

Our Africa Trip continuing our gripping story from page 34

1971

But it was now time for my wife and I to embark on our fabulous 5 yr travel journey.....

So in 1971... it was decided (as hippies) that Marrakech and Kathmandu, would be part of our current hippie destination..... and 'La Barre' in France and Jeffries Bay, South Africa, part of my surfing destination....

So.....In the winter of 71'flew to Sydney.....then the 3 day, 4,400 kilometre Indian/Pacific train across to Perth, West Australia

6 months working in Perth, followed by a freighter trip to Singapore....

going thru the straights of Sumatra and Java saw with glee, some beautiful waves breaking on the Sumatran reefsfinally got back there 30 yrs later

But, the freighter we were on, had a number of hippie passengers on it, including us,.....with long hair naturally.....and when we reached Singapore, ..the police came on board and arrested the ship..... (which apparently owed 1 mill in docking fees).....

but the other troubling thing was, that the police demanded, that all us hippies, go out on to the top deck.....lined them up in front of a row of chairs.....sat all the hippies down.....put a

bowl on their heads..... and promptly cut all their long hair off.....I managed to put my beanie on.....to conceal all my long hair...ha!

Crossing the road the next day.....at a pedestrian crossing.....minus my beaniea Singaporean police pointsman keeps looking at my long hair.....pulls out his gun and points it at my head.....

we take off,freaking out.....and he leaves his duty as a police pointsman,..... chases after us(gun waving around)

We run into a jewellers shop,.....jump over and hide behind the counter.....he runs past

We run into a jewellers shop and jump over the counter!!!!
.....sheeeesh!.....lucky he a was a nice jeweller man!

The next day, visit a Singaporean nite club.....funky music.....but strange....every guy is wearing a beanie.....

when the band came out , so off came the beanies....guess what?...

Everyone (the Singaporeans) had hair, longer than mine ..ha!

Rebellious generation!!!!!!

The next day we were to depart to London via Bahrain.....but the plane that all us hippies were booked on, had apparently been overbooked by 30 people.....

But we complained

so guess what they did....

put us all on the same plane.....30 extra people on a fully booked plane.....

people were sleeping in the aisles, in their sleeping bags, you had to climb over them to go to the toilet....ha!

And guess what....this was 1971, and you could still smoke on planes.....and there was more than just cigarettes being smoked.....im'e surprised that the pilots didn't get stoned with all the Marijuana smoke that was filling the cabin...it was so thick, that you could hardly see your hand in front of you.....

and we lived to tell the tale.....ha!

Finally arrive at Gatwick Airport,.... London.... depart to Earls Court where all the Kiwis and Aussies hung out, and bought ourselves an old 1959 Kombi sleeper van.....as you do!!

And for the next week or so, Putted around London in our comfortable old kombi, pulling up and just sleeping anywhere we wanted (in our van,which you could pull up anywhere, any street,.... and camp for the night, in those days).....

one morningin our pyjamas....we cook bacon and eggssmell drifting out the window of the kombi,.....and much to our surprise....guess where we were!...

Right in front of 10 Downing street.....politicians walking past our bacon and eggs smelling kombi.....ha!.....Their front door directly in front of us.....ha

Finally headed down to South Devon...Woolacombe, ...and met Phil....my surfing brother there.....was nice!!

Phil introduced us to a couple ...John and Di (a South African surfer and his Rhodesian girlfriend), and as we had been in touch with the AA, (Automobile Association) and explained to them where we wanted to go.....

this particular route, was suggested to usby the AA

to drive from London to Capetown (across the middle of the Sahara).....back up to Dar-es-salem.....across to India....then on to Nepal.....

Wow.....big call....

But John and Di said "we'll come too"so that settled it for us..

Of course.....not realising the enormity of the adventure, that lay ahead of us.....

the euphoric momentsand the terrifying ones that also lay ahead

The perilous journey

We had no money, so we got to work real fast.....we needed more than \$4000 dollars (according to the AA) to achieve thisgot to work real fast,..... because, the AA suggested to us, that its necessary to leave in early September, to miss the heat of the Sahara summer, and also miss the beginning of the monsoon rains in Central Africa, and now it's April (and we were broke), so heads up, bums down.....7 days a week working....working.....working....well... we did manage to save \$1500.....i wonder if that's enough!!!!

i guess we figured, If we have accomplished half that amount by September, we were doing well.....Paula worked at seaside junk shop....selling souvenirsme at a fish and chip shop.....

we (the staff.. in the fish and chip shop) would sing and sway together, and sing catchy songs ..ha.....get an inch long piece of fish, and put it in the batter, and cook it..... then put it in the batter, then cook it, then put it in the batter.....until it was more than a foot long.....11 inches of batter”I'll have that one”.....greedy people ...ha.....but was fun.....but the boss didn't think it was that funny.....but it was to us.....juveniles ...ha

We would cook up some hot chips....put them in a carton....freeze them (still in the carton) in the freezer,.... then sprinkle a few hot chips on top, and sell frozen chips with a few hot ones on topha.....naughty boyshavin a bit of fun.....great days....and happy customers...well...most of them anyway.....ha.....

Can you believe...would go for a surf when I finished at 10pm.....twilight!!!...amazing.....surf til midnight

Decided we needed a new 1200cc motor (dam.....should have got a 1500cc) for the Kombi (and the first leg will be 25,000 kilometers to Capetown).....quite a haul for that little motor

A 25 horse power motor...proved to be (unknown to us) way under powered....and was nearly the death of us many times.....oh boy.....because we weren't aware of the severe terrain that was ahead of us.....

and we were supposed to be 4 wheel drive...according to the AA.....gulp!.....Sahara....yeeeks!in a 2 wheeled drive underpowered KombiAAAAAAAH!....yikes, very scary moments ahead.....

and a travelling companion vehicle is a must....thank goodness for John and Di

We also needed to put on extras,..... and modifications to the kombi also, during this time....as well as stock up with goodies.....dried food, canned food,multiple water containers (50 litres), petrol gerry cans (300litres), extended roof racks, sand ladders, tools of all kinds, 4 spare tires, 4 spare innertubes (tires in those days still had innertubes,, which would often be our saving grace) shovels, air horns,.....spare oil, grease, 2 wheel jacks, puncture repair outfits.....bull barsand many small modifications were also necessary, like double air filters, increased air flow vents (air cooled motor), light protectors and warning lights....

However the Gerry cans were unavailable locally.....so the local wreckers yard constantly saw visits from us, and subsequently, 3 loose Kombi petrol tanks would substitute nicely I thought (for the Gerry cans).....bad mistake I was to find out..... 4 cheap treadless tires was all i could afford....sheesh what dumb move, and substitute air horns (push bike hooters).....proved a last minute saviour to us

We would also need a extra long aerial, for our shortwave radio, to keep in touch with the scary changing volatile African political climates, and changing weather patterns...a must.. the AA informs us

Both us, and John and Di, our traveling companions ...worked tirelessly to have sufficient money....and competent working vehicles and abundant supplies.....incidentally, both got the old paint brushes out also, to paint the vehicles a more inconspicuous colour.....green for ussandy yellow for John(paint brush!!!!).....be inconspicuous as possible ...said the AA....wonder why!!.....

we were soon to find out!

Just about ready

Having finally departed South West England....and saying good bye to my brother,spent a short time in the New Forest...practising our adventure

2 weeks apple picking in Kent, and we all were proposing to catch the ferry to France the next daybut

.....tragically John and Di get the horrible news

that some of their African visas had been disapproved.....
(understandably ...as they were a South African and Rhodesian couple) and this.... has now put a screeching halt to their amazing adventure (and possibly ours).....remember, this is 1971, and Apartheid South Africans (and white people) were despised everywhere in Africa (unbeknown to us....naive NZ kids).....and they would have to find some other way returning home to Rhodesia

Remember independence was rife all over Africa at this time...from white Colonialism,....(was fine in the 1950s,but not so, in the 1960s--or 70s)

and white people were not welcome in Africa
.....(again.....unbeknown to us naive kiwi kids).....

Idi Amin was expelling Asians from Uganda.....

Nelson Mandelas ANC guerilla group was land mining roads in Rhodesia.....

Algeria..... murdering white people was common place.....

and we would find ourselves in the country of Morroco as a violent Military coup would be taking place.....shiiite!

South Africa was not the place to be in 1972 either.....

Civil war in the Congo had destroyed all infrastructure

Genocide was about to erupt in Burundi,
and the Vietnam war was in full swing, and the Chinese communist army influence in Africa, was immense and clearly visible.....
and now we had to consider whether traveling alone would be viable and wise.... according to the little information we had.....and especially in our inadequate 2 wheel drive underpowered old 1959 Kombi, that was well past its used by date
But in good ol' England, we were naïve to this, and were blissfully unaware of all these African atrocities,..... but soon we would be in the thick of it...no question!

Europe

As we watched John and Di depart on a large ocean liner.....our heads hanging low.....Di yells out to Paula, something somewhat inspiring ,
" did you hear what she just said"I echoed
"Paula, come and be my bridesmaid in Salisbury in March"
.....
Hesitating,i finally said....."yes sireeeee.....lets do it"
That was really all that we needed.....

"South Africa.....where on our way...yahoo"

Were on our way

The next day we find ourselves in France.....driving on the right hand side of the road for the first time

Hit the first roundabout.....went around it the wrong way , and consequently pissing off all the locals, as they scrambled up the curbs....ha!...beepin' their horns like madman.....cars going up the footpaths..... yiiiiikes.....what a start (and nearly the finish for us, as well)ha

The next day we hit one of my favourite beckoning surf spots 'La Barre' harbour mouth,and it didn't disappoint me.... beautiful peaks.....but unfortunately, is no more..... ah progress

Encountered a somewhat horrible moment as we played volleyball on the beach.....a rather large fishhook found its way into my big toe....

After unsuccessfully trying to remove it.....found ourselves at the local hospital

Wondered what all the screaming was about.....

i was about to find out....

as the doctor told me lay face down on the bed.. hold on to the bedhead as tight as you can....and subsequentlygot hold of my big toe.....scapple in hand.....slices right thru to the bonepulls the hook out and starts sowing me up.....

without any sort of anesthetic....no needles...nothing

jeeez,.... no wonder people were screaming ...I nearly put finger imprints in the ends of those steel bedheads

why no anesthetic?because foreigners don't pay their bills, that's why....jeeeeeeez!!!

Down to Spain and Portugal.....and on to Gibraltar after beautiful waves in Mundaka and Nazare

Hit the North African coast of Ceuta...then on to Moroccobeautiful surf once again,.....then my wife and I headed on to Casablanca, and a Moroccan nightlife experience

Found a dodgy lookin' kind-of a hotel (sort-of) in Casablanca and then, proceeded to climb the internal staircase, as we were ushered up there by the hotel staff..... in this shabby sort-of hotel....

Expecting to find a bar of sorts upstairs.....we instead encounter a room full of Arabic men, (about 20.....no women) all sitting lotus fashion on the floor in an elongated circle with 2 large bubble pipes in the middle of the room.....the musician (bongo drums player), beckons us over to sit next to him.....which we do,but notice that there is only one small window and one narrow door opposite us, as the only exit.....

oh well, were here to have a Moroccan nightlife experience and if this is their experience, so be it!.....

The bubble pipe mouth piece kept going around the circleand naturally we always complied, and took a puff at regular intervals.....

But after the first puff,. We noticed that this was clearly more than tobacco, and in Morocco at this time.....hashish was quite legal...and in fact, there were many shops that sold hashish, and we did buy some hashish cookies at one time, but were mistaken, into thinking they were just cookies to have with your tea.....no wonder we felt so spaced out and stoned, after gorging ourselves on heaps of cookies all afternoon, and tea.....ha!

But back to the story.....and as hours passed by, and everyone continued the smoking of these bubble pipes.....what became clearly noticeable.....was the sneaky looks around the room...at my wife

to the point where open discussion (in Arabic of course) and pointing at my wife, became a bit nerve wracking, and of concern.....in fact.....it became so heated,that a fight broke out between 2 men.....

was very disturbing.....especially when they kept pointing at my wife during the heat of the argument

a third Arab joins in, and a scuffle breaks out in the small doorway(which of course, is the only way out)

Yiiiiikes!.... this is getting scary

I whisper to Paula, "that we need to make a run for it"

“you go first and I’ll try and protect you as best I can”

“When I say gojust run for the door, and just try and push them out of the way.....I’ll be right behind you”

As the argument rose to fever pitch, and I was about to say “go”suddenly.....

Another man bursts into the room.....pushes everybody out of the way and gesticulates frantically, for us to get out pronto.....

we dive for the door, as the man is in violent confrontation with the other three guys..... bolt down the stairwell.....out to our kombi.....and we were gone.....’man’we were shaking all over, as we screeched off down the road.....and vowed never to put our foot on Arab soil again....

However that vow was short lived as we reached the cross roads further north at Rabat and instinctively turned right towards Algiers.....

thinking to ourselves, that guy who intervened in our hour of need, must have been the manager or security, or the owner.....but boy.....were we thankful for him that evening sheeeesh!.....

but what lay ahead was to be...far more confronting than this

Back roads 1971

As we crossed the border into Algeria.....

fear gripped us, as the anti-white sentiment became clearly obvious to us, as we turned on the local short-wave radio (mainly speaking in Arabic of course, but the tone was very revolutionary and aggressive).....

independence from France was relatively new for Algeria

however our fears were allayed, when we came across some Arab kids,.....who were very friendly and even very warm to us..... culminating in (compassionate) Paula, washing out the nits and lice, from the Arab kids hair.....so.....

was a nice moment!!

Remember that this was the time of no computers, no GPS, no mobile phones,.....in factthey never even had television in South Africa until 1976.....we were just to follow maps and listen to short wave radio for our information

We had not followed the advice of the AA.....in going to Algiers first (to stock up).....as we figured country people, may have more accommodating and friendly.....and we found.....that was the case.....

But we were in, unfamiliar back roads.....and were confronted by a somewhat scary and unnerving situation as we moved further south towards the Sahara

Nestling under some small trees we found.....some several hundred meters off the main track south...(very isolatedbut sandy desert type views to the horizon).....

We were very sure we were alone (visually we could see nearly 50 miles), so I jumped out of the van and I began practising throwing my Bowie knife into a tree (thought I would bring along some protection in the form of a Bowie knife..... carrying guns would get you into a lot of trouble at the borders....so that was a no-no).....

Paula was cooking dinner, oblivious to the outside world, and completely oblivious to the approaching threat, that was no more than, 5 meters away.....

3 Arab men were sneaking up on the kombi, (sneaking behind trees) as I, some 30 meters away (and obviously, unnoticed by them), continued to watch them from behind a shrub, wondering (with trepidation), what my next move would be.....

as they got menacingly closer to the kombi.....I felt myself, in a panic and desperately wanting to intervene, but was unsure what to do,

When suddenly,..... instinctively.....I rushed at these 3 knife wielding guys.....my bowie knife ...(in a threatening position above my head)....screaming, and yelling blue murder to these guys,..... and, through fright, they all took offrunning for their lives....as this knife-wielding madman pursued them for a moment or two.....then i quickly retreated to the kombi....jumped in the drivers seathoping like hell it would

Commented [MC1]:

startand hightailed it out of therebouncing all over the show...Paula holding on to the hot pots and pans, as we raced back to the road, with our Arab pursuers once again....in pursuit....it was panic, panic, panic

Travelling down the bumpy dirt track, for another 20 kilometres or so, towards the Sahara..... we finally found ourselves, in another camping spot, that we regarded as ideal, because of its vast isolation, and obvious 360 visual aspects.....and proceeded to stay the night there.....thinking that we have left our dastardly pursuers well behind.....and this definitely was the case, as we settled down for the evening in our somewhatuneasy state

Checked regularly for sign of outside movement,..... nothing.....looks good,no..... we're definitely alone,..... so finally hit the pit at 11pm after a somewhat terrifying eveningand after a bit of cassette music by Elton John and the Moody Blues (to calm us down somewhat....ha.!)

Finally fell asleep some time later, considering that we still had 20,000 kilometres to go, and still have the 2000 kilometre hostile and unforgiving Sahara Desert ahead of us, big question markshaunted us

Oh.....butso nice to hit the pit...and get some sleep

WHEN SUDDENLY

When suddenly.....around 2am
there was this bashing on the door.....
people yelling and screaming.....
bright lights all around the van,and rocking the van

I had no idea what was going on, and with great trepidation I
open the door, only to have a gun shoved up against my
head.....and through the bright lights, I could see a jeep with a
machine gun mounted on the back, ...aiming at me.....Paula's
following me, getting the same treatment

We are made to kneel on the ground.....hands behind our
heads, as two men ransack the inside of our kombi and starts
throwing everything outside

This is very very disturbing!!!.....

However, I notice that their uniforms are not like conventional
army uniforms, but more like possible Algerian police
uniforms,..... and as they also seemed to speak French,..... my
wife (who spoke a little French), tries to converse with
them.....

We eventually work out what's happening as we piece
together some words.....and it appears that these are indeed,

the local 'gendarme' (policemen).....searching for drug smugglers, drug traffickers,.....the cartel (so to speak)

And of course, we were totally innocent, but still followed them back to the local town....'Laghouat'...10ks further south, and in convoy,..... at 3am in the morning,and consequently, were heralded into the 'Commandants' office to be interrogated

Surprisingly, the Commandant was quite jovial and compliant....understanding our situation well...and even placed an armed guard around our kombi, who surprisingly was still marching around our kombi, as we awoke...6 hours later

In return for his favour, he pulls out a stamp album, (would you believe)..... shows it to us,... very enthusiasticallyand asks us if we have any New Zealand stamps.....of which we did,...and gave them to him, somewhat willingly, I might add

This was a very small town, with a large 10ft high, barbed wire fence all around the police compound, and they still felt it was necessary to place an armed guard around us,sheeeeeesh!!

We continued on our way, in the morning, but not without a stern warning from the Commandant, that we may find ourselves in a perilous situation,

“if you continue south, they will take everythingeven your motor while your sleep”

.....a somewhat of an unpleasant parting gesture...I must admit.....but it had as ring of truth about it....unfortunately

Sahara

The road continuing further south .. had obviously, dramatically deteriorated..... By and large, because, the country of Algeria had been in civil war, for the last 10 years, and infrastructure, clearly, had been sadly neglected.....the road south (track) was getting seriously third world....and we hadn't even reached the Sahara proper yet.....

we were bouncing around everywhere, and a little further south, we were about to experience the full impact of these dodgy roads, with possible dire consequences.....

When we reached the outskirts of our last town, 'Ghardaia' .. and the roads had deteriorated considerably more,we had the unfortunate experience of the kombi showing major signs of 'calling it a day' So to speak.....with the wooded roof rack I made, falling to pieces, the kombi's rear springs looking awful like their about to break,.....with all that weight on them

The baldish old tyres (that I could only afford) were showing serious signs of old age inflexibilityas they began to split everywhere.....(thank goodness we still had inner tubes in those daysthat you put inside the tyres)

And a large crack developed across the middle of the kombi threatening to break it in half.....

But all these things were fixable,.....

except what my wife was about to lay on me!!!!

With around nearly 20,000 kilometres to go, I am told....

And was certainly not expecting this.....

That she thinks she may be.....

"3 months pregnant"

Ime gobsmacked.....

we have just come over the worst road possible with 2,000 kilometres of Sahara ahead of us....and who knows what lays beyond.....

and im'e thinking that the possibility of a miscarriageis very very real.....and in the middle of the Sahara...guuuulp!

Especially considering the declaration, that we knew that we had to make, at the Algerian border post further south...(more on that later).....was very scary

But the pressing point at this very moment, was, the necessary repairs to the kombi.....as this was the last town, as we headed for the Sahara

A few screws fixed the roof rack.... And fixing up the tyres was elementary...especially easy with innertubes

The rear suspension was a little harder.....

converting our newly acquired heavy foreign shock absorbers, to fit the kombi.....but the split in the central bodywork was of more concern, but was finally repaired, bolting on a long horizontal steel plate, and hopefully that would compensate

We continued to head south...with the thought in the back of our minds, that an accompanying vehicle might turn out be a good option...but there was no other vehicle heading south, even after 3 days of waiting for someone, while doing repairs at 'Ghardaia'

so it appeared to be somewhat of 'wishful thinking,' as we headed towards the last fuel stop for over 2000ks, and then, slightly further on, the isolated border post,which was kinda scary...especially regarding the current Algerian border rules (and as I mentioned earlier,..... more on that later)

The last petrol stop was such a sleepy little, kind-of, Sahara petrol station, with noticeably highly inflated fuel prices..... and we were to get over 300 litres (according to the AA), to make it to the next fuel pit stop (a 44 gallon drum, so we were told....nearly 2000ks further on).....

One little building (our so called petrol station)....stuck out in the middle of nowhere.....and the tiny little border post, 20ks

further on, even far more isolated and eerymade you question the validity of this trip.....and when I was filling up with petrol, I somehow fell short in my fuel consumption calculations.....we were over 80 litres short (the 4 kombi petrol tanks....3 on the roof rackconsumed 60 litres ..NOT 80m litres, like I was told).....hence 80 litres short ..and no possibility of us buying any containers here.....but I assumed that a 2 wheeled drive, 25hp kombi, would consume far less fuel than the AA calculated (bearing in mind...their calculation was based on a 4 wheeled drive 70 hp vehicle.....with way more fuel consumption than us).....

I think we might just have enough...I figuredbut I also figured this is gonna be real close.....

bit scary

But our biggest concern, was running out of money, having only \$1100 US dollars left,..... and well over \$3000 was recommended by the AA at this stage of the trip.....anyway

Did a thorough 2 hour check of the kombi..... looks all in order.....

“what the helllets do it”were sure not going to turn back now.....was the cry of the day..... from the both of us I might add

And off we motored..... heading off to the lone border hut, some 20ks south.....and many countless unbelievable, scary & mindblowing experiences...I might add.....

Border

The border hut was as we expected....about the size of a small shed.....and that was it (desert all around...as far as the eye could see).....nothing else.....

not even any sign of transport for him.....and it was a tin shed.....and 50 degrees Celsius outside.....and somewhat unbearable inside

We hand him our passportsstamps themthen proceeded to hand us the Algerian Statutory of Declaration form ..which we knew was to follow (and still have, it to this day)

(By the way.....this the same route, that the 'Paris to Dakar' rally would use, a decade into the future.....and they would have serious backup...we were alone....just Paula and i....gulp!)

This declaration, is a declaration that absolves the Algerian Govt from any intervention ...should calamity, hostility, or any such unfortunate incident befall us, during our 2000 kilometre Sahara crossing.....in other wordsif you get lost, or worse, and you don't make it to the other end.....we aint comin lookin for you..... your on your own.....'sign here'!!

And we were given a 1 month legal time period permit to do the crossing.....

(you see, even though, the actual Algerian border was still 1500 kilometres further south, the access border point was actually in the north of the Sahara).....you would not

find any indication of a border 1500 kilometres south....just desert).....anyway.....time to go!!

Scary

We drove across to the track markers pointing south
.....contemplating whether we were doing the right thing or not

Stopped motionless for a moment

Smiled at the border official.....and one another!

Then we slowly moved off, with just a row of rocks to follow
.....at this stage.....

lucky if these row of rocks go another 10k ...I pondered....I wonder what's after that?.....we had no idea!!!

And so, as we waved to the border guardand of course, contemplating that,..... we were alone, and my wife 3 months pregnant....serious troubling doubts kept flooding our minds.....

as we drove off.....into the unknown

but after about 20 minutesand the border post gone from view, and desert all around....euphoria hits you...."wow were crossing the Sahara Desert"
....."unbelievable"exhilaration and excitement sets in.....

which never leaves you.....even as far as to Capetown

We continued on, some 150ks south, and began to climb, and drive along a flat mountainous rock plateau, some 40ks long and more than 300ft high.....you drive up, along,... then down the other sidethere are many of these mountainous plateaus that we would negotiate during our Sahara trip

But, as we were about 20ks into our first plateau experience, we decided to stop for the night,.. as the hypnotic mirages, in the distance, began to fade,..... (created by the relentless scorching daytime sun)

As night fell.....we were cooking dinner in our little old kombi.....put on some Santana and James Taylor.....and life was just great.....no one, in more than 150 kilometres from uswas so exhilarating

The night sky was simply breathtaking, as I clambered onto the roof to get some water.....only movement in the desert was shooting stars.....not a breath of wind.....what a mind-blowing experience

Finally settled down for the evening.....knowing full well, that the desert can go well below freezing at night, and up again to 50 Celsius during the day.....what an amazing contrast we were to experience

Finally got to sleep about 11 pm.....and all was quiet.....

WHEN SUDDENLY.....

When suddenlythere an enormous bang outside.....

I jumped to my feet.....exiting the door,... In a hurry.....
wondering what hell was going on

What on earth could have happened..... I frantically surveyed

Looked up, petrified

and saw petrol running down all over the kombi.....all over
the roof and down the sides.....hoping like hell it wasn't
dripping on the battery.....because, if it ignited in any
way.....we're alltoasted crispies

We would go up in a blaze of glory....

Scrambled frantically up on to the roof.....and one of the
spouts on one of the petrol tanks had snapped off at the
base.....with us, losing about 15 litres of fuel.....(which we
desperately could not afford to lose).....lifted the petrol tank
into an upright position and secured it firmly.....leaving it in
that position all night....expecting to deal with the problem
the next day.....

spent considerable time moping up, and trying to dry
everything out.....and trying to figure out what could of
possibly happened.....of which we came up with this
conclusion

That the spouts of the petrol tanks would have been
weakened,.....due to the bouncy corrugated potholey
roads.....intense heat would have also expanded the petrol

in the tanks, (in which petrol is notorious for) ...and the cold would have contracted the petrol...in the tanks.....so hence, all this movement..... snapped the spout base

Of course we didn't want it to happen to the others as well, so the next 2 days, was spent getting all 3 fully laden petrol tanks down off the roof racks, manoeuvring them into an upright position and Fibreglassing around the 3 stems..... (which was very heavy and awkward).....the fibreglassing taking up most of the day, because, having worked with fiberglass many times before, I had wanted them to cure slowly, as to not create further daytime heat than the 50 degrees we were already experiencing (fast curing produces a lot of heat.....so hence slow curing..... or less hardener)

And then we had to get the fully laden tanks , back up roof again, and secured....quite an effort, I can assure youand particularly awkward

Desert forever

Having lost a further 2 days, and more fuel, and a high consumption of water I might add (due to our stationary status).....serious doubts crept over us, as we neared the end of the plateau, and the track, supposedly ahead in the endless sand dunes.... was not visible from this elevated position, and the Sahara suddenly woke up to its scary reputation.....and our isolation was becoming somewhat unnerving

It was at this stage that we made the decision to just wait, hopefully, for some more possible company, that we were assured....would eventually come.....if we just waited

It had now been a week since Ghardaia, and not a sign of any travellers.....and of course I had a 3 month pregnant wife as well.....helping me do the heavy duties i might add.....

things were not lookin particularly good.....as we waitedand waited....and waited

Another day passed,and if I remembered right, we waited 3 days, until finally there was a speck on the horizon.....and would it be our long awaited companion, or, is it just another puff of dust in the distance, mesmerizing us once again.....

However, this time, the dust exploded into a black dot,and a motor could be clearly heard.....with eyes straining, an 8 ton lone army truck came into view,finally stopping close to us....and we began to swap stories,....theirs being,that they were with an expedition company (as the supply truck)...had broken a rear axle (on those notorious corrugated roads), and stopped off at Ghardaia to fix it, 8 days ago, but were unable to get it replaced or repaired

so, a week later, continued on with just front wheel drive.....

and here they were.....The Siafu Trans Africa expedition support vehicle, a week behind the other 5 expedition Land Roverswho had gone on, well ahead of them.....and now, we were lumped with their supply truck.... and full of

food, I might add!!!.....bummer!....ha.....but plastic food unfortunatelyjust add wateryuk.

Anyway, there was plenty of ityahoo....

There's nothing likesitting in a circle, around a dinner table....bit of Elton John, and a sing song.....in the middle of the Sahara Desert.....hundreds of kilometres from the nearest person.....very special!!!!!!!

The next morning we negotiated the descent from the plateau, only to be confronted with a series of piles of stones being our only indication of any sort of track.....these piles would often be around 500 meters apart but were often obscured by sand drifts, but never the less we continued on for several days, following them whilst they remained visible or partially visible ‘

At one stage the sand got particularly soft and boggy, and slow progress was going to be inevitable, with no more than 50 kilometres progress for the whole day, very laborious and extremely dusty.....so we made some drastic, and error ridden changes to our progress, that nearly ended up in complete disaster

Even though the truck was clearly labouring, with front wheel drive only....because it had bigger fatter tyres, and a far more powerful motor than ours, we felt that they should go first at

this stage, and leave some wheel prints in the sand, for us to follow in.....and because we had lowered our vehicle by dropping significant tyre pressure, it would be easier to negotiate the sand drifts.....behind them

By this time, we were at least 600 kilometres from any sort of human activity, but were feeling very confident and secure, and in charge,..... even though nearing the middle of the Sahara..

Butits amazing how quick things change

Near Disaster

Off they drove,

.....throwing up more dust than we anticipated, and because of this, we tended to drop back from them somewhat, as the sand dust just continued to engulf our vehicle.....were we driving with handkerchiefs as face masks, sand all through the kombi...and as we dropped further and further backwith no visible sign of the truck in front of us....and, of course, they couldn't see us.....

Suddenly, an ominous sound appeared.....it was as though the motor was labouring and struggling.....

and eventually we came to a sudden halt, as the bottom of the kombi came to rest on the sand drifts....the motor displaying its well underpowered, and underperforming ability,.....which I was afraid ofstuck well in the sand.....going nowhere.....and....and

our companion truck hurling off into the distance.....totally unaware of our predicament...and could be at least 50 kilometres ahead of us before they realised that we weren't behind them.....in fact we would be bogged axil deep all alone some 50 kilometres further behind them, ...

and they, like us ,were touch and go, in the petrol stakestheir consumption being significantly higher than ours.....they wouldn't be able to retrace their footsteps.....and of course, particularly now as darkness would be creeping over them later in the day.....we would be all alone, and unable to move

You have to make decisions very quickly in desperate moments like these, and so a desperate lunge was done by both of us, (and yelling and screaming I might add)...as we squeezed and hooted and blasted the push bike 'so-called air horns' on each side of our roof racks and just kept blasting away...barp....barp..barp....barp.....barp...they were very loud in the stillness of the Sahara air.....along with our yelling.....our only hope was that they had heard us

We continued on ...like it seemed for ever....

but eventually just stopped,.... and quietly listened in the stillness of the desert..... for a change of pitch motor sound, or visual affirmation.....

Nothing.....

Nothing.....

Seconds seemed like hours.....as we quietly waited and waited for some form of affirmation.....but all we could hear....was just the ever quietening gear shift changes in the diminishing distance

Untiltotal quietness

This is when, you go into crazy creative mode.....and million crazy options flood your mind....and you become frantic for solutions

.....

But fortunately... Unbeknown to us,.....was, that they had also deep sand difficulties themselves up ahead....and they also, had come to a halt, like us,and were themselves motionless temporarily ,

However

Redemption

but now also with good rear visibility,and as the dust was now settling.....

and it was noticed by them, (and heard by them)..... of our following absence,..... and so, a hastily turn around was executed by them, (after freeing themselves from their predicament...of course).....

and bursting out of the suns haze...with airhorn blastingcame our fantastic redemption

'Now a days' of course, there is a tar sealed road across the Sahara,.....but then, civil war, had neglected and diminished the Sahara crossing to, an obscure track of sorts, which was only just distinguishable at places,and when the sand storms hit.....(which we were about to experience by the way) you could travel vast distances with only a pile of rocks for navigation (the Sahara covers nearly 10 million square miles, larger than the whole of North America, so of course, so its vastness is legendary and scary)

and so.....

We adopted different strategies after that, and got through the next week with relative ease....eventually arriving at the small Sahara Oasis of 'In Salah'approx. 700 kilometres south of 'Ghardaia'(and of course.....after many euphoric and magical moments.....which you can understand, are somehow too difficult to describe, but fantastically unique, all the same)

The small Oasis of In Salah, was mainly occupied by the desert dwelling 'Tuareg' people.....of whom we got to know particularly well, as we hung around for several days

At night we would have a large outdoor fire....all of us sitting around it, including our 'Tuareg' friends, and the hospitality was truly magnificent

At one stage, as we swapped gifts..... the 'Tuareg' leader handed me his great grandfathers sword ..as his gift to me

(which of course..... I still have today).....even to this day in 2021, 'Tuareg' warriors still carry a Tuareg sword.

However....this 100 yr old sword I was given, had no doubt seen blood.....but unfortunately today, it is 'worse for the ware' in my care, because 'no humidity' preserves leather (Sahara)....'high humidity' destroys leather (NZ)but we s

However....this 100 yr old sword I was given, had no doubt seen blood.....but unfortunately today, it is 'worse for the ware' in my care, because 'no humidity' preserves leather (Sahara)....'high humidity' destroys leather (NZ)but we still have it fortunately... in its damaged state

The girls tried on Tuareg clothes while we played with the Tuareg kids.....was so awesome

But the time came, to finally move onand as we listened to short wave radio ('voice of America')...chills ran down our spine, as a new dictator had taken over Uganda (which we were now heading towards)....and Idi Amin was throwing all Asians and whites out of Uganda.....

Never the less we continued on our way, confidently knowing that we have complied with all the rules, and have visas to match

As we continued on our journey to our next Oasis spot.... 'Tamanrasset' (600 kilometres to the south)... a beautiful day for travelling was on the cardswhen suddenly ...to the west....thundering towards us...was a huge wall of turbulent

air-borne sand ,,,as far as the eye could see.....and nearly a mile high.....finally hitting uswith ferocious winds that engulfed and shook our kombi, like a rag doll

After an hour, it calmed down a little, but we were to negotiate thru a steady sand storm, for the next 3 days.....no wonder the Bedouin and Tuareg covered their faces.....we, and our kombi were riddled, with sand build ups everywhere and even though I had double filters on the engine..... when we reached Rhodesia, the brand new motor was on its last legs.....blowing smoke everywhere...only got 20,000 kilometres out of it...sheeeeesh!

I Rebuilt the motor.....new rings and pistons in Salisbury, and again in Capetown.....but gave up in the end,.....defeated..... I concluded.... it was stuffed

Weird

However, we had now covered a considerable amount of the Sahara.....and at some point during our journey south towards Tamanrasset, became quite puzzled as we ran across, a rather peculiar, deserted looking airfield, rubbish and military build-up of abandoned military equipment everywhere. Army helmets, 44 gallon drums, helicopters, trucks, jeeps, half-tracks.....all abandoned.....very strange

So thought I would grab a helmet... as a souvenir (as you do) when I was stopped in my tracks by our companions ..yelling.....'don't touch'.....'don't touch'.....'Im'e pretty

sure, this is where the Nuclear Atomic warheads were tested'

Of course they were proved to be right....detonation point being, just a mile away.....was very eerie

and everyone in that mid 60s nuclear program died of radiation poisoning.....and a monument to those who died of radiation poisoning was erectedand fenced off I might add,.....some 40 years later.....as high levels radiation still exist there even today

Imagine, if I had of taken that highly radio active helmet and slept next to it for the next 6 months.....and my wife being pregnant,.....sheeeeeesh!!

Tamanrasset

Tamanrasset was a bigger town than expected, but unfortunately, currently, no fuel available here, so we pushed on to 'In Guezzam', 500 kilometres to the south, accompanied by a Swedish group we found in Tamanrasset, who had an exciting Sahara journey, accompanied by a trail bike.....each took turns at riding the bike, and it was so cool to watch the bike departing alone, and later the support vehicle following up in the rear.....

however, they took a wrong turning, at a certain point, and distressingly, we never saw them again.....oh the wiles of desert lifewe saw their tracks heading south west into a very deserted region of the Sahara....heading towards

'Timbuktu'....hopefully they were ok ...but I would have to say, we were sceptically doubtful

Crossed into the country of Niger, and at a place called Agadez, which was around the 2,000 kilometre mark from 'Ghardaia' (in Algeria) and fortunately found some fuel here (in a 44 gallon drum, as were informed), but my concern over fuel supplies was quite justified, as we learnt that we had just 1 litre left....sheeeesh!.....and it was very expensive.

As we headed for the town of 'Zinder' in Niger, the terrain became more savannah type plains, and we had our first wild animal experience (so to speak), as we chased some Ostriches through the scrub, off the beaten track....to take some photos.....was awesome fun....."we're in Africa...yahoo"!

shortly after a leopard ran out in front of our moving vehicle and ran for half a minute or so on the track, 3 meters in front of the van.....very exciting moment for us kiwi kids.....wild animals 'wow'...amazing!!

Unfortunately the life expectancy in Niger was only 35yrs old at that time, as was noticeable as the locals appeared somewhat malnourished and undernourishedas there was no doubt, a cruel side to the Sahara as well.....

And as we entered into the city of Kano, Nigeria, (further south).....we find out that public executions were a daily occurrence in Nigeria, but apart from their fanaticism, we did fall in love with their simple, sub Saharan existence.....just loved the blue dye works, where Berber and Tuareg garments

were made, and their simple architecture, including impressive mosques

Moving on to Cameroon where public executions were also a daily occurrence, was also a bit of a worry, but when we reached the border of The Central African Republic.....chills ran down your spine, as you camped on the Cameroon side of the border for the night, and you could hear the screams of many unfortunate criminals (both men and women) being ostracised into a 5 kilometre wide 'no mans land' strip between the 2 countries.....this was their jail (so to speak).....with no police interference, and so criminal activity was rife.....rape and murder unenforcedvery scary, as we had to drive across that 5 kilometre strip the next day.....and, can you believe, got a puncture half way across.....that's the fastest wheel change in history.....should be in the Guinness book of records....ha.....friggin scary

As we entered into The Congo, we had a mixed experience

At the border of The Congo, we were confronted with straight out racism, that we knew we would experience in Africa, and it became a game of submission and surrender, so as to somewhat lighten up the border officials.....

The border crossing buildings, were very sub standard.....dirt floors and the border officials were very unkempt and rowdythere were many people doing the border crossing, with many lines throughout the day.....but we were the only white faces...

When we spent an hour or so, lining up, like everyone else did, and finally it was our turn at the front of the line, but

instead of stamping our passports, that we were expecting, we were sent to the back of the line again.....and this happened right throughout the day until all the migrants had disappeared except us.....our passports were then thrown to us yelled at to 'get out'

This was very intimidating for a kiwi used to integration.....but then again, knowing the history of The Congo, I was not at all surprised.....

Just a few years earlier, 'The Congo' had gained its independence from white colonial rule and obviously,...was still fresh on their minds....and a group called The Simba (Mau Mau), had been violently active against white settlers locally, and we fell in that same category.....makes you feel very vulnerable.....and as we headed for Uganda, apprehension was rife amongst us...and we were proved to be correct in our assessment as we approached the border later on

However the opposite treatment was also shown to us.....

On Christmas day we stopped at a Catholic mission(shortly after the border) and thought us guys, would scout through the jungle looking for a nice Christmas lunch for us all,..... leaving the girls to have a workout on the washboards

However, unexpectedly, as we rounded a corner on this track in the jungle.....there in front of us was this huge white Palace..... and servants who opened the large gates, and waved us inopened the doors for us and chaperoned us

into a large room,.....us 3 were just in our t-shirts, shorts and thongs (only white faces in the place..... i guess was the reason).....but all the Africans present, were immaculate3 piece suits, ties, polished shoes.....and out walks President Mobutubeckons us to sit next to him at the 24 seat table and promptly loads the table up with chickens, turkeys....you name it, and beckons us to help ourselves.....and promptly tells us of this boxing fight he was arranging between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman...'rumble in the jungle' he calls it.....didn't mean much to us then....but we did get great hospitality ,.... And unfortunately, had to tell the girls we were unable to find anything to bring back.....naughty eh!!

Empathy

As we made our way through the now, thick jungle, on this track towards the Ugandan border post,we were bewildered to see.....(1 kilometre before the Ugandan border post)a European couple walking along the track by themselves , clearly in some sort of distress.....

Being as this was in the middle of the thick jungle.....we stopped and picked them up obviously, perplexed by the obvious distressing and dangerous situation they were inand they began to proclaim their dilemma to us.....warning us in no uncertain terms to bypass Uganda

The Ugandan army had commandeered their kombi.....taken all their money and passports.....left them with nothing, and had thrown them out of the country.....penniless

As we could visually see the border post.....they may have wondered about our quick turn-a-round and exit.....ha!

However, finally, after 2 days, left our new friends at a Catholic mission, in The Congo, at their request, and continued on our merry way

What a trip

Shortly after we encountered another weird thing.....there was this white guy walking along this jungle track, all alone, with a back pack on, oblivious to the danger that obviously lurked in the jungle.....and clearly oblivious to the anti-white sentiment that is being displayed locally.....so we asked him if he would like a lift....."where are you going" ..we asked..... "anywhere" was the reply

This guy clearly seems to be distressed about something "are you ok"was the question.....and the answer really spooked me

'Lee' had just finished his tour of Duty in Viet Nam, and he was visibly shakenas he began to recall all the terrible stuff he had seen...the dramatically heightened fear factorthe Napalm.....the killings.....and he just wanted to get away from it all.....

He seemed to be living in a dream...in fact he slept under the Kombi often, and often you would see leopard paws all around the van in the morning.....one hardcore man!!

You had to be very alert in those days, as stealing was rife in that part of the world, and often when we would stop at some village, to get water supplies and so on, would often need to aggressively defend our belongings, often patrolling around our vehicles carrying our machetes,....

and even then, they still stole my wetsuit, much to my annoyance,....so promptly stomped into the local mud hut village, some distance away and demanded to see the chief, and have wetsuit returned

The Chief did emerge from his mud hut, but so did many of his henchmen as well.....and when (being the only white man there)....and being surrounded by his machete and spear brandishing entourage.....i promptly said the wetsuit was a gift from meand I hope it fits sheeeesh!

Monsoon

Unfortunately the monsoons came a little early that year. and even just a slight sprinkle would slow you up considerably.....

sometimes travelling only up to 5 kilometres a day....often towing one another on the greasy surface, and slamming against the bank, as we would often lose controland negotiating the bridges was often equally as tricky..... sometimes with only sparse logs to negotiate across.....and extremely dangerous when wet and slippery

we only encountered 3 kilometres of tar seal from Ghardaia to Rwanda (in approx. 5,000 kilometres of travel).....but with comical consequences, I might add.....

So proud of their new tar seal in the Congo (which also crossed a bridge half way along this 3 kilometre stretch).....

that they just closed the road for 3 days, while the bitumen hardened on the bridge..... ..and vehicles just camped in the middle of the road ,(each side of the bridge) and lit fires on the roads for cooking, and hammocks across from truck to truck.....very compliant.....but ...not us!!.....

As the water in the river was still only 1 foot deep (the monsoons hadn't fully come yet), we decided to not use the bridge...but clear a track down to the river, drive across the river, and up the machete cleared track on the other side ...which we did successfully, and saved 3 days, I might add, much to the amazement of all the onlookers.....but I was not surprised, that they didn't follow in our footsteps, as they were all heavy laden old trucks

Getting across the main Congo River was another level again.....civil war in the county had virtually destroyed all infrastructure, and a few planks on some dugout canoes was the only way to finally get across.....being conscious of the many hippos that frequented this river.....

one of which was killed on our far bank landing spot..... delaying our landing for up to half an hour.....

watching these 2 African women fighting over the still pumping heart of the hippo ,was quite a spectacleblood spurting everywhere....they were just covered in blood..... reminded me of working at the freezing works back home (NZ).....ha!

Butterflies

There were many spectacular moments during this trip, and one of those particular euphoric moments, was when a light shower of rain would hit, and literally hundreds and thousands of every imaginable coloured butterflies, would fill the sky,... and land on you.....hundreds of beautiful butterflies, all over you.....

But for some reason, hundreds collapsed and died in front of me.....all over the ground.....so I gathered up many, and took them back to New Zealand, (and in later years) made up a beautiful collage, and had it on the wall until recently.... as a memorial

Another amazing thing about Africa in.....those days,was the amazing array of fruit that was just growing on the sides of the jungle track.....which were often seen ripening on our roof racks.....bananas, pineapples, and pawpaws,

But also had our scary moments tooas we stopped at the Kembe falls on the Congo border.....

A beautiful waterfalland very mesmerising.....

And as we were engrossed in the mesmerising hypnotics of the waterfallsa dugout canoe gently pulls up beside us and in the relatively calm area of the river starts to unload a canoe full of fruit.....which he was intending to sell to us.....or swap for a t-shirt.....we naturally obliged and during the course of our bargaining I gesticulated to him.....'can I have a paddle'.....he nods

So I jump in my first dugout canoe experience.....fantastic...

i paddle calmly, in the still waters at the slight flowing side area, and before you know iti was out of sight of Paula, our African friend, and the kombi...

Monkeys and birds in the jungle trees.....and just me... fantastic.....felt a bit wobbly, in the 20ft long, log, dug out canoe....but persevered up river a little more....."wow, Im paddling up the Congo river,...all alone,...in a hollow dugout canoe amazing"never dreamed I'd be doing this several years agowhat an experience.....

until.....until.....a hippie pops up next to me, and im'e struggling to keep this thing afloat...this ..round log Ime in, wobbly all over the place, and now...turbulence created by the hippos.....making it even worse

but things get even more worse than that, as I didn't know how to successfully turn this 20ft log around.....so I figured that the only way to turn this thing.....was to allow the front of the dugout, to slowly creep across into the slipstream of the fast flowing part of the river,.....which is 'thankfully'..... is exactly what happenedand the front of the dugout did

swing around...and point me in the opposite direction...which was a relief.

But of course,I'me getting pulled into the fast flowing part of the riverand there is a waterfall just around the corner.....

holy shit.....did I panic.....have you ever seen a speed up movie.....imagine a normal frame movie at 25 frames a second.....well I was about 2000 frames a second..... superman.....

and eventually made into the calm area as I rounded the corner, 50ft from the waterfall.....I reckoned that African would have been a little bit pissed, seeing his lovely dugout careering over the falls,..... don't you.....ha!

Marijuana

Of course, in the middle of Africa.....in those days.....there was no police presence anywhere, and tribal reinforcement of values, was different with each village,but the general consensus was, that smoking dope was locally encouraged, in place of tobacco (which was hard to get hold of).....and not policed in any way

and that is why, we were constantly barraged and inundated with people wanting to swap for anything, and marijuana was often their swapping currency.....10 , 20, 50 kilos....baskets full everywhere,

but carrying anything that might catch the attention of the border guards,..... (so it) became a resounding no no from us.....the least attention possible.....was our mandate

Tense

We would often travel with some other vehicle (like the 8 ton Siafu truck).....and often times.....even up to a week....by ourselves, but at this particular time, we happened to be travelling with the truck.....and a Land Rover

We pulled over into a jungle clearing.....of the single lane dirt track.....our kombi, the Siafu truck, and our Land Rover friends that we had recently met.....and were settling down for a nice dinner.....even with outside chairs and tables.....very civilized...

Thick jungle as far as the eye could seeand totally deserted,..... but, in the way distance, we could hearfor a considerably long time.....the changing pitch of a truck negotiating up and down terrain

In the stillness of an African night.....noise carries And this vehicle, seemed to take more than half an hour to get to us

In fact, it was well after dark before they reached us, and all we could see, was approaching headlights

But we became very disturbed when the truck stops directly opposite us, on this single lane track, and turns off the motor..... and headlights

On the back of the truck were about 20 machete yielding men, obviously coming home from work.....but were all drunk

and pointing at the girls and making fun at them.....we told the girls to get in the vehicles and be ready to take off , should anything happenand then went and got our machetes out and put them on the table

At about that time neighbouring Burundi was experiencing genocide,...with over 500,000 people executed and murdered by machetes,.....so we knew what the locals were capable of.

A stand off, for more than an hour took place, and tensions were extremely high.....with them getting drunker every minute.....was extremely tense, and with us 5 guys, sitting quietly and adrenaline going thru the roof

After an hour, he starts the engine up, and after about 5 minutes, slowly moves away.....

You could just about hear the reliefeveryone just collapses in their chairs.....exhausted!!.....you have to be in a situation like this, to feel the crippling tension inside of you.....you realise that at any second you may feel the blade of a sharp machete,,.....very frightening, and especially that, one of our own...Peter...was a very, very impulsive person ...who had caused us headaches before.....and we knew.....he could be as scary as them,.....with his impulsiveness..'sheesh'

Steep

The Land Rover went ahead of us at this stage of our journey and our travelling companions, were once again, just the 8 ton Siafu Army truck.....which was also about to cause us more headaches once again

We ran across a steep incline, on a narrow track, through the jungle, that worried us greatly,.....in terms of it being very steep, and one of the corners half way up, had a menacing camber on itand on the right side of the road, was a 500ft jungle laden cliff into the ravine below

We decided that the truck would traverse the ominous steeply graded track first... as it was doubtful, that we had enough engine grunt, to get to the top, and we may possibly need a tow

So they took a good run up, as you do, (and remember, they only had front wheel drive)....but plenty of power.....

It looked like it was just going to be a breeze for them, traversing the lower stages with ease and power.....in fact, too much power

As they reached the half way point, and about to encounter the corner with the difficult camber on it,.....the front wheels had the power,spinning, vibrating, and bouncy along, seemingly with great ease,.....

However, the back of the truck was being dragged over towards the edge of the track (because of the bad camber of the road of course).....and because they had no traction (being lifeless wheels).....

when eventually,

the rear wheels lost their grip.....

and slid over the cliff, pulling the 8 ton truck backwards, over the cliff

Down through the jungle laden cliff it fell.....several hundred feet, backwards,smashing, and crashing through the trees, and was about to fall over the steeper part of the cliff into the ravine below...when it was arrested by the myriads of the strong and thick ...jungle vines.....

hanging precariously..... but with very little damage

The three adventurer friends of ours, in the front of the truck were unhurt....but very shaken up of course

Not a word was spoken by anyone.....which seemed like forever, but everyone just stood and sat there frozen.....all thinking ,what the hell do we do now

We assessed our situation, and it was clear that we were unable to take any more weight in the kombi, as we were choc-a-bloc now.....even overloadedwith Lee still with us, and the motor now underperforming, as the sand had chewed it out somewhat.....

i was doubtful it would even get us to South Africa, and as I mentioned before, and irate citizens in South Africa complained to the police, about our pollution,.... more than once

our 3 friends, Peter, Katrina, and Geoff....climbed carefully out of the truck, and made their way up to the road once again (the cliff at this top point was just manageable in terms of climbing ...about 80 degrees steepness and jungle laden)

And many proposals were put forward, but after a half an hour (this being about 10 o'clock in the morning).....a decision was made that we would try and winch the 8 ton truck, back

up the cliff face, and they had an army 200 metre 1 inch thick winching steel cable on board

It took us about 3 hours to clear (with machetes) a pathway up for the truck, with trees and jungle removed on the sloping cliff, so as make it easy as possible for the wheels (they would not get caught on anything)

Bought the cable up and wrapped it around a huge tree at the top, and then back down to the truck

The cable was then attached to the extended front wheel rims, and as you drove up in first gear, the cable would rap around the extended rim, and slowly wind up around the rim, winching itself up.....very precarious and dangerous

And with a huge amount of tension on the cable,and having seen one break before, which springs back like a rubber band, cutting everything in half in its wakeand knowing that there will be more than 8 ton vertical strain on this cable..... was very worrying...especially to the Peter the driver

However, at one o'clock, we were ready to start hauling up the 8 ton truck,hoping like hell the big tree wouldn't uproot, or worse be cut in half

Finally all went according to plan, and the truck finally settled on the clearing, at the top of the hill at about 3pm

Another one hour was spent, picking up the debris, as there was junk everywhere, including all their private belongings,

and food (which were in the open back, of course) ,...spread right down the cliff

By 4pm we were ready to move on again...making only about 5 kilometres this day

Freedom

At this stage we decided to separate, and continue on alone by ourselves, as they spent the day doing repairs on the truck

Crossed over the equator, and found a few old buildings with dirt floors that look like kind-of shops....went in oneis this a shop I thought!.....'certainly there were shelves and shelves stacked with cans of food'but guess what....they were all the samebaked beans...thousands of cans of baked beans....nothing else....."aaah,..ill have a can of..... let me seemake that baked beans"...ha!

That was the only thing you could buy here in these shops, were baked beans.....

Tensions again

As we headed south towards the country of Rwanda, we came across a tribe of pygmies.....and did a big swap (as you do)a t-shirt, for a 'monkey skin covered' quiver, cross bow, and poison tipped arrowsof which I obviously removed the poison tips as we entered Capetown.....didn't wanna get pricked by none of those...ha!

But the scariest thing of all, was, after I did the swap, decided to take a photo of the Pygmies.....which apparently is a no no.....and they chased us up the road, after I had taken a photo ,....because they believe, apparently, that their

spirit enters the camera, and their spirit is stolen from them.....so they became very irate.....but.....we won the raceha!

A short time after, we experienced another flat tire (which was now happening daily.....or even multiple times a day), but this happened on..... (once again) a narrow track, with a heavy camber leaning the wrong way (sound familiar), but only a small drop into a creek.....but unfortunately, both jacks were now broken, (however managed to fix them further on) but unfortunately, all the weight of the vehicle was on this lower rear, flat wheel.....

there was no way that I could lift the Kombi manually (and we were now travelling alone, Paula and I).....so as a last resort, cut down a tree, and tried to use length of the tree trunk, to lever the kombi uprightbut tried, and tried, and tried, but to no avail....too heavy.....

We were all alone, and this track in the jungle, is rarely frequented, so after half an hour of so many different ideas,..... gave up.....and were just sitting on the track contemplating our next move.....

Haven't seen anyone, or any village in the last 20 kilometres,so not sure what to do.....

When suddenly about 8 big Africans, walk out of the jungle..... friendly looking I thought.....

so gesticulated to them,..... If they would lift the van for me, so I can change the tire...that would be nice of them,. I thought

They complied, and the 8 Africans lifted the van , and I was able to change the wheel very successfully,.....nice guys

However, I didn't realise that their act of compassion would actually cost me anything....

Well it certainly did

and, apparently, in the form of clothing..... each wanting his fair share, and pulling and tugging on my t-shirt and boardshorts became alarmingand it was noticeable they were becoming, a little more agitated, rougher, and aggressive as well"I want t-shirt" I'm sure they were saying

their voices were also being raised, and a bit of push and shove was going on.....

But it escalated to the point where machetes were noticed, and the picking up of rocks and timber battens, also became somewhat frightening.....and being uncertain what to do (as this was also my last t-shirt, having already given 20 away) told Paula to get in the kombi.....and when I say "go".....but I must tell youI was a little more concerned, than more than just my t-shirt

"just put your foot down, and just drive away as fast as you can ..when I say go"

She started the kombi up, and I was pushing and shoving with these guys when I suddenly yelled out to Paula..... "go" "go"and Paula floored it, with me just being able to grab hold of the roof rackhoping like hell it wouldn't fall off or break with my weightand as I also (at the same time jumped on the back bumper), also hoping it would hold my weight.....

meanwhile these guys are trying to pull me off the van, while I'm frantically fighting them off, and they are now throwing rocks at me , banging me with pieces of wood and we continue racing down the road,

with us finally outpacing them.....Paula doing about 50k an hour with me hanging on the back.....

Very very Scary.....

But we still have even scarier situations ahead of us

But some amazing times as well

Silverbacks

Shortly after, we entered the country of Rwanda.....and Silverback Gorilla country.....which we were pretty excited about

However, neighbouring Burundi had just experienced genocide 1 week earlier,half a million murdered.....

and the Silverback Gorillas, were to be found on the border between Rwanda and Burundi, in the mountains.....

and we were just 5 kilometres away from them.....very tempting!!!!

Anyway..... we made the decision to proceed up the mountain to see the gorillas, as they were just so close, and we would be forever kicking ourselves, if we didn't at least try, being so close

However, as we turned off the main dirt track, and proceeded to go more than a kilometre or more, towards the advancing mountains,.....we noticed another kombi, tucked in a clearing, and hidden well off the road, and the occupants waving us down

Was so nice to see some more travellers againbut the urgency in their actions was slightly alarming....

and so, they proceeded to tell us that their friends had gone for a quick jaunt to the mountains, and would be back in an hour or so.....but this was yesterday morning, and no trace of them since.....or their vehicle....even though this couple had gone to the mountains, just an hour or so ago, before we arrived, in search of them.....but with no trace of their companionsor their vehicle

If that doesn't give you alarm bells,.....nothing will

So we did a big turn around and headed in the other directionnaturally.....but we were not at all surprised, considering the short-wave radio information that we were receiving from the BBC broadcasting stationwas...."to avoid all contact with the nation of Burundi"

Commented [MC2]:

Serengeti National Park

You tend to get over things pretty quickly.....especially when there is always something exciting ahead of you....and Tanzania and Kenya were ahead of us.....Mt Kilimanjaro and the Serengeti ...which I was really looking forward to...

Incidentally 'Toto's song....'I bless the rains down in Africa'which was still, a decade away.....but even today, is still my favourite theme song.....naturally

But anyway,..... we decided to give Nairobi in Kenya a miss.....crossed lake Victoria.....and continued on to the Serengeti, even though the monsoon rains had finally come...which slowed our pace right down considerably, on the dirt roads, because of the very slippery surface, and difficulty getting up some hills, required us to wait several hours, even days, as the mud just played havoc with us, and steep inclines caused us to lighten the vehicle (walking up the hills with the excess weight...water etc) more than once, to make the grade

However, followed Lake Victoria around until we reached 'Ldabaka', the 15,000 sq kilometre Serengeti turn off....and with great excitement headed out to the Savanah plains, on a largely unused track.....but at least it saved us having to go further on up, towards the more difficult hilly regionsanyway.....what a great feelingno one around.. just us.....in fact we never saw one other person in the several days we were in the Serengeti.....but did run upon two abandoned Safari lodges....so evenings saw us camp,. In our

kombi, wherever we pleased, and often the kombi would be surrounded by Zebras, warthogs, Deer, vultures, Elephants, Ostriches, wildebeests, and even at one stage had to shoo the Zebras away as they chewed on my roof rack tarpaulinwake up in the morning with animals all around the kombi...awesome!!but alas, saw no lions.....often heard them at night, but didn't see any.....but did see Cheetahswas nice!

However, did spend a lot time mending punctures,.... and some of the flat tire surroundings, kept you very alert,....very alert.....let me tell you...often very scary if you got a flatty with lots of foliage around

But I freaked out one day, when we had crossed over the river and said to Paula, that I would like to photograph the hippos.....not realising that I had sneaked up to the hippo's out of sight of the kombi,...and when i realised this was a game park and my vehicle wasn't visible....,man did I feel vulnerable.....as I ran back 100mteres to the kombi, I envisaged an attack by something.....very scary

Commented [MC3]:

But our worst nightmare of the trip, was to still to come

Our biggest Nightmare

We got to the edge of the Serengeti plains, and saw that the track south, continued up the nearby mountain, to the Ngorongoro crater at the summit (which was naturally, shown on the plan).....but one concerning factor, was that the so-

called volcanic track (or road) up the mountain seemed to go vertical (on the map).....not side to side (like a snake)..and this was very concerning, as this seemed like more than 1,000ft climb.....straight up the mountain (in a straight line).....with the most steep part, at the top

This was the only road southand it looked far to steep for me.....if it snaked up the mountain.....we may be able to handle itbut a straight roadno way

However it was the only road, so we had no choicei was quite certain that our gutless 25h/p motor....and our heavily laden vehicle, is gonna create a heap of drama for us.....and it did

We did a small trial run, and drove up 100ft or so, then had to back down, realising Ime gonna have to get a good run at this..... (any local vehicles would be in the 70h/p range... .powerful,... and 4 wheel drive....so...would be a piece of cake for thembut certainly not us).....the brakes became red hot also.....as we reversed down the 100ft or so

So.....we took a fast run.....my pregnant wife bouncing everywhere, as we found every pothole on the Serengeti

Raced up the face of the mountainmotor screamingstuff bouncing everywhere, and managed to get about 800ft up the mountain until the engine died.....getting steeper all the time.....no grunt left in the motor.....

what the hell do we do now.....Ime not backing down 800 ft, and totally burn the brakes out, and have to travel the rest of

our trip without brakes.....providing we can get back up the mountain of courseno....was to risky.....so what the hell do we do?

After several minutes of different ideas,..... the idea was mentionedto lighten the vehicle by taking off as much weight as possible, and make a big pile of bits and pieces on the mountain ...800ft up.....and I would try and drive the lightened vehicle up the last 200 ft.....

But remember.....where still in the Serengeti.....and heading towards the Ngorongoro crater. which has the largest concentration of wilds animals in the world

Took us an hour to unload the vehicle and roof rack, bull bars etc.....

Paula obviously was left alone near, (but back from the pile), ...which was scary enough, and I managed to start the lightened vehicle and slowly drove forward, with the clutch smoking away, as I rode the clutch (you only half engage the clutch.....because you have to increase the revs of the motor while half dropping the clutch).....burns your clutch out real quick.....but managed to pull ahead.....

until.....until....until the motor just conked out 50ft from the top.....and at the steepest part....i might add

Now were really stuffed.....no power left.....brakes straining on....Paula 150ft down the mountain.....no way of backing down 950ft.....and the volcanic rock of the mountain getting slipperier every footand narrower.....

if you went to the sides of the track, you would slip over as the fine peddles were unstable on the volcanic rock

What the hell do I do know?.....

Shit.....

The only course of action, I could think ofwas to edge my way up to the topsideways ...(at right angle to the road)

3ft forward (sideways) 3ft backwards (sideways) 3ft forward (sideways)....being careful not to get on the slippery pebbles each side, as i would just start to slide, and then how do you stop sliding

Also ...the steering was manual....not hydraulic.....very difficult

And so i started it up....with about 50 ft to the top.....drove sideways on the roadand continued my decent upwards...

3ft forward.....3ft backwards.....3ft forward.....3ft backwardsslowly inching up the mountain.....but this is getting very scary, as the van seemed extremely light on the top side

I was about 5ft from the top. when the top 2 wheels lifted off the ground, and I had about 2 seconds to get out of there before then van tipped and would roll 1000 ft down the mountain.....and of course....i would be killed. if I didn't get out in time....the kombi smashed to pieces.....and the worst thing of all.....

5 month pregnant Paula left all alone (and without protection)in the Serengeti.....shiiiite!!

What a horrible thought

As I opened the door to jump out.....the weight of the open door, slowly brought the kombi back on to the ground again

I negotiated the last 5 ft, hanging out the doorlike a yacht sailor leaning out from his yacht.....but driving at the same time.....and eventually reached the top.....yahoo!

We were so ecstaticbut quickly came down to earth with the thought of the 200ft hike...up and down with all our excess weight belongings...bringing them back up to the kombi

Took us about 2 hours, and your eyes are constantly searching for renegade animalsnone were seen fortunately

Man, did we earn our sleep that night

Dar-es-salaam

Spent a lot of time at the Ngorongoro Crater, then finally headed towards Arusha and Mt Kilimanjaro, and finally on to Dar-es-salaam,.....where we were told we could do well on the black market...the money exchange rate that is very beneficial towards us,(having American dollars) but heavily policed against such practice (as the corrupt bank officials

would pay off the police to keep control of it...and minimise the exchange rate)

Which naturally led us, down alleys, and finally, into dark rooms, where the uneventful exchange was finally done...but everyone in there, looked like something out of a dim horror movie.....scary

Checked out the surf in Dar-es-salaam at a place called Coco bch.....saw an awesome peak, got into my boardshorts..... yahoooo!

But the absence of anyone in the water,(and ide be out there by myself), and thought of stingers, or sharks, or saltwater crocodiles, kinda put me off a bit.....but as I found out years later, I needn't have worried.....bummer!!

But what lay ahead of us, was like something out of a cold war movie

As we headed for Lusaka in Zambia, we were informed by short wave radio, to avoid the place if possible,..... but as we were now down to our last \$100 dollars, our options were becoming more and more difficult

however, one enjoyable moment confronted us, as we walked down the streets of downtown Lusaka,..... there walking towards me was one white face in the crowd.....yahoo a white face....

It was one of my close surfing mates, from my home town, Brian Kane(from Whangarei NZ) about to do the trip that

we've just done..... but of course going up, not down like us.....what a treat.....lifted our spirits somewhat,

but our spirits were about to come crashing down...

As we were finally about to cross the Zambesi River (where the Victoria Falls are) on Beit bridge at Chirundu (50ks South of Lusaka), we were confronted by the Rhodesian army on one side of the river, and the Zambian army on the other side, with closed borders between, and an empty bridge between them both (the borders being closed because of Nelson Mandela's, ANC so-called terrorist revolutionaries, were been housed in Zambia)...and Rhodesia was not happy about that

Incursions and so-called terrorist actions were happening every day into Rhodesia

And sowe reached the bridge

.....the Zambian Army lifting the border barrier gate at the northern end of the bridge for us, and our lone vehicle crossed slowly over the empty bridge..... it felt like something out of a James Bond movie.....halted at the other end by the white Rhodesian army,

They took our passports.....handed them back to us

and horrified

our passports were handed back to us.....

"Denied Entry" stamped all over them

We were mortified, having reached our first white country in months.....and then to be denied Entrywas pretty hard to handle....my 7 month pregnant, wife bursting into tears

We argued with those, higher ranking officers in charge....

But, we were told

until we had \$1000, we would not be eligible to cross into Rhodesia or into South Africa.....

we were devastated!!!

So consequently headed back to Lusaka...not knowing what to do next.....my wife was distraught

We didn't know where to stop for the night, as violent acts were happening regularly, locally, and our van could easily be ransacked at any moment.....as the anti-white feeling was rampant.....naturally enough

we drove around looking desperately for a suitable place to pull into.....and just on dark ,we found a farm with a substantially high electric fence, surrounding this farm.....buzzed at the gate, and a white Boer South African came out and met us, with his rifle raised.....very scary

We explained our predicament, and ended up camping next to his house for more than a week.....but I must admit.....feeling nice and safe.....in the paddock in our kombi...surrounded by a high electric fence

But what are we going to do about our money problem.....

when we didwhat no one likes to do....

call daddy for help in New Zealand.....what else...ha!

And Paulas dad wired \$1000 across to uswhich was met with great jubilation I must add.....good ol dads !!!

Finally we crossed into Rhodesia but took a more obscure road to Salisbury....thinking that keeping to the less prominent roads would be a little safer.....yea right!!!

On the same road, 2 days later, a vehicle was blown up as it ran over a land minesheeeeeesh!!!

Well, remember when Di said in England,..."Paula come and be my bridesmaid in Salisbury in March"

Well, we made it by 3 days.....and Paula was Di's bridesmaid 3 days later...how awesome....

Finally reached Capetown, after a quick stop off at J Bay,....

but finally went back there 2 years later, with the Cape province surf team, of Piers Pittard (Mr J Bay...as he was known), Johnny Paarman (in my opinionthe greatest big wave rider around) and Tich Paul....and my wife and 2 little kids ...ha!

...and surfed against the very young Natal team at J bay, including Mike Espitiso, a young Shaun Thompson, Michael Thompson and others.....and attended the Nahoon Reef Gunston 500 at East London

My most memorable moment of my surfing career.....

But Capetown had its memorable moments toobut for a different reason

The day we arrived in Capetown.....I was so keen to get a surf in.....knew nothing of the local spots, but saw (what seemed like a nice 6-7ft left hander)...however did wonder why, no one was out!

Got in my boardshorts, and ran down to the water.....

Shit.....it was a 40degree C, hot summers day ,.....but the water was about 15degrees C (aprox 60degees F).....and I only had boardshorts on.....absolutely freezing

Anyway figured I would catch just a couplethen come in...

Looked a bit bigger than I thought....but decided to paddle out anyway.....

"bigger than I thought"holy shit!.....15 ft sets started pumping endlessly through.....and ime paddling further an further out the back.....freakin out about white pointers, that supposedly frequent these cold waters.....when suddenly, misjudging.....an 18 ft wave drives me down into 30ft of freezing cold waterand thick tree trunk size kelp ...

Ime 20ft under freezing water....just in boardshorts...cant feel my hands or feet.....there just so cold

My board and legrope are being tossed everywhere....as i was, of course.....but remember this is 1972and legropes were still in the experimental stage.....and my legrope was tied to my ankle.....

with a knot.....(no Velcro then).....the knot had majorly tightened on my leg, with the turbulence,.....

and the legrope and board.... were wrapped around the thick kelp.....

and I was so cold, I couldn't feel my hands, so consequently, Ime 15 ft under the water.....board is wrapped around the kelp...and unable to undo the knot around my ankle.....and major turbulence swishing me everywhere

struggling and struggling.....til I finally gave up trying to undo the knot, and resigned to the fact, that I was going to drown.....my 6 month pregnant wife, making lunch in the kombi, totally oblivious to the fact, that her husband, is just drowning just a few hundred feet away

Over a minute passed....freezing.....getting tossed all around.....

My frantic state stopped.....entered into a foggy state of peace...resigned to the fact that it was all over.....my whole life flashed by me.....and felt myself drifting off.....drifting off.....drifting off.....

When BANG, my board hit me in the face.... and had untangled from the kelp.....I raced 15ft to the surface with about 3 seconds left,.....my lungs bursting.....hoping and praying a wave doesn't land on top of me, just as I surface.....luckily there was nothing

Lovely introduction to Capetown, I thought.....ha!

The Cape

After many eventful moments and great surf, it was time to head back to New Zealand, even though we had intended to stay here permanently, and even applied for citizenship, and also, had started a business here("Cosmic Sound")building stereos and surfboards once again.....in a friends garageand even had found a nice place to live.....

But,.....when I sprung someone breaking into my girls bedroom, and when they confronting me, threateningly, with a large screwdriver.....I felt it was time to move on

My good South African surfing friend "Spange" (Andy Spangler), and his American wife, had decided to move on, (to the US), and the Apartheid system in South Africa was becoming frustratingly stifling.....even to the point, that if you engaged in an illegal gathering ie. (more than 2 cars in front of your house).....like a kids birthday party.....you could be arrested,.....and I had been arrested once, for surfing on a "blacks only' 'beach,and a good surfing friend of mine committed suicide....being unable to marry the love of his life (a coloured woman).....as both were denied passports as well

freedom of movement was becoming heavily monitored and when I put my stereo systems, up for sale in an anti-apartheid activist's record shop (Paul Pretorius).....I supposedly, became associated with his philosophy and activity, so was heavily monitored, until the day we left

We felt that we couldn't bring our kids up in a country with such attitudethat attitude, just creeps on you unknowingly somehow

However, i was very enlightened to the African struggle of dignity....as I went about my job as a supervisor, of a large upmarket housing development, (supervisor...being white of course, set you apart in South Africa at that time)..... and noticed that the Bantu labourers, would come to work every day, in spotless 3 piece suits.....and jump in the muddy, often collapsing trenches and start digging..... covered in mud, by the end of the day.....but came to work next day again, ...spotless again...in their 3 piece suits again..... amazing!!!!

man did I learn a lot about dignity on that job

New Zealand

Caught an Italian cruise ship back to NZ, experiencing 15ft high lines of swells ...breaching the liner and causing her to plain on the breaching swells, and the ship would plain down into the trough of the wave.....just like surfing....but on a 50,000 ton liner.....was awesome fun....bit of spewing going on around the place,..... but thats ok

Continuing gripping Story on long version from page 67