An Overview

A little under three years ago, Sam and I arrived in Cape Town on our motorcycles. We finished a ride we started in Cairo six weeks earlier.

We survived the heat in Sudan and the rains in Ethiopia. We traversed the desert of Northern Kenya. We rode through great canyons in Tanzania and heard fisherman singing in the dark on Lake Malawi. We saw Victoria Falls in Zambia and rode through the grasslands of eastern Botswana.

By the time we reached Cape Town we added some 12500 kms to our KLR 650s. We fixed 8 punctures. We collected a lifetime of stories.

Three moments stand out for me. Racing to make the ferry from Egypt to Sudan. Lying pinned underneath my bike on the bandit road in Northern Kenya. And arriving in Cape Town in the rain.

Making the ferry on time

We arrived in Egypt on a Saturday. We expected the bikes we had shipped from Montreal to be cleared through customs and ready to ride. A full week would pass before our mounts were finally loosed, and not before we haggled, bribed and tried to laugh our way through Egyptian bureaucracy.

Our bikes were freed on the next Saturday afternoon. We left immediately and raced into the night on our way to Aswan in the south of Egypt. We slept in the desert. Crossing into Sudan requires an overnight ferry ride on Lake Nasser. The ferry leaves every Monday afternoon. If we missed it we would be stranded in Egypt for another week.

We arrived in Aswan Sunday night after 18 hours of riding, most of it with terribly slow police escorts. Our ferry would load and leave early afternoon on Monday.

We needed only to turn in our Egyptian license plates and get stamps in our *carnets de passage* – something like a passport for a motorcycle. Then we could arrive at the port and depart for Sudan. We almost missed that ferry.

The Egyptian government issues front and back license plates to all visiting motorcycles. Except for Sam and me. We were only given rear license plates. When we attempted to return them to the traffic authority they would not accept them. The man behind the glass, who stood in front of what seemed like hundreds of yellowing record books, insisted that we were given two plates each. Without both plates we would not be stamped out, meaning we could not board the ferry.

There is no bureaucracy like Egyptian bureaucracy. We were released only after both swearing identical false oaths. Under the direction of the police, we swore “Last night while walking around Aswan city, I lost my license plate. No one stole it.” And with that we were free to leave the country. But only after riding our bikes as fast as we could, racing towards the ferry.

Riding our bikes in t-shirts and shorts, we raced in 45 degree heat towards the ferry terminal. The port sits by Nasser Dam, the great barrier that turned that part of the Nile into a massive lake.

We crossed the Aswan Dam at full speed (which is truthfully only about 130 km/h on a fully loaded KLR!). Winding down from the dam we arrived at the ferry terminal with minutes to spare.

We won our long battle against Egyptian bureaucracy, loaded our bikes on a barge, boarded the ferry and found a place on the deck for our overnight trip to the Wadi Halfa, the northern port of Sudan. We went to sleep lucky men to have made the boat.

Dust yourself off, pick your bike up

Our trip through Sudan was not without incident. I had a small accident on our first day of riding. It was nothing big, but enough to keep me from being able to pick up my bike if it was dropped or to throw my bag up on a truck.

Our trip through Ethiopia was more eventful. It was a book full of adventures. The short story is that Sam avoided prison after an unavoidable traffic accident. These were not small challenges and they were not expected!

Another great challenge of the trip – one we expected – was crossing the desert in Northern Kenya. A track runs 500 kms from the Ethiopian border to tarmac a few hundred kilometers north of Nairobi. Only the town of Marsabit, perched on the side of a volcano, breaks up the road.

The desert is full of cattle-rustling bandits who hijack and empty cattle trucks and lead the livestock into the desert and sometimes over the border into Sudan or Somalia. Government-armed nomadic herdsmen also cross it.

The first half of the road is rocky and deeply rutted. It is traversed by a small number of vehicles every day and dotted occasionally by army checkpoints.

The second half is unforgiving washboard and deep, talcum sand.

The first half would claim both of our rear tires 100 kms from Marsabit. With the sun going down, we risked being stranded in the desert over night. We chose instead to put our bikes in the back of a cattle truck and ride into Marsabit in the dark.

The second half of the road would prove even tougher. Faced with deep washboard, we chose to ride at high speed. This posed two challenges. First, it meant that we could hit deep sand at high speed. Second, it overworked our rear shocks, which we did not upgrade before the trip.

Halfway to our destination my shock exploded. It did not break. It blew into pieces. Looking under the bike, there was nothing but a spring and a shaft, with oil sprayed over the rear tire and underside of the bike. We had no choice but for me to ride a bouncing bike 70 kms to Archer's Post, the closest town.

Controlling a bike in deep sand relies on being able to use the throttle to lower the rear end and power the bike straight through. Try this with no suspension!

Soon, riding through a tough patch I lost control of the bike and buried the front tire in deep sand. Hitting the throttle, the bike rocketed towards the road's edge. Trying to gain control, I let my right foot off the peg. In a moment I was under the bike, my leg behind me twisted and pinned beneath my aluminum pannier.

I could not lift the bike off of me. I could not free my wrenched leg. I could only wait for Sam to come and lift off the bike.

I feared a broken ankle and I feared a night in the bush. Motocross boots, I am convinced, are singularly important pieces of equipment. Nothing more than my pride was really hurt.

We rode another 40 kms, mostly through the dark, my headlight bobbing up and down and doing nothing. Sam had to ride close behind with his high beam lighting the way for both of us.

We eventually arrived at Archer's Post and found a safe place to camp and park our bikes. We shared beer with some local men and retired to our camping spots. We had survived the bandit road. We went to sleep as lucky men.

Arriving in the rain

Our entry into South Africa marked the end of our trip. But we took our time to Cape Town. We rode from Nairobi to Johannesburg in just eight days, crossing five countries. We were sick for two days from exhaustion. We recovered for those days and then rode to Lesotho. We spent a night in the Mountain Kingdom.

And after that we made our final run for Cape Town. South Africa is a massive country and it would take us two days to make the rest of the trip. Had we been on sport bikes and not dual sports, it would have been faster. But these KLRs had treated us very well and there was no reason to wish for any others.

The night before arriving in Cape Town we crossed the mountains in the Eastern Cape in the dark. We saw forest fires burning in huge rings on far off hills and smelt the smoke in the air. Coming over those hills we saw the Indian Ocean for the first time, just beyond Port Elizabeth. We rode a bit farther and camped in a surf town called Jeffrey's Bay.

The next day was a dream-like ride along the Garden Route that tracks the coast of the Indian Ocean. We rode over massive gorges, occasionally down to the shore and occasionally on the top of high ridges.

Eight hundred kilometers later we would arrive in Cape Town. It was raining hard, the traffic was in rush hour, and we were rushing to meet a friend at a corner downtown. In all of this tumult, I think we missed the plain fact that we had arrived and that our journey had ended.

We soon we stopped our bikes outside of a menswear store, told the proprietor that we had just arrived from Cairo, and that we needed clean clothes. He could not believe his eyes. Then we unzipped our dirty jackets and removed our boots to try on new jeans. I think the smell convinced him. We hit our beds that night as lucky men with fresh clothes and a lifetime of memories.

PJL

Egypt

Flying into Cairo, heading to Alexandria

This city is like a circuit board dropped on a sand lot. It is either open desert or low buildings so densely placed that it is hard to imagine walking between them, let alone navigating them by car. For the first time, but not the last, I wonder what we are getting ourselves into.

I had spent the previous few days in England. I'd been to a conference at the University of Manchester – something quite interesting but also arcane on the use of field experiments to study the effects of political policies. And I'd spent two days after that in Belsize's Park staying with Ben Rusch and Christina Loucas, two old friends of Anamitra. Ben and I took curry in Hampstead, admired a nanny in the Heath, and wrote two songs. It was a strange way to prepare for our trip. I had mostly avoided thinking about the adventure that was ahead of us. I was, by this point, as trepidatious as I was excited. Ben and Christina having left earlier that morning for Victoria, I spent the whole night up before departing for Heathrow at 3 am for my 6 am flight. I could not sleep had I wanted to.

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My journal records my thoughts as I sat in the airport in Vienna waiting for the flight to Cairo, and then aboard the flight as well:

- I find the physical proximity of people and the strange swagger of men off-putting.
- (On the plane) I sit beside a man with a thick goatee and an absolutely black-eyed boy with whom the man is clearly in love. He reminds me of my nephews at home.
- The lush green follows out from the irrigation channels. But from there it's only the circuit board of buildings.
- In the airport guards carry around guns casually. It occurs to me that I wish I knew enough about guns to know their history, to know where they had come from, to understand the exact politics which made a government choose one set of firearms over another.
- "There is such a mix of people here, fully-covered women, others in tight jeans, mean in all states of dress, and then those who must be Nubian or Ethiopian, looking a little more sheepish that the rest."

In the airport, I am immediately accosted by a man flashing some tour operator badge and offering me coffee. I am mostly focused on the dark patch of skin on his forehead, some evidence that he is devout. Or at least a man who frequently presses his head to the floor. Quick with his questions, he soon elicits from me Sam's flight information and assures me he can help both of us. I will later slough him off at the airport after I meet up with Sam and he tries to charge us too much for a taxi to Alexandria. Sam's bags are lost, but we are both in good spirits looking forward to the ride to Alexandria. We soon negotiate a taxi ride for the 200 kilometres to Alexandria for less than $40.

The ride is harrowing, hilarious, and somehow typical of all that we will experience in Egypt. There is a great rush on the agricultural road to Alexandria. The cars drive without headlights until they are ready to pass one another, at which point they flash their lights. They pay little regard for lanes. And the space between them seems as small as that which I saw between the buildings from the plane.

But despite all this rush, we are still more than three hours to Alexandria. We stop at a roadside restaurant after less than an hour. Sam and I take tea while our driver takes sheesha. I remember little of our conversation, except for a great sense of excitement, some discussion of our next day's activities, and some talk of bewilderment at the otherworldliness of it all. It is not long after this stop that we stop again, but this time for banana bubble gum. It is as absurd as it sounds.

We arrive in Alexandria and leave it to our driver to find us a hotel. He locates the Hotel Jeddah on the seaside. We pay just $40 for a night and check into our room. When we go downstairs to take sheesha our driver is smiling outside the hotel, clouded in smoke, his taxi hood open and cooling off. I imagine he contemplates the drive back to Alexandria as we contemplate our next day's task: retrieving the bikes from customs and departing for Cairo. A visit to a friend of Sam awaits, as does my appointment to get a Sudanese visa from the embassy in Cairo.

PJL

The Search for the Bikes

By the end it was a cab driver, a harpoon fisherman, a jacket maker, his brother, Sam and I all in cab. It takes a lot of mango juice to feed such an army.

We had arrived in Alexandria the night before. I had flown into Cairo from London and Sam from Paris. I met him at the airport. He was free of his bags as they were floating in the ether of international travel.

We stayed in the Hotel Jeddah, a mid-rate place on the ocean that served us stale croissants and strong coffee for breakfast, not to mention lime wedges and cucumber and salty cheese. We would learn, after many more breakfasts than planned, that one could make from this a passable meal if the croissant was spread with cheese, and then stuffed with cucumbers, and then sprinkled with lime juice.

I remember this as a heady time. We could see out to the Mediterranean, could smell it, and could see into the blue blur fog at the edge of the horizon. The day was neither too hot nor too humid. The street below was a hectic mix of eight lanes, all of them full with drivers directed by some unknown and largely random algorithm. No logic was apparent. This is the traffic into which we would find ourselves later in the week, hurtling towards Aswan and dreaming of the ferry into Sudan.

We set out to find our bikes after breakfast. My journal entry from 2:30 pm explains briefly what happened:

- "waiting outside the port. The bikes will likely not be ready until Wednesday, so we've been running around trying to get our license plates and insurance. We were taxied to three different buildings, the first two of which through we wanted Egyptian passports. The General finally set us straight, sitting in the shade watching the road tests, also watched by many spectators. Now we are sitting at the port with our taxi driver."

And my journal entry from 8 pm captures the conclusion of the day:

- "On the train back to Cairo. We have achieved nothing except a long and hot taxi tour of Alexandria. Tomorrow I will get my visa. Not sure what else we will do except tour around Cairo. Perhaps a visit to the pyramids. And some letters and postcards to write and send. Finished reading RK's *Shadow of the Sun*, a pretty remarkable book. Would like to write just one essay about the trip as elegant and subtle."

But these entries do not nearly capture the absurdity of this circumstance, nor the cast of characters we would find ourselves with. We had been ripped off by our shipping company, the victims of a fraudulent bill of lading for which we would later receive a court settlement in Canada. We discovered this only upon arrival in Alexandria. We were on our own to free our bikes. We set to it that day with the aim of getting our insurance and license plates. We did this with a great cast of characters.

Let us begin with our cab driver. I cannot recall now how we found an English-speaking cab driver, though I think we flagged down cars on the corniche until we found someone sufficiently fluent.

This man would be a godsend. After going to our shipping agent to locate our bikes, discovering that the bikes would not arrive until Wednesday, discovering that the customs clearance services we paid for would not be provided, and discovering that we had likely been defrauded by our shipping company, we committed ourselves to freeing our bikes ourselves. And, before this, we reasoned that this day was a good one to get our licenses and plates so that we would be ready when our bikes were freed on Wednesday (it would take until the next Sunday). So, we laid out our task for this man and he took to it with gusto.

He began by driving us to series of government buildings. We entered a room crammed with people, with employees behind glass and behind them thousands of yellowing record-keeping books. We were spirited to the front of the line where, after many minutes of confusion, we found out that this office could offer us drivers' licenses, which we neither wanted nor needed. So, we then strolled across a long parking lot towards another building. On the way, we passed what passes for a driving test in Egypt.

This crazy country, where people drive without headlights, where lane markers are but recommendations, where drivers put their cars inches behind those ahead of them and flash their lights to overtake, awards drivers' license to those who can drive a car through three sets of pylons over a 100 foot stretch, and then back up through the self-same

pylons. While other drivers watch from a viewing area. It was an absurd and remarkable sight.

The next building was the same story on a different scale: another room, but with more people. Glass, but with more people working behind it. And scores more yellowed books. And the same outcome: we would not be able to get the required insurance or license plates. We did, however, get an audience with the general who ran this shop. In between bestowing his large, red-penned signature on the documents that beseechers brought to him, he suggested to our driver that we head to the port and try to get some assistance there. He could do nothing for us. So, we set out.

We would find out parts of our driver's story over the course of our day. He had, at some point, been a richer man, but he intimated that he had lost much because of political reasons. He longed to move to another country. He told us he thought Canada was a great country (though he thought it neighboured Sweden), but that he most wanted to move to Australia. And, upon probing him gently about the politics of his country, he told us that "We are a good people, but we live in a jail." One likes to think that he was representative of most of his generation.

We arrived at Gate 22 of the port, the entrance for those doing commercial work. It was here that our entourage would grow. Our driver drew the attention of a man who was some sort of a private customs agent. He was also supposedly a manufacturer of motorcycle jackets. And he was accompanied by a harpoon fisherman, who we can only guess was waiting out the opening of the season. The Jacket Man in turn had a brother who could help us, so we all packed into a car and headed down a back alley to find him. It was here that we took tea in the shade, we thought to wait for his arrival. As it turns out, everyone was just catching up on our dime, as "they all come from the same part of the country!" It was here that I wrote my first journal entry. And it was here that it was becoming quite clear that we were going to make no progress this day.

Despite this realization, we gave everything one more try. We all piled again into the taxi, six full grown men in a small car (but thankfully no harpoon), and headed down the lakeshore. We entered the office of a man who was also some sort of shipping agent. He resembled nothing so much as a well-tanned, rested, and exercised Jabba the Hut. He offered all of us mango juice while he looked over our *carnets de passage*, while he was waited on by two or three women and his similarly constructed son. He too informed us nothing could be done. And he offered us no more juice.

We retreated defeated to our hotel to retrieve some things and store the rest. We paid our driver $20 and set off for the train station to make our return to Cairo. We had high hopes of retrieving our bikes on our return to Alexandria two days later. We should hope to be so lucky.

The flight into Cairo had been like seeing a circuit board thrown on a sand lot. The train ride, along the agricultural route, was like winding through the Southern United States. It was not a feeling of home or comfort, to be certain, but even then it was at once foreign and familiar enough to both excite and comfort, and to remind one, even at the end of such a day, that I am a lucky man to experience such things.

PJL

Ethiopia

Leaving Gonder, Returning to Gonder

On 23rd July, we encountered our biggest challenge of the voyage. Sam's bike collided with a young boy while leaving the town of Gondar in northern Ethiopia. While Gondar has much to recommend it (e.g., fine churches, rugged landscape, an impressive castle), we were scarcely able to enjoy these features. At the time, the experience felt as though it might end our trip.

The basic fact is this: while riding motorcycle on the busy 10 kms of road from Gondar to Azézo, Sam collided with a small child. Such an event is every overlander's nightmare and, for reasons that will become clear, the depth of the trouble is greatly magnified by the punitive and irrational nature of Ethiopian traffic laws.

It was just before 9am and we were finally departing Gondar in a convoy of five KLRs, having spent the previous day with fellow travellers Tom, Tyson and Yeremy at Six's Garage getting some necessary repairs. Everything felt great: the temperature was cool, there was beautiful sunshine, and the mountainous road south to Addis Ababa is every motorcyclist's dream. All of a sudden, Sam nearly ran squarely into a pack of mules that came quickly out onto the road, seemingly from nowhere. Slightly separated from the lead pack, this was a reminder to take it slow on the unpredictable roads with their unpredictable, multi-dimensional challenges.

Pulling the bike into the centre of the road – "the safest place to ride a motorcycle" – Sam checked his speed at about 50kms. All of a sudden, from the left side, there was a streak. That was the only warning. There was really no time to react beyond a slight shift to the right in a vain attempt to swerve and too-late application of the brakes. The crunch was sickening and it was immediately obvious what had happened. Once stopped on the side of the road, the small boy was visible lying motionless near the left verge of the road. We feared the worst. Sam could barely bring himself to approach the scene.

Luckily the blow had been glancing rather than direct, since the boy had been running diagonally, with his back to oncoming traffic, instead of directly across the road. Clearly he had run out, most likely to catch his friends on the other side, without looking. Perhaps he believed the way was clear after watching the first pack of three bikes pass. In any case, there was nothing Sam could have done to avert this collision.

The boy, Gashaw, 12, had broken tibia and fibula in his right leg and had taken a worrisome bump on the head. Immediately after the accident, someone from the gathering crowd urged us to put him on Sam's bike and take him to the hospital. This seemed both impractical and dangerous, but before Sam could react, a man quickly gathered Gashaw's limp body, jumped into a crowded minibus, which then raced from the scene. The crowd then insisted that I wait for the police; a seemingly sensible course of action (by this time the Peter and the other riders had returned to the scene). We were very encouraged by the sporadic translation of witness accounts which invariably corresponded with Sam's experience: the accident was caused by the boy's carelessness.

In retrospect, waiting for the police was the right decision, even if it was not the wise course of action. While I have broken some regulations in my life, I do respect the law and the police, but in this case the police were clearly working against my interests and the law was stacked against me. But even if leaving the scene of the accident could have saved us some bother, ethics demanded that we confirm the status of the boy's health.

Once the police arrived, the next phase of the proceedings began: the legal wrangling and financial haggling. The bottom line is that Sam was civilly and, potentially, criminally liable for Gashaw's injuries. A government official told us that if Gashaw were to die, the sentence would be an automatic 17-year sentence. That was indeed a cold shower. But criminal charges seemed unlikely given two facts. First, whether or not Sam had driven with recklessness or intent to injure; neither of which were in question. Second, the severity of the injuries. Happily for everyone involved, Gashaw's injuries did not seem grave or life threatening. It was here that Yeremy and Tyson, medical students back in Canada, came to our rescue. They visited Gashaw in hospital on two occasions, speaking with the doctors and family, getting the latest prognosis, assessing the quality of the care and even leaving some of their personal stock of painkillers. Over he first 36 hours, they reported steady improvements and, most importantly, that the head injury did not appear serious or permanent in any respect.

There was no getting out of the civil liability: it turns out that Ethiopia has an administratively simple but outrageously unfair law that makes any vehicular accident involving a pedestrian the sole fault of the driver. Not only does this strain reason and “justice” by any definition, but it flies in the face of the reality of Ethiopian streets where pedestrian do the stupidest things with abandon and regularity. One can't help but wonder if the street life in that country might be just a bit more orderly if this law were replaced by something more sensible.

Irrespective of the remoteness of criminal charges, the term “prison” slowly started to rear its head more frequently in discussions between the police and the flaky lawyer that Sam briefly engaged. Avoiding prison rested on Sam acquitting his civil liability to Gashaw. This was more tricky and ultimately proved tortuous. The civil liability was a matter to resolve with the family or, if we failed to reach an agreement, by the courts. A court resolution would have meant a lengthy stay in Ethiopia and, consequently, the end of the trip; neither of which were desirable options. Settling with the family was the only realistic option. Let the haggling begin.

These were not truly negotiations in the classical sense of two parties sharing and withholding information, seeking to swap items in a manner that creates value for both sides. This was haggling in its most basic sense. In fact, we didn't even need a translator or a common language. All we really needed was time, a slip of paper and a pen with which to write our latest offer and counteroffer. The family’s first demand was for slight north of US$10,000. We failed to reach a settlement that day.

Throughout that first day and the one that followed, Sam’s position was considerably weakened by the gleeful meddling of the Gondar police, who frankly seemed to revel in

the whole spectacle of a helpless westerner. Successful haggling depends on sending credible signals that you will not pay or accept a particular price, or that you have other options in the event of not reaching a deal. The police systematically eroded Sam's position vis-à-vis the family by publicly eliminating his other options. For instance, they held his bike and passport in hock like a bail bond, and steadily increased the threats of sending Sam to prison in the presence of the family. At a certain point, when the bailiff came unexpectedly to haul Sam to the slammer for a night, Peter was there to insist that they first call the Canadian embassy in Addis and then swiftly escorted Sam off the premises amidst much bluster and some clutching at arms and sleeves.

The only thing we could do shift the balance was to introduce some community pressure into the equation. In this regard, as with many others, Peter was resourceful. He tracked down a British woman called Kate who was married to a resident of Gondar and was also an active member of the community. She suggested enlisting some community elders as brokers. She believed a reasonable settlement might be about US$100-200 even though a Canadian couple several years back had paid an amount equivalent to US$4,000 after the accidentally death of a child. While her analysis of the reasonable amount was slightly off, her advice to seek some informal counsel ultimately advanced the negotiations considerably.

With this help, Sam hesitantly and unhappily paid the grandfather about C$1,700. Gashaw's medical expenses were expected to be less than $100. The payment felt unjust, injurious and distasteful in that the greed of the family was palpable. Happily, as we hastily left town Gashaw's condition and prognosis had improved significantly; the hospital was preparing to discharge him completely to his family's care. In the end, we were relieved to leave Ethiopia. We had the impression that the children of Ethiopia, with their sticks and stones aimed at our helmets, were also glad to see us leave.

SSM

Malawi and Zambia

Waiting at the Bank, Waiting at the Border

I could have been in Sault Ste Marie or Winnipeg. This could have been Wichita, save for the chicken necks at breakfast.

We woke up at the Crossroads Hotel in Lilongwe, the principal city of Malawi. We'd come in the dark the night before, at the end of our first full day in Malawi. The day before that had been spent trying to find gas and cash in Tanzania and then eventually ending up at perhaps the most beautiful hotel on our trip, a villa beside Lake Malawi run by a Geordie and his Scottish wife. He was a drunk and she seemed longsuffering. We'd gone to sleep in a light rain and to the sound of fisherman on the lake calling out to their friends on the shore, alternating melodies and whistles. It is their form of navigation. It reminded me of nothing more than killdeer in the morning on Lake Nipissing.

I'd pushed hard to stay at the hotel in Lilongwe. It was comfortable and a bit posh. Sam had wanted to push on a bit farther into the night. This was an ongoing negotiation over the trip: Sam wanting to ride later into the night and me wanting to call it a day. He has more energy than me, I think. And he is certainly more comfortable riding at night. My eyes do not adjust well to glare, so I am forced to ride with my mask up, which further dries the eyes and then makes seeing difficult again. So, on this night, my argument carried the day and we stayed in Lilongwe. Indeed, I had stayed up late working on a paper in the longue, drinking gins and tonic – I was missing my work and anxious to make some progress.

I had hoped to make conversation with the group of Christian missionaries also staying in the hotel. I wanted to know why they were there, what they were doing, and what they made of everything they were seeing. I gathered they were from Alberta. I imagined what their composition was: some really earnest and faithful members. Others unsure about their faith but desiring adventure. And then the odd one there for his parents' pleasure but probably getting into guilty and hasty fun in the evening from his female counterpart.

In the morning, I had tried to place a phone call to Cape Town and another to London. In Nairobi, I had received the numbers of a man who may want to buy our bikes at the end of the trip, so I placed a call to his office in South Africa and his office in London. I was back in the past, waiting for an operator to connect a call, and then forking over an obscene amount of money to make the call. It was all for naught, in the end. I could not get hold of the man.

We had the chicken necks for breakfast and headed for the Zambian border.

Over the course of the trip, we'd learned to carry as little local cash to the border as possible. Every dollar exchanged incurred a cost, so we'd made a practice of withdrawing local cash from ATMs on the other side of the border, either at the border or in the next town. So, when we arrived at the Zambian border, we assumed we were fine with the fifth US dollars Sam held. We miscalculated on two fronts. First, we assumed that there was no fee for a visa in Zambia. Despite our pleas that we were sure they did not apply to commonwealth citizens (as if!) we paid with the last of our American dollars, save a

single greenback! Second, we never guessed there would be such a thing as a carbon tax for visiting motorcyclists. Stephane Dion, eat your heart out, because there was one in Zambia.

So there we were: no American money, no Kwacha, and a bill of $40 US to pay for our eventual emissions. Luckily, there was a bank at the border. Unfortunately, it was a bank which neither cashed travelers' cheques nor allowed withdrawals against a credit card.

As so many times before, we were helped by the kindness of strangers. The manager of the border bank offered to loan us $40. I would ride into the neighboring town, just 15 kms away, withdraw cash from an ATM, and return for Sam.

It was a simple plan. It was little different, really, than the time I ran out of gas in Labrador. Sam rode ahead, I waited. It turned out to be much more of a wait. The timeline follows:

- 1 pm: I ride into town. Locate bank machine. Find out the bank machine isn't working. Ask around and find out that no ATMs are working in the town that day.
- At the same time, Sam chats amiably with the banker and her guard. Probably writes in his journal something like "I am just sitting here while Peter goes to the bank. He should be back in 30 minutes and then we'll be good to go."
- 1:20 pm: I am in the bank with most of my gear on. I am 57th in line. I've counted and noted this in my journal. After a few more minutes the 58th person begins his long campaign to become the 57th person in line. This mostly involves him talking to his friend, who is 56th, and slowly but relentlessly sliding up beside me, shoulder to shoulder, and then trying to get his shoulder in front of mine. I swear my first look is as stern as my third, but he continues this long and unrelenting plan to get up one spot in line.
- 1:40 pm: Sam thinks something like "I wonder where Peter is. I am sure he's fine. Perhaps the town is just a little more than 15 kilometers away."
- 1:50 pm: I begin a conversation with the woman beside him. Turns out she's a Kenyan woman doing a PhD at Cornell in agriculture. She's an experimentalist doing field work in Zambia. And she's interested in explaining ethnic politics in Kenya. I am in heaven and do not care if the line takes 10 hours. My guard down, I am soon 58th in line (less all the people who have now been served. I am probably down to 30th or something).
- 2:00 pm: Sam starts to get seriously worried, wondering if I've been in an accident.
- 2:10 pm: I am happy as a clam.
- 2:11 pm: Sam gets more worried. Rightfully so. This worry increases until he meets two Canadians who agree to give him money for the fee, which he promises to pay back by pay pal.
- 3:00 pm: Sam is finally free of customs and makes a race for the town. I am finally free of the bank and make a race for customs. Five minutes later I see Sam's headlight and he sees mine. We pull over at the side of the road. Sam speaks first and expresses great concern, wanting to know if I am alright. I, seeing that Sam was worried, tell him it was awful, that I had to stand in line for two hours while a man tried to steal my spot. Sam tells him how worried he was and

how glad he is that I'm safe. I fess up that it was actually quite pleasant in line and proceed to show Sam the phone number of the girl I've met.

This reunion out of the way, we rode on to a campsite on the other side of town, looking for the Canadians who bailed Sam out. We find them at the site, and take a break with a beer. Near the bottom of the glass, I note a whole busload – a whole busload!! – of early 20s travelers pull into the campground! But last night we stopped early, so today we'll ride off. I may or may not have been crying when we left.

We rode on, soon in the pitch dark, to Sinda, a highway town with an old motel that a man is trying to refurbish. We stayed there and ended the night with a drink. We met a man who tells us about his travels to Europe. Many times. It seems to me the story comes out of a travel brochure, but I cannot be sure. It's a bizarre end to a long day, but really no different to any one that ends in exaggerations and bullshit in hotel bars the world over.

We retired to our room. The beds were covered in satin sheets. On the outside, over the blankets. I opted for my sleeping bag. And I slept fine, save for the rat that I thought I heard gnawing on my dry bag through the night. We were not really in Sault Ste Marie or Winnipeg or Wichita.

PJL