

The trip where the diffs all went wrong

It was 1991 and I was 26, and that's old enough. I had done a couple of great Safaris down to Dar and back. Had a charge out to Egypt which was relaxing. I was probably the worst mechanic in the fleet, but possibly the happiest. I was a forest ranger in New Zealand, I know how to camp and use an axe. This story is about gurty, so I've left out some interesting stuff, they were good times alright.



Figure 1 Bert, happy in my work

This trip was brutal, stuff broke continuously, run out of time, out of money, but people helped me on the way, especially Stan Moffat, "Acacia" Andy Kibby, hot seat, Tony Watson and all the other overland drivers, who supplied beers and good humour.

So come the end of the Egypt run I was on the plane for London. I got into Heathrow with \$10 usd left, not enough for any screw-ups but a reasonable gamble for an experienced bloke. \$10 was enough to get to Earls Court and eventually for Moira to see me right with 100 quid from wages.

Pete Mellick was in the hot seat, and he gave me the next Trans Africa, and that was what I wanted. To Hitchin for beer and gossip, Eddie and H, leaving for Africa by Land Rover.

8-10

Trained from Hitchin to London where Jonesy gave me a quietly rousing send-off talk. Charter flite to Malaga, and so on until Africa by train, plane, ferry and bus.

9-10-91

Met Richard at the truck in Ceuta camp, GURT (Gertie) is looking good. About 7000 mile on speedo, which means nothing. Richard says she's good. Sure.

We drove to Tangier then had a wild night out with Moira's mates. I can't describe a night out in Morocco with Moira and her entourage, Anyway, Im sworn to secrecy about that.

12-October 1991

Saharan Journey, Trans Africa plus.

Met the group at the campsite, mixed nationalities, ½ the group speak French and ½ speak English.

Four days getting through Morocco and around Fez without seeing Ghali and buying carpet.

I hit Riff mountains early while avoiding Fez as per hot seat instructions which I may have misinterpreted, its not a shortcut. Took 3 days camping amongst mountains and hash factories, cold and remote. Lots of rain.

Wipers failed, indicators failed, charge light on, lots of fuel blockage issues, handbrake not working right, repaired fuel lines and connectors, replaced filters.

Border crossing at Oudja to Algeria. Pissed with rain, although Oudja apparently has no annual rain at all.

17-October 13 days to Tamanrasset, down the East side of Algeria. The Eastern route was much more remote and lonely than down the centre my GS trips had followed.

Appalling weather, the desert was flooded with roads washed out.

Ghardaia was where we finally got dry.

Filled up with diesel at Illizi, she's a greedy beast at 2 miles to the litre. Headed to Djanet on hard and rocky piste, 15-20km/hr max. Dark sandstone broken country, striking.

Long days driving in the most appalling conditions. Very dry rocky and desolate area, beautiful and bleak. Very tough on the truck, 15-30 km/hr mostly. 4wd linkage fell off and got stuck in 4wd.

Came down the Tin Taradji pass, which was beautiful and followed sandy valleys through rock gorges to Fort Gardel. Got stuck a few times in very bad sand.

Djanets a great little town, like Tamanrasset but wilder. Telexed EO and got the message to wait for Mike Travers on Great Safari in Tam to cross the piste together because of the Touareg bandits nicking trucks. Checked the oil levels in Gurty.

Couldn't get diesel in Djanet without a permit, made the outstanding decision to leave without fuel, albeit I had 400 litres or so, sick of rules at that point.

Got to Ft Ghardel by 4 hours travel, got more water and headed out towards Amguidi on a desolate piste, Searched for the alleged turnoff to Tam after 55 miles, took ages and camped when it appeared very uncertain. Fixed the diesel pickup. Low on diesel also, only about 3-400l.

I was worried about finding the piste and not running out of fuel, the desert looked the same all around with no wheel marks or markers. Had a few passes up and down the piste but marked up the

likely turnoff spot from speedo mileage. I heard someone say how relieved they were that I'd filled up the diesel up in Djanet, I kept to myself that night.

Found the piste after pushing on in the morning. We had lost faith from difficulty seeing it and the wrong directions from guidebooks. Made good time on remote piste and no traffic to Idles. Met a Land Rover and motorbikes without enough gas to get to Djanet.

Got water from a 20-foot bucket well at Hirafok. Drove in to Assekrem, on a very steep trail to the monastery for sunset.

Drove down to Tamanrasset. Went to town for diesel but a touareg in a berliot bought 2000l so we waited a long time.

Tam seems tame after Djanet.

4-11

Mike T arrived in Tam in JNM. Planned a convoy with 2 ex guerba drivers in Mercedes trucks with Peugeots.

Telexes to EOL. Permission granted to travel with a convoy of 5 vehicles minimum.

6-11

Early start. Met the convoy in town. One Mercedes van, Toyota Landcruiser, Acacia MAN aka King Rat, Mercedes 4wd 911, + Peugeot and one 911 2wd. Drove out the piste with waits for pushing the grey van. Big bump in the piste and a crash and grinding noise, when I looked the rear prop shaft and handbrake drum was hanging on the ground. Took out the half shafts, sealed the axle ends, took off the prop shaft and proceeded. Went well for couple of hours until the front left half shaft snapped so we camped. Took off the diff pan and saw the rear crown wheel and pinion both wrecked. Front ½ shaft snapped. Couldn't get pinion nut off with heat or chisel, we took one of Mike's ½ shafts from JNM and had it together by 230 am. The lock washer hadn't been tabbed over by whatever pisscrock workshop trainee was on tools that day.

7-11, Crossing to Niger

Long day bogging in sand giving GURT no stick at all. We had a hell job getting the trucks up the drifts to the border post at In Guezzam. Front wheel drive is not very effective. Got thru Algerian customs and camped outside.

8-11

Assamaka to Arlit camping. The convoy got 500m for the 1st stop for a flat tyre then more pushing, digging and stopping. Andy tried to pull me with the King Rat and snapped my cable and wrecked his clutch. Fixed it and got in to Arlit by dark. Got beer and mutton, the convoy finished now.

Drove to Agadez and met James Alexander there.

On to Niamey, to look for spare parts for the truck. Issa from camp helped. Found an old mechanic yard who would try for the parts for a couple of days. Setting up the diff was done using a hacksaw blade held in vise grips as a backlash measure, you marked up the pinion or crown wheel teeth with blue grease and set the backlash and pinion spacing using grease markings and hacksaw width of free play. At least that's what I did. The object being to get the correct engagement and free play,

without being loose, or tight, which meant running hot and further breakage. I would feel for heat with my hands at every stop, in diffs, shafts and bearings.

Crossed into Burkina Faso after going into the mechanics for the bits. Had to fix a diff oil leak with a home-made cardboard gasket, found bits of bearing in the diff. I've made a lot of gaskets from cardboard.

Early start and to Ougadougou by midday. Very hot and dusty, not pretty at all. Diff was very hot and noisy. Took the cover off for a look, rear pinion bearing is shattered. Pulled the front one out put it in back and took out hypoid and pinion to do it. Reset up the diff by midnight, rough but should do. Danish Maryann and Aussie Rachel helped. Those girls became the main pit crew for axle stripping and helped a lot. We did a lot of axles and diff strip downs, and it took several hours, usually in the dark, and in the sand.

16-11

Drove on for the Mali border. Clutch or front wheel bearings making bad noises.

Dirt road from Yako, poor condition to Mali border. Fuel problems, front right wheel bearing hot.

Got stuck in a big dune and had to try another way.

Drove to Djenne with noisy handbrake pieces loose in the drum.

Arrived Bamako mid-afternoon. Train with new pax was not due until morning. Ran into Phil's group who showed us the small mission camp. Phil's truck was in there, with an em with malaria, who tragically died later. Phil was painting his wheels, I never paint my wheels, its bad luck.

22-11 Friday

The train arrived along with Tim English as courier to a small group.

Helped Phil with his rear main bearing. Took off the gearbox with a rope sling. Tim and I got a local onto searching for spares for me but in the end, he vanished with the cash, about \$100. Stupid really, and we kind of messed that up in a story which I won't relate.

Drove from Kolako to Bobo Dialasso. Rough road, but ok in the dry. Got fined at police points for not stopping and having people on the roof. They give receipts.

The Into Africa landrover guys borrowed my hand drill to drill an oil gallery in a bearing shell. They were terrible mechanics, the whole show completely unprepared for Africa, although we enjoyed a few beers along the way. The bearing shell broke of course.

I telexed EOL from Hotel Independence, garbled message about parts. Rear hub seal in a bad way. Replaced a brake return spring. Drank more beer. The Into Africa drivers got mohawks to celebrate "fixing" their engine.

Angela went to a doctor because a monkey bit her.

30-11

Crossed into Ghana,

Accra, coco beach campsite.

Went to a wrecker's yard in Kintempo and talked to Ofafa who had Bedford spares. Got an expensive diff pinion and half shaft for 300,000 cedis or \$775 usd. Started fitting and worked at it over a couple of days Put in diff then a half shaft, next day did the other half shaft.

Carol left, she had missed out on Timbuctoo as we couldn't do the full Southern desert piste in the convoy and was worried about missing out on the Congo crossing, we didn't know if it was open or not then.

The land rovers from Into Africa arrived for beers.

They had camped in a village of mud huts on a slope and left the landys in gear, landy handbrakes are rubbish. One landy bump started itself in the night and drove thru through a hut.

Cruisy day on the beach. Im not popular with the group just now, its complicated, and I have to focus on fixing the truck, and that's all I've got to say about that.

Anders flew home.

Im very pissed off with everything.

11-12

Tried to leave and got 25km out of Accra when the diff started to scream. Stopped real fast. Gurtie wouldn't come out of 4wd. Jacked it up and let off a lot of transmission wind up. Returned to Coco beach and rang Tony Watson, he said to count the teeth, sure enough 37 teeth on the front and 34 on the back. Took off the drive shaft to the front. Way over budget now and late and still not fixed. Andy Kibby and King Rat is here but he has malaria. The group is better, but Antonia has left.

Waited for parts they had the right stuff and reasonable price, 700 FF, not as good as the last diff but ok. We got it fitted out and going by 4, too late to leave.

Got away for the border, expecting to break down, got there ok. Bit of a scar on a building from machine gun fire. Nice looking place Togo but we headed through and then through the Benin border also, 3 countries in one day in a Bedford, a land speed record.

Couple of driving days to make up time. Made Benin city to shop after the mayhem of the Lagos ring road. Got money and diesel outside the Lagos hellscape.

Another driving day. Truck trouble again. Took another bit out of the handbrake then found that both return springs were broken on the left rear wheel. Fixed it while we shopped.

Darren Nicholson hit Calabar town on a Northbound GS in the ML, nice truck, the same rough camp together as last time! Big night on Sangria and beer.

22-12

Off to the border, into rough as guts roads in Cameroun.

Went up to the Bamenda Presbyterian mission. Good for 2-day camp for Christmas. Got 6 chickens for the Christmas dinner, one later expired but 5 was enough.

26-12, to New years eve.

Late start, 3 people sick, 1 with malaria. Clair spewing everywhere and Zoe with the shits.

Drove to Douala where I spent a stressful 4 hrs in the bank collecting \$1990 usd in 7 cheques but trying to get cash. Broke the rear diff pinion and crown wheel again, pinion nut stripped.

Pulled out the pinion and crown wheel then relaxed on the beach down a steep track. Thieves raided us and took more of Rachels money and Andrea's diary. He got it back later from the beach.

Fixed diff by removing pinion and crown wheel, useless.

Decided to drive out of the beach. Couldn't get the trailer up the hill. Left it and took ages to get the truck up. Had to empty the trailer and pull it up by hand. Reloaded and hitched up and got stuck on the next hill. Put on the tyre chains, took off the trailer and got stuck again and blew the front diff. packed it in and slept there, couldn't find a tow that night.

Got a ride to Kribi town in a Unimog with a German guy and a girl from the stolen kumuka truck. Found a big log loader to tow me out to hotel polygons dAlice, nice beach and cheap.

Telexed EOL and looked for parts. EO suggested I find parts and get visas, cheers Pete and Rebecca. Went to Bekol a Dutch sawmill and logging company. They had 2 bedford RLs abandoned somewhere, I went looking for one in a huge overgrown yard, they gave me a team of millworkers.

1 January 1992, Wednesday

Took out the front pinion from the diff housing and the crown wheel assembly. Dropped it on my finger and cut through the nail. No spare to put in though. Took out the crown wheel from the rear. Front half shafts a bit of a hassle.

Back to the Bekol yard to find the lost Bedford. Got the sawmill D8 fired up and pushed some cane grass and heaps around. Had to wipe out a bee's nest 1st, we got a bit stung but got them with petrol. Caught a poisonous snake so I cut it up with a machete and put it on the road. Didn't find the bedford and ran out of juice. I bought the mill lads who helped me an offal feed and a beer.

Talked to a local mechanic who said he could find parts, went from 250,000 to 100,000 cfa. Met explorer III an overland Bedford. They are returning to London after failing to cross Zaire and byriver boat Bangui to Brazzaville then trying for a ship to Angola, but couldn't get visas. They are 3 months late and sold me their spare diff for \$300usd. Talked to 3 brits in a yellow RL, no spare diff though. The Britts seem to have been sent down from Cambridge or some yarn, very funny.

Spent all day under the truck but that's not so bad, relaxing really. Put in the new diff and pinion. Found the grease markings I'd been using were backwards. The workshop manual is confusing.

Decided to rebuild the front end to run without a diff and half shafts. Got it together then it wouldn't start. Epulu Pete arrived with a truck load of wood and a live pig. Tried a jump start but melted his jumpers.

Got a tow arranged by a local truck to get mobile. Arranged to meet the sawmill director for a guide for the forest. Truck still wouldn't start, got more battery acid. Saw Dave from explorer III, he has broken the planetary gears on his diff, I gave him some from the broken one. I had plenty of those.

Early start, to the mill and away to the Macurdi block to find the ghost Bedford, which looked ok. Took the front and rear diffs and pinions. Rear in bad shape, pinion very worn and bearing busted. Took a brake pipe and ½ shaft also. Pygmies living right by the truck, and in the cab. Loads of very large biting flies. Went and saw the Dutch owner of the sawmill and gave him 3 bottles of scotch for the parts. He suggests that I leave EO in Dar and get a job in Kribi. 2000 quid per month, mostly paid

overseas, vehicle, house and flight home each year. He showed me a gorgeous local girl who could be my "housekeeper".

8-1

Shifted camp to Landji plage and shopped in Kribi. Truck started; the battery is the latest problem. Got out my parts and started rebuilding the truck. Mike from Exodus came over, the parallel bearing for the pinion is wrecked so nothing can go in. He says the diffs aren't good either so do it in 2wd. OK.

Drove to Yaounde for visas. Pineapple Doug was there and couple overlanders. Spent the day in town and telexed Eol. Went up to the mission and camped with the RL crew and mixed others. Had a party, the RL Brits are into footlong smokes and whiskey sours they make by the bottle.

Drove out towards Nanga Eboko and had to change a front hubseal at lunchtime. Very rough roads, and the next day 185 miles of more very rough dirt road. One flat tyre, quick change. 6-inch spike still inside it. Camped late, another rough site. Fixed tyre and worked on the electrics with Barry.

12-1

132 miles rough dirt. Worked on the electrics in the morning for CAR. Got away for 730. Crossed the border at Kentzou, Gamboula, overtime tax in Cameroun.

13-1

What a day. In all 330 miles but more than 1 days driving. First up started early, 630 start, 830 rolled the trailer going downhill, crossing a rut too fast. Took it off and pulled back on the wheels. Broke the diff ½ hour later, same noise and actions as usual but only the taper roller bearing was damaged, put one in from another pinion and away again. Drove all night to Bangui, no dinner and no camp. Into Tourist Accueil centre, 7.15 am.

14-1

After arriving in Bangui, had breakfast and set up camp. Headed for town at 9ish and to the bank, can't find my money. 2 Pax with malaria.

Telexed again, regarding state of the truck and diffs. Messed about with the truck and trailer and accounts. The axle is bent on the trailer. Exodus arrived at the camp. Skip asked me about his Bedford's squeal, he didn't know about adjusting wheel bearings.

Got Eo's telex in town. They are sending a trainee, Stan Moffatt with 2 spare diffs to Bangui. Worked on the trailer, wheel bearings and tightened U bolts, truck also. Few beers with Pineapple Doug and the Afries crew. Rang Tony Watson and Pete Mellick rang me. Tony was good, Pete is going off me breaking things.

Picked up Stan Moffatt at the airport. Loads of extra weight in diffs. A very big guy Stan, useful for carrying parts. Stan was pretty taken aback when he saw me. I was wearing one of his favourite tee shirts which Freddy had looted from the Wren Park drivers secure stores. Back to camp and on the piss with the RL boys and others like Andy of Okapi, very entertaining. Stan made himself useful with spanners and greasy rags.

Put in the front diff and pinion, started too anyway. Slow progress.

Checked out rear diff and decided it was ok and sorted out front diff.

Finished the front end and took the trailer into repairs at Michels engineering, a French chap who seems very good.

23-1

Left Bangui! First picked up the trailer from Michels. Camped up out of Sibut. Checked the diff, oil leak. Took off the cover, the inner roller again broken. Bummer. Took out crown wheel and pinion, put in new from London. Pinion wouldn't turn, verdict, axle is wrecked. Bed at midnight.

Put on front prop shaft and sealed the rear diff. Drove back to Bangui. Met the Into Africa land rovers. They're on the road sans money as their boss is broke. Ran into the RL crew, full of hope for Zaire. Back to Bangui camping. Convinced a police check that drivers authorisations are insurance.

Took the truck to the Mercedes place in Bangui. They said we must change the axle. Gave us a name, found the place and a chap said he had one. Took a crew to get the axle. Picked up the guide at one and drove to Boda via Mbeiki. Found an intact Beddie on the side of the road and camped.



Figure 2 Rob, Rach, Stan and Bert getting parts.

Into it while the guys cooked breakfast in the morning. Took off the rear axle no problem. Diff, pinion and shafts already gone. Some surface rust about the pinion bearing lands and one suspect thread on axle end. Put her on Gertie and back to Bangui. Party at the marines' house, played pool.

Took the axle to Michel, he suggested SAM engineering to rethread it, 70,000 cfa, gave matey 40,000 to buy the axle. Took the trailer axle to Michel to straighten and reinforce.

Picked up the Beddie axle from SAM engineering. LHS end rethreaded and 2 new nuts cut. Put the truck up on hubs at a garage and swapped the axle but didn't set up the diff or put in ½ shafts. Drove back to camp in front drive.

Finished putting diffs into the truck and went for the trailer axle, not done. Picked it up after lunch and dumped the old Gurty axle. Trailer axles have been reinforced; Michel said the original reinforcing caused the problem. Put the axle on the wood rack, back to camp and some clown lost his brakes in the market, hit us and broke a sidelight so we were lucky. Put the axle in the trailer.

30-1

60 miles Bangui, to camp near Libenge. Left Bangui via ferry to Zongo.

Camp was raided in the night, so a late start for damage assessment. Lost clothing, cameras, stuff got slashed, including my pack. Rained heavily in the night so the roads were wet. Stan drove that afternoon, got stuck once, side of the road and a bit of Police hassle at Gemena. Met Fyonna Campbell walking across Africa. She was surreal, and incongruous. Passed Stan off as me at a police check for my licenses and drivers authorisation form for insurance.

Made it to Bumba for the night and stayed by the river in the Noguiera yard. Big lightning storm and huge rainfall. Visited the RL on the ferry- cargo boat. They seem happy but broke on the interesting river boat. Fixed the broken trailer spring centre bolts.

Late start to shop and let the road dry. Met Ian Stevenson and Dave Marshall early afternoon and camped up in a village with them. Dave wanted to camp on the village burial mound, we talked him down. Ian funded me 1000usd and swapped \$500 cash for cheques. One bridge out so we forded a creek. One dodgy bridge to cross, bit of a sway on it.

Left at 4 to get thru Aketi and got water at a huge mission. 2 dodgy bridges, one log bridge in very bad shape, scary. Trailer fell thru and broke off a shock, yanked it over and broke the remains of the deck.

8-2

Good day in Kisangani. Got the brake pipe fixed and small welding in the trailer hitch. Got flour sack clothes made.

Got away finally by 130. Had fuel blockage then cleared it after that, replaced the fuel filter and sediment bowl.

10-2, Monday

Long day, 232 miles. Got to Epulu late despite a broken diff and tree over road. Diff developed an oil leak, got hot and blew out the pinion and spigot bearing. Carried on with front drive. Tree down across the road just on dark. Chopped thru it and continued in the dark to Epulu camp.

Day at Epulu. Got the group to the okapis for the bush walk and Stan and I put in one of the Kribi diffs in the rear and a new bearing. Big day repairing.

Eledrover arrived, they no longer have a trailer, they broke a spring and wrecked it, no spare so they swapped it with a local for some eggs and bananas, first he told us he didn't need it anymore then he admitted he'd broken it. Hopeless organisation.

Early start and got to Mambassa by 1130, rough road. Took the notorious Beni shortcut. Very rough, very wild. Impossible in the rain. Got stuck in a big hole and couldn't get out before dark. Got the truck out by crawling under and digging under the diff. Camped there.

Drove to Kayna Bayongo then transited Virunga national park. A big baboon got in the truck and took plantains off the group.

Rutshuru to Goma, paid \$1800 for gorillas at Bukima in the Goma office.

Up early to get the 1st gorilla group to the hut by 630. Back and looked in the diff, filings galore and a strange wear pattern on it. Backed the crown wheel off the pinion and put in another spacer. Pinion nut not tight also.

18-4

Off to Goma, early, Barry and I walked to Gisenyi across the border in Rwanda and phoned England to extend his leave, no visas needed and paid for the phone in usd. Barry later turned up in Nepal, I picked his group up returning from Tibet at the freedom bridge, I still have his hat.

Early start, 630 and drove on to Bukavu on rough roads. The diff broke when we hit the tar seal. Lost the spigot bearing and fired a tooth through the diff pan. Pulled out the crown wheel and continued to Bukavu and camped at the circle sportif. One top steering arm stud also shorn off and coming loose.

Put in visas for Burundi. Met Andy from Okapi doing the same. Stan started on the truck while I did the visas. Andy offered us his diff, but he had no spigot bearing.

21-2, Friday

Serious days' work on the truck. Took the tractor housing and had the snapped stud pulled, welded up the diff pan and put in steering studs with Loctite. Found a spigot bearing for the rear diff, \$20. Took it back, Stan already had the front diff out, so he put it back. Had to get a spacer milled to fit the bearing. Took a long time. Big argument about the price. They want \$200 usd, I paid \$20.

Gave Andy a letter to replace his diff in Dar.

22-2, 12 miles

Reassembled the front end of the truck, went to town for oil. Got to the border near town by 230. Diff was hot so we checked it at our early campsite. Pinion spacer shattered. Took out the pinion.

23-2

Out to Burundi,

Money not at either bank I checked. Telexed EOL, answer after banks had shut. Had to borrow food money. Nice town Buj. Developed a tooth ache, which became epic. Found chocolate and an address for Bedford parts.

Still no money at the bank. Taking veganin for toothache and very sore.

Boring toothache day. Got nothing done but Stan found a spigot bearing and fixed the diff. So 4wd again. Still no money and head aching like hell.

Into the bank again. Took Allan and Rachel to lend me money. No luck. Waited for a dentist to open by eating icecream at the Novotel. Flashy and shabby. Got to a dentist at a private clinic. He xrayed the tooth. Poked at it and hurt it and gave me a prescription for special toothpaste and amoxillin. Very sore now. Telexed EOL, carry on without money they say, so we will.

Into the bank 1st thing. They have the money. Began paying people back the loaned funds. Telexed EOL and did a shop for supplies for 3 days.

Early start, 3 hours to the border. Into Tanzania. Drove on confusing roads in Tanz, rough gravel. Tooth much better. Diff got very hot, so we took off the rear prop shaft.

1, 3, 1992

138 miles, not all in the right direction! Up very early due to the misunderstanding of the time change. We did 22 miles and then turned around, doh!

Into town for Banks and food stocking. Changed the front right spring at an Asian yard. Completely snapped the top leaf.

4-3

Drove on to Ikoma Park gate, thru to Seronera, Called in at HQ. No guides until 2 so we went to the lodge where a guide told us about cheetah, so we found it near the lodge. Out to campsite 4 and the lodge. Rained in the night and a hyaena chewed the rubbish bin.

5-3

Raining in the morning so a late start. Road was very slippery, and we fell in the ditch a couple of times. Started to see big herds just before Naabi Hill. Went through the gate and down the Lake Nduti track through herds of wildebeest and zebra. Naabi hill for lunch to enter Ngorongoro by 12. After lunch Stan drove up to the crater through big herds. Booked landrovers for the crater.

I didn't go into the crater to drive the truck through to the gate by 12. Back to Safari junction nice and early.

Drove to Moshi, took all day. Took off the rear prop at Mtowambu. Broke a spring on the gravel road, no big bumps, just fatigued. Met Mike Travers at Mt Meru Hotel in Arusha, he was on a mountain gorillas. Lost a few punters to Nairobi. Got to the Keys hotel by 930 ish and changed the spring. Finished by midnight.

8-3

Long days drive to Dar. Had tea at Challinze, a bus stop area with loads of great chop stalls. Got to Dar by 11pm on crap roads then to the Rungwe Oceanic hotel midnight. 4 Encounter trucks in. I think we were 20 days late.

9 March 1992, Monday

Bludge day. Stan and Rob went into town for a last meal out with the last of the Ems but I was tired and stayed behind.

Stan arrived back from town bearing gifts and cards from the group, I should have gone. Telexed EO from the Bahari beach hotel and helped some local fishermen pull in their nets and ride around on their dhow.

Another work on the truck day. Took out the rear diff for Andy. Didn't like it and put it back.

Messed round with the front axle checking it out. Big chunks of pinion missing and crown wheel bits. Finally gave Andy the rear diff and put front in back.

Took out front diff and rear diff. Cleaned up rear diff for Andy. Not terribly good shape but ok for spare. Front diff looking like a rat had been at it, also no spigot bearing left and big scores in the diff casing. Big day. Set up front diff in rear.

Got out all the tents, and cleaned them with local help. Got a telex from London, don't do any more to Gurty, shes going home.

On the 7th day we rested. Pineapple Doug was in so we bludged about drinking cokes and things.

Working day. Stan got parts from the airport and had no problems although they wanted him to pay taxes which he didn't. Back to town in the truck to send a telex about where is Rob. Pete said to have a lobster and count tools on WBH.

Rob was late because a girl had burnt all his belongings for some indiscretion.

17-3

Took out the gearbox from WBH 646 using ropes with Dougie Pineapple helping with comments. Stopped and checked, need more parts than London sent, 2 layshaft driven gears have chipped teeth. Put it away when Rob Hall arrived. On the piss with Jason of Okapi. They have sacked Andy from his 22 quid per week Leader position but as he's in Zanzibar he doesn't know it yet. Apparently, he won't be flown home either. I may have left Robs gearbox laying in the sand while I spent days drinking.

18-3

Mark Hopkins arrived on a GS southbound. Stan got Malaria so I took him to Mincheka hospital. They gave him chloroquine injections.

Into town with Mark in his truck. Saw Stan, he's ok (if you like malaria).

22-3

Rebushed Rob Halls trailer in the morning. Had tea then took Martina to the Bahari as she'd been bitten by a monkey and was freaking out. Had a couple of nightcaps with Mark Hopkins. Good times drinking the entire top shelf.

23-3

Stan, Mark and Rob got up early to into Dar airport run. Flight details were wrong, group in tomorrow. I hate that airport road.

24-3

Went with Rob and picked up some pax from the airport. Got loads of mail from various girls. Did a hub seal on Marks truck. Put the gearbox back in Robs truck.

Pete rang us. I'm to go on holiday then ship out GURTy and do a Safari South to Harare. Stan is flying home. I did have that holiday, took myself to Zanzibar, Mombasa and Lamu, outstanding month off.

Robs truck prepared for his GSAF Northbound. Helped Mark with his truck. Removed rear diff and replaced planetary gears with gurty spares. Replaced and reset diff.

27-3

Rob got away. Stan to fly home to London via Nairobi, and Adis.

Changed \$100 usd TC to cash to pay Marks departure tax and got 50 quid to pay Marks tiny bar bill. Stans bar bill was epic, mine was the size of a small island nations gdp.

Stans plane had a forced landing in the desert, which seemed funny at the time.



Figure 3 Left is Bert, right is Stan, Bangui campsite

So that's Africa, shit happens. I used a normal lifetimes supply patience on that trip, and for a few years I had almost no patience at all. I did some Zimbabwe and Namibia runs after I got back from Lamu, man that was so easy. I still have a love hate relationship with tools, but I drive a Landcruiser now which doesn't need spannering because its Japanese.

Hakuna matata.

Bert Hughes