

**TOGO
MT AGOU
APRIL 2010
By Karen Hauptfleisch**



The taxi rank

28 April: My heart went out to our poor Nigerian driver, who looked exhausted and defeated after he was ordered to pay several bribes on the journey from Lagos to Lome. We reached Lome by 06h30 and keeping Rachel's warning about the dangerous beach in mind, a tired Alan and I dragged ourselves to where we thought we could find a bank and accommodation where we could lay our weary bones.

I was extremely grateful when a lady enticed us into a restaurant before handing us an ice cold fruit juice. After freshening up, we paid the exorbitant price nonchalantly and booked into the hotel next door. We then set off for the banks. It was extremely hot, my legs were past swollen, we got badly sunburned but we did stumble upon a market where we found some food, much needed shampoo (my fancy camping soap did not stand a chance against Africa's dust) and my sense of humour. Then it was off to the internet café and by 21h30, my batteries have run out.

29 April: It was so hot! At 04h00, I was under a cold shower, washing clothes. After a visit to the Ghanaian embassy, I spent 6 blissful hours in the air conditioned internet café, trying to download pictures and sending e-mails. Then it was off to do some shopping for bread, avocados and bananas. Stuck in the room that night, sweating profusely, I visualized myself back in the internet café with the air conditioning.



The market

30 April: I had no more dirty clothes to use as an excuse to be in the shower, so when the internet café opened, I was the first patron. I sat there patiently enjoying the cold air until it was time for us to fetch our visas for Ghana. At the motor park, we had to wait a while for our share taxi to fill up.



The taxi's roof

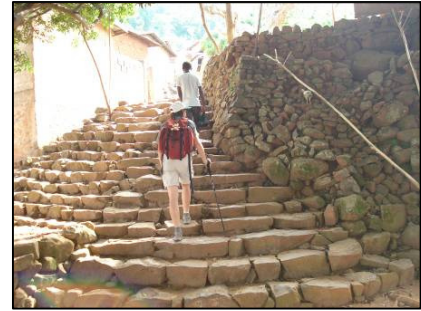
Our journey to Agou was not uneventful. It involved a motorbike accident and several conversations with musicians and Rasta's, all asking me if I was married to Alan. After 15 cramped hours in the share taxi, my sense of humour was slipping away. I informed Alan that we were married from that point on in the trip. At the Bafana Bafana guesthouse, Alan enjoyed a local meal while I enjoyed the local beer.

1 May: Joe had declared himself our official guide and by 07h00, we were on our way to Agou in a share taxi. There were four other passengers but after five km, the driver stopped, two passengers got on a motorbike, we traveled one km further, stopped again and the same two passengers got back in.

There is some law and order in Togo and you get a fine for overloading, but looking at some of the other vehicles and luggage, I was determined not to think logically while traveling in Africa.

It could have been the heat, but I watched in amazement as two joggers came past, running slowly for 10 m before stopping and doing some dance movements to the left and then the right before repeating the exercise.

The 12 km hike to Mt Agou turned out to be pure magic. 30 m Silk Cotton trees reminded me of the Avatar movie and I couldn't stop trying to capture the images on camera. We took shortcuts through the villages and were greeted by everyone. The villages were immaculate and the villagers use everything in nature. They pick leaves to feed the goats and in the one village' courthouse, they contained the branches to act as umbrellas. According to Joe, petty crime is punishable by a bottle of wine while, more serious crime calls for a goat. Mangoes and avocados kept falling off the trees.



The "green" village on our way



The top of the mountain

Before reaching the top, I received a lecture from Alan about keeping a low profile in the security area and being careful taking pictures. Lucky for us, just as the security guy was escorting us to the top, two French guys arrived in a taxi, distracting everyone's attention by taking pictures left right and centre from the communication towers on top. No one, including Alan, said anything when I took a picture of the South African flag next to the Mt Agou sign. We didn't linger too long and just before we got our passports back, we chucked the rubbish that

was lying around the dustbin into the dustbin.

Descending was just as pleasurable. At the Agblodone village we were invited for lunch by the locals and were given Avocados to take with us. Back at the start, Alan and Joe had some home made beer before we got a share taxi back to Kpalima.



The descent

After a quick shower, we were on our way to Mt Kloutse. The guide was not the friendliest and once again, a Rasta was lurking in the background. We ended up paying a fee to be on the mountain and hiked to the top before descending to Agome Tomegbe, Joe's village.



Alan buying chillies

The hike involved some bundu bashing and I thought Joe was wary of snakes, but it turned out to be snares he was wary about. Safely at the village, we went from home to home where he introduced us to all his family. Alan got more chillies (for his garden) from the market and then we headed back through the spectacular road again. For supper, we had bread with avocados, lemon juice and salt. My best meal so far.