with a can opener, scissors, etc. I put a key ring on the knife and tied it to my belt with a length of cord about two feet long.

1 leather belt with secret zipper pocket on the inside, where I could keep some twenty and fifty dollar bills carefully folded up.

1 leather pouch and 1 cotton money belt, using either one to hold my passport, traveler's cheques, health care and other documents. The pouch was worn on the outside of my pants. It is worth considering having some secret pockets sewn in your shirts and pants.

1 light down jacket and a light wool sweater.

2 T shirts.

1 permanent pressed shirt for looking nice when applying for visas, etc.

1 pair of brown corduroys, to wear with permanent press shirt or for hitching.

1 pair of jeans.

1 pair of shorts, tan, safari-style.

1 pair of comfortable tennis shoes. These are fine, even for mountain areas, and you can even climb Kilimanjaro in a good pair, though most people prefer hiking boots.

1 pair of sandals, rubber thong type, for wearing in showers or around town.

1 small first aid kit and personal toiletries.

1 flashlight, compass, sewing kit, length of nylon cord.

5 boxes of matches and a butane lighter.

1 small gasoline stove and gas container.

1 small pack of cards and a miniature backgammon set.

5 or 6 assorted books, including a guide book, the *Tao Te Ching*, Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Eklal Kueshana's *The Ultimate Frontier*, and various other books on Africa and philosophy which I traded or gave away as the time came.

3 maps of Africa and Arabia, the popular Michelin map series.

1 Pentax spotamatic camera and three lenses.

15 rolls of color slide film.

1 large assortment of souvenirs, knicknacks, postcards, notes, munchies and gadgets.

And at various times I also carried:

1 tent, lightweight nylon with a rain fly and mosquito netting.
1 foam mat for sleeping.
1 mask and snorkle for the beaches and coral reefs of the east coast of Africa and the Arabian coast, and for the many islands in the Indian Ocean, the Seychelles, Comoros, etc. The Red Sea has some of the finest diving in the world.

In my pouch I kept my international student card, youth hostel card, bicentennial passport, health certificate, driver's license, and traveler's cheques. When I arrived in Egypt in January 1978 I had about two hundred dollars on me. When I left Africa two and a half years later, I had more than two thousand dollars on me.

It is important to budget your money, and therefore having some idea of what things will cost is necessary. First of all, the distances to be covered are vast. Africa is three times the size of the continental United States. It is 5200 miles from Tangiers to Capetown, approximately the same distance as from Panama City to Anchorage, Alaska. It is 4700 miles from Dakar to Cape Guardafui, the easternmost point of the African Horn-only 65 miles less than the airline distance from Moscow to New York! Geologically, the whole of the Arabian peninsula should be considered as unitary with the African continent. The Rift Valley that cuts both, begins in northern Turkey, and stretches down through the Jordan Valley and the Red Sea, then down through Lake Rudolf. The rift then divides at the bottom of Lake Rudolf and splits around Lake Victoria to join again at Lake Malawi. It runs down the Zambesi River and finally out to sea, where it continues as an ocean valley. It extends over one fifth of the earth, over seventy degrees of latitude, and contains some of the deepest lakes in the world.

The African continent is a vast plateau of ancient hard rock with incredibly diverse climatic zones. Comfortable Mediterranean climates exist at the ends of the continent, with deserts and grasslands as we move toward the equator. The humid forested lands of the Congo Basin and West African coast have the highest rainfall, and no real dry season. Rather than having a summer and winter in Africa, you have a wet and a dry season.

Traveling these distances, then, takes time, and money. It is not uncommon to take four and five day train rides; some can be a week

or more. It is essential to get a decent set of maps as well, either the Michelin map series or the Bartholomew map series. These maps divide Africa and Arabia up into five or six areas with sections overlapping. Hotels in general are expensive all over Africa and Arabia. A run-down, bottom of the line hotel can be as much as $20 a night. In some countries, hotels are quite cheap, such as Egypt or Kenya, where a hotel room can be as little as $1 or $2, but this is the exception. Accommodations are really the traveler's main worry, since there is nothing quite so frustrating as arriving in a large city late at night and not knowing where to stay. Therefore, this guide book endeavors to give the traveler a good indication of where he might stay when he arrives in certain key towns. In time, the hitchhiker should become confident with himself and be able to sleep anywhere, feeling comfortable enough to throw his sleeping bag down anywhere and crash for the night. There is really no place more like home than beneath the stars. Still, nothing seems to bring up more anxiety in the traveler than wondering where he will stay that night, especially as he arrives in a big city full of big expensive hotels. Just remember that you can always sleep for a night in a park, in the railway station, at the airport, at the police station, sometimes even on the lawn of a hotel. However, you must have a sleeping bag, one of the definite requirements for being a hitchhiker.

Food is generally cheap in Africa; a bunch of bananas might be 5¢, a plate of vegetables 40¢. You can rarely afford to eat in a really nice restaurant, except for a splurge, but you can always eat in the little roadside restaurants and tea stalls as well as in the cheap Indian greasy spoons that are all over the eastern coast of Africa. Generally speaking, African style restaurants are affordable, but be careful what you order at the local restaurants in Arabia! I had some mutton stew in Yemen once and it turned out to cost me $10. It taught me to always inquire about the price of a dish before ordering.

Throughout this book I refer to the black market in currency. In most African countries, the government places restrictions on the amount of foreign currency that may be taken out of that country by its citizens. This creates a demand for cash dollars or other "hard" currencies, even though it is often illegal for citizens of an African country to have foreign currencies in their possession, and it renders the currency of your typical African country absolutely worthless

outside its own borders. Therefore, certain shopkeepers, traders and businessmen want to buy your American dollars from you with their currency. They will pay you a higher rate for your money than the bank. Depending on how inflated the government has valued their currency against the dollar, they can give you any exchange rate they want at the bank, where the shopkeeper may give you two or even three times the bank rate.

Black market rates vary from country to country and from year to year. In some countries it would be almost prohibitively expensive to buy things with money changed at the bank. In Uganda during the war, the black market rate was five times the bank rate. A loaf of bread that would have cost five dollars at the bank rate, cost only a dollar at the black market rate—still pretty expensive at that. Black market rates rarely make things incredibly cheap, but just bring prices down to a reasonable level. For instance, Tanzania, with a black market rate of double the bank rate, becomes about as expensive as Kenya, which has no black market, when you cash your money with a shopkeeper.

Be cautious, however; it is illegal to use currency black markets and both you and the person you are changing with could find yourself in trouble if you are caught. Most countries will issue you a currency form when you enter. Every time you go to the bank and change money, you should present them with the form, and they will record your transaction on it. Then as you are leaving the country, you must—theoretically—present this form to the customs officials. This could be a problem if you are flying out; in two and a half years of traveling around Africa and Arabia, I never once was asked to hand over a currency form to any person. That doesn't mean that you won't be asked to hand yours over. It might behoove you to keep yours handy and change some money at a bank just in case. I often did.

In the matter of black markets, use your own discretion and talk with other travelers about what is happening and the rates of exchange. You may decide that it is not worth it. Also be careful of con artists in some places, especially Kenya and South Africa, who will offer to change money with you, but cheat you instead. In Arabia there are no black markets for currency, all the markets being open. Arabian currency is also negotiable outside of the country. In the bazaars of almost every Arabian city there are money exchangers who will change cash or travelers cheques. Remember: most African currencies are

absolutely worthless outside the country, so just cash enough to get you through. It is handy to have cash and traveler's cheques in small denominations, some $10s and $20s at least. You can change what local currency you have left at the border of the country you are just entering.

Safeguard your money! Keep it with you all the time, either in a money belt or in a pouch on your belt. It is unwise to keep it in a hand bag or day pack, as pickpockets in larger cities are quite active. I liked to keep a hundred dollars or more carefully tucked away in a secret zippered pocket in the back side of my ordinary looking leather belt. These can be bought at stores in the United States or specially ordered at leather shops. Even if you are robbed, your thieves are not likely to get this money unless they leave you standing in your underwear. Always carry the numbers of your traveler's cheques in a different place than where you carry the cheques themselves, as you will need these numbers should you have to make a claim. When sleeping in dormitories, put your passport and money under your pillow, in a locked locker, under your mattress, inside your sleeping bag or in your money belt around your waist. Others in the dormitory, even other travelers, may be thieves.

° °

It is worth noting some of the possible dangers that might be encountered while traveling in Africa and Arabia. As far as danger from people is concerned, both places are pretty safe. Violent crimes are rare compared to America and Europe. Some major cities are dangerous, notably Nairobi, Mombasa, Dar Es Salaam, Johannesburg and Lagos, Nigeria. Be wary when walking in large cities at night; if you are aware, you can sense danger long before it happens. The rural areas of Africa are quite safe; and contrary to the opinions of many people who have never hitched through Africa, blacks do not hate whites. At least in Africa. Even in Southern Africa where wars for "majority rule" are being fought, blacks do not hate whites, and I found them to be quite friendly. They are sometimes wary, however, and may suspect that you hate them, but by making the first friendly move, you will find that people are very helpful and friendly.

Women, whether traveling alone, with other women, or with a man,

should be careful. Especially in the Muslim countries of North Africa and Arabia, women are viewed more as possessions than people. Nevertheless, for women to travel around in Arabia by themselves, and I have known several who did, is a real possibility. Dress very conservatively and don't flirt with men in the least bit. Always insist on your own room and make sure it can be locked from the inside with a bolt or padlock, not just with a key that the hotel may have. Arabian men are usually pretty reserved and not likely to hassle you during the day, although Egyptians are notorious for pinching women as they walk down the street. Because of movies and propaganda, most Muslim men have the impression that European women are all nymphomaniacs, just waiting to be jumped on. Make it very clear that you are not interested in sex, unless of course, you are. However, it would be inadvisable to flirt with someone and lead him on and not deliver. This might arouse the worst in a normally very nice person.

In sub-saharan Africa, people often walk around without any clothes on at all, and therefore it's no big deal how the traveling woman dresses. Most blacks are not sexually aggressive in the way that Muslim men are, and you shouldn't have too much of a problem in this area. Sexual crimes are sometimes committed around Nairobi, however, and women as well as men should be careful in all big cities.

The truth is, many women travel by themselves all over Africa and Arabia. What is needed most is presence of mind and self-confidence. Merely know that you can take care of yourself and everything will turn out fine.

* *

Africa was long called "the white man's grave" because explorers and travelers tended to get sick and die there. Malaria and yellow fever took their toll everywhere and are endemic over most of the continent. Today, all the familiar diseases are treated successfully with common drugs which are cheap and readily available in every African and Arabian country. Mosquitos are the carriers of two of the most debilitating diseases known: malaria and yellow fever. The first can be prevented by the taking of malarial tablets and the second by a simple one-time inoculation. I personally have had malaria twice, and do not recommend taking malarial tablets over an extended period of

time. This is unhealthy in itself, and even worse, you run the risk of contracting malaria anyway. Since you are taking the tablets you don't think you could have the disease. Many people have gotten sick and died from taking malarial tablets, catching malaria and letting the disease get to a late stage. I recommend not taking the tablets as a profilactic. Rather, take them as a curative dose when you get a sudden feeling of chills, headache, and achey feeling in your body. A large dose and a couple of aspirin will take care of the malaria and you'll feel fine in the morning. Remember, taking malarial tablets will not necessarily keep you from catching malaria. Consult your doctor on what he may feel is the best thing for you to do. Short stays in malarial zones are better for taking preventative doses.

African Sleeping Sickness or Trypanosomiasis is another disease with some notoriety, but it is quite limited and becoming increasingly rare. It is carried mainly by the tse-tse fly, and infects cattle more than humans. Effective medicine is available to combat this.

One disease that travelers should be keenly aware of is Bilharzia or Schistosomiasis, caused by the infestation of the veins by blood flukes. Bilharzia is contracted by swimming in the fresh water rivers and lakes of Africa where these blood flukes live. They are practically microscopic and can enter the body through the flesh. It may take several years for the disease to show itself, usually as the passage of blood through the urine. Bilharzia, once it is diagnosed, is easily cured. Because these blood flukes are endemic in Africa, it is unwise to swim or bathe in most fresh water lakes and rivers. There are some exceptions, such as Lake Malawi and the Blue Nile, that are supposedly free of Bilharzia.

It is also unadvisable to go barefoot throughout Africa, as it is possible to get hookworm, a tiny worm that enters at the feet and eventually finds its way to the intestines.

Diarrhea, and worse, dysentery, are very common among travelers in Africa and Arabia. Dysentery is acute diarrhea, usually accompanied by stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting and sometimes fever. It can be caused by a virus, bacterium or intestinal parasite; the most common is amoebic dysentery, caused by a protozoan and carried in infected water or food. Dysentery can be quite serious. People have died of it, largely due to dehydration and loss of electrolytes (salts). I remember one traveler at the Africa Hotel in Juba, the capital of

Southern Sudan, being carried away to the hospital in a stretcher, totally emaciated and unable to walk from dysentery. He later recovered and cheerily went on hitchhiking through Africa and Arabia.

Prescription drugs such as Lomotil and Imodium can help bind you and stop the cramps, but they don't fight the infection. Charcoal tablets or powdered campfire charcoal is a good remedy. If diarrhea persists for several days, consult a doctor.

Hepatitis is another dangerous disease acquired from food and utensils washed in contaminated water. Raw vegetables, salads, unpeeled fruits and dairy products, can all potentially carry hepatitis virus and gastrointestinal diseases that cause dysentery. Purify water; when possible, peel fruits and eat boiled vegetables. Be cautious, but don't take things to extremes. Hepatitis is present in Africa and Arabia, but fear of contracting the disease may counteract all your precautions. . .

There is such a thing as a gammaglobulin shot, which theoretically helps immunize people against hepatitis if taken every six weeks. There is some difference of opinion in the medical community as to the value of these shots. Some feel that if you contract hepatitis after having had gammaglobulin, the disease is much worse. If you suspect you have hepatitis (pain in liver, achey body, dark urine, feel like you are about to die), seek medical advice immediately, as permanent damage to your liver may result. Don't drink alcohol or eat fatty foods that put a strain on your liver.

Africa is just full of obscure, interesting and horrible diseases. Elephantiasis can be seen along the coast of northern Kenya and other parts of Africa; a person's leg filling with lymphatic fluids because a small parasite has lodged itself in the glands at the pelvis. Once, while I worked in Sudan, the entire southern section was quarantined while the dreaded Green Monkey Disease ravaged the area and people dropped dead like flies. Your chances of catching any of these or other strange diseases while in Africa are so remote, you are more likely to choke on a radish and die at your dining room table.

Often, in tropical climates, small sores from scratching a mosquito bite or from an abrasion, appear on the skin and won't heal. Papaya flesh can work wonders on these sores and is available all over Africa. Honey is another traditional cure, and works well. Carry a small first aid kit with you with your personal cures. Medicines are widely availa-

ble in Africa and Arabia, are extremely cheap and usually don't require a prescription.

The last danger one should be aware of is that of wild animals. There are dozens of varieties of poisonous snakes in Arabia and Africa, and in East Africa more wild animals than you can shake a stick at. This need not really be a concern, although all animals are potentially a danger. Stay clear of elephants, buffalos, rhinos and hippos and they won't bother you. All these animals can run surprisingly fast, even hippos, and will catch up to you in a jiffy.

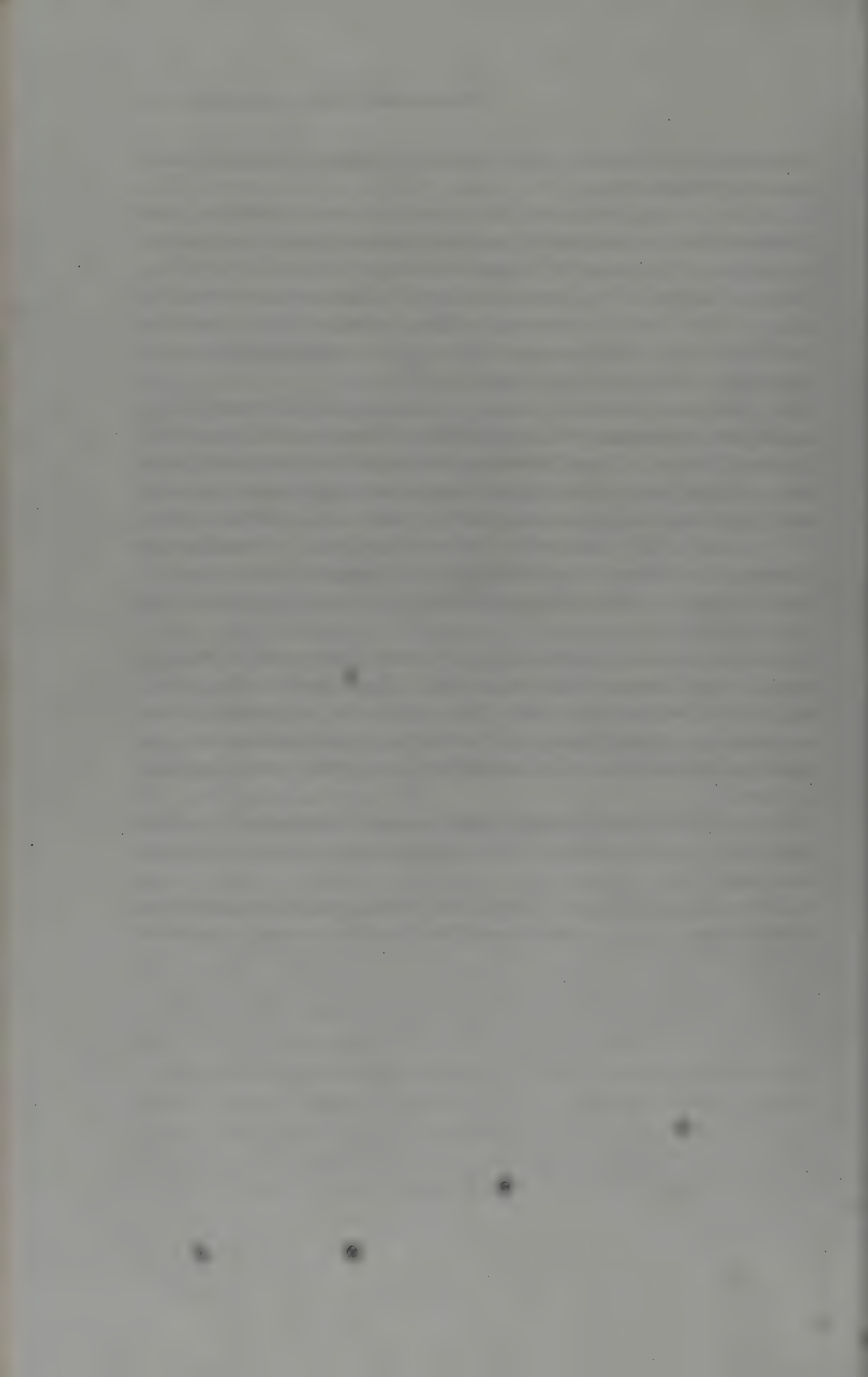
One fisherman friend of mine in Africa told me of the run-ins he would have sometimes with hippos while fishing in Lake Tanganika. He would wade in along the shore and begin fly fishing until some hippo, wading nearby, felt irritated and threatened. The hippo would snort and chase the fisherman out of the water and into the forest.

"I was only able to escape by running in a zig-zag pattern through the trees," he told me, "as the hippo could out-run me, but was too bulky to dodge around and between trees." This was good hitchhiking advice, I felt.

Lions, hyenas and baboons are more curious of people, so be extra careful when those animals are present. If you are camping out at night where wild animals roam, keep a fire going as late as you can and sleep in a tent. It is at night when the forests come alive. You occasionally hear of travelers having problems with animals, but they are rare.

Scorpions and other poisonous insects are also dangerous, but like snakes, they only bite when they get stepped on, so watch where you are going.

All in all, hitchhiking in Africa and Arabia is a lot less dangerous than driving a car five miles to work. Statistically, anyway, you've got it made.



2 · EGYPT: RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX

. . .of the gladest moments in human life, methinks is the departure upon a distant journey to unknown lands. Shaking off with one mighty effort the fetters of Habit, the leaden weight of Routine, the cloak of many Cares, and the slavery of Home, man feels once more happy. The blood flows with the fast circulation of childhood. . .afresh dawns the morn of life. . .

SIR RICHARD BURTON
JOURNAL ENTRY 2 DEC. 1856

WITH A GREAT braaat . . . , the fog horn cut through the chill winter evening fog. I slung my pack over my back and walked down the gangplank off the Yugoslavian freighter from Greece and onto the shores of Egypt. I had already been stamped into the country by customs, on board the ship an hour earlier. I was now free to walk through the docks into Alexandria.

"So this is Egypt!" I said under my breath. A chill ran up my spine. A wharf rat ran across the boardwalk in front of me and I could hear the rattling of an anchor in the water somewhere.

I was just coming from Piraeus in Greece, having gone deck passage on a tramp steamer flying the Yugoslavian flag and manned by a bunch of big, hairy, bearded Yugoslavs and Greeks. It had taken us three days to get to Alexandria. I played cards with the cook and watched for dolphins from the rail. For twenty-five dollars, a deal I had struck with the captain, it was cheap.

And now I walked the streets of Alexandria, a stranger in a very strange land. I had almost two hundred dollars in the passport pouch I kept inside my shirt. It wasn't enough to get me to Capetown, but it was enough to get me into Sudan, far enough for me at the time. Me, with my sandy blond hair all salty and curly, a pair of fading brown corduroys, blue t-shirt and well-worn tennis shoes, my gold wire rim glasses covered with salt so that the lights sparkled. Here I was. The first thing I had to do was find a hotel, the hitchhiker's number one concern; where to sleep?

In most ports, cheap dives are to be found near the docks and Alexandria is no exception. I was soon standing at the counter of a nameless hotel, haggling over the price of their cheapest single room. They wanted four dollars a night for a dirty, one bed, table and chair room, with a bathroom I could use on the second floor. This was too much, I felt, and offered them two dollars a night for it. Without a fuss, they took it, and I was already feeling like I had paid too much.

The mattress was stained and lumpy, but I didn't care. I washed the salt off in the shower, which didn't have a spray nozzle on it anymore. The lukewarm water just came out of a pipe, in a steady stream at least. The toilet, a hole in the floor, was flushed by a bucket of water that sat beneath a faucet. In an Egyptian toilet, you had to bring your own toilet paper, or use what the Egyptians, and other Africans and Arabians, use: water.

In Africa and Arabia, as well as most of Asia, people cleanse themselves with their left hand after their toilet, and eat or pass food with their right. It is important to remember while traveling in Africa and Arabia not to pass food or eat with your left hand, as this is extremely impolite, and could be taken as a dire insult to someone who is not aware of western ignorance of this basic courtesy.

Mohammed once said, "the Europeans are savages; do they not wipe their ass and eat with same hand?" He had a point back then, when Europeans were savage, compared to the relatively enlightened

Islamic Kingdoms. Europe was going through the Dark Ages, and science, literature and the arts were being preserved in the middle east and north Africa.

Out on the street, I was faced with a sensory bombardment. The street was alive with smells, sounds, sights I had never seen before. Men walked down the street in long striped robes, which practically swept the street as they walked. The shops were small, with little bare light bulbs in the back, casting long shadows in the dusty, litter-strewn street. I stopped in a tea shop where old men were playing backgammon and smoking honey and tobacco through tall waterpipes that sat on the floor and were three or four feet high. I had a cup of tea and watched in utter fascination the people walk by in the street. This was Egypt, this was Africa. This was real! I enjoyed every single second of it, and promised myself again that I would savor every moment of my stay in Africa and Arabia. I probably would not be back.

Egypt: a land whose culture and history fade back into the dim mists of antiquity. Egypt was ancient even to the ancients, who viewed Egypt in much the same way as we view ancient Greece or Rome today. Recorded history goes back more than five thousand years in Egypt, while the great library in Alexandria, burned down by the invading Muslims more than a thousand years ago, held records of even more ancient Egypt and of civilizations before it. It was at that library in Alexandria that Plato read about Atlantis, and related to his fellow historians and philosophers Egypt's records of our dim past.

In incredible splendor Egypt basked in the light of its god, Aton, the sun, for at least twentyseven hundred years. Modern history has its beginnings in Egypt. With the United States barely two hundred years old and already on the brink of destroying itself and the rest of the world, I could hardly help but think that there might be something to learn from the ancient Egyptians.

After two days of wandering the markets of Alexandria, I caught a bus up to Cairo, a four hour ride in an old, rusty Mercedes packed from end to end with striped-robed Egyptians. I sat next to an old man who gazed dreamily out the window, spitting occasionally on the floor and smiling at me from time to time. Out the window, the cotton fields, rice paddies and wheat fields of the lush Nile delta passed by in a green blur; donkeys and shirtless men were tilling the fields with water drawn off the Nile in a labyrinth of little canals.

In Cairo the bus let us all off at Tahir Square, which can be considered the center of Cairo, a metropolis that is Africa's largest by far, at nearly nine million. Cairo can be rather overwhelming, I found out, as I stepped off the bus into a huge crowd of people and was swept away for nearly a block with the surge of people along the street. It turned out to be rush hour. Totally confused and frustrated, I made an effort to grab a taxi. This proved to be impossible, as every cab, and there were quite a few, was packed full, with several people in each one.

Fortunately, it turned out that I didn't need a cab. The cheap hotels for travelers were just down the street, Tahir Street, in fact, an easy walking distance from the square. I walked several blocks down to Al Azhar Square where there were a number of hotels costing between $1.50 and $5.00 a room. They had names like the Viennoise, the Tari, the Golden, the Swiss, and the Everest. These hotels were nicely located because of their easy access to Tahir Square, where the majority of city buses can be caught, the Police Headquarters is located (the place to get your visa extended), and the Egyptian Antiquities Museum is situated. Buses can easily be caught out to the pyramids at Giza from here, and the museum is an absolute must, having the finest ancient Egyptian relics to be seen anywhere, including Tutankhamen's sarcophagus. The Hilton Hotel is on the western side of the square and has some nice bookstores in the lobby and a bar where you can get a Stella Lager beer for only a dollar or so, as cheap as anywhere in Egypt. A nice touch on a hot, dusty, possibly frustrating Egyptian afternoon.

There are other places to stay in Cairo as well. Hotels are generally cheap all over Egypt, but bargain for your room whenever you can. Hotels will get cheaper as you get away from the center; but they are less conveniently located and transportation can be a major hassle in Cairo. The Cairo Youth Hostel is the cheapest place to stay, but you will have to buy a youth hostel card for ten dollars if you don't have one already. It is located by the El Gamaa Bridge, near the Shah El Din Mosque, a good twenty minute walk south of Tahir Square along the Nile. It is a huge building with hundreds of beds in dormitory rooms of five bunkbeds or so. A bed for the night is under a dollar.

I took a room at The Golden Hotel for two dollars and fifty cents a night and got a tiny single on the third story. It had its own bathroom

and shower, stuffed into what should have been a closet. It was an old run-down hotel whose better days were ancient history. I like to check the view from my room; I had a great view of a brick alley about ten feet away, but at that price and with a bath, I couldn't complain.

I was soon off wandering the markets and side streets of Cairo, gazing into little shops filled with all kinds of brass ware or leather stools, eating in small pastry shops with flakey honey-gooey sweets covered with sesame seeds, and then drinking tea afterward. The next day I visited the Egyptian Antiquities Museum and walked about aimlessly for six hours gazing at myriads of artifacts, gold encased coffins, statues, papyrus texts and wooden paladiums. There is so much stuff in the museum that the back half isn't even catalogued. I found myself wandering about in the back rooms among piles of statues; Horus-headed falcons staring moodily at the ceiling, glassy-eyed Pharoahs looking down upon the tourists. I was lost for some time among these relics of times gone by. What an incredibly grandiose civilization! They left a lot for posterity, and here it was, five thousand years later, not just junk, but fantastic, beautiful stuff. In five thousand years, if modern civilization was suddenly wiped out, what would we have to show? Not a whole lot. It is inconceivable that any buildings would remain standing; they're routinely condemned every hundred years or so, not made to last for thousands of years as Egyptian buildings were. Even the Golden Gate Bridge would corrode and collapse within a thousand years, if not sooner. Could it have been that the ancient Egyptians were of a civilization more advanced than ours? They were certainly more advanced than we were a mere three hundred years ago.

With the help of a caretaker in faded grey uniform and dusty, thick spectacles, I found my way back into the sunlight and the 20th century again on Tahir Square. After a 4¢ fried chickpea sandwich (called falafel) with some salad in it, the fast food staple of Egypt, I grabbed a bus out to the Pyramids.

Buses in Egypt are quite incredible. Old and run-down, they are packed from end to end with Egyptians and the occasional tourist. Sitting next to me with his head in my armpit was another traveler, a young white male with curly brown hair. It turned out he was from Scotland.

"Cheers, mate," he said, looking up from his cramped position on

ANCIENT TRADE ROUTES

LEGEND: ANCIENT SITE — o
SAILING OR CARAVAN ROUTES — →

the edge of a seat. His nose was right in my armpit, my arm reaching up to grab the luggage rack above his head.

"Howdy," I smiled, "I just had a shower this morning, in case you couldn't tell."

"No problem," he said, I've been in Egypt for a week now, I'm used to this."

"The buses are pretty crowded."

"You can say that again, the bus driver doesn't even stop at the bus stations because he can't pick up anymore passengers."

"That can be a problem if you're trying to get off the bus, I suppose," I said.

"You can say that again," he said. "I've just come here from India, and I can't believe how much Egypt reminds of the sub-continent; crowded, poor, dirty, old, and incredibly interesting!"

We ended up at the last stop: the Pyramids, at Giza, a western suburb of Cairo, a forty-five minute bus ride from downtown. The Great Pyramid, as tall as a forty-story building, towered above us out of the sand and into the sky like some alien structure. Behind it was the pyramid of Cephren. Smaller and built afterwards, it looks taller than the Great Pyramid in many photos because it stands on a small plateau or rise. To the southeast is the Sphinx, small by comparison, staring silently out toward the Nile in the east.

The Scottish fellow's name was Derek. Together we walked past a couple of camels and up to the Great Pyramid. We each bought a ticket to go inside, 60¢, and climbed the stairs that led to the entrance of the building. The Great Pyramid: first wonder of the ancient world and the only one left! For thousands of years the pyramids had been attracting travelers and hitchhikers from all over the world. Some Great Pyramid enthusiasts even brought their armies and took over the country so that they could visit the pyramid. Now that's quite a tourist attraction!

Entering the pyramid, we first descended a narrow passage. Presently we came to a split where there was a narrow passage leading upward. This passage was originally blocked by a huge granite plug. The first Arabs to dig into the pyramid, led by the Caliph Al Mamun, dug around this granite plug to get to the passageways beyond.

We ascended the low passage, steep and dark, until it opened into the Grand Gallery a hundred yards or so up the passage. The Grand

SYRIA
NORTH
JERUSALEM
AMMAN
ALEXANDRIA
BENGHAZI
JORDAN
CAIRO
SINAI
AQABA
ASYÛT
LIBYA
EGYPT
LUXOR
ASWAN
MEDINA
SAUDI ARABIA
MECCA
JEDDAH
WADI HALFA
PORT SUDAN
RED SEA
ABHA
CHAD
ATBARA
SUDAN
MASSAWA
SAN'A
HODEIDA
KASSALA
OMDURMAN
KHARTOUM
ASMARA
TA'IZZ
AXUM
ASAB
ADEN
ABÉCHE
KOSTI
EL FASHER
EL OBEID
GONDAR
DJIBOUTI
NYALA
BERBERA
DESSYE
BURAO
BABANUSA
RENK
LAS ANOD
HARAR
HARGEISA
MALAKAL
ADDIS ABABA
ETHIOPIA
BENTIU
JIMMA
GALKAYU
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
GOBA
WAU
YIRGA-ALAM
BELET HUEN
RUMBEK
BOR
JUBA
MEGA
YAMBIO
NIMULE
MOGADISCIO
ZAIRE
UGANDA
KENYA
SOMALIA

NORTH EAST AFRICA

MILES 0 100 200 300
KILOMETERS 0 100 200 300
BORDERS
ROADS
RAILROADS
SWAMP

Gallery was forty feet high at least, and since we had to crouch in the passageways, at first it seemed even higher. Back into the passage for another few hundred yards, and then, with one last, great step, we emerged into the King's Chamber, located about in the center of the structure. Pyramid, in fact, is Greek, and means "fire in the center."

The King's Chamber was entirely empty except for a lidless stone tomb at the northern end of the room, large enough for twenty-five or thirty people to crowd into. The walls were completely bare of hieroglyphics or art of any form, nor was there any ornamentation of any kind on the sarcophagus. In fact, it is rather strange that there was not even a lid to it. The room is just how the Arabs found it when they entered centuries ago.

"Is this it?" said Derek, echoing what the Arabs must have said when they first entered the pyramid. "Let's go."

Derek left, but I stayed for awhile, the only person in the room. The tomb was just big enough for a normal-sized person to lie in comfortably. On an impulse, I got into the tomb and lay down. According to esoteric legends, initiates of the Egyptian mystery schools would spend the night in the King's Chamber, sleeping in the tomb. Looking up at the ceiling, I was filled with awe. Not just at the pyramid and its builders, but at life in general. It was a great feeling lying there. I felt very much alive.

Some people entered the room, and I listened to the odd echoes that their voices made as I lay in the tomb. I got out, sat quietly in a corner for awhile, and then returned back down the passages to the exterior. Derek was waiting for me.

"Cor, you were in there a long time!" he said. "I've waited out here for forty-five minutes!"

"Forty-five minutes!" I answered back. "Wow, it hardly seemed like any time at all to me." Time had flown. We walked down to the Sphinx, interesting, but very small in comparison to the Great Pyramid. Derek had to get back to the Youth Hostel and left. It was getting late anyway; sunset would be soon.

I decided to hang around for awhile, and maybe catch the Sound and Light Show that was later in the evening. Killing time, I walked back around the Great Pyramid, and while on the far western side, decided to climb to the top. Most of the tourists were gone, and I didn't see anyone, so I tried it even though it is against the rules to climb on the structures.

Nearly an hour later, after plenty of huffing and puffing and dragging myself up over countless three and four foot high blocks, I was sitting on the flat top of the Great Pyramid. To the east, I had a great view of Cairo and the Nile. To the west, the sun was just setting in the desolate western desert, an area of sand and a few oases.

I watched the sun silently while sitting cross-legged on the granite stones, when I suddenly heard some heavy breathing to my left. I figured it was some tourist policeman, come to arrest me, and started thinking of a good story to tell. With a great gasp of breath, followed by much panting, a figure hauled himself up into the top with both hands, and a knee over the edge. Crawling on his hands and knees, he came over to where I was sitting crosslegged on the western edge.

He wasn't an Egyptian. A trim man in his forties, I guessed, he had short brown hair and brown plastic-rimmed spectacles. Wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and a pair of black wool pants, he didn't seem dressed for pyramid climbing.

"Quite a climb," I said.

"Yes, indeed," he panted. The two of us sat silently on top of the pyramid for several moments and looked off to the west. Beyond the sand and other ancient structures, a giant orange sun was slowly settling down into the horizon.

"Ah, this is a great pyramid," I sighed.

"Yes," the man laughed, "yes, it is."

"Have you been inside yet?" I asked.

"Earlier today," he replied.

"It's interesting," I said, "that the pyramid was empty when first opened by the Arabs a thousand years ago. And that the King's and Queen's chambers were totally devoid of hieroglyphics or ornamentation."

"That, you might say," said the man, turning his head to look at me, "is the Riddle of the Sphinx." He reached into his back pocket and brought out his billfold. "Who, why, and how the Great Pyramid was built has always been a mystery. The Great Pyramid is very different from the other pyramids. Evidence suggests that it was built for some other reason than a tomb."

"Wow, you know alot more about this than I do. The Great Pyramid has always fascinated me," I said, my eyes on the orange glow of the west.

The stranger pulled a bill out of his wallet. It was an American one dollar note. "The Great Pyramid can be found on every one dollar bill," he said. "This is the Great Seal of the United States." I had never noticed it before, but there it was, the Great Pyramid! On top of it was a sort of all-seeing eye, and in the dim light I could read a Latin inscription below it, "Novus Ordo Seclorum". I translated this via my highschool Latin as "New Order of the Ages".

"That's pretty interesting," I said.

"The Great Pyramid is rather interesting," he said. "Among other things, it encompasses a number of incredible mathematical concepts. Aside from the Golden Mean and the Pythagoran Theorum, the pyramid rests on a square that is exactly 36,524.2 pyramid inches in diameter . . ."

"Pyramid inches . . . ?"

"Indeed. One hundredth of that is the precise number of days in a year. The pyramid inch, by the way, is one five-hundred-millionth of the diameter of the earth through its polar axis."

". . . one five-hundred-millionth . . ."

"Right! The Great Pyramid was built by a system of sophisticated canals and locks to move the huge blocks of stone. The smallest one weighs nearly three tons and there are over 2.3 million blocks of stone in the pyramid! Not bad for a culture that was supposedly one step from the stone age!" He suddenly turned to me. His face was scorched by the last light of the sunset and alive with a terrific grin. There was no doubt about it, it felt great to be up there. "The builders of the Great Pyramid were superior scientists and architects. Their expertise, precision and mathematical knowledge was unmatched until only a few years ago. For nearly six thousand years the builders of the Great Pyramid were unequaled in excellence!"

"The builders? You mean the Pharoahs?"

"No, the builders of the Great Pyramid were the Hyksos, a people who came from Ethiopia and migrated to Egypt in about 5,000 BC and brought the technology with them. After they had infiltrated the Egyptian Government they set about to build the Great Pyramid, a monument of precision and scientific excellence which still stands after six thousand years!"

"Wow, and we're sitting on top of it right now," I said. Glancing back to my left, I could see the Sphinx still visible in the dim glow of

the sunset. The cool winter night was coming alive with stars, dancing in the desert to the music of the spheres. "What is all this new order stuff, then?" I asked.

He thought carefully for a minute and then said, "Well, the pyramid wasn't just built as a scientific marvel. Some ancient records say that it was built to hold the Biblical Arc of the Covenant. That is what the empty tomb in the King's Chamber is for. And it was also built to formalize a prophetic message, that mankind will once again live in a new golden age, a new order, after thousands of years of wars and chaos."

"Can't wait," I said. "When will all this take place, do you suppose?"

"Oh," said the stranger, standing up and stretching, "pretty soon, I would think. We can't take too much more of this chaos and war. My name is Dick, by the way." And he held out his hand toward me.

Shaking his hand, I introduced myself. "My name is David."

"Pleased to meet you, David," he said and suddenly produced a flashlight. "Shall we start down?"

It was already dark. The last rays of the sunset had already died. At our backs, the lights of Cairo were lighting up the sky. We carefully climbed down the pyramid, lowering ourselves from block to block, Dick shining the flashlight for me as I went ahead. At the bottom we shook hands again.

"Thanks for the conversation," I said.

"My pleasure," he said, turning toward the road. "Good night."

I walked to the sphinx just as the sound and light show was starting, and sat on a sand dune to watch the show. Afterwards I caught a crowded bus back into Cairo. Just before the bus came I stood and looked skyward at the African stars in the cloudless desert sky. Practically across the street was the Great Pyramid, looking like a space ship about to take off. On its far side sat the sphinx, still waiting for an answer to its riddle.

° °

Over the next new days in Cairo, I met Derek at my hotel or at the Youth Hostel, and we wandered the bazaars or sat in the tea shops of Egypt. We would drink the sweet, strong tea and eat pastries in the

street cafes full of old men in striped pyjamas or robes, who played backgammon all day, drank coffee or tea and smoked their water pipes.

One afternoon in a tea shop, Derek took a long, syrupy sip of his tea and ordered a water pipe, just for the heck of it. He was a cigarette smoker, anyway. Our waiter grabbed the nearest one by the wall, about three feet high, and placed it next to our table. He then took a clay bowl, packed it with tobacco which was soaked in honey, and placed two or three red hot coals on it.

Derek took a couple of puffs and passed the hose to me. Not being a smoker, I took a small token puff. Everyone in the tea shop was watching us. Derek said it was pretty strong stuff, but the waterpipe mellowed it out quite a bit.

Afterwards we walked about the market and stopped in one of the many shops along the street. They were small, sole-proprietor-type places, some a sort of general store, others specializing in clothing, dishware or tourist gifts. It was in this last kind of shop that we decided to stop and browse. After some time, Derek picked out a souvenir, a cast bronze statue of an Egyptian god with a human body and jackal's head. I offered to bargain for him.

"How much is this?" I asked the merchant. His heavy face twitched slightly, and he looked up at the ceiling with his brown eyes.

"Oh, let's see," scratching his green striped robe in the vicinity of his buttocks and tugging on his black, thick beard. "Only ten pounds."

"I'll give you four," I said.

"Four pounds? You must be joking. I'll make it nine. Special for you!" he said in amazingly good English.

"Nine?" I countered, "No way, I'll give you five, tops."

"Five! Come on! Eight is the absolute cheapest I can go. Here," he said handing it to me, "take it, eight pounds, only for you." He began wrapping it up as if I had already bought it.

"Take it," Derek whispered to me. "We'll never get it cheaper!"

"Sorry," I said to the merchant, "I can only afford to pay six pounds. I'll pay six, tops," and I reached into my pocket and pulled out six pounds, Egyptian cash.

"No!" protested the merchant, shifting his fat bulk to one side and nervously stroking his rough moustache. "Seven is the absolute cheapest."

"Really?" I said. "I'm afraid that I can only afford six. That's Ok.

It's not really that important. Thank you anyway." And Derek and I started to walk out.

"Take it!" Derek whispered. "Let's take it!"

"Wait!" the merchant suddenly came after us. "Alright, I'll take six—but I'm losing money . . ."

Later down the street we saw the exact same statue in another shop with the price Five Pounds written on it. The merchant nodded to us as we passed. We couldn't help break out laughing . . .

° °

The next day we were both on our way to Luxor, about 350 miles to the south along the Nile. We were traveling on the Luxor Express, going second class air-conditioned, in comfortable reserved seats that were much like airline seats, reclinable and spacious. We were constantly amused on the train. Even a magician came to our car and did magic tricks, and then passed a hat. At other times we were engaged by some Egyptian wishing to practice his English and learn about our countries.

I knew after my first week in Egypt that there was no hitchhiking to speak of. Egypt is so crowded, and public transportation is so plentiful, although crowded, that it would be rather difficult to get a lift. The exception would be in the remote desert roads going out to the oases to the west, such as the El Qasr Oasis, where there are fewer vehicles and people. All over the world, hitchhiking is best in unpopulated, rural areas.

The best way to travel long distances in Egypt is by train. They are cheap and efficient, and unlike many African countries where nothing other than fourth class is affordable to the hitchhiker, second class reserved is a real bargain, and you are assured a seat. It is also possible to get a student discount on train fares if you have an International Student Card. The student concession office is at Ramses Station, the main railway station in Cairo.

Buses are also cheap, but insanely crowded. If you are making a side trip to the Red Sea or an oasis, you will probably have to take a bus. One trick for obtaining a seat is to pay some little kid a few piasters to get on the bus and hold a seat for you. Taxis are reasonable, and handy for getting around the metropolises of Cairo and Alexandria,

although it can be hell trying to comandeer a taxi sometimes, as there is a severe shortage. Try going to a major hotel and asking the doorman to call you a taxi. ("You're a taxi," one doorman at the Hilton in Cairo said to me, a joke he had learned from a New York tourist.) Taxis have meters but rarely use them. Bargain for your ride if possible, or establish a standard fare with the desk clerk at your hotel before you go somewhere.

Egypt has three big ports. Alexandria is a good spot for catching a boat to Italy, France or Greece across the Mediterranean. There is Port Said on the Mediterranean side of the Suez Canal, also a good spot for catching a freighter across the Mediterranean, but the port for hitch-hikers on their way to Arabia and the African countries beyond Egypt is the port of Suez, on the southern end of the Suez Canal. From here you can get freighters or yachts to Jeddah, Port Sudan, Djibouti and other ports in the Red Sea, as well as into the Indian Ocean and ports in East Africa and India.

There are also sailboats, called "feluccas", that sail up and down the Nile and will take passengers. You can rent one by the day or week, go for a day cruise or sail between cities. It is slow, however, especially if you are going south, or upstream. Sailing between Luxor and Aswan is probably the best idea, as it is only a hundred miles or so. Bargain for these boats.

Lastly, there is the twice weekly steamer on Lake Aswan, between Sudan and Egypt. It leaves the docks at the High Dam a few miles north of Aswan and takes two nights and a day to make the trip to Wadi Halfa, the northernmost town in Sudan. Take food and water with you, though some food and drink can be purchased on the ship. As a tourist, you'll breeze past the customs officials who are tearing apart the locals' luggage, and be able to get a good spot on an upper deck of the boat. You'll definitely need a sleeping bag, unless you are going first class and have your own cabin. There are four or five on the ship. Make sure that you have a Sudanese visa before you're off to Sudan, as you can't get one at the border.

We arrived late the same night in Luxor, the ancient city of Thebes, an area of a lot of ancient Egyptian ruins. We found a cheap hotel just outside the train station, the New Karnak Hotel, a fleabag of sorts, utterly full of travelers from Europe. The top floor had a big room with foam mattresses all over the floor, and for fifty cents a night you

could sleep up here in your sleeping bag. Derek and I crashed out and began exploring Luxor the next day.

Basically a small, sleepy tourist town, Luxor is popular because of Karnak Temple, a huge temple complex, most of which is still standing, and the Valley of Kings, five miles across the Nile to the west. Aside from the New Karnak Hotel, there is the Happy Home Hotel, Soukri's El Aref Hotel, a Youth Hostel, and several other cheap hotels where you can get a room for a couple of dollars a night, or a bed in a dormitory for less than a dollar.

Derek and I decided to rent bicycles and ride out to the Valley of Kings, a necropolis of sixty-four pharaoh's tombs including the tomb of Tutankhamen, the only one not looted by grave robbers. We paid twenty-five piastres for a ferry across the Nile and then rode out to the tombs, about six miles away. We visited the tomb of Seti I, the largest and perhaps the most impressive, with amazing drawings and hieroglyphs on the walls. Just near the entrance is Tutankhamen's tomb, where his golden mummy lies encased in his original three nested gold coffins.

Nearby is the Valley of Queens, where there are fifty-six more tombs to visit, but most are unsafe, as the ancient Egyptians placed lots of boobytraps and death pits in them to discourage grave robbers, many of whom did meet a rather grisly end while attempting to raid a pharaoh's possessions.

Back at Luxor, we went for a walk along the Nile and up to the Temple of Karnak, the 3,400-year-old temple of Amenophis III. It is crowded with the monumental architecture of Egypt's Age of Empire. Within the 60 acre complex are temples, chapels, giant stone pharoahs, commemorative obelisks and the largest columnar structure ever raised, the Temple of Amun. There is nice sound and light show here in the evenings; check for days when it is in English.

Other sights to see in Luxor are the museum, the Temple of Luxor and other temples out near the Valley of Kings. All in all, Luxor contains the ruins of the most gigantic and best preserved monuments, statues and temples in all of Egypt, representing the greatest artistic accomplishments of the ancient Egyptians from the XIII to the XXX dynasties.

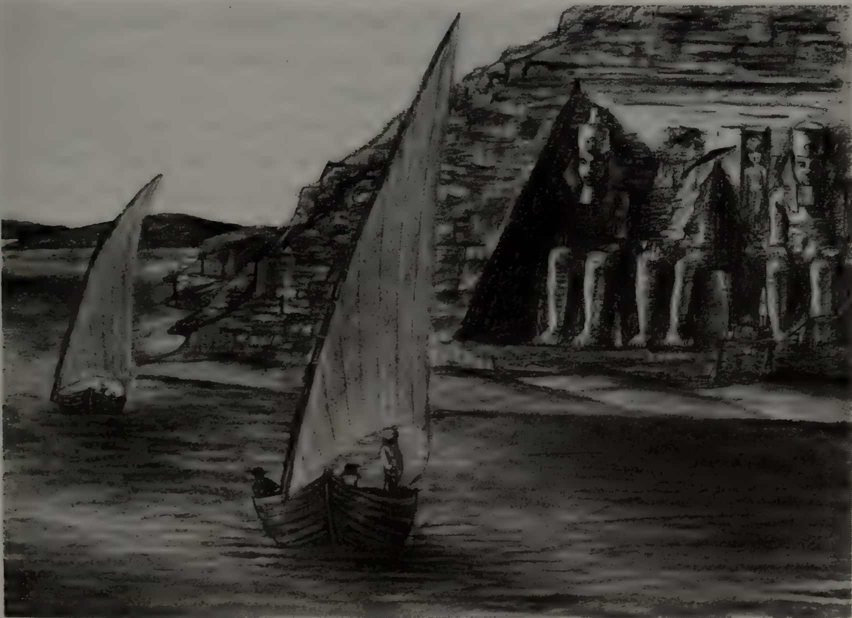
A couple of hours south by train is Aswan, traditionally the gateway to the south and the trade route from Egypt to central Africa. There

are no major archeological sites in Aswan, but it is a very pleasant, and for Egypt, a relaxing town. Here locals do less begging of tourists for "baksheesh" (tips), and there are no huge crowds of people fighting to get on buses. It is a peaceful spot, good for walks along the Nile, afternoons sailing among the islands of Aswan in a felucca, or just watching those lovely sailboats from the balcony of your hotel.

There are a number of cheap and pleasant hotels located along the Nile, a mile or two from the train station, so you may want to take a taxi or donkey cart out to them. There is the Aswan Palace, the Aswan Continental, a Youth Hostel and more, all with beds in a shared room for one or two dollars a night. Derek and I checked into the Aswan Palace and shared a room with a young French traveler, his head shaved, perhaps because of lice, and one of the smallest backpacks I had ever seen. The room had a great view of the Nile and we used an old but clean bathroom down the hall.

Derek and I spent several days in Aswan just relaxing. We wandered in the market, ate Egyptian sweets, looked for 3 piaster eggs, drank tea and sat for hours every day by the Nile.

It was very pleasant, but eventually my dwindling supply of money—



I had less than $150 left—made me realize that my stay in Egypt had to come to an end. Derek was heading back to Cairo and Great Britain; I would be taking the ferry to Sudan. I wanted to get as far into Africa as I could before I ran out of cash. I bought some provisions for the trip, and then Derek went with me by train, only half an hour's journey, to the New Harbor just past the High Dam, built by the Russians in the early sixties: a monumental task Egyptians like to compare with the building of the pyramids.

Derek went back to Aswan and I was left standing on the docks at sunset, waiting to board the ferry. I got a space on an upper deck, sitting with some other travelers, and later in the night the ferry started to move. In the morning I found we had indeed gone somewhere, to a small mooring about a hundred yards away from port! Shortly after breakfast we were really under way, the diesel engines sputtering us along. The shores on either side of the long, skinny, man-made lake were absolutely barren and rocky. There was not a plant or village in sight.

The ferry passes by the fantastic, colossal statues of Ramses II and the Great Temple behind it. However, this is at night, so you won't get to see the temples from the boat. There is a hydrofoil that takes tourists from Aswan, but it is usually being repaired. It is also possible to fly to Abu Simbel, the name for this site of statues and temples, but that is quite expensive. I just had to pass it up.

On the ferry the travelers chatted and told stories they had heard of Sudan, Kenya, and other countries. We were all excited to be heading into black Africa. On the second day of the journey, in the late afternoon, I leaned against the boat rail. The sun was just setting to the west, turning the sharp barren mountains of the Western Desert a deep orange-red. Glancing to my left, I saw an old man, an Egyptian, wearing a brown striped robe and plastic sandals. His bushy grey beard was distinguished, and there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Salaam Aleikum," he said, when he noticed me staring at him.

"Aleikum a Salaam," I responded.

"How have you enjoyed Egypt, sir?" he asked in English.

"Very well, thank you. Egypt is a wonderful country."

"Oh, thank you. Thank you very much," he said. "You are a friend." And he put his hand on my shoulder. We smiled and watched the glow of the sunset. In the morning we would both be in Sudan.

3 · SUDAN: THE RETURN OF THE MAHDI

The joy of travel is not nearly so much in getting to where one wants to go as in the unsought surprises which occur on the journey.

ALAN WATTS, *THE WAY OF ZEN*

I **HAD NO SOONER** stepped off the boat when the customs officer asked me if I had anything to declare. He was squinting at me in the bright morning sun, a faded blue-grey hat covering his dark brown, balding scalp. Short locks of tight, black, curly hair popped out around his ears. Although his skin was quite dark, his facial features were more semitic than negroid; his nose was long and narrow though his lips were fuller than an Egyptian's. On the corners of his eyebrows were four tribal scars. He wore a long white robe which was thoroughly in need of washing. If it hadn't been for his official cap, he'd have been just another body in the crowd of white robes, which is what most men in the Sudan wear.

I thought for a moment. No, I didn't have anything to declare, I told him. He smiled broadly and genuinely. "Too bad. Well, welcome to the Democratic Republic of the Sudan. We're pleased to have you."

"Thank you!" I answered. I felt as if I had just been invited personally by the president himself. On such a positive note, I officially stepped into the Sudan at Wadi Halfa.

Northern Sudan, like southern Egypt, is as barren as a desert can

be—no sight of vegetation anywhere. The flat landscape is broken by jagged volcanic mountains which rise several hundred feet out of the thick dust which covers everything.

In the middle of all this dust and scorching heat squats Wadi Halfa, not one's idea of an idyllic desert oasis. A small town of about a hundred mud brick houses, the main reason for its existence is as a border post and the northern terminus of the extensive Sudanese railway system. There is also a satellite telecommunications station here, built by the Americans, and of course the small port, immigration station on Lake Aswan for the twice weekly ferries to Egypt. It is really not a spot that encourages tourists to linger.

Being the kind who enjoys just sitting in a sidewalk cafe and watching the world go by, I immediately noticed a small tea stall off to the left of the docks by the lake. Walking up to it, I asked the young, dark Sudanese kid how much a cup of tea was in the Arabic I was starting to pick up. Seeing as I was now in a new country, I wanted to get a feel for prices and a cup of tea was a good place to start.

"Three piasters," said the kid, who was probably about ten years old. His white teeth contrasted strongly against the charcoal face.

"Fine," I said in Arabic, "I have to change some money." He smiled and said in simple Arabic, "That's OK, you don't need money, have a cup of free tea."

I was truly stunned. A camel could just as easily have come up and kicked me in the head. We certainly weren't in Egypt anymore! In Egypt you would be charged double for a cup of tea!

I sat and had a cup of pinkish-red karkadee tea with the young boy. Karkadee tea is made from the red petals of the hibiscus flower. It is served with sugar, hot or cold. This was the first time I had ever had any, and it was delicious.

My new friend the tea seller was pretty tall for his age, I thought. Lanky and slender, he wore a long, dusty, white robe, like almost everyone else, and a white knit skull cap on his head indicating he was a Muslim. His hair was short, tight and curly, and he had beautiful, dark brown skin, with those customary Sudanese tribal scars on his eyebrows.

Casually sipping my hot tea, I gazed out at Wadi Halfa. Low, one-story houses made of brown mud bricks, they were square and typically had four or five rooms. Surrounding each home was a nine

foot wall of the same bricks, making each house a sort of small brown dirt fortress. Houses of the more affluent had broken shards of glass all along the top of the wall to keep out thieves.

There is no hotel in Wadi Halfa; at least there wasn't one when I was there. I was told that my best bets were to stay at the Police Station, something I ended up doing in quite a few small towns, or else sleeping on the beach in front of the ferry. I actually intended on doing neither of those things. Looking over out past the scattered brown buildings was the train station at the far end of town; beyond it was a barren sea of dust.

"Better get a place on that train," said my kind tea server, "it fills up fast." And in fact, people as they got through immigration were making a mad dash for the train. I'd heard that Sudanese trains can be pretty crowded, so I grabbed my pack and walked across town to get a third class seat on the train.

There was an English couple already on the train who said they would save me a seat next to them, so I left my luggage there and went back into town to change some money and buy a train ticket. Then I had some more tea and small cookies at my favorite tea stall with that lanky kid and passed away the rest of the hot, dusty day. The train filled up by late afternoon and we started on the trip to Khartoum. It is theoretically a twice weekly, twenty-four hour trip to Khartoum from Wadi Halfa. I say theoretically because, like all things in Sudan, trains don't really run the way they are supposed to. The Sudanese are used to this, of course, and it is generally the accepted way of life that "if anything can go wrong, it will."

A train is not really late until it is three or four days behind schedule.

Boats that run "regular" schedules on the Nile are know to take an extra two weeks because of variable conditions. The first words learned and the most often used in Sudan are "tomorrow" (bukra), "it doesn't matter" (mahlesh) and "if God wills it" (inshallah). It is this characteristic of Sudan that makes its people probably the most amiable, easy-going and patient of any in the world. You will rarely see a Sudanese in a hurry or angry because something hasn't been done. Anyway, it will happen tomorrow, if God wills it, and it really doesn't matter anyway.

After a fitful first night on a crowded seat in the third class car, I spent the entire second day on the roof of the train. Having noticed a few Sudanese up there at some of the stops, I climbed up and sat on top of the car. At first I was a bit afraid of falling off the side, but the train's motion was entirely forward and I was assured by the Sudanese that there was no danger. It was cool as well, despite a danger of sunstroke. I kept my head covered to protect it from the unrelenting sun. The train generated a huge cloud of fine dust; it would get so bad inside the train, with the fine brown stuff everywhere, that most of the passengers would breathe through a damp hankerchief so as not to inhale a lung full of dust. That evening as the sun was going down, a steady warm wind blew across on the train roof, and the small towns along the tracks began to light up, I began really thinking about Sudan. Egypt was touristy and Mediterranean, but this was the real Africa. My whole body shivered with the joy of being there on that train, heading south into Africa, into the heart of the unknown, into something I knew nothing about, not what to expect, not anything really. With my mind empty of expectations, I was ready to experience Sudan.

Sudan is the largest country in Africa, about the size of the United States west of Colorado, from the Canadian to the Mexican border. Its population of fifteen million is concentrated in the fertile area around the two Niles—the Blue Nile coming from the mountains of Ethiopia to the southeast and the White Nile which begins at Lake Victoria in Uganda and flows north through Sudan and Egypt for 3,670 miles to the Mediterranean Sea. These two rivers meet at the capital of Sudan, Khartoum.

I lay back on the roof and gazed up at the myriads of stars that pricked through the black sky like a trillion tiny holes in a tin lantern.

I could not remember ever having seen so many. I had read that Sudan was one of the most underdeveloped countries in Africa. Before 1964, when Sudan gained independence from Britain, it was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and was administered jointly by Britain and a semi-independent Egypt. After independence, Sudan kept close political and economic ties with Egypt and declared itself, like Egypt, a Socialist State. Like Egypt, it sought aid from the Soviet Union while at the same time fighting a long and economically frustrating Civil War between the Muslim Arabs of the North and the non-Muslim blacks of the South. In the 1970's Sudan followed Egypt in breaking ties with the Soviets and developing stronger ties with the west, though remaining "socialist".

Sudan's history has always been linked with Egypt's. About 800 B.C. the Kushite kings established their capital at Merowe, north of Khartoum, and at times, also ruled over Egypt. Later the kingdom of Nubia arose and was converted to Christianity in the 6th century. Several centuries later the Arabs began to penetrate Sudan and bring Islam with them, affecting only the north. In 1830 the Sudan was conquered by the Egyptians and a Turko-Egyptian rule was established under the Ottoman Empire. Then in 1881 Mohammed Ahmed Al-Mahdi (the Mahdi) led a successful revolt against the Turko-Egyptian rulers. General Gordon, who was employed as the Governor of the Sudan by the Egyptian government, failed to halt the revolt of the Mahdi's fanatical Mujaheedin (Holy Warriors) and they swept over Khartoum, killing Gordon and all other foreigners. In Arabic, a war led by a religious leader for some sacred cause, such as ridding of your country of foreign rulers, is known as a "jihad" or holy war. The Mahdi was then in control of Sudan but died soon afterwards. He was succeeded by Khalifa Abd Allahi who resisted the Egyptians and British for more than fifteen years, but in 1898 the Khalifa was defeated at Omdurman and Anglo-Egyptian rule, for the time, was re-established. Legend has it that the Mahdi, some kind of incarnation of the Prophet Mohammed himself, would return to free the country from its worldly rulers and create a righteous state in Sudan.

I suddenly sat up from where I was lying on top of the train and looked at the gentleman sitting next to me. He was tall and of a strong figure. His robes were immaculately white, a nice lizardskin dagger was stuck in his belt and a huge white turban was wound around his

brown shaven head. His face had three tribal scars on each cheek and as I stared unconsciously he gave me a wink, as if to say, "I'm back."

The train arrived in Khartoum in the middle of the night. Tired and dirty, the English couple and I managed to walk to the Youth Hostel, which is about eight minutes along the railroad tracks to the north from the main station. After a good sleep in a bed, we explored Khartoum the next day. The houses, as in Wadi Halfa, were of baked mud bricks. And there were a lot of them, each with its wall around it and garden and terrace inside. Because of the hot dry weather, Sudanese like to sleep outside a lot, dozing on their jute string beds in their gardens. In the downtown are more modern government buildings and hotels, but they look rather rundown and dull, concrete and square. Here we find the Palace where General Gordon was beheaded by the Mahdi's fervent warriors. Now the President of Sudan lives there, a general himself.

There is also the confluence of the Niles and the more authentic-feeling city across the Nile, Omdurman. In Omdurman you'll find a great bazaar and camel market. The tomb of the Mahdi is to be found here as well, and a special treat is the Sufi dancing at a Saint's tomb on the northern outskirts of Omdurman.

There is a good choice of cheap hotels in Khartoum for the hitchhiker to stay in. Generally they are the walled courtyard type, where you will have a jute-string bed and cotton mattress to sleep on, either in a room, with other people, or just out in the garden, as many like to do. You can have your own room, and this is cheap too. About three dollars for a room and a dollar just to occupy a bed somewhere. The accommodation is simple; if you have a table in your room, you're lucky. Just store all your stuff underneath your bed. If you are staying in a common room with all kinds of people coming and going, as I usually did, keep your money and passport on you or under your pillow and things like cameras deep in your pack immediately under your bed. There are also watchmen who watch the hotel during the day, and it is unlikely that anyone will walk off with your luggage. Bathrooms are always common, and a toilet is a hole in the floor. There is not likely to be any toilet paper there either, so carry your own. Sudanese use water and their left hand for hygiene of this sort, and this is the reason why you never pass anyone food or eat with your left hand! Flushing this kind of toilet is often done with just a bucket of water.

There are a number of choices of places to stay in Khartoum; the youth hostel is pretty good, and a nice place to meet other travelers. It is probably the cheapest place to stay at seventy cents a night, and is located just behind the American club, a ten minute walk north of the train station. At the American Club you can get a temporary membership for a small fee and use their swimming pool, which is one of the nicest in Sudan. There are a number of cheap hotels around the train station. Just walk straight out of the gate and head toward the downtown area, turning to the left or right after the first block. You'll find hotels such as the Royal, where you can get a bed for one or two dollars. If you are planning to stay a while, or find Khartoum too cosmopolitan, then you might consider renting a room in a hotel near the market across the Nile in Omdurman. Here is a nifty camel market, jeweler's bazaar and plenty of cheap hotels. This is also a good spot for checking out trucks that might be going out into the wilds of Sudan. Ask the drivers if there are any trucks going your way.

Sudan has very few roads to speak of. They are mostly dirt tracks that run off through the desert or forest, each truck following the tracks of the truck that went a few days before him, hoping that guy knew where he was going. In all of Sudan there is about fifty miles of paved road, from Khartoum south to Wad Medani. You can hitch-hike on the gigantic "lorries", the British term for big trucks, that ply the far corners of Sudan. This is probably the fastest way to get around. You should just hang out in the markets of the towns until you see such a truck—in major towns there are usually quite a few parked on the street, and ask the driver, who will usually be close by. Normally, you will have to pay for these rides, but occasionally they are free. Prices vary from quite reasonable to simply outrageous, so bargain. Sudanese also travel this way and the trucks usually have other passengers, so reserve your seat early. It is more expensive to sit up front in the cab with the driver, so most hitchhikers prefer to hang out in the back of the truck, lounging on a big soft bale of cotton, if they're lucky. Otherwise they could be standing on an oil drum. It would be best to inquire about the cargo your truck will be carrying. Sometimes meals are included as part of the fare, but otherwise you had better take some food along with you, and always carry a canteen of water. Hitchhiking on planes (private ones) is also possible in Sudan and parts of central Africa. The airport in Juba is a good spot to pick up lifts to

Kenya, Zaire, Khartoum and other spots. There are small airstrips all over Sudan and many missionaries and development companies fly their own planes. Just walk up and ask someone with a plane where they're going and if you could have a lift. It happens all the time!

There are ferries that run up and down the Nile from Kosti to Juba, though it's easier and faster to take a truck between Kosti and Malakal and take the ferry south from there. Going north, down river, is a lot faster, but the journey from Kosti to Juba could take as long as two weeks. Third and fourth class are extremely crowded and pose a definite health problem as malaria runs rampant in the lower holds and it is not uncommon for old people and small children to die of the disease on the journey. First class is very expensive, so travelers often find a happy medium by sleeping on the deck of the first class. Carry a mosquito net and malarial tablets. Here it is a good idea to take a heavy dose for the entire trip, as well as a couple of weeks after the trip, as you are almost sure to be exposed to malaria!

Port Sudan, on the coast, also has plenty of freighters in port and it is possible to hop a ship north or south along the Red Sea. For the adventurous, an interesting way to travel around Sudan is by camel. Camels are relatively cheap in Sudan; you pick one up at your local used camel dealer in Omdurman or other towns in the north, and ride him all over Sudan. You can even make a tidy profit by riding your camel to Egypt or Kenya, where camels are quite a bit more expensive, and selling it there.

Whenever possible, I preferred to travel by train. Sudan has an extensive railway network, but trains are slow and chokingly crowded. There is really no difference between third and fourth class, and if you opt for this style, then go early to the station and get a seat or hire someone to do it for you. Otherwise, go second class where a seat will be reserved for you. Riding on the roof is quite enjoyable and safe—and cool during the hot months. It is possible to get a 50% reduction on trains and ferry fares by going to the Ministry of Youth Offices in Khartoum, Juba and other major cities and showing them a valid student card.

On the train to Khartoum I had met a Chinese-Canadian biologist named Blythe, from Vancouver, who was interested in traveling to the South of Sudan. After a few days of sight-seeing in Khartoum and Omdurman, we decided to buy tickets on the weekly train to Wau,

the southern terminus of the Sudanese railway system. Because I was practically broke, I convinced my potential traveling companion to buy a fourth class ticket with me, one that was totally unreserved. We were advised to board the train early as it tended to fill up very fast—just how fast and full we found out too late.

It turned out that most people actually spend the night on the train—the night before, even though it doesn't leave until noon the next day. We arrived three hours before departure and the train was already completely stuffed from fourth class through second class. It was impossible to make our way through the cars, as the aisles were full of people, chickens, beds, suitcases and other belongings. We had been warned! Although we didn't have first class tickets, we juggled our way into first class and settled down in the hall, where we spent the night.

The next morning at our first stop, I got off the train and had a quick look around. The sight that greeted my eyes was astonishing. The inside of the train was completely packed; now the top was just as crowded! Trunks and mattresses, chickens and people were tied or hanging onto the top of the train. There were easily several hundred people up there, enjoying the view and squinting in the blazing African sun.

I climbed up the side to the roof (on the theory that there is always room for one more) and spent the rest of the day relishing the best view I'd ever had on any train. Looking forward I could see the whole length of the train, the diesel engine up at the front dragging us west along the semi-arid grassland of central Sudan. The whole top of the train was in high spirits; we'd all wave at the occasional shepherd with his flock or nomadic family on the move. People would share a mango or some bread. Life took on the spontaneity of the moment; it was good to be alive and we all knew it. A certain exhilaration flowed down the length of the train, through us and into the sunset that was already engulfing us.

The scenery was semi-desert, flat with dry grass and bushes, and an occasional baobab tree to break the monotony. Baobab trees have large, thick, short trunks that suddenly flare into leafless branches. During the winter, young trees flower with pink blossoms, still without leaves.

We crossed the White Nile at Kosti and continued toward the

junction of El Obeid and Babanoosa. Toward sunset, the next day, I notice a dark swarm moving along the tops of bushes toward the train. The swarm covered the whole horizon and flew together in a wave motion. Soon we were engulfed in a cloud of locusts, thousands of them blocking out the sky, covering the train and all the bushes that we could see. Everyone was covered with locusts; I was freaking out, brushing them wildly off me, but three would take the place of each one I brushed off. Finally we drove through that cloud of locusts as one drives through a rain storm, and it was a great relief for me, although the Sudanese on top of the train didn't seem to have minded a whole lot. It was dark by now, so, at the next stop, I got down off my perch and went into the first class car where my companion was waiting. We spent another night in the first class hallway.

The next morning we awoke to find the train not moving. Stepping outside, we saw we were not in a station, but out in the middle of the desert. During the night we had passed El Obeid and were halfway to Babanoosa, the main station in western Sudan. The engine had broken down before dawn, we were told, so we would have to wait for relief in the form of another engine coming from Babanoosa. We waited and the sun beat down.

At mid-morning all the water reserves on the train ran out and at mid-afternoon our own canteens were empty too. I looked around the train and found the army car which is attached to every train going south and west. The soldiers offered me some water and I gratefully filled my canteen. Still stranded in the desert, we spent another night on the train, my friend and I making dinner out of halva, a sesame seed candy, and bread. About nine the next morning, a put-put car arrived from Babanoosa; after hours of tinkering the engine was running and an hour and a half after that we pulled into a small desert station and happily replenished our water supplies at a small well pump, while the engine took on water from a tank. Toward evening we finally arrived at Babanoosa, where we would change trains for Wau.

There was a mad rush of people trying to get a place on the train to Wau. Hoping to get a seat this time, we hurried over to the waiting train ahead of most of the others who had, it appeared, whole households to move. To our dismay, we found the train already full of "squatters" who had been waiting several days (the train running only

once a week at best). While most of the people fought for a spot on the roof, we once more settled in the first class hallway.

Later, as I walked around the station in the evening by myself, a station of only a few small buildings and ticket office, but many people cooking and sitting around fires or selling food, I talked with a young black private in the army, a tall, very dark negro from the South. Clean shaven and handsome, he wore a neatly pressed but old soldier's uniform and he spoke remarkably good English. He had gone to a missionary school in Equatorial Province, he said. I commented on how crowded the train had been coming from Khartoum.

"If you thought that was bad, wait until you see this one to Wau— now that's crowded!" It was difficult to imagine, I admitted. He went on to explain our breakdown in the desert; apparently, the conductors had managed to entice some girls into a first class compartment, become drunk and let the engine overheat. They didn't bother fixing the engine, so we sat there for a day waiting for a new one to come from Babanoosa. I was shocked at this, so he further explained that the reason the train went so slow and we stopped for such a long time at each station was that the engineers get paid by the hour, so naturally they took as long as possible to get from Khartoum to Wau. Like everyone else in Sudan, they were in no hurry.

The young soldier and I walked along the tracks for a while and eventually we came to a small group of people sitting around a fire. My friend and I sat with them for a bit and presently one man, older than the rest, announced he would tell a story. Like the men around the fire, and most Sudanese men in fact, he wore a long white robe of cotton which went down to his ankles, a pair of leather sandals on his brown cracked feet and a long white piece of cloth wound around his head in a turban. He was cleanshaven and had three very deep parallel scars on each brown cheek to indicate he was of a certain tribe. My friend interpreted for me the tale that the man told in Arabic.

"Long ago there was a saint, a Sufi or holy man. Many people came to him to learn of the many things he knew. Then one morning he gathered all his followers together and said to them, 'I have had a dream. The dream told me that I and my followers should go on a long journey across the desert. But before you can go with me, you must promise to say 'I must die instead of the Sufi!' when I throw both my arms above my head like this.' "

Our turbaned story-teller threw both his arms above his head like the Sufi. The fire leapt and flickered in the night, illuminating the rapt faces of the listening crowd.

"The Sufi's followers were aghast. Was the Sufi mad? Was he trying to kill them? How could they ever agree to such a thing? All but one of the Sufi's followers decided not to go, so the following morning the Sufi and his one faithful follower left on their journey.

"For many days they traveled on foot. They crossed a burning desert and an isolated mountain range and had many adventures. Then one day it happened that they approached a walled city in the desert. A terrible, cruel tyrant had siezed control of the city-state with his merciless army and was busy trying to consolidate his power. He wanted to frighten and awe the people by performing a savage act in front of the crowd who had gathered in the square. He ordered some of his soldiers to ride out of the city and capture the first traveler they came upon. He was then to be brought to the square where he would be killed in a horrible manner as an example to the people.

"The soldiers rode out of the city and whom should they come across first but the follower of the Sufi! They dragged him back to the city square where he was told in advance the tortures he would have to endure before they killed him. The crowd of people were very frightened and reluctant to look at the spectacle that was about to unfold before them.

"Suddenly the Sufi stepped out of the crowd and addressed the tyrant. 'Oh, great king,' he said, 'this man that you are planning to kill is my follower. It was I who urged him to go on this journey with me, so I beg you, please take my life instead.' And as he said this he threw both his arms above his head, like this." And the turbaned man raised both of his arms above the crackling campfire. The fire cast orange and black shadows on the face of the old man as he spoke; the crowd listened intently as he went on.

"When the follower saw this sign from the Sufi, he shouted, 'No! I must die instead of the Sufi!' The crowd of people were enthralled. What courage on the part of these two strangers! The tyrant was amazed but not amused. He conferred with his generals and asked them, 'What kind of men are these? They are so willing to die. They are spoiling our plans by giving courage to the people.' His generals advised him to kill both of them, but first they should find out why they were both so eager to die.

"The Sufi's answer to this question was 'Oh, great king! Both my follower and I have heard that on this very day a man will die on this very spot, and that man will rise up and have eternal life and will rule the world! Naturally both my follower and I are eager to be that man.'

"The tyrant conferred with his generals. 'What is this? Why should we give them eternal life and rulership?' And with that the tyrant and his generals ordered themselves executed on the spot, and in the confusion the Sufi and his follower slipped quietly back to the desert."

We all sat quietly by the fire at the end of the Sufi story, each of us in meditation as the flames flickered about. After some time someone said, "What of the Mahdi, will he ever return?" Silence fell on the group but the old man did not speak. I reflected about the Mahdi, "leader of the Faithful." One day, it was said, he would return to rule Sudan and usher in a new age of prosperity for the country.

The Mahdi's revolt had been a sort of "jihad" or religious war, the soldiers mostly dervishes and other wandering types, caught in the fervor of ridding the country of foreigners. It is doubtful that the Mahdi was a Sufi as he advocated violence and death—a decidedly un-Sufi practice.

The black soldier and I left the campfire and walked back to the train. I found my Chinese-Canadian friend, Blythe, sleeping on the floor of the hallway of the first class car. As I stretched out on the floor, I thought of the frenzied hordes of the Mahdi's dervishes and the soldier's parting words as he rejoined his group that night, "You never know when the Mahdi will return."

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When we awoke the next morning we were still in the station! Finally by mid-morning we left. We had been on the train now for four nights and this was our fifth day. In those five days we had gone about 800 miles. "Right on schedule," the conductor told me.

I was glad to be leaving Babanoosa, though it was a nice enough town. It had a movie theater and a hotel, plus a few guys that hung out on the street and sold bowls of beans. Plenty of nomads with lots of character cruising through town as well, though we were afraid to go too far from the train.

We were now heading due south and the transition of semi-desert

brush to Savannah was becoming apparent. The Arab influence was disappearing and we were getting into black tribal areas. Bare-breasted women could be seen along the tracks, and occasionally a naked man, sometimes covered with white ash and usually carrying two spears, one to throw and the other to keep in case he was attacked by the wounded animal—or person for that matter.

All day I rode on the roof with hundreds of other passengers. Several times the conductor came crawling along, maneuvering over chickens, beds and bodies, to check tickets. I would obediently dig into my pocket to produce a ticket stub—one of the few who ever did produce a ticket up there on the roof—but no one was ever thrown off.

The frequency of stops was about the same, but food was getting noticeably scarcer. At each stop I climbed down to stretch my legs and look about the station, which at best was a village with a small market. Usually the only things to eat and drink were homemade peanut butter rolled up into balls and sold for a penny apiece, watermelon, and beer in a gourd that was sort of a fermented sorghum slush. Strolling about the station, naked men would come up to me with great grins on their faces and eagerly shake my hand, holding their spears in their other hand. No fear of foreigners for these people; they were genuinely glad to see me and honored that I had come to visit their country.

I was overwhelmed by the honest and sincere friendliness all Sudanese showed us. I was scarcely able to buy a cup of tea for myself as someone was always stepping up to pay for it and engage me in conversation, either in English or Arabic.

On the morning of the fifth day, the train broke down again, but the engineers fixed it themselves this time, and within a few hours we were going once more. At noon we came upon a small river that hadn't dried up, the first since we crossed the White Nile at Kosti. The train stopped and all the men jumped off, stripped away their clothes and plunged in the water. The bath break took about an hour, and then we were again on our way.

That evening we stopped within 70 miles of Wau at a small town named Aweil. I was invited to dinner at a school teacher's house by two of his students, who were on the train. Thinking the train would be there in the station for several hours as usual, I didn't hesitate to accept. Half an hour later we were eating beef stew with pieces of

bread and fresh onions, being careful to reach in with only our right hands to scoop up some spicy meat or soak up juice with our bread. Suddenly a young lad came riding up on a bicycle, chattering excitedly. The train had just left—with all my worldly goods on board! Fortunately, my Canadian friend was still with the train.

I was somewhat perturbed, but the Sudanese did not seem to care about having missed the train. We finished dinner and looked for a truck to take us to the next station. Not finding one, we all spent the night with the teacher, and the next morning got a ride in a land rover to Wau, which took only three hours (not including the two hours spent vainly hunting an elusive gazelle with the chief of police, who was driving).

When we arrived in Wau, we found that the train still hadn't arrived, having (not surprisingly) broken down some 10 miles out of town. I ended up waiting at the station until midnight for the train's arrival. My traveling companion breathed a sigh of relief when I jumped on the train to help unload our packs. He was not so much relieved to see me again as glad that this journey was at last over.

Wau is the second city of the Autonomous South, Juba being the capital. There is really not much to say about Wau, except that it has a nice little youth hostel with a refrigerator in it and even a restaurant in the market. Wau is a town of about two streets, each two blocks long. In the market you can watch blacksmiths hammering spearheads out of old car springs, and cobblers making shoes out of camel hide. This is a good place to buy a snakeskin knife or some milk gourds or other nomadic knick knacks.

Blythe and I spent three days resting. The first two days, we just slept in the comfy beds of the youth hostel. Later, we ventured out into Wau to do the town, so to speak.

"What would life be without its little challenges?" said Robert Maker, a student from the Tonj Institute, a school a day's journey to the east. We were staring into the fire of a blacksmith in the market. He was busy hammering out a knife from some odd hunk of metal. The man was naked except for a loincloth and leather sandals. His body glistened with sweat as he squatted in front of the fire. "We are continually being tested by God and growing as fast as we can meet our tests," Robert went on.

"That train ride was a pretty good challenge," I confessed. "My

Canadian friend is still resting!" Indeed, Blythe was prone to spend long periods napping and resting in the cool of the youth hostel. We both slept especially well for several nights after the train trip. "I have to admit, though, that I'm already looking back at that train ride with a certain nostalgia."

"It's like," Robert said, "everything has it's positive and negative side. It's often easier to take the negative side of things, but we should all try to look at the bright side and consciously control our thinking. Look at events as precious opportunities to learn a little more about yourself and life. You may find that you are really having a great time all the time, but you just don't realize it. We must remember that we are all blessed by Allah."

Robert and I smiled at each other. His white teeth and big eyes were a strong contrast to his dark, almost purple skin. Across his forehead were nine or ten thick scar beads, reminiscent of the make-up that Boris Karloff wore as Frankenstein's monster. "Such were the Saints," said Robert, "they must have been able to see the bright side of everything."

Two days later Blythe and I were on top of a gigantic Sudanese truck, plowing our way through the hilly, forested country along the border of the Central African Republic. My Chinese-Canadian companion and I were on our way to Juba, the capital of the Autonomous Southern Region, which was many hundred miles to the east of us through the dense forests of Central Africa.

"This is hitchhiking at its best!" I thought as I lay back on a huge bundle of cotton and stretched out. These "lorries", as the Sudanese and British call them, are like big cattle trucks, solid steel cages welded together in Omdurman onto British Leyland truck chassis. These trucks ply all the lonely desert tracks and swamp roads to the far reaches of the Sudan. We had organised our lift in the "souk" or market in Wau and were paying about ten dollars for the ride to Yambio.

It was several pleasant days on the road. We'd pick up and leave passengers, stop for the night in some small village, where everyone would climb out and sleep on the ground. Blythe and I would each tie up a mosquito net to the side of the truck and sleep under it; women would usually sleep on top of the cotton, boxes and other goods in back of the truck; and the men would sleep, without mosquito nets, on blankets by the side of the truck.

Our mid-point was the small town of Yambio near the border of Zaire, a village with a few shops and about thirty grass huts, as well as a police station. We stayed at the police station for a night, which is a good alternative in the small villages in Central Africa where there are no hotels. Occasionally there will also be a church or mission of some sort, and these will often let you stay for a small charge, or at least let you camp on the lawn. We slept in our sleeping bags on the porch of the police station, a one room office building.

We waited for two days in Yambio and then picked up the owner of the truck, a Northern Sudanese Arab who wanted to go with his merchandise to Juba. Things were going just fine on that sunny winter day in Central Africa as we bounced and spun our way through the thick forest, all green and wet from the rains the month before, until the owner of the truck brought out a bottle of Sudanese date wine. The biologist and I each had a small taste but didn't like it, so the owner and a friend of his who was along drank the entire bottle in the space of only an hour.

There were eight of us in the back of the truck: the owner and his friend, another dark Arab from the north; Blythe and I; a woman in her late twenties and her ten-year-old son; and a couple of other Sudanese getting a lift to Juba. About half way through the second bottle of date wine, the owner announced in broken English that he was a Communist and a Russian sympathizer. "Chinee—Good!" he declared. "Chinee—Good!" He would look at Blythe, very Chinese, and reach over and pat him on the leg. "Good—Chinee, Good—Russia!" Then he looked at me, scowled and blurted out, "Carter bad!" He then flew into a rage and began hitting me very hard on the legs with his flaying fists.

Hurt and shocked, I tried to move away from him, but there was nowhere to go. The owner's friend tried to stop him, but the drunk politician was sitting just opposite me, and even though I moved as far away as I could, he still was able to hit me.

"Chinee— good!" he said again as he calmed down. "Merica—bad!" and he flew into a drunken rage again and started hitting me. I tried to stop him, grabbing his wrists. He was really hitting hard.

"If he does that one more time," I told the biologist, "I'm going to throw him off this truck!"

"Better not do that," said Blythe, "he owns this truck. He'd proba-

bly make you get out and walk. And we're a long way from anywhere!" This was true, and the idea of being dumped out in this forest where there weren't any villages for miles and when the next truck might come by in a couple of weeks wasn't too appealing.

I suddenly remembered Robert telling me back in Wau that you don't always realize what a fun time you're really having. . . . The owner dozed for a while in a fitful sleep, to wake up every once in a while and hit me, screaming, "Kill, kill, kill, I kill you!" I'd kick back, but not too seriously. Later he verbally attacked the lady and her son, calling her a whore and him a bastard, spitting at them and making them cry.

"Not the most uplifting experience I've ever had," said the biologist as we got off the truck at Juba the next day. The owner seemed somewhat ashamed of his actions, but made no effort to apologize. Anyway, we were now in Juba and ready for another rest.

We checked into the Africa Hotel, one of the two hotels in Juba, and rested for a couple of days. You can get a room at the Africa Hotel for three dollars a night, or just take a bed for a dollar and a half, or sleep on the ground in the cool evening air for twenty-five cents. Juba has a main street that is almost a block long, with a dozen little shops and two bean and bread shops where you can get something to eat. There is also a small restaurant at the Africa Hotel, run by an old Greek guy who can often be seen sitting there under a fan drinking brandy and chatting with other "old African hands" and the occasional big game hunter who might end up in southern Sudan. If you feel like a big splurge, you could go to the Juba Hotel, the only other hotel in town and expensive at twenty dollars or more a room. Here is a real restaurant, at least by Juba's standards, where you could conceivably get a very good meal, but you'll have to pay for it. A hitchhiker on a budget of five dollars a day would probably rather spend twenty-eight cents for a bowl of beans downtown, than four dollars for a steak in a fancy restaurant. And if you are really cheap, you can camp out at the police station or on the island to the east of town in the middle of the Nile.

Mostly Juba is for resting. At any one time, there will be twenty-odd travelers hanging out at the Africa Hotel, recovering from dysentery or waiting for a truck to Lodwar in Kenya, or waiting for the ferry to come down river from Bor, Renk, or some other swamp town where

the ferry stops. Mainly a commercial center for the Nilotic tribes in the South, it is official policy that everyone must wear clothes in town. When a group of Nuers wanders down the Nile to Juba, they might only have one pair of shorts to share between them. The first puts them on and sprints into town, does his business and sprints back. He then hands the shorts to the next guy, who sprints into town in this decency relay. All in all, Juba was a lot of fun.

Blythe and I made one side trip south to Nimule Park on the Ugandan border, to check out the elephants and other animals in the park. It is a day's truck ride from Juba, and has a police station and a few shops. However, there was absolutely nothing edible to buy there. Not one banana, watermelon or anything else. Fortunately we stayed with the game warden, who was able to feed us from his own private stockpile. Because there had been a sudden change of regulations in Juba, all the truck drivers who regularly drove up from Kenya through Uganda had to return to Nairobi and get their passports which they had never needed before. Consequently there had been no transportation from Nimule to Juba for four days.

Blythe and I spent two days in the park looking for elephants, found a lot of gigantic turds but not much else, and decided to go back to Juba. The next morning we went down to the market in Nimule to catch the first truck in five days to Juba. As I boarded the truck with an Australian couple, who had also been in Nimule at the park for two days, a young negro from Uganda said "Hi" to me. He was on his way to Juba to visit some relatives, he said in very good English. Short and stocky, he looked to be in good health, wearing a pair of blue slacks and a brown plaid shirt. He had a hearty smile.

"How long have you been waiting here?" I asked him.

"Five days!"

I was genuinely shocked, knowing there was no food in the shops or market. "What did you eat?"

He looked at me with his big, white eyes. "Nothing," he said.

Such were those crazy days in Sudan. Rather than take the ferry back up north, we decided to hitch on trucks up to Malakal and Kosti. It is a couple of days by truck up along the eastern side of the Nile to Malakal, and this can only be done in the dry season, which is the winter. Malakal, a swampy little village on the banks of the Nile and the official starting point of the "Black South", has one hotel, the

Upper Nile Hotel. Two days before we arrived there, the owner, an Arab, and his friends had been sitting out front having some afternoon tea when a black guy came riding along on a bicycle and tossed a hand grenade into the party, killing everyone, including the owner. This was just an example of the tension that exists between the Arabs of the north who control the economy, and the blacks of the southern region, who resent it.

Another day's truck ride north is Kosti, which we had passed through on the train three weeks before. Nearby is the largest sugar factory in the world, the Kenana Sugar Company, and lots of sugar cane. There is a government rest house in Kosti, where you can rent a bed or room for three or four dollars or camp out on the lawn. From Kosti it was a day's train ride back to Khartoum, where we checked, exhausted as usual, back into the youth hostel.

In many ways, Sudan is a hitchhiker's delight. I found it easy to live on five dollars a day, but that meant camping out quite a bit, and bargaining for rides whenever possible. Food is cheap if you eat with the local people, sitting on the street next to a "phool" shop, a place that serves beans and bread, the staple diet of Sudan. There is also a black market for currency in Sudan, private businessmen giving about half again the bank rate, but it would be possible to get double, depending on how well Sudan's economy is doing. Ask other travelers in Khartoum about the going rate. Outside of Khartoum it is difficult to change traveler's cheques, except in Port Sudan and Juba, so carry plenty of Sudanese pounds with you as you travel in the countryside.

Back at the youth hostel in Khartoum, I was shocked to discover I had scarcely seventy dollars left! I wondered how I was going to make it back to Europe. If I could get to France or Greece I could pick fruit for awhile, or ask my parents to send me some money. Then I remembered an Australian guy I'd met in India who told me he had gone from New Delhi to Amsterdam on forty dollars!

On an inspiration, I applied for a job at a geophysical company to work at an oil camp in southern Sudan. They weren't hiring, they said, but they referred me to another company which might be interested. I went there and was hired as camp and office manager by the Kenyan-American Catering Company, which was feeding the people who worked on a multi-million dollar oil exploration project in central and southern Sudan.

My first job was to work in the office in Khartoum, expediting materials to the camps and managing the huge shipment of frozen meat and fresh vegetables that came in from Kenya twice a week. For this I was given a security clearance for the Khartoum airport. Our office and staff house was the same. We were five of the craziest, wildest guys in Khartoum at the time, and had a reputation that fit the fact. We were three Americans, an English bloke, and an Ethiopian, all travelers who had been hitchhiking around Africa and found work when they ran out of money, except the Ethiopian, Gary, who was a refugee from Eritrea and the war there.

We'd work ten hours a day, seven days a week, but would party it up four or five nights a week with some of our and Gary's friends. Our Eritrean cook would always leave a pizza or some super-spicy Ethiopian curry called zigney, served with a sort of sourdough spongy pancake-flat bread called engera. We'd cool down some of Sudan's local beer, called "Camel Beer," but known popularly as "Camel Piss," to drink and save our tongues as we ate zigney.

I had a habit of stopping at the same ice cream place every day I was downtown, largely because they had the best mango ice cream in Khartoum and the cutest little Sudanese girl at the cash register. Curly black hair was pulled back from her brown skin, and her big, gorgeous eyes would open up very wide when I asked her what kinds of ice cream they had that day. Over a period of several months of going there and talking to her, I gradually became bolder and wrote her a note that said, "You are very charming." As my courage increased, I finally asked her out on a date, to have lunch with me and fellow staff members at our house.

Because Sudan is so hot, especially in the spring and autumn, private businesses and government agencies take a midday break of three hours from one to four p.m., when everyone naps. We did this in our office too, and one day during my nap, the charming young Sudanese girl came to visit me. Nazia was her name, and to my surprise, our house boy just let her into my room where I was reading and listening to music.

"Nazia! What are you doing here? This is a pleasant surprise!" She was nineteen, and was on summer vacation from a girl's school that was the Sudanese equivalent of a prep school. Shy and very sweet, her behavior was amazing in a Muslim girl. Even formal dating is not encouraged in Arab countries.

"Let's dance," she said, reaching down and turning up my cassette player. We danced in my room for awhile, holding each other close and swinging our hips. One thing led to another and soon we were kissing and hugging on my bed. I'm sure she had never done anything like this before; I would have been far too shy ever to have suggested such a thing.

Slowly I undressed her, as we gazed deep into each other's eyes. "My father would kill me if he knew I was here," she said. And she meant it. He would probably have killed me too. The life of the hitchhiker can be very dangerous.

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Later, I was transferred down to an oil camp in the swamps of central Sudan. Sudan is a gigantic basin and through it runs the White Nile, the longest river in the world until the construction of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt. From Malakal south to Mongola is the Sudd, a gigantic swamp that covers several hundred square miles, and through it meanders the Nile on its long trip north. I worked as a camp manager during the dry season at Bentiu on the western edge of the Sudd. The Nilotic tribes of this area, Nuers, Dinkas, and Shilluks, still live very traditionally, most of them wearing clothes only on rare occasions, and they are always seen with their two spears for protection from possible tribal conflicts or wild animals. Though very friendly to the expatriate oil workers who worked for Chevron and the other companies, they watched approaching natives carefully, noting the tribal marks of deep scars on each other's faces.

One of my duties as manager was to purchase local food for the oil workers. We often had frozen meat flown in, but sometimes we needed local meat for a special Sudanese stew, so about twice a week I'd walk a couple of miles into town to purchase a cow for slaughter at our mess hall. I'd grab some money out of my petty cash box and take my trusted aide and confidant, Kennedy Toot, a local swamp dweller who worked for our company, into town with me. It was company policy that every employee have two names, and since he didn't actually have a first name (or was it his last name he was missing?) Mr. Toot took on the name of Kennedy and became our laundry boy. He'd put on his best t-shirt and, on my insistence, he'd wear a pair of pants. A

pair of red plastic Hong Kong sunglasses and a copper pipe topped off his wardrobe. Kennedy's orange hair (a color he achieved by bleaching it with cow urine) was combed straight up from his forehead. All in all, he was sensational, a cool visitor to town, although people might not recognize him with pants on. I had often told him that I'd like to take him to a New Wave bar in London that I know of, but he never really showed much interest.

Once in town, Kennedy went over to talk to some of his friends who were hanging out underneath one of the huge mango trees in the center of town. They were Dwop Thop and Simon Gash, who worked for us as houseboys. Simon, Dwop and Kennedy were all in their late teens, tall but youthful in appearance. I waved to them and walked toward the large open area where some cattle and their owners were starting to gather for the daily cattle auction. Suddenly, as I was checking out the cattle, a slight commotion to my left caused me to turn and look. A naked woman with bone and copper jewelry around her neck and a spear in each hand was singing and dancing and coming straight for me.

Initially shocked, I realized that since I was the only European in town, she was singling me out for a little fun. She danced in a circle around me, waving her spears, singing, and shaking her bouti like a go-go dancer. Everyone had stopped talking and the whole compound waited to see what I would do. I saw Kennedy, Simon and Dwop looking apprehensively in our direction; they worried about me sometimes.

Europeans are known to be weird and stuffy, but I was no tight-ass. With a snap of my fingers I did the strut and joined her in her dance. She was delighted, and we both laughed and danced around the park in great rhythm. Everyone was greatly amused and probably a bit surprised at this display of craziness. People laughed and clapped and even joined us in a kind of elephant walk through town. I lost my partner near the crowd that was gathering for the cattle auction and joined my friends for the bidding.

Kennedy looked at me through his red plastic sunglasses, brushed his orange hair back and took his smoldering copper pipe out of his mouth. "You're a pretty good dancer," he said, and Simon Gash, Dwop Thop and I had a good laugh. The new wave clubs of London would never know what they were missing!

During my year working for the catering company, I was able to save up more money than I had spent in two and a half years traveling in Asia and Africa, and then some. With a passport pouch full of traveler's cheques, and some money in the bank back in Montana, I decided to see the rest of Africa, first going over to Arabia, and then hitchhiking south to Capetown. After saying good-bye to my friends and Nazia in Khartoum, I went by train to Port Sudan, passing by Kassala, but first going up to Atbara, which is north of Khartoum, to visit a friend. Atbara is an industrial city, where there is also a junction in the train lines, north of Wadi Halfa, or east to Port Sudan. There is a youth hostel here, plus a number of cheap hotels by the railroad station.

Kasala also has a youth hostel, and is a nice town on the border of Ethiopia, with several cheap hotels near the main market and by the train depot.

Coming down from the cool hills of Kasala into Port Sudan is like entering an oven on a conveyor belt. Port Sudan is one of the hottest cities in the world, situated just north of the Danakil Desert in Eritrea, which *is* the hottest place in the world. As a port city, it is steamy and sleepy, not much to do really, except maybe look for a freighter out of the country. There are plenty of ships stopping here, and you have a good chance of getting some sort of ride to another port in the Red Sea. Diving equipment can be rented at an Italian resort hotel about twenty miles north of Port Sudan. Twenty miles to the south of Port Sudan is Suakin, an old Turkish city with some excellent Islamic architecture, but now the city is mostly ruins. There are many buildings from the Ottoman Empire days still standing, however. Port Sudan has a number of cheap hotels that will cost you one or two dollars a night, located in the main square to the west of the deluxe airconditioned hotels like the Red Sea and the Olympic Park.

I looked around for a freighter to Saudi Arabia, but all the ships were having to wait in the harbor for up to two weeks to unload, and so I decided to fly to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. After all, the company had given me an airline ticket. Sudan had been good to me; I hoped I would be back.

4 · JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA: A PILGRIM TO MECCA

Do they not travel through the land, so that their minds and hearts may learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear. Truly, it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts.

THE HOLY QURAN, SURAT AL HAJI

HITCHHIKING IN ARABIA can be very difficult, simply because most Arabian countries don't want hitchhikers or any other travelers. Many Arabian countries issue no tourist visas, and therefore have no tourists. They do, however, still get a few travelers: those intrepid adventurers who don't let small details like passports and visas stop them from exploring a country. As an old Tibetan horse trader in the Karakorams once told me, "Where there's a will, there's a way".

I was determined to go to Saudi Arabia from Sudan. The fact that Saudi Arabia didn't want me made me want to go even more. It was a major challenge, and I was determined to meet it. All of the oil-producing Arab countries are difficult to get into because they earn all their foreign exchange in oil and therefore do not need tourists and their dollars, nor do they desire any more foreign influence than they already have. They are highly conservative countries resistant to change.

Jordan is the one exception. It can actually be entered without getting a visa in advance; you will be given one as you cross the border,

or fly in. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in existence since 1946, is a largely uninhabited desert about the size of Indiana. Once the home of the biblical Samaritans, Jordan was part of the Roman and Greek Empires for centuries. Conquered by the Arabs in the 7th century, it was taken by the Turks in the 16th century and remained in their control until 1916. The League of Nations gave a mandate to Britain to govern the area that now comprises Jordan and Israel, then called Transjordan and Palestine. The Jordan River separated the two countries. In 1948 Jordan gained full independence as a kingdom ruled by the present king's father, Abdulla. Arab-Israeli conflicts dominate Jordan's foreign policy, and Jordan, much to the government's dismay, remains the hotspot of Middle East negotiations. Jordan has become more and more involved in the conflicts of the volatile Middle East. Civil war broke out in Jordan in 1970 between Palestinian guerillas and Jordanian forces, the Jordanian Army virtually eliminating all guerilla bases in their country and creating many in Syria, who broke diplomatic relations with Jordan. During the Iran-Iraq war, Jordan was actively helping Iraq in its struggle to gain Iranian territory.

Jordan is still the legitimate government of the "West Bank" and the eastern half of Jerusalem, both of which are now occupied by Israel. It is possible to get a permit in Amman to visit the "West Bank," which is in fact a permit to go to Israel. Jerusalem is only a couple of hours from Amman, and is a fascinating city with a history that dates back beyond the first millenium B.C. Historically, Jerusalem has been the center of some of the most important events in history, many of them wars of some kind or another, and its name means, ironically, "City of Peace".

There are a number of cheap places to stay in the old city of Jerusalem, mostly in the Arab quarter in the northeast corner of the city, where you can find dives like Saint Mary's Bath House, which is a Turkish bath house with some rooms to rent for one or two dollars a bed. It's pretty run down, though, an ancient bath house made of stone, probably several hundred years old. More popular, though not necessarily any cleaner, are the family-run hostels in the Armenian Quarter. These are usually private apartments which the owners have outfitted with a few bunk beds and mattresses on the floor, where hordes of travelers crash for a couple of nights as they come from their kibbutzim. These places are often full and have names like "Mr. T's"

or no name at all. To find these places, which come and go overnight, ask some other travelers on the street where they are staying and if they know of any cheap hostels for a dollar or two a night. More standard places exist, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Hostel, clean and cheap at $1.50 a night, located on St. Mark's Road. The Danish Tea House is popular as a cheap night club, and they also rent rooms near Jaffa Gate. Near Damascus Gate are two spots, the Armenian Catholic Patriarch, with dorm beds at $3.00 a night, and the Al Ahran Hotel, beds $3.00 a night. There are lots of nice cafes in Jerusalem and food is reasonably cheap. Throughout the Old City you'll see old men drinking tea and playing backgammon at the tea shops and on the street.

There are more things to do in Jerusalem than even the people who live there have time to do. In the old city alone, there is The Dome of The Rock, one of the most beautiful and famous mosques in Arabia, and just below it is the Wailing Wall, the last remaining vestige of Solomon's Temple. Jerusalem is one of the three holiest cities to Muslims, Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia being the other two. The Wailing Wall is the Jew's most sacred spot and you will often see Orthodox Jews praying there, especially at sunset on Fridays. For Christians there is the Holy Sepulcre where Jesus "rose from the dead" after his crucifixion. These and many other religious shrines, the winding streets and bazaars of the old city and many old buildings make Jerusalem an especially interesting and popular city.

In Amman, the capital of Jordan, the cheapest hotels are to be found, as in most Arabian cities, down by the central market and bazaar, or souk, as it is known in Arabic. The central market is easy to find because the main mosque of the town will usually be in the same area. Just look for the tallest minarets and head for them. Hotels such as the Odabar Hotel, near the Central Mosque, or the Happy Land Hotel on King Hussein Street, are $3 to $5 a night for a bed in a room that you will probably have to share with someone else unless you can fill it up yourself with your own party. You can save some money by asking if you can sleep on the roof, which would be $2 or less; bargain. There is also a youth hostel in Amman, which may or may not be functional. Try calling them before you go off looking for it.

Amman lacks the charm of Jerusalem, but it is still fun to walk

around the market, visit the museum, or go to Jerash, the Pompeii of the Middle East and one of the best preserved Greco-Roman provincial cities in the world. It is located just to the north of Amman, within easy access by a local bus for the morning or afternoon.

Jordan does have one of the most incredible sights in the world: the ancient caravan city of Petra, built during the first millenium B.C. to protect the caravan routes from Mecca to Damascus. Petra is cut into solid red sandstone cliffs in a remote canyon in southern Jordan.

I decided to hitchhike out to Petra from Amman, after having spent a week in Jerusalem and a few days in Amman. I caught a bus out of Amman to the crossroads of the Desert Highway and the King's Highway, both of which stretched south through the desert to Aqaba on the

Red Sea. The King's Highway cuts through virtually uninhabited desert along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. I decided to take the Desert Highway, thinking that there would be more traffic, and walked a short way down the two-lane blacktop and took my stand to do some heavy hitching through the Jordanian desert. Shortly, a Bedouin woman appeared and walked up to me, hoping to get a ride when a truck stopped for me. She wore a long black dress, embroidered in pink and green thread with squares, crosses and other geometrical designs. Her face was brown and wrinkled, and she appeared to be very old. Both of her eyes were cloudy with cataracts.

"Salaam Aleikum," I greeted her as she stood silently next to me.

"Aleikum a Salaam," she answered, looking vaguely at me through

her cloudy eyes. I gave her a piece of pineapple candy, probably the first she had ever had, and she tried to flag down a public bus, but it wouldn't stop, which was just as well, as I wanted to hitchhike.

Shortly after that an old Mercedes dump truck stopped. He indicated he wanted me to get in, but I let the old lady in first, knowing she would have troubles getting a ride on her own. "Where are you going?" asked the driver in English, a large, full-bellied and unshaven trucker with a white shirt on, brown polyester slacks and a white knit Muslim cap.

"Petra!" was my enthusiastic answer and with that we roared off down the empty highway. It wasn't long before we let off the Bedouin lady in the middle of the desert where a small village was just visible in the distance. After this the driver talked. He was a Palestinian and had learned English in Cairo; indeed, he spoke it fairly well. He now drove this dump truck around and was taking it to some quarry to get a load.

"You know about these Israelis?" he asked.

"Well, uh, I guess I have heard of them. . . ." It wasn't a subject I wanted to appear too knowledgeable about, as Arabs can get pretty worked up over it, understandably.

"I kill them!" he said, and he made a pistol out of his right hand and pretended to fire shots out of the windshield. "I kill them all!" I remained quiet and merely nodded. This volatile issue, one that encompasses religion, politics and even sex in the same breath . . . better just to look out the window. . . .

"Why do you Americans support Israelis?" he wanted to know.

I could think of several "official" reasons, but decided not to give them. It is, after all, a very complicated situation.

"I don't know," I said.

"I like America," he said, "but I just don't see why you support our enemies." We were cruising down a typical Arabian desert road, flat, dry, a few shrubs and a long straight black ribbon of tar lending some reality to an otherwise dream world of mirages and hallucinations. Suddenly he stopped the truck, pulling off the side of the road.

"Just a minute," he said, jumping out and running into the desert. I figured he was going to move his bowels or something, and decided to urinate myself. There were no villages or trees in sight, a few hills and dry shrubs was all.

After a minute he came back and we both jumped into the truck without a word. He started it up and drove straight off the road and into the desert toward the hill he just had come from.

"Hey, where are you going?" I wanted to know. This guy was a bit strange and talked violently. Why was he driving off into the desert? I braced myself to jump out of the truck if necessary.

"Just a minute," he said. "Five minutes." And he drove around the low hill where there were two tents pitched, tall enough to stand in and ten feet square. Two men were standing around a truck watching us as we pulled up. My driver stopped his truck and we piled out, but first he grabbed a couple of Jordanian dinar notes out of the glove compartment. He went straight into one of the tents without saying anything to me.

"Hmm," I thought, "is this some kind of desert tea house?" I tried to follow my driver but an older, grey-haired man with a stubbly beard came up to me and aggressively pulled on my shirt sleeve, saying, "shuk-shuk" over and over, and rubbing his thumb and fingers together in a way that indicated money. I pulled away from him and went back to the truck. He seemed a rather distasteful person. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out what was going on. Then I heard a female voice and a woman, pregnant and in her late thirties, came out of the other tent in a pink nightgown. It suddenly struck me: this was a desert whore house! I banged the dashboard at my realization. "Of course!" I said aloud. "I would never have expected. . . !"

The truck driver had only been in the tent a few minutes when he emerged, zipping up his pants. "OK," he said, "let's go." I was still looking around in wide-eyed astonishment. I didn't think they had prostitutes in Arab countries! This certainly exposed my naivete. "No good," he said. "Let's go! No good!" As we pulled out back toward the highway, a woman came out of the tent, younger and homelier than the pregnant woman. Her lonely face was strained. It was a hard life in the desert, I thought.

We roared off down the Desert Highway and soon the driver stopped for a beer at a small roadside store. I began to realise that this guy was a little crazy. He drove like a maniac, smoked cigarettes one after the other, guzzled beer and Arabian whiskey alternately and spoke of sex outrageously.

Back in the truck as we blasted down the highway in the early

afternoon, my driver found himself behind a large semi-truck and trailer with Kuwait license plates, the Desert Highway being the main road into Saudi Arabia and then Kuwait and the other Gulf States. After a slug of whiskey from a bottle he kept under the seat, he tried to pass the truck and trailer. The other truck wouldn't let him pass, and we played games for a while until my driver finally passed the truck, forcing it off the road for a moment.

After a few more miles, a car was stopped in the road and my driver slowed down as a cautionary measure. The Kuwaiti truck then passed him and pulled across the road, blocking all traffic. The driver of this truck jumped out, absolutely seething with rage. His face was beet red and his lips curled back over his thin mustache. He was young, but powerfully built, in his early twenties.

My driver reached down beneath his seat and grabbed a sledge hammer. "Don't worry," he said to me. He opened his door and brandished the hammer menacingly at the other driver who was on his way to our truck. When the younger driver saw the sledge hammer, he ran back to his cab and re-emerged with the biggest monkey wrench I had ever seen, plus a pair of Chinese "nanchakas" (two wooden pegs with a heavy chain between them which can be lethal when used by someone who knows how).

These guys were too macho and crazy for me. I grabbed my pack and jumped out on the other side of the truck, heading out into the desert. No sense getting caught in this fight, I figured.

Fortunately, the armed confrontation was stopped just as the two were about to attack each other. Two policemen who happened to be coming up behind us stepped in and the whole fight was reduced to a lot of name calling and verbal abuse—words I'd never read in the Quran. We got back into our trucks eventually. "My," I thought, "tempers do flare out here in the heat!" It's no wonder these countries are always fighting each other. Arabs seem to have enough trouble getting along with themselves, never mind the Israelis.

My driver had told the other that he was a boxer and sergeant in the army who didn't want to hurt kids, and that eventually settled the argument. Just a short way up the road, the truck let me off at another crossroads in the desert where I could hitch west to Petra. I waved goodbye to my friend and temporary bodyguard, who gave me a toothy grin as he drove away. He was a nice guy at heart. "Goodbye,

King of the Road!" I called, and started toward Petra, which was still about sixty miles away.

My next ride was with an off-duty police officer in his thirties, friendly and well-educated. He wore a neatly pressed shirt and slacks, was cleanshaven and good-looking. Also in the car was a businessman from Amman, also well-dressed and in his thirties, although he did not speak English.

"I would like to go to Canada. I have a relative there," the policeman told me. "How much does a wife cost in Canada?"

"Free," I said, "no cost at all."

He sat in silence for some time and then talked in Arabic with the other man for awhile. Then, in his best English, to be sure I understood his question, he asked again, "In Canada, how much cost one wife?"

"Canada—wife free!" I repeated. "No pay!"

This occupied the policeman for some time, contemplating a country where wives were free. If wives were free, he may have thought, perhaps he'll take three or four. . . .

They let me off at Petra, where there is a small visitor's center where you can get water and find a lift out. There is also a small village nearby where a bus runs daily back to Amman.

Located near the foot of Mt. Hor, Petra was the capital of the Edomites and Nabateans. It declined near the end of Roman times, and was lost to the world between the 12th century and 1812, when it was rediscovered by the Archeologist J. L. Burckhardt.

After replenishing my canteen at the visitor's center, I began the mile walk down the narrow canyon, Wadi Musa, toward the city. A dry river bed that had cut and twisted its way through the sandstone is the only entrance into Petra, making it a highly defensible city and especially safe as a caravanserai for the spice caravans coming north from the Arabian peninsula, loaded with frankincense, myrrh, amber and exotic goods from the far east. Suddenly, the narrow wadi opens up into a box canyon, and standing opposite the entrance is the Treasury Building, a two-story, colossal stone building carved straight into the red sandstone walls of the canyon. With pillars more than fifty feet high and two stories of Roman-sculpted bits of architecture, it is a very impressive site. Throughout the canyon are temples, amphitheaters, courts, tombs, apartments and other buildings carved directly into the stone. It took more than 500 years to build Petra, and now it is a ghost city with a few archeologists and Bedouins.

There are a couple of Guest Houses in Petra; one is located at the head of the canyon near the Visitor's Center, and the other is in the heart of Petra itself, providing tents and cave homes for its guests. When I was there, this inner Guest House was full of an American archeological team. After spending the afternoon wandering around the city and talking with the archeologists, I watched the sunset from the amphitheater and then walked back through the wadi a ways, looking for a good spot to camp. One of the archeologists had told me that scorpions and heat-seeking poisonous vipers roamed the sands there, so it was best to sleep as high up in the cliffs as possible. After looking around awhile, I found a nice little ledge on a rock where I slept out beneath the stars, though I later wished I'd had a mosquito net. It is 169 miles back to Amman from Petra, or, if you wish to continue to Aqaba, 25 miles further south, Jordan's one and only port, located next to Eilat in Israel on the northern edge of the Red Sea. On the way to Aqaba, it is also worth stopping at Wadi Rum. Called the "Valley of the Moon", it is a spectacular desert valley with a "Beau Geste" fort, Royal Jordanian Mounted Desert Police, and lots of camels to ride on. It was here that most of *Lawrence of Arabia* was filmed. There is a Tourist Camp-Rest House here and many places to camp.

There are a number of cheap hotels down by the port in Aqaba, and some more expensive pensions like the Golden Fish or the Palm Beach. Expect to pay $4 to $6 a bed in a room, but sleeping on the roof on a mattress is cooler at night and cheaper. Throughout the Middle East it is acceptable to bargain, but be tactful and polite; the price may be firm. There are good skin diving and nice beaches at Aqaba and it's a good place to catch a freighter to Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia or on out the mouth of the Red Sea and into the Indian Ocean. There is a railway from Amman into Syria and south into Saudi Arabia and it would be quite an adventure to hop a freight train to Saudi Arabia, though the border crossing would be tricky.

Hitchhiking in Jordan is fast and easy. Many people use their cars as taxis and will be driving through the country picking up people off the road, so don't always assume that you have a free ride. Your lift may be assuming that you are going to pay.

The main road into Saudi Arabia starts from Malan, about fifty miles north of Aqaba, and turns south toward Tayma in Saudi Arabia. This isn't how I got to Saudi Arabia, however. I spent more than a year

in Egypt and Sudan first, and then flew from Port Sudan to Jeddah, on the Red Sea coast.

It had been a major hassle just getting a visa in Khartoum. Three types of visitors are allowed into Saudi Arabia: businessmen working in the oil fields or some other development project; transit passengers who are driving across the vast desert expanses on their way to the Persian Gulf or Yemen; and pilgrims, or hajis as they are known in Arabic, on their way to Mecca. I spoke Arabic fairly well after living in Sudan for a year, so at first I didn't see why I couldn't qualify as a genuine pilgrim to Mecca. However, at the Visa Office I discovered that Arabs take their religion a lot more seriously than I. The pilgrimage requires a lot of study, and you must be an orthodox Muslim, able to recite verses from the Quran in Arabic, and to follow the prescribed rituals on the pilgrimage exactly. Failure can mean death! I wasn't going to risk everything to get to Mecca, but nothing would prevent me from seeing something of Saudi Arabia. Determined to get a visa by hook or by crook, I told the Saudi Arabian Consulate in Khartoum that I was a medical student who had been working in Central Africa and I wanted to visit my father, who worked in Saudi Arabia for the Saudi Arabian Oil Company, ARAMCO. Furthermore, I said, I hadn't seen my father for two years (a clever device which preys on Arabians' strong paternal instincts) and I was flying to Jeddah on the coast of Saudi Arabia in two days.

"Have your father send us a telegram," said the Consul, "and I'll give you a visa."

"Impossible," I countered, "I'm leaving for Jeddah in just two days; there's not enough time! My father will meet me at the airport and get me a month's visa while I'm in the country. Just give me a transit visa so I can get in."

After some discussion with the Vice Consul, he gave me a transit visa. This was apparently completely against their rules, but I have heard it said that rules were made to be broken.

A couple of days later at the airport, as I was standing by the duty free counter looking at cameras, what few they did have, a tall, thin Canadian stepped up next to me and ordered two bottles of Dewar's White Label Whiskey.

"Aren't you going to buy some duty free whiskey?" he asked, turning to me.

"Hmm," I thought, "I hadn't thought of that." One hitchhiker's trick is to buy duty free whiskey and cigarettes in the airport as you are flying into some Asian or African town and then sell them to your taxi driver, since imported luxury goods such as Scotch and English cigarettes are quite expensive. I could certainly use the money to help me pay expenses while I was in Saudi Arabia. I knew it was a terribly expensive country. What the heck, he was buying whiskey, so I bought a bottle and stuffed it way down in my pack.

As it turned out, that traveler wasn't going to Saudi Arabia. He was going somewhere else, perhaps to Cairo. On the plane I spoke to the guy next to me, a swarthy, middle-aged, olive-skinned Arab gentleman who looked to be of good education.

"Tell me," I asked him, leaning out from my seat and sticking my head as far out into the aisle as I could, "what can I get for a bottle of Dewar's White Label in Saudi Arabia?"

He thought for a moment and then replied, "Oh, a good whipping and then one to three years in prison, I suppose."

"Wha-what?" I croacked, my throat suddenly getting rather dry.

"It's a very serious offense to drink alcohol or have any in your possession in Saudi Arabia," he said very calmly. After all, he didn't have a bottle of whiskey in his luggage. He took a sip of his orange juice. "Certainly you would get a public flogging, and then possibly a prison term—why do you ask?"

"Uh," I could hardly speak. My mouth was totally devoid of any moisture and my stomach had dropped beneath my seat. "I, oh, I, just curious, that's all. It was nothing really, I mean . . . will you excuse me for a moment while I go to the toilet?"

It's really funny how these things happen. In retrospect I can sit back and have a good laugh. At the time though, I thought I was going to throw up. What could I do? Because of the strange loading set-up at the airport, my bag with the bottle of whiskey was in the hold of the airplane and I wouldn't be able to get it until I was in the airport, and through immigration, which would be too late. Gritting my teeth and holding my stomach, I decided to go through with the whole thing and actually sneak the bottle past the customs officers. This was certainly not what I had planned for my trip to Saudi Arabia, a public flogging and a year in prison. Now I know how smugglers must feel.

I walked up confidently to the immigration officer who was looking

pretty sharp at the immigration booth, one of many, at the new Jeddah International Airport. I could tell just by looking at him that he was no Saudi Arabian. Egyptian, I guessed. The Saudis hardly do any menial work, importing laborers from all over the world. The airport was crawling with Koreans, Philippinos, Egyptians and Pakistanis as well as Sudanese, Jordanians, Palestinians, Yemenis and workers from all over the world who were attracted to jobs in Saudi Arabia by the high pay.

"Salaam Aleikum," I said, stepping up to his booth and handing him my passport with my visa all ready.

"Where are you going?" he asked without looking at me.

"Mecca," I declared while out of the corner of my eye I noticed my bag coming out of a conveyor belt behind the officer.

He took a quick look at me; I was no pilgrim to Mecca.

"What?" he said.

"Did I say Mecca?" I answered. "Just stopping in Jeddah on my way to Abu Dhabi." As an afterthought I added, "I'm here to visit my father."

"Let's see your airline ticket," he demanded. After inspecting it momentarily he saw I did not have an onward reservation. "Make a reservation for your flight out," he said, indicating a Saudi Airlines reservation booth behind him. Putting my passport on the bottom of his little stand, he turned to the next passenger behind me.

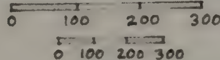
I made a reservation for exactly three days later to Abu Dhabi, the very limit of my transit visa. Actually, I had no intention of flying to Abu Dhabi at that time. My plan was to hitchhike south to Yemen, but I couldn't tell them that. I showed the immigration officer my new reservation.

"Good," he said, glancing at it and handing me my passport, "you may wait in the transit lounge until the flight."

"You mean wait three days in the transit lounge until my flight to Abu Dhabi?" That was really too much. I didn't even want to go to Abu Dhabi.

"Yes, that is correct."

I was already a little tense about having the whiskey in my luggage, but this was too, too much. Besides, it looked like the best thing to do at this point was throw a scene right there in the airport. I simply had to get into Saudi Arabia. . . .


ARABIA
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BAGDAD
IRAN
TABRIZ
TEHRAN
ISFAHAN
SHIRAZ
BANDAR ABAS
SUEZ
PETRA
AQABA
JORDAN
TABUK
TAYMA
BASRA
ABADAN
AL QAYSUMAH
KUWAIT
AL KUWAIT
SAUDI ARABIA
MEDINA
AFIF
RIAYD
DAMMAM
BAHRAIN
QUATAR
DOHA
DUBAI
FUJARAH
JEDDAH
MECCA
TAIF
HARAD
HADDAR
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
ABU DHABI
AL AIN
HAMRAH
MUSCAT
PORT SUDAN
RUB AL KHALI
(EMPTY QUARTER)
OMAN
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JIZAN
ASMARA
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SADAH
YEMEN
ARAB REP.
SAN'A
MARIB
SHIBAM
PEOPLE'S DEM. REPUBLIC OF YEMEN
SALALAH
DOKA
NAFUN
HODEIDA
IBB
ASAB
MOCCA
TAIZ
MUKALLA
ADEN
MILES
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KILOMETERS
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BORDERS
ROADS
RAILROADS

"Are you crazy?" I said rather sharply. "My father is waiting for me right now outside the airport, I've got a perfectly valid visa and an airline reservation, and you want me to go to the transit lounge for three days. ARE YOU NUTS?"

I felt somewhat better after letting off steam, but this poor immigration officer, who was merely following orders, just turned away and continued stamping in other people. In desperation, I turned to the airline officer who had just seen my tantrum and was standing there watching me sympathetically. He went to talk to the chief immigration officer, who had a lot of clout and was a real Saudi Arabian. After explaining that I was here to see my father, whom I hadn't seen in two years, and who was waiting outside for me at this very moment, the chief officer took pity on this hitchhiker and wrote me a note, allowing me to actually enter Saudi Arabia. I felt better already.

I was stamped into the country and walked over to my pack which was circling around a luggage carousel. By now it was the only one, but fortunately more passengers were arriving all the time. I had also, fortunately, packed the whiskey inside my sleeping bag so it wouldn't get broken along the way. As calmly as possible, I picked out the busiest customs counter I could find, walked up, flopped my bag on top.

"Open your luggage!" the customs officer commanded me. "Take everything out!"

Thank God he was a man in a hurry. I took out all the stuff in my pack, which was quite a lot of junk, and put most of it on the counter. A few things, including my tent and sleeping bag, I lay on the floor. He passed by me, glanced at my stuff and scrawled a line on my pack with a piece of chalk. "OK," he said.

Whew! I made it! I packed up my pack faster than you could milk a camel, and was out on the street. "What a hassle getting into this crazy country," I thought, "but then, what is life without its challenges?"

The airport is near the central bazaar and I walked into the main souk, checking out the hotels. Everything in Saudi Arabia is expensive except gasoline. The cheapest hotels run $15 a night for a single, which was way above my budget, although one night wouldn't have killed me.

As usual, the cheap hotels are down by the market, near the con-

junction of King Abdul Aziz St. and Bab Shariet St. They have names like the Cairo Hotel, the Mukram Hotel, Hotel Istanbul and the Alharamein Hotel. If you are a male, and used to camping out, you may also choose to stay in the tea shops that abound throughout Saudi Arabia, called in Arabic, "garuwaz." In these garuwaz you sleep on a rope bed, usually under the stars or under a tent if you prefer, and it costs about 5 Saudi rials, or about $2 U.S. In a big city like Jeddah or Riyadh, a garuwaz will usually be located on the roof of a hotel or some other building. In a smaller town, they will usually be along the side of the road, easily spotted by the rope-strung beds outside and a small restaurant adjacent. You can ask someone where there is a garuwaz and people will be happy to point one out for you. In Jeddah, I stayed in a garuwaz just across the street from the Alharamein Hotel, on the roof of the building. Women should not try to stay in a garuwaz, even if they are traveling with a man. I would suggest renting a single room in a cheap hotel and sharing it. A single of $15 would then be about $7.50 each.

After leaving my luggage at the garuwaz, I headed down to the main market. Jeddah is the main port on the west coast of Saudi Arabia and has a nice bazaar within walking distance of the hotels, just down by the docks. There are vendors selling gum arabic out of big baskets, unflavored straight sap from the tree. Arabians like to chew it as bubble gum. There are shops galore selling gold, cameras, watches, cassette players and such. All of Saudi Arabia is duty free. There are sandwich shops and some sidewalk cafes, plenty of women on the streets too, to my surprise. There were Saudi Arabian women there, and a lot of Orientals, wives of expatriot workers, Americans mostly, who had married while in Thailand, the Philippines or Korea. Very few of the women wore veils, but all women were dressed conservatively, in long sleeves, long dresses or pant suits, and often with scarves over their heads.

Lots of foreigners in this city, I was noticing, looking around at the sailors and other "ex-pats" from the cafe I was drinking tea in. I started up a conversation with three young Scottish doctors who were interning at a hospital in Jeddah.

After a cup of tea, I inquired quietly, "Would any of you be interested in buying a bottle of whiskey?"

They were suspicious at first; after all, alcohol in any form was

forbidden in Saudi. But their Scotch taste for some Dewar's White Label won them over and I was able to unload my bottle to them, to my great relief. The whole episode was decidedly not worth the risk, and I swore I would never try anything like that again. The tension my back had been anticipating from the flogging quietly melted away and I felt I could stand a little straighter.

I walked back to the garuwaz. Old men were sitting on their rope beds watching TV and smoking tobacco mixed with honey from water pipes. I nodded to the watchman, lay on my sleeping bag and gazed up at the stars until I fell asleep. It was good to be in Saudi Arabia, a pilgrim even if I couldn't get into Mecca.

* *

The next morning I was awakened early by the sun, warming my face and sleeping bag until I couldn't comfortably sleep any longer. I packed up and left. I had only three days in Saudi, and I had to make good use of my time. Today was the first day of Ramadan, when Muslims fast to commemorate the Prophet's flight from Mecca. During daylight hours, Muslims cannot eat, drink, smoke or even swallow their own spit. In most Muslim countries, this is all done purely by choice, but in Saudi Arabia, it is mandatory whether you are a Muslim or not. If you are seen in public eating, drinking or smoking, you may be put in jail or publicly whipped. Most Muslims know better than to do this, so it is usually foreigners who get into trouble.

I was sitting in the lobby of the Alharamein Hotel talking with a young Sudanese kid, tall and dark, who was the receptionist. I told him I was just coming from Sudan and lived and worked there for a year.

"What are you going to do here in Saudi?" he asked.

"I'm planning to hitchhike south to Yemen," I told him, "I think I'll go to Taif, in the mountains, today."

"Today is the first day of Ramadan," he said. "The royal family will be going to Taif today. It is better that you don't hitchhike because if they see you on the road, you could be in trouble."

That was good advice, so I went down to the bus station and bought a bus ticket to Taif. I left my luggage in a locker and walked around the port and market for awhile; I had three hours before the next bus. If you have time, you should try to visit the museum in Jeddah; the

market and mosques are the main things of interest. If you come on a yacht to Saudi, as many hitchhikers do, you can do some good snorkling off the coast. The Red Sea has some of the best coral reefs in the world. If you do arrive by ship, you'll have a much easier time getting into Saudi Arabia than I did. They will give you a transit visa that will allow you several days to cross the country or to stay in port for an unlimited time. There are a number of freighters and other vessels always in port. Just wander around down by the docks to look for a lift farther south down the Red Sea and beyond. Another way to get a transit visa is to say that you are driving a car across Saudi Arabia to the Gulf States or Yemen. You will have to show them a driver's license, but they will give you a three day transit visa, and you shouldn't have the same trouble I did getting in.

The road to Taif, the summer capital, is high and windy. Twisting up into the Hejaz Mountains, which run down the length of the western coast, the road runs right past Mecca (less than an hour from Jeddah) and on to the cool mountain city of Taif, a three hour bus trip. At the bus station in Taif, I asked an American working at the counter what there was to do there. He was in his late thirties, going grey and bald, and he had a slight curvature of the spine, causing him to hunch over slightly. He looked at me sharply. "What are you doing here in Saudi Arabia, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm just hitchhiking around. I'm going to Mecca."

"Mecca!" he snorted. "You'll never get to Mecca! Mecca is for Muslims. They would kill you if you tried to get into Mecca!"

I did know that the Kaaba is guarded by guards with machine guns who watch the pilgrims very carefully. Any person who does not follow the rituals, and appears to be a non-believer trying to sneak into the courtyard around the Kaaba, would be in big trouble.

Sir Richard Burton had managed to sneak in a hundred years ago, the first westerner ever to do so, at the risk of his life. In the center of Mecca is Islam's holiest shrine, the Great Mosque. It stands loftily in the white-hot desert sun, lifting its seven tall minarets up to heaven. In the center of the mosque is the 50 foot high, cube-shaped Kaaba, draped in black silk, embroidered with verses of the Quran in gold thread. It is toward this building, the Kaaba, that some 800 million Muslims pray five times a day. Tradition has it that the Kaaba was built by Abraham, the Biblical progenitor of the Hebrew peoples, in

the second millenium B.C. Abraham built the Kaaba as a House of God in which to worship the monotheistic deity of the Hebrews. For thousands of years the desert dwellers of Arabia made an annual pilgrimage to this shrine, which netted a tidy profit for the inhabitants of Mecca who created a yearly festival for the event. The desert tribesmen would often bring their own idols or deified gods and over the years the Kaaba was filled with such pagan dieties as Awf, the great bird, and Uzza, the goddess of the morning star, as well as some 360 other images.

Sometime in the late sixth century A.D. the elders decided to renovate the Kaaba, but could not decide on who should have the honor of resetting the most holy object in the Kaaba, the Black Stone, in its place back in the masonry after it had been cleaned.

The Black Stone, considered to be the only thing remaining that was originally placed in the Kaaba by Abraham himself, was then and is now, the central article of the pilgrimage to Mecca. Believed to be a meteorite, some 12 inches in diameter, the Black Stone plays a very important part in Islam.

It was agreed by the elders that the next man to enter the sacred precincts would judge the dispute of resetting the sacred stone. The first man to appear was a young Meccan merchant and former caravan guide, whose wisdom and honesty had earned him the nick-name of El Amin, "the trustworthy". A lean man, strong of body and character, his thick black beard framed his tanned face and dark serious eyes. A very serious man, his laugh was said to be rarely more than a mere smile.

To settle the dispute, he spread his cloak on the ground and placed the stone on it, then had two nobles grasp a corner of the cloak and together raise the stone. Then with his own hands, the young merchant, El Amin, placed the stone into the niche, where it remains to this day. That merchant's name was Mohammed!

Born north of Mecca in Yathrib, now renamed Medina, in AD 570, Mohammed was orphaned at six and raised by an uncle. He traveled widely on the caravans as a conductor, carrying frankincense and silk through Mecca north to Damascus. A well-traveled man, Mohammed was said to be illiterate, which many scholars feel is unlikely, for he was very familiar with 6th century Jewish and Christian thought.

Mohammed devoted much time to contemplation and often climbed

to a small cave among the rocks of Mount Hira, just north of Mecca, to meditate and fast. In the year 610, Mohammed had a vision. The Angel Gabriel told him to clear out the false dieties in the Kaaba. The leading elders of Mecca, however, did not like this at all, as the annual pilgrimage was a major event. They in turn threatened and scorned Mohammed.

Mohammed and several trusted friends and family members slipped out of Mecca one night and went to the oasis of Yathrib, about 200 miles from Mecca to the north. The year was 622 and the Muslim calendar of 354 days begins on the date of this flight, or as it is known in Arabic, hegira.

In Yathrib, Mohammed and his followers built the first mosque and established the first Islamic community in what would eventually become Islam's second holiest city after Mecca, Medina.

Mohammed and his ever-increasing followers waged a superficial war with the elders of Mecca for 20 years. During one battle, Mohammed himself was almost killed and companions dragged his unconscious body to safety.

By the year 630 Mohammed had converted enough Bedouin tribesmen from the surrounding desert that he was able to re-enter Mecca with an army of 10,000, a considerable army in the desert expanses of Arabia at that time, and Mecca surrendered without a fight. Mohammed walked to the Kaaba, touched the Black Stone and made the prescribed seven circuits around the building, a ritual still followed today. Within two years most of Arabia was under his sway, and within 100 years, shouting the name of Allah, Arab armies siezed a realm that stretched from Spain to Central Asia, and had come within 100 miles of Paris.

There is a certain fanaticism about these dwellers in one of the largest and most desolate deserts in the world, that enabled Mohammed to weld such a huge empire out of a bunch of camel herders in such a short time. "Divinely inspired," they waged holy war on the rest of the world, their battle cry "there is no god but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet!"

It appeared that my dream of going to Mecca was to be shattered. Mecca was a fascinating place, and I had always wanted to go there, planet earth pilgrim that I am, but it wasn't worth risking being riddled by bullets from the guards who were bound to spot me. I decided to keep heading south to Yemen.

It wasn't difficult to part from the American in Taif. The guy hadn't been too helpful but he had told me about his two wives, one in Philadelphia and one in Bangkok, Thailand.

"Isn't it illegal in America to have more than one wife?" I asked him.

"I don't give a damn!" he snarled. He seemed bitter, perhaps because he had to work in this bus station in Saudi Arabia while both of his wives lived in foreign countries. "Besides," he said, "I live in Saudi Arabia, I can have as many wives as I want!" He didn't seem to think that there were many things to do in Taif. But to me it appeared to be a pretty nice place to live, fresher and cooler than the hot humid coast. With rugged purple mountains that shot straight up into the cloudless sky, a pleasant little bazaar to wander in, plus the summer palace of the royal family, it was Saudi's version of a resort town.

I was heading for Abha, straight south along the mountains. I caught several short lifts out of Taif and south down the mountain highway. My best ride was with a young Saudi Arabian named Saeed. He was taking a new Dihatsu truck to Khamis Mushad, an air base that the Saudis had in the south. He was neat, cleanshaven and courteous. Friendly enough, he didn't speak English, so we conversed as best we could in Arabic. I told him about life in America, and he was astonished at the ease of getting married.

"A wife in Saudi Arabia costs between 50,000 and 100,000 Saudi rials in dowry money," he said. I figured this out to be about $16,000 to $33,000. In the Middle East, a young man must save all his money for years and then pay a huge dowry to the family of the bride for his wife, a woman he is unlikely to even see before his wedding day, as women are kept in their homes most of the time and wear a veil on the rare occasions that they go out. Things in Saudi Arabia are changing, however. Nine tenths of Saudi Arabia is a barren plateau which includes the Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter) and Al-Nafud deserts. Here there are lots of Bedouin tribesmen who are still making the transition from the 8th century to the 21st. As Saudi Arabia rushes headlong into its ambitious development program, funded by its bottomless oil revenues, it creates a form of future shock in all its inhabitants, many of whom are very resistant to change.

I stared out the window and looked at the mountains as Saeed and I continued on the long drive south. He was amazed, as are all Arabs

when they hear it for the first time, that you do not have to give a big dowry to your wife's family when you get married. This dowry is a heavy financial and psychological burden for young Arab men, it being almost impossible to satisfy any sexual urges until they can afford to get married. Prostitutes, while available in other Arab countries to a limited extent, are virtually unknown in Saudi Arabia, and therefore many men turn to homosexuality out of desperation. Saeed was fine, and at no time in Saudi Arabia was I ever even teased. Homosexuality is also illegal in Saudi, but there is still some prostitution and abuse of young boys.

In the east part of Saudi Arabia, where all the oil fields are, ultramodern cities are springing up out of the dust and are manned by virtual armies of American, European and Asian workers. Damman, on the Persian Gulf, is a miniature American city, complete with American TV, Dairy Queens, pizza parlors, and American schools. Hotels are especially expensive in the newly constructed eastern cities, and the traditional garuwaz of the country are fewer. In these cities, you might ask some American if you can camp out in his yard, or inquire at one of the oil camps if you can spend the night. Try going to schools and universities as well; they will often have places for foreign students to stay for a few days, or will let you camp out. It is best to ask other Americans and Europeans where you can stay cheaply or camp out, as Saudi Arabians would probably not understand about camping out, especially in the environs of a city. In Riyadh, the capital of Saudi, there are also many hotels, most of them very expensive. You'll find cheaper ones at $10-$15 a night in the central bazaar, and I've been told there are a few garuwaz tea shops there too.

Saeed and I stopped frequently at gas stations, and munched on apples, bananas and meat pies while we talked intermittently.

"If it is Ramadan, Saeed," I asked him, "how is it that you are eating and drinking during the day?"

"Because," he said, "it is alright for travelers to break their fast while they are traveling. They must have sustenance. Still, you should not eat or drink while in public." There was a beautiful sunset that night, a deep set of rainbow colors that sandwiched along the rows of jagged bare mountains to the west. We stopped at a tea shop for awhile in the evening and ate dinner. Saeed ordered a water pipe and puffed on it for a while. I had some shish kebob mutton and whole wheat pita

bread, a flat, round loaf. Restaurants are quite expensive, but street vendors, making mutton sandwiches and sesame snacks, are quite cheap. I bought food in stores: peanut butter, cheese, bread and fruit, and made my own sandwiches most of the time. Be sure to carry water with you at all times, as it is still precious all over the country. In some places, a glass of water may cost you a dollar or two.

Saeed finally let me off at a garuwaz on the outskirts of Abha, a town of a few thousand in the mountains near North Yemen. It was about midnight and I was tired. Saeed drove on to the east and I went to sleep on one of the ropestrung beds in the tent-like frame and canvas structure that was the tea shop. Because of Ramadan, old men were still up, watching TV and smoking their water pipes all night, then sleeping most of the day.

The next morning I walked through town looking for the road out on the way to Jizan, on the coast and closer to the border of Yemen. Because they were just building this part of the road down from the mountains to the coast, the way was closed until three o'clock while they did some blasting in the steep slopes. There was a police station and road block just at the end of town, and the police seemed to think I was a bit of a strange character. I guess they had never seen a hitchhiker before. They utterly tore my luggage apart. Again I was grateful that I had sold my whiskey in Jeddah.

They were a nice bunch of guys, these policemen. They were amused and delighted to find a frisbee in my pack. I showed them how it worked and then three of us, including the chief of police, played frisbee for a while in the back of the police station. The town itself had a couple of hotels, and one big central square where people brought in the produce, melons, apricots, and nuts, to sell. Many people had cars; four wheel drive trucks like Toyota Landcruisers were the most popular. I bought some apricots, almonds and a jar of American peanut butter at a shop and walked back to the police station. It was about time for the road to open.

I got a ride with a Lebanese engineer who was in charge of the construction site, down the switchback road to where there were cranes and bulldozers working. He was thirty and quite sophisticated. Lebanon is the most cosmopolitan country in Arabia, often called the Switzerland of the Middle East because of its mountains. As we neared the construction site, I could see that a crane had driven off the edge

of the road and down the steep mountainside. As we neared the wreckage we saw a worker pulling a lifeless body out of the twisted mass of steel that was once a crane.

As the worker lay the body down, he took a deep drink from a water bottle. "When you touch a dead person during Ramadan, you may break your fast," the Lebanese engineer told me.

He stopped at the wreckage site, and I began walking down the road. I got a ride in a share-taxi, the big Mercedes Benz sedans that drive long routes and pick up passengers along the way, charging them accordingly. They are quite a bit more expensive than busses, so you should inquire with cars if you suspect that they might be share-taxis. They are not marked, but they usually have quite a few people in them already.

"Are you a taxi?" I asked them in Arabic when they stopped for me.

"Yes, where are you going?" replied the driver.

"To the coast," I replied. "But I am hitchhiking and I only can take free rides. Thank you for stopping, anyway."

"That's alright," they said, "we'll give you a ride."

"Thank you very much," I said, and got in back. I was sitting next to a guy I had spotted earlier at the police roadblock. He was a wild looking fellow with fierce dark eyes and long braided black hair with a beaded headband. He wore a sort of black cotton pyjama outfit and a cartridge belt with some very large shells in it for what must have been a powerful rifle. Tucked into his belt was a large curved Arabian dagger which I imagined he was quite an expert with—not your typical oil-soaked Mercedes-driving Saudi! He was rugged, handsome and silent, the type who might throw a blonde woman over his horse and ride off into the desert with her while the movie cameras kept on rolling. The taxi let this guy off in the middle of the mountains, not a human habitation to be seen anywhere, and it was difficult to imagine people living out there in those steep, dry, barren slopes. He paid with some old, tatty notes that he carefully pulled out of his belt. The other guys told me as we drove off that he was a Bedouin and had probably stashed his rifle out there in the desert somewhere.

The share-taxi took me down to the coastal plain, to a place called Ad Darb where, after standing in the dust by the side of the road in this tiny town of a few hundred people, I got a ride with two Saudis in white robes driving a Toyota Land Cruiser. We traveled down the

road for about ten minutes while I told them who I was and where I was going in Arabic, and that I was hitchhiking. They did not look like a share-taxi, and I don't think they were, but often in Arabia, just as in Africa, people will charge for rides. They said I would have to pay, only 100 rials they said, to the next town which was about sixty miles away. This was about $33, which was way too much, I felt, although transportation is expensive in Saudi and *they* certainly didn't think it was too much. In Africa I probably would have paid for a lift like this, but they really wanted too much, and there are so many vehicles in Saudi Arabia that I knew I would get a free ride without too much waiting. I nicely told them that I didn't have that kind of money, especially for such a short ride. They stopped the truck right there in the middle of the desert and told me to get out. They seemed a little irritated; there is a general impression among Asians and Africans that Americans and Europeans are made of money, so why shouldn't I be able to pay?

"Alright," I said in Arabic as I got out of the truck. I thanked them and they sped away in the dust, with me standing alone on the highway.

I confess I was worried as I took a drink of the precious water in my canteen and surveyed the road. A dust storm was threatening in the distance. It could be that the next car to come along might be a police car, a thought that was decidedly unpleasant. I had already been searched by the police once today, a suspicious lot, and I feared that if they found me out here in the middle of nowhere, I would be in trouble. My visa was expiring today and furthermore it said right on it that I was on my way to Abu Dhabi, while here I was 300 miles south of Jeddah near the North Yemen border. What could I say? "Gee, officer, I must have taken a wrong turn."

In the distance I could see a car emerging from a dust cloud to the north. I prayed it wasn't a police car and started to wave. Hitching in Saudi Arabia and Africa is a lot different than in other countries. You don't just stand there on the road with your thumb out, you take a far more active stance.

Setting down my pack, I waved with both my arms over my head and jumped up and down a few times, just to make sure I had gotten the driver's attention. Then using my whole right arm, I motioned down the road in several long sweeping gestures and pointed to the

road where I was standing, thus indicating I wanted him to stop for me. I repeated this several times until he was so close it was superfluous to continue. I stood and waved, smiling, all the time confident he would stop, and sure enough he did. It's not every day that you see a blond kid standing in the middle of the Arabian desert waving his arms like a madman. Who wouldn't stop?

To my great relief, it wasn't a police car but a friendly truck driver who immediately offered me a drink of water, a handful of grapes and a gleaming smile. "What in the name of Allah are you doing out here?" he quizzed, obviously confused by finding me in the middle of nowhere.

I explained about my former ride, that I couldn't pay the fare the gentlemen were asking and so they dropped me off right there in the desert. I told him that I was going to Yemen.

He took me pretty close to Yemen, to a place called Jizan, and let me off at the crossroads just outside of town, the road to the Yemen border. I stood there for a while at dusk, the sun gradually sinking into the grey-brown dust of the atmosphere to the west. Hitchhiking was definitely the way to get around Saudi Arabia, I decided. There are lots of cars, and except in the big cities like Jeddah or Riyad, people will usually pick you up, out of curiosity if nothing else. You do have to be aware of taxis, because they are not always marked. Discuss the price of your ride before you go too far. On the other hand, because gas is so inexpensive, if you want to take a short taxi ride around town, to a hotel, or to get you out of town, they can be pretty cheap. It's the long rides in the country that are going to cost you twenty or forty dollars to get you to the next town. By all means bargain with these guys if you are going to pay for your rides.

It is virtually unheard of for women to hitchhike through Saudi Arabia, although they can in some other Arabian countries, Jordan for instance. Women traveling in Saudi Arabia should probably take the busses or arrange a share-taxi ride in a major city to their destination before they start out. A woman traveling by herself in Saudi Arabia is uncommon, to say the least, but it has been done. I know of a woman, an American medical student, who traveled across Saudi Arabia by herself on share-taxis. She didn't have any trouble except one night when she and the men who were also in her taxi were all staying in the same hotel in some small town in central Saudi. She

heard them coming up the stairs to her room later in the evening, and, being the gutsy woman she is, she let out a blood-curdling scream at the top of her lungs. Quite frightened, they all ran back down the stairs and never bothered her again.

There is also a train line from Damman to Riyadh, which would be interesting but no doubt expensive. An idea would be to hop this train, riding in or on a freight car, but talk with the engineer first, as rules in Saudi Arabia are very strict. You can also get lifts on ships from any Red Sea port or Persian Gulf port. From the Red Sea, it would be fairly easy to cross over to Sudan, Egypt or Djibouti, and from the Persian Gulf to go to Pakistan, India, the Far East or Africa.

The major expense in Saudi Arabia is hotels, if you are hitching and only taking free rides. You will be spending at least $2 a day for a garuwaz, and another couple of dollars a day on food, so that eats up a five dollar a day allowance right away. There is no black market for currency in any Arab countries, either, and money changers abound in the markets, especially in the port cities. You can cash almost any currency in the world there, and traveler's cheques too. It is also worth your while to try and get a job in Saudi Arabia if you have some skills. Carpenters, engineers, teachers, computer programmers, nurses, geologists and just about every profession you can think of is needed in Saudi Arabia and they pay well.

Just as it got dark, I got one last ride out to a garuwaz about twenty miles out of Jizan toward Yemen. Right in the middle of the desert, it was full of Yemenis who worked at the local cement factory near Jizan; this was like their dormitory. They were fun and talkative, told me stories of Yemen and drank tea with me all night. I finally crashed out under the stars in one of those comfortable ropestrung beds and had a good night's sleep.

The next day, a young Yemeni boy, hardly fifteen, gave me a lift on his motorcycle, a Honda 125, painted a bright orange and yellow with six reflector studded rearview mirrors on the handlebars and multi-colored streamers flowing out of every orifice on the bike. We were like a two-man parade bombing south through the desert.

It wasn't long before we were at the border, where I had to wake up the immigration officer. I thanked the kid for the ride and he took off back to his cement factory. The immigration officer looked at my passport and noticed that my visa said that I was going to Abu Dhabi.

He didn't notice that I was one day over my transit allowance, however.

"This visa says Transit to Abu Dhabi," he said, wiggling his mustache in order to scratch his upper lip. He was thin and had the ancient scars of smallpox all over his face.

Hoping I looked more confident than I felt, I leaned back in my chair and responded in my best Arabic, "Yes, I'm on my way to Abu Dhabi, but I'm going to Yemen first." This sounded like it made some sense, and the immigration officer nodded silently.

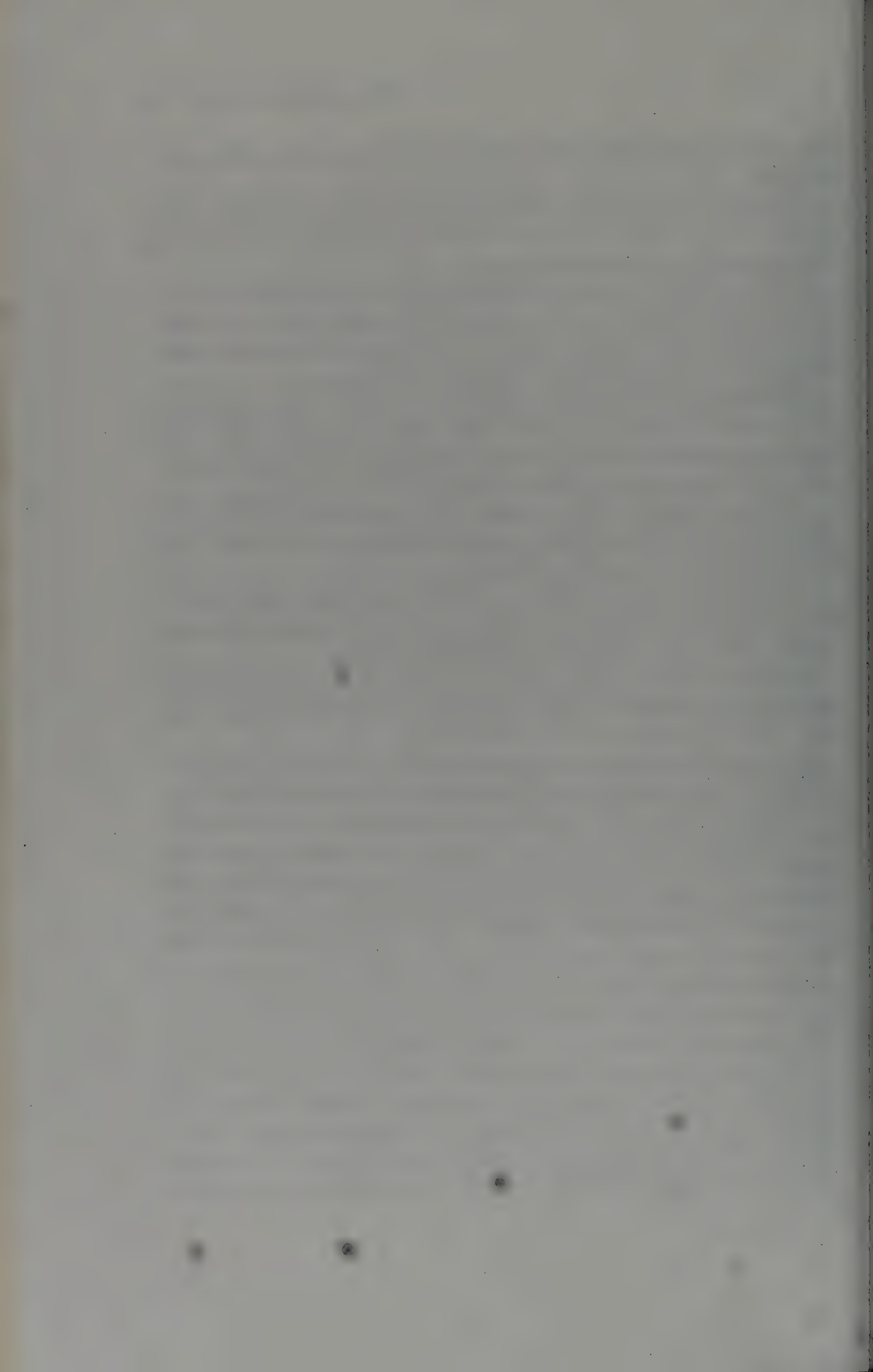
The border post was in the middle of the desert, just a couple of small cement buildings and lots of sand. Looking out the window, the immigration officer thought this over, wiggled his mustache and talked with another man in the office, a customs officer.

"Will I ever get out of this country? It's as hard getting out as it is getting in! Well, if I can bullshit my way into this crazy country, then I can bullshit my way out!" I thought.

"Yep, on my way to Abu Dhabi," I said, "just have to go to Yemen first." We then talked of the weather and had a few laughs about this or that. My Arabic was getting better all the time.

Finally, the officer looked at me with large dark eyes, wiggled his mustache once and said, "Well, ok." He put a big exit stamp on the page that had lain open on his desk so long.

I gripped the edge of my chair to keep from sliding off from relief and tried to suppress a grin of self-satisfaction. As I picked up my pack and headed out the door, I couldn't help but feel like some sort of pilot being ejected out of his plane into space. Saudi Arabia was a nice country and interesting as hell. I turned to wave goodbye to the immigration officer who kindly let me walk away. He wiggled his mustache one last time and a gleam in his eye seemed to say, "Crazy kid."



5 · YEMEN AND THE GULF STATES: CARAVAN TO THE EMPTY QUARTER

For God's sake give me a young man who has brains enough to make a fool of himself.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

He who stands with both feet on the ground cannot take a step forward.

ARAB PROVERB

IN THE DISTANCE, through the waving wall of heat, I could see the outline of a city, walls rising six stories above the desert, small black windows masking each floor. Bleary-eyed, I stared off into the desert. It was hot; I had to be careful of touching the side of the land cruiser, lest I burn my arm as I leaned on the door.

The city in the distance was a mirage. I had seen half a dozen already that day. Through the heat, my sweat-stinging eyes saw great lakes of water, endless beaches and waves and even huge cities and tall, brown, adobe skyscrapers in the distance, like the misty veil of some long lost city out of a prehistoric past. Each time I thought it was real, but each was a mirage, an illusion of the oven-hot desert along the North Yemen coast.

Suddenly the landrover stopped and I wiped the sweat that was

beading up on my forehead with a faded blue bandana. We actually were in a town! It wasn't a mirage, but for once a real sight of adobe skycrapers, small shops and, I hoped, water.

Back at the Saudi Arabian border, I had met a taxi driver as I stepped out of the immigration-customs house, who was on his way

to Hodeida. "Would you like a ride?" he asked me in Arabic, looking me and my backpack over.

"Sure," I said, and suspected he was a taxi. "I'm only taking free rides, though."

"That's OK, I'm happy to give you a ride. Where are you from?"

"America," I said, throwing my pack in the back seat of the four wheel drive Japanese jeep that is so popular in Arabia. "Thanks for the ride."

"Think nothing of it. God provides for us all."

Speaking only Arabic, he was a dark man in his thirties, had a thick mustache and was of medium height. He was a very serious person with a lot on his mind. He had been working in Saudi Arabia for year, driving his Toyota Land Cruiser around from place to place, saving his money; now he was returning to Yemen. Things are not so serious in Yemen, he told me, forcing a smile.

He was very friendly, and bought me the small, 8-ounce Japanese Pepsi's that you see all over the deserts of Arabia. The Japanese are so clever, I thought, they have even made a million dollar exporting business out of little half-sized cans of Pepsi. They were definitely the rage in Saudi Arabia and Yemen when I was there. He kept a big bottle of mineral water in the jeep which we gulped on every now and then as we followed the two-wheel track through the gentle rolling desert plain, steering around sage brush and spiky aloe plants.

With a grunt, the taxi driver jumped out of the landcruiser. Feeling greatly lethargic, I managed to stagger out after him, still stunned by the fact that we were actually at a real town and not just another mirage. I aimed for a bit of shade across the street, a garuwaz-tea shop.

I collapsed on a rope bed, next to an old man, thin and naked except for a loin cloth, who was sleeping noisily by the water urn. After a drink of fresh, cool water and a Japanese Pepsi brought to me by the taxi driver, I lay back on the bed and almost fainted.

God, it was hot, I thought, there weren't even any flies out! Now that's hot! Too hot for flies . . . flies . . . hot . . . I was sinking down into a state of heat exhaustion. My head was achey, my mouth was dry, I dozed fitfully.

I dreamed of cities in the desert,
tall and ancient

the wind blowing sand through empty streets;
I dreamed of lost continents
rising from the ocean,
and flying machines hovering
above the Great Pyramid.
Of caravans, a long line of dusty camels
making their way to India and the far east,
I dreamed of a planet
in the birth throes of a new age.

"Let's go," said the taxi driver, kicking me gently on the bottom of my foot. Still dazed, I staggered over to the Toyota and got in. I don't know how long I had been sleeping, but the sun was still high, and it was as hot as ever. Once again we were bumping and jumping through the dirt and low brush toward Hodeida. I glanced at the book I had in my lap, *The Ultimate Frontier*, by Eklal Kueshana. It had something to say about illusions. We know that matter is made up of molecules and atoms, it said; what most people don't realize is that atoms are made of almost entirely empty space—nothing! An atom is empty space consisting of a central blob of whirling energy sheathed by the orbits of electrons. The orbiting electrons describe a more or less spherical shell of energy. Imagine an atom—if the nucleus were enlarged to the size of our sun, the shell described by the electrons would be twelve times greater than the diameter of our solar system. A pound of iron, so concrete and solid, is just a mass of energy swirls separated by comparatively vast reaches of emptiness. Our bodies are just the same, space and vibration!

It's probably a cop-out to say that the whole world is just a mirage, I thought, staring out at the shimmering glare of a huge mirage lake, complete with sandy beaches, palm trees and surfable waves. I tore open a package of United Nations Dehydration Salts that a friend in Khartoum had given me.

I remembered the last time I had had lunch with him, at the Greek Club in an upperclass district of Khartoum. "Life is illusory," he said, dipping a stalk of celery into a bowl of homus, a chick pea paste. "Einstein proved time is a function of matter and vice versa. Without matter there can be no time, without time, there can be no matter."

After a gulp of Camel Beer he went on, "When you're working with a lot of vibrations and space, well, anything's possible. These miracles we read about occasionally, stuff the prophets did in the Bible, that these yogis do in India and Tibet, it's no big deal in the world of the void. Why, anything is possible. What physicists are just now proving, the mystics of the east and west have known for thousands of years. The first precept of Buddhism is that the world is an illusion, and so is the Indian concept of Maya."

Recalling my conversation in Khartoum and the beers we were having for lunch made me awfully thirsty. I finished off most of my canteen of dehydration salts and put my feet up on the dash board. What I would give for a cold beer right now, but as in Saudi Arabia, alcoholic beverages were illegal. In heat like this all a person could really do was sleep. . . .

* *

We eventually made it to Hodeida, Yemen's chief port, a medium sized town of 80,000, and the most modern of all towns in Yemen. It was dark when we finally got there, and I made the mistake of buying my taxi driver dinner as thanks for the long ride from the Saudi Arabian border. We had a bowl of mutton stew and some bread with salad in a thoroughly dumpy little cafe-cum-greasy spoon, and to my horror, it cost me twenty dollars for the two of us! I was expecting maybe three. That was the last time I ever ate anything in Yemen without first checking the price. I found a garuwaz, one of those outdoor dormitories of the Arabian desert, on the roof of a six-story building, the tallest in Hodeida, right in the downtown. They charged five Yemeni rials a night for a rope-strung bed and mattress, and another five rials (about one U.S. dollar) for a shower. There are other hotels in the same area by the central market where you can rent a single or double room for anywhere from six to fifteen dollars and up. Hotels are not cheap by my standards; I'm used to getting a bed or room for one or two dollars a night and living on five dollars a day. In most parts of Yemen, the cheapest bed in a cheap hotel, in a room shared with other people, is four or five dollars. This garuwaz in Hodeida was the cheapest place I stayed in all Yemen, at a dollar a night, but in the mountainous interior it is too cold to sleep outside,

and there are no garuwaz to be found. There are, however, similar indoor dormitories called "muffrages". These offer bunk beds or just pillows on the floor and are two or three dollars a night (ten to fifteen Yemeni rials).

I wandered around Hodeida for two days. The heat was stifling. I was awakened in the morning by a score of flies that happily buzzed around me and crawled on my hands, legs, and face until I got up. I could only afford one shower a day, so I waited until sunset to wash the day's sticky sweat off. I walked down to the port to check out ships to Djibouti or the Persian Gulf and India. I wasn't too fussy about where I was going; this was the Zen of travel. There is also the market to wander in, which is always fun. Otherwise, aside from getting a ship across the Red Sea or out into the Indian Ocean, there's not much to keep the hitchhiker in Hodeida, unless you're into flies. But Yemen becomes one of the most fascinating countries in Arabia, once you head up in to the mountains.

Known in ancient times as Arabia Felix, Latin for "Happy Arabia," "Al Yemen" means happiness and prosperity. A series of rich agricultural and trading kingdoms flourished in Yemen in the first millenia BC, the Kingdom of Ma'in in 1300 BC and the Kingdom of Sheba in 1000 BC being the best known. The spice caravans from Oman skirted the dreaded empty quarter and came through Yemen, and Yemen also had a brisk trade in coffee, its old port of Mocca lending its name to a certain variety.

The Sabeans of the Kingdom of Sheba, whose Queen had an affair with the Biblical King Solomon, were superceded by the Himyarites under whom Judaism and Christianity took root. Later their rule was eclipsed by a force of invading Christian Ethiopians in the 5th century AD, who brought coffee with them and probably the drug, qat. Meanwhile the Persians drove out the Ethiopians, and Yemen seemed to be pretty hot real estate. Islam finally conquered Yemen shortly after Mohammed sent his Mujaheedin out to spread the word. The Ottoman Empire controlled Yemen and the rest of Arabia from the sixth century to 1918, when a theocratic dynasty that was founded in Yemen as far back as the ninth century regained full power over the country. In the late fifties Yemen joined the United Arab Republic (UAR), forming a federation of Arab states with Egypt and Syria. These three countries found it difficult to get it together, all being geographically

separated by other countries who had no interest in joining the federation. Shortly after the dissolution in 1961, a long civil war broke out between Republican and Royalist forces. Egypt was supporting the Republican forces and sent 40,000 troops and an air-force to Yemen to fight the Saudi Arabian-backed Royalist forces, who were forced to withdraw to Marib, their headquarters on the edge of the empty quarter in western Yemen. The Egyptians remained in Yemen until 1967, and never completely subdued the Royalist forces, even after bombing Marib.

The country continues to be a land of violent change and uncertainty. In June 1978, the Presidents of both North and South Yemen were assassinated in a 48 hour period. One was blown to smithereens when his briefcase exploded; the other was shot in the head by a hired assassin. There have been border clashes between the two Yemens over the years, as well as unification talks. Saudi Arabia does its best to thwart any progress, fearful that the eight million persons in a unified Yemen would overrun their own country.

One of the most untouched and traditional Arab countries, Yemen still operates on a tribal law system much as things were two hundred years ago. In the interior, it is common to see Yemen tribesmen with cartridge belts on their chests and bolt action rifles on their shoulders, though it's becoming more and more common to see automatic rifles and four-wheel-drive Toyota Land Cruisers.

The interior is ruggedly beautiful mountains and green cultivated fields. Here the rainfall is much higher than anywhere else on the Arabian Peninsula, and Yemen was once a major grower of coffee. Now the narcotic drug, qat, has taken the place of coffee. East of the mountains is the Empty Quarter, a huge sea of sand that lies mostly in Saudi Arabia. There is virtually no plant or animal life, and water is extremely scarce. Even the Bedouins rarely cross this inhospitable area of Arabia. To the west is the Tihama, the coastal desert plain where there are many Negroid strains mixed with Arab blood, and villages have a district African flavor. It is here in the Tihama that Hodieda is located, and I was determined to escape the heat and hitchhike east into the mountains and San'a, the capital of Yemen.

At the crack of dawn one morning, after the flies had waked me up, I decided to get an early start hitching out on the road to San'a. No sooner had I crossed the street, which was the main road out of town,

than an Arab man in his forties picked me up. He was on his way to a construction site about thirty miles out of town, where he was an engineer. He spoke good English and had traveled in Europe quite a bit. We had a nice talk; he was very helpful and concerned about me, there not being too many hitchhikers that make it to Yemen. As I got out of the small jeep he was driving, he asked, "Do you need any money?"

I chuckled quietly, genuinely touched by his care. "No thank you, sir, I'm fine, I have enough money for the time being, I just have to spend it wisely."

"Take care, then," he said.

"I will, and thank you again for the ride." And he was off, and I was once again left standing on the road.

I caught a ride the rest of the way to San'a, two hours in a truck with three Yemeni guys, winding up the steep road up into the cool and green mountains of the central, most populated area. It was mid-afternoon when they let me off the truck near the main bazaar of the capital, and it didn't take me too long to find out where the cheapest hotels were. San'a is a city of a hundred and fifty thousand or so, located in the heart of the agricultural area. Yemen's architecture is famous; its brown mud buildings are square and tall, with lots of dark, narrow windows, sometimes rising ten stories above the street.

Hotels in San'a are the most expensive in the country. You will find the cheapest ones around "Meda El Tahir", or Tahir Square. A typical room is mud-walled, cramped and rather musty, furnished with a rope-strung bed and little else. If you have a table and a chair in your room, you're lucky, and will probably have to pay more. Showers are shared, and there will be no more than two for the entire hotel. Toilets will be Arabian style, a hole in the floor, but they will flush. These Yemeni fleabags will cost you 20 to 30 rials a night ($4.50 to $7.00), for a room. You can also take a bed in a dormitory room for 12 to 18 rials ($2.50 to $3.50) a night. There will be three or four people in your room, and this is an especially good deal if you can fill up a small dormitory room with your own party. A bed at the Al Shybani Hotel on Tahir Square costs 12 rials ($2.50) a night. This was the cheapest place I could find in San'a. There are also huge dormitories, called funduks, larger and less cozy then the qat dens called muffrages, at the "Bab Al Yemen" souk (bazaar) near the buses and taxis to the south

side of the bazaar, which is on the southeast side of town. These huge dormitories are sort of big warehouses full of rope-strung bunk beds, perhaps twenty to thirty a room. Especially dirty, these beds still cost about 15 rials ($3.00) a night. Better to stay around Tahir Square. When staying in a dormitory, something which a woman would not be allowed to do, always sleep with your clothes on, as this is an Arabian custom.

San'a has some fantastic markets that offer endless wandering. Rarely in my travels have I seen bazaars as exotic and fascinating as those in the major cities of the Yemen mountains. Small shops lit with kerosene lanterns in twisting narrow streets offer everything the Arabian wanderer could ever have wanted, from silver jewelry and amber, to jewel-encrusted daggers and exotic fruits and sweets. You would think you were in the sixteenth century. The Souk el Gaa and the Bab el Yemen Souk are the two main bazaars in town.

My second night in San'a, I met a young Yemeni kid, Ali, about eighteen, who spoke especially good English. He was tall and slender, and wore blue jeans and a t-shirt that said University of California on it. He was cleanshaven and had dark brown eyes, which were big, and got bigger as he asked me questions about America.

"I've always wanted to go to America," he said, "I like to watch American movies at the theater, whenever they have one, which is rarely." He showed me around the Bab el Yemen Souk while we talked about Yemen and America, I trading him questions on Yemen while he asked about my country. The streets were narrow and winding, barely big enough for two donkeys to pass. After a rain, which can be frequent in this part of Arabia, the streets are muddy and slick. The shops are boxes with a large wooden door that will swing up and lock in place to make a shade. A vendor, often dressed in a striped robe, or baggy pants, shirt and a colorful vest, will sit crosslegged about chest height on a platform with his wares. There were knife shops, dried fruit sellers, cloth sellers, jewelry shops, sweet shops, knickknack stores, and much more.

"The souk stays open until very late," said Ali as we strolled through this endless maze of booths, tea shops and stores. We stopped at one street cafe-coffee shop, which was a couple of tables on the street and a few kerosene burners with some pots of tea, coffee and stew in a shack off the street. We each had a cup of coffee while we watched

an old man at the next table. He was haggard and thin, dunking some brown flat bread into his mutton stew. His gaze was vacant and bare; he felt his way with his bread to the bowl of stew. After he had slurped up the last of the juice, he produced a worn and tattered note, that looked like it had been around as long as the old man. It was a one rial note.

"How much is this?" he asked another man at a table sitting to the other side of him.

"One rial," said the man.

"No, it's five!" said the old man, who then left it on the table to pay for his dinner. He slowly got up, leaning heavily on one ragged, greasy sleeve and grabbing a cane that was propped on the table. As he shuffled away down the street I looked at Ali and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Just another blind beggar," he said, "on the streets of desire."

After finishing our coffee, we paid and walked in silence for awhile and then came to a strange alley with many carts and vendors, each with a number of bundles of small green twigs. The sellers sat on the street with their twigs in front of them on a cloth, or in a permanent stall, or on a movable cart, selling their wares. It was the busiest street in the market, full of men, and one or two women, dressed in black dresses but without veils (most women in Yemen seemed to go without them) selling some of the bundles.

As we watched the men picking their way carefully through the bundles and bargaining with the vendors I asked Ali, "What is this stuff?"

"Qat!" exclaimed Ali. "This is what everyone, at least the men, and many of the older women, do for recreation. Qat is a bush that is cultivated by farmers in the mountains here, and the young reddish green shoots are snipped off and taken to the market and sold.

"People then chew the tips of a twig, mixing the juice with their saliva and swallowing it. It makes you . . . feel good!"

We walked slowly along the twisting, muddy, streets. Gas lamps were glowing on the many tables, casting flickering shadows on old men who walked about, browsing through the many vendors and their carts full of qat. In the booths, I could see men reclining on a mountain of pillows with a huge pile of qat next to them. They had a huge wad

of qat in their cheeks, like a cow chewing on its cud, or a panda bear and a fresh stalk of bamboo. Next to them was a pepsi or a bottle of water that they would occasionally sip on.

A couple of young women were selling qat from a cloth in the middle of a street, enticing buyers with their fresh green bundles. One girl, young, and pretty, with dark eyes and long black hair, only sixteen or so, smiled a big golden smile of metallic teeth and offered me a few stalks of qat for free.

"Go ahead," said Ali, "just bite off the ends, the reddish part, and chew it slowly, don't eat it."

I popped a few twigs in my mouth and bit off the tips. A few short moments of chewing told me that this was pretty bitter, awful-tasting stuff.

"Yuk," I said to Ali.

"Just keep on chewing," said Ali, who bought a bundle from the girl. It was rather expensive, five dollars or so for a small bundle. He began chewing on it. "Keep the qat in your mouth and just swallow your saliva. Keep biting off new pieces as you go. Eventually you will build up a large wad of qat in the back of mouth, between your teeth and gums."

I thanked the girl, who flashed me her golden smile again. Ali and I continued to stroll down the street past the many piles of qat and people chewing it.

"In order to relieve the bitter taste in your mouth," Ali went on, "we like to have sip of Pepsi Cola or ice cold water or even a little mint candy and sweet tea."

As we walked down the street, an old man saw me chewing and some stalks in my hand. In surprise he asked, "Do you chew this qat?"

I replied in Arabic, "Yes, I guess so."

"Here, have some more," he said, smiling, revealing teeth with bits of green qat stuck between them.

After chewing for awhile, I started to feel light-headed and energetic. Ali took me to a room just off the market where a lot of men were sitting around on pillows, bundles of qat next to them, thermoses of water, bottles of pepsi; you could call it a "qat den". We found a little spot in the corner and started to chew our qat in earnest. So many people had given me qat as I walked through the market that I now

had a pretty good-sized bundle, which I was chewing slowly. Still, it was nothing compared to the piles that the Yemenis themselves had.

This qat den was called a muffrage, and I learned it was somewhat the social center for men, at least the ones who chewed qat, which was a very large portion of the population.

"It's great that an American is here chewing qat with us," said one man.

"Do you have qat in America?" asked another.

"When you chew qat," one old, grizzled man told me, in Arabic, leaning toward me with his right elbow resting on a pillow, "You go to America!" He meant, I supposed, that you spaced-out on qat and daydreamed.

He was right, I was indeed "going to America." I was alert and coherent, but my mind seemed to be working overtime, thinking of all kinds of pleasant things. There was a certain numbness in the back of my head and I didn't feel tired at all, even though it was getting late. It was sort of a speedy feeling.

I found myself back in the land cruiser, coming from the Saudi Arabian border, the heat, the mirages, the fine line between reality and a vague world of dreams. But instead of being tired and uncomfortable, I was alert and fascinated. I realized what a great trip it had been so far, the incredible wealth of experiences I had had.

Still, I never lost contact with the men in the muffrage. "How was I enjoying Yemen?" asked one man.

"Yemen is great," I told them, "I like it very much," which was true.

It seemed these guys would go on all night, chewing qat, watching TV, drinking tea and daydreaming. They probably did. I left at some point; I don't know what time it was. Ali showed me the way back to my hotel. I was coherent, not staggering or anything. It was not like being drunk or stoned. My mechanical functioning, like walking, seemed utterly unimpaired. But, my mind was racing, active and inventive. There was a terrible price to pay, however, as I found it very difficult to get to sleep. I lay in my bed, next to an old man who snored noisily and talked in his sleep, wishing my mind would slow down on its race track. Eventually it took a series of spins and turns and I was "off to America."

* *

I awoke with a very dry mouth. It was as if I had been sucking on cotton all night, and the cotton was still in my mouth. My head ached as well, and I wondered if everyone in Yemen woke up like this, with a qat hangover? After a vigorous brushing of my teeth and tongue, I was ready to hit the street. Qat was an interesting social drug, but once was enough, I felt. Later, after a week or so, I did chew it again, this time a very small amount, just to be sociable.

I decided to hitch out to Marib, an ancient and still barely living city on the edge of the Empty Quarter in eastern Yemen, only a hundred miles or so, though it would take me the good part of a day to get there, I knew. It was supposed to be the capital of the Sabeans, where the Queen of Sheba sat at her throne. Because it had been the site of the Royalist Forces headquarters during the civil war in Yemen and was still a very lawless place, both the Tourist Office and the American Embassy in San'a had told me not to go there.

"Off limits to tourists," said the rather thin and busy man who ran the tourist office. Yemen could probably count all its tourists on one hand, I figured, but he didn't have much time for me. "Marib is out of the question, why don't you go down to Hodeida?"

I was polite and friendly but determined to go to Marib, though I didn't tell him that. I knew I could just go. My Arabic was getting pretty good, and I felt I could take care of myself. It might be a little dangerous; all those guys out there carried rifles and knives as a woman carries a purse, and if someone should decide he didn't like me and used me for target practice, well, he damn well would, and nobody would try and stop him! I have faith in my positive thinking, but I must admit that my sense of adventure does get out of hand sometimes. I get into a sticky situation now and then, but this was one adventure I felt I could handle.

I left San'a in the late afternoon, hitchhiking out of town just before it got dark in an effort to miss any road blocks that the Yemen government might have set up, not so much to stop crazy travelers like me, but to search people in and out of San'a for weapons. I knew I wouldn't get to Marib that night, nor did I want to. I'd just stay in some road-side funduk-dormitory or muffrage-qat den. I got a ride out of town with an unshaven young trucker in his dump truck. He was

friendly and rowdy and understood perfectly why I wanted to go to Marib. "Great place," he said.

He let me off at an Egyptian road camp, full of Egyptian road construction workers who wore striped pyjamas all the time and were interested to see me. I had dinner with them, played pingpong and watched TV with them, in their little tent city out in the desert. I thought it was funny that they wore their pyjamas all the time, looking very unmacho in a macho country. Certainly Yemenis wouldn't wear pyjamas like that all the time. I told them the joke about shooting an elephant in my pyjamas once, but I could never figure out how it got into my pyjamas in the first place. . . . but it didn't translate well into Arabic and nobody laughed. They were very nice, a generous, worldly bunch; we talked about Egypt and how they missed the more sophisticated atmosphere of Cairo. Yemen was truly the backwater of the Arab world.

They found me a spare bed, and I spent the night underneath the starry Arabian sky, cool and cloudless. After breakfast with them, I was off again, hitchhiking over a mountain range of black barren crags. There weren't too many vehicles on this road either, I noticed. Eventually, after I had been walking down the road for forty-five minutes, two guys in a pickup truck stopped and gave me a ride in the back. They took me over the mountains and then let me off at a dusty, barren crossroads. I waved goodbye to them as they drove into the desert toward the south.

I sat down on my pack and took a drink from my canteen. I had prepared for the trip by bringing a change of clothes, my sleeping bag, some food and a liter canteen, plus my usual odd assortment of books and writing stuff. Sigh, this was what hitchhiking was all about, I thought, sitting on the side of a road in a desert without a car, building or person in sight. On my way out into the forbidden territory of Marib and a taste of the Empty Quarter. Ah, the dreaded Empty Quarter! I liked the sound of that. The size of Texas, the Empty Quarter is known for its infrequent rains that set off the hatching of grasshopper eggs and trigger the vast plagues of locusts that cause the crop destruction that Africa is famous for.

As I was staring dreamily into the east, from behind a couple of empty oil drums beside the road emerged an old lady, a Bedouin in black embroidered robes and sandals, a little boy and a young girl

about sixteen. Both women were veiled, but as the older woman approached me, she took her veil off. The little boy and the young woman remained by the oil drums.

We greeted each other in traditional fashion, "Salaam Aleikum," and I asked the woman if I could take a photo of her. The old lady declined but kept coming closer and began saying something in Arabic which I didn't fully understand. It had to do with going to her home, which was not visible but which she indicated was to the north of the road somewhere. We could have some tea with her daughter, she said, and was very aggressive about this proposition. It all centered around her daughter, who was very attractive I thought, and alluring with her thin veil on. I presumed that the lady was offering me her daughter for sex.

This was the last thing I expected to happen to me on my way to Marib, and not the sort of situation I wanted to get involved in. Women in Arab countries just do not come up to strangers and talk to them, much less offer them sex. Furthermore, I was in some of the wildest country west of Afghanistan, where everybody, except me, carries a gun, and uses it quite frequently! Shootings and feuds generally center on women in some fashion or another. If some Yemeni guy was to come along and find me just talking with these women, heaven forbid making love with one, I could be in big trouble. A bullet in the head or a knife in the chest is pretty common. I had no intention of going with this lady and her kids to her house somewhere in the desert out there; that seemed like suicide . . .

"Uh, lady, I really don't think I have time to go to your house right now. You see, I'm just hitching to Marib and . . ." I managed to get this out in my best Arabic.

"Come to my house and drink tea with my daughter," said the old lady.

"Look, lady," I wanted to say, "just get away from me." But before I could say this, I saw a jeep coming down the road from the same direction I had just come.

"Now I'm in big trouble," I said aloud in English. "Lady, please leave me alone." I imagined the tough Yemeni tribesmen in the trucks cocking their rifles, ready to shoot this infidel who was pestering a female desert dweller. I took several big steps backward and picked up my pack, trying to put as much distance between myself and the lady as possible.

The jeep pulled up to the lady, who was a few feet in front of me now. In it was a Yemeni in desert garb-robe, head cloth, cartridge belt across his chest, an automatic rifle on the seat next to him, a large curved dagger in his belt. The old lady was talking to him and he cast a few glances my way and argued with her.

Eventually I got up my courage to walk over to him and stick my head in his truck.

"Are you going to Marib by any chance?" I asked in Arabic.

"What are you doing here?" he replied.

"Oh, I was just hitching to Marib, you see, and I was let off here . . ."

"I'm not going to Marib," he said rather gruffly, and then the old woman got in the car with him and they drove off in the direction she had also indicated to me. The little boy and veiled girl remained standing by the empty oil drums along the side of the road.

I was relieved that there hadn't been too big a fuss, as it was a sticky situation. The tribesman must surely have thought it strange . . . not too many hitchhikers out in the desert talking with women just like that. I started walking down the road and fortunately another jeep came along before too long. Looking over my shoulder as we drove away, I heaved a great sigh of relief. That was one set of desert crossroads I was glad to be leaving.

An early morning sunrise
A dusty desert ride;
We came upon a pickup
Abandoned by the roadside.

The wind howls around the truck;
The only sound to hear.
A Bedouin smiles up at us
His throat cut ear to ear.

POEM AT THE PEACE CORPS, SAN'A

I never made it to Marib that day, but I did get to Al Hasool, a smuggler's town near Marib. It was one strange place, full of tall, tan adobe skyscrapers and kids as young as eight years old running around fully armed with automatic weapons and driving Toyota Landcrui-

sers, and sometimes even large Dihatsu trucks. I had to look twice to see if it was all real. A camel caravan coming into town from the Empty Quarter, a sesame mill using a blindfolded camel to drive the grain wheel, and the buildings, just as they were five hundred years ago. Then the Toyota Landcruisers, adult desert dwellers and their young sons, daddy's pride and joy, all armed to the teeth with cartridge belts across their chests, automatic rifles slung over their shoulders and their pickups full of smuggled goods from Saudi Arabia; cases of pepsi, tunafish, canned meat; nothing that was really contraband like alcohol. They met everyday there for a smuggler's market, the landcruisers coming in from Saudi Arabia, and people would sell their goods in bulk.

It was about noon when I got there, and the market didn't open until later in the afternoon. I found a shady porch, an old abandoned storefront with a couple of other guys lounging around, their rifles on their laps. Leaning back on my pack, I looked over the town. It was run down, with thirty or forty tall mud skyscrapers. A few stores here and there, but it was still Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting during the day, so most of the places would be closed until dusk. The center of town was a large parking lot which was where the smuggler's market took place. There were quite a few people and trucks there already, but they kept their goods covered.

I fell asleep in the hot sun. Not even the flies could wake me up. When I did wake, I was looking down the barrel of a Soviet AK-47 Assault Rifle, a bearded and rather scruffy looking tribesman standing behind it, gazing down at me.

I took a rather dry gulp and blinked real hard, thinking this was probably a dream. I wasn't really sure where I was at that stage, my dreams had been pretty wild lately. It wasn't a dream, nor was I in any danger, actually. Some desert dweller had just been curious about me, and was checking me out, his rifle pointing in my face as he looked me over.

He sat down next to me. "Salaam Aleikum," he said.

"Aleikum a Salaam," I returned, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. He was tall and had a rich olive-colored skin. His face was badly scarred and even though his general appearance was tough, with his knife, cartridge belt, and black robe, he looked like a nice guy.

We talked for a little while. Like most people around here he had

a little farm, which he cultivated from an artesian well and where he grew some subsistence vegetables. He had gone to Saudi Arabia to work for awhile, where he earned the money to buy a jeep. He already owned a gun, that was about the first thing he ever owned. He was in town for the market, and said he would give me a ride to Marib, which was only a couple of miles away, after the market.

I went around taking pictures of people. Everyone loved it, I was the instant celebrity of the market. A group of kids, eight to twelve, would line up and hike their rifles up proudly, show a gold-capped tooth and try to be as tough as possible. I walked up to one old man and asked him if I could take his photo.

"How much?" he asked in Arabic.

"Nothing, it's free," I told him.

"Oh! Alright then," he chirped with a smile, nestling his rifle on his shoulder. He stood straight and proud, straightening his cartridge belt and brushing the dust from his white, neat beard. His head was wrapped in a black and orange turban; his clothes were a deep but fading blue. He stood very seriously as I took my photo. I felt like the official photographer to these modern-day desert smugglers, recording the scene for the King of Arabia himself.

For all their knives, guns and bullets, they were very nice people. A good bunch, friendly and generous, they gave me advice, invited me to eat with them and offered me rides back to San'a.

Later, just after dusk, I left these dusty warriors, and got a ride with the fellow who had greeted me with his rifle after my nap, to Marib. An ancient but now small town, there were the leftovers of a hotel there, to which I was shown by a shopkeeper. An old guy ran what was left of it. He showed me up to the very top floor where there were some mattresses on the floor, and I promptly fell asleep.

Marib was pretty bombed out, as I discovered the next morning. After the Egyptian Air Force bombed it a couple of times during the civil war in the 60's, it was never rebuilt. Today there are just a few shops and the one hotel, which I thought was cheap at fifteen rials ($3.00). It is a deserted building, as so many in Marib are these days, with the top two floors still used as rooms. The ruins of Sheba's Temple can still be seen, as well as the ruins of the ancient dam that was built to water the farmland. Now it has been reclaimed by the desert, but the glory of the Sabean culture, gone for three thousand years, is still visible about a mile out of town.

I hitched back to San'a that same day, and spent several weeks hitching and even trekking around in the mountains of the central part of Yemen. Near the northern border by Saudi Arabia is Sadah, a walled city in one of the wildest parts of Yemen. Much bigger than Marib, it has a thriving market and is good for several days of exploring. This is also a good place from which to go into Saudi Arabia. Hotels are just outside the south gate.

Just nearby, between Sadaha and San'a, is the road to Wadi Jawf, and in Wadi Jawf is the ancient, lost city of Barakesh. Once an important walled city on the caravan routes in Arabia, it died out several hundred years ago. I was determined to go there just as I had been determined to go to Marib. But Barakesh is another story. Several Peace Corps volunteers had been killed there the year before, and unlike Marib, it was a dead city; no one lived there, supposedly, just ghosts.

I thought I would give it a try, and hitched to the town where I might get a jeep out to Wadi Jawf. I had two canteens of water and a couple of days worth of food. Now if I could just get a ride. . . .

"Where are you going?" asked a merchant who saw me standing by the road.

"To Wadi Jawf," I told him.

He thought for a minute and looked at me. "I would advise you not to go to Wadi Jawf," he said. "The people there are not good. They do not keep their word. The law of the desert is that if a man asks you for shelter you must give it to him. If a man is staying with you, even if he is your enemy, you are honored to take care of him and do him no harm. But in Wadi Jawf, they do not honor this code." This is what had happened to these Peace Corp folks, they had been killed in the night by their hosts. "Don't go to Barakesh."

I know when to quit. I hitchhiked back to San'a and headed south the next day. About a hundred miles from San'a, I stayed in Ibb for a couple of days. A quaint town of 20,000, it has a neat bazaar that winds up a hill through the twisting, narrow streets. On the main street there are several hotels. Recommended is the Maen Tourist Hotel.

I hitched out of Ibb, and stopped at the old capital city of Yemen on my way to Taizz. Jibla, the old capital, is a picturesque small city built around a hill in a green, mountainous valley, and is a perfect place to wander in for an afternoon. The entire road between Ibb and Taizz, the other major city in the mountains after San'a, is very scenic.

It was a couple of hours' easy hitching to Taizz from Jibla, a city of 79,000 with probably the largest and most interesting markets in Yemen. I found a hotel, and a small single room, which is rare in Yemen, for a couple of dollars. The unnamed hotel was located at the first round-about as you come in from Ibb. There are several cheap hotels in this area, and it is only a few minutes' walk down the hill to the market. The market here is a good place to buy an Arabian dagger or other metal work. Used stuff is cheaper. There is lots of qat for sale on "qat street" and some cheap little bean shops and cafes in the market as well as all over town. The market in Taizz, as another traveler I met there, a Frenchman, and one of the few other hitchhikers I ever met in Yemen, said, is full of character. It's full of characters too, all kinds of merchants, prostitutes even (a cloth merchant I was sitting with pointed them out to me), beggars, and wild, red-eyed old men who have been chewing qat for fifty years and are out of their trees.

I hitched around some small towns and walked through the mountains for a few days, staying in funduks and eating beans and bread in the little cafes. Eventually I ended up hitching down to the coast again, to Mokka, the ancient port of Yemen. Old and dilapidated now, there wasn't a lot to do, but I had to see it. With only a few thousand people there now, it is another smuggler's town, with Arab dhows sneaking in from Djibouti, across the Red Sea, with a hold full of whiskey.

Hot and humid, Mokka seemed like the epitome of the washed-out, rundown town. I was sitting in a cafe-street-stall-fruit-shop on the main street, which was no more than a block long. I could see that I was in the middle of the weirdest collection of characters ever to assemble at a tea-shop-fruit-stand in Mokka during the month of Ramadan, or at any time for that matter.

To my right was a brown, shirtless, handsome but retarded beggar, who stood there and looked through everyone, muttering to himself and occasionally breaking out into an enigmatic grin of realization. The keeper of the shop gave him dates to eat, and water.

To my left was a black kid with a cowboy shirt and a red bandana around his neck, looking like an escapee from Wagon Train. He too was begging, rather silently and awkwardly, picking through the dates the other had left behind, and then taking some chewing tobacco from

the display of fruit and consumables in front of the shop. Neither he nor the retarded beggar seemed able to fathom his existence.

Then there was the old red-haired Haji, who must have been to Mecca, as it is customary to dye your hair and beard red when you have made your pilgrimage. He wandered about silently in a daze. And there was a wide-eyed kid in jeans with his hot-rod motorcycle taxi, looking like a prepubescent James Dean of Arabia.

Last was a fat, pot-bellied old man with one blind eye, his cheeks bulging with qat, moving in and out in front of the counter of his shop. And strangest of the lot was me, sitting amongst the dregs of Mokka, myself some sort of freak. I must have been crazy, I guess it was the incessant heat, to stay in Mokka for even one day. Still, I had to see what it was like. . . .

There are a couple of garuwaz-type tent hotels where you can crash out on a rope bed for one or two dollars. The two that I found when I was there were full of sleeping, or perhaps even dead, Yemenis, so I slept on my foam mat at the police station.

Before I left Mokka the next day, I inquired about the ships across the Red Sea. Since Hodeida is the major port, no freighters call in at Mokka anymore. There are small Arab dhows, with sails and even engines these days, which still carry cargo on them to Djibouti, Aden and other ports. These vessels are quite capable of sailing to Madagascar or Indonesia, and often did until a hundred years or so ago. Today, only the dhows out of Oman sail any great distance, to Zanzibar and back with the monsoon winds. There are a lot of dhows sailing between Mokka and Djibouti, so this would be a fairly easy trip to make, Djibouti being less than 200 miles away. Directly across the Red Sea, only 40 miles, is Asab, in Ethiopia. When Ethiopia opens up to tourists and travelers more, this would be an especially easy trip to make from Mokka.

I decided to hitchhike all the way back to San'a that day, something that would take me six or seven hours of good rides. Yemen is fantastic hitchhiking. It's really the only way to travel. There are no trains and only a few public buses, and they are quite expensive. Share-taxis are the way most Yemenis without cars get around the country, but they are also quite expensive. Everything is expensive in Yemen, to a slightly lesser degree than Saudi Arabia. Economically, North Yemen is a strange place. They have absolutely no exports, not even coffee

anymore, as all the farmers have switched production to qat, which is consumed in the country. Yemen's only export is laborers, who go to Saudi Arabia or the Gulf States. So, not having any petroleum, why is the exchange rate so inflated against Western currency? The reason is that Saudi Arabia backs the Yemeni rial with its own currency, which is in turn backed by its huge petroleum deposits, giving the currency value. With Saudi Arabia backing the Yemeni rial, Yemen can then import all the goodies it wants to, export nothing, print up all the paper money it wants, and its currency can be used by Japan, America and Europe to buy Saudia Arabian oil. This all makes Yemen a suitably false economic area. The place is expensive only because the exchange rate is so high. Realistically, instead of getting five Yemen rials to the dollar, you should get ten or fifteen!

Yemen is an open currency market, and there is no black market. Money changers are found in the bazaars of all the major cities, especially Hodeida and San'a. They offer the same rate as the banks, slightly higher for cash.

So, at these inflated rates, it is almost impossible, unless you own an oil well yourself somewhere, to pay for rides in Yemen. A Yemeni may ask you to pay fifty rials for a ride to the next town twenty miles away. To him it's nothing, he always asks that, and people pay it because it's the standard fare. But fifty rials to you is ten dollars, which is a lot to pay to go twenty miles, especially when you are trying to live on five dollars a day. Fortunately people are friendly, and when you tell them you are just taking free rides, and that Yemen is very expensive, they will generally take you anyway. You can spot the taxis after a while, too. They are often sedan cars, like a Mercedes, and usually have several people in them already. Learn to ask before you get into a car whether it is a taxi or not.

Because Yemen is so mountainous and has only a few roads, it is possible to go on some nice treks in the mountains, walking from one major road over the mountains to another. It is safe, even for women, and there are always villages to stay in and a funduk or muffrage to sleep in for ten or fifteen rials a night. Carry some food and water with you, but you will be able to buy food and fruit along the way. Take a sleeping bag along as well, and some kind of warm rain gear, as it rains frequently and can get very chilly.

Some of the popular treks are to hitch to Hooth and El Gabei, and

then trek to the village of Sahara, high up on a mountain ridge. Another is to go from San'a to Amran and Kuhlan by truck and then walk to Hajja, Alror, Khosru, Al Dahy, and Bazil, coming out at another road that will take you back to San'a.

Food in Yemen is relatively expensive, especially meat and fruit. Beans and bread are the inexpensive staples to make up the bulk of a hitchhiker's diet; and fish is available on the coast. There are a lot of Peace Corps volunteers in Yemen. You might meet some at the Peace Corps Library in San'a. Peace Corps volunteers can give you good information on traveling in Yemen, and might invite you to visit them out in some remote mountain village, which would be a lot of fun.

I caught several long lifts out of Mokka, one to Taizz and then another to Ibb, and a third into San'a, getting me there just at dusk. I was ready to leave North Yemen now, and inquired the next day about getting another transit visa to Saudi Arabia so that I could hitch across to the Persian Gulf. They were closed for the next five days, and I didn't feel like waiting. I still had a ticket on Saudi Airlines that would take me anywhere I wanted to go, so I had it changed so that I could fly to Abu Dhabi from San'a.

By the next evening I was on an Al Yemen jet flying over the Empty Quarter, except it was dark. It was the last day of Ramadan. It was after midnight when we arrived in Abu Dhabi, and a horde of Pakistani taxi drivers descended on me as I stepped through immigration. I had gotten a one month's tourist visa in San'a and had had no problems getting in. Some of the taxi drivers offered to let me stay in their homes for the night, but I decided to sleep in the airport with a hundred or so other people, putting a foam camping mat on the floor of the waiting lounge and crashing out.

I walked around Abu Dhabi the next morning. I had to get some mail there, so I tripped down to the General Post Office and walked around the downtown. Abu Dhabi is a city of 200,000 and is the capital of the United Arab Emirates, a cluster of small sheikdoms and sultanates comprised of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, and Umm al-Qaiwain.

Abu Dhabi is the richest of the Sultanates. The main oil fields of the Emirates are concentrated in the area. It is a modern cement, steel and glass city that has sprung out of the dust in the last twenty years. Unless

you are looking to buy a Rolls Royce at one of the dealerships here, there isn't a whole lot to interest the hitchhiker.

Dubai is much more classical and interesting and hardly more than two hours' hitching north. Without even spending a night in Abu Dhabi, except at the airport, I hitched up to Dubai. On the way out of Abu Dhabi I got picked up by a van of Pakistani workers on their way out of town to a factory. I sat in the back and took a swig of some lemon flavored dehydration salts in my plastic canteen.

The Pakistanis looked at me and said, "Whiskey!"

I laughed. "No, it's not whiskey," I told them in Arabic, "It's just water. Here. try some."

"Oh no, it's whiskey!" they said. "All Americans drink whiskey!" This was the old "James Bond" mystique, men who are all government spies, drink whiskey like water and sleep with a different woman every night.

"No really, it's not whiskey, it's just water. Here, smell it. I don't drink whiskey, really!" But no matter what I did, I could not convince them that I was not drinking whiskey, and they wouldn't try it themselves. They let me off on the main highway north up the coast to Dubai. Lying next to me in the sand was a dead camel, run over by a truck. It was like a huge camel balloon, inflated by the decomposing gases as it rotted. It was twice the size of an ordinary camel, and the stench was terrible. I was horrified that if it should suddenly burst, I would spend the rest of the day throwing up. I walked down the road a ways and soon got a lift with a Turkish guy on his way to Dubai.

He let me off near the Gold Market on the Dera Dubai side of Dubai Creek. Here there is a nice covered market, with lots of little shops selling everything from gold to duty free cameras and cassette players. Dubai is sort of the Hong Kong of the Persian Gulf. The best spots to find hotels in Dubai are around the Gold Market and the central market on the Dera Dubai side. They are pretty expensive, though, and you'll have a tough time finding one for under ten dollars a room. If you're traveling with a friend you can share a single or pack three or four into a double. I stayed in the Al Siddique Islamic Hostel between the Gold Market and the Fish Market. It charges about $17 a week and may give a daily rate. I rented a bed there by the week. This is the cheapest place to stay in Dubai to my knowledge, unless you can stay with someone who lives there, or possibly stay at the University of Dubai for free.

I met a Pakistani clerk one day in a cafe in Dubai. He was on holiday and just passing the time. We talked at great length about Pakistan, America and the world. He had been sailor and had sailed around the world several times. He also spoke English quite well. After that we met at the same cafe every day, down in the central market, and sat at a table on the street and watched the bazaar pass by. We'd have a good strong fan aimed at us and drink cup after cup of tea and eat snacks. He'd have on his immaculate white shirt that covered his brown, trim body. He was in his late thirties, had dark skin and a thick black mustache.

One day my Pakistani friend, whose name was Mustaq, introduced me to an Indian friend of his, a doctor by the name of Mr. Kintia. We sat on a hot afternoon drinking tea in the central market and Mr. Kintia and I discussed the Middle East from a geographical point of view.

Mr. Kintia was 45, rather overweight, and very hairy. He had thick black hair on his shoulders, back and ears and a hearty laugh.

"It only makes sense that the major religions of the world stem from the Middle East," he said, "they are the crossroads of the world! Why, the only other major religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, stem from

my country, India! So it is only natural that Jesus was born in Israel, the crossroads of the entire civilized world at the time.

"Why, two thousand years ago, the caravan trade between civilized centers of Egypt, Southern Arabia, Greece, Rome, Persia, India and China, all centered around Israel, a rich cultural area. And these areas too, inherited their civilization from those countries before them, the Chinese from the Uigers; the Egyptians from the Osirian Civilization, and the Indians from the Rama Empire.

"Why, did you know that Jesus as a young man traveled on a caravan through Persia to India?" Mr. Kintia asked.

"Is that right?" I said, taking a sip of tea.

"Indeed; the Bible mentions nothing about Jesus' life between the years of eleven and thirty, but there are records that indicate what became of Jesus during those years. They say he traveled to the Jaganath Temple in Orissa, on the Bay of Bengal in India, and studied for four years. He was a good student, but preached against the false Hindu doctrines of caste and transmigration, and the Hindu priests sought to have him killed. He escaped and went north to Kapilavastu in Nepal, the place where Buddha was born some 500 years before, in the foothills of the Himalyas. From Nepal, he traveled to Lhasa in Tibet and there he met the Chinese Sage Meng-tse, who was very old already. Jesus studied the ancient records kept in Tibet by the Ancient Masters and began his return journey at the age of twenty-three.

He traveled and studied in Persepolis, where the three wise men, who were Zoroastrians, and who had visited him in Bethlehem as a child, were living. He went on to Athens and Zoan, Egypt where he studied for his remaining years and was initiated in the Great Pyramid before starting his ministry at the age of thirty at Ein Gedi, in Israel!"

"That's amazing!" I said. "Is there any proof of that?"

"Plenty," said Mr. Kintia, sitting back in his chair and lighting a cigarette. "It is mentioned in several Indian texts as well as the so-called "lost books" of the Bible, which were excluded from the Bible in the 4th century BC. Even the Holy Quran mentions the fact. St. Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, is buried in South India; I myself have been to the tomb. It is really not so incredible, you see. Many people traveled widely in those days on the caravans. The trade caravans and ships daily plied the well-worn and established trade routes of Asia."

"I can buy that," I said, "why not spend fifteen years traveling

around on caravans? Lots of other people did."

"Sure," said Mr. Kintia, "Jesus was an especially knowledgeable person, he received as fine an education as anyone could have possibly had at this time. It is evident by his words and actions that he was a highly evolved ego."

* *

I was especially keen on going to Oman, a country straight out of *The Arabian Nights* where people still live as they did five hundred years ago. Slavery is rumored still to exist in Oman, a country completely cut off from the outside world until 1970. A that time, there were a handful of automobiles on some one and a half miles of paved road! Sunglasses were banned as western decadence. Oman is officially known as the Sultanate of Oman and is ruled by an absolute monarch, Sultan Qabus ibn Said al Bu Said, a young man in his twenties who overthrew his father in 1970. His father is known as one of the most tyrannical despots in this century; sanitary facilities and stoves, as well as movies, drums, tobacco, and cultivating new land, were all banned. The Sultan did his best to keep Oman in the Middle Ages.

During the 17th century, Oman was the most powerful country in Arabia, controlling such far-off places as Zanzibar, much of the Persian Coast and parts of Pakistan from its capital of Muscat. The Omani sailors were some of the best in Arabia, and their ships plied the Indian Ocean with each monsoon.

An exciting, romantic place, Oman offered a very good opportunity to step back in history a few hundred years. I hitched out of Dubai to a place called Al Ain, near the border of Oman, and a university town. Should you want to spend the night here, try the university. They might have some cheap accommodation for fellow students, or you could camp on the grounds. Otherwise there are some hotels down by the central market, but they will cost you ten or fifteen dollars a night.

I couldn't get a visa to enter Oman, but I thought I would at least go to the border and try to get a transit visa. Currently, in order to enter the country you need a "No Objection Certificate," which is difficult to obtain. Transit visas and some tourism are planned for the 1980's, however. Oman is considerably cheaper than the other gulf countries, I was told, and cheap hotels can be found down around the

central market in Muscat. The best time to visit Muscat and eastern Oman is November to April, but the western and southern parts are cool and green in June and August because of their higher altitudes. October-November would be the best time to be in Oman if you wanted to visit the entire country.

But in spite of my eagerness I was refused entry into Oman. I hitchhiked back to Dubai, which was only a few hours away, and decided what to do next.

I could hitch north along the Persian Gulf Coast to Qatar, the eastern Arabian coast, and Kuwait, where I had heard there was a fine youth hostel that was free. Hotels are a major problem in these countries, not to mention just getting in. Hitchhiking is excellent, though, and it was very easy to get lifts. Food is reasonable, especially if you eat at the little Pakistani and Indian restaurants in the markets. It is hard to travel on five dollars a day, mainly because of the hotels, so camp when you can, which is rarely. Universities, colleges and other schools are your best bet for camping, or you may get a ride with some American ex-patriot workers who will let you camp in their yard.

There aren't any trains in these countries, but they are all ports, so it is easy to catch a ship and go deck passage to Iran, Karachi, Pakistan, India, or other places in Asia and Africa.

I still had my mileage plane ticket from the catering company in Sudan. It had a few thousand miles left on it, and I knew I wanted to go back to Africa eventually. I decided to fly back west to South Yemen, where I thought I could get a transit visa at the airport, and then on to Djibouti and Somalia. I had my ticket changed to go on to Aden, the capital of South Yemen, and flew there a few days later.

South Yemen, known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen officially, is well entrenched in the Soviet political sphere. It is difficult to get to; they do not encourage visitors from western countries and overland travel from North Yemen or Oman into the country is impossible. This means that you will either have to fly in or come by ship. It is possible to get a three day transit visa to visit Aden, I discovered, but not at the airport.

I flew in one sunny afternoon and figured I'd just breeze through immigration and customs, but this was not to be the case. Back at the airport in Dubai, I had written in my journal: "Here I am taking a plane to Aden, no visa, no Onward Ticket, no morals and in a whole lot of trouble!"

At the time I wrote that, it was just a joke. It was no joke to the army officer who was in charge of immigration, however.

"How did you get to Aden?" he demanded. "They should never have let you on the plane. You have no visa." He called me an American spy and said I would have to fly back to Dubai, but the plane had already left. "You'll go to North Yemen then."

"I want to go to Djibouti," I said. But there were no flights to Djibouti for several days, and they wouldn't allow me into the country. I spent the night in the transit lounge with a bunch of Somali guys returning from the University of Moscow, where they had been studying for several years. They were friendly and bought cases of duty-free Japanese beer in gigantic liter cans and got drunk. I'd have a beer with them and talk about Russia or Africa or America, and read occasionally from Basho's *Narrow Road To the Deep North* or *The Ultimate Frontier*.

South Yemen is a pretty cheap country, they told me, compared to other Arabian countries. A socially progressive country in many ways, they made women stop wearing veils in 1967, took away all the guns from the tribesmen, which cemented the rule of the Marxist dominated military, and made the chewing of qat illegal except on two specific days of the week.

Hotels are pretty cheap, but there are special hotels for foreign tourists as in the Soviet Union, and these are more expensive than the normal hotels, as well as more comfortable. Travel outside of Aden is very restrictive, but there are some very expensive prepaid tours being run out of Paris that will take you to the remoter parts of South Yemen. Should you get into South Yemen and be allowed to travel outside of Aden, make an effort to visit Shibam, a city in the northeast that is famous for its tall square buildings similar to those in North Yemen only bigger. The entire eastern part of South Yemen is called the Hadramout area and is especially wild and mountainous. It is in this area that the frankincense tree grows.

The next day, as I was hanging out around the airport lounge, the immigration officer, a general in the army, ordered me to get my bag and come out onto the blacktop strip where a small Canadian Twin Otter plane was waiting to fly to North Yemen. He handed me my passport which he had been keeping. "Get on!" he said.

I looked at him squarely. "I don't want to go to North Yemen." It

was a small plane that only held about fifteen people and it was already full. "Furthermore, I won't pay for a ticket."

The pilot, a Frenchman, said, "You'll have to pay for a ticket, it's about a hundred and fifty dollars."

"Well, I'm not going," I said flatly.

"You will go!" shouted the general, turning red in the face.

He spoke amazingly good English, I thought. This was natural, really, as Aden was a British naval base and colony until 1967 when the British pulled out. Since then the economy of South Yemen has suffered greatly, and the port is largely inactive despite Soviet help. The closing of the Suez canal ruined it, and it has not regained anything since the Suez was reopened.

The general was tall and muscular, clean-shaven and handsome, with very angular features, just like a career soldier should look, I thought. He wore an old but neatly pressed tan uniform with just the right number of medals on it.

"You are going!" he said again.

"No, really, I'm not going. I don't want to pay to go back to North Yemen. I've already been there," I explained as nicely as I could, "I'm going to Djibouti."

"He can't make you go," said the French pilot. "Besides, we're full anyway. OK, that's it, we're going without you." And he shut the doors and started the engine on the other side of the plane.

I'd never seen a general cry before, but Arabs can be very emotional. Really, Europeans, and Americans especially, should learn to let their emotions out like Middle Easterners. The general turned his back and walked fuming into the terminal. I was left standing there by myself on the tarmac as the Twin Otter taxied down the runway. I picked up my bag and walked slowly back to the transit lounge.

I spent another night on a chair in the lounge, and in the late afternoon the general came to me and said, "There is a flight to Djibouti today. You will be on it."

"Great," I said, and apologised for all the inconvenience I had caused him. Within two hours I was in the air over the Red Sea on my way to Djibouti. I made a note to remind myself about little things like visas; they can complicate life sometimes for the hitchhiker.

6 · SOMALIA, DJIBOUTI, ETHIOPIA: THE QAT SELLERS OF THE OGADEN AND THE HIDDEN EMPIRE

He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost beyond remission. He never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality.

ORTEGA

I **WAS HIT** by a blast of hot air as I stepped out of the airport in Djibouti. It was even hotter than Aden! I didn't have the trouble getting into Djibouti that I had in Aden, although they did charge me twenty dollars for a visa, the most I have ever paid in my whole life. I knew Djibouti was going to be expensive from the very beginning.

Taking a taxi downtown, a ten-minute drive, I began looking for a cheap hotel, the major hassle of the hitchhiker in Africa. There was no such place in Djibouti, I found out, unless you wanted to sleep on the beach near the French Club, which is what one overland guide to Africa suggests. It was too hot to do that, so I took a bed in an airconditioned dormitory-type hotel for $12 a night. It is hard to find a hotel for less than $10 a night. Mostly the rooms are clean but sparsely furnished. Cots and mattresses shared between four or five other people is standard fare; there are a dozen such places around the

central downtown-market area of Djibouti. It is also possible to get rooms for five to ten dollars in some of the many bars in Djibouti, most of which are also brothels. Bargain here if you can. It might also be worth trying the Catholic and Protestant churches in town, as they have guest rooms and sometimes put up travelers. And of course, sleeping on the beach, down by the French Club, near the tennis courts, I've been told. This would work for one or two nights, but don't leave your luggage there while you're gone during the day, as it may be stolen. Also, during the summer months it is so hot and humid that you may find it impossible to sleep on the beach. Use a mosquito netting at least. I was grateful for my airconditioning, even though the hotel was twice my normal budget.

Djibouti is mostly famous for its bars and the fact that it is a duty-free port. Coming from Arabia, it was amazing to go into the go-go bars that abound all over Djibouti. They are filled to the brim with tall, dark, beautiful Somali and Ethiopian women who play for pay. The bars are rather seedy, filled with French Foreign Legionnaires with lots of money to spend and a few skeletons in their closets, which they try to forget by running away to foreign countries and drinking, or so one legionnaire told me.

You can get beat up in fights in these bars if you're not careful, if not by a drunken legionnaire, then by a prostitute. Djibouti is the only port in the Red Sea that even remotely resembles a wild and crazy place full of booze and women that are available for sex. It is therefore the roughest and most dangerous place on the Red Sea, at least if you hang out in the bars. Drinks are expensive; we hitchhikers can't afford to get drunk here anyway.

I must admit, I didn't really feel like spending a lot of time in Djibouti. Aside from the fact that it is one of the hottest places in the world, it is just too expensive. The last remnant, almost, of France's once vast African Empire, it only achieved independence in June, '77. A tiny little enclave on the horn of Africa, the main reason for its existence is the 486-mile-long railway to Addis Ababa in central Ethiopia, and its French naval base. More than half of Ethiopia's exports go out through Djibouti, making it a major port along the Red Sea. Of course, its thriving trade in booze, duty-free goods and hot night life also make Djibouti a popular spot for sailors and other travelers in the Horn and Arabia.

It's a city of a hundred and twenty-five thousand people or so, but you would never know it, unless you drove around the sheet metal shanty towns that lie to the south, west and north of the main port. The rest of the population, another 125,000, live out there in the desert; to the north is the Danakil Desert, the hottest geographical area in the world. Ethnically, Djibouti is divided into two groups; the Afars, or Danakils, and the Assis, a Somali tribe. From these two tribes comes the old name for Djibouti, the French Territory of Afars and Assis.

"They're pretty savage," said the French lieutenant about the Danakils. We were sitting together at a sidewalk cafe in downtown Djibouti. He was drinking beer, and I was drinking cold mango juice. It was a hot, humid afternoon, as usual, and our clothes were soaked in the perspiration that dripped off our noses from our foreheads.

He had the look of a true legionnaire, a hardened and tanned face, tough as leather, a few scars, a trim, brown mustache and dark aviator sunglasses. He spoke English in a thick French accent. "You know," he went on, "those Danakils have a real curious custom. They must present their fiance with a pair of human testicles before they can get married. Human testicles! They have to cut them off somebody! God! They're savage!" And he finished his beer in one great gulp. Ordering another one, he continued.

"The first thing a Danakil boy owns is a knife, then a gun, then a shirt! They're rough. Don't get caught out there in the desert by yourself . . . or schlept!" and he made a cutting motion onto the table. I gulped down the last of my mango juice and ordered another, hoping it would dispel a slight tingly feeling between my legs.

"One night I was driving from the very north part of the country to a small army camp in the desert, right in Danakil country, when my jeep broke down. I didn't have a gun or anything. Whew, that was scary! If a couple of unmarried Danakils came along. . . ."

"I know, I know . . . schlept!"

"Oui! Well, fortunately, another car happened along just after me. That was fortunate, very fortunate. I was a nervous wreck! I just abandoned the jeep. Never even went back for it, probably wasn't there anyway." He finished off his other beer, and I could see him shudder. I suddenly felt a little chilly myself, a nice feeling on a sweltering hot Djibouti afternoon.

He wasn't kidding, either. The most famous artist in Ethiopia, who

did the well-known stained glass windows at the Addis Ababa airport, was castrated as a young kid in Ethiopia in Danakil country, which runs for hundreds of miles north along the coast. He and his father had been walking and his father saw some tribesmen coming toward them, and in a panic, left his son, fleeing himself. The son was castrated and left to die, but survived. He went on to become a famous artist, but never spoke to his father again!

I wanted to go to Ethiopia, and spent some time in Djibouti trying to get a visa. At the Embassy, the Ethiopian consulate told me that I would have to fly in to Addis Ababa, remain in the capital for my entire stay in Ethiopia and then fly out. I wanted to take the train up from Djibouti, and stop in the towns of Harar and Dire Dawa. This wasn't possible at the present time, they told me, and refused me a visa.

I went back downtown, somewhat depressed, as I had always wanted to go to Ethiopia, and now it didn't seem that I would be able to go. Sitting in another cafe in the late afternoon, I met an American named Chuck, who was just coming from Ethiopia. Chuck, who was in his thirties, had worked in Saudi Arabia for two years and now had a fat billfold and a Pan Am ticket around the world. He had been flying and traveling around Africa for six months now, and had gotten to Djibouti a few days ago from Addis Ababa.

"It was pretty crazy there in Ethiopia," he told me over an imported French beer. The beer was cool and refreshing. It is the drink of African travelers from Cairo to Capetown, and the customary exchanging place for information is over a beer on the terrace of a cafe. "The government wants you to stay in these expensive tourist hotels, like in them commie countries. But I wasn't about to pay twenty dollars a night when there are hundreds of African hotels around for two dollars a night. So I just stayed in the African hotels.

"You bet! I've been around Africa for a while, and I know all the tricks," he said, tipping his baseball hat back from his dark sunglasses. "You see, to get out of Addis, you have to have a special pass to show at the road blocks that are all over the country and especially in Addis. So, I pulled up to a roadblock in a taxi on my way out of Addis, acted like I knew just what I was doing, and showed them my International Student Card like it was some special pass or something. You see, it has my photo in it, and writing in all these different languages, includ-

ing Russian, which is what the Ethiopians care about, since the commies are running the country. They looked at my student card and let me pass. I took a bus to Bahir Dar on Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile. But wouldn't you know it," he went on, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief, "the commies were having some kind of convention there in the town. There were Russians all over. I checked into a cheap African hotel and went down to the lake.

"You see, I travel with this here little mini-recorder," and he showed me a miniature cassette tape. "I tape what I'm thinking and conversations with people as I travel around. When I saw all those Russians down by the lake, I went behind a bush and dictated into my tape recorder, 'Jeez, this place is crawling with commies. They're everywhere!' Stuff like that. Then that night I was lying in my bed, in my sleeping bag, listening to what I had taped earlier that day through an earphone, when suddenly the door to my hotel was busted open! The hotel manager knew that foreigners were not supposed to be staying in the cheap African hotels.

"So, the police just burst into my room. Kicked the door in and jumped inside, pistols on me the whole time. They thought I was James Bond!"

"That is quite an experience," I put in, and ordered us each another beer. This was as good a story as any African traveler could tell, and deserved another round. "What did you do?"

"Well, without getting up, just lying still in my sleeping bag, my tape recorder was underneath me, you see, and I didn't want them to see it. I knew it was rather incriminating. 'OK,' I told them, 'I'm coming out. Just go back outside, close the door, and let me put my clothes on, and I'll let you in.' And you know what? They did! They actually left the room and closed the door. I got up and put my cassette recorder way down in the bottom of my sleeping bag, got dressed and let them in.

"Of course they arrested me as a spy, and I was escorted by bus back to Addis, which took a day. I was put under house arrest in the Hilton Hotel, and they developed my film, expecting it to be full of photos of military installations, bridges, etc. They were sure I was a spy, kept my passport and everything to do with me. And do you know what happened? Well, they found my tape recorder, the only incriminating evidence I had, I mean, if they had found that, I would have been in

real trouble! But when this detective was going through my stuff in front of me, he turned on the recorder, which still had the earphone plugged in to it, and therefore you couldn't hear anything. 'Broken?' he said. Boy, did I breathe a sigh of relief. 'Yeah,' I said, 'That's right.'

"They eventually gave me my passport back, but by then I had been staying in the Hilton for two weeks, and had racked up a hotel bill of a few hundred dollars. I wasn't going to pay that! I booked two flights out of Addis to Djibouti, and slowly over a period of several days moved most of my luggage out of the Hilton into a cheap African hotel. At the Hilton, they had room checks four times a day, and you didn't even have a key to your own room! On the morning of my plane flight, I left the hotel just as if I was going out for a walk, took a taxi straight to the other hotel, paid my bill and took all my stuff straight to the airport.

"I was afraid they would look in my room and find I was gone, although I tried to make it look like I was still staying there by leaving a few things lying around. The first plane that I had a reservation on never showed up, and the second plane was two hours late. As I sat in the departure lounge, I cringed every time someone walked in, thinking they were coming for me. Finally I got on the plane and flew here to Djibouti. Thank God! When I got off the plane, I was so pissed off at the Ethiopians that I wanted to just yell at some Ethiopians and tell them what a lousy country I thought Ethiopia was. I walked up to this guy who was on the same plane as I was at the Djibouti airport. 'Are you from Ethiopia?' I asked him. 'Yes,' he said, 'and am I glad to be out!' Both of us heaved a big sigh of relief. I couldn't yell at that guy!"

Ethiopia isn't such a bad place really, though I didn't get there myself. Known as the Hidden Empire, its official name until recently was Abyssinia. Its history fades back into the mists of time. The Empire was founded, according to tradition, by Menelik I, Solomon's son, born to the Queen of Sheba in about 1000 BC. Before that, tradition relates that the Hyksos, the Shepherd Kings of Egypt, came from the Ethiopian Highlands to Egypt and built the Great Pyramid under the auspices of the "Great White Brotherhood."

Axum was the capital in the 4th century AD. The rise of Islam in the 7th century caused Ethiopia to withdraw into itself and lose control of its coastal areas, the inner highlands being too rugged for

invading Muslim armies to conquer. Ethiopia entered a long period of isolation which was well summed up by the 17th century historian, Gibbon, who said, "Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of the religion . . . Ethiopia slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten."

Rugged and mountainous, Ethiopia is for the adventurer. In 1930, the Lion of Judah, Haile Selassie, 225th Solomonic ruler and central figure in the Jamaican Rastafarian cult, ascended the throne of Abyssinia. He was destined to be the last of a continuous line of Solomonic rule, when he was deposed in 1974 by a Military Council and died a year later. The Military Council, or "Dergue," as they are known in Ethiopia, chose to ally themselves with the Soviet Union, who gives them military, technological, and financial aid in combating the several sessionist wars that it has been fighting for the last fifteen years. Because of these wars, the unstable nature of the Ethiopian government and its xenophobic paranoia about the capitalist western states, travel in Ethiopia is severely restricted.

However, the country is opening up more and more all the time and soon hitchhikers may once again be allowed to roam the mountains and deserts of the Hidden Empire. Should you get into Ethiopia, make an effort to stay out of trouble. If you are not allowed to stay in the many cheap African hotels, try these lower-class tourist hotels. They are known as Youth Oriented Tourist Hotels and consist of such places as the YMCA and the International in Addis Ababa. There is also the Itegue Hotel, the Shoa Hotel and the Gondar Pensione, all of which are centrally located in downtown Addis.

Toward Lake Tana, in the majestic central mountains, are the famous rock churches and monasteries of the Coptic Ethiopians. There are beautiful mountains, game parks, Lake Tana—the source of the Blue Nile—and some good backpacking in the mountains. Axum is the old capital of Ethiopia and has a lot of charm; it is the main town in this area. Try the Ras Mengesha Hotel here. In Meqele, near by, is the Abraha Castle Hotel. In Lalibela, another town closer to the coast, is the Seven Olives Hotel. Gondar is the closest city to Lake Tana; there the Fasil Hotel is the cheapest authorised to take tourists.

Asmara, the capital of former Italian Eritrea, is a major city of 300,000 and has a distinct Italian flavor. There are a large number of hotels that the traveler can stay in, including The Adulis and Deren

Hotels, the Axum Hotel, the White Hotel and the Pensiones Africa and Diana. While the Eritrean war continues, travel in the Eritrean countryside, especially at night, is very hazardous. Ethiopia's main port is only a hundred or so miles from Asmara and it has a nice Italian flair. There are a number of pensiones and the hotels Luna and Corallo.

Travel is cheap in Ethiopia, either by hitchhiking or by public bus, of which there are many. Tarred roads go out from Addis Ababa to all the provincial capitals and down to Djibouti.

Because of the guerilla wars and martial law, hitchhiking in the northern part of Ethiopia and night travel would be unadvisable. Check on conditions when you're there and also on curfews that are often enforced. Buses usually stop at dark because of the high possibility of ambush. Don't do anything suspicious while in Ethiopia and be careful what you take photographs of. Nothing of military potential is a general rule; airports, bridges, ports, police stations, etc.

The roads to the south of Addis to Kenya are fine, good hitchhiking and safe. There is also the road and train to Harar, an old Islamic fortified city, and Dire Dawa, on the way to Djibouti. This road is also pretty safe, but watch for flare-ups of Ethiopia's other war, the Ogaden War with Somali nomads.

It is also possible that you might be entering Ethiopia by one of its ports, Massawa or Asab. Shipping is steady here, and you can get freighters to other ports in the Red Sea and East Africa, although Soviet bloc vessels tend to be the majority of the ships, and they don't usually take hitchhikers.

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"Talk little, listen plenty" was a Somali saying an old man had repeated to me as I walked away from the border of Djibouti into Somalia. It made sense to me, and made me think of the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, who said, "Those who speak do not know, those who know do not speak."

Buttoning my lip, I prepared to hitch out of the little border village where I found myself. Since I couldn't get into Ethiopia, I had decided to head south into Somalia. It was only an hour or so by public bus to the border, and it took only a few minutes to get through immigration and be on my way.

It was good to be back on the road again. Hitchhiking is a form of meditation. It's a focusing of the mind upon the present, a quietness of thinking. Meeting people and taking the time to be part of them for that moment, without being critical or judging them, is all part of the pleasure of hitchhiking. Just relating to different people around the world on a one-to-one basis, letting them be themselves and appreciating them for what they are, is what every hitchhiker should try to do, or said a hitchhiker I once met in Afghanistan. This was a Canadian named Winston Whittaker, who also said, "In every person is an inner core of perfect energy, a light that is their inner self. We can, and should, love each person unconditionally. The less we know someone, the easier it is to do this." Winston was a die-hard traveler, and like all hitchhikers, a philosopher of sorts.

I caught a ride to Hargeisa, the main town in northern Somalia and a good day's driving from the Djibouti border, in a big two-ton cattle truck with a score of traveling Somalis in the back. I climbed in back with everyone else, after negotiating a price for the ride with the driver. It was about ten dollars in Somali shillings. After awhile I sat up on a box above the cab of the truck as we voomed along in the vague wheel tracks of this remote desert road. Suddenly another truck passed us, and our driver was so incensed at his daring that we were treated to the maddest, wildest, craziest truck race across the Ogaden Desert that any hitchhiker ever had. At first I enjoyed it, leaning back with the sun in my face, singing aloud an old Somali tune: "The desert was hot, but my baby was not . . ."

We shot off the road into the bushes and roadless wasteland at full speed in an effort to catch and pass the truck ahead of us. I was too stunned to breathe as we dodged bushes and roared down ravines and over flat spots trying to get to the next set of definite tire tracks and pass the truck in front of us.

My teeth were clenched and gritty with dust as I hung on for dear life, absolutely horrified and frozen by this display of kamikazi truck driving. Eventually we came to a win or lose situation where we raced along parallel to the other truck on a flat section toward a steep ravine and a narrow set of tracks cutting to the left. If we missed the road, and we weren't even on it at the time, we would surely run down into the ravine and turn over. On this final leg, both trucks gunned it, side by side, neck and neck, each determined to make it to the "pass," so

to speak, before the other. Our driver would not quit, and while I suppose the Somalis in the truck were used to this kind of driving, I was not, and was practically shitting in my pants. In desperation I began stamping with both feet on the top of the cab, which I was sitting directly over, as hard as I could in order to make him slow down. To my great relief, he did, and even came to a stop, while the other truck zoomed on ahead.

The driver stuck his head out the window and gave me look as if to say, "What's the matter with you?"

Later, when my heart beat had returned to normal, I thought about how difficult it was to break down the barriers between people. We were barreling off through the desert, no other trucks in sight, into the low afternoon sun. It is easier to label people than to be non-judgmental. Oh, he's a Foreign Legionnaire, or a policeman; write him off. Or he's a fanatical Muslim nomad, can't talk sense with him; or a racist white living in Africa, I refuse to even speak with him . . . ah, if we could all just reach out and accept each other as we are and love. . . .

Fat chance, it seemed. With one third of the nations on our planet at war at any one time, it would take a miracle to straighten out the mess the world is in right now. As Winston Whittaker had told me in Afghanistan, "We have to change people's attitudes toward each other before we can make any real progress."

In the distance, the sun was setting in the west, over the Ogaden. The sky was slowly turning from yellow to orange and red. The sun was a white orb floating above a dusty, musty, stark desert planet of mountains. It seemed like some other world. A cool evening breeze was just starting to pick up. Sitting next to me was a young, brown-stained Somali kid, with a small suitcase, a comb in his fuzzy hair and wistful look on his innocent face. I put my arm around his shoulder. At least I could make an effort to straighten out the world, we had to start somewhere. . . .

We continued on to Borama, a small town in the mountains near the Ethiopian border, where we stopped for dinner. After an hour break, sort of a pit stop where the driver and his greasy, fuzzy-haired teenage mechanic did a little work on the truck, we were off again, driving through the crisp night air toward Hargeisa. We eventually stopped at around two in the morning and everyone slept. Most of the

people in the back were already asleep anyway. At the crack of dawn, we all jumped back in the truck, sleepy-eyed, from our blankets and mats on the ground next to the truck.

We were in Hargeisa by mid-morning, pulling right into the central market where everyone piled out. There are several hotels in Hargeisa, all quite reasonable at two dollars a day for a bed in a room, which you would have to share with someone else. There was the Most Modern Hotel, the Union Hotel and the Oryantal (Oriental) Hotel, which I checked into.

Hargeisa is the main town in northern Somalia, an area of arid mountains. Northern Somalia was once part of British Somaliland, and therefore English is widely spoken. Southern Somalia was an Italian colony, and Italian is more commonly spoken; of course, Somali is the official language and Arabic is widely understood. The southern part of Somalia is situated on the dry coastal plain that eventually becomes the Ogaden Desert. Called the land of Punt by the ancient Egyptians, the capital Mogadiscio was known to sailors as early as 1500 BC. Punt was the main supplier of frankincense and myrrh to the pre-Islamic kingdoms of Arabia, along with the Hadramout area of Yemen and Oman. Hot and arid, its people are mostly nomadic camel herders, Muslims who are dark-skinned but semitic rather than negroid in appearance. The country has been virtually untouched by travelers and tourists; it was closed to foreigners until a few years ago and is still well off the major travel routes for hitchhikers. In the three weeks I spent in Somalia, I never met one other traveler, nor have ever met any other hitchhiker who has been there, though you will meet diplomats and other Europeans on business of some sort.

Somalia does have some things to offer the traveler. It has the second longest coastline of any African country and its beaches are entirely empty. Down south around Kisamayo would be the best place to hang out on a beach as the people are more used to tourists and less puritanical. The ancient cities of Mogadiscio, Kisamayo, and Burao all have an old-worldly, Islamic-Swahili charm, with their old quarters and narrow streets with busy African markets. The life of the nomads in the interior is wild and harsh. It's quite an adventure in itself to hitchhike from the north down to Mogadiscio, because of lack of transportation and the on-going Ogaden war with Ethiopia.

Everyone will be mobilized, and all boys old enough to carry a spear will be sent to Addis Ababa. Married men will take their wives to carry food and cook. Those without wives will take any woman without a husband. Anyone found at home after receipt of this order will be hanged.

DECREE OF THE LION OF JUDAH, EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE, AS THE ITALIANS INVADED ETHIOPIA, 1935

"Ethiopia was fairly jerked out of the middle ages by the Italians," mused the British-educated Somali guy I was drinking tea with at the Oryantal Hotel in downtown Hargeisa. He was chubby and pleasant, friendly, intelligent and handsome, running his father's hotel for him. Talking with him in his office at the hotel was like talking to an old friend. He told me of the good old days when he worked as a clerk for a company in the oil centers of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates and the wild weekends they had in Bangkok, Thailand, flying there on Friday after work, drinking and screwing their brains out with the friendly Thai women, and flying back on Sunday night to be at work on Monday morning. At twenty-eight he was still single, but his parents were trying desperately to get him married to some nice Somali girl.

"Why, when the Italians invaded Ethiopia from their coastal colony of Eritrea, the Ethiopians tried to stop them with spears and shields! Reality was a hard cold machine gun!" he said, leaning back from his desk.

"It was like when the Polish cavalry rode out to meet Hitler's motorized divisions," I put in.

"Really! Look at the sophistication of the weaponry developed by western culture. They have taken the art of death and destruction to its very heights, and are still refining it! Military technology is the number one industry in the world today, the basis for our whole world economy!"

He sighed and took a sip of sweet, milky tea. "The Ethiopians have sure come a long way," he went on. "A few years ago they were

fighting off the Italians with spears; now they are run by a military council of generals who spend all their money on Soviet machine guns, grenades, rockets, and fighter planes. My country is run by a military council as well, but they want their arms from the Americans now! Why," he exclaimed, slamming down his empty cup on the desk, his mouth contorted with rage at the foolishness of wars, "these countries can't pay for these arms! They can't even feed themselves! The Soviets, Americans, British and French practically give them these weapons of death, but make them sign over their souls first. It is evil!"

"You're right," was all I could say. The horrible reality of the Third World arms race was hitting me for the first time. It made me feel ashamed to be an American. I blew my nose on the corner of my dirty shirt. I was going to wash it that day anyway.

"Even though people around the world have real problems that have to be solved, like the problems between Somalia and Ethiopia, most of these wars are being fostered by the capitalist and communist Powers to enslave the Third World economically. These countries spend the bulk of their foreign aid and national budget on military hardware to arm themselves against their neighbors. These mini-arms races are going on all over the world and serve the industrial world's purposes very well. It keeps the arms factories going and the huge exports of sophisticated weapons on the ever-upward swing. But like all products, they are meant to be used, they are consumables that will eventually be consumed in a war of some fashion. Did you know," he said, "that almost every African country is fighting some war or another, many of them secret wars you never read about in the newspapers?"

"No," I said.

"That is true. In a world at war, there will be a never-ending demand for instruments of destruction. Ethiopia is a good example. They are currently fighting three or four wars against sessionist provinces in the north and south. They were fighting Somali nomads over the control of the Ogaden Desert, why, just near Hargeisa! Using Russian MiG jet fighters, they fought back at the Somali guerillas who are indigenous to the area. But the Ethiopians aren't trained and educated well enough to operate all this sophisticated equipment, so East German and Cuban technicians fly these planes for them, while thousands of Soviet advisors instruct them on how to use millions of

dollars worth of military hardware. The Russians want Ethiopia to stay at war! The Americans do the same thing. All these underdeveloped countries are so eager to build up their military strength, making a headlong rush into the "everything must go Armageddon sale!" The Third World is destined to destroy itself, thanks to the industrial world."

"The industrial world will probably destroy itself, at the same time. It's a sorry situation, alright," I said.

"I'm just happy to sit here at my father's hotel and drink tea," he said, "at least Hargeisa isn't likely to get hit with an atom bomb!"

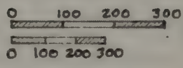
I hung out in Hargeisa for a couple of days, resting up after my trip from Djibouti, sitting in the shady restaurants around the market. On my second day in Hargeisa, a public relations officer for the Somali government saw me on the street and offered to take me on a tour of a refugee camp a couple of miles south of town. They didn't get too many hitchhikers through Somalia in those days, and the few Europeans who did show up in Somalia were mostly people who worked for the United Nations or the American government. I suppose it was only natural for this young Somali man, in his early twenties, to mistake me for some visiting diplomat. I mean, me in my worn-out tennis shoes, dirty t-shirt and faded jeans, what else could I be? Anyway, I decided to take it for a compliment, and accepted a tour of the refugee camp, as a visiting official.

It was a short but crowded bus trip out to the camp, less than ten miles from town. The place was like a huge nomad town, lots of huts made in typical Somali style, out of brush and trees, each about ten feet circular, just tall enough to stand in and take one big step across. One sees such dwellings all over Africa. There were some 8,400 such huts at this camp, I was told, housing 47,626 people, mostly women and children. All the able-bodied men were out there in the Ogaden fighting the war. Every two weeks they were given a ration of rice, spaghetti, oil, maize, powdered milk, dates and a twenty-gallon drum of water. The UN High Commission on Refugees was paying for the tab. As we walked around, the public relations officer, a tall, handsome, likeable guy with a big, black, fuzzy Afro, explained everything in very good English, as if quoting from the Somali government's official paper on refugees from memory. He showed me a small medical center where some German volunteers were treating the women and children for various things.

CENTRAL AFRICA

ADEN
DJIBOUTI
BERBERA
BURAO
HARGEIS
SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA
ETHIOPIA
CENT. AFRICAN REP.
SOMALIA
JUBA
KAPOETA
LOKITAUNG
BELETHUEN
UGANDA
GULU
LODWAR
MARSABIT
MOGADISCIO
MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON
FT. PORTAL
JINJA
KENYA
KITALE
WAJIR
BENI
KAMPALA
NAKURU
KISANGANI
KISMAYU
KABALE
LAKE VICTORIA
MUSOMA
GARISSA
NAIROBI
LAMU
KIGALE
NORTH
BUKAVU
MALINDI
KINDU
MWANZA
RWANDA
ARUSHA
MOMBASA
BURUNDI
MOSHI
TABORA
TANGA
KALAMI
KIGOMA
ZANZIBAR
ZAIRE
DODOMA
TANZANIA
DAR ES SALAAM
MBEYA
LUBUMBASHI
NKATA BAY
NKHOTA KOTA
MOZAMBIQUE
CHIPATA
NDOLA
BALOVALE
KAPIRI MP SHI
MO BIQUE
LUSAKA
LILONGWE
ZOMBA
MALAWI
ZAMBIA
KARIBA
LIVINGSTONE
TETE
BLANTYR
HARARE
QUELIMANE
KASANE
BEIRA
BOTSWANA
ZIMBABWE

BORDERS
ROADS
RAILROADS
SAVANNA
JUNGLE
DESERT
MILES
KILOMETERS



It was enjoyable walking around the camp, talking with the doctors, a few other Somali government officials, and taking photos of the people in the camp, who were eager to get on film. Meanwhile, my official guide was telling me how America could help his country.

"In all of Somalia, there are 11 million refugees in about 25 camps. And Somalia is one of the five poorest countries in the world," he said. "Your country must give us more money. We have our war to fight with the Ethiopians. It is our land! These people need more food, how can they live on what little food they are getting? It is so little. Go back to America and tell your president to give us more money."

I stopped for a minute and looked him square in the face. "Come on," I said. "I'm not some United Nations executive here from New York or Geneva. I'm a hitchhiker! I live with these people out in the desert. I sleep and eat with them in their homes, I know what their life is like in the Ogaden. They don't eat spaghetti, or corn meal, or oil, or rice; they live on camel's milk. None of them have ever lived so well in their lives, than in this camp. This is incredibly luxurious compared to the normal life they lead. And you say they need more than they are already getting! It sounds like a scam."

"Yeah, you're right," he said, as we walked back to the bus station, "These people are living it up, and your country is paying for it. We don't mind. Why should you? You have so much money, you are rich. Look at what you spend on one atom bomb or jet bomber. Why, you spend a tiny fraction really helping other countries. We just want to get a little bit out of the fat cats. The government of Somalia keeps most of the money anyway, and gives a fraction out to the camps, that's the way it is." I put my arm around him and nodded. "Yeah," I said, "it's crazy. We throw away so much money, and then spend incredible amounts on the forthcoming destruction of our planet. You might as well squeeze as much out of us as you can. Hey, I'll buy you dinner back in Hargeisa."

We took the bus back into town. It was comforting, actually, to know that there were lots of well-fed and happy refugees in Somalia. But people are in big trouble in other parts of Africa and all over the world. People die of drought and famine in Africa every year. But most of the relief and charity work happening around the world is nothing more than a poor joke. A fraction of the money reaches those people who need it, while executives pay themselves fat salaries to

administer these charity organisations, and the officials of the government in question take a big chunk for themselves. Meanwhile, the big money is spent on bombs and such. Imagine what could be done in Somalia with the money it took to make just one atom bomb. . . .

We had a nice dinner in a small worker's restaurant just near the Oryantal Hotel. Beans and tomato sauce with small loaves of whole wheat bread. Back in my hotel, my mood was lightened when I read the sign on the inside of my door:

> *Patrons are requested not to spit on the floors and for safety's sake to put out their cigarettes in the ashtrays provided.*

I left Hargeisa the next day and took the local bus down to Berbera, the main port of the north. It's not very far, an hour and a half or so. Berbera was like some dream, hot and illustory. Hargeisa was in the mountains, and the temperature difference was incredible. Berbera

was so hot and humid my clothes were constantly stuck to me. I walked around in a daze for an hour, checked out the hotels near the bus stand to Hargeisa, plenty of cheap hotels for a dollar or two a night, but I decided not to spend the night. It was only noon, and I could still hitch back into the mountains to Burao. I walked out of town onto a flat sandy plain. To the west, the direction I was walking, was a range of mountains shooting directly up from the plain. My Michelin map of Northwest Africa indicated that this was an especially scenic road, by the looks of the mountains, their ruggedness and steepness, I thought they would be right. I caught a ride in a big truck on its way back to Burao to get straw, sitting in the front with a pleasant, balding, English-speaking Somali. We talked of Somalia and America as the truck switch-backed its way up into the mountains. Looking back toward the coast, the view was incredible. The shore was visible in the distance, white waves lapping the sand, which stretched back barren and perfectly flat to the mountains that rose out of it suddenly.

We got to Burao just after dark. We had stopped in a small town called Sheik for a late afternoon tea, and then drove the rest of the way without stopping. Burao was a nice little town, small and easy to get a handle on. I took a room at a very nice little hotel just near the central bus court. The hotel didn't have a name, but it was a fairly new, cement building, one story, and for two dollars I had my own room, with a table and chair. This was luxury! There was also a nice terrace restaurant adjoining the hotel, and after a meal of shish kebobs and spaghetti, I walked through the market. Old Somali men were sitting around the many small shops, little stalls with their goods inside so that the buyer browsed from the street. Everyone had a pile of qat too. Qat is grown just north of Burao in Ethiopia, and it is at its most plentiful in Somalia in Burao. I enjoyed sitting on the street drinking tea and talking with the old men, most of whom spoke English. Burao had a special mellow feel to it, probably because most of the men were into qat, and didn't really give a hoot about anything else.

Burao impressed me as a particularly nice town, but it was really very small, and I had seen the whole place by mid-morning the next day. I decided to start hitching on the long road to Mogadiscio, through the Ogaden and many days away, I knew. There was as a bus that went straight from Hargeisa to Mogadiscio in 24 hours non-stop driv-

ing, someone told me, but it was crowded and expensive and there was no way I was going to spend 24 hours in a crowded bus. Besides, I wanted to take my time and see parts of Somalia along the way.

I started hitching out of Burao at noon that same day, and caught a ride on a truck to a small little town that wasn't even on my map, about sixty miles from Burao. There wasn't much there, but there was a spaghetti stand by the road, a cement and brick building with three rooms, like the dozen or so other buildings in town. It was here, while sitting in this little spaghetti stand in the Ogaden Desert, that I met Hassan, who was to become my faithful companion on my trip through the Ogaden. Hassan was a Somali kid from Djibouti. He was fourteen, with a fresh, brown face, medium length tight wiry hair, and a cheap permanent press suit. He carried a small suitcase and was traveling by himself.

"Bon jour," he said, coming up and sitting next to me. He had been waiting all day for a truck, but there hadn't been anything so far. He was on his way from Djibouti to Mogadiscio to visit some relatives. The bus to Mogadiscio from Hargeisa showed up after a little bit. It was packed to the brim with chickens, goats, people and luggage. I could have sat on a goat or vice versa for a couple of hundred miles through the desert, but decided against it. I wasn't in that big a hurry. I'd just spend the night here if I needed to.

I practiced my French with Hassan for awhile. He told me he would look out for me. Just what I needed, I thought, a fourteen-year-old kid to keep me out of trouble. We ate spaghetti and talked, looked at my map, and eventually a rusty old landrover pulled up. It was the Shell Oil man who ran the filling station in another town a couple of hours south. He said he would give us a ride, and so Hassan and I jumped into the back, as it was a pick-up. A few other Somalis climbed in back with us; transportation in the Ogaden is rare and best taken advantage of.

"We're off!" said the Shell Oil man in perfect English, yelling out the window. He was bald and cheery, with a smile that showed off his white teeth. I held onto the spare tire, while Hassan looked at the young nomad bride who had also gotten in. A few other Somalis were carrying a couple of large cans of camel's milk. We sped off through the desert, cutting through the chill late afternoon air like a dagger. We passed camel caravans making their way slowly through the sparse

low brush. The countryside was dotted by huge monolithic termite mounds, the tallest soaring up into the sky like a minaret for twenty feet.

This is what hitchhiking is all about; those precious moments of adventure, motion and companionship in the exotic corners of the world. Chills shot down my spine and a smile lit my face. Hassan was smiling too. Our smiles were highly contagious, it turned out, and soon everyone in the back of the landrover was grinning away like there was no tomorrow. For me it was the joy of living and sharing these moments with strangers. Life was really a gas, I told Hassan, and he nodded his agreement, keeping his eye on the attractive nomad bride, dressed in a black, single piece dress with a beaded belt around her waist and lots of colorful plastic bracelets. She was a teenager herself.

"We just don't always realise it," said Hassan.

Our Shell Oil friend let us all off just after dark in Dusa Mareb, a little town in the Ogaden where he had his gas station. Aside from the station, a couple of spaghetti joints and a hotel that Hassan found for us, there wasn't much else to this town. The hotel was a couple of rooms, none with doors, each with some rope-strung, wooden frame beds, typical of the beds in the Horn of Africa and Arabia. I threw my sleeping bag down on one, Hassan placed his suitcase on another.

We went out to eat. A glass of camel's milk and a bowl of 30-cent spaghetti was dinner. The cook at the clay stove and small petrol burners that were the kitchen in this one-room, three-rickety-table cafe, told Hassan in Somali, and he then translated it to me in French, that this small town, Dusa Mareb, had been bombed by the Ethiopians a few months before. "Fortunately," said the cook, "the pilots were Ethiopians, and most of the bombs missed the town." Somehow that made me feel better. Hassan was soon busy chatting to a pretty Somali maiden. Life was strange, but it was a gas.

° °

The next morning Hassan and I were sitting out in the street waiting for a truck or car to come by that we might get a ride with. We had tea and bread in a restaurant by the road, one of three in the town, which was probably the Somali version of a truck stop. The owner of the little restaurant came up to me and said in broken English, "Somalis drink tea like Americans drink whiskey."

After gagging a bit on my tea, I said, "What?"

"We drink a lot of tea in Somalia," he said.

"Well, we don't drink that much whiskey in America," I returned.

"Sure you do," he said, wiping his hands on a dirty apron, his brown eyes widening in disbelief. "I've seen the movies. Americans always drink whiskey instead of tea or water. We Somalis know this."

"Well, that's just not true," I laughed, wanting to set him straight. "We drink tea, water, milk, fruit juice and many things. We don't drink whiskey all the time. Many people do not drink whiskey at all; I don't!"

"You don't!" he gasped. I had shattered his image of Americans, poor guy. Many people in Africa and Asia have warped ideas of life in America and Europe, often called the James Bond syndrome. From seeing certain movies, James Bond films being the most popular, people think most westerners are secret agents of one sort or another, drink whiskey like water and that women will jump into your bed when you look crosseyed at them.

Hassan and I sat there for the morning. We found a truck, paid for it, got in and then found out it wasn't going anywhere really, got out, got our money back. . . .

We went back to our roadside tea stall and Hassan handed me a toothbrush stick, a twig cut from a bush that was very fibrous, good for chewing on and cleaning your teeth. All through northeast Africa, the middle east and even India, it is what people use to brush their teeth with. Nearby, a donkey was chewing on a cardboard box, occasionally breaking into a braying fit. Dust clouds searched through town, looking for a pile of papers to scatter. I wiped the sweat from my forehead. It was hot, but not as hot as Djibouti or Berbera. I pulled out my Michelin map and attracted a big crowd of people, all curious about this large, colorful piece of paper.

I was getting thirsty for a lift. We had been waiting about eight hours now for a ride, for just anything to come along, but there was not even one truck. I didn't mind waiting so much, it was good to back in Africa, life took on a whole new time reference, and I knew from my travels in Sudan that waiting for one or two days for a ride was nothing. Just being able to sit there at that cafe for a day was enjoyable enough. I would savor the experience, and quench my thirst with camel's milk instead, thick and creamy, a meal in itself.

Eventually Hassan and I got a ride in a Toyota Landcruiser. We all rode inside. These guys were qat carriers, or at least that's how I translated it from Somali. They were coming from Togo Wichale on the Ethiopian border where another car from Harar in Ethiopia met them with a load of qat. Now they were bombing down to Mogadiscio with their load of fresh qat. They had about $2,000 in qat in the truck and we were making good time, rolling through the desert. We all sat up front and chewed qat, such a speedy drug, and drove like crazy. I talked with the driver in a mixture of English, Arabic, Italian and Somali. He told me about the Somali custom of circumsizing women.

"Women, when they are reaching puberty," he said, biting off a bit of qat and chewing it slowly, "have their clitoris and labia cut off with a knife and then a medicine woman, usually an old lady, sews up the vagina."

With a mighty, horrible gulp, I accidently swallowed my wad of qat, something you shouldn't do, as the wad is spat out.

"That's horrible!" I said.

"It's our custom," he told me. "The old women, especially the grandmothers, insist on it. It's tradition. Then, when a woman gets married, the husband has no doubt that his wife is a virgin. Usually, a Somali man will have to open his wife up by slipping a dagger up her on the wedding night, because her opening is scarred shut."

"That's terrible!" I cried, biting my tongue at the same time. "I just can't imagine that!" Shivers ran up my spine. How savage! This is actually common in much of northeast Africa, female circumcision, but the dagger stuff . . .

"Of course, a real Somali nomad would never use a dagger," he went on, "they have a great desire on their wedding night, being in their late twenties and never having been with a woman. They don't need a dagger . . . but today, in Mogadiscio, the educated people don't use these daggers either, they will take their bride to a doctor who will open them very carefully. This is the best way, I think."

Suitably shaken by our conversation, Hassan and I were let off in Galcaio, the district center just near the "wedge" of the Ogaden, where Ethiopia juts into Somalia. Galcaio was bigger than most of the other towns, had some extra shops, and Hassan, faithful companion that he was, even found us a movie theater to spend the evening in.

The qat carriers had given me a little qat. It had been a while since

I had chewed it in Yemen, so I decided what the hell. I bought a bottle of Vimto, the prune juice pop from Britain that is very popular in Somalia, and sat watching the movie and slowly chewing my small bundle of qat. Hassan was too young for qat, and fortunately wasn't interested. He was absolutely mesmerised by the film, an absolutely atrocious Indian movie about a witch and a rather foolish truck driver somewhere in Podunk, India. It was horrible. The Somalis loved it. It didn't matter that they weren't showing the reels in order. They started with the last reel first, then showed the first reel, and lastly the middle reel. It didn't make much difference, I reflected, and if anything added a little depth to the film. The narcotic effect of the qat was starting to affect me again; it had been several hours since I had chewed with the qat carriers through the Ogaden.

"Great movie," Hassan said in French as the last reel started. He had a Vimto too and took a drink. As the hero of the movie beat up six or seven thugs single-handedly, I put my feet up on the empty chair in front of me, and thought about our sojourn through the Ogaden so far.

Transportation is scarce in Somalia. There are no trains, and only a few vehicles were driving the one all-weather road between the English speaking north and the Italian speaking south. We had just entered the Italian southern part, although you couldn't really notice the difference, except people would occasionally speak to me in Italian as well as in English. There is the daily bus from Hargeisa to Mogadiscio, something I would not recommend unless you are really in a hurry. Theoretically you could take the bus part of the way, but you would have to buy a ticket for the full journey, as it's "a non-stop" run. If you do decide to take this bus, from either Hargeisa or Mogadiscio, make sure you get there at least four hours before departure if you want a seat.

Hitchhiking is fair, on what few vehicles there are. Watch out for transportation sharks, though; they will set you up for a ride and charge you outrageously. As in most African countries without any real public transportation and few vehicles, lifts can be very expensive. I also found the Somalis difficult to bargain with. I had to refuse some rides because the driver wanted too much, like ten or fifteen dollars to go to the next town or so. If you're patient you'll eventually get a ride. These high prices are not just for foreigners; there really aren't

any in Somalia. The locals are paying them too, so Somalis don't travel very much if they can help it. There is a bus service between Mogadiscio and Belet Huen, a town due west a hundred and fifty miles on the main road through the Ogaden. If you're heading north then it would be good to take this bus to Belet Huen and then hitchhike from there. In my case, I hitchhiked to Belet Huen from the north and took the bus into Mogadiscio from there.

Somalia's two big ports, Berbera in the north and Mogadiscio in the south, aren't the busiest in Africa, but there are still quite a few freighters that stop there and you have a good chance of getting a lift up or down the coast, or over to Arabia and even India. The small Swahili town, Kisamayo, near the Kenyan border often has dhows that sail down to Lamu in Kenya, a two-or-three-day journey.

There is a black market for currency, but it is difficult to find. Try getting some currency just before you enter, in Djibouti or Kenya. Some shop keepers in Mogadiscio will change with you. The rate is usually half again as much as the bank rate for cash. Because Djibouti has no black market and is completely open, it is a good place to turn some of your travelers cheques into cash for trading on black markets in other African countries. Ethiopia also had a black market for currency, but be careful in Addis; remember, it is illegal.

We spent one night in the only little hotel in Galcaio. A bed each in a dormitory room was less than two dollars. We hit the road the next morning after showering in the small cold-water shower they had, quite a luxury in the Ogaden. We got another lift with some more qat sellers on their way to Mogadiscio. They let me off in Belet Huen in the mid-afternoon, and Hassan went on with them. I waved goodbye; it had been a good trip. Hassan, I hoped, would make a great hitchhiker in his later years, a thoroughly cheerful and resourceful person. I spent the night in the Government Rest House in Belet Huen, a nice little town with a main street and a grass hut village that stretches out into the desert for a half a mile. There were no other hotels in Belet Huen. Throughout Somalia, though, there are hotels at a reasonable cost. Nearly every little town has a small tea shop or qat house where you can sleep on a rope bed, sometimes outside only, for a dollar or two. These places will often serve spaghetti and tea as well, the culinary fare of the Ogaden truck stops. Camping is also possible, but a tent would be advisable. Sleep at police stations or in front of

Government Rest Houses in the very small towns, if you're without a tent.

The next day I caught the daily bus into Mogadiscio from Belet Huen, a four to six hour trip. I had the name of a single hotel in the city, the Savoy; it was something, at least. I felt like a cheap detective pounding down the exotic streets and alleys looking for that elusive hotel. I never did find it, but I did find a cheap and conveniently located two story hotel for only fifteen shillings a night, the Hotel Vittoria. It and other inexpensive hotels such as the Hotel Warshiq can be found around the American Embassy in downtown Mogadiscio. Also just near is the Uruba Hotel, a large luxurious hotel on the beach with a night club and nice terrace to meet on in the evenings.

Not feeling the least bit tired after the bus trip, I tossed my pack onto one of the beds. It was a small room, cement floor and walls, just big enough to put two single beds in, a desk and a chair. It was sparse, but by Somali standards, pretty luxurious. There was a balcony at one end. I swung the louvered doors open to get a nice evening view of the market from my second story balcony.

I was out on the street after a quick shower. The market was alive with the evening proprietors, hawking everything from lizard skin daggers to Italian ice cream. Mogadiscio has that Italian feel. People are often heard speaking in Italian and the food is definitely Italiano! Probably the best place to eat in town is the Italian Club, which has a great buffet and is quite reasonable. There is also an American Club where you can get hamburgers and beer.

I grabbed a bowl of spaghetti and tomato sauce for dinner at a street cafe, a vendor whose kitchen was a bucket of charcoal and a pot. I grabbed one of the few stools that the vendor had around for his customers, and squatted on it watching the fascinating night walk by. Old men, their hair receding from the skull caps that Muslims wear, exposing their smooth, delicious-chocolate-flavored brown skin, were browsing along the streets. The men would be wearing a Somali "ma'oose", a sort of long skirt, often in a blue, brown or red checkered pattern, which they would wrap around their waists like a bath towel. The women often wore a black, loose robe that was similar to a nun's habit, I thought. A large black hood which could cover their faces, should they feel the need, was attached to the back. Most women did not cover their faces, however; after all, this was supposed to be the swinging, modern capital city!

As I slurped up that last bit of spaghetti, I sighed at the incredible beauty of the Somali people. Tall and stately, they had fine facial features, a distinct blend of negroid and semitic racial characteristics—high cheek bones and thin faces with full lips, broad noses and tight wiry hair.

Someone else wanted my stool, so I gave the spaghetti merchant a couple of shillings and tripped on into the night. I could hear some music coming from a few blocks away and headed for it. It turned out that the next day was National Unity Day, Somalia's main holiday, and there was a big celebration in the central square near the capitol building.

As I neared the square, I could see a band up on a stage, playing music. All around me people were jumping up and down in one big open air party. On the stage was a bunch of fuzzy-haired Somali men, young, in their late teens and early twenties, playing a wide assortment of instruments. There were guitars, congas, bongos, steel drums, xylophones and more. The music, a combination of African rhythm and reggae, rolled out of the loudspeakers and onto the street. It bounced, jolted, hopped across the square. The people too. Through the waves of energy and sound, I could hear the deep, sensual voice penetrating the music:

I'm talking about Africa,
I'm talking about Zion,
I'm talking about Rastaman,
I'm talking about Ganja,
I'm talking about Haille Selassie. . . .

The continuous thump, da thump, thump of music . . . the bright ringing of the steel drums. . . .

I'm talking about Jah . . . ho . . . va . . . h,
I'm talking about . . .

A hand tapped me on the shoulder. I turned to my left to look at a tall, well-dressed European. "Do you know what this guy is talking about?" he asked.

"Sure," I laughed, "he's talking about Rasta." The man introduced himself. His name was Rolf, and he was a Norwegian diplomat based in Tanzania. He was stopping in Mogadiscio for a few days on his way back to Norway. I was the first other "tourist" he had seen in two days.

We decided to go back toward the beach for a cup of tea and talk. As we left, the band broke into another song:

The whole world is Africa,
But it's the violent continent, yeah.

Rolf and I walked down to the Uruba Hotel and decided to have a beer in the disco rather than drink tea. There at the bar a young lady, pregnant, asked Rolf to dance. She latched onto him, something which Rolf didn't seem to mind too much. Her name was Alia; she was short and cute. She spoke good English and told us she was from the north.

Alia introduced me to her friend, Fushia. Fushia was six feet two and built like an Olympic Decathaloner. With a tall afro that made her look seven feet tall, beautiful dark brown skin, and big wide eyes, I was in love with this Amazon.

We danced and held hands. I tried to talk with her, but she didn't speak English. We communicated as best we could in a combination of Italian, Arabic and Somali, while Alia did alot of translating for us. Eventually Alia suggested we go for a taxi ride to a place she knew, and Rolf went and got us a taxi. Alia took charge and directed the driver. Rolf made a joke about liking his women the way he liked his coffee, strong and black. A Norwegian proverb, I guessed.

We drove out of town to what was the Somali version of a drive-in, a bunch of huts you could rent by the hour. The four of us groped around for a while on a camel hair blanket. Alia seemed pretty aggressive with Rolf. Fushia was more reserved.

Fushia announced that she wanted to take me back to her sister's house, and we all got back into the taxi that was waiting for us. Rolf and Alia let us off in a nice area of Mogadiscio where there were many villa-style homes with walls around them. Fushia was the daughter of a Somali Supreme Court Judge and an Eritrean mother, she told me. Her father had remarried an Italian lady, and was quite a well-known person in Somalia, I gathered.

In the house, a three-bedroom cement home with a kitchen and bathroom, were her three sisters. We all chatted for a while and one of her sisters made up a bed for us in one of the bedrooms. Suddenly someone came to the door.

"Who can it be at three o'clock in the morning?" cried Fushia. She and her sisters quickly hid me in a closet. The rest of the night was like an Italian sex comedy, hiding under beds and in closets from one room to another. I never did find out who came to the door; one or two different people in and out for about an hour. But I did eventually find out that Fushia was not circumcised. . . .

Several days later I was preparing to leave Mogadiscio. I had had what was left of my plane ticket rerouted, and I was flying out of Mogadiscio to Nairobi that day, as the border between Somalia and Kenya was closed at the time. It had been a great trip through Somalia. It was good to be back in Africa, even if it was the violent continent . . . yeah.

7 · KENYA AND UGANDA: IDI AMIN AND THE MONTES LUNAS

Sometimes people mistake the way
I talk for what I am thinking.

IDI AMIN

STANDING IN LINE in front of me at the Nairobi Airport was a young lady with short dark hair, freckles, blue eyes and a big smile. "Howdy," I said.

"Hi," she returned.

"Where are you coming from?" I asked.

"Sudan," she replied. "Before that I was in Egypt."

"Great. Sudan's a neat country, Egypt too. Are you traveling around Africa?"

"Kind of. I'm a stewardess for a South American airline, and I'm just taking some time to see the world. We stewardesses often get to fly on other airlines for free."

She didn't look or talk like she was from South America. It turned out she had gone to an American school in Santiago, Chile and her parents were actually from Germany. She was traveling by herself, and this was her first time in Nairobi. Because of my associates in Khartoum who worked for the oil companies, a friend of mine whom I had worked with in Sudan was now in Nairobi. I had written him that I was coming, and he met me at the airport. We all went out to dinner and then dropped the traveling stewardess from South America, whose name was Chantelle, off at the Nairobi Youth Hostel.

The friend picking me up was Rick, a farm boy from Kansas, who was traveling through Africa like me and got a job with our crazy catering company. After working at the oil camps in central Sudan for awhile, he was transferred to the Nairobi office.

Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is one of the most modern and cosmopolitan cities in Africa. With a population in excess of 800,000, it has everything to offer, from super-fashionable shops to appalling crime. The center of Nairobi is best defined as the Hilton Hotel, a tall, circular building right in the middle of the downtown. A block away is the Thorn Tree Hotel, which has a terrace cafe that is known all over Africa. As far away as Algeria or Capetown you will hear people tell each other that they will leave them a message on the bulletin board at the Thorn Tree. A popular spot to sit on a hot afternoon, drinking a cold Tusker Lager on the terrace, you will often meet people whom you thought had died of dysentery in Juba two months before or were still in jail in Zaire for being a mercenary. The Thorn Tree is the meeting place for all of Africa, and sooner or later everyone is going to show up there. Ask at the desk for a note card to write a message on for someone, and then stick it on one of the circular bulletin boards on the terrace. Don't forget to check it for notes written to you as well. Another good spot to leave messages in Nairobi is the youth hostel.

Hotels are fairly expensive in Nairobi. The cheapest single rooms to be found in town are at the mainstay traveler's dives such as the Iqbaal, Al Mahnsura or Hadhramut hotels, located a few blocks from the Hilton in the "cinema district," beyond Government Road if you are walking from the Hilton. The Iqbaal is just behind the Odeon Cinema. Cheaper than getting a room at these hotels would be to stay in one of their dormitories, at about two dollars a night. Watch your possessions, however; all kinds of people are constantly in and out of these hotels.

If you want a dormitory, then the Nairobi Youth Hostel is probably your best bet. It is clean, has kitchen facilities and a nice living room where travelers get together and swap stories. It is not as centrally located as the Iqbaal and Al Mahnsura hotels, being out on the south side of town, up a steep hill from the downtown. It is still close enough to walk, and the neighborhood is pretty good, so it's pretty safe. You must have a youth hostel card to stay here, but can purchase one at the hostel.

Another popular hostel in Nairobi is Mrs. Roche's, a home turned into hitchhiker's crash pad. It is also located away from the downtown in a suburb. Take a bus out to Parklands opposite the emergency entrance of the Aga Khan Hospital and then ask someone where Mrs. Roche's is.

Most of the hotels are Arab-run and have greasy restaurants that serve some sort of Middle Eastern or Indian cuisine; rice pulao, meat and vegetable curries, flat breads and the like. There are also plenty of "fish and chips" shops around, and more expensive restaurants that serve everything from pizza to Chinese food.

Nairobi, and its sister town of Mombasa on the coast, are two of the few cities in Africa and Arabia that are actually pretty dangerous. After dark, it is better to take a taxi than to walk in many neighborhoods. During the day there are lots of con artists, thieves, and pick pockets on the streets, so be wary; they are very clever. One routine is to offer you a high rate of Kenyan shillings for your dollar, maybe twice the bank rate. They will take your cash and give you an envelope supposedly with your Kenyan shillings in it, but it will be empty. Presently, Kenya is pretty much an open currency market and there is no black market, but that may change.

After two days of shopping and wandering around downtown Nairobi, Rick, Chantelle and I went out for the evening. Rick had a beat-up old VW bug, so we picked Chantelle up at the youth hostel. I was staying with Rick out at his place in a valley ten miles or so from Nairobi. After dinner at one of the nicer Indian restaurants, we ended up at the New Florida Disco, a big flying-saucer-shaped night club in the central district. It was a couple of dollars to get in. We were promised live music, a show and a good time. Almost as soon as we had sat down, Rick was talking with a short, cute little Kenyan woman with a big afro and a low-cut dress on. I was watching some girls do the limbo in tiger-skin bikinis on the dance floor. Later a Kenyan rock group began playing plenty of loud, western oriented pop music, the latest disco hits, tinged with reggae and African rhythms. Chantelle, who was in her mid-twenties and pretty lively, wanted to dance, and we all, Rick and his new friend too, danced happily for hours.

Glancing around the room, I noticed that the ratio of women to men in the place was about 20 to one. The place was utterly packed with tall, sexy Kenyan women, all waiting to dance, among other things. It certainly wasn't necessary to bring a date to this place.

As it got late, Chantelle wanted to go. "Chantelle's ready to go, Rick," I said, turning to him at our table. "It's pretty late."

"You're right," he said and turned to the lady he'd been dancing with all night. "Want to go to my place?" he asked.

She was busy talking with another girl who had joined her at our table. "Not now," she said.

"Later?" he asked.

"Maybe," she said coolly, turning to her girl friend. She certainly was in no hurry to leave. This place stayed open until dawn.

"Let's go," said Chantelle.

"Rick . . . ?" I asked.

"Yeah, okay. What the hell . . ." And we all got up and started out the door. Suddenly, with a wild scream, two women at the next table started fighting. Kicking and scratching, they began to tear off each other's clothes. After turning over a few tables, some other women got into the action, and soon it was an all-out fight between a dozen or more drunk chicks. Bottles and chairs flew, other bottles were broken on the tables. We headed for the door, keeping our eyes out for flying objects. Someone grabbed Rick's shirt.

"I'm ready to go now," she said.

"I thought you would be," he smiled, ducking a beer bottle.

° °

The next day Rick and I were sitting on the terrace of the Thorn Tree having a beer.

"Kenya is an economy based on sex," said Rick. We were sitting on one of the sidewalk tables, watching Nairobi pass by. It was a pleasant afternoon, especially after a few Tusker beers. We watched slender Kikuyu women, the main tribe around Narobi, walk by, dressed as fashionably and with as much sophistication as women anywhere in the world. Brown-skinned Indians, well-tanned whites, sunburned tourists just off the plane, and the globe-trotting black New African businessmen of industrial Africa in their conservative suits were all passing by us on the street.

"Kenya's tourist industry rivals its major export, coffee," Rick went on. "Kenya is by far the most visited of any country in black Africa, more than 3,000,000 tourists a year, most on package tours. Kenya has

everything to offer, miles of tropical beaches, game parks with nearly every African animal in them, snow-capped peaks for mountain climbers, unexplored deserts to the north for modern-day explorers, and best of all, sex!" He took a long, refreshing drink of his beer. "Yeah, the nightclubs of Mombasa and Nairobi are just crawling with women. They're all over the place. You can hardly walk down the street without some girl coming up to you wanting to go out dancing or something. Kenya is well known in Europe, especially Germany, as the ideal spot in Africa for a sex holiday."

"You mean they don't just come here for the elephants and lions?" I asked.

"No, man," he said, his pimply face turned toward a sleek, beautiful, sexy black woman walking by. "It's because of the tigers, man! These girls are tigers in bed!"

"Oh, come on!" I laughed.

"Really. There are special hotels along the coast where they cater to orgies for package tours from Germany. The tour supplies Kenyan men and women for a wild time. In all the hotels for tourists there is a certain element of sex, but these hotels are something else. The night club the other night was typical. Places like that are all over."

He was right, I found out later, as I spent more time in Kenya. After all, you do tend to attract into your environment what you seek. And if it's sex, it can't be far off in Kenya.

Kenya started developing its tourism in 1963 when it gained independence from Britain under the presidency of Jomo Kenyatta, the "George Washington of Kenya." He had led a rather bloody rebellion, on both sides against the colonists prior to independence in what is called the Mau Mau Rebellion. Kenya steered a pro-western course that helped its economy greatly after independence. Kenyatta died in 1978, and it was discovered that he had an entire warehouse of ivory in Mombasa that he had been illegally smuggling out of the country for years. He is still revered, however, though his reputation was tarnished slightly.

Kenya has a large population of whites and Asians, some 200,000 of them. In the early 20th century, the Kenyan highlands to the west of Nairobi became a popular spot for European immigration, being a cool and healthy climate, as well as sparsely populated. Originally there was competition between white settlers and Asian immigrants

over the choice farm land, but the Europeans gained the upper hand by having 16,700 square miles of the highlands reserved for whites, as opposed to Asians. This area became known as the "white highlands" and many successful farms began producing most of Kenya's exports.

Chantelle and I decided to hitchhike out to some of the game parks around Nairobi. I had my tent, and we both had sleeping bags. We hitchhiked to Masai Mara Game Park, to the southwest of Nairobi, first. We carried plenty of water and camping food in the form of powdered milk, bananas, dried fruit and potatoes. We caught one good ride out to Narok, an hour and a half from Nairobi, and then a ride with an Englishman in a landrover who was the engineer on a black road crew just outside the park. It was almost dark when we got to his road camp, having gotten a late start out of Nairobi, so he invited us to spend the night with him. He was in his forties and had a wife and teenage son in England. Economics had forced him to come to Kenya and work. He had a nice little two bedroom trailer home that was his office and headquarters of the road crew. There were twenty or so blacks that lived in tents and a quonset hut who also worked with him. We had a nice dinner and talked about Kenya and England. He missed home, but liked Africa.

"Come on, I'll show you the savannah at night," he said suddenly. We got into his landrover and drove out into the flat, grassy bush. It was incredible. We ran into herds of zebra and wildebeest, who were momentarily frozen by our headlights.

"Yee-ha!" he shouted, chasing them through the low bushes and sparse thorn trees. We were barreling along amongst a hundred zebras who were running in all directions. The Englishman cracked open a beer, his fourth, and guzzled it. He was really letting himself go; I took it that he didn't do this often. With more yelling and shouting, he ran into a pack of hyenas, and Chantelle cried out in disgust at their ugly, canine heads, big teeth and oversized haunches. The seven or eight hyenas stared at the car for a moment and then broke out running in different directions.

We went on driving through the dark moonless night, not a road to be found anywhere. We came upon another herd of zebra and with whoop were chasing them off through the bush again. This time the zebras got back at us. As we chased a cluster, there was a sudden whomp and Chantelle and I hit the roof. We had driven into a ditch.

"No problem," said our inebriated zebra rustler, "these landrovers can do anything!" With some spinning of wheels and shifting of gears, he managed to get us out. Chantelle wanted to go back to the camp. We all slept well, and he took us out to the main gate of the park after breakfast. It had been an exciting stay.

We hitched into the park with some French tourists and then watched a water hole from the Keekorok Lodge. Just at sunset, we hiked out into the savannah a short mile, and built a campfire. I pitched the tent and we cooked up a vegetable soup. It's important when camping in these game parks to keep a fire going most of the night. Stock it up well before you go to bed to keep animals away. Don't camp in the same place two nights in a row, either, as animals will come back scrounging. Hyenas, lions and baboons are the animals to be cautious of when spending the night, and of these, hyenas are probably the most dangerous.

The lodges at the game parks are expensive, not designed at all for budget travelers. Camping is the way for a hitchhiker to see the game parks in Kenya. You can camp outside the entrance of the park; there are campsites at the entrances of some parks. Or you can hang out at a game lodge until late afternoon and then walk a mile or so into the bush and set up your camp at sunset. Officially it's not allowed, so don't be too obvious about it. A tent is advisable.

Masai Mara is just opposite Tanzania's Serengeti Park, the best game park in Africa. Masai Mara has Kenya's greatest abundance of animals, and every year in May or June wildebeests and zebra migrate to the permanent waterholes in Kenya from the plains of Serengeti in Tanzania. The sight of over 50,000 wildebeest and zebra migrating across the plain is overwhelming.

Chantelle and I then hitched down to Ambosselli Game Park, where you can camp near majestic Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa and a spectacular sight. Kilimanjaro is actually in Tanzania, and Amboselli is right on the border. You can camp on Observation Hill near Amboselli Lodge in the park, and at Ol Tukai there are self service cottages and some campsites in the vicinity.

Tsavo Park (east and west) is especially set up for campers with campsites and shelters, as well as bathrooms and showers at Aruba and Voi Gate (Tsavo East) and Mtito Andei Gate (Tsavo West). Tsavo is just west of Amboselli and Kilmanjaro and to the east of Nairobi. It

is the largest national park in the world, with lots of volcanic hills and craters, and the most varied though not the most abundant population of animals in Kenya. Poachers have taken their toll of the animals in Tsavo, unfortunately.

After a week of camping out in the game parks we headed back to Nairobi for a taste of civilization. A friend of mine in Sudan had written to tell me I could use his Yamaha 125 motorcycle for a couple of months while he was up in Sudan at a camp. I had it tuned up and told Chantelle I'd meet her in Mombasa. I left one day from the youth hostel in the late afternoon, bombing down the road toward the coast. Chantelle had gotten a free plane ticket to Mombasa as a stewardess and was flying down two days later.

As I wound around the green hills outside of Nairobi and into the lower grasslands, I glanced into my rearview mirror to see a couple of giraffes, silhouetted against another African sunset that was burning down the hills behind me with its deep reds and murky oranges. I rode on through the night until I came to a truck stop, a place along the road with three bars and a hotel. It wasn't even on the map. I got a room for a dollar and a half in the hotel and was going to chain my motorcycle to a pole outside, but the manageress, a friendly but street-wise old black lady, made me keep it inside my room.

"Won't be there in the morning if you leave it in the street," she said. "There's a lot of crime in Kenya."

I was up early the next morning and zooming down the highway again. It felt great to have the wind in my hair. My backpack I kept on with the shoulderstraps on but the belt off. It sat right on the seat behind me and took the weight off me, but held firm so it wouldn't shift around. I couldn't take any riders, though.

As I passed a particularly parched and dry section of the savannah, I saw a large baboon squatting on a road post, just beneath an elephant crossing sign. With his chin in his hand, elbow resting on his knee, he looked like he was in such deep, contemplative thought, watching me roar past on the bike, I felt that I just had to stop and take a picture.

Baboons can be dangerous, so I parked the bike a safe distance away, a hundred feet or so, hoping I'd be able to jump on and start it before the baboon attacked, if he had a mind to. I didn't know what this guy was thinking about, but he seemed to be taking it very seriously.

It took me awhile to get out my camera, which was well inside my pack, put on a telephoto lens, and then get a light reading with my hand-held light meter. Meanwhile, the baboon got impatient, lost his concentration and decided to split. He hobbled off his post and meandered into the bushes. He not only was not going to attack me, he was just plain bored with me.

I arrived in Mombasa in mid-afternoon. Kenya's major port and second largest city at 350,000, it was named by the early Arab sailors "the island of war." The Portuguese built a fort here in 1593 to fight off the Turks and Arabs who were raiding the coast. The city's well known sleazy nightlife reflects its long history as a major sea port. The old city with its narrow winding streets of cobblestones and the Portuguese port are the main attractions, plus the miles of sandy beach to the north and south of the city.

I drove right up to the Hydro, a well-known and popular hotel among hitchhikers. The Hydro is located near the central market and the entrance into the old city. A room or bed in a shared room is a couple of dollars, depending on what you're after. It is quite clean, rooms have dressers and chairs, and there are several working showers on every floor, which is a real plus. It also has a cheap little restaurant that is popular with the locals as well as travelers. There are other cheap hotels around the Hydro and plenty of Indian restaurants. Some travelers like to stay in the Sikh Temple near the Hydro. The Sikhs, a religious order from northern India, put up travelers as part of their religion, and the Sikh Temple in Mombasa has several large dormitories where they will put you up for a dollar or so a night.

The Castle Hotel, a first class hotel on the main street of Mombasa, Kilindi Road, has a nice terrace cafe similar to the Thorn Tree in Nairobi, and is a good spot to meet for a beer or cup of tea. Mombasa really swings at night, and it is as wild a sailor's town as ever was, so be careful.

Mombasa is also fun shopping. You can walk the old city for hours looking at African Kangas, printed cotton material with colorful local designs that women wear as wrap-around skirts and that make good beach wraps and sheets. The male version of the kanga is the kikoi, a smaller woven fabric that is also printed sometimes, and is worn around the waist.

To the south of Mombasa is Twiga Beach, where there is a lodge, the Twiga Beach Lodge, a popular hangout for travelers. The lodge rents bungalows for a couple of dollars a night and you can put as many people into them as you want.

Chantelle and I decided to go north. I had met her at the Hydro, and after 5 days of shopping and going to the beach in Mombasa, we

headed for Malindi, three hours up the coast. Chantelle took the bus and I rode the motorcycle up. It is a popular resort area with several big hotels, but the cheap budget hotels for one or two dollars a night are around the bus station. We stayed in the Lucky Lodge, recommended to me by a friend because he liked their yogurt. It was nice and clean too, with mosquito nets on the beds. Malindi has nice beaches but we were interested in continuing farther north to Lamu.

Lamu is the legendary home of that most famous of Indian Ocean sailors, Sinbad. For thousands of years sailors have been visiting Lamu and the east coast of Africa. In the first millenium BC, Egyptian, Phoenician, Arabian, Indian and even Chinese ships sailed down the east coast. King Solomon's ships apparently sailed as far south as Zimbabwe and Mozambique to his gold mines at Ophir. Cities along the coast and inland rose and died out. The Arabs and Persians eventually established permanent towns of stone, mud and wood that still exist today; Lamu is one of them. They developed the trading language for east Africa, KiSwahili; Arabic for "coast." They lived in comparative luxury with silks, porcelains and spices from the East. Rarely venturing inland, they depended on the interior natives to bring the goods to them, on their island cities. They traded metals for ivory and ostrich feathers and animal skins.

From these ancient sailors of Arabia we get our tales of the Arabian Nights and the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor. As for the Arabian legend of the roc, a gigantic bird that carried one of Sinbad's sailors away, such birds were known to have existed at Sinbad's time. The largest bird known to have existed, the aepyornis, a bird ten feet tall, weighing almost a thousand pounds and laying an egg six times the size of an ostrich egg, was still extant in parts of Madagascar until the 19th century. Marco Polo was told by the Chinese that the roc came from islands to the south of Madagascar and Herodotus was told by Egyptian priests about a race of gigantic birds "beyond the sources of the Nile" which were strong enough to carry off a man.

The ancient sailors of Arabia were known to have sailed to Madagascar, where they would probably have seen these huge flightless birds from their base of Lamu. There is also some speculation that these sailors ventured as far as Australia and around the African Cape.

It was a full day's trip north to Lamu from Malindi. There are daily buses to Lamu from Malindi, and Chantelle was on one with all our

luggage while I rode up on the motorcycle. Lamu is an island, just off the mainland, and even today there are no roads or cars there. As a result, Lamu retains much of its traditional flavor as an ancient trading town. I had to park the cycle in a government parking lot with a watchman on the mainland, and take a ferry over to the city.

Lamu was the perfect place to wind up our romance in Kenya. Chantelle had to fly back to Europe soon, but we would have a week to spend in the medieval atmosphere of Lamu. I was fortunate enough to rent a room on the top floor of a private house, with a fantastic view looking out over the three and four story stone and cement homes that rose up the hill from the port into the palm trees. Lamu is a small place of around 10,000, with narrow stone streets and a thriving market, scores of little tea shops and a population of people whose quiet, unhurried lives have yet to be touched by the industrial world outside. Lamu lives in its own peaceful little world of palm trees, sunsets, beaches and Sinbad the Sailor. There are few places like it in all of Africa.

Chantelle and I spent our week together shopping and walking along the port, watching the fishermen with their catches and the ships coming in from other ports, small Arab dhows with two sails and a cargo hold in the hull, just like the ones Sinbad used to sail in. The beach is two miles away from town to the southern end of the island, a pleasant walk, and a perfectly deserted beach with sand dunes behind it. Although it is against the law in Kenya, some people swim nude here.

After a swim at the beach we would walk back into town and stop at Petley's Inn on the seafront, a small, charming tourist class hotel with a nice cafe out front, for a cup of tea or a late afternoon beer.

There are lots of lodges in Lamu that offer comfortable and cheap accommodations for as little as a dollar a night. There are the Castle Lodge, the Karabuni, Salaama and Bahati lodges, the Mahrus and Libya hotels and many more. Plenty of nice little restaurants and tea shops as well. Things are inexpensive in Lamu, as it is out of the mainstream of the Kenyan economy.

We kissed each other goodbye on the wharf at Lamu. Chantelle would take the ferry back to the mainland and the bus back to Malindi and Mombasa. She would fly to Nairobi and then to Amsterdam and

back to South America. I would miss her. She got the last bus back to Malindi before a torrential rain completely washed out sections of the road to Lamu, and an important ferry across the Tana River at Garsen. The rest of the travelers in Lamu were stranded for three weeks and no more could get in unless they came by dhow.

I settled into an easy routine, drawing in my penthouse suite of sorts, going down to one of the chai shops in the morning for sweet milky tea and donuts, and walking out to the beach. Often I would stop at a friend's house along the way, and before I knew it the day would be gone and I had never gotten to the beach. In less than a month, I was supposed to meet a girl friend in her mid-twenties whom I traveled with for some months a few years before. We had kept in touch, and now she wanted to come to Africa for awhile. I promised to meet her at the airport in Nairobi, and we would go to Tanzania together. My motorcycle was still on the other side of the strait on the mainland and there was no way I could ride it back now. I only hoped that in a few weeks the roads would be passable again.

One afternoon I was sitting with some friends on the steps of the Castle Lodge in the heart of Lamu. An English traveler named Don and a fellow from Quebec and I were chewing marungi, a Kenyan form of qat, and playing music. Don was playing his guitar, Jean was blowing a mean harmonica and I beat a piece of wood with a stick in my best rhythm.

We were grooving that afternoon on those steps, getting a little high from the marungi, chewing the tender red stems and spitting out the fiber, but swallowing the juice mixed with our saliva. Soon it seemed like every kid in Lamu was sitting with us. Their smiling faces and eager looks kept us going. An old Somali man, grizzled and unshaven, sat next to me and began clapping his hands. He wore a kikoi wrapped around his waist, his brown thin chest was bare, and on his grey, tight curls was a white Muslim cap.

He also had a small bundle of marungi, offered me a stem, and began chewing his own. We talked of Lamu, Somali bandits known as "shiftas" and the current wars in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe.

"Since the beginning of history," he said in excellent English, "mankind has tried to solve its problems by killing each other. We'll never learn that killing doesn't solve problems, it just creates more."

Don and Jean stopped playing. There were more than fifty kids from fourteen to four sitting around us. The old man offered to show us all a palm wine place on the outskirts of town. We waded through the sea of kids and walked through the narrow streets to the south, and then out into the fringes of the palm forest.

The palm wine place was a shack with some benches around it, and forty or fifty people standing and sitting around with old wine bottles filled with fresh palm wine. Palm wine is made daily in a bucket and tap system, similar to the method of getting syrup from maple trees. It is allowed to ferment overnight and is slightly alcoholic, about the strength of a beer, but only costing a few cents a bottle. We each bought a bottle, and I took a good swig. The locals didn't have much of a problem drinking it, but the stuff tasted a bit like vomit to me. It was a challenge getting a bottle down. Although each mouthful got easier. . . .

The old Somali man went on about violence. "Killing, no matter how justifiable the cause, unless you are protecting your very own life or your family's, just begets more killing," he said.

Jean, the French Canadian, said, "Isn't that the law of karma, that what you do will return to you?"

"That's true," said Don.

"I've never heard of karma," said the old man, "but I do believe that you will reap as you have sown. The prophets have always taught this. But mankind does not listen. Those in power beget nations to go to battle. It is a sad situation."

By now we'd had one bottle of palm wine each and were starting into our second bottles. Empty bottles lay all around us from the other drinkers. It was starting to get pretty dark, and those people who could still walk were slowly puttering off, the men lifting their kikois to let the wind blow up between their legs.

Jean, Don and I bid the old man goodnight and walked back toward town, slightly inebriated. We wandered the twisting back streets, a windy, dark maze that turned and ended in a myriad of alleyways and black, shadowy doorways. It was wonderful. Lamu felt like such a timeless, mysterious place, I thought that anything could happen. A certain mystical feeling hung in the air.

The timeless words of the ancient teachers was quietly echoed down the flagstone streets: Love your neighbor as you do yourself.

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I finally made a break from Lamu and tried to ride the motorcycle back to Malindi. I had gotten a late start from Lamu, so I spent the night at a road crew station just outside of Witu. The next day I rode as far as I could, often through several feet of water, until I came to a spot where water flowed across the road for as far as I could see, at least a mile. There was no way I could ride through that on the motorcycle. Just when I thought I would have to go back to Lamu, a landrover came along, filled with Africans, driven by a black game park warden. For a dollar he agreed to put the motorcycle up on top of the four wheel drive vehicle and take me over the worst part. We drove through the swamp, which was about a foot and a half to two and a half feet deep all the way to the ferry. At one point a virtual river was flowing across the road. He disconnected the fan belt and we rolled up the windows while driving through four feet of water.

At the ferry at Garsen, which was still washed out, I paid a guy in a dugout canoe to take the motorcycle and myself back over the river. It was shaky, and we almost tipped over once, but we made it. It was clear riding from there. I rode to Malindi that day and spent another night at the Lucky Lodge. Then on to Mombasa the next day, and up to Nairobi the day after that, just in time to meet Kay, the Swedish kindergarten teacher who was flying in from Copenhagen.

We spent a few nights with Rick at his place and inquired about getting into Tanzania. The border was still closed between Kenya and Tanzania, because of the collapse of the East African Economic Community a few years ago. Tanzania hadn't been too pleased about the way Kenya seized most of the planes that belonged to the joint-owned East African Airways, and at how the tourists would stay at the nicer Kenyan game lodges and just drive over to the better Tanzanian game parks for the day. So now it was impossible for anyone to drive or even fly between Kenya and Tanzania. Since Kay and I wanted to go to Tanzania, our only choice, we were told, was to go through Uganda, which was currently at war, Idi Amin and his troops in the north and the invading Tanzanians in the south.

Kay decided to try it. She had a lot of spunk and wasn't deterred too easily. Besides, if I thought it was safe. . . . We said goodbye to Rick and began hitchhiking up toward Lake Naivasha and Nakuru. We

made a quick detour to Mount Kenya on the way, the second highest mountain in Africa, at 17,058 feet, and a majestic sight. There were a number of places to stay including a youth hostel, a private hostel called Mrs. Keneley's and some people camped out near the Naru Moru River Lodge, which is just near Mrs. Keneley's, in some empty shacks.

If you are heading farther north, there is Thompson Falls to the northwest of Mt. Kenya where there is a nice game lodge that you can camp at. All over the remote, unpopulated and dry north, you can camp anywhere and the lodges are not likely to mind if you camp on their lawns. Ask them first. In the frontier towns of Lodwar, Kargi, Marsabit, Garissa, etc., there are small, cheap and dirty hotels to be found around the markets.

Kay and I hitched up to Lake Nakuru, a great bird sanctuary with some game. A friend showed us an abandoned, half-built house just past the lodge on Lion's Hill. It has a great view of the lake, which is often absolutely pink with thousands of flamingos.

Another half a day hitching north was Nakuru, Kenya's third largest city and the center of the white highlands, with a population of almost 70,000. There is a colorful vegetable market, this being the main agricultural region. Cheap hotels can be found near the central market. We took a single room and shared it, cutting our expenses down.

We found that hitchhiking was good. There are a lot of private cars in Kenya as well as a very good system of tarred roads that stretch all over the country. As you get into the extreme north of the country, though, vehicles become scarcer and roads sometimes non-existent. Buses run all over Kenya, are quite reasonable price-wise and not nearly as crowded as in other African countries. There is a good train between Mombasa and Nairobi and then it goes on to Nakuru and Uganda.

Mombasa is the main port, and it is possible to get ships to places all over the world. Dhows and yachts pull in here too, and these would be a good way to get to Tanzania if the border is still closed. Try the Yacht Club in Mombasa, and check the bulletin board for crew members wanted. Put a note up yourself if you are interested in going someplace in particular. At the smaller ports of Malindi and Lamu, you can get dhows to take you along the coast, up to Somalia or down to Tanga or Zanzibar in Tanzania.

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With a wild screech and clattering of nuts and bolts, the rusty bus ground to a halt in some muddy village near the Ugandan border. Kay and I had hitched up from Nakuru in a day and were about to enter Uganda. I had been riding up on top of the bus, perched on the dusty luggage rack with the bed rolls, trunks, suitcases and bicycles. Swarms of insects were gathering above the trees and the colorful African birds were making more noise than usual. It was sunset once again.

I handed our packs down to Kay, who had been riding inside the bus. She looked so cute in her pink t-shirt and safari shorts, long dark hair tied in a pony-tail behind her, falling down over her small curvaceous body. She was lovely and radiant, and the only thing that made me wonder about her, was that she was willing to follow me into Uganda. . . .

Grabbing our packs, we headed down the dirt road to a muddy crossroads. I decided to ask directions of a suitably gnarled, bent and intelligent looking man, who was leaning on a walking stick that was nearly as old and twisted as he.

"Excuse me, sir," I inquired politely, "but can you tell us the way to Uganda?"

He didn't move at all for several long quiet moments, then his tight, closely clipped grey beard twitched against his wrinkled, black face. "Uganda!" he winced. "What do you want to go there for?"

"We're interested to see it," I said.

"We're trying to get to Tanzania," said Kay.

The old man leveled his dark brown eyes at us. "Don't go," he said. His voice was even and relaxed.

"No, it's OK, really. We'll be fine. We've already made up our minds." This was all I could think of to say to him.

The old man let out a loud, spontaneous snort that cut through the gathering evening mists of the Kenyan highlands. Bits of phlegm clung to his sleeve and my shirt. His face was friendly and concerned as he put a gnarled, wrinkled hand on my shoulder and pointed down a road to the southwest.

"There! There!" he cried. "There is the Montes Lunas! The Mountains of Madness! And that is what you find there, death and madness!" He squeezed my shoulder ever so gently. "Be careful," he said.

Just then a flock of flamingos went flying over us, heading east away from the setting sun. The noises of the evening insects became noticeably louder. Thanking the old man for his advice and directions, Kay and I held hands and strode forth down the road to the Mountains of Madness, the Montes Lunas, the Mountains of the Moon.

Called the Jewel of Africa by Winston Churchill, Uganda was once considered to be the potential paradise of the continent. These days, just the mention of the word Uganda can strike terror in the hearts of men. From the lush tropical shores of Lake Victoria to the snowcapped Ruwenzori Mountains, the Montes Lunas, Uganda is as varied and beautiful a country as could be. Wild life abounds, herds of elephants roam the country, great flocks of birds fly overhead, and even that shyest of primates, the great mountain gorilla, resides in this landlocked central African state.

Uganda's history begins in the 15th century when a series of small kingdoms emerged, fighting and allying with each other. By the 18th century, the two main rivals were the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro-Kitara. Swahili-speaking tribes and Zanzabari traders began penetrating central Africa. In their wake came the European explorers in the 19th century; the most famous was John Speke, who discovered, in a sense, the source of the Nile, Lake Victoria, near Jinja in 1858. By 1894, the British established a protectorate over Buganda and intense missionary activities of all kinds ensued, eventually dominated by the Anglican Church. This protectorate spread over the rest of Uganda, with the Buganda chiefs dominant over the entire country, but dependent on its actual British rulers. The stubborn independence of the Bugandan rulers lasted well into the 20th century, which hampered the development of national unity. Still, Uganda prospered more than most African countries under colonialism. Education was good and Uganda had a high literacy rate, while the standard of living continued to increase dramatically as the British showered attention on their African prize.

In 1962, Uganda became an independent state and Milton Obote became the first prime minister. Meanwhile, a Muslim sargeant, Idi Amin, who had served in the British African Rifles, was rising fast in the Uganda army. Smuggling is sometimes seen as the hobby of African politicians, and Milton Obote was busy smuggling coffee out of Uganda for his own personal wealth. He needed an accomplice, and thought he had found it in Amin.

Thinking Amin to be dumb and controllable, but at the same time unscrupulous enough to help with his smuggling schemes, Obote raised him to the rank of major general, the second most powerful position in the country at the time.

Idi Amin turned out to be more ambitious than anyone thought. In 1971, while Obote was in Singapore for a Nonaligned Nations Conference, Amin seized control of the country by merely proclaiming himself the new president for life and telling Obote he would be killed if he came back to Uganda. Obote went into exile in Tanzania, one of the few countries that refused to recognise Amin's government. For the next eight years, Amin's troops, mostly ruthless hired mercenaries from southern Sudan who owed their dominant social position to Amin, terrorised the country.

Finally, after Amin had killed a large number of his own soldiers in southern Uganda in an attempt to suppress a coup, he made his big mistake by claiming that Tanzania had attacked Uganda. He then counter-attacked Tanzania, which had never attacked Uganda in the first place, and claimed a small area of extreme northwestern Tanzania as part of Uganda.

Tanzania could never put up with Amin anyway. He was the laughingstock of the entire world with his insane political antics and murderous internal policies. So they responded by really attacking Uganda. The entire Tanzanian army was used and this became the first time in African history that one African country actually invaded another. Kay and I were now approaching the border about five months after the beginning of this war. Idi Amin's troops were still fighting in the northern part of Uganda, while the Tanzanians, so far the victors, had "liberated" the southern half of Uganda, including the capital, Kampala. Amin had retreated to his own homeland and powerbase in the north, an area that would take a long time to clean up, as they say in army jargon. Kay and I were about to enter the newly liberated Tanzanian part of Uganda, the first travelers to do so since the war.

"Welcome to Uganda!" said the immigration officer, nodding his head and taking a bony hand out of his torn, faded blue uniform to shake our hands. Cheery and friendly, this old Ugandan was pleased as punch to see a couple of tourists coming to beautiful war-torn Uganda. The border had opened a few days ago, and nobody really knew what was going on inside. I held Kay's hand and gave her a gentle squeeze of reassurance.

We had to declare all our money and weapons, having none of the latter, except a Sudanese lizardskin dagger and a tear gas pen that looked like a big black felt tip marking pen. I declared neither.

I had gotten a visa in Nairobi for Uganda, but we had been told that Scandinavians didn't need one. I had wanted them to give Kay one anyway at the time, but they had refused. The immigration officer at the border was awfully nice but said that Kay would have to get a visa. "You'll have to go back to Nairobi," said the officer.

"That's OK," said Kay, who wasn't all that crazy about going to Uganda anyway.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Well, I guess I could give her a visa," he said, winking. "I'll have to charge you 200 shillings, though." I figured that up in my head real quick. It was about thirty dollars, quite a bit of money, I thought. But then, since he couldn't find any receipt books because they had all been looted in the war, and because we were the first travelers into Uganda, he decided just to stamp us in.

With a giant, sincere smile, he tipped his faded official black hat and said, "Enjoy your holiday in Uganda!" as if Uganda had the reputation as being Africa's playground.

We laughed and thanked him. Somehow, I suspected our holiday in Uganda would hold a few surprises for us. Why not enjoy it?

We found a ride with an American Baptist missionary, the first missionary to enter Uganda since the war, he said. He was taking some medical supplies to Kampala, driving in the dark. He had a big two-ton truck and was pulling a small French auto. Going from the border to Tororo, the first town inside the border, we gave some Tanzanian soldiers in a VW a tow, saw quite a few machine gun nests and a white Peugeot that was completely blasted apart. The missionary, who had lived in Uganda before, said it was one of Amin's cars.

Things were pretty expensive in Uganda, I reflected, or at least some things. A plate of rice and vegetables at the border had cost nine dollars at the official bank rate. On the other hand, a Soviet AK-47 Assault Rifle could be had by trading a carton of cigarettes for it. "It's all in what you value," said Kay.

We let off the Tanzanians and their VW in Tororo, and then drove through the forest between Tororo and Bugiri with an armed guard as some of Amin's soldiers were said to be still lurking in this area. We

passed a number of schools and hotels which were all just empty shells of buildings, burned and blasted out by bazookas. We also passed a small town where Amin's troops had slaughtered 37 schoolboys only two weeks before. It was like driving through a ghost-country inhabited by countless confused ghosts.

The missionary let us off in Jinja and continued on to Kampala, another hour's drive to the west. We checked into the Crane's Head Hotel, the only hotel in Jinja, and found out that we were the first Europeans to stay there since the beginning of the war. In our hotel room we found some binoculars and a hand grenade in the dresser. I wondered if they were standard issue in Uganda hotels, like soap and towels.

We walked around town the next morning. The Crested Crane Hotel was the only one in town, and rather expensive for the traveler, especially if you are cashing your money at the bank rate. They have a nice lawn and will let travelers camp out on it. We took a single room and shared it at the hotel. We walked down to the lake, where the Nile starts its long journey northward: there is a plaque indicating when and where Speke made his historic discovery. On our way back through town to the hotel, a crowd was gathered on the main street. One of Amin's soldiers had been apprehended in civilian's clothes; a Tanzanian soldier kept the crowd from killing him then and there. . . .

We hitched into Kampala that day, getting some rides in the most beat-up, dilapidated vehicles I had ever seen anywhere. One car was an old fifties sedan, the insides completely gone, so we sat on wooden boxes, including the driver. We ended up going the last twenty miles or so in a bus. A drunken Tanzanian soldier sat next to us and talked loudly in Swahili about "Muzungus," Swahili for foreigners. He threw a dead fish onto Kay's lap. We laughed and thanked him in Swahili for the fish. When he finally got off the bus, the people around us apologised for him.

We stayed at the Makere University Guest House while we were in Kampala. We had checked out the YMCA when we first got there and were told that we could sleep on the floor, but they had no showers. They then recommended us to the university guest house, where we were allowed to stay because we had student cards. Other cheap hotels to stay in around Kampala are the Tourist Hotel near the railroad station, the Park Equatorial, The Antler's Inn and the Amber Hotel.

The Speke Hotel is an expensive luxury hotel, but has a nice terrace cafe that is a pleasant place to sit and have a cup of Ugandan coffee.

Hotels in Uganda are scarce and expensive. If you are cashing your money on the black market, these hotels are affordable, as the black market is often ten times the official rate. This will then make a thirty dollar a night hotel room only three dollars. The black market rate fluctuates wildly, but you are likely to get five times the bank rate while you are in Uganda. Because of this wild difference between exchange rates, Uganda can be either an incredibly expensive or quite a reasonably priced country. I found that the black market rate generally brought the price of things down to about the same level as Kenya.

If you are not cashing your money on the black market, then you can still camp, which is generally free and relatively safe. Carry a tent and sleep at police stations or on the lawns of the nicer hotels. They probably won't mind, but ask them first. If you are traveling with two or three people, you could rent a single room, and then pack'em in, as they say. It always helps to explain to the hotel that you are on a tight budget and are looking for a cheap place to stay. Hotel managers and desk clerks are usually very understanding and will usually try to help you as best they can.

Makere University is situated on a hill above Kampala, looking out east over the city. The guest house was very nice and inexpensive. We had a beautiful double bed in quite a luxurious room for a couple of dollars a night, by the black market rate. As we were going to bed that night we heard gunfire, but during the day everything seemed pretty safe. The Tanzanians were certainly in control of the city, and had set up their HQ at the Nile Hotel. Kampala is a major city of 380,000 people, and wasn't so destroyed by the war as were the smaller towns. Most shops and businesses had been looted, however, in the anarchy that followed Amin's retreat from Kampala.

One day, while sitting at the sidewalk cafe at the Speke Hotel, to our surprise we met a young British couple. They had been teaching English in Uganda and were on holiday, like us. They would have left the country and gone to Kenya, but they had only Ugandan shillings to spend so they had to stay inside the country. I remembered the smiling immigration officer at the border, "Enjoy your stay in Uganda!"

We had coffee and sweet potato french fries at the restaurant there while we chatted. "Want to see Idi Amin's house?" asked Rose, the

wife of the English guy, whose name was Don. She was tall and blonde with glasses, pleasant and fun. She was raised in Kenya and spoke Swahili. Don was thirty, with long brown hair down to his shoulders, though practically bald on top. With thick glasses and an average build, he seemed like the school teacher type. "Idi Amin's Kampala residence is just a few blocks away," she said.

Why not? We all trucked off up the street past the modern homes of this upperclass neighborhood. Idi's house was a large two story home, typical of suburban America, but luxurious by African standards. We just walked right up the walk and into the house.

Inside, it looked as if a hurricane had hit it! Papers, photographs and movie films were everywhere. You could hardly step without walking on some TOP SECRET or CONFIDENTIAL document. All the furniture and valuable household items had been taken, leaving just the papers. I imagined that Idi Amin's house was one of the first in Kampala to be looted. For some time we looked around and read documents. Suddenly Kay screamed, "God, look at this!"

We ran downstairs to the garage where Kay was. Inside, was, literally, a mountain of t-shirts! They were different sizes, but all had the same thing printed on them, "Idi Amin Dada; King of Africa: Conqueror of the British Empire." There was a picture of Idi Amin being carried on a paladium by some British businessmen, a well-known incident in Idi's rule.

These were the only things in Idi's house that no one would take during the looting; pardon the pun, but no one would be caught dead in one of these. I picked one and held it up. It was a Hanes t-shirt, made in America, the label said.

"Go ahead and take one," said a Tanzanian soldier who was suddenly standing behind us. Tall, bulky, and friendly, he was dressed in camouflage gear, an officer of some sort. "Go on, take as many as you like. I've got quite a few myself." He spoke English like someone very well educated, and was very knowledgeable about the war. We all grabbed some t-shirts and he showed us around the grounds.

"Idi Amin is feared by the people here," he went on. "Many actually believe him to be the devil himself. He was certainly evil enough, and he had some sort of mysterious, charmed life."

"Like what?" asked Don.

"For instance, there were many attempts to assassinate Amin. One

time a hand grenade was thrown into the back seat of Idi's limousine where he was sitting. It bounced off his fat stomach and exploded harmlessly outside the car. Another time an assassin was waiting to shoot Amin as he was driven into Kampala from his Entebbe residence, but on that day, Amin decided to drive, and his chauffeur was sitting in the back seat. The chauffeur, instead of Amin, was shot through the head!"

"Wow! Idi Amin was a pretty lucky guy," said Rose.

"That is nothing," the Tanzanian soldier went on. "Another time, just recently, Amin was driving a landrover pickup with some troops in the back, while our troops were advancing. He was heading back from Entebbe when a Tanzanian mortar landed right in the back of the vehicle Amin was driving. Everyone was killed, except Amin! Every time he missed death by a hair! Amin has survived at least fourteen assassination attempts!"

"What about reports that Amin was a cannibal?" asked Rose.

"We believe that Idi Amin was using black magic," said the Tanzanian. "I don't know what you English believe, but in Africa we believe in spirits, demons, and magic, which can be used for good or bad. Idi Amin practiced many black magic rites, including cannibalism. We have reason to believe that he was used by evil witch doctors, most of them only on the spirit plane. There are many interesting parallels between Amin and Hitler, who was also involved in black magic. Hitler also escaped certain death many times, almost as if by miracle. I read a book once on how Hitler used black magic to gain his power in Germany. Like Idi Amin, he was the tool of evil witch doctors!"

We thanked the Tanzanian officer for his talk and went back to the Speke Hotel, our minds blown by what the man had just told us. It seemed incredible, but possible at the same time.

Kay and I went back to the university and made dinner on the stove in the kitchen. We were tired and went to bed early. The next morning we met Don and Rose at the Speke Hotel by arrangement, and this time they brought another friend they had met, an Australian journalist who was writing a book on Uganda for the United Nations. He was on his way to the State Research Bureau, near Amin's house, and invited us to go along. The State Research Bureau was heavily guarded

by Tanzanian troops, but we were able to get in because the journalist had a note of permission from Jules Nyere, the President of Tanzania himself.

An officer met us at the gate and then took us inside. It had the unassuming look of a large, three-story house in the Kampala suburbs. At one time that's probably all it was. Now it was a captured jail and torture chamber, the former headquarters of Amin's secret police.

The first floor was an armory. The floor was covered with bullets of all shapes and size; crates of grenades, bazooka shells, dynamite and all sorts of arms were everywhere. A carelessly tossed cigarette butt could have blown us all to smithereens, remarked Don. Nobody laughed.

That first floor could have kept Idi's army cooking for a long time. The second floor was files and offices. Papers were strung out all over the floor as in Idi's house. One room was full of old magazines, *Time*, *Newsweek*, even *Grit*.

One magazine caught my eyes. It was the July, 77 issue of the Italian periodical *Grand Motel*. On the cover was a painting of Amin casing a lustful gaze at a distraught Jackie Onassis. The headline translated as: "Jackie's Latest Problem; Amin wants to seduce her!" Hmmm.

The third floor was a couple of jail cells, and not much else. We weren't allowed to go down into the basement, where the "personal research" went on, namely torture. All for the better really. The Kenyan newspapers had been full of the most horrifying stories of what went on down there, most of them true no doubt. I tried to still my imagination.

It was good to be back out in the warm sunlight. I really wondered about the people who saw daylight for the last time as they were dragged into that deceptively plain building for questioning. I remembered a quote from a book, *The Ultimate Frontier*, by Eklal Kueshana: "They seek absolute power over every activity of every person—the kind of limitless power to make another suffer privation or die at their whim. They exult in their terrifying grip on throats of men. . . . Slavery, torture, horrifying savagery and extermination are the devices of sheer evil."

Back at Makere University it was dark. As Kay and I lay in bed, I could once again hear gunshots down the hill in the city. A student had given me this poem that evening:

The sound of rapid gunfire
Wakes me from my sleep.
I think of those in torment,
And those lost in the deep.

° °

It was getting dark. We had just passed through a bombed-out town, its buildings mostly leveled in the shelling of the advancing Tanzanian Army a few weeks before. I had to swerve the little yellow Honda Civic from side to side on the road to avoid shell craters and spots where tanks had torn up the asphalt. Kay was sitting next to me, the English couple was in the back seat. We were trying to make it to Kabale, a town in southwest Uganda where we thought there might be a still-operating hotel, and eventually to the Montes Lunas.

It was crazy, I thought, and a huge grin lit my face. How insane, how wild and stupid! What am I doing here and how did I get to be driving this car? I asked myself.

The answer to these questions was really very simple. The English couple had rented this car and procured a large ration of gas to make their planned holiday trip to the Volcanic Park in the southwest where they wanted to look for mountain gorillas. There was just one catch; neither of them knew how to drive.

"Oh, well, I know to drive," I said one morning at the Speke Hotel Cafe.

"Great! Let's all go tomorrow. We've got the car rented and everything, we just have to pick it up."

It seemed so simple. . . .

With a wild screeching of brakes and a hard lurch of the car, we came to stop within an inch of a makeshift road barrier across the two-lane highway. It was quite dark now, and there were no lights or reflectors to indicate a roadblock, just a long pole across the road. Maybe I should have just run it. . . .

Several men came running out from the small guard hut to the road. Two of them had old rifles and they were all dressed as poor farmers; they were not Tanzanian soldiers.

"Get out!" said one of the men in Swahili.

"Don't get out!" said Don from the back seat.

I felt it was better to alleviate the tension, and swiftly popping the lever, jumped out of the car. "Jambo!" I greeted them in the Swahili greeting, my hands outstretched to show that they were empty. The Englishman got out of the car then too, and Kay got into the back seat. The two rifles were leveled at us.

"We are English teachers on our way to Kabale," Don told them in Swahili.

"We're just coming today from Kampala," I said.

By the smell of their breath, they had been drinking. We gave them our passports and told the girls to stay in the car. They shined their flashlights in the car, looked briefly at our passports and then told us we could go.

"You should really put a light on your roadblock," I said as we got in, "it's quite dangerous like this, you know." One of the guards nodded and gave a grunt. They waved goodbye and we drove on toward Kabale.

About a half an hour later, just as we were coming into Kabale, a soldier in camouflage uniform leaped out of the bushes right in front of us and aimed a machine gun straight at the car. It was his way of telling us to stop. He was one roadblock that I had no intention of running. Crouched and ready to fire, he didn't move at all as the car screeched to a halt in front of him. This night driving was getting hazardous, all right.

Don and I got out of the car with our hands up. He ordered everyone out and Rose explained to him in her fluent Swahili just what we were doing there and where we were going. He searched all our luggage and the car very thoroughly, which took him a good half hour, and then he let us go. We were impressed by his efficient, no-nonsense manner. He was friendly and courteous under the circumstances. What did we expect, anyway? Here we were, four loony tourists off looking for mountain gorillas in a country at war. It was kind of hard to believe. I had trouble believing it myself sometimes.

He let us go, and we asked him directions to the White Horse Inn in Kabale. We checked in at the hotel at ten o'clock. It was a relief to be in a hotel room, and the White Horse Inn was a very nice hotel. Kay looked at me and sighed as we got into bed. I put my arms around her. All this danger and excitement made us both pretty romantic. "Night driving is always hazardous," she said.

Kabale is a pleasant little town in the beautiful hill country of southwest Uganda. There are a number of small restaurants and shops here, plus some cheap, African-style hotels. The White Horse Inn is located on a hill above the town, and it's rather luxurious and expensive, but you can camp on the lawn if you like.

We left for Kisoro around mid-morning the next day. Kisoro is only thirty miles or so from Kabale, but it takes several hours to drive there as the road is very winding through the hills. Arriving at Kisoro in the early afternoon, we checked into the local hotel, The Traveler's Inn. The first thing we did was arrange for a guide to meet us and take us up one of the tall volcanoes nearby to look for gorillas the next day.

Walking around Kisoro that afternoon, we found that it was a very small place. There were a few shops and a small vegetable market. The view of the volcanoes was spectacular.

The main feature of the town seemed to be The Traveler's Inn, a small but nice little lodge with an African-style restaurant serving mutokee, a big glob of cooked green bananas served with gravy and Rwandan beer.

At some time, Kisoro was probably quite a tourist spot. There are seven lakes in the vicinity and the valleys are filled with terraced farms and green hills; it was like a mountainous garden of Eden. To the south were a series of tall volcanoes, five or six, all inactive, the highest about 15,000 feet.

These volcanos, which straddle the Ugandan-Rwandan border, have a thick, green forest on their slopes, so dense that there are few trails, and only pygmies can live on the hillsides. It is here that the rare mountain gorilla lives. As tall as six and a half feet and weighing as much as 700 pounds, this rather fearsome primate was discovered only in 1901, when a French hunter brought a skin back from Rwanda, proving the "outrageous" legends that zoologists had been poo-pooing for decades.

We hoped to get close enough to meet one of these beasts. We met our guide early the next morning and he took us to his home near the base of the volcano. He was a large, hearty mountain man, who climbed these volcanos barefooted. He wore an old tweed sport coat and brown denim pants and carried a long walking staff. He used to have an old rifle, he told us, but the Tanzanians took it away when they arrived. His broad, square face betrayed a certain simple honesty. He

was a straight talking fellow who could be trusted. His name was Zacariah and he brought with him a young zoology student from Kampala. We parked our car as close to the base of the volcano as we could and began our hike. Straight up the side of the volcano we went. It was strenuous walking through the terraced fields on the lower slopes that grew bananas, potatoes, carrots and other vegetables. It was hard going and we were soon out of breath. Rose had to stop, and said she couldn't go on any more. She would wait there until we got back.

We rested for awhile at the edge of the jungle, and then we plunged in. Incredibly thick and overgrown, it all but choked out a slim, faint trail up the edge of the gorge. Suddenly Zacariah plunged into a bamboo thicket. Following him, we found ourselves hunched over in a tunnel of bamboo that cut vertically across the steep slopes of the volcano. After several hundred yards of bamboo thicket, we arrived at a small clearing where the bushes and small trees had been pushed down. Zacariah set his rusty machete down and reached for a little something on the packed underbrush. Lifting it to his nose, he sniffed it and passed it silently to Don, who took a big whiff.

Coughing and gagging, Don cried, "Phew, what is that stuff?"

"Gorilla shit, and fresh too," said Zacariah.

"Fresh! I'll say!" said Dick, still choking, his face gone blue.

"Here, smell," said Zacariah, passing it over to me.

I took a step backward into the bamboo and fell down. "No thanks, Zacariah," I said, "I believe you." Don was still trying to clear his throat.

"This way," said Zacariah, and we dove into the jungle, our guide hacking his way through the vines, bushes and thick trees. The forest was constantly in a dim twilight of its own. Sunlight could not penetrate the upper foliage canopy. We never saw the ground, but walked on a dense mat of growth and fallen logs. Sometimes my foot would go down through a hole in the undergrowth and I would sink up to my knee.

We seemed to following some kind of vague path through the jungle, marked occasionally by a broken branch or slightly compressed spot, but only Zacariah could see it.

Suddenly, without any warning, a five-hundred-pound male gorilla leaped out of a tree and landed about thirty feet in front of us. Our hearts stopped, and there was a general loosening of the bowels in our

party. The gorilla pounded his chest for twenty seconds and then stopped to stare at us. This was gorilla talk for, you've come far enough! His clan of babies and mothers must have been behind him somewhere, and he had come out to scare us off. It worked.

We all looked at our five-hundred-pound friend for one long silent moment and then started backing up. We headed down the mountain and picked up Rose on the way. We were all still a little high from the adrenalin rush we had gotten from our meeting in the jungle.

It was late afternoon when the four of us got back to the hotel. We sat in the center courtyard to rest at the lawn chairs and tables, exhausted from our adventure. As we were having our afternoon tea we watched the volcanoes, which we could see very clearly. A perpetual cloud hung at the top, with a white tail streaming off from the consant wind at the high altitude. We were writing in our diaries, looking at maps and quietly sipping our tea.

What we didn't know was that all day something had been brewing in the hotel. This area of Uganda had never seen any fighting. A small unit of Tanzanians had been sent to it to secure the area and keep the peace. Everything had been peaceful until a week ago when there had been mysterious killings. Some Tanzanian guards at road blocks had been found dead, their throats cut. Therefore, the Tanzanians were naturally a bit on edge and rather suspicious.

Suddenly, four Europeans cruise into town in a car and say that they are looking for gorillas! This was an unlikely story, many of the Tanzanians felt, and there had been rumors of Palestinian Liberation Army (PLO) guerillas fighting with Idi Amin's troops, as well as Rhodesian soldiers. It was a fact that Libya had sent some troops to fight for Amin and the Tanzanians had captured quite a few.

So, two Tanzanian soldiers had been sitting in the restaurant all day drinking beer. They were discussing the many different theories of whether we were actually school teachers looking for gorillas, or trained killers that were knocking off Tanzanian soldiers one by one. As the afternoon went on and on, they got more and more drunk. And as they got more and more drunk, they got more and more positive that we were the culprits and would have to be arrested.

Now, we didn't know any of this. And suddenly one of the two men, a sargeant, came into the courtyard and walked up to our table. He said he wanted us to go with him to the barracks, began looking at our

maps of Uganda and Africa, decided to sieze them, and took Kay's Swedish diary as well. "Let's go," he commanded in Swahili, and then fell over backwards onto the ground.

This was our first indication that he was very drunk. I got up and went to Kay's and my room, got the keys and the tear gas pen, which I put in my front pocket, suspecting that this fellow could be dangerous.

Another soldier came out, a young private named John, who spoke pretty good English. He was also drunk, but seemed to be in a better mood than the sargeant. The sargeant, a husky, wide-shouldered guy with very short hair, gave orders to John, a taller, thinner fellow, who translated for us, even though Rose could speak Swahili perfectly well.

"He wants to see your passports," said John. We gave them to the sargeant, who looked at them for a moment and then told Don and me to go with him to the parking lot. We walked through the restaurant to the parking lot and the hotel manager followed us. He was a very nice man, concerned and sincere. He watched the whole thing rather nervously. He sent a waiter out to get some military police in case things got out of hand with these drunk soldiers.

The girls sat in the courtyard finishing their tea, while Don and I stood out in the parking lot with the two drunk soldiers and the hotel manager.

"Let's go to the barracks and talk to your commanding officers," I suggested.

"You're under arrest," said the sargeant. "Give me the keys to the car, I'll drive."

Not realizing the circumstances that had led up to all this, and being something of a rebel against authority, I didn't feel I should give him the keys. He was much too drunk to drive the car.

"No," I said. "I'll drive."

It is fortunate that the sargeant did not have a pistol on him, as I grossly misjudged his reaction to my refusing to give him the keys. Unfortunately, he did have a very large and sharp military knife with an eight inch blade that was definitely designed for killing people.

With a growl, he drew his knife and attacked Don and me with it! He moved toward us with the knife raised above his head, his eyes bulging, saliva foaming at his mouth and a look of murderous frenzy in his face.

We were all shocked by his reaction. It was certainly uncalled for. At that point, I had to decide whether run or to stand and fight him, spraying him with tear gas, dodging his knife and wrestling him to the ground. We were all frightened, including the hotel manager, and it was a very dangerous situation.

I decided to run. Don did too.

We both ran around the Civic with the crazed, knife-wielding sargeant after us! After running around the car three times, John, the private, dashed in and grabbed the sargeant. With John between us and the sargeant, gripping the sargeant's wrist that held the knife, I quickly took the keys out of my pocket and threw them on the ground at the sargeant's feet. The hotel manager was totally aghast. Both Don and I were shaking.

The sargeant took the keys and tried to unlock the door, but he was too drunk. He and John then went back into the restaurant just as two other soldiers came along. The hotel manager stopped them and told them quickly what had happened. They went into the restaurant and the manager told us to go around the side, grab the girls and lock ourselves in one of the rooms.

We grabbed the girls, who had no idea what was going on, and took them to Don and Rose's room. We played cards until the district commissioner came and told us that everything was alright. We had to meet with the local Tanzanian High Command who apologised to us, and who wanted to know who we actually were and what we were doing in Kisoro anyway.

Kisoro is a good place to cross into Rwanda from, if you are so inclined. The Virunga National Park, which contains the volcanoes, is well worth the trip. If the hotel is too expensive—The Traveler's Inn—they have a nice yard that you could camp on. It rains here frequently, so a tent would be handy.

The next day, we headed north in the Honda to Fort Portal, the gateway to the Mountains of the Moon, the Ruwenzori Mountains. On the north side of the mountains is the Ituri Forest, where pygmies live in their ancient traditional lifestyle. Mount Ruwenzori is the third highest mountain in Africa at 16,763 feet. It is covered by clouds 360 days out of the year and has one of the highest rainfalls in the world. The Ruwenzoris are a good place to do some backpacking, but bring a good raincoat. If you're really into mountaineering, there is a Moun-

taineering Club in Fort Portal that you can contact for information on climbing and equipment rental. Fort Portal has two hotels, the Ruwenzori Tea Hotel and the Mountains of the Moon Hotel, both of which are of a high standard and rather expensive, at least at the bank rate. Both allow camping, however, and have good views of the mountains, when they're visible, which is generally for a few minutes in the late afternoon and early morning. The very top of Mt. Ruwenzori can often be seen sticking out of the clouds. The hot springs of Bundibugyo and the Toro Game Reserve are also sights to see here. The women of this region are famous all over Uganda for their beauty and dignity.

We said goodbye to Rose and Don here. They drove back to Kampala and we were going to head for Tanzania. After two days in Fort Portal, we hitchhiked back south to Kasese, a couple of hours from Fort Portal near the Zaire border. It's a good spot for crossing into Zaire and a good view of the Ruwenzori Mountains and Lake Edward. Kay and I spent the night at the Margerita Hotel, the first tourists to stay there in six years!

Hitchhiking is good in Uganda, people are very friendly and eager to help you and to chat. There are lots of paved roads, from Kenya to Jinja, Kampala, Fort Portal and Rwanda, and north up to Sudan. Private cars are pretty scarce, but there are trucks plying all the roads who will stop, though they may wish to charge you. There are buses running regular routes throughout the country, but they are old and overcrowded.

Uganda has two train lines, one from Tororo on the Kenyan border to Kampala and Kasese and one from Tororo north up to Gulu. There are no real ports in Uganda, it being a landlocked country, but there are ferries running from Entebbe to Kenya and Tanzania.

Kay and I hitched out of Kasese toward Mbarara in the south, getting a long ride in a big five-ton truck full of Ugandans. In Mbarara, we stayed one night in the Agip Motel, a nice spot with clean, modern rooms, and a good lawn to camp on.

Finally, we were on the road out of Uganda on our way to Tanzania. We had hitched to the crossroads of Masaka from Mbarara and were now on a Tanzanian army truck on its way down to Mwanza. We sat in the back of the empty truck, huddling together in the cool evening while up front, two Tanzanian soldiers on leave were happy as anything to be heading home. There wasn't even a border post on this

main road to Tanzania so we never got stamped out of Uganda, or into Tanzania for that matter. No matter. It had been an exciting holiday in Uganda, that was for sure. Kay put her head on my shoulder and fell asleep, the stars were bright and white. It was fine to be alive.

8 · TANZANIA: TALES OF KILIMANJARO

We carry with us the wonders we seek without us; there is all Africa and her prodigies in us. . . .

SIR THOMAS BROWNE

WE WERE ALL breathing hard. With a final burst of energy, I took the last few steps to the summit and collapsed on the snow. Pant, pant. "God, what a view," gasp, gasp. I swung my pack off my back and lay on a rock that was sticking up out of the snow.

So this was the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro! Fantastic! It was still dark. We had left at one o'clock in the morning from the last mountain shelter on the mountain and started climbing, a New Zealand couple, our native guide and myself. It was ten minutes before sunrise. To the east, a faint lightening of the sky was just visible.

It felt great to be on top of the highest mountain in Africa. 19,340 feet was quite an altitude, and it was exhilarating to say the least.

We had left the hut a bit early, apparently. Our guide didn't realize that we could do the last three thousand feet so fast. We had arrived near the summit by four-thirty and sunrise wasn't until 6:00. The freezing temperature combined with wind chill at over 18,000 feet posed a serious problem of how we were going to keep warm. We were all wearing down jackets, sweaters, and wool hats, but at the subzero heights of Kilimanjaro we were literally freezing to death. My experiences mountaineering in Colorado, Montana, Washington and the Himalayas told me one thing—keep moving to keep warm!

But we couldn't continue on to the summit; we would arrive at the top an hour before sunrise, and there we would be the most exposed to the wind and elements. So we huddled in a small cave, taking what little shelter from the wind we could, and beating our legs, chests and arms to keep up the circulation and stay warm. After twenty minutes or so, it was just too cold to keep this up and we had to continue slowly on up to the top. We stopped again at another small shelter near the summit for another twenty minutes or so, beating ourselves and stamping our feet to keep warm. Eventually we slogged our way to the glaciated summit, our boots crunching on the hard snow. Seracs, huge blocks of ice as big as freight cars, were strewn around the crater rim of this famous volcano. The center was a huge, white, icy bowl dotted with jagged blocks of ice sticking up into the sky.

My breathing was becoming more controlled. I closed my eyes and rested for a minute. It seemed like ages ago that I had been standing on those lonely crossroads on a hot dusty afternoon waiting for a ride.

I had just arrived in Tanzania and was sitting on my pack, the tall savannah grass all around me, the plain dotted with thorn trees, looking like gigantic surrealistic mushrooms. In the distance, to the south, I could see a couple of giraffes grazing on the tender top leaves of the trees, their long necks stretched up and towering above the plain like polka-dotted construction cranes.

It felt good to be on the edge of Serengeti Park, lounging the day away on a lonely crossroads waiting for a lift. It could easily take all day to get a ride—maybe even two or three days. This is because there aren't any cars or public transportation of any kind—no buses or taxis or anything. If I was lucky, a landrover full or tourists might come along, or maybe a truck full of Africans. Hell, I wasn't fussy. And I wasn't in a big hurry either. This was a good opportunity to work on patience, a virtue that Western people often are lacking in, at least by African and Asian standards.

Kay had met some Danish Overseas Volunteers, sort of like our Peace Corps workers, at a small village near Mwanza and we had mutually decided that she should remain with them for a while. So I went on by myself to hitch through Serengeti and climb Kilimanjaro. I had mixed feelings about leaving Kay; I was somewhat relieved to be on my own again, but also sad and lonely that we weren't traveling together. She felt I was too reckless and adventuresome. She was

mostly interested in finding a nice beach and soaking up the sun. Since we couldn't find a compromise, mostly due to my stubbornness, we agreed to separate and meet again on the coast in a couple of weeks.

Two days of hitching had brought me here. At times I was elated to be back, living for the moment, walking down a country road, with no immediate cares or concerns. At others I was sorry I hadn't made more effort to make both of us happy, and wished we were still traveling together.

Staring out into the yellowish-brown tall grass, I was lost in thought about my life, my relationships, my future—certainly I wasn't living in the immediate present.

A low droning sound brought me out of my contemplation and I stood up to peer over the grass. It was a truck! Oh boy! I had only been waiting about eight hours for a ride, and here came a big, rusty, dusty red cattle truck, right my way! It looked beautiful.

Smiling foolishly out of sheer joy, I began jumping up and down and waving my arms wildly in true African hitchhiking style. There was no way in the world they weren't going to stop. I made sure of that.

With a grinding of gears and squealing of well-worn brakes, the ancient cattle flatbed truck ground to a halt just in front of me. It was an old British Bedford lorry, circa 1950's I guessed, judging by its style and front grille. In the back, standing up in back of the cab, were half a dozen Africans in various stages of dress and undress, all covered with grey dust, all smiling a big white grin as they gazed at the crazy young hitchhiker standing in the grass at the edge of the game park.

I grabbed my pack and slung it over my shoulder, striding happily up to the driver and the cab.

"Where are you going?" called a short, sort of purple fellow from up in the cattle cage.

"Seronera!" I answered, speaking of the main village in the center of Serengeti Park where there was a youth hostel, a game lodge and a small cooperative village called an Ujama.

The English-speaking guy in the back said a few words to the driver and they had a quick exchange of words.

"Come on," he called finally, and the driver smiled. I handed my back pack up to the fellows in the back and climbed up myself. Before I was inside the truck was again hopping down the dusty wheel tracks that pass for a road through the African bush.

"It's great to have a ride," I said, holding onto the front railing and moving next to the man I had spoken with, who was standing just behind the cab.

Everyone was all smiles. Most of the men in the back were wearing traditional Masai tribal garb, a faded red cotton loin cloth with a strap over one shoulder. They wore sandals made from old tire treads and strips of inner tube on their hardened, cracked feet. They were carrying spears and their hair was long and braided, tied back behind their heads with string and an occasional glass bead.

With broad grins of delight and amazement, they all stared at me, and me at them.

"Jambo!" we all said in greeting together, and I laughed. They laughed too. The African standing next to me put his arm on my shoulder and asked, "Where are you from, brother?"

He was dressed differently, in a blue, flowery polyester shirt, red polyester slacks and machine-made plastic shoes; he had a certain city look about him. Spoke good English too.

"The United States of America!" I said. "Where are you from?"

"The Republic of Tanzania," he said, white gritty teeth showing. The wind from the truck blew in our faces.

"Where in Tanzania?"

"Arusha," he said, "I'm just here to visit some relatives in this part of Tanzania, and now I'm heading back to Arusha."

Suddenly we had to duck a low bunch of branches as the truck plowed through the bush. I told him about my trip to Uganda and my break-up with Kay.

"Ah! Well, you'll just have to change your attitudes if you're sad," he said.

"I'm not sad," I told him.

"You look sad," he said. He thin face was young but full of character. He was obviously well educated for a Tanzanian, and he seemed to have that good native African savvy that western educated Africans in the cities often didn't have. "Your thinking is important to what happens to you in life."

"Are you sure?" I said. "I mean, aren't we really just victims of fate; how can we be responsible for our situation in life?"

"I don't believe in chance," said my friend. "Our thoughts and desires usually cause the things that are happening in our lives. Like

your break-up with your girl-friend—you must have been wanting that on some level."

"I suppose you're right," I said, slightly distracted by a small herd of zebras to the left of the truck. The sun was getting low on the horizon; the great, flat, grassy plain was blending into the dusk. There were giraffes, wildebeasts, zebras, and gazelles to be seen all around, in the distance and next to the truck as we passed by them.

We came into a small town just as the sun was setting, one part of the sky a deep yellow and the other orange-red. I jumped off the truck to take a photograph, and as I stood there, the English-speaking man told me we would have to spend the night here, because the truck didn't have any headlights and couldn't drive at night.

"OK," I said, "by the way, my name is Dave."

"Mine is Samuel," he said. "Here, follow me, I'll find us a place to stay."

We walked into the center of the village, which was quite small, maybe twenty or so grass huts, and a few other small, square cinder-block buildings. The last glow of the sunset was fading away and I was amazed to see that the entire village was gathered around a fire and everyone was drunk! They had been drinking the local African millet-corn beer, easy to make and plentiful, and were all fairly soused.

Samuel said a few things in the local dialect and suddenly a great fight started between two women who began shouting and arguing and pushing each other. Somehow I knew it was about me, and became very uncomfortable, wondering what I had done wrong, and what kind of trouble I was in now.

"They're arguing about you," said Samuel.

"I know," I said, "What did I do wrong?"

"Nothing," he replied, "They're arguing about whose guest you are going to be tonight. The one lady says she saw you first—do you remember taking a picture of her at sunset? And the other lady says that she is the wife of the chief and that you will stay in their hut!"

"Oh, is that all!" I was greatly relieved and accepted a bowl of brown millet sludge that was their beer. Like the palm wine in Kenya, this has a sour fermented taste, reminding me of stomach fluids. I could drink the stuff down, though, having gotten used to it before at similar native drinking sessions in Sudan.

Samuel and I sat by the fire and drank the beer. I made a pot of soup

out of some food I kept in my pack while the chief's wife settled the argument with the other lady. It was decided that I would stay in the chief's hut. Samuel too.

As I got into my sleeping bag that night, in the doorway of the hut, two nubile young teenage girls took a particular interest in me and sat next to me. One offered me more food, and when I told her I was full, began stroking my stomach. I realized they were drunk (like everyone else in the village) and was a bit afraid that one or both were going to attempt to crawl into my sleeping bag. They didn't, and as I drifted off to sleep, I recalled a sign I had seen at the entrance of the game park when we had crossed it late that afternoon: HITCHHIKERS FORBIDDEN. IF FOUND INSIDE THE PARK THEY WILL BE PROSECUTED.

I was already on the run.

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Tanzania is a nice country, I thought, as I stood at the crossroads of Seronera trying to get a ride south toward Oldavai Gorge and Ngorongoro Crater. I had been waiting all day for some kind of ride, but had so far not had any luck. Only one car had passed, containing a couple of Japanese tourists who looked right through me. I tossed a pebble at a sign that said NGORONGORO: 92 km. I wouldn't get there today, I thought.

Tanzania is the only country in the world to set aside nearly one quarter of its land as national parks, game preserves, and forest reserves. It is a beautiful land, rich in wildlife and scenery. It is perhaps the ideal African country from the tourist's point of view.

It is the largest country in East Africa, cut on its western border by the Rift Valley, forming Lakes Malawi, Tanganyika, and Victoria. The southern central area is a high, arid plateau, while the northern area is known as the Masai Steppe, a semi-arid plateau with occasional hills and mountains, including Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa, and still an active volcano (a fact recently rediscovered). Then there is the narrow coastal plain, a hot, humid strip which varies in width from 10 to 30 miles.

The United Republic of Tanzania was formed in 1964 when Tanganyika, the mainland which achieved independence in 1961, and the

island of Zanzibar agreed to unite, forming a republic. Julius Nyere, a politically active and idealistic school teacher, was elected the first prime minister and remains the prime minister today, having been reelected no less than five times, indicating his popularity among his people.

Nyere was instrumental in setting forward a form of African socialism known as ujama, which means "familyhood" in Swahili, and is

based on an agricultural commune system based on "love, sharing and work." It is similar to the better known kibbutz system in Israel. On a broader scale, ujama means a joint effort by which all Tanzanians can theoretically gain an equal share of the nation's resources. In 1973 the ruling party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) decided that all peasants had to join ujama villages, making the movement no longer voluntary.

Nyere's government has progressively nationalized private businesses, banks, and privately owned homes. They have sought aid from all countries, but, because of its strict policy of neutrality, its major financiers and aid donors are the Scandinavians and the Chinese, who built the Tazara Railway between Dar Es Salaam and Zambia.

In Seronera, the hub of Serengeti Park, there is the Seronera Wildlife Lodge, a modern, expensive tourist lodge that is generally lacking in tourists. I recommend the youth hostel, where I stayed, which was nice and roomy with showers, and, at the time I was there, it was virtually empty. I suggest buying food at the cooperative store behind the youth hostel and cooking it at a campsite outside. There is also a small defunct hotel in Seronera, and nine campsites within two miles (4 km) of Seronera.

Back in Mwanza, the fourth largest town in Tanzania, (population 34,000) there are a number of hotels in the town center, but I can't really recommend any of them. We stayed with the driver of the truck from Uganda, who shared an apartment with a friend. A huge, friendly, wonderful guy, he had us all go down to a photography shop and have our photo taken together before we left Mwanza. Seventeen kilometers (seven or eight miles) north of Mwanza is Sukuma Museum, located at Kesesa Village where there are small huts for rent and camping. This is also a hangout for Danish volunteers and a good spot to meet other travelers.

I finally did get a lift in the late afternoon with a landrover on its way to a safari camp outside the southern border of the camp. It was a couple of hours from Seronera to the southern entrance of the gate where I was left off. The driver, half Asian-Indian and half African, gave me a terse goodbye. Maybe he'd read the sign about no hitchhiking in the park. His helper, a cheerful African, gave me a bright toothy smile and a grand wave. "Take care!" he called as they drove off, "and good luck!"

"Bye!" I called, "and thanks for the ride."

There were still a few hours before sunset, and I could see that I wasn't going to get a ride any farther that day. A tall, articulate game warden at the small fortress-like ranger station asked me what I was doing and where I was going, and where I was going to stay.

"I'm on my way to Ngorongoro Crater," I told him, and said that I would camp out by the park entrance if that was O.K. with him.

"There are many wild animals," he said, "it's too dangerous."

"I have a tent," I told him, which wasn't strictly true, as I didn't have one with me at the time.

He agreed to let me camp out, and I walked up a hill by the ranger station where I got a great view of the Serengeti Plain at dusk, wide and grassy, stretching out in a sophisticated blend of browns, greens, yellows and blacks in every direction. Thorn trees dotted the savannah like chess players on a faded mahogany board. There were herds of zebras, wildebeest, gazelles, and giraffes in the distance, and even a small pride of lions lounging around the carcass of a wildebeest in the shade of a tree at the bottom of the hill. They looked satiated, so I wasn't too scared that they would mistake me for an afternoon snack. Even so, I found myself wondering, as I strolled back to the ranger station, whether tear gas was effective against a charging lion.

Back at the ranger station, I played a game of frisbee on the lawn with a young boy in the growing twilight. There were quite a few people here, I noticed, at least one family, plus a half dozen workers, a ranger and a cook.

Later I tried to light a fire behind the back of the ranger station. As it was too windy to get a good blaze going, I went into the station and asked the cook if I could borrow some hot coals to start my fire. Instead he suggested that I cook my food inside on his little charcoal grill, and the chief ranger said I could stay in his room since his roommate was gone for a week and therefore his bed was empty.

As my soup simmered on the fire in the soot-black billy can I carried with me, I chatted with the chief ranger about Tanzania.

He talked about being a ranger, and how Somali poachers would hunt in the park. "There will usually be four or five of them," he said, "each armed with a machine gun." He got out his ancient carbine rifle and showed it to me. It looked like some relic from the first world war. "All that we rangers have is a bolt action like this! My best friend was

killed by poachers! They machine-gunned a whole herd of elephants and my friend and two other rangers crept up on them to arrest them and they all were killed."

"What happened to the poachers?" I asked.

"They escaped. Always do," he lamented.

I asked him about what he thought of the government, Nyere and the economy. Nyere is often called affectionately Mwalimu, or teacher.

"Mwalimu is wonderful, but he is too idealistic and not practical enough. He does not know what is happening in the country. He thinks everyone is as idealistic as him. When ujama was started, everyone loved it, even the privileged class. They thought ujama was for the poor people in the bush, not for them. But now the privileged must also be part of ujama, they must move to the communal villages and live without their cars and other luxuries."

"Here in the bush, there do seem to be a lot of shortages of consumer goods," I said.

"The whole country is corrupt, except Mwalimu," said the ranger bitterly. "Everyone is trying to make an extra hundred shillings on the side to get ahead. The government controls the prices of everything, but the demand exceeds the supply. People will buy out a stock and then sell it again on the black market to their friends, doubling or tripling their money. This is so common, it makes me sick!"

We sat in silence for awhile. The glow of the hot coals caused red shadows to climb and dance on his face. His eyes were wide and bright; sweat dripped off his broad, black nose onto his upper lip. He was handsome and intelligent, and very sensitive to the problems of his country. After finishing a cup of tea he had made for us, we retired to our rooms.

When I awoke in the morning, he was busy making crepes. He handed me a cup of sweet, milky tea as I sat down next to him by the stove. Such a refined, loving person, I thought. Not what I had expected to find out here in the wilds of Tanzania. He was like the Boston lawyer who decided to take up fur trapping in the Yukon.

He gave me a warm, firm handshake when I bid him goodbye. Swinging my pack on my back, I began walking east down the road away from the park.

It wasn't long before a landrover came by and picked me up. It was five park employees on their way to Ngorongoro, only about fifty miles

away. I sat in the back on an old tire, crouched over and uncomfortable but glad of the lift. We passed Oldavai Gorge, where the famous Kenyan anthropologists, Dr. and Mrs. Leakey, had unearthed in 1959 a skull over one and three quarters million years old. This skull was said to belong to "Nutcracker Man," or Zinjanthropus. There is still work being done at Oldavai, a dry brown ravine with the remains of many hominids. The fellows driving the landrover weren't stopping, however, and I was content to see Oldavai from the back of the car.

The road was rough gravel with lots of potholes. We began climbing uphill after Oldavai and then came to a small, green grassy crater that was absolutely teeming with zebras and wildebeest. After another 12 km, we came to Ngorongoro Crater itself, the largest intact crater in the world. It was an active volcano some eight million years ago. Actually Ngorongoro is a caldera; the cone collapsed and slid back into the volcano leaving a crater 17 kms in diameter. With a total floor surface of 160 square kilometers, the rim of the crater where the hotels are located is 2,286 meters above sea level. It's 610 meters from the rim down to the crater floor. It's so steep, only four-wheel drive vehicles can make the trip down the narrow switch-back road into the crater.

Around the south side of the rim are a couple of nice lodges, the main one being Ngorongoro Wildlife Lodge. There are also the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge and the Ngorongoro Forest Lodge. These are nice places to quaff a beer on the crater rim at sunset, but hitchhikers probably couldn't afford to stay here. Therefore, I suggest trying the small village south of the gas station and tourist office that has some shops and a guest house or two. You can rent a small room with a bed or two very cheaply—one or two dollars a night. You can camp in this area as well, but a tent is advisable. There is also a tea shop or two where you can get a snack or a plate of rice.

It was barely noon as I sat on the terrace of the Ngorongoro Wildlife Lodge, drinking cool Kilimanjaro Lager beer.

"Excuse me," said an African gentleman, pulling up a chair and sitting at the table next to me. "Mind if I sit down next to you?"

"Not at all," said I, looking at him carefully. There was no one else on the veranda. He was dressed in a light green safari suit, corduroy shoes and carried a dark mahogany cane. He looked friendly and honest; in his mid-thirties, I guessed, his hair a bit more fluffy and longer than most city-bred Africans.

"I'm a game warden here at the park," he said. "This afternoon's been a bit slow."

"There aren't many tourists here at the moment, are there?" I replied.

"No, it's slow this season," he signaled to a waiter and ordered a beer. "Must be the war in Uganda. Most Europeans aren't that familiar with African geography, and they know that Tanzania is involved in the conflict. Where are you from, by the way?"

"Montana," I said, "in the northwestern United States."

"A nice place, I've heard. Myself, I'm from a small village near Shinyanga, southwest of Ngorongoro." He gave a small smile and added, "my father was a witch doctor."

"Really?" I sat up from my slouch and finished my beer. "Wow! A witchdoctor!"

"Right, it's no big deal. He was familiar with local herbal remedies and such cures for maladies of the tribal people. Western medicine is replacing most of these nowadays. My father passed on much of this knowledge to me as a child, hoping I would be a witch doctor too, but I became a game officer instead. I suppose," he said, "you'd like to go down into the crater."

"Of course," I responded, "I'm just looking for a lift down to the crater. Perhaps I can share the rent on a landrover for a day."

"I've got my landrover just outside," he said; "I'd be happy to give you a ride. You can pay for gas. I love going down into the crater myself."

"That sounds great! I'd love to."

"My Christian name is Thomas," said the Ranger, taking some brownish-red bark out of a worn small leather pouch and putting it in his mouth.

"My name is David," I said, "what is that stuff you're eating?"

He washed it down with a bit of beer and replied, "I don't know the English name; it's bark from a rare tree that grows in some dry parts of Tanzania. I like to take some before I go into the crater."

"May I try a little?" I asked.

"Sure, just a bit, it's kind of strong," and he took out a pinch and put it in my open palm. Popping it in my mouth, I washed it down with the last of Thomas' beer.

"Let's go," he said. I grabbed my camera and we headed out the door.

Within a few minutes we were bouncing and jouncing down the road to the edge of the crater where the road heads down to the bottom.

Over 30,000 animals live in the crater, the most dense concentration of wild animals anywhere in the world. Looking down into the crater I could see a large lake at the southern end, and there was an off-pink foam all around the edge of it. A funny feeling of tickling was happening at the salivary glands on each side of my mouth, sort of forcing my mouth open in a grin. I began feeling a little light-headed about then, twenty minutes or so after I had taken the bark. I recall asking about the odd pink foam.

"Those are flamingos!" bellowed Thomas, laughing heartily. Indeed they were. Thousands, millions of them, feeding off the algae that grows exclusively in these soda lakes of the Great Rift Valley.

At the bottom of the crater we headed for the edge of the lake, and then stopped and got out. I was dizzy with the wild vibrations of herds of zebras, wildebeest, and gazelles, plus the pink foam of flamingos that totally covered the shore of the lake.

I felt good and was grinning ridiculously. The crater rim seemed to flow and move. The entire crater was vibrating and alive with wildness; I could feel it everywhere, surging through my bones and out into the lake. The grass, flowers, and lake were a symphony of green, yellow, red and blue, playing its special time to the tune of nature.

"I feel funny, Thomas," I said, "what was that bark?"

"Don't worry," he laughed. Soon my anxiety was gone and I relaxed. We jumped back into the landrover and chased a rhino along the lake and then barreled past some elephants wallowing in a prehistoric swamp. As we passed herds of zebras and wildebeest, I watched fields of yellow flowers whizz by the car in psychedelic splendor, to be suddenly interrupted by a small spotted cerval cat which pounced upon a snake in the road. We stopped and watched it for some time and them continued on our search for a pride of lions.

It was incredible. Every blade of grass, every flower, every bird, leaped up at me in vivid vibrating color. I had the feeling that I had gone back in time two hundred million years where the ecology was intricately more wild, balanced, alive.

We stopped again on our way out of the crater. The sun had already

SOUTHERN AFRICA
LUANDA
ZAIRE
TANZANIA
ANGOLA
LUMBUMBASHI
MALAWI
NKHATA BAY
NDOLA
NKHOTA KOTA
NOVA LISBOA
KAPIRI MPOSHI
LILONGWE
MOZAMBIQUE
LUKULU
ZAMBIA
ZOMBA
LUSAKA
MOÇÂMEDES
BLANTYRE
KARIBA
VILLA ROCADES
LIVINGSTONE
ZIMBABWE
ETE
HARARE
OSHIKATI
RUNDU
QUELIMANE
KASANE
VICTORIA
QUE QUE
UMTALI
TSUMEB
MAUN
BEIRA
FT. VICTORIA
OUTJO
OTJIWARONGO
BULAWAYO
GHANZI
FRANCIS TOWN
BEIT-BRIDGE
WINDHOEK
BOTSWANA
SWAKOPMUND
GOBABIS
WALVIS BAY
PIETERSBURG
SOSSUSVLET
GABORONE
NAMIBIA
PRETORIA
LOURENÇO MARQUES
JOHANNESBURG
KEETMANSHOOP
MBABANE
NORTH
LÜDERITZ
SWAZILAND
UPINGTON
BLOEMFONTEIN
ORANJEMUND
KIMBERLY
MASERU
PIETER-MARITZBURG
LESOTHO
DURBAN
PORT ST. JOHNS
SOUTH AFRICA
EAST LONDON
CAPETOWN
PORT ELIZABETH
JEFFRIES BAY
BORDERS
ROADS
RAILROADS
MILES
KILOMETERS
0 100 200 300
0 100 200 300

gone down over the rim and it was getting dark. For one last time Thomas and I felt the vibrations of Ngorongoro. There were the voices of the evening, clouds of insects buzzing around, the chirping of crickets, the occasional snort of an animal or the call of a bird. Silently a covey of quail crossed the road in front of the landrover.

At the top of the crater a full moon was rising in the east and the sun was setting in the west. Unable to speak anymore, I watched the sky while Thomas drove back to the lodge.

After thanking him, warmly shaking his hand and giving him gas money, I went to the terrace of the lodge alone where I had been sitting some six hours before. God, how the time had flown! And how my mind was blown! I drank beer the rest of the night, but never got drunk, just staring out over the crater, watching a lightning storm that hung above the crater, but did not affect the rim; still mind-boggled by such an intense experience with the wild.

It was late when I left the lodge to walk the mile back up the lonely road between the lodge and the village where I was spending the night. After a quarter of a mile, at a dark spot by a tree I heard a noise of rustling in the bushes. There was some animal there. I paused cautiously for a moment, knowing that leopards, lions, rhinos, and water buffalo were everywhere. I could be charged if I continued, but I had to go on up the road to my village.

"Courage," I told myself, and decided to continue on up the road. One hundred yards further up there was a sudden loud crashing in the bushes beside me as if some large animal was coming down to the road. I turned and fled in terror, yelling at the top of my lungs and running faster than I have ever run before in my life.

I didn't stop until I was back at the lodge. Luckily a landrover came slowly bouncing along just then. Standing in the middle of the road, I managed to stop it, and the two Africans inside gave me a ride to the village. Safely in my bed for the night, I lay awake for the longest time thinking about this incredible day.

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I had been given a 24 hour pass token when I entered Ngorongoro Park, and was three hours over this when I left the park the next day. I got a lift in a landrover pick-up with half dozen spear-carrying,

half-naked Masai warriors and a policeman. It was about thirty miles to Lake Manyara National Park, a game park famous for its tree-climbing lions and giant herds of buffalo. On those roads it took about four hours to drive there.

There is a nice lodge on the Rift wall above the lake with a spectacular view down into the park, 300 meters below. This lodge, the Lake Manyara Hotel, is a great spot to have a beer or afternoon tea and watch game, although binoculars would be helpful. There are some telescopes on the hotel terraces.

I stayed at the small village at the turnoff to Lake Manyara Hotel. Here there are several small hotels and African restaurants. There is camping at the park entrance and also a youth hostel.

It's 128 kilometers from Lake Manyara on to Arusha, the central town of the northern highlands. You'll find movie theaters, Indian restaurants, gift shops, the works. Arusha is also probably the main tourist center in Tanzania, situated between Kilimanjaro and the game parks to the west. There is camping at the Hotel Equator, but you might want to take a bed or room for a couple of dollars at one of the cheap hotels downtown, such as the Meru Guest House, the Ruby Guest House, or other hotels along Main Street. If the border between Kenya and Tanzania is open, this is the main route to Nairobi.

Only twenty-five miles from Arusha is Moshi, easily reached by bus. Moshi is virtually at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro and in the heart of Tanzania's coffee region. There is an excellent YMCA in Moshi that has a bulletin board to check for climbing information. There are a number of cheap hotels down in the main part of town plus a very clean, friendly, and uncrowded Sikh Temple that will allow travelers to stay for several nights for about a dollar a bed.

In Arusha I had met a couple from New Zealand. Melvin was tall, dark and athletic; Sonja was of medium build, pretty with long auburn hair; it turned out that we were all staying in the same hotel. We talked at dinner that night and Mel told me, "If I came to Africa and didn't climb Kilimanjaro I'd kill myself!" Since I felt the same way, we decided we'd climb the mountain together. We set off the next day for Moshi, and within two days we were prepared to make the climb.

Climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro is well worth the effort, and it's not too difficult, so don't be discouraged by its awesome height.

The climb is basically five easy days and four nights spent in com-

fortable large Norwegian mountain huts. Carry food in the form of dried soups, powdered milk, dried fruits and meats, candy, oatmeal, cashews, peanuts and peanut butter, crackers, cookies and cans of luncheon meat, beans and fish plus a few oranges and bananas. Plan your meals carefully and take a little extra food.

The park entrance fees are pretty steep; it will cost you about $50 just in park fees to make the climb. It will cost more if you need to rent equipment from the well-stocked rental store at the park headquarters. Get to the headquarters by taking a bus from Moshi to Marangu and walking or hitching the last 5 km to the park entrance. If you don't already have some very warm clothing—a down jacket and sleeping bag or equivalent, wool socks and mittens, a sweater and long underwear, as well as boots, you can rent these at the headquarters. Rent dark goggles as well if you don't have sun glasses. A guide may be procured, but this seems unnecessary to me as the trail is well marked, and, except for the last thousand feet, which is the most difficult, a guide is totally unnecessary. There are rangers at all the huts where you'll be spending the night, and for a bit of cash, the ranger in the last hut would show you to the top if you felt you needed his help.

Remember, you will be climbing the last leg at night in order to reach the summit at sunrise; this is traditional in mountaineering around the world. You'll need flashlights, and you might want to plan your climb so that there will be a full moon.

The first day is easily done in four or five hours from the park entrance to Mandara Hut, so you can leave Moshi in the morning, have a good breakfast and spend the night at Mandara Hut.

The second day is about a five hour walk through the jungles of the lower slopes, sunlight filtering through the moss-covered trees dripping with lichen, and ferns crowding the undergrowth. Monkeys chatter and play in the trees overhead. Before you reach the second hut, you'll come out onto a kind of treeless alpine moor, open and covered with grass and moss. The second hut is Horombo Hut; it's actually a group of 10 small huts and a large A-frame lodge.

The third day is probably the most difficult; it's six hours of pretty steep climbing, though at a slow pace, to Kibo Hut, the last hut before the summit. It is important to take all three days to reach the last hut even though it could be done in one day by a healthy adult, because

of the acclimatization necessary to avoid altitude sickness. Even so, you are likely to notice slight headaches and insomnia at Kibo Hut, the highest when you spend the night there. A couple of hours from Horombo Hut, following a stream, you will come to a large, wide saddle between the two peaks of Kilimanjaro and Mawenzi. Fill your canteens and take all the extra water you can from the stream just before getting to the saddle, as there is no water at Kibo Hut. Water containers can be rented at Horombo Hut.

From the saddle, you can see Kibo Hut to the west and the majestic summit of Kilimanjaro behind it. In the thin, clean mountain air the hut looks closer than it is and it's a tiring walk at that altitude, over 15,000 feet. Firewood is also unobtainable at Kibo Hut, being situated on an alpine desert. You must carry either firewood, a stove, or sterno or else plan not to cook.

Melvin, Sonja and I had brought firewood and water with us to Kibo Hut, and made some soup. We were all tired from the day and retired early because we knew we would be getting up around one o'clock to make the final push for the summit. We all lay in bed for hours, unable to sleep.

Insomnia is one of the first signs of altitude sickness, along with loss of appetite and shortness of breath. People become more irritable at high altitudes as well. There is really no danger as long as you don't ascend to a much higher altitude and stay there for a long time. The best prevention for altitude sickness is to ascend slowly to acclimatise your body and to breathe deeply to give extra oxygen to the brain. If the sickness becomes too uncomfortable to handle, the cure is to descend to a lower altitude.

I hardly slept at all that night. I finally dozed a little, when suddenly our guide woke us. We were already packed, so we merely dressed, had a cup of tea to warm us and started out on the rocky, winding trail that zig-zagged up the final steep face.

And so it was that my New Zealand friends and I with our trusty guide climbed to the top of Kilimanjaro, about 5½ hours from Kibo Hut. It was certainly worth the trip I thought, and got up to take a photo from the icy summit as the sun rose over the plains of Kenya to the east. The sight was spectacularly beautiful, and I appreciated it even more when the shutter froze on my camera as I tried to take a picture. As the sun warmed the air slightly, we spent a good long time enjoying the view.

If you climb the peak in January, February, September or October (the best months) you can easily walk around the crater to the true summit, Uhuro (Freedom) Peak, which is about two hours farther on. There you will find a log book and you can sign in with the other heroes who have "conquered the White God."

Our fourth day was to decend from the summit back to Kibo Hut, get our packs and descend on down to Horombo Hut where we spent our last night on Kilimanjaro. The last day is a long one from Horombo back to the park entrance and Moshi.

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There was something about the forced-steam sound of train engines and the general confusion of the Moshi train station that excited me. I was taking an overnight train to Dar Es Salaam, and it was going to be a mite crowded, that was for sure. Fortunately I'd met a conductor who bought me a third class ticket so I wouldn't have to wait in line for three hours. He told me to try and get a seat in the Buffet car, as the train would be jammed.

"Vedy, vedy crowded," he said.

"I'll bet," I answered and thanked him for getting me the ticket. My mind was already flashing back to my train trip in Sudan—I knew what these trains could be like!

As I walked around the train yard, I saw a young boy selling peanuts and roasted lentils in a little flat basket. I came up behind, meaning to buy a snack from him. He suddenly turned, saw me reaching toward him and gave a horrified shriek, backing away.

"Shillingi, ngapi," (how much are those?) I asked, reaching toward him. He shrank away, absolutely horrified, his face full of terror for this white vagabond pursuing him. Did I look so bad? I wondered. I had showered and shaved this very afternoon. Some older boys next to him started laughing and one put a reassuring hand on the small boy's shoulder and obviously explained to him that I just wanted to buy some peanuts, not eat him. Just then the train came, and with a mad dash, showing all my expertise of living in India and Africa for three years, I dove through a window of the Buffet car and procured a seat. I could have gone second class and had a reserved seat, but I would have been missing half the fun.

It was a rather restless night on the train, but by mid-morning I was in Tanzania's main port, Dar Es Salaam, the "Haven of Peace." One of the prettiest ports in the world, Dar is a fairly modern, but rather dirty and run-down city. If you enter by train, you're right downtown, and the cheap hotels are just a block or two away, though they are

often full. You'll find the typical African rest houses at a dollar or two a bed, like the City Guest House or the New Dar Guest House on Chagga Street off Morogoro Road, and others down around the clock tower on Independence Avenue. One good place to stay, especially for women, is the YMCA-YWCA complex near the post office. They have

cheap, clean rooms and a nice cafeteria, but like most hotels in Dar, they are also very often full. If you make a friends with a hotel owner, he may let you sleep in the hall or on the roof for a night or two until a room opens up. Otherwise you might want to hop on a bus and get out of town to Bagamoyo, a small delightful old Arab town that was the mainland port for Zanzibar in the old days before European colonial development really got cranking. Bagamoyo is 80 km north of Dar, easily reached by bus or hitching. It has a nice beach, shady palm trees, cheap hotels and a fishing cooperative. It's possible to get dhows to Zanzibar as well.

Other places to stay in Dar are the Sihk Temple and the beach out on Bagamoyo Road, but be careful of thieves and muggers around Dar; they are plentiful. It can be somewhat dangerous at night, so don't make it a habit to wander the dark back streets of this old port city late at night.

There is a black market for currency in Tanzania and you can get two or even three times the bank rate from Indian shopkeepers around the New Market, especially in those shops dealing with tourists. Here you can change Kenyan shillings as well as U.S. dollars or British pounds cash. Indian restaurants abound in Dar—a good place for chicken and fish curries.

There are several ways to reach Zanzibar from the mainland. One is a twenty-minute flight from Dar Es Salaam which isn't too expensive, but much more adventurous and cheaper is to take a dhow from Bagamoyo or a steamer from the harbor in downtown Dar. Steamers leave every few days and a third class ticket is reasonable. I climbed aboard a rusty old tramper one night and slept on top of the third deck with the permission of the captain, who was a Norwegian working for the United Nations. By morning we were steaming into Zanzibar harbor, all green and tropical in the early morning sun.

You get stamped in and out of Zanzibar just like it was a separate country. You have to have a visa; they'll give you a one-week visa when you step off the boat and it can be extended.

Hotels are a bit more expensive than on the mainland, but food is cheap and very good. There are only a couple of hotels to stay in that are "hitchhiker class." The most popular is probably the Malindi Guest House where bed and breakfast is four or five dollars. Africa House and Victoria House are also possibilities; bargain for a weekly rate if

you plan to stay for awhile. There are lots of nice beaches in Zanzibar, a good museum, and plenty of friendly people.

Zanzibar is one of the truly idyllic, relaxing places in Africa. Full of charm and history, it was not always the peaceful place it is today. The last open slave market in the world was closed here in 1873 by the British who sought for years to destroy the East African slave trade. To combat the British anti-slave raiders, the Arabs told the captured slaves that the British were cannibals and they would be eaten if the British captured them. Therefore, when the British tried to capture a slave ship, the Arabs would set their slaves loose and let them do the fighting, as the slaves thought they were truly fighting for their lives.

Zanzibar gained independence in 1961, and the last Sultan of Zanzibar fled the country in 1964 when the Afro-Arabian conflict came to a head and 5,000 Arabs were killed in the peasant uprising; the land which the Arabs had controlled for so long was redistributed among the peasants in 3-acre plots.

Today, Zanzibar has the highest per capita income in black Africa, and keeps its currency reserves separate from the mainland. The economy is largely dependent on cloves, most of which are actually grown on the neighboring island of Pemba.

I had been resting in Zanzibar for two weeks, lounging around on beaches, wandering the wonderful twisted streets and marketplaces and drinking tea in the small tea shops. One day there was a knock on the door of my room at the Malindi Guest House; it was Kay! How wonderful to see her again! We embraced and held each other for a long time. We were, in a sense, meeting each other at our destination.

I sat with Kay down by the harbor; young kids were selling sweet roasted casava root and peanuts. Another vendor sold ice cream cones. The sun was slowly lowering and people were milling around the harbor park to watch the evening glow. What a wonderful place, Zanzibar! I thought of Livingston preparing for his last expedition to the mainland. Kay and I were preparing for ours too; I would take the train to Zambia, she would fly back to Sweden. I squeezed her hand gently; we had had a memorable time on the beaches of Zanzibar together over the past two weeks, but now it was time to move on.

Like Livingston, my steamer was leaving for the mainland shortly. Africa the unknown continent called once again. On our last day we made a final tour of the nearby beaches on rented bicycles. Kay turned to kiss me goodbye.

"Dr. Livingston, I presume?" she whispered.

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Within a few short days I was on the famous Chinese railway on its thousand mile journey to Kpiri Mposhi in Zambia. This is a two-day train ride straight through the heart of Tanzania and touching the northern tip of the Selous Game Reserve, the largest and wildest of Tanzania's many national parks.

Tanzania has many miles of railway, so rail is perhaps the easiest way to see the country. The network stretches out from Dar Es Salaam to Moshi and Arusha in the north, Dodoma, the new capital, and Kigoma in the west, and Mbeya and Zambia in the southwest. It is also possible to take sidetracks to Mwanza on Lake Victoria, or Tanga, the old German sea port on the coast near the Kenyan border. Trains are exceptionally crowded, so go early to get a seat.

Tanzania also runs a fairly extensive bus network around the country, but it is an uncomfortable way to cover long distances.

Hitchhiking on trucks around Tanzania is slow but more rewarding, and you will not have the intense crowding of the trains, since you merely stand or sit on the back of a big truck. There are very few private cars in Tanzania, but it is possible to get a ride in a landrover driven by missionaries, or tourists, espcially around the national parks.

As we neared the Zambian border I found myself talking with three Chinese technicians who were in Tanzania to inspect the railway their country had built, and to observe how the Africans were maintaining it. Not too well, from what I gathered, although it is by far the most efficient and modern train in Tanzania. Suddenly into our compartment burst a Zambian health official. "Let's see your vaccination certificate," he demanded. I showed him my yellow booklet with my cholera, small pox and yellow fever vaccination shots.

"Where is your plague shot?" he asked.

"I don't have a plague shot," I answered.

"Then you'll have to go back to Dar Es Salaam," he said. "You can't enter Zambia."

"Wha-what?" I stuttered. "You must be joking! I didn't know I needed a plague shot. Are you sure?"

"Positively! You can't enter Zambia without a plague shot." He then

showed me a United Nations brochure which stated that the plague still existed in parts of Kenya, Tanzania and Madagascar.

"I can't go back to Dar Es Salaam," I pleaded, "it's 900 miles and two days' ride back there. This is crazy. I'll get one in Lusaka" (the capital of Zambia).

"No way," he stated, and as he left, he said, "I'll talk to you in your own compartment privately."

I went to my own compartment, a first-class compartment. I had it all to myself, because a Swiss couple who had purchased all the tickets for this compartment had got off at the last stop. I had had my usual third class ticket, but they had generously invited me to share their compartment.

I sat alone wondering what to do. How frustrating! I figured I would just get off the train at the next stop and then sneak in Zambia. No way was I going to go back to Dar after coming all that way.

Suddenly the officer burst into my compartment again and said, "OK, let's change money!" He wanted to change fifty American dollars at the bank rate for Zambian kwacha, and I realized this was a scam. He would scare travelers like me and then force them into changing money with him at a terrible rate so he could make a killing on the black market. I figured him out fast, but played along with him and changed what few Tanzanian shillings I had into Zambian kwacha, but no dollars.

"OK," he said, and before he turned to go, he asked, "by the way, do you have any English magazines or paperback books—for my kids, you know."

"No, sorry," I told him, "not a one," which was true. For a conman, he was reasonably likable, even though I'd been a nervous wreck for half an hour. Later I talked with a Dutch girl on the train to whom he had told the same story. She had changed a hundred dollars with him at the bank rate.

"That's African socialism for you," she said.

I just smiled and peeled a mango. "Dr. Livingston," I thought, "never had to deal with customs or health officials." I wondered what he would think of the white man's civilization in Africa today.

9 · ZAMBIA AND MALAWI: THE SMOKE THAT THUNDERS

One must examine the four directions to see if one is following the right path. When one indulges in non-virtuous activity, it is like a poison and eventually he must pay the consequences.

LECTURE AT TIBETAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE, DHARAMSALA, INDIA

I **ARRIVED AT** Kpiri Mposhi, the end of the Tazara-Chinese railway, and within the hour I was off on a bus to Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. It was a short ride on a smooth paved road, only 150 km from the train station.

Within two hours of my arrival in Lusaka I was arrested.

In most African countries it is rare to be arrested looking for a hotel, but Zambia was under a lot of strain at the time, and apparently the muscles I'd gained from toting a fifty or sixty pound backpack, plus my short cropped hair and beardless face, made me seem a suspicious character.

The trouble started because I didn't know much about accommodations in Lusaka, and had decided to try the Silk Temple which some-

one had told me offered clean accommodation at a reasonable cost. I left my pack at a Seventh Day Adventist church and took a bus into a fashionable suburb of Lusaka, where the temple was located. After a bit of walking around a neighborhood of nice, modern western-style houses, I finally found the temple which had closed down a few months before. "Oh well," I thought, and started to walk back toward the main street to catch a bus back to the center of town.

A security guard caught up with me and began talking to me, very curious about what I was doing there. It was getting late and I was in a hurry to make some sleeping arrangements, so I answered his questions briefly and kept up my fast pace through the quiet neighborhood. The security guard left me and then reappeared with a policeman a minute or so later.

The policeman escorted me to a small police post and called the Lusaka police headquarters, referring to me as the "suspect." It was slowly dawning on me that I had done something wrong and was being apprehended for questioning. As the questioning continued, I began to realize that they thought I might be a Rhodesian soldier, here to bomb a house, assassinate some nationalist African leader, or maybe simply on my way back to Rhodesia. (There were tensions between Zambia and Rhodesia because the Rhodesian civil war for independence was at its height.)

After about fifteen minutes (it seemed longer), a squad car pulled up. Four black policemen and, to my astonishment, one white woman got out.

"In the car," said one rather burly fellow dressed like the others in a green military police uniform. He sandwiched me in the back seat between another large policeman. By now I was thoroughly apprehensive. In the car, the well-muscled officer on my right asked all the questions, but, unfortunately, I had the wrong answers.

I didn't sound like an American, he said, looking through my documents. My English sounded as if it were a second language for me; he decided I was a Jew, seeing that my student card was issued in Jerusalem, and therefore I was probably an Israeli spy—I was too young to have so much money on me, a thousand dollars or so in travelers checks—I was already heading for the firing squad, so he offered me my last cigarette. "I don't smoke, thank you," I told him.

At the police station, I was told to wait in a chair in the desk sargeant's office until Detective Somebody could come.

"Detective who?" I asked. "Who's that?"

"Be quiet and sit down," someone said.

"I want to call the American Embassy," I responded, more calmly than I felt, "and let them know I'm here." But no one answered, and no one seemed to care.

"I'll be alright," I told myself. "After all, I've done nothing wrong." Then I remembered a small bit of African bongo (marijuana) in my shirt pocket which a teenager had given me in Kpiri Mposhi as we waited for the bus to Lusaka. It was a small ball wrapped up in a piece of brown paper. "Oh cripes!" I cringed, "maybe this IS the firing squad!" However, there was a moment when everyone left the room for a few seconds. I quickly took the little ball and emptied into my shoe, hoping it would look like foot grunge if they searched me carefully.

Meanwhile, I explained to several officers my story of how I got there, what I was doing and where I was going. "Just coming down from Tanzania for a visit," I told them.

Detective Somebody or other was too busy to see me, so they told two policemen to take me to my luggage and search it. We piled in the car and went downtown to the church, where they let me out.

"I'll show you my luggage," I said. They were nice guys, and I was as friendly and helpful as I could be, naturally.

"No, that's OK," they said and drove off. "Goodbye, and enjoy your stay in Zambia!"

"I will!" I called back, waving goodbye. Gee, I thought, picking the grunge out of my shoe, I've hardly been in Zambia a day and I'm already making lots of friends.

I did finally find a place to stay in Lusaka, the country's largest city with a population of almost half a million. Despite its being the capital of Zambia, there's not much to do or see here; it's a place with no defined center. Most of the shops, banks, airline offices, etc. are strung out along the mile long Cairo Road which is best considered the main thoroughfare in Lusaka. Out the southern direction of Cairo Road is Kafue Road, and five kms down this is Makeny Campsite, probably the best place for you to stay in Lusaka. There are toilets, showers and a watchman, and it's quite safe. He will charge you a kwacha or two (roughly $1 or $2) a night to stay; it's nice to have a tent, but not necessary. I slept there several times without one; all I had was my

sleeping bag. The one night it rained, I grabbed my sleeping bag and backpack, went into the men's room and slept there. The campsite is located near the Italian restaurant, and it's an easy hitch to the downtown area, or not too far to walk.

There are other places to stay, though hotels in Lusaka are pretty expensive. You could try the YMCA-YWCA or the guest houses at the University of Zambia and Evelyn Home College. There is the Barn Motel, out near the airport, which is as cheap as any hotel and conveniently located if you're flying in or out of the country. You can also sleep at the airport for one night if you have an early flight to catch, as I did.

Another possible place to stay is The Yielding Tree Farm, a small farm run by an English couple that likes to take boarders. It is 10km out of Lusaka, and you should call them first. Their old number was 715212.

Restaurants are fairly expensive in Zambia. I found myself usually grabbing a hotdog or hamburger at a snack bar or cafe, of which there are a great many in Lusaka. Otherwise I'd buy bread and cheese at the supermarkets and make sandwiches.

Lusaka is a new, modern city of cement buildings and empty supermarkets. Zambia has had some economic difficulties in past years, and often suffers shortages of one type or another. Sometimes their shortages can be inconvenient, like having no bath soap. When I was there the first time, I could not find a bar of soap anywhere! Out of desperation I eventually stole a small used bar from a hotel bathroom. Shortages can also be of bread or cornmeal, the staple diet, and you will often see huge lines several blocks long of people waiting to receive a ration of cornmeal. The meal is mixed with boiling water and served as a sort of gruel with gravy. This is the main staple of eastern and southern Africans.

While standing at the bar having a beer at the Lusaka Hotel one afternoon, I struck up a conversation with a white Zambian businessman who was down from the Copper Belt in the north, where the mines dig out Zambia's major foreign exchange commodity, copper.

"This country's going down the tube!" said the white Zambian plaintively, lifting his beer up to his unshaven face. He wore a brown safari suit and suede safari boots—standard African colonial dress. "Everybody knows it, especially the young people. We need a change of government, everything's going to hell."

"What do you do here in Zambia?" I asked him.

"Don't get me wrong, I love Zambia," he said. "I was born here, up in Ndola in the Copper Belt. I have a little business manufacturing soap up there. Make a killing. Make a killing!"

This was interesting to me as I was still looking for a bar of soap at the time. "Hey, that's great," I said, "could I buy a bar of soap from you?"

"Oh, sorry kid," he snorted, "it's all detergents that I make, laundry soap and stuff like that. Yeah, I know it's tough to get a bar of soap around here. I don't know what to tell ya. Boy, if I could get a truck load of hand soap into the country, I'd make a killing—a killing, I tell ya." He finished his beer and ordered another.

"This government is crazy," he went on. "Take for example a bottle of Coca Cola. The government controls the price of Coca Cola at seventeen cents a bottle. The best hotel in Lusaka has to sell it for seventeen cents. The hotel has to buy it for sixteen cents—sixteen cents! They can only make one cent on a bottle! If the bartender drops one and breaks it, they've got to sell sixteen more bottles of Coke just to break even. It's insane!"

It did seem pretty silly; African socialism could get out of hand occasionally; it often sacrificed practicality, so the economy suffered. I glanced around the bar full of upperclass blacks in business suits having a cocktail after work. The Lusaka Hotel is the main hotel on Cairo Road, though it's pretty old and run down. Nobody seemed to be paying much attention to our conversation, which was a relief, as it is often advisable not to discuss politics too loudly in African countries.

"Yeah, the hotel here doesn't serve Coca Cola," he went on, "couldn't afford it. A couple of months ago the Zambian government sent some ministers down to South Africa with three million kwacha to buy supplies for the stores and supermarkets up here, and you know what they did? They blew the first two million at a gambling casino in Swaziland and spent the last million on booze and wool blankets. God! No soap or cheese or bread in the stores, but lots of whiskey, gin and wool blankets! It's crazy, but still I love my country. I'm a humanist."

A humanist, according to my dictionary, is someone who studies literature or history or one who studies human nature. The president of Zambia, Kenneth Kanada, was very fond of saying that he was a

humanist, and this became sort of the unofficial slogan of Zambia. Like someone, white or black, might say to you "I'm not a racist, I'm a humanist!"

Indeed, Zambia seemed like a pretty well integrated society, where people were judged on their abilities and productivity, whether they were white or black. Blacks could be just as corrupt and inefficient and intolerant as whites, while whites could be as unmotivated and impractical as blacks. This was human nature; the idea was "we all have to shape up and pull together and build our country." The official motto of Zambia is "One Zambia, one nation," reflecting their aspiration to build a nonracial society divided by neither race, color nor tribe.

Zambia's namesake, the Zambesi River, spills over the country's main tourist attraction, Victoria Falls, in the southwest corner of the country and flows along its southern border. Definitely one shouldn't miss the falls when in Zambia; Luangwa Game Park in northeast Zambia, near Lake Tanzanika, is also worth seeing. This is one of the few parks in Africa where you can walk among the animals in the company of armed guards. Game is prolific and the "big five"—elephants, giraffes, lions, rhinos and hippos—are all readily seen. There are six lodges, but only one caters to tourists in the sense of being a hotel. At the others you are required to bring your food. You can also camp in the park. The best time of the year to go is September when the grasses are short, enabling visitors to spot the animals clearly.

Most of Zambia is a vast, thinly populated, tree-clad plateau in the heart of Africa. Completely landlocked, it depends on its rail links with the surrounding countries. Zambia is the third largest producer of copper in the world, and when copper prices fell drastically in the seventies, Zambia's economy took a plunge. This and the boycott of white-ruled Rhodesia, which severed Zambia's traditional rail link for exporting copper, sent the country on the road to economic ruin. The Tazara Railway on which I had just traveled was meant to open up Zambia's copper to Indian Ocean ports, but proved inadequate.

Meanwhile Zambia was actively supporting one faction of the Zimbabwe-Rhodesian war. (Zimbabwe is the name the rebels used for Rhodesia; during the civil war reporters referred to the country as Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in order to be even-handed; the country is now called Zimbabwe.) The Zambian-based wing of the Patriotic Front

was headed by Joshua Nkomo, whose sister just happened to be married to the president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda. Nkomo's fighters were Soviet-backed, trained and supplied, while his opposition in the Patriotic Front, Robert Mugabe (who eventually became prime minister) was based in Tanzania and Mozambique and was backed by the Chinese Zambia, at the time of my travels there, was full of Zim-

babwe-Rhodesian nationalist guerilla camps. The white Rhodesian government forces would occasionally drive up to these camps and blow them up. Once they even blew up Joshua Nkomo's house in Lusaka. The Zambians were therefore a bit jumpy, and if someone thought you were a Rhodesian soldier, he was apt to shoot first and ask questions later. As I came to understand the political situation better, I realized gratefully that I was lucky the security guard had called the police that first day, rather than shooting me on the spot, for I have no doubt he suspected me of being a Rhodesian mercenary.

Preferring to forget all this political turmoil, I just acted my usual carefree self, and hitched around Zambia as I pleased—and, as usual, got into trouble. But before that, I met some delightful people.

Stepping into a crowded African beerhall one night in Lusaka, I casually glanced around, then worked my way up to the crowded bar to order a beer.

"One beer, please," I said.

Suddenly to my left I heard the strangest American accent yet.

"Wa'ye ya'll from? America?"

I turned and saw a big smile stretched across a round black face topped with short curly black hair; gold rim glasses didn't hide the merriment in his eyes.

"Yeah," I said, "just got here in Zambia."

"Way'el, Ah'm glad to meet ya'll," he said, coming over to stand next to me. I was all smiles by this time too. "How neat," I thought, "Some black American guy traveling around Africa!" Far out, you don't meet them every day—hardly at all in fact.

"Where are you from in America?" I said, wetting my whistle with a beer.

"Way'el, Ah'm not from America. Ah'm from Liberia."

"Liberia!" I shouted above the hoot and holler in the bar, "hey, you sound just like an American with a southern accent!"

"My ancestors came from America," he said. "Ah've been there once mahself, t'see relatives in Virginia. Ah live in Monrovia mahself."

I had to put down my beer and stare at my feet, I was grinning so hard. So, I finally met a Liberian. Far out! Liberia was settled in the 1820's by freed American slaves who returned to West Africa to colonize it. Its constitution, institutions and flag are modeled after the United States and its currency is actually American dollars—worn and tatty, I've heard. Liberia's only political party, the rather antiquated

True Whig Party, ran the country until a few years ago when a military coup placed a sargeant in power.

My beerhall companion was named John. He told me a little about Liberia and how he was in Zambia as a student, his strong Liberian accent in full display. It was so wild hearing this Southern Plantation accent in a Zambian beerhall that I couldn't help grinning the whole time he was talking. Before I left, he gave me a great quote:

> *The darkest thing about Africa*
> *is America's ignorance of it.*
>
> REV. JAMES J. ROBINSON

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It took me one full day to hitchhike from Lusaka south to Livingston, the main town near Victoria Falls. Several short rides got me well into the country, along a two-lane paved road that just sort of melted away at the sides into the bush. Eventually I got a ride with a cheerful little black truck driver and his semi-trailer full of beer; he was transporting it to Livingston. The truck ambled along slow but steady—a comfortable ride. Toward late afternoon the driver picked up two young African girls hitching into Livingston. Teenagers, I would have said, and pretty too. They had on nice neat cotton dresses and their hair was pleated into rows that lay flat on their heads. They didn't speak English, but, like all Africans it seemed, they smiled a lot, which was good enough communication for me.

Just before sunset, the driver stopped the truck in the middle of the forest. We all piled out to help him collect wood for his evening fire in Livingston, then he opened up the back of the truck. Climbing over the beer cases, all returnable bottles naturally, he pulled out eight beers, each from a different case.

We piled back in front and roared off toward Livingston, an hour away. I was trying to figure out how to open the beers as the driver passed them out to us. Then one of the cute young girls gently took it from my hand and quickly opened it with her teeth, using her mouth as you would a bottle opener on a pop machine. I winced as she handed me mine and watched her open the rest the same way.

Out the window to my right was a great orange African sun setting through the leafless, dry-season trees. It hung on the horizon like a great ball, and I found I could look directly at it. It seemed to be following the truck as we drove through the barren forest. In that parched, dry land the warm beer tasted as good as any I'd ever had.

Livingston was once the capital of Northern Rhodesia (the capital was moved to Lusaka in 1935). The old Government House is now a national monument, and the Zambia National Museum is here, renowned for its collection of Livingston's possessions and "early man" artifacts. The falls are a few miles out of town and are truly spectacular. They are rightly considered one of the great natural wonders of the world. At the height of the floods, from March to May, more than five million liters of water pour over the falls every *second*, causing a deafening roar and a cloud of vapor to rise over 300 feet that can be seen 50 km away. Hence the falls received its African name, Mosi-o-Tunya, "The Smoke That Thunders."

Around the falls, the recently completed Knife Edge Bridge takes you right through the spray to a rock tower on an island downstream opposite the eastern cataract. The bridge is slippery, but it's an exciting trip through the mist and thunder—looking down into the surging cauldron below is a dizzying experience. From the island you get a good view of the main falls and Rainbow Falls. There is always a rainbow on the east corner of the falls when the sun is out.

One can take luxury cruises along the river sipping drinks and watching hippos, crocodiles and the wide variety of birds that play around the Zambesi. The Livingston Game Park, just outside of town, contains over 400 animals, if you're not already game-parked out by now. The Maramba Cultural Center has recreated an African village which preserves the crafts and customs of age-old Africa. In the evening traditional dances are performed for tourists in the village center.

I stayed at the Rainbow Hotel, just a few hundred meters from the falls. They have inexpensive bungalows to rent and they allow camping for a kwacha or two a night. Located right on the Zambesi, it had a nice little restaurant outdoors for sunset dining or tea time. Just down the road is the Mosi-O-Tunya Intercontinental Hotel—it's a good place to socialize. Other places to camp or rent a room around the falls are the Zambesi Motel and the Rest Camp, where you can camp or rent little African huts.

It was my first day in Livingston; I went down to the falls and spent the morning admiring its incredible beauty. Towards noon, I walked out on the main road looking for an ancient baobab tree reported to have a platform high up in its branches. It was known as the Lookout Tree.

By coincidence, I met a beautiful young Zambian maiden who happened to be on her way into Livingston to visit her sister. We were both walking down the road; I asked her if she knew where the Lookout Tree was. She did, and took me there—a solitary baobab spreading out like an upside-down ginseng root, its thick, puffy branches stretching out to the sky.

We ended up at the hotel restaurant drinking beer in the hot afternoon and talking of ourselves. She was only seventeen, a dancer at the cultural center, and she had this evening off. She also had a boyfriend, a teacher from Germany who had gone home. "I like Americans," she told me.

When tromping around Africa, hot, dusty, unshaven, caked with bits of the local savannah, one longed intensely for two things: a tall, ice cold beer, and a warm generous lady, in whose arms one could recount everything one had seen and done, not just in the forgotten deserts of Africa and Arabia, but throughout life. The first is a lot easier to come by, although it may take a week or two of walking and hitching to find a restaurant with a refrigerator and beer.

The second was a sight more difficult. The African traveler has to rely on his luck and determination, knowing that sooner or later he will fairly collapse in some strange woman's arms and blab out his life story like an idiot.

It was my great good fortune that day to end up back at my bungalow beside the Zambesi with lithe and lissome Ann of the warm and generous heart.

Later in the afternoon, as we lay on my bed, and I had finished telling her how the soldier had attacked us at the volcanoes in Uganda, there was a sharp knock on the bungalow door. I opened it a crack, and to my dismay saw a policeman standing there.

"Get your clothes, documents and luggage and come down to the police station. We want to talk to you. Bring the girl too." He was carrying a rifle and had a very serious look on his face.

I forced a smile and said, "sure." My whole body tensed in an

all-over physical grimace that was the opposite reaction to my smile. I was in trouble, and worse yet, I was afraid Ann might be in trouble as well.

We dressed and the policeman escorted us both to a small police station with one room and a desk near the falls. After searching my luggage very carefully, they found what they considered to be some incriminating evidence; a large Sudanese dagger, an American tear gas pen (given me by an American friend), and some souvenirs from my raid on Idi Amin's house in Uganda. These included some documents I had picked up off the floor of his house with the official seals of Uganda, and CONFIDENTIAL or TOP SECRET marked across the top of them, a Christmas card from Idi Amin to the Libyan Ambassador to Uganda, and, of course, my twenty or so "Idi Amin Dada, King of Africa" t-shirts, which had been looted from Amin's garage.

I faced the officer sitting opposite me at his desk with all these items piled in front of him. The other policeman who had brought us in was standing behind me with his rifle. There was Ann sitting in the corner, totally embarrassed and undoubtedly thinking, "How did I get mixed up in this?"

In all seriousness and with a certain tone of final gravity in his voice, the officer looked me in the eyes and said, "So you're a spy for Idi Amin!"

I was so tense and this remark was so absurd that I burst out laughing at the Kafkaesque incongruity of it all. They weren't laughing, however.

I explained to them that I had only been in Uganda at the end of the war and had "looted" Idi Amin's house. These were just some of the souvenirs. "Say no more," said the officer, dialing the police headquarters in Livingston. "It will only be worse for you."

"Oh come on," I said, "what would a spy for Idi Amin be doing with twenty Idi Amin t-shirts? Passing them out to other agents? This Christmas card isn't to me, I've never even met Idi Amin! And everyone in America carries one of these tear gas pens!"

No matter what I said, he was convinced I was a spy. While we were waiting for a squad car to come and pick up Ann and me to take us to headquarters in Livingston, I made friends with them as best I could. My main concern was for Ann; I didn't want her to get into any trouble.

The officer was still going very carefully through my passport pouch and as he took out my student card from its little plastic sleeve, a small pill dropped out.

"What's this?" he said, picking it up and eyeing it carefully.

"Oh no!" I thought. I had completely forgotten that I had it; it was some organic, compressed mescaline given to me by a friend from California when I was in India—over a year ago! "It's a . . ." I said, thinking hard, "a pill for diarrhea. We tourists sometimes get the runs out here in Africa."

"Oh," he said. "I've been kind of sick the last few days . . ."

"It's the only one I have left," I countered, and prayed. If he took that pill, I'd spend the rest of my life in Zambia. . . .

"Oh, alright," he said. "I was going to stop by the pharmacy this evening anyway."

"Let's go to the restaurant over at the Rainbow Lodge and have a beer while we're waiting for the squad car," I suggested. He said OK and sent the other policeman with us.

We sat by the Zambesi drinking beer. I bought one for the officer, whose rifle was trained on me all the time, and we watched the sunset over the Zambesi. On the other side of the river was Rhodesia. The thought occurred to me that I might escape by swimming across. If I could swim across, and the policeman missed me with his rifle, if I wasn't swept over the falls which were only a hundred meters downstream, and if the crocodiles didn't get me, I'd be safe. . . .

"Don't try and swim across," said the policeman, reading my mind. "I'd hate to have to shoot you."

"Never even occurred to me," I said finishing my beer. "Would you like another one?"

"No thanks. You seem like a nice guy," he said, "too bad you have to go to prison."

"I'm just an American tourist. Really," I told him confidently.

Eventually the squad car came to take Ann and me to Livingston. Two policemen dressed in light gray, neatly pressed uniform shorts escorted us into the gray landrover pick-up. Ann rode in back, and I was put up front between the two policemen. I told them my story hoping to make friends with them, for they seemed like nice guys.

In the Livingston headquarters, the police, half a dozen of them, spread all the evidence on a table to be viewed.

"Wow! Look at these!" they exclaimed, picking up the t-shirts. "Are you selling these?" they asked hopefully. They browsed through the documents, knife, tear gas pen, etc., and when I told them the story of how I had picked up this stuff, they were fascinated.

Meanwhile, a rather suave, handsome and quite intelligent detective took Ann into a back room to question her. I talked with the police for a while and then wrote in my journal. After more than an hour had gone by, I became worried about Ann. In my mind I imagined the most brutal things that could be happening, she could be being raped, it had happened before. . . .

To my relief Ann came out, and I could see by her composure that she was alright. The handsome detective now beckoned to me and I followed him into a plain room with white walls, empty except for a table and two chairs. He had a big lamp to shine in my face, but it was turned away toward the wall. The detective was dressed in plain clothes—a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a shoulder holster and pistol, gold watch, black dress pants. He sat across the desk from me and looked at me with a calm, intelligent face. We talked for an hour or so. He wanted to know how I met Ann, where I got all these things, what I was doing, where I was going. He was a bright, competent young man in his early thirties.

After I had told him the whole story, I said, "So you see, I'm not a spy for Idi Amin, the Rhodesians, America, or anybody, I'm just an American student coming from Tanzania."

"Yes, I believe you," he said quietly. "But there's one more thing before I let you go. . . ." He paused, trying to find the words. "Um, could I have a t-shirt?"

"Of course," I grinned at him, and he smiled back. I gave him a t-shirt and got ready to go, packing up all my stuff. By now it was after ten o'clock. The detective ordered a taxi to take me back to the Rainbow Hotel, but wouldn't allow Ann to go back with me. I'd already caused enough trouble for one day, so I left without arguing. The taxi driver, however, after letting off two other passengers, told me it would cost me about $10.00 to go out to the Rainbow Hotel.

Thoroughly incensed at this, I told him to take me back to the police station, where I blew up; I told them I had been there for seven hours, that I hadn't had any dinner, and the restaurants were now closed, and on top of that they wanted me to pay for the long ride back to my hotel. That was rude, I informed them.

They agreed with me and said I could take the next available squad car, and just then the two fellows who had brought me there in the first place pulled up.

"Take this man back to the Rainbow," the desk sargeant told them.

"Glad to," said the driver as I got in. "Good to see you again, kid. Where's your girlfriend?"

"I don't know," I told them. "They made me leave without her."

"We just saw her walking down the street toward the falls." As we drove out of town we saw her walking along the side of the road. The police stopped the car and she and I got in the back seat and I gave her a hug. "What happened?"

"The detective wanted me to go back with him," she said. "They tried to get me to tell them that you were a Rhodesian spy. Oh dear. . . ."

It was cool and crisp in the back of the landrover going out to the falls. I still had a lot of stories to tell Ann. . . .

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I hitched back to Lusaka a few days later. Hitchhiking is good in Zambia. There are plenty of private cars, commercial trucks and good roads to boot. You can enter Botswana by the Kazungula Ferry less than 100 miles from Livingston. Zambia also has a good network of trains going to Zimbabwe, Zaire, Tanzania and Angola. If you prefer to travel by rail it is one day to Livingston from Lusaka, or a day north to the Copper Belt towns of Kitwe and Ndola.

All over Zambia there are government rest houses and various sites or trailer parks where you can camp and shower. There are also cheap hotels in the business sections of the northern industrial towns which are full of miners and technicians from all over Africa and the world at large.

If there is no hotel, rest house or camping area in the town you happen to end up in, then go to the police station, mission school or church, or even a government school. You will be able to sleep for a night on the floor, porch or in the yard, if you ask first.

Zambia is fairly expensive unless you are changing your money in the plentiful black market found in all the major towns. You can get triple or quadruple the bank rate. Be cautious changing your cash

dollars, however. Try the batik sellers on the sidewalk near the Aeroflot office on Cairo Road in Lusaka, or certain European and Indian shop keepers and businessmen. Be discreet! This is also a good place to sell your camera or other electronic equipment, as they are in short supply; you should be able to strike a profitable deal.

I decided to hitchhike from Lusaka to Chipata in eastern Zambia and on to Malawi, a long thin country along Lake Malawi. The day before I was going to leave I met a young political student from West Berlin, a girl named Bubbles. I invited her to hitch with me to Malawi.

"You're the first other traveler I've met since I flew to Zambia from Berlin," she said. "I thought I'd meet lots of other Europeans."

"Yeah, not too many travelers in Zambia these days; I suppose it's because of the war in Zimbabwe."

"All the whites should leave Africa," she blurted out hotly.

Suddenly, a black who was listening to us talk from the next table at the ice cream parlor said, "And all the blacks should leave America!"

I laughed so hard, I spilled my bowl of ice cream. Bubbles didn't find this very funny, however.

We decided to hitch out the next day along the road toward Chipata in eastern Zambia. This road was said to be dangerous as there are many Zimbabwe guerilla training camps along it. We were warned, but for some reason I thought I'd gotten into enough trouble for one country. I was wrong.

We started out about midday, got a few short lifts out of town past the airport, and then an Englishman from India gave us a long lift, thirty miles or so, to a small truckstop. We got out and stood by the side of the road, waiting for a car or truck to come by.

Bubbles, short curly hair, cute button nose and terribly pale skin, sat down on our packs. "We'll never get a ride!" she said.

"Come on," I replied, "we've only been waiting fifteen minutes." A large truck with semi-trailer pulled up at the small bar next to a filling station. I explained how we were looking for a ride toward Chipata and followed him into the beerhall. We stepped up to a long wooden well-worn mahogany bar and each ordered a beer. "Do you think you can give us a ride?" I asked. Suddenly someone tapped my shoulder, and, as I turned around, I became aware that I was the only white in a bar absolutely packed with blacks—that was no surprise, but now I realized that the crowded room had fallen into dead silence.

I found myself staring directly into the face of the biggest, meanest, most scarred and ugly black guy this side of the Congo gold mines. I could smell a strong scent of alcohol on his breath as he said gruffly in pretty good English, "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

Now there are times when a person's life is in great danger and his health and well-being may depend on his quick and rational thinking. There are other times when he should panic and run screaming in whatever direction his feet happen to be pointed at the time. I decided this was not one of those times.

I glanced to my left at the driver, as if to say "What's going on?" The driver looked away and it dawned on me that I was face to face with a Zimbabwe guerilla fighter. Not only was he a guerilla, but I now realized that the whole room was full of guerillas and this bar was right next to a Zanla training camp. A powerful shiver shot straight up my spine to the cortex, electrifying my brain. Adrenalin surged into my stomach and I broke out into a cold sweat. There were probably half a dozen or more guns pointed at me right now and I was about to start leaking red stuff all over the cigarette-strewn floor if I didn't come up with some good answers mighty fast.

"I'm an American tourist and I'm coming from Tanzania and I'm going to Malawi and I've never been to Rhodesia and please don't shoot me mister—here's my passport." In a jiffy I produced my trusty little Bicentennial passport and handed it to him. Fortunately I always kept it in a little pouch on my belt and it was handy to get at.

"See, I just came two weeks ago from Tanzania," I said nervously, pointing to a Zambian entrance stamp on my passport.

The bar was deadly silent; you could have heard a safety being flicked off in the gas station next door. The big, burly guerilla looked over my passport for a minute, flipping through some of the pages. I knew that it didn't really mean a whole lot to him but it might serve to squeeze me out of this alive.

Looking me right in the eye he handed the passport back to me. "You're OK," he said calmly, "but if you were from Africa. . . ." meaning from South Africa or Zimbabwe I supposed—he made a quick slice across his throat with his right forefinger to indicate that I would be pushing up African violets in a bog in the back of the saloon.

I fairly melted back onto the mahogany bar. The truck driver reached over to support me. "Here, finish your beer," he said.

With one big slobbery gulp I downed the last of my Mosi-O-Tunya Lager and made a bee-line for the door.

Back across the road Bubbles said I looked like I'd just seen a ghost.

"I did," I told her, "my own!"

Fortunately it wasn't long after that that we were on our way to Chipata, cuddling up in the back of a little Japanese pick-up driven by two rather strange African Jehovah's Witnesses. The sun was coloring the dry African forest in flames of orange, yellow and red. This was the end of one adventure, many more were sure to come.

Zambia wasn't so bad, I thought, but it had a long way to go before it was a tourist's paradise.

There are nice government rest houses all along the Lusaka-Malawi road, especially in Kachalola and Chipata. If they are full or too expensive for your taste, try their lawns. I found the Kachalola to Chipata road to be especially good hitchhiking although traffic is fairly light.

If you're heading farther north, up to Tanzania or Lake Tanganyika, you can stay in the Kpiri Mposhi Inn in Kpiri Mposhi, and in Mbala, on the south shore of Lake Tanganyika, there is the Grasshopper Inn.

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Those moments in the Zimbabwe guerilla bar stayed with me for quite awhile. I resolved that I'd have to straighten out my act and stop precipitating all these stressful situations in my life. Why was I attracting these things in my environment? I couldn't spend the rest of my hitchhiking trip in Africa in police stations and on the edge of danger.

"Perhaps you should stay out of the war zones," said Bubbles, her brown curly hair flapping in the wind as we got a lift on the back of a truck into Malawi from Chipata.

I suppose this is just one of the dangers of traveling in Africa; after all, one third of the world is actually at war in some form or another, and Africa is especially ripe for a major war and the settling of old scores. It soon becomes apparent to the traveler that borders are quite haphazard and arbitrary. If the British had a fort here, the French a fort there and the Portuguese a fort somewhere else, well, voila, you've got three African countries.

Entire African nations were divided by the colonial powers and remain divided today. But no matter what political philosophers say, Africans and other people all over the world are tribally, not nationally, oriented. It's a mess, and won't be sorted out without some bloodshed.

The month spent in Malawi was like an idyllic vacation. Time was spent hitchhiking down lazy country roads, sleeping on beaches and drinking Malawi-brewed Tuborg beer in friendly little Malawi pubs.

It had taken two days to get from Lusaka to the Malawi border a few miles east of Chipata, although you can take a bus between Chipata and Lusaka that only takes a day.

Bubbles and I hitched to Lilongwe, the new capital of Malawi, that same day and went on the next day to Salima on the shores of Lake Malawi.

Soaring mountains and the long inland sea of Lake Malawi have justly earned Malawi the nickname "The Switzerland of Africa." The resemblance stops at the scenery, however, for Malawi is statistically one of the poorest and most underdeveloped countries in Africa, having very few natural resources to support a large population. At any one time, 300,000 Malawians are working as immigrant laborers in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Malawi is one of the few African countries that feeds itself, however, and has some very rich farmland. Its exports, naturally, are agricultural: tobacco, tea, peanuts, corn and cotton. Tourism has also become a major industry in recent years, largely due to Malawi's continued relations with South Africa and its picturesque 360-mile-long lake which has nice beaches and is one of the few fresh water lakes in Africa that is "officially" free of bilharzia, a blood fluke that infects the waters of Africa, making swimming hazardous to your health.

Malawians are an especially cheerful friendly people. As Bubbles and I sat in the back of an army truck driven by several handsome soldiers, I couldn't help noticing the three pretty and winsome bank tellers who were also hitchhiking to Salima for the weekend. Ample and full of bright smiles, they immediately attracted me to Malawi and her people.

"We're going to have fun in Malawi!" I told Bubbles.

"I'll keep my eye on you," she returned, jabbing me in the ribs.

Malawi is surprisingly inexpensive, and hotels or guest houses are cheap and a very good value for the money. All over Malawi are

government rest houses and city council rest houses. City council rest houses are less expensive, but simpler. Often you won't have a choice, but main towns such as Lilongwe have both. All rest houses have shared bathrooms and cooking facilities, and are usually reasonably clean.

A double room is five or six dollars, and camping is allowed, often for free or for a dollar to camp in the yard. A tent is handy, but not necessary. In Lilongwe I'd recommend the government rest house, and in Salina, a town largely washed away by floods a few years back, you can camp at the Grand Beach Hotel, or take a room.

Farther up the lake, about a day's hitching, is Nkhotakota, a town already old when David Livingston arrived in 1859. Sitting beneath a giant elm tree in the spacious center of Nkotakota, having a shave, I decided that Nkotakota had not changed at all since 1859. Green tree-lined dirt roads stretched along the lake, lined with small wooden huts, shops and businesses. Dugout canoes were pulled up on the shore. (They would be gone in the early mornings when the fishermen paddled out onto the lake with their nets.) Women walked by, ever-smiling in their bright African kanga skirts, carrying a basket of fish on their heads, shaking their hefty derrieres like the fish that flopped in their baskets.

And here under the gigantic elm, which I privately named Livingston's tree, was a chair, a plastic washbasin and a sign resting against the bottom of the chair, hand-painted by some budding young English student. It said "barber."

Standing by the chair was an elderly man. His black curly hair had long ago turned grey. Naturally he was clean-shaven; he was also barefoot and wore a piece of blue cotton cloth wrapped around his waist; his skinny chest was bare except for a few grey hairs. He stared wistfully off over the lake, all shiny and silver-bright in the midday sun. Even though I had already shaved that morning, I knew I had to, just had to, have a shave by this old African under Livingston's tree.

It was sheer pleasure looking out at the lake and eyeing the women passing by as he lathered my face with a real English boar bristle brush. "Did Livingston get shaved under this tree when he was here?" I wondered out loud.

A Scottish missionary and explorer, David Livingston was a fine person in my estimate. His travels around Malawi (which he named

Nyasaland) brought the British attention to the horrors of the Arab slave trade in East Africa. His writings were instrumental in helping to halt the slave trade by the 1890's.

His revulsion to the Arab slave trade prompted Livingston to establish Scottish missions and he promoted business groups to develop legitimate commerce as a substitute for the trade in human beings, a practice perpetuated by African chiefs and warring tribes as well as by the Arab slave traders. This allowed Britain's foothold into the country and by 1891 Nyasaland was made a British protectorate.

There are several small hotels to stay at while in Nkotakota, aside from the rest house, which is a little way out of town to the north along the lake. There are the cheap African hotels such as the Pick and Pay Restaurant and Resthouse (I dare you to say that three times fast). These little family restaurants can serve up a delicious platter of fried fish and potatoes, but give them plenty of time.

Hitchhiking along the coast is good, but slow. Vehicles are rare, but eventually you'll get a ride. The road is paved, and small villages dot the way. A day's hitching north of Nkotakota is Nkata Bay, a popular spot in northern Malawi, with an especially nice beach for swimming and sunbathing. There is a government rest house here, as well as a small African hotel closer to the beach known as the Heart Hotel. Both places have restaurants and bars, serving beer whenever it is available, which is usually when the Malawi Lake Steamer, the Illala II, makes it into port. Fried eggs, fish and potatoes are the specialty at the Heart Hotel.

If you decide to go further north in Malawi (you can cross directly into Tanzania if you like, or cut west back into Zambia) you'll be passing through the two main towns of the inland north, Muzuzu and Livingstonia, both of which have nice rest houses.

Transportation, food, gasoline, people and beer all get scarcer the farther north you go in Malawi; therefore, hitching will be a lot slower. However, another way to go north is by the steamer, Illala II, which makes a seven day run from the southern end of the lake to the northern and back every week, leaving Monkey Bay in the South every Friday. The Illala II is sort of Malawi's mini-liner with three classes, including a very comfortable and expensive cabin class which is popular with tourists on holiday in Malawi. You could take the liner to Chitimba or Karonga in the north or, like me, head back south via Likoma Island, Nkotakota, and Chipoka to Monkey Bay.

Second and third class are exactly the same in my book, crowded as any boat could possibly be, so I would recommend buying a third class ticket and save yourself a few bucks. It is also possible for you, being a tourist and not a native Malawian, to sleep on the bow of the ship, an area sort of reserved for the crew.

Boarding the ship at night at Nkata Bay, I was once again traveling alone. Bubbles was hitchhiking up to Tanzania to meet a friend and I was heading south.

Sitting up on the top deck, talking with an English chap who had hitched down from Tanzania to visit his brother in southern Malawi, we were both slightly startled when a tall, slender Malawi soldier plopped down beside us and began to set up his wireless radio. He was slightly drunk and began telling us how much he loved his country and that Mozambique, the Marxist country across the lake, was wanting to invade Malawi.

"We have to keep our eye on them all the time," he said, patting me affectionately on the back. "They want our country."

"Why do they want your country?" asked the English fellow.

"Because of our women—very beautiful women in Malawi." He was friendly and eager to talk with us. I figured he was only joking about the women, but it is true that Malawians think that Mozambique would like to invade their country, though it seems unlikely to me, since Mozambique has plenty of problems of its own without invading Malawi. Still, nearly every African country indoctrinates its citizens with ideas that the country has some specific enemies in order to foster nationalism and a sense of national unity. Often the threat is imaginary, but it is a useful tool for controlling a populace. In actuality, said my English friend on the boat, every country does this, making use of its enemies, real or unreal, to mold the popular opinion of the citizens.

"Here, listen to this," the Malawi soldier said, handing me the headphones to his radio set. "Radio Mozambique!"

I listened for awhile and heard someone speaking French; it sounded like Radio Madagascar to me. In Mozambique they would probably be speaking Portuguese. I handed the headset to the English fellow and the soldier handed me a can of corned beef and a can of mackerel in tomato sauce, which we all shared, and before you knew it we had a little party going!

"This is what hitchhiking is all about," I thought, "meeting new friends and sharing their lives." It was really a joy to be listening to that radio and eating mackerel under the starry Malawian sky while the wave gently crashed against the hull of the mini-liner.

We were at Likoma Island by noon the next day. Here there is a rest house and a mission station established in 1885. It lies a few miles off shore from Mozambique and has a cathedral rivaling Westminster Abbey in size. At the end of the trip, two nights later, we arrived in Monkey Bay, where there is a Rest House and the Monkey Bay Hotel, which, though expensive for a hitchhiker's budget, is in a superb location and has excellent fried fish.

Camping is excellent here too, especially at Cape McClear on the western side of the peninsula that sticks out into Lake Malawi. There is a rest house here, and the Golden Sands Holiday Camp, where you can rent a room cheaply or camp if you prefer. Sunsets are particularly nice here, as they are over the lake, and snorkling is also good—lots of bright colored fish!

It is a day's ride (hitching or by bus) to Zomba, the old capital, or Blantyre, the largest city and business center of Malawi. Both have city council rest houses, and you can camp. The Blantyre Rest House is between the railway station and the long distance bus station about three quarters of a mile from the center of town. The campsite is nice, and, if it's raining, you can sleep in one of the huge covered rooms where thirty or forty people are sleeping on the floor. There are some inexpensive Indian and African restaurants, plus supermarkets where goods imported from South Africa are for sale fairly cheap. While in Blantyre, I usually cooked my own food and sometimes ate at the rest house cafeteria.

If you're into hiking, you may enjoy a couple of days backpacking on Mulanje Plateau. On top, it's exfoliated granite domes, knife-edged ridges and peaks shaped by the wind, and there are rushing streams irrigating luxuriant alpine meadows blooming with colorful flowers and dense ghostly forests thick with lichen and moss.

Malawi is definitely quality hitchhiking; its roads are good, and transportation is available. Malawi also has a good bus network which is relatively cheap and uncrowded, but it operates mainly between the central towns in the south. There are trains from Blantyre to Mozambique (though Mozambique is generally closed to tourists), and up to

Salima on the lake, but again, trains are slow and about three times as expensive as the buses. It would be cheaper and faster to hitchhike.

It is also worth mentioning that Malawi is a very conservative, western oriented country. Men's hair should be well groomed, not too shaggy, and women should not wear short skirts, as the government, at least, is very puritanical. Malawi is generally speaking inexpensive and has a free currency market, to a degree. There is a small black market, but it's hardly more than the bank rate. If you're looking for it, you'll find it the main towns—Blantyre, Zomba, and Lilongwe, among Asian and European shopkeepers and businessmen. It's hardly worth it though, unless you're going to change large amounts of currency. Malawi currency, the kwacha, is worthless outside the country, but readily exchanged on the Zambian border.

After a short but pleasant stay in Blantyre, I took the bus back to Lilongwe, spent a night in the rest house and hitchhiked back toward the Zambian border. I was on my way to southern Africa: Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa herself, awaited.

10 · ZIMBABWE: SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

If a man had but sense to see
Each time Death brushed his elbow
He would recognize himself to be but a Pilgrim
Traveling between clashing armies.

BEDDOES, *DEATH'S JEST BOOK*

I **GRIPPED THE STRAPS** of my backpack tighter as I started across the border into Zimbabwe, then called, officially, Rhodesia; on top of everything else, I'd heard that there was some good hitching there and that's what I liked most. In those days, the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe was closed, so I entered Botswana first in order to get into Zimbabwe. Later, on another trip to Zimbabwe, I entered across the magnificent bridge over Victoria Falls from Zambia, the ideal entry point and a good view of the falls. Lake Kariba on the main Salisbury-Harare and Lusaka road is another good point to cross between Zambia and Zimbabwe.

I was interested in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia for a number of reasons. I've always had a healthy distrust of politicians; as Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." I don't see myself joining any political extreme, so being the Zen Cowboy that I am, I resolved to experience this country with an open mind and with as few preconceptions as possible. I also admit that a country involved in a civil war piqued my curiosity as I would probably never have a better chance of witnessing the birth throes of a nation. The conflict

was reaching a crescendo, and both sides had said they were willing to negotiate.

I had slept out in a trailer park at the border the first night and the next morning caught a ride all the way to Harare, called Salisbury in those days. In most areas of Zimbabwe at the time, people traveled in armed convoys, their passenger vehicles interspersed among "escort cars" which were usually Mazda pickups with a rotating machine gun manned by a helmeted soldier. Often several other soldiers with their automatic rifles sat in back with the machine gunner and his Browning 50 caliber machine gun. There were usually three such vehicles in a typical convoy, one placed at the rear, one center, and one in front.

It was only about a seven-hour-straight drive to Salisbury. Fortunately my lift was going straight through, in convoy, and we made great time. The couple who had given me a ride, a dentist and his wife, gave me their address and told me to visit them at their comfortable suburban home, "and take a dip in their pool." They let me off at the Salisbury Youth Hostel, a large, rambling old wood frame building on the northwest side of the city.

I fished through my passport pouch for my Egyptian youth hostel card while a bald, elderly European waited patiently behind the counter.

This was no ordinary youth hostel full of friendly, fresh-faced Canadian girls with braces on their teeth. A sign at the reception desk said, "No machine guns, pistols or explosives in the dormitories." No one paid much attention to that sign, however; the men's dormitory was a miniature arsenal. Almost everyone had a locker full of grenades, cartridges, pistols, and the occasional automatic rifle. The Salisbury hostel was really an old residence turned into a hostel; one large room in the back served as a men's dormitory with eight bunk beds. A smaller room was used for a girl's dorm; a kitchen and a reading room completed the accommodations. An elderly retired couple managed the hostel, living in the rooms at the front of the house. They had lived in Zimbabwe all their lives and had made their living farming north of Salisbury. A rather sickly couple, we dorm residents rarely saw either of them except once a week when the old man would come around and collect the rent, which was one Rhodesian dollar a day.

Once called Southern Rhodesia, Zimbabwe is an amazing country with a great deal to offer the traveler. A grassy, landlocked plateau with good mineral, manufacturing, and agricultural industries, Zimbabwe has one of the highest standards of living in Africa, and for the whites, it had what has been called the highest material standard of living in the world. It was not uncommon for a saleman or garage mechanic to have an olympic-sized swimming pool in his villa-sized house. All made by the sweat of blacks, of course, but the standard of living and education was far higher than in any other African country; with independence the economy is expected to decline as the government socializes more and whites continue to leave the country, mostly to South Africa. Civil War and tribalism among the different African groups in the country is also expected to take its toll in Zimbabwe, but if Zimbabwe can get it together, it has the most promise of any African state.

Zimbabwe was first opened to settlers in 1888 after David Livingston discovered Victoria Falls in 1855. Cecil Rhodes, a British financier, negotiated certain mineral rights for the British South African Company, and this eventually paved the way for white settlers in Northern and Southern "Rhodesia."

In 1953 Britain established an economic community involving Nyasaland (now Malawi), Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). This was dissolved in 1963 and Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were given independence.

Britain wanted Southern Rhodesia to give the African population more representation, but the white government resisted. Eventually Southern Rhodesia made a "Unilateral Declaration of Independence" (UDI), and broke away from Britain in 1965. In an effort to force Rhodesia to its terms, Britain had sanctions placed on the country and the government declared illegal by the United Nations. A long and difficult guerilla war followed, with several black nationalist guerilla groups fighting a war of terrorism and harrassment against the regime of Ian Smith, the white prime minister.

The economic sanctions placed on Rhodesia stimulated the economy to such a degree that the country attained a surprizing selfsufficiency and manufacturing capability, its imports coming from South Africa, the only nation not to comply with the United Nations call for economic sanctions. Rhodesia, the Colony in Rebellion, was cast a drift by itself in the world, its only friend South Africa, who shipped out the country's exports of tobacco and minerals.

The civil war reached its peak in 1979, one year after three moderate black leaders had agreed to be in an election which would give black majority rule, but guarantee the whites certain rights. Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo, two opposing Nationalist leaders who often shot at each other as much as at the Government Security Forces, called the election a sham, and refused to participate, rather intensifying their own war against the government. It was just at this time that I entered Zimbabwe, as the new government, headed by the African clergyman Bishop Muzorewa, was negotiating with the Patriotic Front, the alliance between Mugabe's Chinese-backed and Nkomo's Russian-backed guerillas.

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All sorts of travelers were hanging out at the hostels, mostly young males from English speaking industrial countries, and a few other Europeans. They had come to find adventure and Action, with a capital "A", or as one fellow who showed up one day at the youth hostel from North Carolina said, "to kill somebody, white or black, I don't care." I was a bit aghast at the casualness of this statement. I certainly wasn't there to kill anyone. Like most of us, he was in his mid-twenties, youthful in appearance, and gave the impression that

he could take care of himself. Still there was a certain innocence (or was it naivety) in his actions.

Typically there were about 15 of us staying at the hostel, including five girls who came from Australia, New Zealand, and Britain. We'd sit around the hostel and drink beer, cook meals and discuss the war or local and global politics, Africa in general, and swap traveler stories. There were plenty of things to do in Salisbury, though most of them centered around drinking beer. We'd go to movies or parties or to a disco or out to a farm for a weekend, invited by a newly-made friend who had stayed at the hostel when he came into town.

One night a German fellow, named Otto, who was staying at the hostel came back about 2 a.m. in a state of shock. He kept saying over and over, "I don't believe it. He shot him right in the head! I don't believe it!" Eventually he calmed down enough to tell us what had happened. It seems he had been sitting in a bar downtown with a black friend. The bar was essentially for blacks and there was only one other white man in the bar besides our friend Otto. Suddenly an African burst into the bar and shot the other white man, who happened to be sitting at the table next to Otto, point blank in the head. Otto figured he was next and dove in a panic under the table. But the African wasn't after Otto or other whites. It seems the other white man had been fooling around with the African's girl friend and the murder was the result of jealousy and not racism.

Incidents of this sort happen all the time as weapons and explosives are very easy to obtain. There were other incidents of hand grenades being tossed into bars or fights starting in the toilets which ended in full scale shoot-em-ups. Oddly, these fights were almost never racial in nature; they were more an expression of the frustration of a country at war.

During the day it was nice to walk through the city of Salisbury, which is very spacious and attractive. During the months of September and October the many jacaranda trees are in full bloom—violet flowers cover the trees and color the streets as they drop their petals to the ground. The result is a rainbow city of purple trees and streets and parks glowing with pink, red, blue, and white flowers in bloom. There are many parks and gardens all over the city as well as a number of beer gardens and sidewalk cafes to lounge in. In the center of town is a shopping mall with several streets closed off to allow leisurely shopping by foot.

The Rhodes National Gallery exhibits local and overseas art while the Queen Victoria Museum is mostly devoted to natural history. The nightlife in Harare-Salisbury is pretty wild, with some crazy clubs and discos to cruise at night. The Estoril Club, downtown, has a nice multiracial feel and is well-known as a pickup spot for foreigners. The Elizabeth Hotel also has a pretty wild night club, mostly African.

Hotels in general are pretty expensive, but there are some cheap hotels on the south side of the downtown, such as the Elizabeth Hotel and others around it. A room would be from five to ten dollars a night. There is a youth hostel and a YMCA to the northwest of the downtown; both are in the phone book. Ask travelers at the youth hostel about boarding houses nearby that take on travelers on a weekly or monthly basis. Otherwise you could camp in a trailer park somewhere on the outskirts of the city, though at 600,000 people, it's a pretty big place and it's nice to be centrally located. The hostel is the best value at only one Zimbabwe dollar a bunk.

One night I returned to the hostel very late after drinking in town. I dozed for a bit and then had to get up about 4 o'clock and relieve myself. As I lay back in my lower bunk, just about to fall asleep again, I heard the door open and caught the rays of a flashlight scanning the room. Hmmm, the night watchman possibly? The door started to close, then he saw me looking at him and slowly the door opened again and the flashlight shot around the room. I was sleeping in the lower bunk closest to the door; I lay in my bunk and watched him warily.

"I kill you," he said softly; it was the voice of an African. "Give me your money." I could see a long slender black thing in his hand about the size of a rifle. "I kill you," he insisted again.

"Jeez!" I thought, but kept my mouth shut. On the assumption that discretion is the better part of valor, I started carefully slipping out of bed and lay on the floor on the opposite side away from the door.

Suddenly someone sat up in the back of the room. "Who's there; what do you want?" he said.

"Who said that?" stammered the thief, shining his flashlight toward the back of the room.

"He's a burglar," I warned from under my bed, "and he's got a gun!" My pack was sitting right by the door and my clothes were on top of it. The intruder grabbed my pants and some shirts from my pack and grabbed someone else's clothes from the top bunk and backed out swiftly, closing the door behind him.

I jumped up from under the bed, held the door closed in case he tried to return and flicked on the light. The other fellow who was awake, a Vietnam vet from Wisconsin, leaped out of his top bunk and grabbed an iron rod that was leaning on the far wall. A few other guys went for their lockers which covered the whole southern wall and grabbed some pistols. When they heard what happened they said, "Why didn't you grab his gun?" "I would have filled him full of lead, could have had a great shot from my bunk."

Someone called the police, who made a quick and fruitless investigation. Since the thief had taken my best shirts and my only pair of pants, I was left without any clothes. In the morning I borrowed a pair of shorts and walked downtown to buy some pants.

As an old African farmer had said to me a week earlier, "life in the big city can be dangerous."

One afternoon I was sitting on the terrace of the Terrescane Hotel having a beer when I noticed that the thin, balding man sitting next to me was reading *Soldier of Fortune*, an American magazine published in Boulder, Colorado, for "professional adventurers". He had apparently been drinking all day and was quite drunk. He was wearing a t-shirt picturing a lot of people running in panic with the words "Lookout the Rhodesians are coming!" underneath it. This was a popular t-shirt in Zimbabwe at the time.

"Buy you a beer?" he suddenly asked, when he saw me looking at him.

"Sure," I said, and moved to join him. He was looking at a blow gun ad in the magazine. He let me leaf through the magazine and I saw articles on "Southern Africa and Guerilla Wars," army training and lots of grim advertisements featuring tough-looking, bearded brutes in camouflage gear lounging around with automatic rifles on their hips. In a grisly sort of way the magazine was funny, though it was obviously meant to appeal to people who dreamt of militaristic adventures.

Rhodesia was often accused of hiring "mercenaries", though the government denied this steadfastly, mostly on the grounds that they didn't pay enough to hire real mercenaries but had a regular army salary which didn't amount to a whole lot. Most mercenaries are paid quite a bit, anywhere from five hundred to three thousand dollars a month or more, depending on their expertise and the job. Looting and

bank robbing is a preoccupation with "mercs"; in the Congo during the sixties, "Mad Mike" Hoare, mercenary leader during the civil war, would put armed guards on the banks as soon as they entered a town, to keep his own men from blowing open the vault and robbing it.

Another famous "merc" was Rolf Steiner, a man who liked "cleanliness, beer, violence and little else," who got his first taste of danger as a Hitler youth skirmishing in German's last ditch defense against the advancing U.S. army. After the Germans surrendered, he enlisted in the French Foreign Legion and adopted their slogan as his own, "Long live death, long live war!" Steiner was a colonel in the Biafran Army during the Nigerian civil war in 1968.

"Glory, hell, I fight for money," Steiner once said. Some mercenaries in Nigeria received four thousand dollars a month, plus looting. Mercenaries are said to "be looking for that strange 'something extra' in life" and find it for a few months or years living close to violent death, high on their own adrenalin.

As one merc said, "The smell of cordite (plastic explosives) is like perfume to me. I miss the sweat of jungle battles, the rat-a-tat of automatic weapons fire—and the prospect of knocking over a fat bank." Magazines like *Soldier of Fortune* would have us believe that this is the good life.

My drinking companion was in a sorry state, but we talked intermittently between beers (we traded off rounds for the rest of the afternoon) and browsing through the magazine. He was of unusual parentage; he had a British-Rhodesian father and an American Indian mother. Apparently they had met in the U.S. during World War II. He was in the Rhodesian Special Forces, a group that lived in the bush with the "terrs" (a slang word for terrorists). After he had described to me the horrible death of a buddy of his, he lamented the eventual end of the war.

"I don't know what I'll do. This war is my life. I love it. It's not the principle, it's the excitement."

"What will you do after the war?" I asked.

"I don't know, find another one somewhere, I guess."

After we mulled that over, we returned to the magazine. There were some t-shirts offered on the back page: "BE A MAN AMONG MEN ** RHODESIAN ARMY FORCES." A large logo featuring a death's head wearing a beret was centered on the page. Underneath

it was the slogan "LIVING BY CHANCE, LOVING BY CHOICE, KILLING BY PROFESSION." I wondered if any of my friends at the hostel had been lured to this country by *Soldier of Fortune* ads.

Drinking beer is the main recreation in Zimbabwe, and just about everyone goes at it with gusto. We'd either go out to a pub or just buy a couple of bottles and sit around the hostel. One day while quaffing a few beers around the kitchen table, a young Englishman, neat and clean-cut, came in. He looked like he'd just stepped out of a military academy. He was hailed in a friendly fashion by several of the guys at the hostel who knew him. His name was Mark and he had come to Zimbabwe, like so many of us, to experience a real war. He was now a captain in the Guard Force, a minor division of the army used to react to terrorist activity in farm areas. Primarily he went out on daily patrol with his small troop to police the farm areas in his district. Mark had a beer with us and then invited us up to his camp for the weekend. This was a fairly accepted way of recruiting people to join the army.

His base was an abandoned farmhouse surrounded by barbed wire with trenches inside the fence in case there should be an attack at the camp. There were about twenty men in his unit, all of whom were black except himself and a West German sargeant. Three of us "hostelers" went on tour with him, and we were all a bit nervous. We sat in the back of an open armored troop carrier, with the sargeant and the black privates. As we drove out of the camp everyone cocked his Belgian "Fabrique National" automatic rifle and buckled his seat belt. Seat belts were always used because one of the greatest dangers on patrol was the threat of hitting a mine. The floor of the troop carrier was mine-proof with solid steel plating, but there was still the possibility of a spinal compression from the shock of the explosion—the seat belt tended to lessen the shock. Another danger was that the engine could be blown right out of the hood and land in the back of the truck, a prospect that didn't thrill too many of us. The greatest danger of all was that a shoulder rocket fired at us would hit the truck. These rockets or bazookas could devastate the entire truck, even with armoring, and kill us all. For this reason the troop carriers, as well as most armored vehicles, had metal shields and angled panels which were designed to deflect the rockets. With these thoughts in mind, we rolled out on patrol.

Fortunately, that day like most days was uneventful. As we made

our rounds to the farms down the country roads in our area, I couldn't help thinking about the black soldiers sitting with me in the back. They were draftees, conscripted into the army and forced to serve in the government troops. Probably they were neutral in the civil war, merely hoping the fighting would stop so they could pursue their normal work, get married or go back to school. Perhaps all they really cared about was their next leave to Salisbury so they could whoop it up. At any rate, it was interesting that the great majority of Ian Smith's army was black. Of course, Bishop Muzorewa had been elected prime minister in elections run by Smith, but he was often thought of as a mere puppet of the white government by the foreign press. Still, it didn't seem to bother too many Africans. Many African nationalists actually stopped fighting at that time.

That evening I was just starting to feel safe as we guests and the two white officers sat around the farmhouse while all the black privates were in a separate bunkhouse about twenty yards away. A barbwire fence separated us from the "enemy." Time to relax and have a beer. Mark told us how he thought maybe his own men had tried to kill him a few nights before as he sat at the dinner table. Suddenly the whole window next to where he was sitting had been blown out by a loud explosion; glass showered the room and narrowly missed him. Fortunately the curtains were kept closed while he ate and it was impossible for the bomber to tell where he had been sitting. Assuming some of his own men had tried to kill him by firing at him through the window, he had all the troops assemble with their rifles and he personally sniffed the barrel of each one to see which had been fired, but none had been fired, apparently, as there was no smell of barrel powder.

The next morning a houseboy was cleaning up the room and found fragments of a "frag" grenade on the floor. Someone inside the camp had placed a grenade outside his window and detonated it, knowing that he would be having dinner at that time.

Hell, I thought, I not only had to worry about the guerilla forces, but I had to worry about the Government Security Forces as well. Feeling a bit uneasy, we all slept in the same room that night in our sleeping bags; I decided to sleep just beneath the window as it seemed the safest place in the room. As I dozed off into a fitful sleep, I remembered another t-shirt I'd seen in a bar in Salisbury worn by a black soldier: "AIRBORNE: DEATH FROM ABOVE."

Eventually the dangers of war in Zimbabwe became a matter of everyday living. Talk of bombs, rockets, land mines, death and destruction became commonplace chit chat. When riding a convoy, you stopped scrunching down in your seat and tensing your rectum. When walking around a farm with a friend, you no longer kept your finger on the trigger of your everpresent rifle. I'd even grab my pack and check out of the hostel and just go hitchhiking for a couple of days.

The people of Zimbabwe are essentially very open and friendly; it's fun to meet up with the different types that pick you up on the road—black, white, Asian, tourist, conservative, liberal, they all had their story to tell. Once while hitchhiking from Salisbury to Bulawayo I got what was perhaps my most interesting ride in Zimbabwe.

Standing on the road with my pack outside of some small town, I tried my skill at flagging passing cars. Eventually one stopped; it was a small Mazda pickup truck. I threw my pack in the back and got in the passenger's seat.

The driver was African, and a very interesting fellow. Once a guerilla fighter for one of the lesser known "liberation" groups, he had lived in the bush for more than ten years. When the first elections were held the year before, he and his comrades had come out of the cold, so to speak, and been integrated with the government troops. He was now a colonel in the Zimbabwe-Rhodesian army. We talked for quite a while about what it was like being a guerilla in the bush.

"We lived out in the bush most of the time. Hardly had any food. We'd just have a little nibble on some dried meat or a little fruit. It was pretty tough. And you know," he said, "we didn't hate the whites, we just wanted fair representation. We weren't like those other terrorists. We only attacked government troops, ambushing a convoy or shelling a police station. We never went in for this random violence stuff, killing women or children or even white farmers. Really we need the whites; it would ruin our country if they all left. They have the knowledge, education and drive that we need. They live here too, we should all be brothers."

Just then he reached forward to the ashtray and said, "You know, we also used a lot of this stuff in the bush—do you smoke dagga?" He opened the ashtray and I saw it was crammed full of marijuana. Dagga is the word for marijuana in southern Africa, although it is called bango in the central African countries.

"Did you smoke this a lot in the bush?" I said as he started to roll some dagga into a piece of brown paper.

"Hell yes, all the time. We could never have held out so long if we didn't get stoned all the time. When you're hungry and thirsty it gives you strength. If you smoke this before some action, you're afraid of nothing—makes you very brave," he grinned at me.

"You mean you would smoke this before you'd attack a convoy or something?" I asked him.

"Always."

"Do guerillas smoke dagga before a contact with the enemy?"

"Oh yeah. Everyone smokes. We may not have food, but we always have a good supply of dagga." He lit the cigarette and we happily shared it for a bit. I had to laugh at what he'd told me, and I realized it made perfect sense. Once while visiting a farm north of Salisbury we had heard on the inter-farm intercom that a farmer had been ambushed on his way home the night before and had been fired on for four or five minutes by seven or eight guerillas with automatic weapons and not one bullet had hit his car! I laughed now as I realized why—they were stoned out of their everloving minds! The thought of a war being carried on by a bunch of stoned guerillas really tickled me; what astonished me even more as I thought about it, was that it was a moderately successful guerilla campaign at that. I imagine this is not the first time a war has been waged by a lot of stoned-out revolutionaries; it probably won't be the last.

"What would happen if we were suddenly stopped by guerillas along this road?" I asked him after I'd stopped laughing. He stopped the car and got out. He was a tall man and powerfully built. His hair was cut short, leaving just enough tight curl to stick a comb in the top of his hair and carry it there, as many Africans did. He had a kind face, but I was a bit worried at his abrupt manner of stopping. We both got out of the truck and he flipped the seat forward. Reaching behind his seat he pulled out a G-3, the standard NATO issue automatic rifle, a common weapon among Zimbabwe government troops. I braced myself for a mad dash into the bush.

"Don't be afraid," he smiled. "You see I always carry my G-3 with me wherever I go. I just wanted you to know that we're safe. Besides, all the guys out there know me. I'd love to run across a few of them right now," he said as we got back in the truck. "I'd tell them to give

us their guns and join us. We'd give them all good positions in the army. They're my friends really. Hell," he reminisced as he lit another joint, "those were some wild days out there in the bush, but I'm glad to be back in civilization; I've got a wife and kids now!" We came to an army check point, a road block where cars were getting a cursory checkover. Our car was full of smoke and my new friend asked me to hide all the dagga. I did this by merely closing the ashtray. He drove up to the check point with our windows rolled up, and the white soldier at the roadblock, obviously recognizing my friend, waved him through. "You see," he said, "everyone knows me."

At this point we picked up another hitchhiker, a young white soldier who was going up to the next town. He also recognized my friend and saluted him. Our new rider was blond and youthful, probably just out of high school. He was on his way to join his unit and wasn't too thrilled about it. We all talked for a while; there was a real feeling of camaraderie and hope. I sat between them, one a seasoned black guerilla warrior and the other young, white and just beginning to see his future. They were working together for a new country they both could have a share in. As we rolled down the endless African highway, a glowing African sunset cast a rosy aura and I felt a sense of wonder that I should chance to be here and watch this nation's beginning.

Bulawayo is the main city in western Zimbabwe and the second largest city, after Salisbury. It's a good place to base yourself for trips to Cecil Rhodes' grave in a nice, forested area to the south of the city. Wankie National Park, which contains one of the highest concentrations of animals in Africa, is also on the way to Victoria Falls and the small town of Victoria, which is mainly for tourists. It is a small town with Zimbabwe's most spectacular attraction, and several gambling casinos. The hotels that these are located in are somewhat above a hitchhiker rating, at $30 to $40 a night. Your best bet would be to camp out at the nice campsite behind the Tourist Information Office. They have showers and a washroom that you could sleep in it if were raining and you didn't have a tent. There is also a nice river cruise, called the "booze cruise" as it includes all the beer or cocktails you can drink while they cruise the Zambesi at sunset. You're liable to see a few hippopotami and crocodiles as well as a nice sunset.

You'll have to hitch the day there and back to Victoria from Bulawayo, unless you're going on to Zambia. There are several inexpensive places

to stay in Bulawayo. The youth hostel is a good choice, clean and cheap at a dollar a night. Located nearby is the New Waverly Hotel and a few other cheap hotels where a room would only cost five or six dollars a night. The New Waverly is a good place to go out for the evening. There are a number of nightclubs in Bulawayo, the New Waverly being the most crazy.

I had met an English traveler at the youth hostel in Bulawayo, a large and spacious home converted into a hostel, which could hold some forty or more people, almost twice as many as the Salisbury Hostel, which was usually full. We were the only two staying at the Bulawayo Hostel. He was of medium height and handsome, with a thick, brown mustache and glasses. He was married and his wife was still in Britain. Like most people, he had come to Zimbabwe looking for adventure, and had come prepared with a Browning semi-automatic pistol which he brought with him from England. Walking the streets was a gas, it was like a western movie, walking down the street with a Texas Ranger bent on keeping law and order.

"Can't understand, mate, how you could come to this country without a gun. I'm surprised you're still alive!" he said, watching the shadows in an alley as we passed by.

"It's not that dangerous," I told him, "I've been here almost a month, and haven't been shot at yet."

"Don't worry," he said, "you'll get lucky." It was the earnest desire of many people here to get into a fire fight with "the enemy", the nebulous "them" out in the bush. It was just a thrill to carry guns and believe your life was in danger. Life could be so dull in Liverpool or Cleveland; this was where the Action was. But where was it? Why weren't they trying to kill us? We were white, weren't we?

"Let's go on into the dance hall here at the New Waverly," I suggested as we rounded the corner from the youth hostel. We had to check his Browning as we entered the hotel; a big black bouncer was at each door and frisked everyone as they went in, taking any potential weapons off them and handing them to the hat check girl behind him. This was very common in the black bars where fights and killing were most common. Those bars that catered mostly to whites, and there was no official segregation, didn't usually find it necessary to frisk the customers. Still, there were killings all the time.

After grabbing a cold Castle beer at the bar, we wandered over to

the main dance hall. Walking through the two bars in the front, it seemed like it was mostly older English men and younger African girls with great bodies. The women found the older white men good providers and well-mannered, and where else could an overweight clerk in his late fifties find a nubile twenty year old to marry?

The main dance hall was an absolute circus, totally packed to the brim with Africans jumping up and down to the rhythmic beat of a native "beat band."

"This is great!" I shouted over the music, as we stood in the back and watched people dance. On stage was a cute little black singer belting out some familiar rock and roll song from the early seventies, shaking her breasts and bottom in time with the music. Nearly the entire crowd of about a hundred people were dancing with a fervor rarely seen in white bars anywhere.

"They sure do have rhythm, don't they?" said the Brit. Just then the music stopped, and the singer made her way through the crowd right up to the two of us.

"Hi!" she said with a big white smile.

"Howdy," I said.

"You are a super singer, dear!" said the Englishman.

"Tanks. My name's Anita. Want to buy me a drink?"

"Sure," we said, and then sat with her on the stage and chit chatted for a while, until the band started to play again. Anita, the Englishman, a friend of Anita's and I then danced for awhile. Between songs the Englishman suddenly took a look around the dance hall. It was packed with a hundred and fifty or more tall, sweating Africans. We were the only whites in the entire hall, and had been all night.

His hand suddenly went, involuntarily I suppose, to his hip, but his gun wasn't there. He looked at me with a slight expression of anxiety. "This would be a bloody bad time for a race riot!" he said, and we both had a good laugh.

* *

From Bulawayo I hitched back along the highway to Salisbury, which is a day, and spent another few days at the youth hostel there. Meanwhile the country officially changed its name from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. An Australian friend of mine at the hostel then began calling the whites, affectionately, Zim-rods, which somehow seemed to categorize them very well, although I can't say why.

I decided to hitch over to the eastern part of the country on the Mozambique border, the main town being Umtali. It is only a hundred and fifty miles or so from Salisbury and can be easily hitched in an

afternoon or morning. I caught the morning convoy out, which made things a lot easier. Hitchhiking is good all over the country. It has good roads, plenty of vehicles and people of all walks of life who will gladly give a lift and talk your ear off for awhile, if it's to lament over how bad they've treated the blacks, or to tell you that they hate the Americans, or the English, or what it was like being a black terrorist out in the bush. Depending on the internal situation, convoys may well be used again in Zimbabwe. In such case it is easy to get lifts between cities. Just show up at the convoy assembly point, usually just outside of town, and walk down the convoy asking for a ride. Ask the local police for when and where the convoys start.

There are also some public buses in the outlying county regions, but they are crowded and slower than hitching, usually. There are also a number of trains, connecting Zimbabwe with all its neighbors, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, and two rail links to its nearest ports in Mozambique. Zimbabwe would be a good place to apply for a visa to get into Mozambique. All trains have passenger cars, but the service is rather expensive unless you go third class.

Umtali is a small town of less than 10,000 and is famous for its breathtaking mountains, which are good for hiking, trout fishing and nature study. Down Umtali's main street are several cheap African hotels and a cheap boarding house where I stayed for two days behind the Cecil Hotel for two dollars a night. Ask the Chamber of Commerce-Tourist Information here for good information on where to stay and what to do while in the east.

On my way back to Botswana I stopped in Fort Victoria, the major town in the center of Zimbabwe and close to the country's other popular tourist spot, Zimbabwe Ruins. No one really knows when or by whom these tall stone structures and towers were built, but it is possible that they are three thousand years old or more. Gold was mined in this area in antiquity and probably shipped to the coast somewhere in Mozambique and taken north to the shores of Southern Arabia, then the land of Sheba. It is often surmised that Zimbabwe was the fabled land of Ophir, site of King Solomon's mines. Some cities have been found in other parts of Zimbabwe and Botswana and there are many legends of cities lost in the Kalahari someplace, seen by a few bushmen and a lonely prospector. H. Rider Haggard made this popular theme into a book at the turn of the century, *King Solomon's*

Mines. It is historically recorded that in 500 B.C. a Carthaginian named Hanno explored a good portion of Africa with sixty vessels, sailing down the west coast and possibly back up the east coast. Arabian sailors were already aware of such far-flung islands as Madagascar and Ceylon.

The ruins are quite impressive and worth a trip. The main gallery is especially impressive with its round, incredibly tall tower and high walls. The ruins are about 10 miles south of Fort Victoria and there is a motel on the main road just as you turn off to the ruins. Called The Flamboyant Motel, they will let you camp out on the lawn if you ask politely. Hotels in Zimbabwe are generally beyond the budget of a hitchhiker; however, camping is easy and safe all over the country. There are campsites all over, and most have hot showers and clean rest rooms. The charge is usually one dollar a night. Many of the motels scattered around the country will let you spend the night on the lawn and let you use their toilets. In the major towns are boarding houses which will let you rent by the night or by the week for a few dollars a night.

After a month I'd pretty much had it with Zimbabwe. It was a wonderful country and, my hunch was right, great hitching. Some of my best rides had been here. It was certainly a thrill, but I figured I'd better leave before I became an adrenalin addict myself. I spent one day hitching back to Botswana and the dusty country beyond. Walking toward the Botswana border in the chilly early evening air, I reflected that I would have made a lousy mercenary. I had looted Idi Amin's house, which would score points with any soldier of fortune, but I just couldn't get into knocking off banks. Carrying a gold bar in my backpack just didn't seem like it was worth the weight.

11 · BOTSWANA AND NAMIBIA: KALAHARI CROSSROADS TO THE SKELETON COAST

. . .the stars there there have heart in plenty and are great hunters. She is asking them to take from her little child his little heart and to give him the heart of a hunter. . . . Surely you must know that the stars are great hunters? Can't you hear them? Do listen to what they are crying! . . . . You are not so deaf that you cannot hear them.

KALAHARI BUSHMAN TO
LAURENS VAN DER POST,
THE HEART OF THE HUNTER

I **PRETTY MUCH** made a bee-line for Botswana from Malawi. That meant a night in Chipata, sleeping outside on the lawn of the rest house because all the rooms were full. Not wanting to risk getting blown away by a nervous black nationalist guerilla who might mistake me for a Rhodesian soldier, I decided to skip hitchhiking and take the bus back to Lusaka. That was one day, and it was another back down to Livingston. A short morning from there to the Kazungula Ferry, the only point in the world where four international borders meet.

The ferry isn't too impressive, really. The Zambesi River meanders along slowly through the cattails, papyrus and grass. The border consists of two small ferry stations, one on the Zambia side and one on the Botswana side. This twenty feet or so, separated by the river, is the only place where the two countries have a common border. Also coming to a point at Kazungula are Namibia and Zimbabwe.

I met John on the streets of Kasane, a small town on the Botswana side of the Kazungula Ferry. He was a Peace Corps volunteer, who was teaching English down in Maun, a hundred and fifty miles south in the Okavango Swamps. On the ferry we struck up an acquaintance with Patrick, a traveler in his early twenties from California, who was on his way to Lesotho in South Africa to visit his mother who was also a Peace Corps volunteer. We all hit it off great, and when John told us about a dance at the local hotel in Kasane, we thought it would be a blast to go.

Tiny Kasane, the main town in northern Botswana, has a few shops, a police station, and a tourist lodge called the Safari Lodge. Hotels are rather expensive all over Botswana and the Safari Lodge is no exception. You can, however, camp on the lawn, though a mosquito net is a must. John, who also hailed from California, and like Patrick was sporting shorts, Hawaiian shirt, and surfing thongs, was staying in a school room at the local school. He invited us to sleep on the floor with him.

It turned out John was a pretty wild guy, and as we were walking along the river he produced a cigarette of the local herb, quite popular with the Africans. "It's called dagga," he said, taking a puff, and handing it to Patrick. My olfactory senses told me it was marijuana. Patrick was in mid-puff when the deafening drone of gasoline engines and the beat of whirling metal blades came from the skies. Having already been in two wars on this trip, I dove instinctively for a bush. John, too, hit the dirt, and Patrick swallowed what was left of the joint as he dove down the bank of the river toward the shallow reeds along the edge. A helicopter, probably a West German Leopard attack chopper, came flying along the river at the level of the tree tops, flying east toward the South African military bases in the Caprivi Strip, which sticks out between Zambia and Botswana. The noise and speed of the chopper's arrival was startling and rather frightening. I could imagine what the Africans must think of these loud toys of destruction.

From my position flat on the ground I noticed machine guns mounted on the underbelly of the chopper, each capable of devastating a village; this was death and destruction at its most sophisticated. As fast as it had come, it was gone, speeding down the river on its border patrol.

"Holy shit!" cried John, rolling another joint. I was helping Patrick out of the reeds. He was coughing, wet and confused.

"That was some dragonfly," said John, lighting the joint and handing it to me. We all had a good laugh and headed for the Safari Lodge. Soon we were guzzling beer, as people are known to do in the afternoon African sun.

As the sun went down and palm trees were reflected in the silvery water, music started to play. Just upstairs a disc jockey was spinning his favorite tunes, a mixture of American disco, Jamaican reggae, and African "juju" music. By the time we staggered upstairs (as John put it, "thoroughly stunk and droned"), the whole place was packed to the balcony with twisting, shaking Africans, each with a can of Lion Lager beer in his hand, thus giving the name to their dance, "The Kasane Beer Can Boogie."

Known as Bechuanaland until independence from Britain in 1965, Botswana is famous for its Kalahari Desert, which isn't a real desert, so say many Botswanians. The majority of the country is a tableland, with the Kalahari covering most of the center and southwest and the Okavango Swamps and Chobe Game Park taking up the northwest. Most of the people, about seven hundred thousand of them, live along the eastern border with South Africa and Zimbabwe where cattle ranching is the main industry. Totally landlocked and semi-arid except for the Okavango Swamps, Botswana is about the size of Texas or France.

The original inhabitants of Botswana were the Bushmen, the earliest known inhabitants of Africa; there are only about 4,000 left. Rock carvings and place names record their existence all over the continent but now their last refuge is the trackless, unpopulated wastes of the Kalahari, where they track animals and follow the seasonal pans of water. One interesting and little-known fact about the Bushmen is that they are not racially classified as "Negroes", but are known anthropologically as "Caucasians", in the four major racial classifications. Botswana is also known as the only multi-party democracy in Africa, all

other African countries being dominated by the party that happens to be in power at the time and that party generally outlaws all other political parties. Still, like most African countries, Botswana seems to have its president for life. Sir Seretse Khama, an Oxford-educated lawyer married to a rather reclusive English lady, has been re-elected to the presidency over and over again since 1965; indeed, he's the only president Botswana has ever had.

Botswana is good hitchhiking. Plenty of empty, dusty, hot country roads to walk down and hitch rides on. There are a few public buses in the eastern population centers and a bus from Francistown near Zimbabwe to Maun on the Okavango Swamps. There is also one railroad from Mafeking in South Africa to Gaberone, the capital, and Francistown and then on to Bulawayo in Zimbabwe. But why take a train or bus when there is a cattle truck full of sweaty Africans to get a ride with?

I was on my way to Namibia, and that meant one of the great thrills of my African trip, the opportunity to hitch across the Kalahari Desert.

Like climbing Kilimanjaro, crossing the Kalahari while in Africa seemed like something one just had to do, not for any reason I could really think of, nor because there was anything of particular interest to see out there in the endless sand veld and arid grassland, but simply, like Mount Everest, because it is there. It is this kind of illogical bullheadedness that makes the best hitchhikers, or so one dust-caked traveler once told me.

Heading across the Kalahari with your thumb and a backpack should not be taken too lightly, and you should be prepared. Carry at least a gallon of water with you and water purification tablets such as chlorine, iodine or halazone to purify any water you might get along the way. Carry enough food for several days as well, for it could take you a couple of days just to get a ride in some places! Still, generally speaking, in the places you'll be likely to be waiting for a ride, there will probably be water and food of some sort or another. As one old desert hand said to me as I was boarding a truck to Ghanzi in the central desert, "If he's a good driver, it'll take you ten hours to get there, if he's not, it'll take you two or three days!"

You'll need money as well. Rides are often free in the populated eastern part of Botswana, but you'll probably be paying for them in the remoter parts of the north, south, and west.

Probably the best way to cross the Kalahari is from Maun to Ghanzi in western central Botswana and then on to Gobabis in Namibia. There are other ways to make the crossing as well, such as from Gaberone to Hukuntse and on to Gobabis.

Patrick and I were fortunate enough to start our trip from Kasane down to Maun with John, the crazy surfer from California, who had a Toyota Landcruiser he had to drive back to Maun, nearly two hundred miles away. The drive is mostly through Chobe National Park on parallel tire tracks through a dirt road that changes from season to season as mud holes and other obstacles get more and more difficult to drive through and have to be circumvented.

Having gotten a late start from Kasane because of our tremendous hangovers from the wild party the night before, we spent our first night in a small village about sixty miles from Kasane. John commandeered the local school room for us to sleep in and set off looking for a "shabine" or local African bar that sold Kadi, the home beer of the locals.

An hour later, when Patrick and I had our mosquito nets all set up and a fire going in the yard just outside the school, John turned up, drunk as a hyena in heat. Singing something about California girls and the surf in the moonlight, he insisted that we go with him back to the shabine as he had left his sandals there. The three of us tripped on off

into the night, weaving our way between the grass huts that were all scattered along the bank of the Linyanti River. Then we were sitting around the fire in a rather large grass hut drinking thick, sour Kadi like some good draft beer. To our surprise (though not to John's), the place was full of nubile young women, five or six of them and all quite smashed. They couldn't keep their hands off John, but Patrick and I were too shy to get involved with these rather forward young ladies. Besides, Patrick had mentioned to me that Botswana had something of a VD epidemic, one of the highest rates in the world. We therefore tore ourselves away before it was too late and we were too drunk, leaving John to close the bar, so to speak.

By midmorning the next day, we were whipping along the African Bush past hordes of zebra, springbok, and giraffe. There would also be the occasional herd of elephant and a lioness or small spotted cerval cat crossing the road. Chobe National Park, it occurred to me, must be one of the most underrated game parks in Africa, absolutely teeming with game and virtually no tourists. In fact, we managed to have a head-on collision with what was probably the only other vehicle for a hundred square miles.

We were barreling along down the dirt road that was no more than two dirt strips big enough for a tire each and elephant grass as tall as nine feet growing on either side of the road, making turns a bit on the blind side. As we came around a sharp, grass-obstructed corner, Patrick and I, who were both sitting in the back, were thrown forward to the front of the truck as Surfer John slammed on his brakes. Doubtless the other driver was doing the same, and we both hit head on, our truck bouncing off theirs and jumping straight back four feet with a neck-snapping lurch. Fortunately, no one in either truck was hurt.

It was evening when we arrived in Maun, a sort of safari town with lots of Great White Hunters, all well over the hill and leading safaris of telephotoing tourists by canoe into the crocodile and bird-infested swamps of the Okavango Delta. Maun has a few shops, the District Government Offices, a safari camp or two, and a small French restaurant called "The Bistro", run by a French world traveler who, like a lot of people, came to Maun and couldn't get out. Perhaps, like so many French, he was running away from the army and couldn't return to France, or else had to get away for some other reason. As John, Patrick, and I sat at a small table drinking beer, waiting for our

hamburgers and french fries, I knew that we fit into the latter category. However, I did not know what we were running from.

In Maun, we stayed with John at the Peace Corps crash pad, practically across the street from the Bistro. Should you meet a Peace Corps volunteer anywhere in Botswana, or all of Africa and Arabia for that matter, don't hesitate to ask him if you can camp on his lawn. If it is a remote enough area and he isn't constantly swamped with guests, he will be happy to put you up for the night. There are several places to camp in Maun, however. One is the Island Safari Lodge, a few miles out of Maun right on the swamps. You can also rent canoes here at the crocodile camp for trips into the swamps. Otherwise, in Maun itself, there is Riley's Hotel, where a single room is rather expensive, but they will let you camp outside (inquire politely at the desk). Hotels all over Botswana tend to be rather expensive, and there is rarely more than one to a town, except for Gaberone and the other major towns in the east. In fact, I did not stay in one hotel the entire time I was in Botswana, for I camped and stayed with people everywhere except for two nights in the Grand Hotel in Francistown, which was way above my price range. I stayed there because I was offered a free room by a lissome English lass. The other hotel in Francistown, the Tati Hotel, is cheaper, or better yet there is the Caravan Park and campsite one mile south of town. In Southern Chobe National Park there is a campsite with hot showers as well.

You may also have the occasion to visit Gaberone, the modern capital city of Botswana, built in 1965. I never had the chance to go there, but there must be a caravan camping site where you can pitch a tent; probably there's a YMCA, too. Possibly you could stay in the Peace Corps Hostel which is located in Gaberone; however, you would have to know a volunteer . . . and what better place to meet one? The Gaberone is supposedly the cheapest hotel, but there are other cheap boarding houses. Ask at the Tourist Information Office or Chamber of Commerce.

Patrick headed for South Africa, John headed for the nearest shabine, and I headed for Namibia across the Kalahari. I had arranged a ride on a truck on its way to Ghanzi, driven by an old Tswana guy who spoke hardly a word of English, but could go on in Afrikaans all day. His truck was an old British Bedford flat bed truck, empty except for an old bed frame in back and me. His tires were as bald as he; a curly grey beard kept the flies out of his nose and mouth.

Buying supplies for the trip, I purchased some tunafish and cans of pork and beans, some dried ostrich jerky, a flagon of wine, a six-pack of beer, a loaf of bread and a gallon of water. This, I figured, would get me to Ghanzi, about 150 miles away. We left Maun at sunrise, heading south along the Nxhabe River towards Lake Ngame. Though I could have been riding inside with the driver, I preferred to stand up in the back, the wind blowing through my tangled hair. I had a great feeling of openness and communion with the countryside as we passed through it. Standing in the back has its dangers too; you have to keep a wary eye out for low branches and watch out for bushes whipping your face as the truck plows on its own road through the underbrush. As we stopped in a small African village just before the lake, all the kids in the village came running when they saw a European traveler standing in the back of the truck.

The kids gathered around the truck, laughing and staring at this crazy guy. "Where are you going?" asked one kid.

"To Ghanzi," I replied, pulling a small green chameleon off my pants and putting him on my shirt where he clung for some time. These charming, slow-moving lizards are utterly harmless, having two feet on the end of each leg and eyes that are like cones, the eyeball at the tip, the cones moving independently of each other. The children, to my surprise, were quite frightened by this little critter, and were shocked to see me let it cling to my shirt. I surmised that he must have gotten knocked off a tree as we drove through the branches, and landed on me. The driver was also amazed that I wasn't afraid of the lizard and asked me to throw it out, so I placed him high up on a tree, where he could go his slow and merry way.

An hour later we were stuck in swamps around Lake Ngami, "the great lake of the unknown region." In the past, only the Bushmen knew of this lake, telling of it in awe at their evening campfires in the desert, "a lake with waves that throw hippos ashore, roaring like thunder. A lake of many, many fish . . ." Eventually the baYei hunters stumbled onto the lake and sent word back to their tribe—that was only in the 1750's. By the 1890's, the more aggressive baTawana moved in with their cattle. There was only one way to find the mythical lake of the unexplored southern desert of Southern Africa, and that was across the Kalahari itself. It was August 1, 1849, that that intrepid traveler and honorary hitchhiker himself, David Livingston, first set

eyes on the lake. At that time it was 240 km wide. At times it completely dries up!

It certainly wasn't dried up the year I was there, but seemed to be covering a lot more than its usual boundaries. We were slipping and sliding all over the place, usually in several feet of water that was supposed to be the road. We had neither four wheel drive nor even good tires. Eventually we got stuck and there seemed no way out of the mud and water this time. "It is times like these," I reflected, "that I'm glad I'm hitchhiking in Africa. I can walk to Ghanzi if I have to."

Fortunately, just then, a very large tractor came by and pulled us out, and even pulled us to a road camp where the driver and a bunch of others were spending the night. We decided to spend the night here also. I heated up a can of pork and beans over the fire and finished off the last of my beer before spending a fitful night in the front seat being eaten alive by mosquitos while it rained outside. The driver slept in the tents of the road camp.

Early the next morning we were off again, around the back side of Lake Ngami, each tree quivering and trilling with thousands of Quelea finches. It was all day through arid grassland, passing one or two small farms near the lake. I drank half the flagon of South African wine, fell asleep in the hot afternoon sun and got terribly sunburned. Once we chased three ostriches down the road for five minutes, their tail feathers up, their mighty haunches bulging as they sprinted down the dirt tracks south toward our destination: the Central Kalahari town and commercial center of Ghanzi.

We arrived just at sunset, my favorite time of the day. I don't think I will ever tire of sunsets, especially African ones—a flock of birds on the horizon, and the deep reds and oranges of the equatorial sun.

There is one hotel in Ghanzi, The Kalahari Arms Hotel. The cheapest room there is fifteen dollars a night but they will allow camping. Or you can sleep at the police station, pitching your tent outside. I was fortunate enough to meet a Peace Corps volunteer there my first evening who let me sleep on his porch.

The main attraction of Ghanzi is the people and atmosphere of the place. I guess that's the whole idea of hitchhiking around Arabia and Africa: meeting people and growing from the experiences. I sat on the porch of Ghanzi's main spot of interest, the Oasis Store. It was a general store in the traditional sense of selling everything the Bushmen

could ever want. At the same time, it seemed to be the social center of the entire Kalahari Desert. All kinds of people would come and go; thin, haggard Bushmen, in to buy some supplies, what little they needed and could afford.

I sat with them on the porch of the Oasis Hotel and drank cans of Lion Lager beer. Sometimes a Tswana, in cowboy hat, wool jacket, and boots, would join us. They were the cattle ranchers of the Kalahari. Usually they spoke better English than the Bushmen, and after a few beers would tell about lost cities and gold mines in the desert, of which there are a number of legends. One grizzled, wrinkled old rancher even talked about a lost continent, Lemuria, and how the people had fled to all parts of the world, even South Africa. But that "was a long time ago."

After two days of hanging out in Ghanzi, I arranged a ride out of town toward Gobabis in Namibia, about 250 miles to the west. To my surprise, I met a Swiss guy on the truck, who was heading to Gobabis to get a part for his Volkswagen bus that had broken down in Ghanzi. The first day, through the low bushes of the Kalahari sandveld, I saw the entire desert blooming with a small yellow flower called the Devil's Thorn, but except for an occasional ostrich, there was almost no wildlife visible. We spent a nice night in the driver's brother's house in Kalkfontein, a very small town between Ghanzi and Gobabis, the site of an especially deep well. The next day the driver let the Swiss and me off at an absolutely abandoned farmhouse and desolate crossroads in the middle of the desert somewhere, as he took off south down an overgrown ranch road in his rusty old cattle truck.

The Kalahari is not uninhabited, for there are small cattle ranches scattered throughout, except in the very central part of the Kalahari which was now east of us.

The Swiss guy and I crashed out beneath a thorn tree with about ten other traveling Botswanians, Hereros, and Tswana who were on their way to Namibia to see relatives in Windhoek. Like us, they were waiting for a ride the last 75 miles to Gobabis. Our supplies of food and water came in handy now. We cooked up some soup with our precious water and slept beneath the tree.

It was only one and a half days before another truck came along. When we saw it, we all ran out onto the rutty tracks, and waved and jumped up and down like mad. You can bet he stopped. There was

no way he was not going to give us a ride! Happily, all twelve of us climbed in back of this empty cattle truck, and headed for civilization again; so far the trip hadn't been so bad, I decided.

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When we arrived in Gobabis, the Swiss fellow went off to look for his car part and I started once again my nightly search for a spot to sleep. "You'll stay at my place, you can sleep on the couch," said a young German-Namibian I met on the street. And so it was that we went back to his place, listened to the newest Pink Floyd album which he had just bought, and then went bar-hopping for the rest of the night. As a result, I haven't the slightest idea where to stay in Gobabis. Still, there must be a campground or park somewhere in Gobabis where you can sleep out. There is, of course, the Gobabis Hotel, and a couple of bars. The hotel is rather expensive, so perhaps you can camp on the lawn. Gobabis is a nice enough town, and the stepping off place to Botswana and the Kalahari. It is an easy hitch from here to Windhoek, about 100 miles by a paved road well trafficked with cars and trucks.

Situated in the rugged Khomas-Hochland Mountains at the center of the country, Windhoek, with 61,000 people, is Namibia's capital and largest city. Windhoek is modern, international, and expensive. With plenty of German cafes, fashion shops, delicatessens, restaurants, and hotels with swinging nightclubs, Windhoek could be called cosmopolitan. Its major tourist attractions are the Old Fort, which houses the Cultural History Museum, and the three German castles at Klein Windhoek. There are really no cheap hotels but you might try the Berg Hotel or the Thuring Hof. If you share a single room with two or three people, that might bring the price down to the hitchhiker's budget. Camping at a caravan park or motel on the outskirts of the city is more reasonable. There are several of these to the south of Windhoek. Some of the schools might put you up for a night or two, or possibly a local church; ask the headmaster or minister. In emergency situations, such as arriving in Windhoek late at night with nowhere to stay, try crashing out in your sleeping bag in Zoo Park.

Namibia is vast, rugged, beautiful, varied and virgin. Some of the best hitching in Africa is offered by this incredible country. The

Namib Desert, oldest in the world, stretches for 1,000 miles along the coast. There are only three towns along this coast; it's the most desolate and lonely coastline in the world. Inland is the central high plateau, where rainfall increases slightly; this plateau slopes down to the Kalahari in the east. Rainfall increases to the north, where there are the swamps of the Caprivi Strip, the farmland of Ovamboland, and the largely unexplored Kaokoveld Mountains to the northwest.

Rich in minerals and the world's largest producer of diamonds, Namibia was annexed by Germany as Southwest Africa in 1883. Fierce opposition to the Germans by the Nama and Herero natives of Namibia led the Germans to virtually exterminate some 65,000 Hereros, and the Hereros have still not recovered from this. South African military forces, as part of the British Empire, drove out the Germans during World War One and a League of Nations mandate was given to South Africa in 1920 to supervise the former German colony. The United Nations attempted to take control of Namibia in 1945, but the South Africans refused to relinquish it, claiming that the UN was not the legal successor to the League of Nations. Meanwhile, Namibia was virtually treated as a sixth province of South Africa and continued to have its independence frustrated by South Africa. At least in 1975, the all-white assembly of Namibia passed legislation ending all racial discrimination and "petty apartheid".

In true adventurer spirit, I decided to hitch up to what seemed the remotest spots in Namibia. No sooner had I stepped onto the road on the way out of Windhoek than I hailed an oncoming VW bus in much the same fashion that one would hail a taxi, and to my surprise it stopped. It was an Afrikaans family on their way up to Tsumeb in the north to buy a house and "shoot terrs" (meaning, of course, shoot the "terrorists") of SWAPO, the outlawed Black Nationalist organization of the Ovambo tribe along the Angolan border. We drove all day up to Tsumeb, a small little town in the farming district with a couple of motels and a caravan park. The hotels are expensive, twenty dollars a night or so, and you can sleep in a tent at the caravan park. I slept outside on a clear night in the park in the middle of town.

The next day I headed down the road to Rundu, which I began to think of as the "road to nowhere"—300 km straight through the empty bush to the Angolan border. I didn't know what I'd find there. I got a ride with some black fellows in an old rundown Ford Fairlane

station wagon all the way to Rundu, where they let me off at the Rundu Club, the only accommodation in town. Naturally I ended up at the bar having a beer and met a couple of South African whites from Capetown who described themselves as the "Biggest Piss Cats in the Southwest". I took that to mean that they were alcoholics living in Namibia. They called themselves "piss cats" and soon had a nickname for me—"the Biltong Kid". Biltong is a sort of meat jerky and I always had several strips of beef, ostrich or kudu biltong to chew on. As I had my first beer in the club at Rundu, I'd pulled out a strip of biltong to chew—and the name was given to me then and there.

Before I knew it these two piss cats, Neil and Rheinhard, whisked me off to their place to drink more beer and watch an old John Wayne movie called "Hatari", about some cowboys rustling rhinos and zebras in East Africa. Neil and Rheinhard often had movie parties at their house, renting a projector and a film and inviting the odd nurse and a doctor or two from the local hospital. There were also some contractors and surveyors who worked on the same road crew as Neil and Rheinhard, and a Portuguese guy with a shifty manner who would periodically disappear for two months at a time into Angola for the South African army.

These guys were all lonely, desperate souls who for some reason had volunteered for the end of the world. Neil, bitter and jolly at the same time, was 40 and somewhat overweight. Twice divorced, he had settled into a life of alcoholism in the far reaches of the empire, content with screwing nurses from the mission hospital and going back to Cape Town once a year.

Rheinhard was far more promising. In his mid-twenties, he was doing his engineering internship for the South African Government in Rundu. Tall and handsome, he still had his whole life in front of him and hadn't reached the point of having to forget the past. Still he drank a lot; there wasn't anything else to do in Rundu anyway.

They let me sleep on a cot in their living room for two days, happy to have some fresh blood around to drink with. "Let me tell you," said Neil, opening another Castle beer with a pphhtt, "about Southwest Africa, er, Namibia to you. One interesting thing is that the second largest ethnic group in Southwest is whites. Yep, that's right. The biggest ethnic group is the Ovambos just west of here in Ovamboland. However, they live on just a small percentage of the land along the

Angolan border. SWAPO, Southwest Africa's People's Organization, is the political wing of that tribe. And did you know," he said, opening another beer, "that the UN has recognized SWAPO as the legitimate voice of the Namibian people? If we had a democratic election here, who do you think would win? The Ovambos, of course, and the other tribes in Southwest would not like it at all. Africans are tribal!"

"I guess that is true," I said. "Democracy is often called the tyranny of the majority. Just because 51% of a population wants something to be so, doesn't mean that it is right. There are many cases of democratic governments where what really happened was the most populous group gained control of the country and began wiping out the other groups. I've read that this has happened to several African countries since the colonial powers began granting independence."

"That's why we're reluctant to just turn the country over to the Ovambos," said Neil. "You know, there are white political groups in Southwest that are so conservative they think that the South African Government, the Afrikaaners, are a lot of Communists! Really! They blew up a Masonic lodge in Windhoek this year and have threatened a terrorist campaign of their own."

"Democracy is a farce," said Reinhard. "People have to be mature enough to vote and take responsibility for themselves and other people, in an enlightened fashion. That leaves out most of the whites and the blacks in South Africa!"

So much for politics in the hinterlands of white-ruled Africa. It's amusing to think of the South African government as a bunch of radicals. In fact many Afrikaaners in the Republic have expressed their opinion that the government is too lenient and progressive in their reforms. It seemed impossible not to get into arguments over politics when talking and drinking with these fellows in Southern Africa. And being an American makes it all the worse somehow.

"You Yanks should just keep your mouths shut, and stop butting into our affairs!" someone would say. "You think you own the bloody world!"

It's a great lesson in tolerance, but tongues loosen up after a few beers and I was likely to be kicked out into the rain if I said what I really felt. I fairly escaped Rundu after two days of non-stop beer drinking. In a morning-after haze, Rheinhard drove me out to the dirt road that would take me back to Tsumeb and the area populated by

white farmers. I walked down the road for a mile or two, feeling relieved that I was getting out, and feeling sorry for all those people who couldn't throw a pack on their back and hitch out like the "Biltong kid".

I caught a couple of lifts on Army trucks up to Tsumeb again, driven by pimply-faced South African kids who were doing their compulsory military service up here in Namibia. This was South Africa's hot spot and it seemed as if all high school boys ended up here sooner or later. After spending another night in the park in Tsumeb, I thought I would hitch to Oshakati, the capital of Ovamboland and the center of all the terrorist activity in Namibia. I stood out on the main road to Oshakati and had no sooner started hitching when a truck load of Ovambo natives pulled up and I piled in. They were friendly and curious, wanting to know where I was from and where I was going, and most of all, how did I like their country, Ovamboland. It was great, I told them, although we hadn't even got there yet. We cruised along at a steady 90 km an hour with the radio blasting away all our "favorite hits on Radio Ovambo," and reached Oshakati in about three hours.

Oshakati was quite a disappointment. I searched all over for a town center or a market, but all I could find was a deserted petrol station. "This is it," said one old man in brown clothes and rubber sandals. Otherwise it was just a mass of fences, barriers, army camps, and the like.

There is one hotel in Oshakati, the International Guest House, which was new and quite expensive, although the cold beer I had there was reasonable. I bought some food at a small store in the hospital there and decided that it wasn't worth spending the night in Oshakati. I caught a lift out to a gas station and general store on the road back to Tsumeb, where there was a lot more action than anywhere in Oshakati.

Standing on the road, hitching back south, I was glad to have satisfied my curiosity about the northern area of Namibia. At least I could say I had been there. I got a ride with four black dudes in a run-down white Chevy of some kind and they asked me to drive the 250 km back to Tsumeb, perhaps because they thought it would be less suspicious and safer for them if a white guy was driving. After all, the area was crawling with South African Army personnel. The guy who owned the car, a tall, skinny fellow with a big gold watch and

a hearty smile, told me he was a "consultant" for the Orangemund Diamond Mines down in the south but it later turned out that he was a driver of one of their trucks, which seemed more likely. Along the way we passed what I would call a "pack" of fifteen South African Army Commandos on scrambler motorcycles. Both they and their dirt bikes were camouflaged, and they had backpacks and rifles on their shoulders. They reminded me of some sort of legalized motorcycle gang, heading down the highway, looking for trouble and adventure in a deadly sort of way.

"I suppose we hitchhikers are a little like them," I thought to myself, "but we're generally a lot more peaceful and avoid hurting people whenever possible." To the Namibian natives in the car it was no big deal, just part of everyday life in Ovamboland.

Namibia really does offer some excellent hitching all over the country, in remote areas. There are good paved roads over most of the country and a large number of vehicles, private and public. Not much of a bus system, but who needs it? The country seems quite safe, and people of all races and tribes are friendly and helpful. There are some trains, going from Windhoek to the north, Walvis Bay on the coast, and to Capetown to the South. Unlike on South African trains, where Europeans are not allowed to go third class, in Namibia you can buy a third class ticket. When hitching around in the really remote areas of the western Namib desert, and northwest, be sure to carry a good map and plenty of food and water, as you may have to wait a day or two for a ride. All over Namibia are German "Kaffee-Bakeries" that serve tea, coffee, baked goods, and usually a fixed noon meal at a very reasonable price. Often whoever I was getting lift from would stop at one of these places for lunch and we'd all have a good square meal for a rand or two. Beer is good and cheap all over Namibia. There are two German breweries, the Hansa Brewery in Swakopmund and the Windhoek Lager brewery in Windhoek. There are nice pubs all over, too, where you can also often get a quick meal of sauerkraut and sausage or meat and potatoes. And biltong is always available. Comparing it to South Africa, restaurant food is usually cheaper, at least two rand a meal, while food bought in a grocery store is a little bit more expensive, most of the food being imported from South Africa.

It is also worth noting that in both Botswana and Namibia as well as South Africa, there is a slight black market for currency, usually an

equal exchange of rand or pula for a US dollar, whereas the bank rate would be about 80 cents to a US dollar. Incidentally, Namibia uses South African currency.

There is good camping in caravan-camper sites all over the country, on motel lawns, in parks, or even along the side of the road. Namibia is such an open, unpopulated country that you can camp almost anywhere. In some remote towns that don't have a motel or caravan park, look for a government rest house or local "club".

The black Ovambo natives and I tried stopping at the Etosha Pan on our way to Tsumeb, but it was closed for the season. Etosha Pan is one of the largest parks in the world with some good game viewing to be had around the waterholes when animals gather during the dry season, from May to December. There are three rest camps at Etosha, all of which offer camping: Namutoni, Halali, and Okaukuejo.

We barrelled on through the night, as the guys were on their way to Windhoek, and they let me off in Otjiwarongo, where I spent a rainy night in my tent at the local caravan site. The next day I met a young student from Germany who was in Namibia to visit a relative and was now hitching around the country a little. She was the only other traveler I ever met in Namibia. We decided to hitch together into the Erongo Mountains to the west and then down to Swakopmund on the coast.

We headed for Outjo to the west, walking down the dry road, with low brown and green bushes covering the rolling plains. The German girl's name was Sabine. She was short and stocky, with curly brown hair and glasses; not what you would expect to find out in the middle of Namibia hitchhiking, but then, come to think of it, what would you expect to find? Our first ride was with a German-Namibian farmer who spoke to Sabine most of the time in German. He had gone back to Germany in 1927, having been born here, "because the time was right." He then fought for Germany during the war and left to come back to Southwest "because the time was right." I figured he was probably some die-hard Nazi, as Namibia is full of right wing extremists, or so I was told. On the other hand, they were supposedly fighting a bunch of left-wing extremists up in Ovamboland, so I guess it all balances out. I dozed most of the time, not being able to understand German, waking up just as we got to Outjo, where there is a nice little hotel. We didn't stay long but headed back out on the road to Khorixas in Damaraland.

We got a ride with a colored gentleman, a Southern African of mixed race, who was taking a load of supplies to his store in Khorixas in his big Chevy pickup. It was a long ride through wild, beautiful country. We saw kudu antelope and springbok along the way and then were treated to a super sunset, slow and easy with just the right number of clouds to catch the glow and tint of the reds, oranges, and yellows. Being a genuine sunset nut, I was overwhelmed by the colors and movement in the back of the vehicle, as we roared over hill after hill. With the wind in my hair and the glow of the west calling me forward I stood up in back, holding on to a railing on the side of the truck, and just whooped and yelled for ten minutes. Sabine thought I'd been in Africa too long and tried to get me to sit down, and the shrieks from the back made the driver look back more than once.

Just as the last glowing embers of sunset faded away, we pulled into Khorixas. A small town with a few shops, some run-down wooden buildings, and a government rest house, it was the administrative center of Damaraland. After some bacon and eggs for dinner, we camped out on the grass behind the rest house.

The lady who ran the place, a charming colored lady from the Cape Province, gave us a lift outside of town after breakfast. No sooner had she let us off than we got a ride with a white doctor making his rounds to the remote villages to the west. We were on our way to the rock paintings of Tyfelfontaine and the petrified forest, as well as the adventure of camping out in the desert for a few nights. We drove around with him for the day, visiting a school and a village started by a bunch of natives with the aid of the South African government. We even chased a lost zebra along a big stretch of flat desert for a while. Such was the excitement of the Namib.

The doctor let us off at a remote crossroads where the only shade was a road sign indicating that this empty desert road was the way to Tylfelfontaine. It was midafternoon and we began walking down the road. No cars came that day, and at the top of one rocky pass we decided to make camp. The land was like a moonscape, full of strange rocky spires and craters, absolutely devoid of plants, except for some dead, dried bushes scattered about. The only plant that grows all year round is the Welwitchis Mirababilis, an unusual prehistoric plant which grows low to the ground and has two big leaves which get lacerated by the wind. It extracts water not from the ground but from the fog

that rolls in from the coast. Most of these plants are from 1500 to 2000 years old! When it does rain, the desert suddenly blooms with bushes and flowers. The infrequent rains had left enough remains of bushes for us to make a small fire.

We spent a restless night on the sand by the side of the road. I had set up my tent, because of lions, but Sabine had refused to sleep in it. Therefore we both slept outside, but I knew that there were lions out there in that desert roaming around, and they were bound to be hungry!

Fortunately, we survived, and we waited all morning for a car to come by, but none came. We decided to walk back to the main road, as we only had water enough for one more day, and it might take that to get back to Khorixas. As we walked down the lonely road back to the main road, we discussed the sunset the night before as we had seen it from a hill overlooking the desert to the west. "The view was breathtaking, a desolate area of hills, eclipsed by more hills with a haze flowing in the valleys between them . . ." said Sabine.

"And in the distances were real mountains, rising up in the brown red tint of the late evening desert. It was like the dawn of time, a primordial prehistoric beginning," I said, passing her the water.

"It was fantastic," she said, taking a precious gulp, "there was not a sound to be heard, not a thing stirring. Truly it seemed like some ancient, time-forgotten desert, and buried deep inside it a secret of some ancient civilization."

"Like Lemuria?" I asked. But she had never heard of Lemuria, and it didn't matter.

What did matter, however, was that we get a lift back to Khorixas. A car was coming along the road from the Skeleton Coast and we stood in front of it waving our arms desperately. Rarely had it been so important to get a ride. This was surely the first and only car along this road today, and there might not be another one for several days. We would never make it back to Khorixas if we didn't get a ride with him. Of course, he stopped and took us back to Khorixas. He was a colored guy (of mixed race), coming from some research station on the Skeleton Coast a hundred miles or so away. We spent another night on the lawn at the rest house and the next day hitched to Swakopmund, 250 miles to the south.

The German legacy of Namibia can best be seen at Swakopmund,

the country's main seaside resort. It's a pleasant holiday town with a relaxing, touristy feel. There are several holiday camps where you can rent cheap bungalows near the beach and several caravan parks where you can camp. Just a couple of miles to the south is Walvis Bay, the main port of Namibia and legally part of South Africa. There is good fishing in Walvis Bay and all along the Skeleton Coast. Walvis Bay would be the best place to get a freighter or some other ship down to Capetown or Durban in South Africa, or up the coast to West Africa and Europe. Up and down the coast are the wrecks of quite a few old freighters, run aground in storms. The hulls are often visible above the water in places, so it is called the "Skeleton Coast".

In Walvis Bay I spent the night sleeping out in a trailer park down by the docks, but there are several cheap hotels a person could try, such as the Desert Inn. The whole town has a rather fishy smell.

Sabine and I split up at this point, she going back to Windhoek, and I to a part of the Namib desert called Sossuvlei. Hitching a hundred miles through some pretty desolate country to a place in the middle of nowhere, appropriately called Solitaire, I was once again well stocked for camping several days in the desert. Solitaire, while on most maps of Namibia, is just a gas station and general store. From there I got a ride with some South African tourists on their way to Sossuvlei, an oasis of sorts amongst the highest sand dunes in the world, curling like sleeping dinosaurs. It is fun to climb up them and slide down, and they make for excellent photography.

At certain times of the year, April through September or so, there is a small water pan where animals, springbok, gazelles and even lions may come in out of the desert to drink. Just getting a feeling for the Namib Desert, the oldest and one of the most desolate deserts in the world, makes it well worth the trip to Sossuvlei. There are a few trees for shade; bring a picnic lunch and plenty of water.

There is camping at the ranger station at Sesrien, 25 miles from the dunes. It is worthwhile to try to hitch out to Sossuvlei, although it is a dead-end road, and the people going out there would be tourists. Still, you should try your luck, but if you don't feel too lucky, rent a car for a weekend with some friends in Windhoek.

My Namibian tour was coming to a close as I left the giant sand dunes of Sossuvlei. It was a day's hitching down to Keetmanshoop, the center of the sheep ranching district and a fair-sized town (for Namibia),

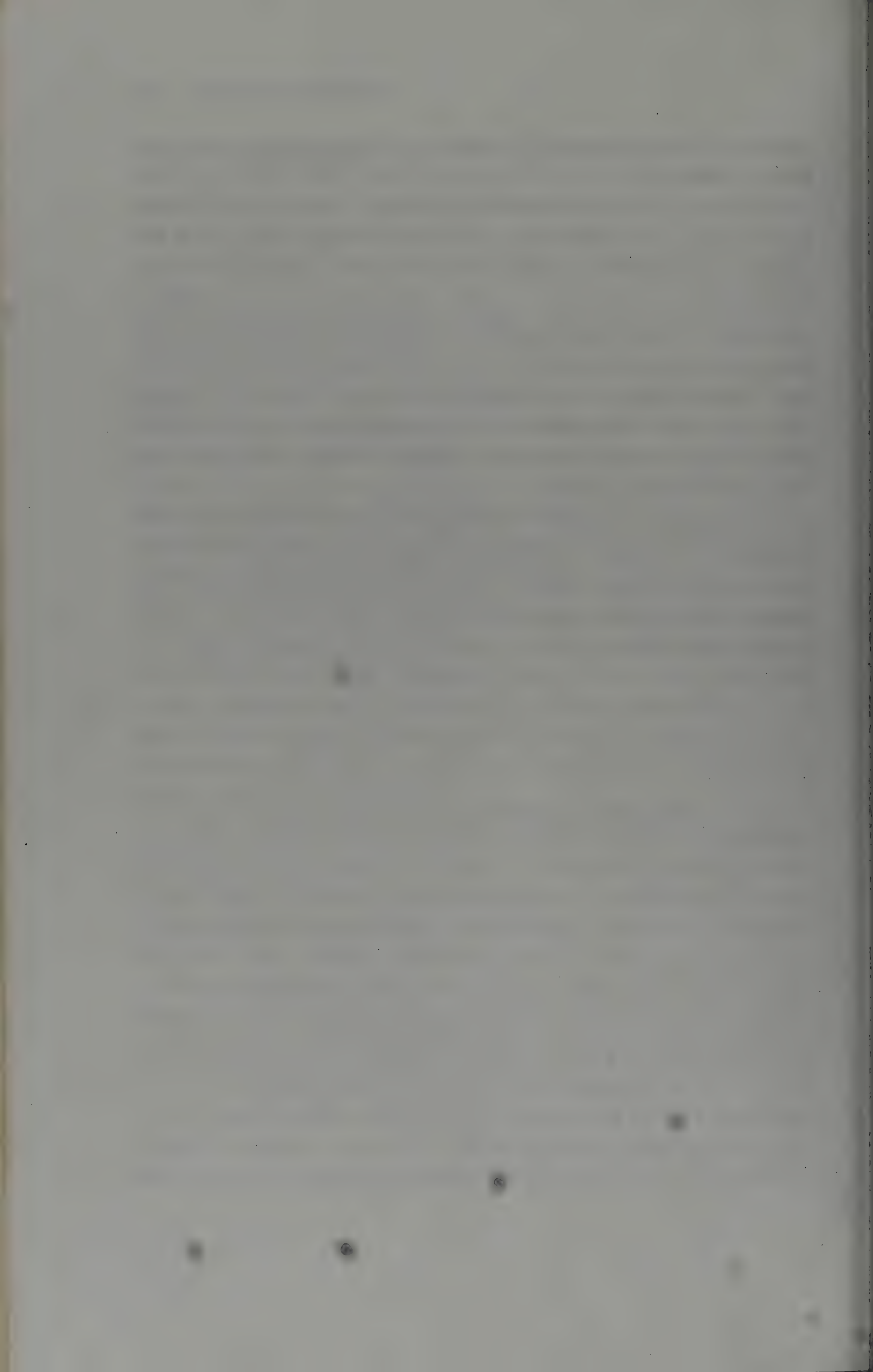
with one hotel, the Union Hotel, where you can get a room for ten or fifteen dollars.

Better yet is camping on the lawn of the local caravan park. Namibia is well suited to camping out as it hardly every rains. There are virtually no mosquitos, except in the north, and it's generally cool in the evenings.

A side trip that you might want to make from Keetmanshoop while on your way south is to Luderitz, an old German port in the middle of the diamond area. Here you can camp on the beach or at a caravan park, while a cheap hotel is Rummler's Hotel. Another interesting sight in the south is the Fish River Canyon, which some claim is a finer sight than the Grand Canyon of Arizona, with the sandy river bed winding 600 meters below.

As I walked down the road one late morning out of Keetmanshoop, having spent the night on the porch of the Union Hotel since the truck I had arrived on got in at two in the morning, I felt a certain sadness about leaving Namibia. What a great country, wild, hospitable, and yet inhospitable at the same time.

It was great hitching.



12 · SOUTH AFRICA: THE RAND TO TABLE MOUNTAIN

He who knows others is clever,
but he who knows himself is enlightened.
He who overcomes others is strong,
but he who overcomes himself is mightier still.

LAO TZU

I **WAS WALKING** down a small road toward the South African border, glancing west over my sunburned shoulder to catch a view of the setting sun; I was also looking for a ride to the upper Cape Province, en route to the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. I hadn't a care in the world at the time; I felt I could just walk forever, absorbed in the sunset and the freedom of the moment.

Roaring down the dirt road with a cloud of dust behind it, came a small grey Peugeot pick-up. I waved and stood by the side of the road. My motions were friendly and definite, "Give me a ride, please." I pointed to the road at my feet, indicating that they should stop. I waved down the road to the west, indicating where I was going, and I waved at them just to let them know that I was a nice cheerful person. They kept their speed up, and didn't appear as if they were going to stop. I waved again; well, I might have to spend the night out here in the bush someplace, but that was all right. They drove by at 110 km per hour and then suddenly slammed on the brakes and came grinding to a halt in a huge cloud of dust. I grabbed my pack and ran for the truck.

Two white men in their middle forties got out and took my pack, throwing it into the back of the truck. "Sorry, we almost didn't stop for ya, mon. Jump in!" they said as we piled in the front, me sitting between them.

"Can't leave a white mon walking in this country! God, the heat will get to you if you're not careful. Where are you going anyway?" said the driver, a man of medium build in cotton work clothes and a typical South African bush hat made of well washed cotton. They both had that odd Dutch-Afrikaans accent. I had heard it before and it was unmistakable.

"I'm on my way to Johannesburg. Where are you guys going?"

"Back home," said the taller and younger Afrikaaner sitting in the passenger seat. "We're foremen on a road crew and are heading back home to the other side of Upington for the weekend. Here, have some whisky and soda."

It was on this first meeting in South Africa that I discovered that South Africans are, generally speaking, pretty heavy drinkers. I had a shot of whiskey and soda just to be polite, and they finished off the bottle and started in on some blackberry brandy.

"Where'r you from, anyway, mon?" the driver asked.

"America," I said, "I'm hitchhiking through Africa; I've come all the way from Egypt to here so far."

"Ach, mon! You traveled through those bloody kafir countries?" said the younger guy on my right. "Kafir" is a slang expression for native Africans; it's derived from Arabic, meaning "heathen" or unbeliever. The Arab traders originally called the blacks "kafirs."

"It wasn't so bad," I said, "in fact, I enjoyed it."

"Well, you're back in civilization again, lad. We know what it's like to be in those kafir countries; we work with 'em!"

This is a pretty typical conversation with a South African; many are racist, but fortunately, not all. In general I found South Africans friendly and hospitable—even the racists.

We stopped at a liquor store after we entered South Africa and they bought me a beer while they had another whiskey and soda and purchased a bottle of whiskey. We continued driving while they took nips from their bottle and I told them stories of Africa. It wasn't long before they were really drunk. They told me that the President of the United States (Carter at the time) was an asshole; soon the car started

to weave erratically from one side of the road to the other. Once I had to grab the wheel to keep us from going in a ditch. It's pretty hard to keep a laissez faire attitude when your transportation is swooping arabesques on a perfectly straight road. I was getting frankly scared. Fortunately we were on a back road in the bush and we hadn't seen another car the whole time. These guys were so drunk and happy to be going home to their wives after being out on the road crew for five days, that they could "just shit." Me too! We finally stopped for a piss at my request. As we relieved ourselves in the bushes with the neon orange sunset behind us, I said heatedly, "You guys are crazy! You're stinking drunk and you're going to get us killed—I'm going to drive!"

"Thou shalt not worry," the driver told me with a pious wink. However, to my surprise, he did let me drive and I think they were grateful that I'd offered to do so.

I drove the last hour into town where we dined on fish and chips at a fast food drive-in. The older man said I should stay with him and his wife that night. That was perfect for me, so we dropped the younger lad off and went straight home where I met his sweet wife—a lady in her late forties with bathrobe and curlers who cooked us a dinner and showed me the family album while I had a quenching tall glass of South African beer.

"Now here's Charlie," she'd say, pointing to a photo of their son in the album, "he's off to college now in Stellenbosh studying engineering. And here's our oldest daughter Anne, she's married now and lives in Germiston. We have a grandchild on the way." Such a dear lady, filling us with desserts, telling her husband not to talk about blacks "that way."

"Thanks for driving him home; he gets in such a condition," she said, and showed me the bathroom. "Here's a towel for you, you'll stay in my son's room tonight." She could have been my own mother, I thought, as I was drifting away in the most comfortable bed (actually the only bed) I'd slept in for a long time.

The world's number one producer of gold, South Africa is a unique country both socially and politically. It is a country of startling contrasts, from steaming jungles and rich farmlands to rugged mountains, silvery endless beaches and desert wastelands. It is also a land of modern concrete skyscraper cities and shantytowns; of great wealth and bitter poverty; of freedom for some and artificial restrictions for others.

Still, no matter what you've read or heard, please try to come to South Africa without any preconceptions of what it is really like. It is a major Zen challenge to come to South Africa with an objective viewpoint. One thing that startled me was the striking similarity to the U.S.A. If it weren't for the African villages between the western steel and glass cities, you could be anywhere in America. South Africa is like two countries in the same land—a traditional African country and a modern Western state. Arriving in South Africa after hitchhiking through the continent gave me a different perspective on South Africa than someone coming straight from Europe or the United States, and I found I had a different perspective than did South Africans of all kinds, conservative or radical.

The history of South Africa is long, complicated and occasionally hazy. For instance, it is claimed that Cape Province was uninhabited when the Huguenots first settled there in 1652. Some historians question that. Whatever the case, the Huguenots came from Holland but were originally French, having fled France in the 1620's when Cardinal Richelieu began cracking down on the Calvinist Protestants. The Huguenots in South Africa are now called the Afrikaans Church and they have a great deal of power in the country. The church is very conservative: for example no movies or sports can take place on Sundays and the whole country generally comes to a halt on this "day of rest."

Such events as the British acquisition of South Africa in the Napoleonic Wars, 1814, and the Boer War (Huguenots called themselves "Boers") at the turn of the century, are all well discussed in a great deal of literature.

Because of the huge diamond deposits found in Kimberly in 1867, and the vast gold deposits discovered in the Transvaal in 1886, the British wanted to annex the independent states of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, formed by the Voortrekkers in the 1830's. The Afrikaaners had no outside help and eventually were subdued by the British who burned their farms and placed many of the people in concentration camps.

This struggle brought out the fierce Afrikaaner national consciousness that survives to this day. There is still a great gulf separating Afrikaans and English speaking South Africans. They often refuse to learn each other's language and like to keep their heritage and tradi-

tions separate. The official languages are, therefore, English and Afrikaans (or Afrikaans and English, depending on who you are talking to).

Another important event to note are the Zulu Wars, the most famous of which was led by Shaka, a brilliant military tactician who organized the Zulu nation and set about conquering South Africa. Shaka's armies savagely annihilated all opposition, and repercussions of this war between Africans in the Natal area were felt all across the high veld of the Transvaal. Some people fled as far as Malawi and Tanzania in their efforts to escape the Zulu. Some tribes held out in their mountain strongholds of Swazi and Sotho and were later protected by the British. These became the independent countries of Swaziland and Lesotho. The Zulu were eventually defeated by the British in 1879 after many bloody battles.

Today, the historical event which probably concerns South Africans most is the national election of 1948, when the pro-British United Party led by Jan Smuts, was defeated by the Afrikaans National Party—a political group which had supported the Germans during the second World War. Apartheid, which literally translated means "separateness", now became official state policy. South Africa became the first and only state to take racial segregation (which exists unofficially all over the world) and legislate it. Suddenly, as if overnight, public facilities were designated either white or non-white, universities were restricted to whites, and non-whites were no longer permitted to move freely around the country. "Job Reservation" was initiated; this means that certain jobs are reserved for certain races and other races are not allowed to hold them. This was done mainly to protect the colored (or "mixed race") population. They actually voted themselves out of the parliament in exchange for the job reservation policy so that they wouldn't lose their jobs to "blacks." Job reservation applies mostly to work that requires tools such as hammers and saws, which blacks are not allowed to use (at least officially) in the Republic of South Africa.

Another regulation was the establishment of black Homelands. The Homeland plan was also begun in 1948; it created separate "Bantustans" for the Africans where they could have political autonomy and develop at their own rate. The first of these Homelands was Transkei, which gained independence in 1976 and broke diplomatic relations with South Africa in 1978, but South Africa was the only country to

recognize its existence. A second Homeland, Bophuthatswana, gained independence in 1977 and a third, Venda, became independent more recently.

You need a reentry visa for South Africa if you visit any of these Homelands, so it is best to get a multiple entry visa when applying at a South African embassy.

It is worth noting here that the only countries bordering South Africa where you can get a visa to South Africa are Malawi, Zimbabwe and Botswana. On the other hand, it is not advisable to travel around black Africa with a South African visa on your passport, for some countries (such as Tanzania) may deny you entrance. Also in some countries it could be used to prove you are a "spy", if you are unlucky enough to get arrested (as I was). The best solution to this conundrum is to plan your trip so you are in either Malawi, Zimbabwe or Botswana just before you plan to go to South Africa. Get your visa in an embassy in one of these countries. It is possible to get a visa at the border with South Africa, but they may want to see how much money you have and they may require that you have a plane ticket home, or at least one to some other foreign country. You are taking your chances at the border and are better off getting a visa at an embassy, in my opinion. If you do try the border for a visa and are refused entry, don't give up, just go on to the next border crossing and try again. Positive thinking will play a major factor here.

Johannesburg was the first place I wanted to see, and I hitched up there in one long day from Upington after the generous Afrikaans lady had stuffed me with boersvors sausage and eggs. Her husband drove me out to the main road that runs up through the Orange Free State. Since we had been through Upington the night before, I didn't feel like hanging around.

After eight hours and one long ride with a young white engineer in his snazzy Datsun which had a CB radio, I was left standing in downtown Hillbrow, the nightclub and "youth" district of Johannesburg.

South Africa's wealth is based mainly on the "golden reef" of the Whitwatersrand (Ridge of the White Waters). The golden reef is the South African term for the huge, long rand or ridge, one long vein of gold ore. Johannesburg, with a population of one and a half million, is the center of this gold rich area. It's interesting to note that "rand"

is also the name of the South African dollar. The golden reef stretches to the east and west of Jo'burg, as the natives like to call it. It's traversed by enormous mine dumps which form a man-made range of hills dug up from some of the deepest mines in the world.

Strictly segregated, the western, eastern and southern suburbs are mostly occupied by white artisans and middle classes. The northern suburbs have among them the finest and richest homes and gardens to be found anywhere in the world. Even the middle class whites, Asians and colored, typically have swimming pools and tennis courts at their homes. The majority of the Africans (three quarters of a million) live in the great southern city of Soweto. Soweto has no parallel in the world—crime in its most violent forms are commonplace, gangs roam the streets at night terrorizing the populace. It is illegal for whites to enter Soweto without a special permit, but it is possible to go on a tour of Soweto. (Contact the Tourist Bureau in Johannesburg if you're interested.)

You can also take conducted tours of the gold mines, but usually they must be booked three months in advance; check this through the tourist bureau.

Meanwhile, for hitchhikers who are coming to the big city to have a look around, Hillbrow is the spot, with lots of cafes, nightclubs, cinemas, bookstores, clothing shops and girls. Hillbrow has one of the densest populations of any area in the world, mostly young women who come in from the rural areas of South Africa to get a job in the big city. Many of them are so lonely and frightened by the whirl of the big city that Hillbrow also has the highest suicide rate of any area in the world.

There are a number of boarding houses in Hillbrow that will take travelers for a night, a week or a month at the fairly cheap rate of a few rand a night. The boarding house area is in the west section of Hillbrow, an easy walk from the downtown area. Odysee House on Lily Avenue is one, Soper Lodge and Allandene Residential Hotel are two others on Soper Road, and there are many more cheap boarding houses for young and old alike. There is also a youth hostel in Johannesburg proper, which is just to the south of Hillbrow.

All over South Africa hotels are on the expensive side for hitchhikers, but usually you can find an inexpensive boarding house where you can rent by the night or by the week. There are also a number of

excellent campsites all over the country, and sleeping outdoors is fine. Rural South Africa is generally safe, though it has more crime than other African countries, but cities all over the continent can be dangerous at night. Don't sleep outside in the major cities in South Africa. Youth hostels are another alternative, but you must be a member, which costs ten dollars.

In South Africa people are generally friendly, and relish the chance to talk to foreigners. Everyone has their particular view of what's going on and how things should be handled. Politics is a popular subject in South Africa, but the citizens must be careful not to be too vocal in criticizing the government. South Africans are not as conservative as you might expect, but then, maybe those who pick up hitchhikers are less conservative than most. People will often invite you to stay with them.

I spent a few nights in Hillbrow, going out to pubs and movies and to a multi-racial jazz club/disco called The Tower. One day I met a charming young Afrikaans lady in a bookstore and invited her out for dinner and a movie. The next morning when I woke up in her apartment, she was gone, and I had the strangest feeling I was being watched. Looking around the room I noticed that the walls were covered with Bruce Lee posters (the kung fu movie star of the early seventies). Like so many single women in a large, alienating, crime-ridden city, she had taken up martial arts for her own security and Bruce was her hero. As I stared back at the huge photos of the Chinese fighter, I recalled that while it was illegal for Chinese or other Asians to marry or have sex with whites or even coloreds and blacks for that matter, the Japanese have been granted the status of "honorary whites" because of the business ties with Japan. South African logic is exceedingly curious, yet practical in its own funny way.

Despite the delightful Afrikaans miss with the penchant for karate, Hillbrow didn't hold my interest for long. Big cities have never appealed to me much; as the old saying goes, "they're nice to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there." So after a burly Afrikaans guy tried to pick a fight with me in the Beer Keller, a tiny beer stube in downtown Hillbrow, and later another guy actually tried to run me down in the street as I was jaywalking (I leapt over the fender of his car to avoid being mashed), I decided to split and hitch down to Swaziland, 200 miles to the west.

Getting out of Johannesburg proved to be a major hassle. After a quick lift with an Austrian businessman a short way out of town, I got hopelessly lost in a maze of on and off ramps and freeways that branched off in a hundred different directions. I wandered about trying to figure out which highway to hitch on, cutting across busy freeways until I found what I distinctly thought was the right direction. Suddenly a car stopped on another off ramp just behind me and a greyhaired European in his fifties waved for me to come to his car. I ran over to him, cutting across the highway to get to his car.

"Where are you going?" he asked in a foreign accent.

"I'm trying to get to Swaziland, but I'm totally confused. Where are you going?"

"North. Here, hop in; I can give you a lift up to a highway that will take you right into Swaziland."

"Thanks a lot!" I said, "I was getting pretty exasperated out there. How confusing!" We talked for a while about ourselves. He was a Dutch person who had come to South Africa about 20 years ago to attend the London School of Economics which has a branch in South Africa; he had simply stayed on.

"South Africa seems to have a high standard of living," I said. "Everyone here is pretty well off materially, even the blacks. And your average middle class person has a large suburban home with a swimming pool. It's incredible!"

"Yes, the standard of living is high, but the quality of life is low," he replied. He was handsome and in very good physical shape for someone his age, I thought. In his three piece suit, driving a large new Oldsmobile, he appeared quite prosperous.

"What South Africa is missing," he continued after a pause, "is a certain quality that adds meaning and direction to life. The people here have no philosophy or ideals to hang on to. They are merely satisfied with the pursuit of material things and sensory pleasure."

"I've heard that South Africa has a high rate of alcoholism and divorce. But in America it's the same—most people spend their lives chasing the dollar," I responded.

"Money isn't the cause of unhappiness, and it's important to have the basics of life without having to break your back all day to earn a decent living. It would be nice if we could find a balance between the physical and the spiritual."

"You don't sound like a typical economist," I said.

He laughed, "Economics is more philosophy than science—we're not all dry mathematicians."

We talked on about various economic theories, then he slowed the car at a crossroads. "Here's where I'm going to let you off." I grabbed my pack. "Take care," he said, "have a nice time in South Africa!"

"Thanks for the ride," I waved to him. "It's been interesting talking to you!" And it was, too—he had given my body a lift and he'd also "lifted" my brain; I felt mentally stimulated from his ideas.

When you let the Tao flow through you, fate can toss you into someone's lap. Who knows what lesson or challenge you'll be facing? I thought about it while hitching my next ride. As car after car passed, I imagined myself riding a Zen wave through time and zeroed in on the next approaching vehicle. It stopped!

It was a brand new Mazda pick-up, silver grey and still gleaming with its show-room shine. Out jumped a small, rather weak older white man. Nervously he said, "Where are you going?"

"To Swaziland," I answered, "thanks for stopping."

"Sure, hop in," he grimaced, "I don't know why I stopped for you anyway, I never pick up hitchhikers."

"That's interesting," I said, rolling down my window as the car started smoothly down the highway. "By the way, I'm from America; I'm sort of hitchhiking through Africa."

"God, who would want to do that?" He made a face expressing his disgust. "Those banana republics up north are crazy. I'd never go there." He was gripping the wheel like it was holding the car together. If he never picked up hitchhikers, he was probably nervous about his "first time."

"Don't worry, it won't hurt," I wanted to tell him. Instead I watched the scenery out the window. Bald, grimacing and basically a pessimist, my newest acquaintance was an English South African. He told me this in the South African accent that the English despise. One Britisher had told me in a Johannesburg pub that the South African accent was the "absolute worst," they just despise it in Britain. "Then comes the Australian, simply atrocious." Americans were bad too, but their accents differed widely—mine wasn't too bad, he said.

The Mazda owner gradually relaxed his grip on the wheel and we fell into conversation about blacks and Afrikaaners. He didn't like

either, but would take an Afrikaaner over a black any day. I read him part of an article that my sister had sent me from the University of Pennsylvania.

"This is a quote from some South African guy—he says, 'If things get rough, the South African Government will bomb the blacks in Soweto and the other townships to pieces, and the whites will be a majority. The government isn't stupid by putting all the blacks together." I looked over at my driver. "What do you think about that?" I asked.

"Christ! I never heard that before!" he winced, frowning. "Actually, I'm fairly liberal, but that's not such a bad idea. Hmmm, maybe that IS their plan!"

"Oh, come on," I said, "the South African Government wouldn't really do that, would they? Anyway that wouldn't make a white majority."

"I wouldn't put anything past those people." A smile crept across his face for the first time. "Who knows what the government has planned for the blacks?" He came to the turnoff south to Swaziland and stopped the car.

"Thanks for the ride, mister. Drive carefully," I said as I got out of the truck.

"You too, kid," and he sped off east as I settled my pack for another hitch. South Africans have some pretty strange solutions to their complex problems, I thought; surely this one was a joke, but who knows. . . . .

I didn't want to let a negative conversation affect me, so I strove to keep my thoughts on a happy note. As I walked, it was a struggle not to get depressed, however. It was now overcast and getting darker. Rain clouds were looming to the north and I was walking down a rather lonely-looking road toward Swaziland, which was still 50 miles away. South Africa seemed a bitter place. So far I hadn't come across much brotherhood. The English and the Afrikaaner didn't like each other, and the other white minorities (mostly Jews and Portuguese) just kept to themselves in their own neighborhoods. The Asians and coloreds too just kept to themselves. I had the impression they would, even if they didn't have to. Meanwhile the blacks were killing themselves in the slums around the industrial complexes. I wanted to run back to Soweto and shout in the streets "Leave this awful place; go back to your villages. Go back and live a healthy life in the country!"

Just as the first drops of rain started to fall on the tarred pavement, I saw a large, brown Mercedes coming toward me. "This is my ride," I said to myself, and started to wave the car down. I waved both arms over my head and did a little hitchhiker's dance on the pavement. The car started to slow, then came to a stop just in front of me. To my surprise it was a black man. I was a little hesitant at first to take the ride. Should I? Was it safe? It did seem kind of strange that a black guy would pick up a white person out here. Still, as far as hitchhiking and Zen are concerned, it's foolish not to accept any ride, unless your intuition tells you that it would be dangerous. My intuition said I was perfectly safe, so, hoping my intuition was in good working order, I walked up to the car.

"Hi! Where are you going?" I asked him.

"To Swaziland," he replied. "Want a ride?"

"Sure," I said, getting in, brushing my rain-wet hair out of my eyes, "Thanks for stopping."

He was a very large person, dressed in a brown suit and businessman's hat; his broad nose sat well on his broad face.

"I'm a businessman," he told me after a short introductory conversation. "I own about ten shops around Johannesburg and out this way near Swaziland. I start a new shop every year somewhere."

I looked at the glossy interior of his Mercedes. "Seems like you're doing very well as a businessman; do you find any restrictions on you as a black?" I asked.

"No, not really," he said, "just that we have to live in the black areas. Since I can afford a nice home, though, it isn't such a problem."

"What do you mean?"

"There are many wealthy Africans in South Africa. Our restrictions are mostly political; economically we can do almost anything we want, just so we don't get into politics."

"What about job reservations?" I asked.

"Oh, that's no big deal, that's just to keep the coloreds happy and secure in their jobs. We still learn whatever trade we want, nobody stops us."

This African was obviously well off; I tried to question him about what blacks wanted in South Africa and what was going to happen to them. He clammed up though and I realized I had been a bit too inquisitive. We rode on in silence for a while until we came to a small

gas station and store in the hilly, green country on the outskirts of the Swaziland border. Pulling in, he said, "This is my place. How do you like it?"

It looked pretty rundown and scuzzy. Some black men in greasy overalls were hanging around outside. No one was really doing anything. "Looks great," I said.

We waited there for a while as he checked things out at his store; then we headed over the mountains in to Swaziland. We went through customs and immigration and then wound our way through the green, misty hills of Southern Africa. There was a soft, wispy spring fog curling around the valleys, lending a romantic, fairytale atmosphere to the land.

It was only another half hour into Mbabane, the capital of Swaziland. Because of a friend's recommendation, I asked my lift to let me off at the Happy Valley Motel a few miles south of the city. At nine rand a night, it was pretty cheap for Swaziland, but my image of this country as a fairytale land came to a halt when I stepped into the bar. In the corners were all kinds of gogo dancers in various stages of undress, a porno movie was being shown on the wall, and the place was full of women of "easy virtue," as the Victorians used to say. Swaziland is South Africa's Sin City. All the South Africans come to Swaziland to gamble at the casinos, watch pornographic movies and have sex with blacks and coloreds—all of which is illegal in South Africa and legal in Swaziland!

Aside from the aforementioned activities, I found there wasn't a whole lot else to do in Swaziland, except, of course, drink beer, and you can do that just as well in South Africa.

As far as accommodation goes, the Happy Valley Motel is a pretty good buy. There are a couple of campsites in Mbabane, as well as some in Manzini, which is a bit to the south. Between Mbabane and Manzini is the Ezulwini Valley, where most of the casinos are located. The Timbali Caravan Park is located here, where you can camp for a rand or two a night.

I spent a day looking around the capital and then hitched around the Usuthu Forest in the high veld, a heavily forested park area with some spectacular views of the countryside and mountain range of Swaziland.

The next day I started hitching south to Durban on the Natal coast.

I never expected to make it all the way in one day since it's a good two hundred and fifty miles and part of the route is unpaved and poorly trafficked. I had been thinking of going to Mozambique while I was in Mbabane, but was told it was out of the question at that time. Swaziland would be a good place to enter Mozambique if the country ever is open to tourists, for Mbabane is only forty miles or so from the Mozambique capital, Maputo.

Anyway, I was lucky to get a lift with a colored South African who took me a hundred and fifty miles down the coast. He was a nice guy and interesting to talk to. A mechanic in his early thirties, he wore brown denim overalls and had a knit cap to cover a bald spot on the top of his head. We talked of the freedom of traveling and the thrill of meeting new people.

"Life is good," he said with a smile, "we have the power to make or break our lives. We can shape our own destinies."

"Right on!" I grinned back.

He also told me something interesting about South African politics. "South Africans are generally a lot more liberal than it appears to the outside world. They use a system called gerrymandering—I believe you have that word in America. The political districts are all gerrymandered so that the rural Afrikaaners will have more voting power than they would have if the vote were actually a straightforward popular vote. So the most conservative element in our country has the most political power. I think if we had a popular vote in South Africa, apartheid would be taken out."

"Yeah, the politicians use that trick in America quite a bit, but I never thought about it happening in South Africa as well," I said. My lift suddenly yelled "Hey! There's a car with Durban license plates." He pulled up next to the car (a blue Chevy Impala) and shouted out the window "Hey, mister, are you going to Durban?"

The fiftyish white man at the wheel looked slightly startled, but hollered back, "Yes."

"I have an American here who needs a lift, will you take him?"

"Sure!" The man in the Impala yelled back, and they both pulled over.

"Thanks a lot!" I said to the colored man.

"Anytime." He waved back and sped away. I got in with the greyhaired energetic white. He was friendly like so many South Afri-

cans, and we had a nice talk as we drove the last hundred miles into Durban. I had made it in one day, thanks to the colored mechanic.

The Natal coast is the most popular holiday area in South Africa. The Indian Ocean waters are warm all year round for swimming and surfing. South Africa has some of the best surfing in the world and is full of "surfies" and bikini clad "surfettes" that make hanging out on the beach an eye-filling experience. To the north of Durban is the Zulu Homeland, known as Kwazulu. Lots of nice scenery around here, as well as Umfolozi, one of South Africa's best game parks (famous for the square lipped rhinoceros). This is one of the few game reserves in Africa that can be traversed on foot.

The eastern influence is strong in Durban—lots of Hindu temples and Muslim mosques. There is a colorful Indian market full of oriental curios, tropical spices, and exotic fruits. Most people come to Durban because of its beaches, and since I hadn't seen the ocean since I left Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania more than three months earlier, I was ready to just kick back and hang out on the beach for a while. I thought I might even rent a surf board. Incidentally, most beaches around Durban are guarded by shark nets; it's wise to avoid those that are not!

The best places to stay in Durban are the boarding houses that start near Ocean Park by the main swimming area—they get cheaper as you go away from the beach. There are scores of these boarding houses, all full of tanned young beach bums. I stayed in a small boarding house near the YMCA called Tralee Court for the slim price of eight and a half rand a week, or two rand a night. There is, of course, the YMCA in Durban; it's centrally located, but rather expensive for my budget. There's also a youth hostel, but it's not always open. Contact the Tourist Bureau when you get there for good information on places to stay and things to do in Durban. Pietermaritzburg, a few hours north of Durban towards Lethsoto, is a sleepy attractive town; it's the former capital of Natal Province. There is a youth center here to sleep in.

In about a week I was ready to head down the coast toward my ultimate destination, Cape Town. In one day I hitched southeast along the coast to Transkei, one of the independent Homelands in South Africa. This area is considered the wildest part of South Africa; in fact, it's called the "Wild Coast." The Bomvana tribesmen of this area had

the curious habit of fighting to the finish with battleaxes. Every Sunday in each district the young men with a score to settle would meet and hack each other to death. I learned this from an English South African who was giving me a ride.

"That's horrible," I said. "Do they still have these fights today?" I was wondering if I was going to get into trouble traveling through this tribe's territory.

"Not so much any more. I used to see a lot as a kid. In those days rival groups of ten to twenty would clash together, attacking bystanders only if they gave the impression they were favoring one side or the other."

"Being a spectator at team sports sounds kind of hazardous," I joked a mite nervously.

"I never felt in any danger," he went on, "there's more danger in the rivers. I remember one time when I was crossing a river in the upper Natal with some Zulu guides. I looked up the river and saw this big black thing floating straight down river at us. 'Is that a crocodile?' I asked my guides. 'No' they said, 'It is not a crocodile.' I looked at it again. We were standing chest deep in the middle of the river, wading across. This thing was coming straight for us; if it was a crocodile we were in big, I mean BIG trouble!"

"Was it a crocodile?" I asked.

"Well, I'll tell ya—I said to those boys, 'Are you sure that isn't a crocodile?' They looked up the river again and told me, 'No, Bwana, that's no crocodile.' And you know, those bastards were right; it wasn't a crocodile—it was the half-eaten body of some tribesman upriver that was floating down the river without any arms or legs. Came floating by just like that. Yessir, those crocs, they'll get you. . . ."

South Africans love to tell foreigners stories of life in Africa. That's OK. We Montanans have our grizzly bear stories. Guess it's the same the world over.

Port St. Johns with its high, wooded hills and rugged, enclosed bays is a spot of delicious beauty and great angling. I couldn't resist spending a couple of nights here in a shelter down by the river. Port St. Johns is a small, one-horse type town with two hotels; the cheaper one downtown would probably cost about fifteen rand a night. I felt fine just sleeping out under the thatched shelter by the river (it rains quite a bit in the Wild Coast). I met a young South African and an English-

man traveler who were camping out in tents a few miles away down by the beach. They were eking out a living by collecting mussels along the beach and steaming them.

I enjoyed the beach for two days, but couldn't swim because of sharks, so I hitched with a vacationing couple in a Winnebago-type camper up through Umtata, the capital of Transkei. It looked like a rather dull and uninteresting place, though a couple of Englishmen at the bar in Port St. Johns had told me there was some pretty wild night life there. I didn't stop to find out.

The retired couple with the Winnebago were a conservative pair—stern, grey-haired, righteous. "You know," said the husband, "the blacks will take over the world. They'll do it through sex. Look—whites and blacks have sex and what do they get? A black. That's how they'll take over the world. But you know who is going to stop them? The Chinese, that's who! Yessir, they'll stop the blacks!"

"That's crazy!" I wanted to say, but I didn't. A good hitchhiker keeps his mouth shut and asks the right questions; he is nice and friendly and tries to learn something from everyone. Occasionally he might be able to help his "ride" see something in a new light—but you don't start by telling him he's crazy.

I made it to East London that day, spending the night in one of the nicest youth hostels I've ever stayed in. That was probably due to the labors of the dear, elderly lady who ran it. Wandering around the town, I found a number of restaurants, some night clubs, and, to my surprise, even a strip joint or two. Not much to keep me in East London, I decided as I walked back to the youth hostel in a fierce wind that whipped up along the beach. The next morning as I was packing up to go the old lady cooked me the best breakfast of bacon, eggs and toast I'd had in months because I had gone grocery shopping for her the day before. "Take care, darling," she said as I was leaving, and asked me why hitchhikers always stole her toilet paper.

"An old traveler's habit from the Middle East and North Africa," I told her, though I hadn't taken any of her toilet paper. But like all travelers, I had occasionally stolen a roll from a hotel when I'd been desperate enough and couldn't find any to buy.

I decided to hitch to Jeffries Bay via Grahamstown the next day; it's a famous surfing spot just outside Port Elizabeth. It took me longer to get there than I thought, but I didn't mind. To me, hitchhiking is the

only way to go in South Africa. Whites must ride first class on all public transportation, more expensive than one might think. The trains in South Africa are justly famous; railroad buffs come from all over the world to ride on them. However, trains are usually slow except for the express trains that run between major towns.

If you have a hankering to take to the ocean, the ports of Durban and Cape Town offer plenty of opportunities to crew on a yacht. Check out the local yacht club, or hop a freighter to South America, Europe or Australia and the Far East.

Roads are excellent, they're mostly paved all over the Republic, and there are plenty of vehicles. Hitchhiking gives you the chance to meet lots of people and listen to their stories. You can learn plenty about South Africa by hitching around. Make sure that people see your backpack, because this indicates to them that you are indeed a traveler, and probably a foreigner. It's a good idea to sew a small flag of your home country onto your tour pack—it should be large enough so cars can see it. This is a trick that Canadians and Scandinavians have been using for years. Another good trick is to make a sign saying where you want to go. Something like: USA TO CAPE TOWN could work very well.

Food in general is cheap in South Africa, and the people eat well here. Hotels and public transport are a bit more expensive, but easily avoided by camping out, staying in youth hostels and boarding houses and hitchhiking. There is also a small black market for cash dollars in the country. Generally they give a ratio of one rand to the dollar, while the banks give about 80 South African cents to the dollar. Try to exchange with Asians or Jewish merchants in the big cities; these are people who want to get large sums out of the country to travel with. South Africans are only allowed legally to take two thousand rand a year out of the country.

After two days, I finally made it to Jeffries Bay where surfers from all over the world hang out, though the majority are from Australia and America. There is a youth hostel in Port Elizabeth called the Lantern Youth Hostel. In Jeffries Bay, a small beach town about twenty miles down the coast from Port Elizabeth, there are a number of boarding houses including one called Atlantis, which I found pleasant. Jeffries Bay is a great place to stay, especially during the summer when it's full of surfers. It's popular with surfers because the bay has

one of the longest left-handed waves in the world, but it's not the place to learn how to surf. The water is shallow with plenty of jagged coral to slice up your swimming trunks and you along with them.

On the way to Cape Town, there is one more youth hostel near Mossel Bay, the Hartembos Youth Hostel.

As I hitched that one long day to Cape Town with a sign that said "Montana to Cape Town," I couldn't help thinking with some degree of sadness that my trip was almost over: from Cairo to Cape Town, overland through Africa. It had taken me two and a half years to do it (counting working time in Sudan), but I'd had a mighty exciting and fascinating time. For some reason I thought of Cape Town and Table Mountain as a sort of mecca for the African hitchhiker. When I got to Cape Town, I would probably collapse in the center of downtown, my thumb out, frozen to the pavement like some glacier on top of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Now I was bombing down the coastal highway toward this mecca, my destination. An Indian had picked me up outside of Riversdale. He was a nice guy, a projectionist at a cinema in Cape Town. He was forty-five, brown and handsome. He told me all about his kids and the affair he had had with a Swedish lady in India when he had gone back there for a visit.

"You must meet my daughter," he said with a soft smile, "I'll introduce you to her when we get to Cape Town. She was dating an American for a while. You'll like her."

"Gee, I'd love to meet your daughter," I said, "but isn't it illegal to date like that, I mean Indians and Europeans?"

"Oh, nobody really cares about that in Cape Town. Besides, that's just sex. I always watch my daughter very carefully; she's in before midnight every night. No hanky panky."

Oh well, it sounded like he wanted her married off—he didn't know hitchhikers, I guess. We talked about life in South Africa, and about apartheid. We pulled into a gas station with a small cafe along the road. "Let's go into this cafe and grab a bite to eat," I suggested.

"Oh no, we can't go in there; they'll never let me in."

"Really, you mean you couldn't get a sandwich in there?" I eyed the slightly rundown building—it was hardly the Cordon Bleu.

"Certainly not," he replied, "go on in and ask them yourself, if you don't believe me."

While he was getting gas, I walked into the cafe and addressed the rotund white cook behind the counter. It was a typical greasy spoon—hamburgers, french fries and coffee—nothing special.

"Excuse me," I asked, "could my father-in-law and I come in and get a sandwich?"

The cook took a half-hearted wipe of the counter with a greying dishcloth and wiped his hands on his apron. "Sure," he said perking up a bit, seeing that I was a foreigner.

"Great," I said, "but he's an Indian."

A look of sadness came over his tired face. "Sorry, kid, but he can't come in. I could make you some sandwiches and you could take them with you."

"No thanks," I said, turning away. "We'll do without."

"Sorry, kid," said the cook again as I walked out. At that point the horrible, degrading essence of apartheid hit home for me. I was crushed. This decent respectable man couldn't eat with me, a lousy hitchhiker, in a greasy spoon in the middle of nowhere. God damn!

"I told you," said the Indian, handing me a beer from a six-pack he'd bought while I was in the cafe. "That's just the way it is."

In Cape Town he took me home to introduce me to his children. His daughter turned out to be extremely beautiful and delightful; it was a pleasure to make her acquaintance. While at their house I called some students of the University of Cape Town whom some friends had told me about, and it was arranged that I would stay with them. After dinner with his family and an arranged date with his twenty-year-old daughter, he drove me to a student quarter of Cape Town, where I met Andreis and Gaby. They were to become my best friends in South Africa.

Cape Town is a beautiful city, often rated as one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Founded in 1652 by the Dutch as a way station to the East Indies, Cape Town is a fine port with a sheltered bay, sandy beaches on two oceans, old trees and beautiful gardens nestled beneath craggy Table Mountain and Lion's Head Peak. The Cape Town Castle dates back to 1666, and it houses plenty of relics from the early colonial period. The slopes of Table Mountain itself can be ascended by cable-car from the station at Kloop Nek. The top affords superb views of the bay and there is good hiking around the top.

There are beaches galore around Cape Town; one can choose between warm Indian Ocean beaches at the resort towns of Muizenberg or Simonstown, or the colder beaches on the Atlantic side of Sea Point, Clifton or Llandudno.

There are several youth hostels to stay in at Cape Town, the Muizenburg Youth Hostel on the corner of Maynard and Westbury in Muizenburg and the Camps Bay Youth Hostel next to the Round House Restaurant to the west of downtown Cape Town are two. There are also plenty of cheap boarding houses in the upper part of the old

section of Cape Town, also to the west of downtown, an area often called "above the Gardens." Try Liberius Accommodation at 15 Union Street above the public gardens, or The Hennox on upper Orange Street, also above the gardens, or any of the many other boarding houses in this area. If you plan to stay in Cape Town and work for awhile, try to get into a cooperative student house; check the bulletin board at the University of Cape Town.

Cape Town has plenty of nice restaurants, too. Seapoint is a good area to go to for the evening, sort of a beach boulevard, and there are nice pubs and restaurants in the downtown, around St. George's Street.

South Africans eat exceptionally well; their food is less processed than most westernized countries and it is relatively cheap by western standards.

There are jobs to be found in Cape Town, and it is an awfully friendly place to settle down for a bit. Cape Town is by far the most progressive and liberal of South African cities. There are plenty of students; most of them are more radical than you or I will ever be. There are also plenty of so-called New Age activities; students into health food, meditation and "higher consciousness."

I found a job selling camping gear and back packs at a local sporting goods store and settled into a cooperative student house with Andreis and Gaby and three other young people, students and teachers. Pretty, fun-loving Gaby was studying to be an elementary school teacher. Tall, handsome, bearded Andreis and another fellow were working illegally in the black township of Googaletto, teaching carpentry to the immigrant blacks there at a church school. They told me that our phone was tapped and that the police knew that they were working in the township, where whites couldn't even go without a permit, much less work. They certainly didn't have any kind of permit; however, they were never arrested.

One grand night everyone in the house and a few select friends were invited to the township for the ritual circumcision of one of the carpentry school's students. Freely we moved into Googoletto on a few motor bikes and cars, breaking South African law as we did so.

At twenty-one it would be rather painful to be circumcised, but this is Bantu tradition, at least in South Africa. The person fasts for a week, is then circumcised, not seeing anyone for a week afterward, just living by himself in a hut in the bush somewhere, and is visited only by the witch doctor.

We sat around a campfire in the back of a pretty rundown house, occupied by a family of six or seven. Relatively speaking it was considerably better than housing in other African countries; in Cape Town it was what you could call crowded, but by no means horrible. Many a time in my travels I'd been happy with a place of less comfort to stay in.

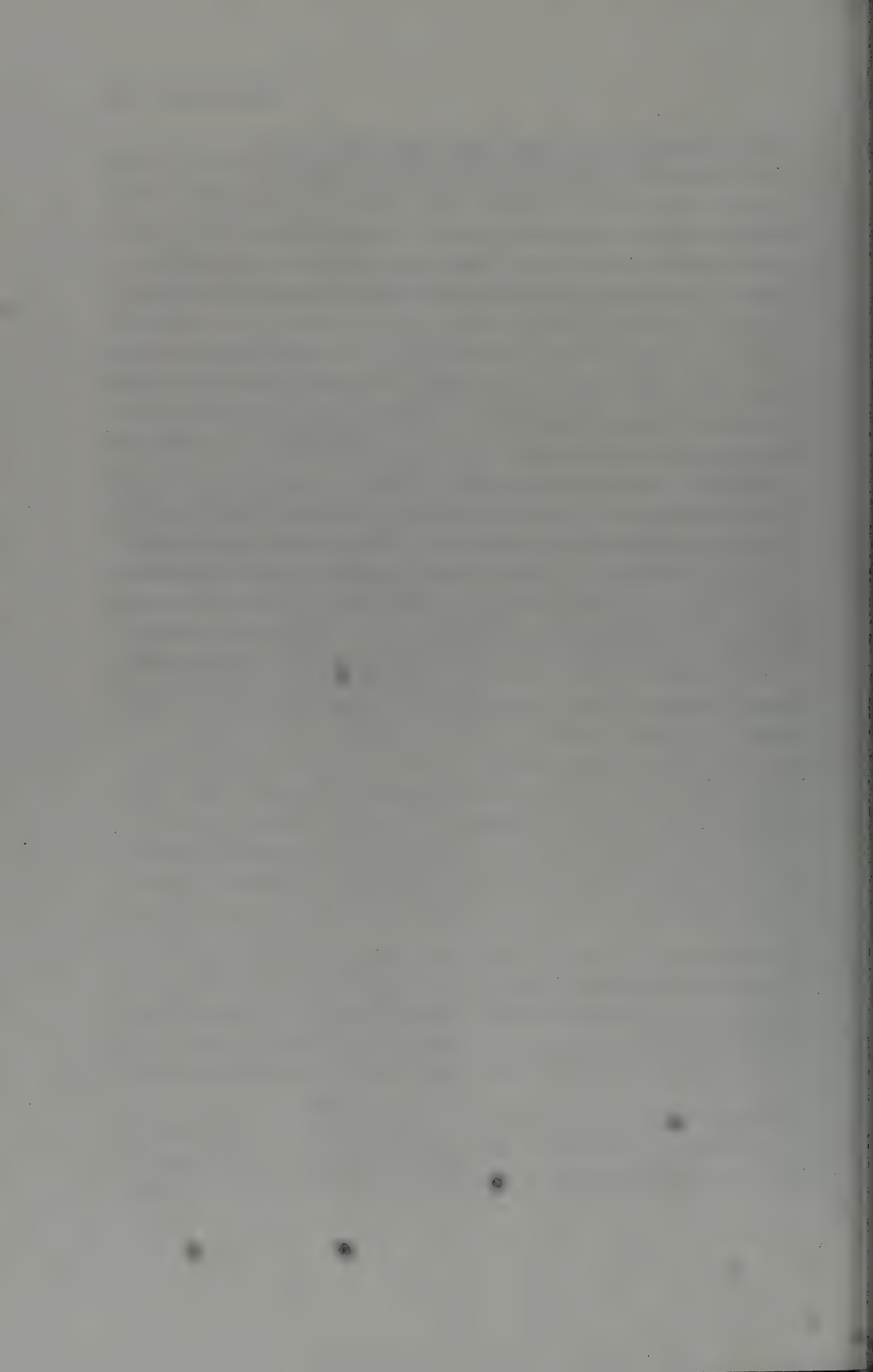
Huge bowls of African beer were passed around as well as cigarettes of dagga (South African marijuana). We visited the guy about to be circumcised, who was in a small hut made of sticks especially for the

occasion. We were allowed to talk with him, but we were not to touch him. After briefly socializing with just about all the Africans living in the township, one of the fellows from our house and I decided to go out and explore Googaletto a bit. We walked around the block. The roads were dirt, rather than paved; there were some street lights at least, but no sidewalks. All the houses looked the same: old, rundown, four or five room 30's style homes.

One black guy from the party took us to a shabine where they served beer illegally. We sat on a couch with a dozen or so blacks and talked very reasonably about life. They gave their grievances about the system, but they didn't seem hostile in the slightest bit, and we both felt quite safe there.

Suddenly Andreis came running in. "Oh, I've found you! Thank God! I was so worried. You two shouldn't go off like that. It's dangerous! You could get killed. People are killed out here all the time!"

We thanked the gentlemen we had been chatting with and walked back to the party with Andreis. We told him we hadn't felt in any danger. It's so hard to tell, really. I suppose everything can be hazardous. As one of the fellows back in the shabine had told me over a beer, "Live your life as if you knew you would die tomorrow. If you would change anything, then you are living your life wrong." I could buy that.



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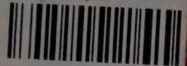
A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Hatcher Childress was born in France and raised in the mountains of Colorado and Montana. At eighteen he left the States on a five-year trek that took him from the Far East through India, Arabia and Africa and gave him the information for this book. He currently lives in a self-sufficient city in central Illinois.



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An extraordinary life on the road — a unique combination of practical travel advice and far-out adventure. Guided equally by Eastern mysticism and sheer American determination, Childress copes with the daily problems of money, sustenance, shelter, even sex, as he rambles from one incredible encounter to the next.

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