

**CAMEROON
MT CAMEROON
APRIL 2005
By Karen Hauptfleisch**

20 April. Still not used to all the attention, we sat on our Landlord's stoep chatting to all the locals and the immigration officer who informed me that my visa had expired. He kept on hinting for a gift. It was not his lucky day. Still unable to exchange any currency, he ended up buying us a coke and bread, which I gratefully gulped down.

By 10h00, George, our landlord brought his truck around and our baggage was thrown in the back, a gospel tape was put in the tape deck and off we sped on a very dusty road. In the following hour, two snakes sailed across the road.



Colorful plakkies everywhere

Finding someone to exchange money was turning into a mission so we gave George \$10 to cover his costs before being able to exchange some Euros. Armed with local currency, we took a motorbike to the motor park, got lucky and within 15 minutes, we were on our way to Bimenda. 4 People in the front and 4 in the back.

The famous Ring Road lay ahead. Unfortunately, all we saw was dust and darkness. The windows were kept open (maybe because the boot was already open) and red dust followed us everywhere. By the time we finally made it to Bimenda at 21h15, we were covered in red dust and the driver took a towel and dusted us and the luggage. Alan, myself and our 4 backpacks shared a motorbike and the driver to the International hotel, who surprisingly offered us accommodation. I took the longest shower of my life, trying in vain to get the red dust off myself and my clothes.

We were starving. Being in the car with 7 other people made sleeping impossible since falling asleep could mean knocking your fellow passenger unconscious with your head going through the potholes. Since there was no space, drinking and eating was also impossible. 12 hours in a taxi without stopping has taken its toll.

21 April. A visit to the Immigration Office confirmed my suspicion about the immigration officer in Dumbo's hints for a gift. Al bought tickets for the bus and was chuffed to mention we had booked seats and would be leaving at 13h30. Ye right!

Comes 15h00 and all the passengers booked on 3 busses are put on one bus. Fights were inevitable. The guy who booked

seat 11 on one of the three busses looked forlornly at the lady sitting in his seat. She in turn glares at me, since we were both booked on different busses on seat 16. 30 Minutes later the driver hit a speed bump and everyone flew in the air, mobiles and loud verbal abuses included. Luckily for us, we had a mayor or two with us going to a conference and the driver slowed down.



Full of Red Dust

As we "rescued" more and more people stranded along the road and the breathing space inside the already overloaded bus got less and less, several more fights broke out. Alan and I joined the "you won't go to heaven" chant if the bus driver refused to rescue any more people.

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks: Cameroon

We finally arrived in Buea at 23h30 where we had to use a 20 liter water drum as a bath plug and the rubbish basket as a table since the only electric plug was above the basin.



Our bathplug

22 April: The day was spent arranging my visa to Nigeria, the trek to Mt Cameroon and exchanging money. A visit to the internet café also showed me that I was getting very patient.

23 April: We were slogging down the street by 7h00, big 85l backpacks filled with 6l of water on our backs, small backpacks filled with 3l of water in front, expecting to start

the hike by 7h30, as arranged the previous day. By 09h00, our official hike started at upper farm, where we were cheered on by prisoners chanting 'put a bit more effort in the hiking'. “

My bird watching reverie was crushed after Francis gave me the same answer “it’s a bird” twice after I admired the bird calls. Since there was water available at hut 1, we had some snacks and a short rest before pushing on. All along the Guinness Route we encountered empty whisky sachets. Our guide’s explanation was: “It’s offerings to Efaso Moto, the owner and protector of Mt Cameroon. He will allow people to live and visit the mountain as long as nothing is removed. When annoyed, he will shake the ground and when angry, he will spit fire into the air”. I had my doubts.



The official start of the hike



On top of the clouds

Another steep uphill followed the small break at intermediate hut and then we stopped at the magic tree. According to legend, the tree survived previous volcanic eruptions and special reflecting tape is wrapped around it so people can see it from afar. Pretty soon after, we reached hut 2 where a group of students were already relaxing and admiring the view.

Once the sun sets the temperature drops, so after a quick wash, the thermals were donned. Whilst we were laying snug in our sleeping bags

listening to the student group singing, they were sitting outside drinking whisky with the porters and guides.

24 April: We only left the hut by 7h30 and after a steep uphill reached hut 3. The temperature dropped and whilst Alan and I were putting on our layers, the porters decided not to escort us to the summit. Although it was not as steep as the first bit, Alan was starting to show strain. Francis pointed out a rock to me and I was instructed to go ahead, which I did, thinking I could set up the GPS, cameras and flag before they arrive.



The last stretch to the top

Unfortunately, the wind was howling, my camera got all misted up and my GPS recorded a height of 4075 m and said I was 20 m from the peak mentioned on Peak baggers. It was sad to

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks: Cameroon

leave so soon but Francis and Alan were suffering. They raced down the scree and by the time we met up with the porters, it was hot again.



The 1999 crater

by Savannah and then the lava field.

Mt Cameroon is a fascinating mountain and forest followed soon after. It became pretty slippery and we all took a tumble or ten. By 11h00, we have reached Bokwaanga, where we took a share taxi to Mt CEO Offices.

Along the way, I have picked up more litter and by now, my daypack was, amongst other things, really in need of a wash. We took a share taxi to Motor Park 17 in Limbe and then another share taxi to Limbe where Alan took an instant liking in the rustic Bay hotel.

I immediately started washing my day pack and then I had to abandon the mission to go and look for an ATM machine, a trip we repeated three times because I kept on forgetting things at the hotel. Then it was off to the Fako Fast Ferry to buy our tickets. We were pleasantly surprised to see a picture of the boat and to hear it was only CFA 30000 to Calabar and that we had to be there by 3 am.



Another lovely forest

The rest of the afternoon was spent washing and trying to dry our clothes and recharging everything. I could not stop staring at Malabo Island, tempting to take a boat and see if we might get lucky and be granted permission to visit Equatorial Guinea's highest mountain.

26 April: Getting to the harbour that time of morning was a bit scary so we didn't haggle too much about the overpriced motorbike ride to the harbour. The Ferry Service was very efficient. Our passports were taken, our tickets stamped, baggage searched (till they reached all the wet laundry and abandoned any further searches) and chucked in a truck before we were also chucked in busses.

A lack of sleep made everyone grumpy and several arguments broke out. One guy carrying fish was told to get rid of it before entering the bus. Another guy who complained about the delay and mentioned time and money was informed by the wise elderly that he could, since he has the money, take a flight, but that at the last flight, the passengers were stuck on the plane for 10 hours waiting without any water.

Listening to all the bantering, I was happy to be where I was, squashed in or not. Finally the bus moved to the wharf and we waited for another hour listening to some heated conversations before being allowed on the boat.

We finally left Cameroon at 6h00 and the journey was started with a prayer. A video of a gospel concert were played repeatedly for the next three hours. Then a local movie (part 1 and 2) from Nigeria was shown and had everyone in stitches.

TRANSIT THROUGH NIGERIA APRIL 2005

Once in Calabar, the waiting started again. When I tried to make the Customs queue more efficient (shouting id cards this side, passports this side and questioning everyone that looked like they were pushing in), Alan hissed at me 'mind your own business', so I tried to take a deep breath and be the most patient person in Africa. It was only later that I was informed that people were paying the security guy bribes to be let in by means of phone cards ☺

The immigration officer was very unhappy that I had been issued another visa. After making a statement about our journey and our religion, our pictures were taken and we given an ultimatum: "One week to get out of Nigeria or you will be arrested".

People were shouting everywhere. The police demanded money. The union demanded money. After returning from a much needed toilet break, I discovered that our luggage was carried 20 meter to our waiting taxi by two guys, who demanded an exorbitant amount and another fight broke out. I got in the taxi, stuffed toilet paper in my ears and read my book until the fight was resolved. The guys were paid a fifth of what they wanted and we were finally on our way to Uyo.



We had a very enthusiastic preacher with us who prayed for our safe journey. I joined him and prayed for calmness and the sensibility not to knock someone's teeth out.

My resolution of not drinking any alcohol whilst on the trip was broken after I was offered an ice, ice cold beer. After watching the Michael Jackson video 4 times, Alan went with the bar tender looking for food.

How to capture a tall woman

At the food stall, the bar tender asked Alan if he had any medication on the trip. It was only after answering: "Yes, stuff for headaches and stomach" that he was handed a plate of custard and beans

27 April: We were picked up by our driver at 06h00. By 08h30, we were still waiting, but luckily Alan and myself, being seasoned African travelers by now, could calm the Cameroonians traveling with us.

Our enthusiastic pastor started our journey singing and then prayed, asking God to protect the driver, the engine, the four wheels and us. He took his job seriously and after 4 hrs he asked a passenger to sing hymns, competing with the local radio.



Lunch

It was a big relief to me since the couple behind me had been

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks: Cameroon

chewing bubblegum the past hours and the toilet paper I stuffed in my ears was not effective. It was very touching to see how the Cameroonian couple treated one another and their little boy. I have never seen a happier 5 month old boy.

We finally arrived in a very chaotic Lagos at 18h30. Rachel, a Cameroonian working in Ghana, was also going to Lome and arranged transport to the motor park where the taxis leave for



Alan and some Nigerians talking Soccer

Togo. At the hectic motor park, Alan and Rachel went looking for a money changer whilst I was left behind with the luggage and an extremely irate driver. It felt like ages, in which my imagination ran wild, before they returned.

Lagos was getting to everyone and instead of looking for accommodation for what was left of the

evening, we bargained for a share taxi. Spread out on



Past tired at midnight in taxi rank in Lagos

the bonnets of the taxis, Rachel, Alan and the group of

young Nigerians talked politics and soccer whilst I was saying one prayer after another, hoping that my poor dad would never find out that his daughter was at that moment, stuck in a motor park in Lagos, surrounded by Nigerians.

28 April: We finally left Lagos at 00h30. The trip was not uneventful and we were stopped several times along the road. At the Benin border, the custom official asked Alan if didn't have anything for him. Alan gave him N200 and he grabbed the other N200 as well. I felt like punching him.