

# A Great African Adventure

15<sup>th</sup> Oct 2016 to 13<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016

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Tour song Toto



Toto - Africa.mp3



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## Day 0 Day in Addis Ababa, 0km

Well, after 12 months in the planning and the last 12 hours on a plane courtesy of Emirates we get off the plane at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport mid-afternoon and are warmed by pleasant 25C sunshine. We waste no time in getting across town to meet up with Flavio our guide for the next month and to meet our trusty steeds.

Oh no! One of the bikes is part way through a major engine rebuild and won't be ready for the off tomorrow morning. We need to spend an extra night in Addis and hit the road Saturday morning.

Four fifty somethings who should know better don't. We've only been here 12 hours and already the stories have started. We landed just after Ethiopia declared a state of emergency designed to end the current civil unrest.

Evening meal and a stroll through Addis? Great idea but no holding hands big lad. At least we've eaten when the shouting starts, we think it's aimed at someone else but the gun definitely isn't, we leg it across 4 lanes of pitch black smog choked mobile roulette, nearly loosing Jerry down a 1m square and 2m deep open manhole in the process. Great the adventures started.



First view of Addis Ababa – Bole Airport



Flavio our guide



One bike needs a bit of work before we set off – late night in store



Our first Ethiopian curry Doro Wat!



Our hotel in Addis Ababa, little did we know this was the last bit of comfort for a month



Hotel jazz band

## Day 1 Addis to Sodo, 335km

Christmas morning in a sweet shop to pick up a new bike, so we can get to our first teenage easy date. Excited doesn't cut it! After a years planning we're stood in Addis Ababa drooling over our KTM holiday flings.

It's all giddy smiles early doors as we enter Addis's death race arena. It's stop start and then more stop for an age before things settle down. It's surreal, it's Africa, we're here, and it's also a good job we're flying on early morning excitement because the riding is average at best until we finally break free of Addis's suburban hold on our coattails.

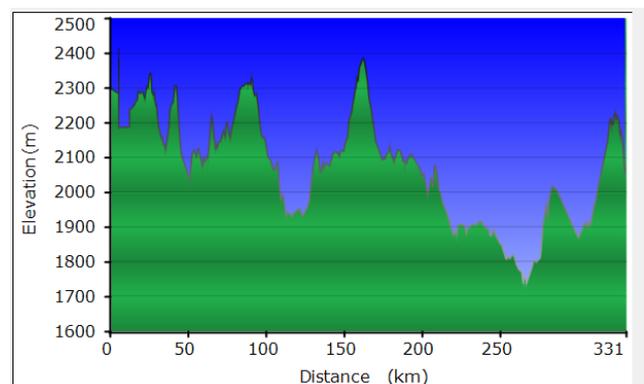
Then we're out, our first breath after a difficult birth and we're grabbing lung fulls. It's not pretty but it is raw, too spoilt by modernity to be authentic and still authentic enough not to be modern. This isn't home, it feels far away.

The culture shock is massive. We roll through towns and villages that are a constant but diluted, one dimensional image on our TV's, but today they're real, we can reach out and touch, smell and taste the differences from our own lives. Stopping for fuel is a lottery as few petrol stations actually have any, by lunchtime we're on the hunt but this town's station is empty, we find some black market fuel sold in 1ltr water bottles out of a shanty shack for nearly twice the going rate. Within 2 mins of stopping half of Africa's population is stood within 6" of where we are, it's a shock and we're all on edge, but that's our fault not theirs. We leave the fuel stop and within 100 yds I get our first puncture, we've just waved goodbye to our new fan club and now we need to do an encore.

We reach Sodo by early afternoon looking for more fuel when we're pulled over at a police checkpoint, we smile but they don't, so we don't. It all gets heated as our Ethiopian guide tries to sweet talk us a way through but they're not interested. The crowd picks up the vibe and starts to look menacing, finally a policeman with a smile appears, though it turns out he's only smiling because it's his job to start whipping people around the face with a cane. Yeah tough guy. The temperatures in the mid 20's, we're in full riding gear and trying to stay upright on the bikes as we get jostled in the crowd. Funny for the first minute but we sit for 20.

We're finally escorted across the road to a hotel but we've been refused permission to go any further until they check out our papers with someone in Addis.

Oh well! The bars open and the only plan we have for tomorrow is to ride, could be a lot worse.





KTM 690 fully loaded for 30 day tour



First fuel stop



Second fuel stop - from bottles



Police stop – no more riding today.



Phil's first puncture (Pockets searching for a patch)

## Day 2 Sodo to Arba Minch, 150km

Easy start as we have permission to leave but no fuel. We head for breakfast whilst Flavio leaves to have discussions with the local garage owner, he has fuel but he also has a queue of hundreds of motorcycles, tuk-tuks and trucks waiting to fill up. By the time we're ready he's back after completing some kind of secret handshake with greased palms. We head out and straight to the front of the scrum; the guy on the pump isn't pleased and rings his boss for confirmation, yeah ok! quick, quick, quick, the crowd don't look pleased either and he wants us full and out of here before anyone gets the chance to realize what a piss take it is. It's all easy tarmac for a short 150km day, with a constant sprinkling of people, cow's, donkeys and goat's to keep it interesting, it's mid 20's sunshine and the locals are out, mostly waving as we pass and full of smiles.

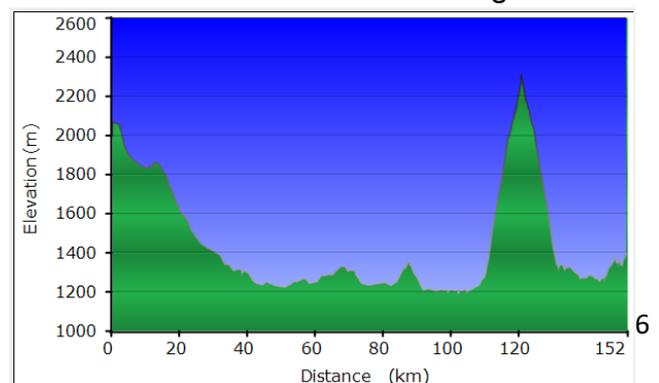
We stop on a deserted stretch of road for a drink and photos and are once again surrounded, people appear from nowhere, they all stand close and love to touch the bikes, our kit, a hot exhaust anything. The kids laugh and point at our grey hair and old faces. Africa's population is amazingly young and people our age have generally been buried for years not riding around on bikes.

We make our way to a Dorze village where we have coffee in a traditional wicker house, the hand pounded coffee's good but the highlight is the 10km of dirt road winding up into the hills to get there, it's our first bit of off road since we arrived and we kick it's arse up and down.

We reach our cheap hotel early so we have time to catch a lift down to Lake Chamo national park, on the way and slide into a wedding convoy, it's a horn honking, flag waving, and singing celebration but we don't hang around.

By mid-afternoon we're launching a small motor boat onto Lake Chamo and gliding over the still waters between crocodiles and hippos with locals fishing from small wooden canoes. African fish eagles are soaring overhead and a flock of pelicans do a low level fly by, it's stunning and our first sight of real beauty.

Back at the hotel there's just time for a quick change before we jump in a pair of tuk-tuks for a giggle trip to a local restaurant for a meal and beer. It's a late repeat back to the hotel but my holiday wife still has time to nearly set fire to the curtains of our tuk-tuk whilst he's staring at the cleavage of our hitch hiking front seat guest.





3 hours queue for fuel – Flavio worked his magic and we jumped to the front.



Every 100km or so we pullover for a head count and instantly draw a crowd in the middle of nowhere



Even the monkeys come to see us ride through



Our first taste of off road, and a broken down lorry



Starbucks African style



Local wildlife



Africa is all teeth



Pelicans on a low level approach

## Day 3 Arba Minch to Turmi, 280km

5.30 start this morning as Flavio wanted to get to Turmi in time for a bull jumping ceremony? Heading further south and the country just gets more like the Africa I expected. The views are fantastic and seem endless. You can see the red hills disappearing into the distance, every one of them appears to have been terraced and cultivated over the years, though many do look as though they have been left unattended for decades. Not sure how anyone can eke out an existence out here as the only thing that appears to grow in abundance are rocks, sand and thorn bushes. It's the first day that guns really make an appearance and we regularly pass local tribesmen with AK's hanging from their shoulders.

After 100km we stop at a restaurant for a Spanish omelette breakfast. Not sure what I expected about the food for the trip but up until now it has been as good as anything you would expect from a good restaurant at home. It's a strange stop because it's a top class restaurant sat in the middle of traditional mud hut village where people still live as they have for thousands of years. I don't know who else eats here but the locals certainly don't.

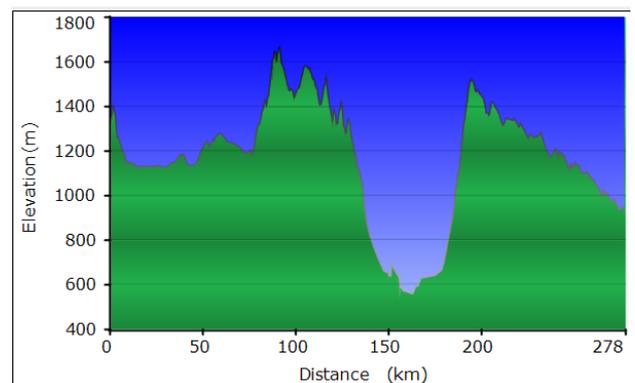
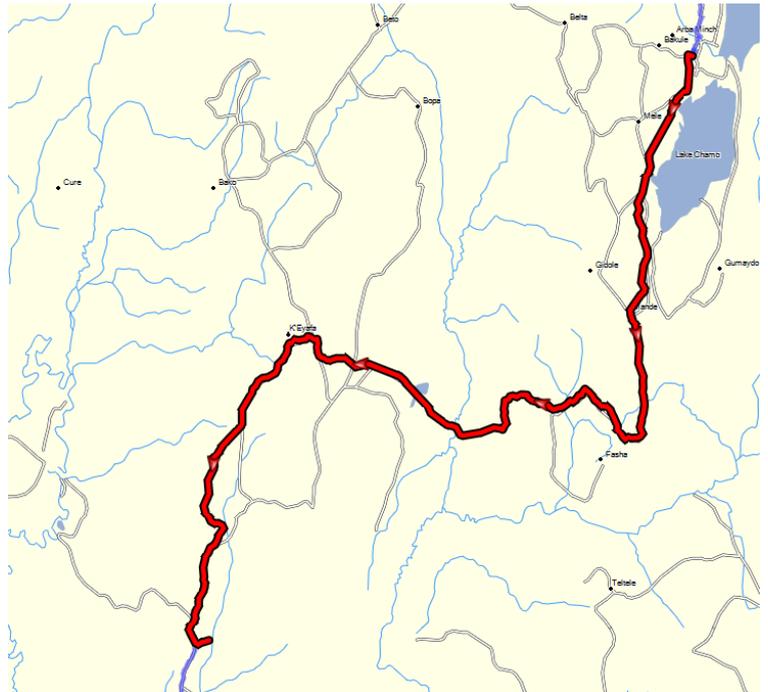
The next stop is for photos at a viewing point looking over the Omo valley red hills surround it on the distant horizon with dust devils waltzing across the valley floor. Except for the half dozen kids that miraculously appear from nowhere we're alone for as far as the eye can see.

Although most of us didn't know each other well before this trip we've all settled into an easy friendship, taking the piss is a default setting and any mistake is compounded by a volley of verbal abuse. Pete has the type of humour that passes some people by but I spend most of the day laughing, unfortunately the others don't notice it and just think I'm simple. Jerry is wearing a fishing jacket with more pockets than a snooker table (a place for everything and everything in its place) which cracks me up every time I look at him and Martyn has been promoted to holiday wife so we're already sleeping back to back at night and he spends the day playing hard to get and tuts whilst I talk bollocks.

It's always funny how 2 wheeled trips make things funnier, bigger, brighter, faster at the same time as providing a common language, goal or interest. They can forge friendships and bonds across social and economic divides that are rarely crossed in real life.

Bonding session over and we're back on the road, the temperature rises as we cross the dry valley floor, it's a long straight rest before we're up to our eyes in sand and rocks for the final 120 km of the day. Our 690 enduros eat up the miles nearly as fast as we eat the red dust.

We've arrive at our camp site tired but happy to accept our cold beer welcome. It's camping tonight and the site is idyllic. We put up our tents in the shade of a copse of trees before we find out that we've missed the bull jumping ceremony, we're all so distressed that we spend the rest of the afternoon and early evening drinking copious amounts of cold beer and Ethiopian honey wine. It's a stagger for dinner along a dark dry riverbed in torch light under a clear star filled sky before a night under canvas listening to the sounds of an African night.





A great view over the Omo plain



Reminds me of Baildon!



Peek-a-boo



Our first taste of camping



Snakes are not welcome here



It beats going behind a bush (just)

## Day 4 A day in Turmi

It's a day off the bikes today so we make like tourists.

Itch, itch bloody itch. I stopped counting at a hundred but the sand fly bites I managed to collect in my drunken stupor are driving me insane. Luckily Jerry stops laughing long enough to check his rolodex of traveling essentials and locates a tub of camomile and Aloe Vera balm which he gives me for free but I would have given my right arm for.

It's a 30 min scramble through the Bush in the mid 30's to visit a Hamar tribe who are this area's original inhabitants. It's a traditional village made up of around a dozen thatched roofed round huts with individual livestock paddocks. It would be nice to think that they've been untouched by modern life but everything has been itemised and a cost applied. We have to pay a fee for any camera we use so we nominate one, and then we have to pay each person we photograph a fee for their image, which is made worse because everyone in the village manages to photo bomb every frame. All this is after we paid a fee to a local guide to get us there and another fee to the chieftain to allow us entry. It's a piece of living history with today's grasping. We've had enough of the pictures and are invited to join the chieftain's wife for coffee, the heat is intense so a break in the shade is welcome, unlike our previous coffee stop this is vile but we don't want to be rude so we endure it with a fixed smile, it's only when we say good bye that she hits us with the bill. We leave feeling like we've had our pants down.

The only high point of the morning was the colobus monkeys we passed on the way back who didn't charge us anything.

Our next destination was supposed to be the bull jumping ceremony that we missed yesterday, apparently the young men have to prove their manhood by jumping over a bull whilst the young girls get beaten raw with sticks to prove they have reached womanhood, don't know who thought of that but it had to be a man. There's a theme for today though and it's cash. How much? Not a chance pal.

We decide on a trip to the market instead but a quick beer beforehand turns into a dozen and that's another plan going nowhere. It's just as well because we're told later that the whole thing turns to chaos when local police shoot a poacher in the market and everyone runs for cover.

It's a repeat of yesterday's stagger for dinner before a planned campfire which I only see flickering through my eyelids as the light goes out on another day of adventure.



Local Hamar village.



Colobus monkey



This time we try Costa Coffee (African style)

## Day 5 Turmi to Ormorate, 90km

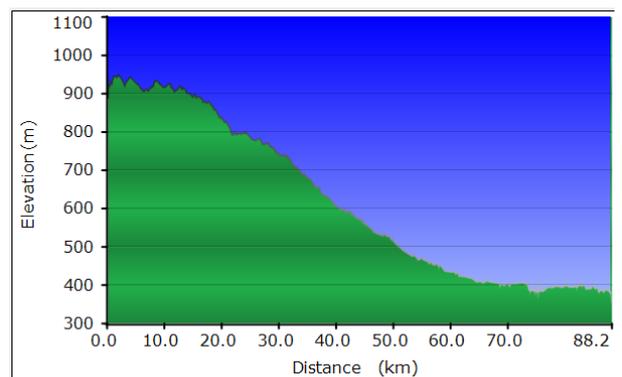
6 am start. Packed the tents early so we could get on the road, even though it was a really short 90 KM day, the idea being that we could get to Ormorate early and get the paper work completed ready for entry into Kenya tomorrow morning. In reality we ended up traveling down a very straight road across the plains of southern Ethiopia which was at best tedious. The views on the other hand were huge, very distant mountains surrounding us on all sides with grasslands and stunted trees all the way to the horizon. We travel under blue skies with the temperature in the perfect high 20's. Also passed some amazing structures built by termites which probably reached about 4m in height. We reached the customs office before 9am and completed the paperwork ready for an early crossing tomorrow within 45 mins. We've been skipping an early breakfast in favour of making the most of the cooler mornings and stopping later. Today we stopped at a local hotel called the Dagmawi in a small boarder town with dust roads and little else. As per usual stopping created an instant crowd of local kids, unfortunately whilst some are curious, most just beg for food or water, or anything else you may have. We eat Ethiopian chick pea soup with bread rolls and roast veg for breakfast which was lots better than it sounds. We also got some black market fuel and filled up with old 1LTR water bottles. After breakfast we head straight to tonight's stop with a great couple who are friends of Flavio's and have been missionaries in Ethiopia for over 20 years. I had my first fall today but it was very unspectacular, Martyn had a couple yesterday whilst practicing his sand riding techniques, although he survived physically his confidence has taken a beating. Can't wait to get some serious riding in now as the last couple of days have been very short on miles, and although they've been good days, it's not why we're here. Tomorrow is supposed to be our biggest and hardest day, though Flavio appears to be concerned about following our original route through miles of deep sand as he has worries about getting through safely. Martyn is struggling with fitness and hasn't ridden in sand before a combination that can be fatal in 40 degrees. We'll see what tomorrow brings.



Dick and Donna our hosts treated us to a light lunch before we spend a couple of hours chilling . Dick spends his days travelling up and down the Omo by boat building wind driven irrigation pumps for the local farmers. He offers a trip in the boat before dinner so we jump at the chance. I was expecting a little put put affair but it turned out to be an open boat with a great big outboard motor. It roars into life and the bow points skyward as we sprint down the river, bent into the wind, cutting the engine whenever we spot water, land or airborne wildlife, crocodiles, baboons Ethiopian sea eagles, most are within touching distance and all are majestic, free. Along the banks local tribes are collecting water, bathing or fishing. Most are in traditional dress going about their normal lives, as they have done for centuries. It's all ear to ear smiles and theatre waves, this was no tourist trap, nothing was faked, it was a privilege to witness, and all this under the most beautiful sunset you can imagine. We make our way back up river under the setting sun in awe, perfection was never supposed to be perfect but it is. We arrive in darkness just in time dinner, Dick says Grace giving thanks for the day we've shared, the friendship, and the food. Absolutely.

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Stayed with Dick & Donna (20years missionaries)



Chilling before our boat ride on the Omo



Great evening boat trip on the River Omo, simple boat with powerful Yamaha outboard motor



We disturbed many Fish Eagles



A crocodile checking us out



Baboons weren't bothered



Spectacular sun set

## Day 6 Ormorate to Eliye Springs, 195km

Another early start as we wanted to get the bikes packed and ready to go before Donna had our breakfast ready. She'd made us an oat meal cake with raisins which she cut into squares and then covered in warm milk. After saying our goodbyes we set off across the sand towards the Kenyan border about 20 KM away. Though we've had a great time in Ethiopia I think we were all relieved to reach Kenya. Even though we haven't see any of the civil unrest because of the state of emergency that has been imposed recently, there is a general unease and paranoia that people are living with which in turn can make it an uncomfortable place to travel through.

From the Kenyan border we headed towards Eliye Springs. This has been by far our hardest day on the bikes so far. The temperature has been in the high 30's and we've spent all day on sand tracks or rutted gravel roads, our speed is restricted on the rutted roads as the corrugations destroy the bikes, even so we've been traveling at around 50 mph on the corrugations and 70 mph on the sand tracks.

We've had a few minor falls during the day which sap your energy quickly in this heat. Just one big off when I managed to throw myself over the bars at 50 mph+ Battered and bruised but otherwise uninjured, which out here is a relief.

We stopped in a remote town for lunch and fuel, once again we were treated like a traveling circus, instantly surround by 100's of people, all who want to stand within 6" of where we're stood.

Finally reached Eliye springs at about 4pm. We are as remote as you can be so it was important to get here before dark as riding in the dark would have been impossible.

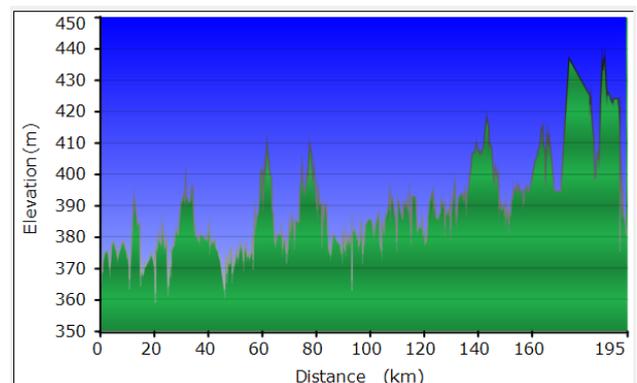
It's a stunning location and we've decided to get a room rather than camp as it's just too hot.

After getting out of our kit we went for a swim in the lake which was a relief from the heat, though we have since found out the there are crocodiles in the lake just not this part.?

Spent some time in the evening on the beach watching the fire flies as they lit up the Bushes.

The night sky here is spectacular. You can see millions of stars, planets and the Milky Way very clearly.

Spent most of the evening with a few beers reflecting on a great days riding, relieved that we made it here and just glad that we ride.





Border crossing into Kenya



Real 'African' desert roads



Shade is hard to come by, need to make the most when you can



Instant crowd as soon as we stop

## Day 7 Eilye Springs

If you're looking for paradise? We've found it on the banks of Lake Turkana.

The beach front itself is about 100 yds from the front door of our rooms and postcard perfect, with fine white sand and palm trees creating shade all the way down to the water's edge. It's also deserted and we have the whole beach to ourselves.

Lazy morning and a late breakfast before getting into our riding kit. What followed was a 110 kph race through the sand dunes and across the beaches of Lake Turkana in mid-morning temperatures of nearly 40 degrees.

This is the reason for being here and will go down as one of the greatest riding days in my life.

Exciting in way that only being within 1" of disaster and riding within just a degree of the edge of your talent can bring.

Arrived back at Eilye Springs exhausted. Spent the following few hours swimming in the warm spring waters of the pool and then down to the lake for a cooler swim. Spent the rest of the afternoon in the bar or sleeping out of the intense heat.

Only down side is waiting until we're all starving before ordering dinner and being told they need 3 hours to prepare it.

Great day...



Just taking 5mins



Wild life never far away (especially at meal times)



A beach ride to die for (no luggage)



Frolicking  
in  
lake  
Turkana



## Day 8 Eilye Springs to Marich Pass, 250km

(also known as Nowhere.)

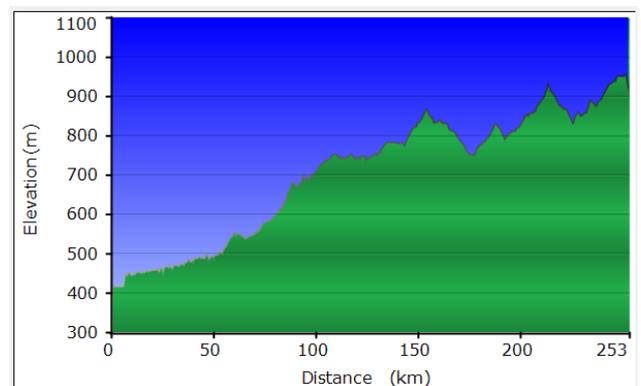
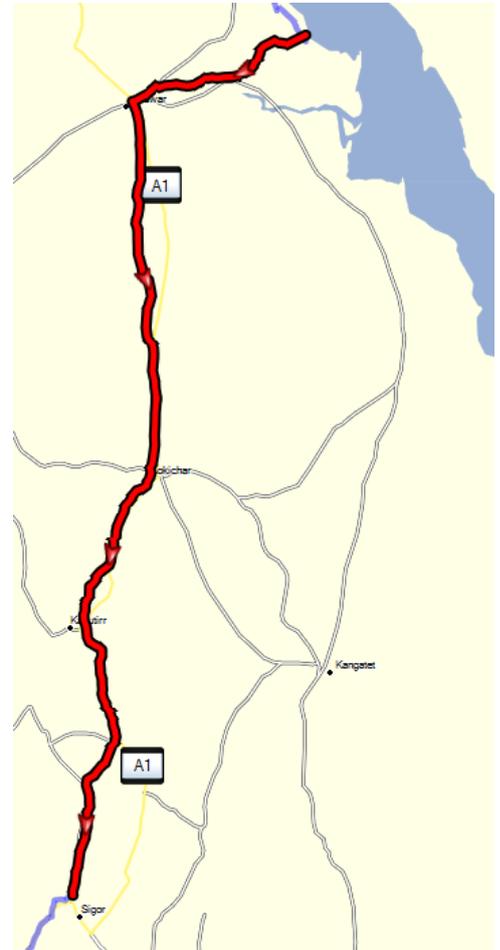
Another early start for an unbelievably tough day, not a great start as it's been so hot during the night that no one has slept. I'm really feeling the effects of Thursdays fall and can hardly move added to the 100's of sand fly bites I picked up camping in Turmi.

Covered 250km on the worst roads I've ever seen, probably best described as a 250km long cattle grid with wider spacings so it feels like the bike is going to disintegrate. After the first few Kms hands and feet are numb and even my teeth hurt. It's also a constant chicane trying to dodge the great big craters, stones and animals, any one of which will have us eating dirt the first time we lose concentration.

Can't believe we only picked up one puncture when Martyn found a nail, but the rest under a tree whilst Flavio did the repair was appreciated.

Arrived at about 5pm at a camp site that isn't in a village so we don't know exactly where we are though it's close to the Ugandan border, we decide to get a hut as no one wants to put up a tent.

Very basic meat stew and rice for dinner which I was ready for and then headed to bed for 8pm. Another long day tomorrow.





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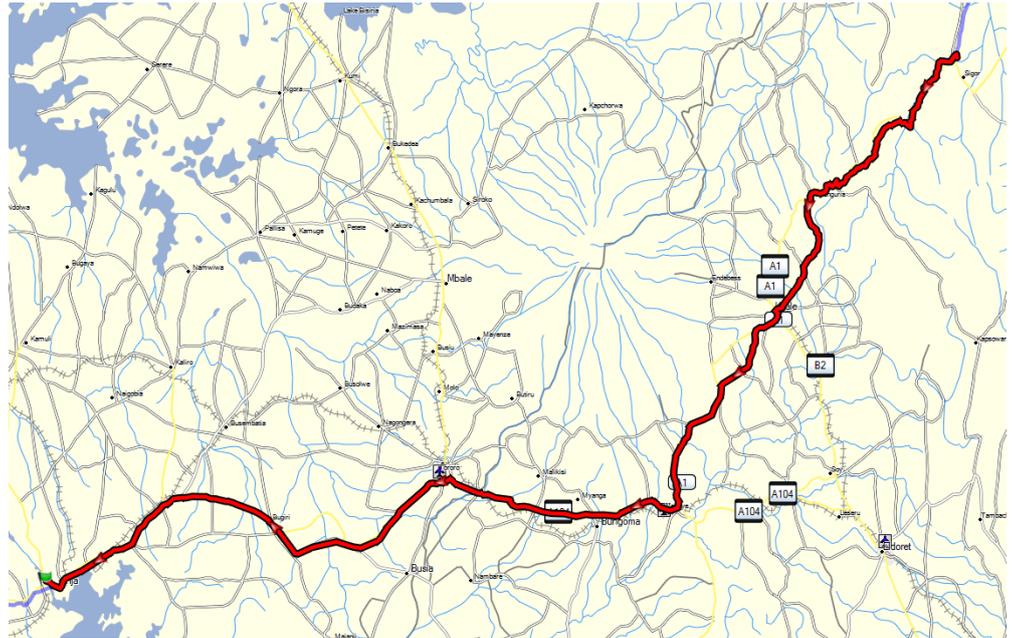


Finally  
Beer



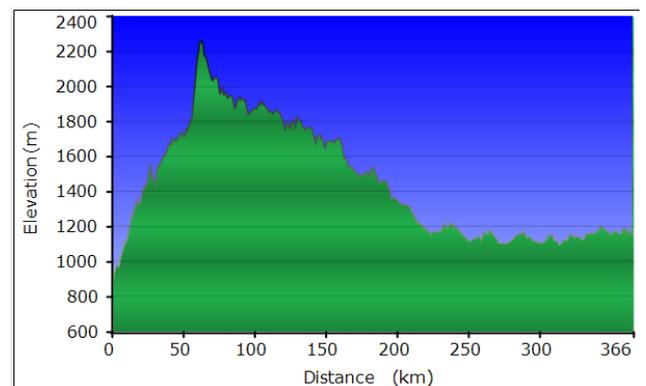
## Day 9 Marich Pass to Jinja, 365km

Left Marich Pass Study Centre where we stayed after an early breakfast. Back onto the same roads that nearly killed us yesterday, but only for 70 km and then onto real tarmac which was a pleasant change after the last few days off road. Travelled through North West Kenya towards the Ugandan border, countryside has changed from flat desert into green hills, with the road sweeping around the hills and through valleys gaining altitude all the time. We stopped after 3 hours for a drink and some samosas.



Carried on towards the border with the roads getting busier. Scenery getting greener all the time and now the people don't all look hungry, which is a nice change.

Get to the border with Uganda and spend 2 hours sweating in our kit waiting to cross which is a pain. Onto the arrow straight roads of Uganda and suddenly the driving gets worse. Apparently bikes are not regarded as important and if someone wants to overtake a car or truck coming towards you, then that's what they do, we constantly have to escape into the ditch to avoid a collision, it's like Death Race 2000 but it's a load of laughs and we arrive in Jinja after 360km with big smiles and ready for a beer.





Fuel stop .....with an interesting shop name!



Goodbye sand hello tarmac and vegetation



Great breakfast stop



Border crossing in to Uganda



Baboons will sit anywhere



## Day 10 Whitewater rafting Jinja

Once again we're up quite early even though it's a rest day. We're staying at an activity centre with lodges and camping though we decide on the lodges as it getting quite late. The lodges are perched on stilts over the white Nile and look like tree houses, they would look idyllic in a brochure but in reality are dark and cramped, they also have the luxury of being placed over an open drain and it all smells so bad that it's hard to think.

Very plain breakfast of pancakes and maple syrup and then into a minibus for today's torture. In our wisdom we've decided that a day riding category 4 and 5 rapids on an inflatable boat is a good way to relax.

We arrive at the start by what seems more like luck than anything else after surviving a dozen near head on collisions.

Then it's into the boat for some instructions, 10 minutes later we're off on a 21 Km ride through some of the most challenging rapids you can find.

Between each section of fear inducing rapids there is time to jump out of the boat and spend time swimming in the white Nile, in total silence whilst watching African sea eagles, monitor lizards, kingfishers and storks go through their daily routines. Then it's back in the boat for more stupidity. 13km in we stop on an island and sit in the shade overlooking the river for lunch, it's another one of those views that should stay with us for life but gets lost under the weight of so many sights and sounds of the last few weeks.

Back into the boat again to finish the day. They save the best until last and we all end up thrown out of the boat and Pete gets a bloody nose for his efforts.

Another 1 1/2 hours of madness in the minibus back to our rooms and a good end to another great day.



As we set off



Our first rapids



Made it through that one



I thought the water was supposed to be under us!



This is getting tough



Bugger!

## Day 11 Jinja to Kampala, 80km

Lazy start to today and except for a few aches and pains no real harm done after a day spent fighting the white Nile. Great breakfast at Adrift rafting centre of toast, sausage, hash brown and fried eggs, though the tea laced with ginger soon reminded us where we were. On the bikes for 10 makes a welcome change from getting up at 5.30.



Short but interesting ride into Kampala. Small wooden shanty shops line most of the route covered in the red dust that is everywhere. Vendors in their blue coat uniforms stand in gangs along the side of the road, all carrying their wares, mostly bananas or skewers of meat, waiting to pounce on any car, minibus or bike that stops.

The traffic becomes less forgiving as we get closer to central Kampala.

The roads are packed and the fact that anyone gets to their destination appears to be pure luck. I manage to get tagged once when a car I'm overtaking does a sudden right even though I'm still alongside his front wing. It doesn't even seem worth a gesture as I don't think anyone cares.

It's only 90km to our next destination so we arrive before 12 o'clock, although Flavio then has to go all the way back to where we started to retrieve his phone, which he put down as we loaded the bikes and forgot to pick up ( he's surprised to find 2 phones in an envelope when he arrives, but is informed that Martyn has also contacted reception to say he left his on the reception desk whilst paying the bill, this is a second time for Martyn. I think the heat is frying his brain. )

We stay in the Red Chilli hotel which is our first piece of luxury for ages. Cool rooms, ensuite, electric and a pool with cool water.

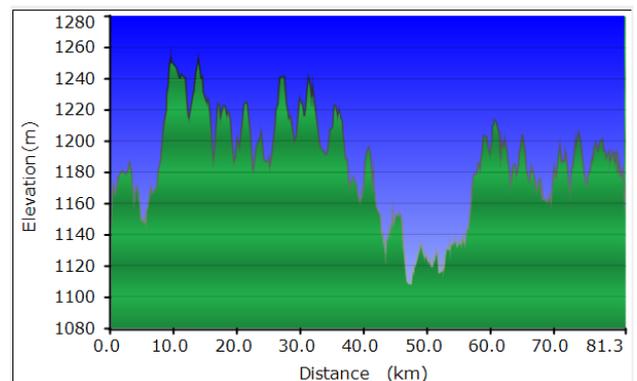
An afternoon lazing by the pool and a few beers is just what the doctor ordered.

We decide on a night out in Kampala and Indian is our meal of choice.

We give a lift to an Australian ex pat who has done charitable work in Uganda for 7 years.

He tells us that 65% of Uganda's GDP is stolen and that the 465 MP's control a staggering 83 separate ministries. They also get a 40,000 dollar car allowance each. The Ugandan population is around 40 million and expected to double over the next 15 years. With class sizes of 2-3 hundred already it can only get worse.

We avoid the bustling street food stalls and push through the chaos to enter a gated complex for our Indian restaurant of choice. The restaurant is outstanding and very high class. As we eat it's hard to believe that the madness we've just witnessed I'd still going on outside.





Red Chili Hotel somewhere in Kampala



Boots off, swimming shorts on; pick up a beer on way to pool

## Day 12 Kampala to Kibale, 355km

Ridiculously early start to the day as we need to be up for 5 am not helped by the fact that my roommate was making an emergency dash to the little boys room every 15 mins from 1 am.

The idea is to get an early start and avoid the worst of the Kampala traffic. Wrong. As soon as the sun gets its hat on it fuels instant insanity. We've changed our plans of heading south in favour of heading west to see if we can see the tribe of Pygmies we've been told about. This takes us directly through Kampala, it's all elbows and horns, it feels like a re-run of Ben Hur and i'm loving every minute.



Out of Kampala and we should be heading into rainforest but the urban spread has taken its toll. The 1000 year old forests have been replaced by tea, coffee, banana and sugar plantations. We travel through rolling green hills wrapped in a blanket of mist, it could be the Yorkshire dales in spring, even the cool 18° was playing its part. The hills are mostly empty of trees as most of the African hard woods have been shipped of to provide us with doors, windows and conservatories back home. Hopefully someone took Joni Mitchell's advice and put all the trees in a tree museum, though at today's exchange rate it would cost 5,100 Ugandan shillings just to see them.

We travel through some small sections of original rainforest but more often than not it's newly planted spruce designed to provide a sustainable resource.

We chase the edge of the rainforest for 320km passing the time with some 70mph 2 wheeled gymnastics, well when I say "we" I mean "me", everyone else just shouts "Cock" but I think it's funny.

We arrive at Fort Portal on the lookout for Pygmies, we notice a few short men with scowls on their faces, but that's the same the world over so I'm not sure it counts.

Out of Fort Portal and we see some more rainforest, this time it can't get away as it's stuck against the mountains that divide Uganda from the DRC, but there's bandits in them there hills, we may be a bit Ben Hur but Deliverance we ain't. We hang a left and head south before the banjo starts and the fat boy gets it.

Another 15 KM down red earth roads and we find what we think is our stop for tonight. Unfortunately the 135 dollar per night price tag doesn't fit our vagrant lifestyle. We've imposed a 25 dollar limit so we decide to look elsewhere.

Flavio knows a place 25km away down gravel roads called The Frog @ Kibale. What could possibly go wrong? We'll a lot actually.

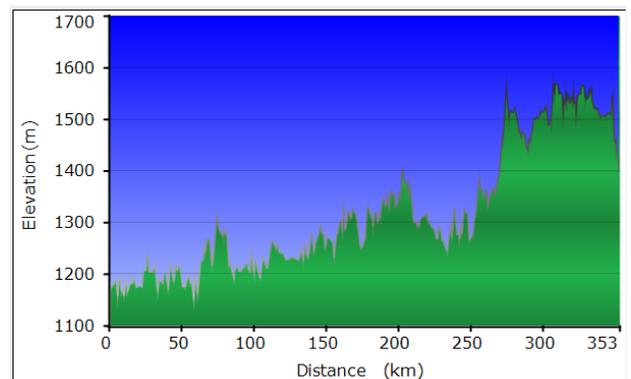
We travel down a deep gravel road with trucks and cars appearing out of the dust that reduces visibility to just a few feet. Unfortunately the only way to ride it is balls out fast because anything less lets the front wheel dig in and then you lose the ability to steer.

I haven't seen Martyn over my shoulder for a while so I stop and wait for him to catch up, he doesn't appear so I go back to look for him.

I find him 5 mins later down a 5' deep concrete culvert. He's OK but bruised and shaken. Apparently he decided to take the conservative line along the side of the road to avoid the oncoming traffic but didn't notice the culvert.

He's been down before but this is by far the worst.

We sort the bike and laugh at him, and then we're off. We finally find our digs, cheap yes, water / electric no. It's rough but the view is spectacular and the owner has just gone to buy us a beer. We finish the day sat around a fire with a lightning storm lighting up the sky, drinking beer and chewing the fat before a simple but delicious meal prepared by our hostess. Happy days. Keep rolling on ha ha





Early start to avoid the traffic – not!



DRC border shrouded in cloud



Monkeys happy to join in



Pygmies are remarkably difficult to spot!



The Frog @ Kibale at night



Need to keep guard at breakfast time



## Day 13 Kibale to Makiro, 280km

We wake at 7 and Martyn tells me he's stiff. Oh yeah, what's the story.

Slice of bread and a boiled egg for breakfast, which we have to fight the monkeys for, we win, opposing thumbs you know.

We hit the road and leave it for dirt before the tyres even get warm. We head through off the beaten track countryside passing through small shanty villages. We head into the hills under moody skies. It's like Frodo's home town and picture perfect. We pass through endless banana plantations in a land that looks untouched by the outside world, well except for the electric pylons that stride from view to view and all the kids wearing premier league football shirts. It's amazing to watch the locals playing the how many bananas can I get on my bicycle game, the winner is well into the 1000's but we don't have time to check because we're chasing a view.

We hit the first bit of tarmac of a long day and hang a left, it's still grey and we're surrounded. To our left is the open African Savannah of tv fame with a distant mountain backdrop.

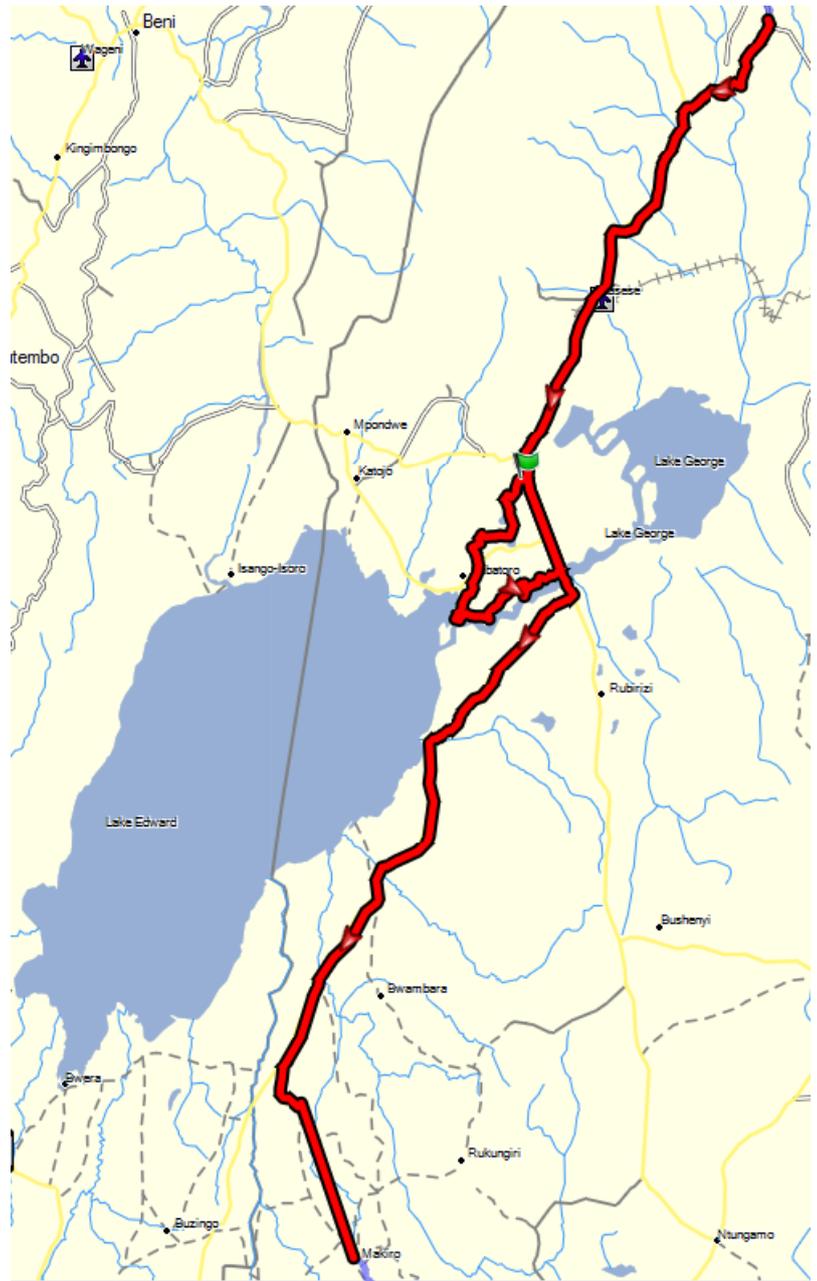
To our right are the mountains separating us from the DRC, they're black as night with a razor sharp serrated ridge. We're back in Lord of the rings territory but this time it's Mordor not the Shire.

They're draped in mist and we wait to see if they send forth the demons of our doom. Obviously they don't as that's all bollocks and we keep the wheels turning.

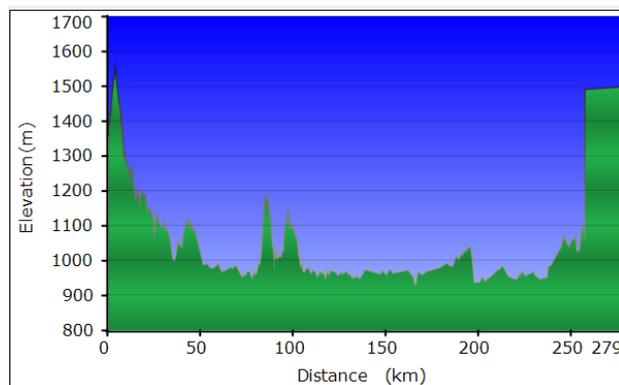
10 minutes later and it nearly goes pear shaped. I stop against the armco at the side of the road to take a picture as the lads disappear around the bend to be met by some w\*\*\*r swerving over the road towards them they dodge his bullet but he saves the best for me. As he rounds the bend at high speed he cuts across oncoming traffic and heads straight for me. I hear the squeal of tires at the last second and I'm fu\*\*\*d, I dive for the armco but don't have time the bike hits 45° but that's it. He's trying to avoid the armco and turns away. His tyres run over the bottom of mine and he fish tail whips my luggage with his rear wing.

The lads work their way back whilst I rearrange my guts, we all say wanker but all think lucky. We're back on the road and heading for the Queen Elizabeth National Park. Jerry "The pockets" Allen and I decide to recreate the Wacky races and think it's hilarious, though we are just given the international signal for self-gratification from Penelope Pete stop and Mutley. It's then that I realize that that's the whole point. Self-gratification!!! That's why we're here, and we're all gratified constantly.

Around an innocuous bend we find our next stop. The Equator sign. It's bloody here, yeah!!! Bloody hell that's taken some finding!!

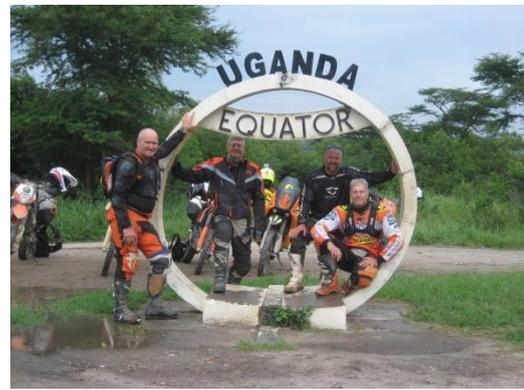


We take the obligatory photos and hit the road again.  
 It's not long until we get to the park and stop for coffee at the entrance.  
 We enter the park along the rough single track road and we're looking for wild animals.  
 The road winds its way into the hills and the views are simply breath-taking, not sure about looking for animals but it's a visual assault, it doesn't get any better than this. And then it does.  
 The road crests onto the ridge of an extinct volcano and runs around the rim; the inside is emerald green with a mirror lake reflecting the backdrop. The lake is dotted with pink flamingos and a herd of hippos are bathing near the shore. My heart and my eyes ache. Stunning. It's times like this that you want to last forever, but also makes you homesick because you want to share it with the people left at home.  
 We tear ourselves away as there's a decision to make, stay on the track or follow a mud trail down the hillside. Easy decision, this is no tin box tourist trip, we're here for adventure and scared of nothing. 5 minutes later we've boxed ourselves in, we're down a track and it's getting impossible to turn around, the vegetation blocks our view and there's fresh elephant shite everywhere. It doesn't take Einstein to figure out that if we meet the elephants we're hunting down here with their young then we're well and truly f'd.  
 We're more Ken than Dr so these four white boys are running for the hills with our tails between our legs. Back on the main drag we're rewarded a few mins later with our first herd of elephants. Wow. We're all lost for words and stand in silence for a while just watching. We're moving again before Jerry "the pockets" can regale us with another interesting fact, I'm sure he's got one about the internal workings of an elephants anus.  
 What follows is beyond my ability to describe but 5 hours later we leave the park almost wildlife'd out. We've stood face to face with water buffalo, and dozens of other wildlife exotica. We've followed muddy tracks up hill and down dale, even the mighty Flavio has binned it twice. Laughing he reminds us that it's only people that don't ride who never fall.  
 It's true that people who don't ride can't understand, the risk of falling is the reason we ride not a reason not to.  
 Our red dust road disappears into the horizon between deep green vegetation when it starts to snow, but it ain't cold.  
 The sun has broken through and everything has a golden glow, the flakes are tens of thousands of red and white butterflies. Someone has photo-shopped reality because this can't be real. Beautiful. Though stopping to look could get you mugged by the gangs of baboons patrolling the verges.  
 It's getting late and Flavio stops outside a dilapidated shack that's for sale and tells us the place he'd booked had apparently closed. Bollocks.  
 Don't worry he says it's just 50 KM to the next one.  
 1 km later he's pulling into a hotel with a grin on his face, everyone's a comedian today.  
 It looks expensive but we're knackered and need a beer.  
 We're met by two lovely young ladies with big smiles. This does look expensive!!  
 We've already had a beer when we find out that there are no deals to be had on the close to 200 dollar a night rooms.  
 The two ladies don't wave us off as we leg it.  
 Sat Nav says we'll find a mission 25 KM away. It's getting dark, it's started to rain, putting a glazed finish on the clay roads, Jerry has no lights, I have no rear brakes, Martyn is on his arse after yesterday's fall and Pete found his dry humour gland a couple of days ago and won't stop playing with it, so doesn't give a shite one way or the other. To cap it all the beer went straight to our heads and we're all pissed. What could possibly go wrong?  
 Well nothing actually. 25 KM later we pull in to our 5 dollar hostel with big grins and lots of back slapping after what we all agree to be the best ride of the trip. But what do we know? Like I said we're all pissed.  
 Keep rolling on.





Cultivated land, low cloud and mountains



Crossing one (of three that day)



There must have been many volcanoes around



About turn!



We shared the park with elephants!



Standard riding formation



The bikes



The road



The beer

## Day 14 Makiro to Ruhenger, 160km.

Up at 6.30 because the vicar has promised tea for 7. (Thanks Godfrey for your hospitality)

Tea on the lawn under a burning sun, whilst we pack up the chariots and Penelope Pete Stop and I formulate a plan for the day. Jerry "The Pockets" is in his element when we ask him for a 15mm M6 hex bolt to repair my rear brake, obviously he has one in the pocket labelled "B".....we fixed it and got on our way.

We're all excited to leave this mission because we're on our own.

We arrived last night down one of the best roads we've ever travelled and can't wait to see where it goes.

The road itself is about 12' wide with a crown in the middle; it's got a 3' camber to each side and is made of red earth. It's like riding on the top of a red snakes back. The road has just been dropped onto the landscape, it runs over 8200 ft high mountain tops and clings by its fingernails to sheer cliffs through prehistoric forests that constantly tempt us to take our eyes off the snake. A mistake here and the only thing that would save us is a parachute.

The grip on the dry bits is surprisingly good but it rained last night and the wet bits hiding in the shadows are waiting to slap us to the ground.

Somehow we escape 80km later when the snake spits us out onto the shores of Lake Bunyonyi. Again it's picture perfect, but Uganda is.

After breakfast we decide to ride around the edge of the lake on a rough single track road cut into the side of the hills and we follow it for another 50km before seeing our first tarmac of the day. We're normally disappointed but it's probably now that we should thank the dozens of race track designers and engineers who must have flown out to Uganda to design and build this road. Martyn checks his stats later and his heartbeat tops out at 205 bpm which sums this road up perfectly.

We hit the Rwandan border under the shadow of Mt Karisinbi, the home of the gorillas. The top is shrouded in cloud so today they're definitely in the mist.

We make the decision not to visit them in person as the 600 dollar per person price tag is too salty for our taste. Besides we have our own resident silverback, so we decide to poke him with sticks and make do.

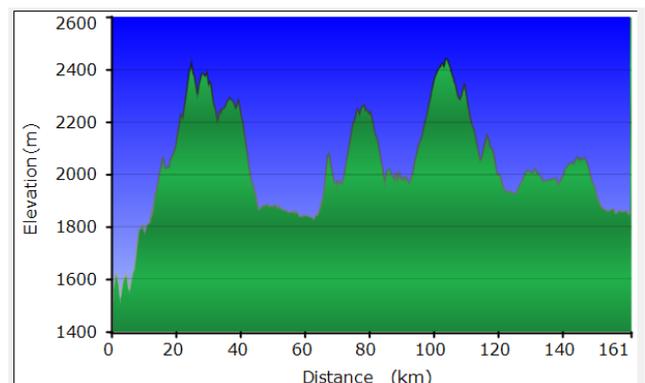
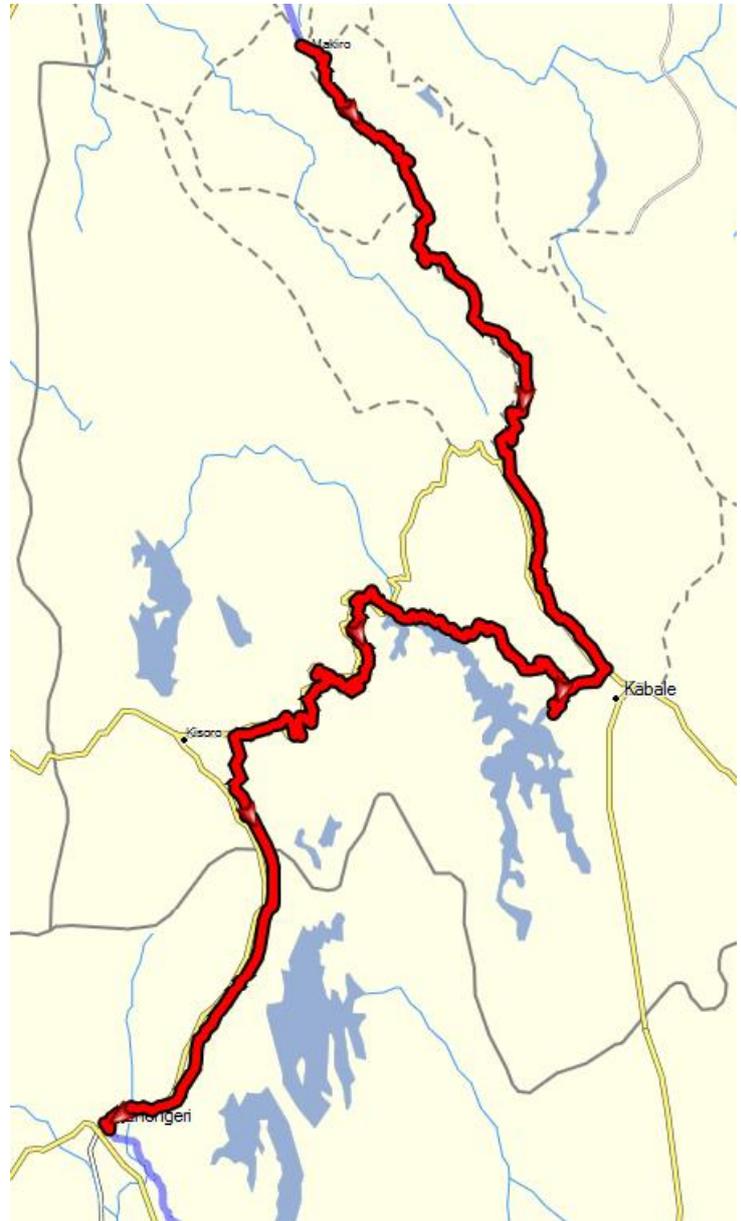
The border is a 2 hour ordeal but we did avoid the rubber gloves.

Within 100yds of the border disaster strikes when Martyn's bike throws a cog. We try to make temporary repairs in a small town, but it's an ugly town and the local idiots are out in force. We're surrounded by groping hands trying to reach pockets and wallets.

We lose a camera.

Not soon enough we're moving again but the repair only lasts a few miles before we're stuck again, this particular part of Rwanda is no tourist destination so the only option is to push (in this case Phil volunteers to ride Martyn's broken bike whilst being pushed by Flavio's boot up his rear end and Flavio's 950 powering forward - not easy). 15km later we find a hole to hide in. Looks like the spare parts could be a while so we need to make a plan. Bar first.

Keep rolling on.





Fantastic Ugandan scenery



A brass band – not what we expected



The 'red snake' road we rode all day



First view of Rwanda, gorillas in the mist



Disaster strikes!



Is there a mechanic in the house?

## Day 15 Ruhengeri to Kigali, 100km

We're up and we have a plan. We'll it's not really a plan but it gives us something to do. Kigali is where we want to be and we crash landed 100 KM short. We need parts and they're coming by royal snail.

We order a man with a van and get a preacher with a truck.

The idea is to get to Kigali by any means so Martyn's stuck with the 100 dollar taxi.

Before we leave we park the bikes in front of the hotel for their promotional photos, we're celebrities out here and everyone wants a piece.

We're on the road for 8.30 and it's surreal.

The Rwanda we saw last night has disappeared, it's like judging England on Dover before you get to Yorkshire.

Apparently it's national clean-up day, which happens on the last Saturday of every month, between 8 and 11am. The result is that the whole population of Rwanda is busy cleaning the verges, streets, fields and towns. No one can drive (except us ha ha) and the roads are pristine. The only vehicle we pass in 100 KM is Martyn, in the 4 wheeled tin box slow lane.

He photographs us giving him the v's as we pass, the compliment is returned when we stop for photos and we photograph him giving us the v's. Who said men were immature?

It's as good as it gets this is a playground and we've got our toys.

The roads are racetrack smooth and hairpin happy. We're on knobbies and on the edge. Every village we pass we collect smiles for miles, kids run from every direction waving and shouting with excitement just to see us pass.

The circus is in town and everyone dreams of joining.

We've got the fire breathing Italian and the man with the magic pockets. The fat man, the wise man and the bearded lady. Take your pick.

The perfect tarmac winds through the picture perfect countryside. After Uganda's prehistoric untouched glory, Rwanda's manicured, ordered neatness is OCD overkill.

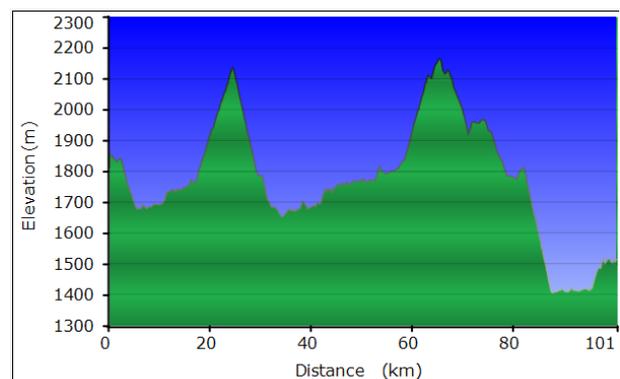
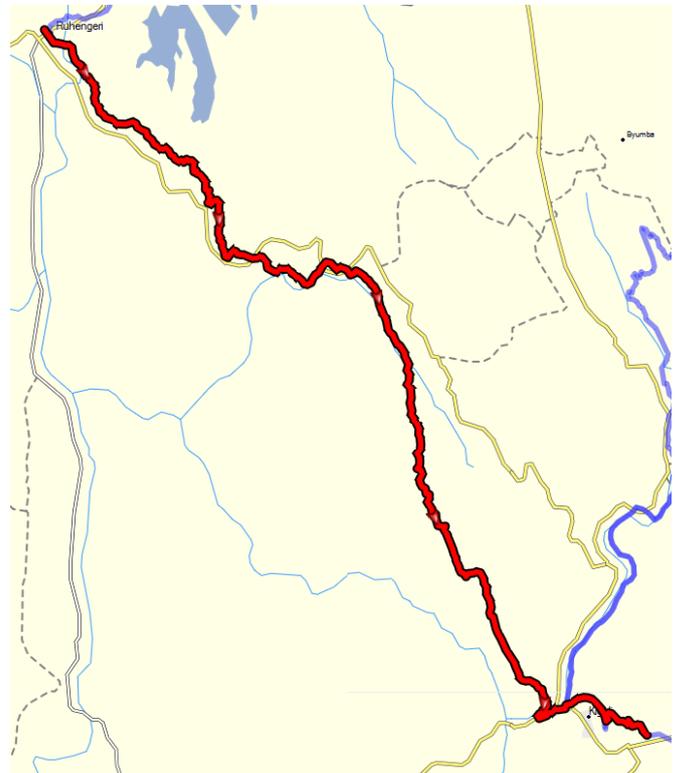
Every hill and valley is a Capability Brown wet dream.

We rock up in Kigali before 12 after what seems like a full day.

We're grounded and need another plan.

Yeah you guessed it. Bar first.

Keep rolling on.





Bad news, wheels stopped turning for Martyn



While we get the road to ourselves

## Day 16 Kigali. Going to the Genocide Memorial.

We're up and its easy like Sunday morning.

It's a rest day and the washing is done, clean pants and it feels as special as Christmas.

We decide to visit the Genocide Memorial and head for a taxi. 4 wheeled comfort or pillion heroics? We're all laughing as we don our pisspot lids and climb aboard. We arrived 10 minutes later and our pilots laugh when they ask for 1000 franc's each. We laugh when we hand it over cos it's only 95p.

When we enter the exhibition the mood changes.

Rwanda is remembered for the genocide that devastated the country in 1994.

We spend two hours face to face with a reminder of man's ability to do evil things, we stand amongst the souls of 250,000 slaughtered and tortured because of who they were.

A people who lived side by side before colonialists separated a nation in 1932 by the number of cattle they owned. If you had more than 10 head cattle you became Tutsi and if you had less you were Hutu.

The mass grave stands on a hill overlooking the modern bustling tomb of the living.

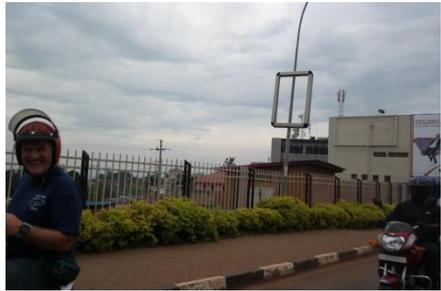
Every Rwandan was affected and now we know, we can see through the mask.

We leave in sombre mood, the pristine, elite troops on every corner have lost yesterday's ceremonial air, they're all hyper alert and ready to act. It's still an open wound here but the Rwandans are putting a brave face on it. It's a country of unrivalled beauty and order, but these manicured streets have recently run with the dreams of tomorrow. Percentages say that on every street walks a bloodied hand. Rwanda has changed now the rose tints have gone.

We arrive back at the hotel still under a cloud and hit the social net, a taste of home cleanses the pallet but we remember the taste.

Hopefully tomorrow will see the arrival of the parts we need to move back into our 2 wheeled bubble, moving's not thinking.

Keep rolling on



## Day 17 Ride out from Kigali, 300km

Monday morning work day and Martyn's still grounded, but we came together, we're a group, a gang, we live together, die together, ride together, we're musketeers all for one, one for all. So we leave him in the hotel and hit the road. Tw\*\*s. We gather outside the hotel and get ready to go as the first moto taxi pulls up to poke his nose in, within 10 mins we're ready to go and now have a cavalcade of 50 motorbike taxis joining our party. They follow for a while honking horns, shouting, whistling, waving. This pop star lifestyle is getting addictive. Kigali's traffic is as neat and organised as its landscape. There's no speeding or madcap overtakes, red lights are observed under the watchful eyes of a gun toting policemen on every junction. We head out of town and standards drop, but not to other African standards.

The traffic disappears after 10km the roads are empty. The skies are grey and it's a cool 20° the road winds through a green landscape of rolling hills, it could be the dales except now we have it to ourselves. It takes a while to get into the groove after yesterday's day off. Luckily we're up to speed when we hit our first dirt road because we're in at the deep end.

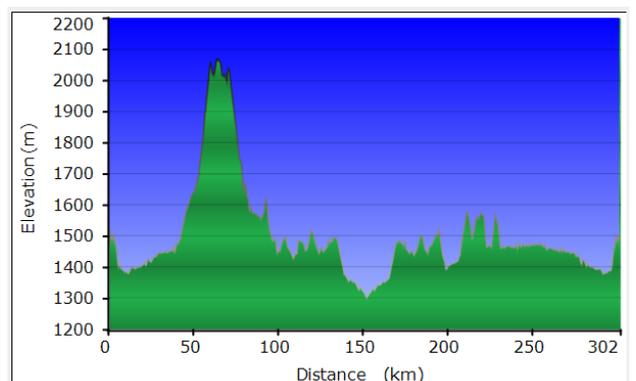
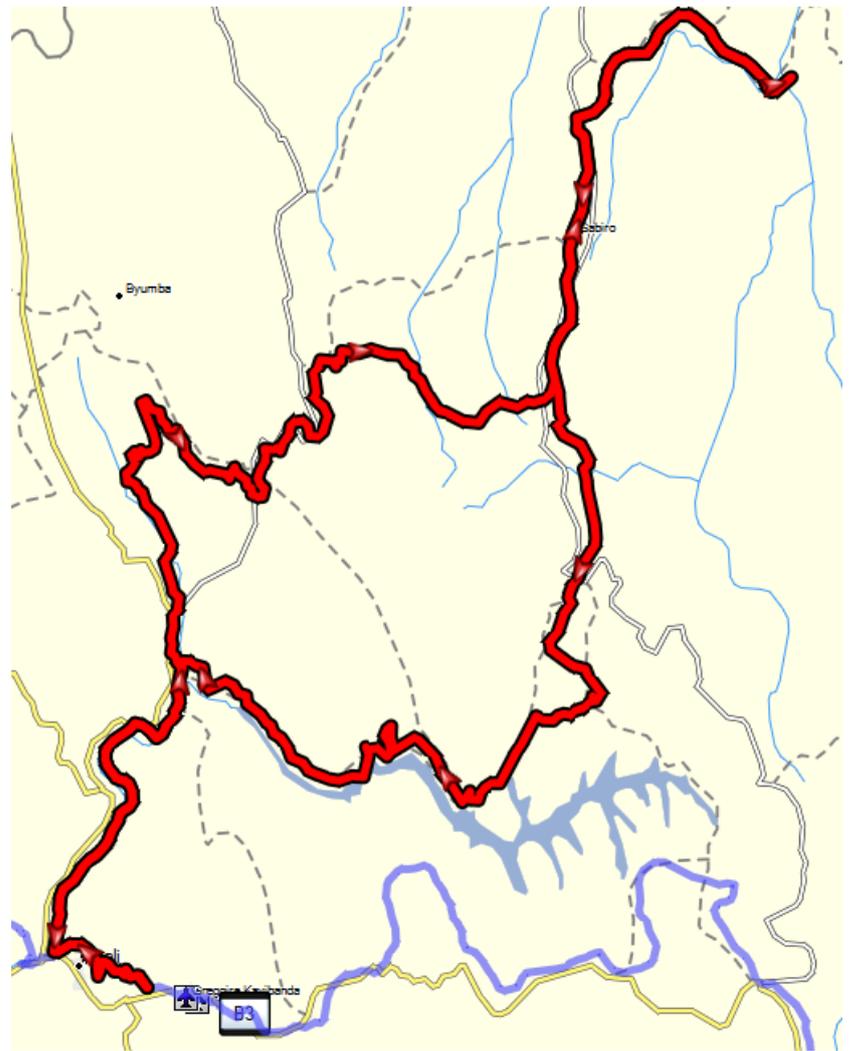
The road is loose shale and grip is hard to find. Our fiery Italian guide has woken in a passionate mood here for fun. We push the grip and tip in to each bend with the throttle open and the back wheel spinning, firing shale over the 1500' drop. It's a great incentive to get it right but not enough to slow down.

It's a 50km fairground ride, but when it ends we still haven't had enough. A short stint on tarmac for fuel and we head down another gravel road towards the national park. Another 50km of gravel at motorway speeds brings us to the gates but they won't let us in on bikes, they say we'll be eaten by the lions and we left the bait at the hotel so it's about turn for another a mad gravel dash.

We spend the next few hours traveling down tracks and goat paths as we skirt the edge of Lake Muhazi where we stop for a late grilled lake-fish and chip lunch, before a rain dodging saunter back to the hotel.

It's another day that hits all our top tens, and we survived. Bonus.

Holiday wife didn't make the beds though.





We escape Kigali – no Martyn today



Amazing ride through mountains



Wimpey still progressing bridge building



Local people very friendly



80km ride down a sheep trail along Lake Muhazi with a fantastic lunch stop

## Day 18 Still in Kigali.

Kigali is a great place to visit, but like visiting an old aunt, the novelty soon wears off when you have things to do.

Martyn the bike murderer has realized the the error in his ways and is repentant, but we're still stranded. Unfortunately we've been sentenced as a team to 5 day's hard labour. well it's not that hard but a beer bottle can get heavy over time.

Flavio collected the parts we needed from DHL whilst we got packed up and ready to leave. We need to leave before 9am so that we can get to a safe destination before dark. By 9.30 its obvious that we're going nowhere. The part we needed for a simple repair is not all we need but as Jerry "the pockets" doesn't have a fully functioning KTM workshop in the pocket marked K, we're doomed. We ask "the pockets" to check again but no joy, he's even running out of interesting facts from the pocket marked I, even though the U pocket containing his uninteresting facts, a spare utility belt (with extra pockets) and a ukulele is still full, though why he thought he needed a utility belt is beyond us all.

Flavio and I jump in a taxi in search of additional parts and a grinder.

We rock up at a local garage with a vague idea of what we need. Labour is cheap out here so not only do we get the grinder we need, we also get someone to hold it and someone the watch him do it. Someone to hold a bottle of water and someone to check he can do it correctly. We also get an oversight committee to watch the watchers. 45 minutes later and it's time to haggle, we look loaded and they don't fall for our sob stories. They double the price and won't back down. They want 4000 for the time and another 4000 for the parts. We think about telling them to shove it but we're stuck, we're over a barrel and they know it.

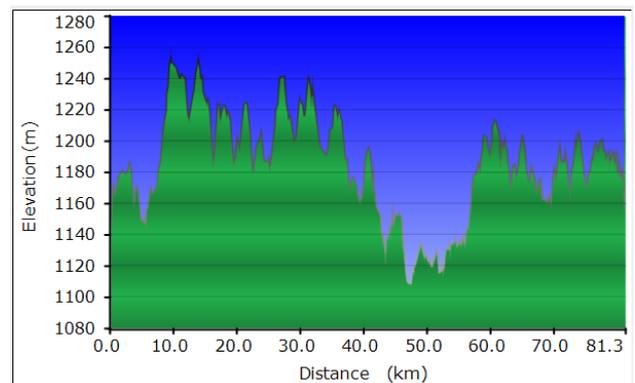
They look smug as we drive away having handed over our two lots of £4.04p

Back at the hotel Flavio works his magic, well it's a temporary repair and could still turn out to be just an illusion, but for now we're back in the game.

Beer o'clock.

Keep rolling on.

Last blog update from Rwanda, we are packed and ready to roll early tomorrow for Tanzania. its been somewhat frustrating sat here waiting for the drive sprocket and we are itching to get on. The situation in Ethiopia seems to have escalated a little but hopefully it will have calmed down by the time we get there in a week. The trip is now time sensitive and we cannot afford any further issues.





## Day 19 Kigali to Geita, 425km

5 am start to a long day, 430 KM day and we have a bike to nurse all the way.

We leave the sanitized city centre and head south east towards the Tanzanian border. We follow the constant screensaver landscape along the valley bottom passing mile after mile of regimented rice fields before rising through banana plantations into the hills. The Switzerland of Africa, the land of a thousand hills, Rwanda. Call it what you will. It's stunning, but something is missing.

We talked to the 29 year old, intelligent, articulate, future of Rwanda last night; he spoke of the troubles and told us that the

neighbours who slaughtered his family are still his neighbours today. He says they forgive because that's all they've got. That kind of sums it up, it's a bit Stepford wives, everyone smiles but no one laughs, no one let's go completely, there's a lack of the African passion we've seen so much of. Maybe if they find it, hate and revenge will be hiding under the same stone. They've bought peace with their soul and the price is high.

We hit the Tanzanian border and change from riding on the right hand side to riding on the right side.

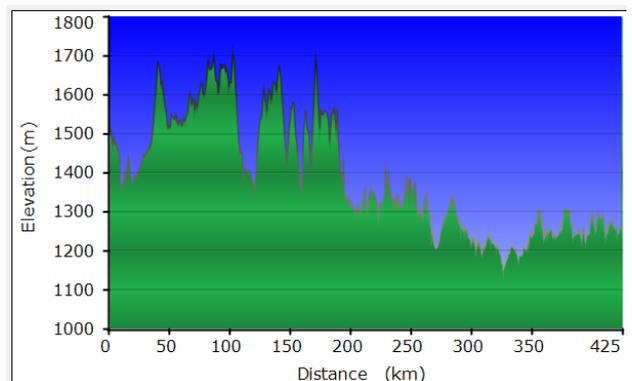
The landscape changes immediately, the road deteriorates, there's more litter, there are more shanty shacks and barefooted kids.

Welcome back Africa..... where have you been.

Within 10 minutes we come across an articulated truck, on its side, dying. It lost its fight with gravity at the bottom of a mile long slope, and punched its face into the scenery. It's a reminder that it can go wrong very quickly.

Today's about miles and the road is the same mundane, two hours, fuel, two hours, fuel. The road is an industrial highway and shack to shack truck stop sleazy. They only respite is a rainstorm just as we leave the tarmac for clay. 50km of slip slidy mud, sand and gravel reawakens the senses before reaching our final destination just before dark.

Great days indeed.





Last stop in Rwanda



We've got Border crossings off pat now!



Greasy spoon truck stop, African style



Bike and bellies re-fuelled and we're off



We stop for fuel just as the heavens open up; everybody shelters under the petrol station canopy



## Day 20 Geita to Mwanza, 135km

4am and the noisiest cleaner in the world is smashing his way along the corridor, Pillock. 2 hours later and it's a sleepy start to a short day, but today is about the destination not the road.

From the front of our digs we can see the first 50k of our 120k plan. It's straight, straight, straight. And Norfolk flat. There's nothing. Even the horizon just peters out, it's scorched earth. People do live here but it looks hard, the landscape is littered with their shiny tin roofed existence.

Finally we rise out of the mundane into the hills, it's change but not enough.

We're spoilt and hard to please until we're pleased.

We crest a rise and there it is. The destination, the objective, the reason, the excuse the jewel of Africa.

Ocean blue, set inside a cluster of pink stones, within an emerald green basket.

Lake Victoria !!!!

Penelope Pete Stop and I stop for some photos and congratulatory slaps on the back. We're here, and it's a turning point.

We've travelled for thousands of miles, crossed borders, crossed time zones, crossed our legs daily and our fingers constantly. We've spent Pounds, Dollars and Birr, we've spent Ugandan shillings, Tanzanian Shillings and Rwandan Francs, we've changed tens into thousands and thousands into millions, and spent it all. We've driven on the right and the wrong and back again. The landscape has changed, the people have changed, we've changed. Now everything changes. For weeks we have had the morning sun on our left, chasing adventure, chasing the southern horizon. But now all roads head north, the horizon take us home. Our internal tune changes, we go all Simon and Garfunkel. We're homeward bound.

We stop to take it all in but Penelope Pete stop is away with the fairies, daydreaming, and testing dementia? He just motors on by. We find him later lost in a world of his own; not realizing we'd lost him in ours.

We short cut the trip with a quick 95p ferry ride, apparently getting squashed to death is included in the price, Flavio sits waiting behind a truck when it decides to reverse, he finds a gap and the truck doesn't stop. Lucky boy. It's another close call.

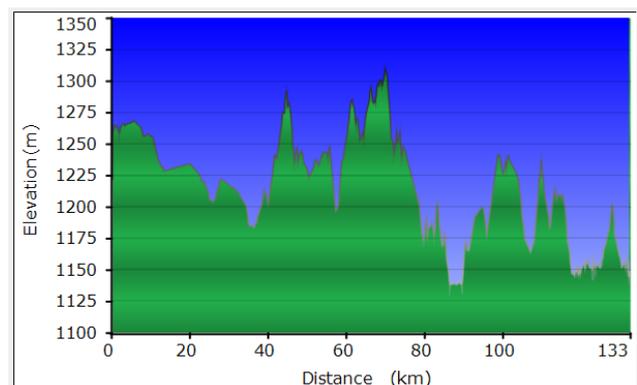
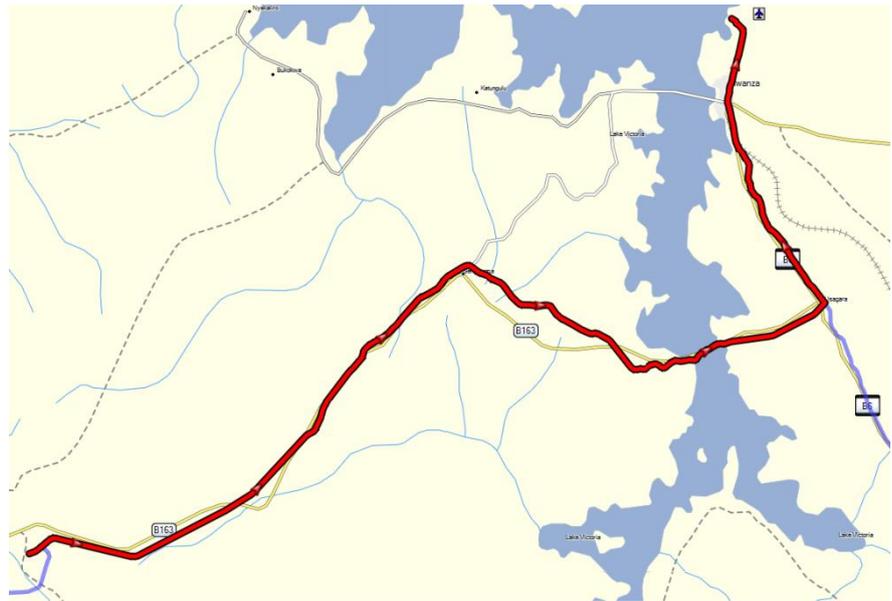
By lunchtime we've called it a day, mankinis are on, and we're swimming in our destination.

And then it rained.

Beer o'clock

Great days indeed.

Keep rolling on





Our first view of Lake Victoria



Penelope Pit Stop GO



Pockets



Bernard Manning AKA the Comedian



Mutley & Flavio



First stop - beer



Lake Victoria's answer to the Lock Ness Monsters



Time to ride

## Day 21. Mwanza to Mt Haman, 490km

Another work time start. But today we wake up in a sauna. I'm in my pants and still a ball of sweat. Can't wait to get all my kit on I'm sure that will help. Tropical storms during the night tried to dismantle the sheds we were sleeping in, ensuring a bleary eyed start.

We're packed and on the road by 7:30 We leave Mwanza on the shores of lake Victoria and head out of town. Traffic is light but chaotic. The only things to keep us interested are the 16 wheeled artillery shells flying towards us at any given moment. Each one has a name scrawled across its front; we just hope it's never ours.

The first 100 KM passes by, leaving little impression. We think it's probably going to be the story of the day but are pleasantly surprised when Flavio finds what he says is a short cut.

We're back on the rough and spirits rise. We're instantly into Tanzanian pothole roulette, the rules are simple. First rule: the game doesn't start until you reach 60mph second rule: The lead bike creates a dust cloud that totally obliterates everything beyond

10ft in front of your nose. Third rule: To survive the game you need to miss the cars, people, people on bikes, people on carts, cows, donkeys, goat's and chickens that appear without warning, traveling in random directions, stationary or airborne. To make things more interesting potholes will appear at random and any stone bigger than a tennis ball will launch you into the scenery.

Oh and for added interest there's a ramp over every drainage channel, which are placed at different intervals but never more than 30 seconds apart resulting in frequent airborne hilarity. And did I say that it would go on for 100km

The last 10km gets serious.

The spacing between bikes increases to 1/4 mile speeds top 80mph. It's not big and it's not clever, but it is funny, and probably stupid. A mistake would probably be fatal at best; luckily the road runs out before our luck.

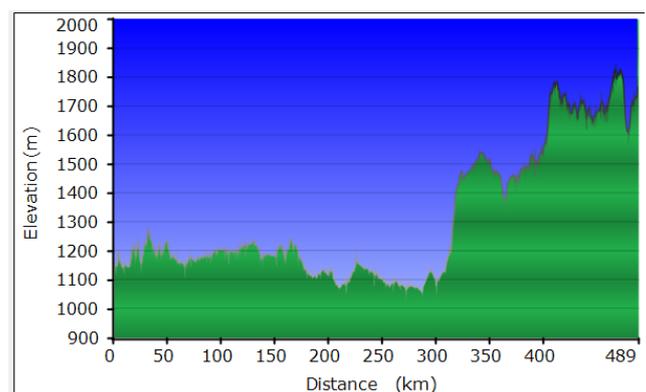
We're back on the straight and narrow, with tarmac rushing past, it should be A1 boring but it's time for some tunes. Two hours of top of the lungs, dad dancing favourites, whilst the African scenery flashes past on two wheels. It should have been on my bucket list. And now it's off before it was on.

All too soon we're getting to the end of our 500km day, Pockets just has chosen to cut some poor kids pet chicken in half with his back wheel before we rise into the hills under a setting sun and we're greeted by the splendour of Mt Haman. Dominating the flatlands of central Tanzania, it's spectacular. Too many views. Too much to remember. Overload. Only time will tell, the memories we keep, but surely this will be one.

We arrive at our £8 a room hotel at the foot of the mountain, tired, content, wanting more, had enough.

Great days indeed.

Keep rolling on





Not all the animals want to eat us!



Fantastic varying scenery



Mount Haman just creeps up on us



Our morning as we set off for a days riding



We were lucky enough  
to join in a  
Swahili wedding



## Day 22 EnGedi to Arusha, 260km

Same old same old. Up early hit the road. Heading out across the xxxx'ft high escarpment. The endless plains are interrupted by the red hills, the road runs dead straight from horizon to horizon, any other day it would be stunning but after weeks of breath-taking beauty, extraordinary becomes ordinary. It's cold, well Africa cold, so warm but colder than yesterday. It's grey and the wind is relentless. We have an easy 300 KM day, it's all tarmac and we have decided to get it over with early, we're driving through the heavens but occasionally we get glimpses of the plains 1000's ft below. The traffic is light and of little interest, except for the bus that puts us all off the road for kicks. Synchronised escape should be a sport and is a thing to behold.

Mutley also added to the fun when we stopped and he decided that putting his face on the ground instead of his foot would get a laugh. It did.

We get to our stop by 2pm; we're staying with Caleb who is a friend of Flavio's and the son of Dick and Donna who we stayed with in Ethiopia.

He suggests dinner out so we're dressed and ready for 4pm. It's a 4 wheel drive on road off road trip to our surprise destination. We arrive at an old colonial mansion for a game of polo. Its bonfire night and they celebrate in style. Its hog roast and beer under the shadow of Mt Meru. Gazelle are wandering the field and we watch the sunset with a snow capped Kilimanjaro backdrop.

Did I say we could no longer be impressed?

I lied.

Speechless.

Breathless.

Man moment.

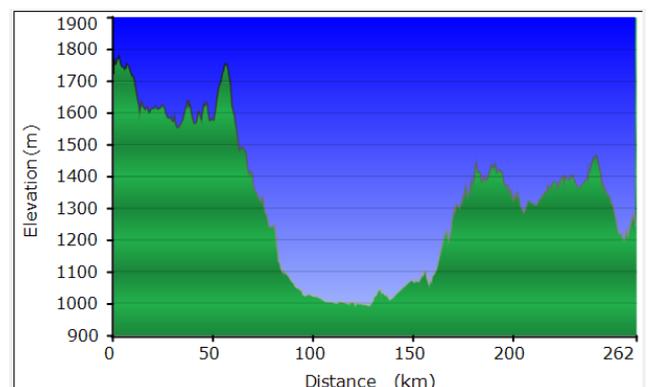
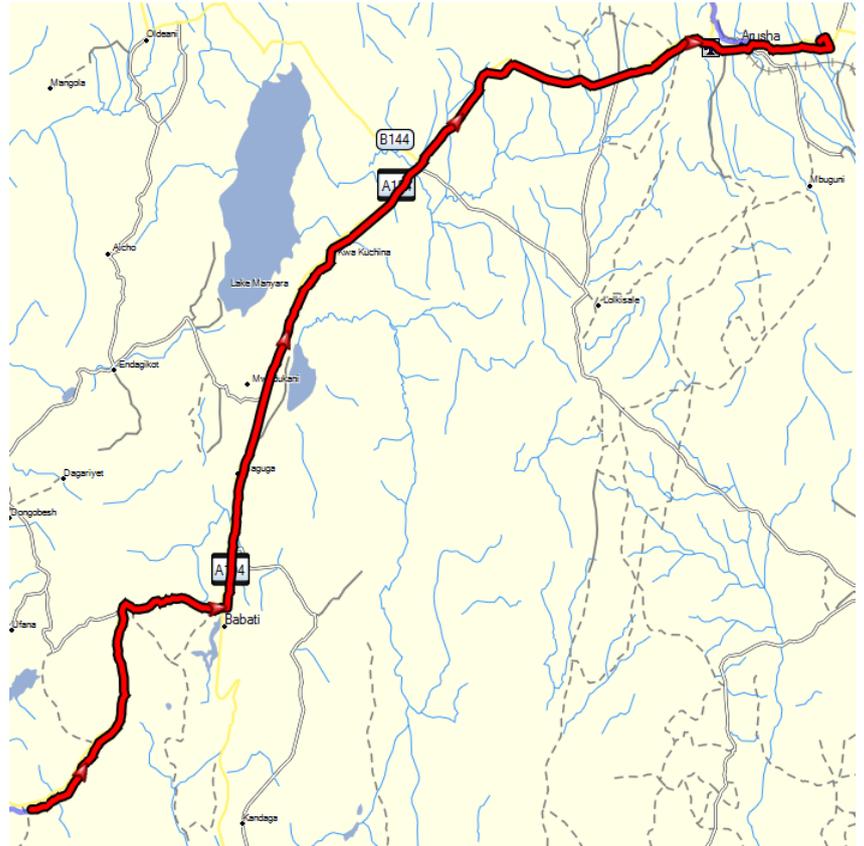
Thinking of home.

Time of our lives.

Paradise down a dusty road (Thanks Pockets)

Africa really is a drug.

Great days indeed.





It's a simple way of life



Caleb and Joanne's missionary training centre



Arusha polo club



It's Bonfire Night ..... Tanzania style with Mt Meru in the background



Another great sunset



Mount Kilimanjaro

## Day 23. Tarangire National Park.

Hungover 5.30 start. We sell out souls and take four wheels. We're instantly fed into the tourist conveyor, we've lost our celebrity status and have become mobile ATM's. Our first stop for snacks nearly sets us back \$35 for 4 cartons of juice and a packet of Pringles; we put it all back and do one.

Apparently the rarest animal to see is a Leopard but it's our lucky day as we see one before we even enter the park, it's not his because he's been spread across the road by a passing truck.

We enter the park and join a dozen other safari trucks, all full of kaki clad adventurers with big lenses and pointing fingers.

We crawl our way through the first mile gawping at the Wildebeest, Zebra, Antelope and Warthogs that look at us looking at them. We pull up to a waterhole along with every other vehicle in the park, and within a minute are treated to a pride of lions ambushing a warthog, it's quick and frantic, somehow the hog escapes in a howling, screaming riot of sound and 3D action.

The lions look pissed and settle back down to wait for their next victim, over the next hour a combined herd of Zebras, Wildebeest, Antelope and Warthogs approach the waterhole. We're all hoping to see a spectacle, willing one of the bigger animals not to notice the lions, resulting in a quick chase and a slow and painful death that we can then photograph. Luckily for them they're more switched on than us.

We move of into the park and for the rest of the time have it almost to ourselves.

The number of animals is amazing and over the next few hours we get up close and personal with hundreds of animals all living in their natural habitat.

There is a down side though.

2 weeks ago we did this on 2 wheels. It was raw and exciting, we were vulnerable but still cocking around, and every time someone hit the ground we were scanning the treeline looking for danger whilst getting the bikes up on their wheels. We stopped for photos with our feet on the ground not in a box. It's a great experience but still a poor relation.

It's a great reminder that a trip to the shops on 2 wheels is still more of a buzz than playing David Attenborough on 4.

By 1pm we decide that it's enough, we've been up since sparrow fart, we're all knackered.

3 hours in the slow mo lane between us and home, no kids running and waving alongside watching our every move.

Fame is a fickle mistress.

Bring back my wheels and superstardom.

Keep rolling on.



## Day 24 Arusha to Nairobi, 295km

Five bloody thirty again.

Pissed off but up. Say our goodbyes to Caleb, Joanna and the kids and we're off..... well for about a minute and a half before we get our first puncture.

Sorted and off we go again, onto the new road that will link Arusha with the border. Half of it is half built and the other half is being built. I think that the idea is that you avoid the bit that's being built and use the bit that's half built, until the half built half turns into the bit that's being built, then you either hit the ditch at the side or the half built ditch in the middle, unless you're a local of course, because then you have to reverse the previous rules. It's also important that you drive on the left, unless you're on the right and pass right unless you decide to go left. Buses have different rules but no one has worked them out yet and cows have just one rule they can only speed up if nothing is coming. There are also pedestrians to consider but they are further down the food chain than motorbikes so if you kill a few it doesn't really matter.

Penelope Pete Stop forgets at one stage nearly killing a motorcyclist, a bus driver and himself but was saved because the oncoming van that should have passed on his right also got confused and went left. We leave Arusha confused but alive.

We head into the hills waiting for the sky to clear, it's grey and cold again but it soon blows over.

As we head towards the Kenyan border the sun breaks through, the view is just huge. Red earth and yellow sand littered with Acacia, the tree of Africa.

There are mountains rising up all around and the sky is blue with cartoon white clouds.

Each mountain looks like it's grabbed the edge of a cloud and won't let go no matter how hard it pulls, smearing itself across the sky.

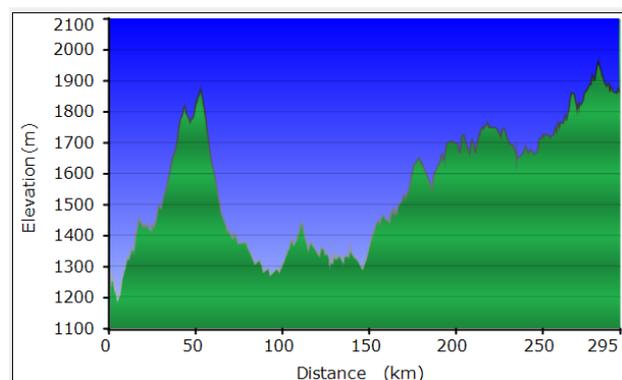
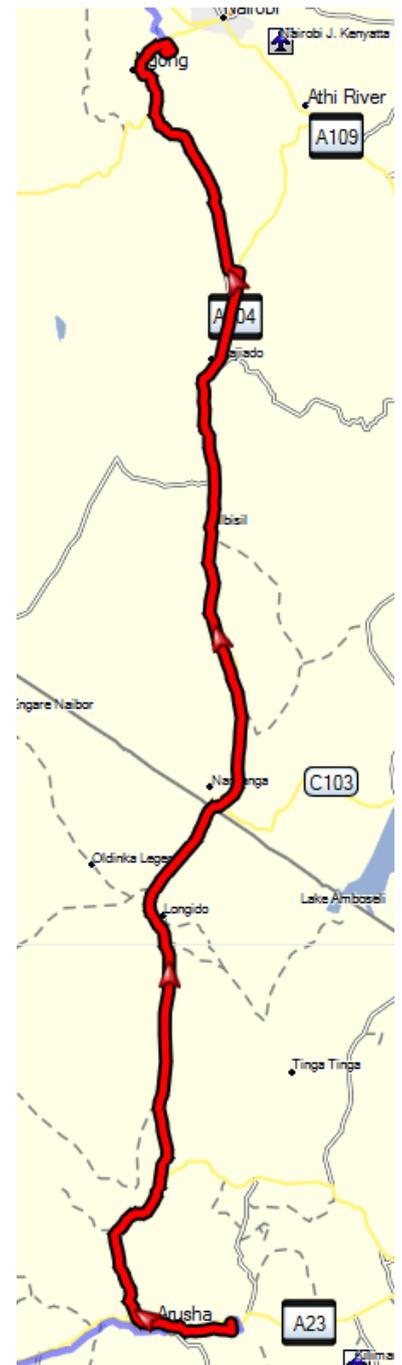
In the distance the sun lights up the flanks of Mt Kilimanjaro, it's snow covered summit defying the African sun. It looks like an invitation daring me to try and kick its ass, later, but not today.

We reach the border and nothing could be more different from the hut in the desert we found in northern Kenya that was all Lawrence of Arabia this is just a swamp, full of human dregs prying wallets and trying patience. They can rip you off in a dozen different languages but don't understand no in any.

A tedious hour and we're through, back on the road. It stays tedious until we stop for lunch, we wait two hours for the most inedible plate of cardboard chicken imaginable, at least refusing to pay the bill adds to the excitement.

After lunch we're back on the rough stuff for the final 80km into Nairobi's back to square one traffic chaos, only the rules are probably different and we haven't worked them out yet.

Hit the bar knackered. Déjà vu





First puncture of the day - 2 minutes in to the ride



There are worse places to get a puncture



Pit stop, expensive coke!



If only the officials were as efficient as us at Border crossings



Tanks topped up again

## Day 25 A day in Nairobi (or not)



New rear tyres fitted to three of the bikes



Karen Camp a great place to meet up with over landers – 2, 4 or 6 wheels



## Day 26 Nairobi to Isiolo, 355km

Ground hog day.

Up at 5.30 again, after a day of complete rest!

Well when I say rest there's always a story. Yesterday we decided to sleep in but got up at 7 to go and get new tyres on the bikes. We decided to spend the day sight-seeing but got no further than the bar. We decided to get an early night but stayed in the bar. So, it's 5.30 and we're all knackered especially Penelope Pete Stop who's still recovering from yesterday's big fall. (Out of his chair in the bar)

We venture out into Nairobi's morning traffic, taking it easy peesey.

It's grey again and cold as we climb up to over 2000 m into the hills. Our first treat of the day is when we crest a rise and are treated to a spectacular view; it's the Great Rift Valley and from up here looks endless. From here we can see the road wind its way down to the basement. It's a log jam of 16 wheelers that just have enough room to pass. The trucks on the way up are reduced to just a few miles per hour and belch a toxic fog of pollution.

They look relieved to reach the summit but they're the lucky ones. The drivers approaching the down slope know that the only thing that will prevent them reaching the town on the valley floor at terminal velocity is divine intervention.

We get back on the road and we're moving at double the average traffic speed so it's a constant hairpin overtaking bonanza.

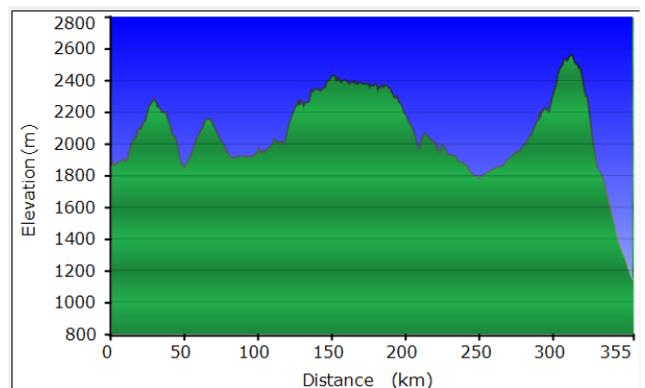
Once we hit the valley floor it's a mobile disappointment. This is a major industrial highway and it's littered with shanty shops and litter and more litter and more litter. It's a disgrace but I think we're the only ones that notice. We do stop for a quick photo when we spot a herd of Zebras grazing at the side of the road, it's not all safari stare though as they're ankle deep in crisp packets and empty water bottles. It's a dump but I suppose everywhere has one. It's another 100km of dull before we head back into the hills. We're back at over 2000m and in the land of "milk and potatoes" it could be rural England but we're reminded that it's not when we come across an equator sign, it's the 4th one already on this trip and it's only another hour before we bag our 5th and last.

We leave the road for a 100km dirt dash before we reach Nanyuki. I've arranged to visit a school where my daughter worked for a short time 5 years ago and drag the lads along.

Rose Muhoro runs the school and greets us like family. We get the tour and we're awed by her dedication and commitment to the children that step through her door. We say our goodbyes and head for lunch before a final run to Isiolo. The weather changes and the rain starts, within a few minutes

we're soaked and cold, we head for cover and wait it out. It's a short run to the hotel but the suns come out and we're nearly dry when we land.

We hit the bar because we all know it could be our last. Tomorrow brings "the road of terror and death," apparently someone is attacked and killed by bandits every day. But it's an adventure and we're not backing down. Besides Mutley the bait is back on two wheels so if it comes to it we'll leave him behind.





What's out there?



Mozzy's were busy again last night



Wide life is everywhere



We find the Equator .. again



Rose & Phil (Phil's daughter worked with Rose)



Thompson Waterfall



Rain stops play ... well for 20 minutes

## Day 27 Isiolo to Moyale, 510km

Road of terror and death!

We made the mistake of listening to the radio show "road stories" before we left, it describes the section of road between Isiolo and Moyale as the road of terror and death. Apparently due to its remote location the authorities have been unable to enforce law and order up here and bandits kill at will, they tell us that to stop means death, and it's another 5 bloody 30 start.

We're moving at sun up as it's going to be a long day, Isiolo looks no better now than it did last night and we're not sorry to be moving. Once we leave that blot on the landscape things change quickly. We enter the Great Rift Valley and it's as spectacular as anything we've seen so far, we're told that it's the largest valley on earth but it's far bigger than that. African red soil as far as the eye can see covered in a carpet of green Acacia trees. All around us great red, slab sided, flat topped rock formations have burst through the landscape, dragging the green carpet up to waist height before reaching for the sky. The lower slopes are still cast in shadow but the red rock glows in the early morning sun.

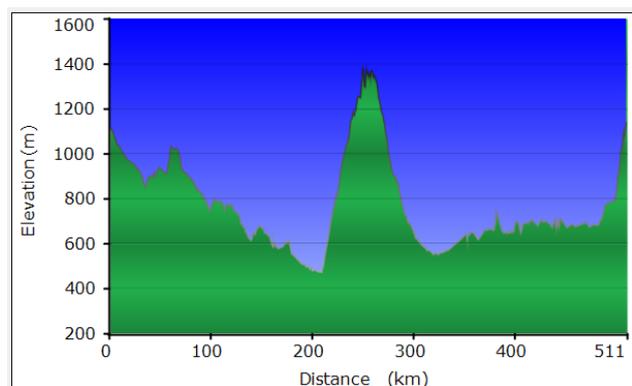
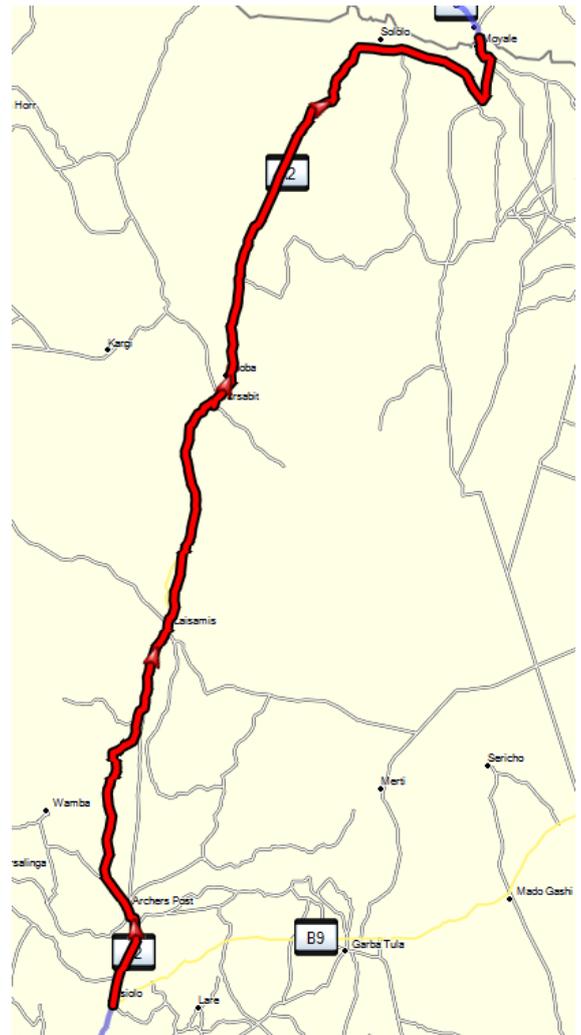
The sky has cleared and as we descend into the valley the temperature rises. Along the roadside we see herds of zebras, antelope, and giraffe we even see ostrich pecking at the dry ground whilst buzzards circle overhead. Local tribesmen in traditional dress, carrying spears and bows are driving their herds of goats, cows and camels to who knows where from who knows where? Though they're as likely to be wearing man u shirts as dinner jackets.

We head out into the valley proper and it just gets hotter, trees get smaller and the green is gone, everything looks dead. The rock formations have disappeared and except for a small hill on the distant horizon there's just nothing here. We finally reach the hill and find a small town perched on top, it's remote and soon behind us, this pattern repeats itself again and again until we reach Marsabit, once again on the high ground, where we stop for a snack. It looks like an old wild west town and not somewhere you'd ever stop, rough doesn't do it justice. Once again we're treated like friends, people show interest not resentment, stop to talk instead of rushing by.

We drop back down to the valley floor and everything changes again. Before there was nothing and now there's even less, no life, desolate. The hills disappear behind us and then nothing, absolutely nothing, just horizon wherever that is, the wind is unchecked and relentless hour after hour whipping up sand storms blocking our view then disappearing again. We've done close to 500km when we finally see mountains rising out of the distance. We feel like sailors finally spotting land after a long journey. Land, safety, we've made it. The feeling soon goes when Penelope stutters to a halt. We're on the lookout for Smokey and the gang whilst we get it sorted. He's out of petrol, Pockets has emptied his P pocket, but he's also relieved himself of every fluid possible over the last 24 hours, so we get some off Mutley as he's got the biggest tank (he he) and let Penelope know that it's because he's a ham fisted amateur who should know better. Within 1 km it's my turn but it's obviously down to a fuelling issue on the bike. Obviously.....

We reach Moyale by mid-afternoon and it's a typical border town. We pass out of Kenya for the last time, it's slow but bearable, and then we hit Ethiopia. It's getting dark when we finally clear immigration but the bikes don't have the same luck, bollocks!! Grounded again. We're running out of time and have no wheels, we'll already have to tip toe our way to Addis dodging any towns where protesters are stoning vehicles, which will add another few hundred KM's to our trip and now this.

As for the road of terror and death? the only terror is the thought of not being able to do it again and the only risk of death is through over indulgence. Don't believe the hype. Keep rolling on.





Our hotel in Isiolo



Towns / villages always very busy



Flat scenery, we navigate mountain to mountain



Road looking back



down the middle



Road looking forward

## Day 28 Moyale to Yirga Chefe, 380km

Good news is we get to sleep in; bad news is we don't have our wheels. Last night's simple border crossing wasn't so simple so we need to wait for a call from customs before we can move anywhere. We don't get the call until 10 and then we need to get the bikes down to the customs shed which is a shack on the high street. We park up and we're instantly surrounded by street kids and idiots, we stand in the Ethiopian sun in full riding gear for an hour whilst some desk jockey does a full vehicle check in the gutter. We stand and contemplate the road ahead, protests have blighted Ethiopia in recent months and we've heard reports of vehicles being attacked all along our route. The original plan was to leave early and dodge around any hot spots, but this nonsense has cost us time and we have a plane to catch.

We finally hit the road glad to be moving but it doesn't last, within 10 minutes we're stopped at the first army road block of the day, they're packing AK's and frowns but we've seen so many over the last 5 weeks we're not scared, well maybe a bit but it doesn't show.

We're moving again, they're not, so who won that one. Foreign investment has built us a new road and because of the news it's empty. It takes a while to leave the straights but when we do it's worth it. We rise into the hills and follow the perfect rolling twisting tarmac for 300km it's a perfect rolling green landscape, we could be in England then Scotland and then Switzerland, on a 25° perfect summer's day. Nothing's as dramatic as previous days but it's all perfect. The only downside is that for these roads the bikes are just too slow, although the off road bias helps to cross the hundreds of kerb sized rumble strips.

We pass through picture perfect traditional villages with small thatched roofed, mud huts, everything is ordered, organized, clean and unspoilt everyone is busy working the land and tending the herds, its different when we pass through bigger towns, the litter starts a kms away and gets worse. The towns look like pits of misery, dirty and unorganized, people work but most don't. It's a shame because Ethiopia is beautiful and could be so much more.

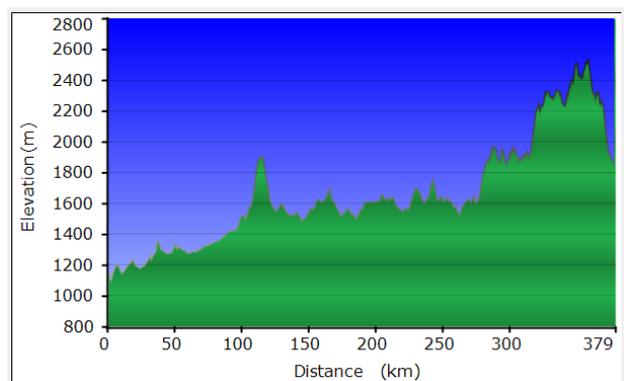
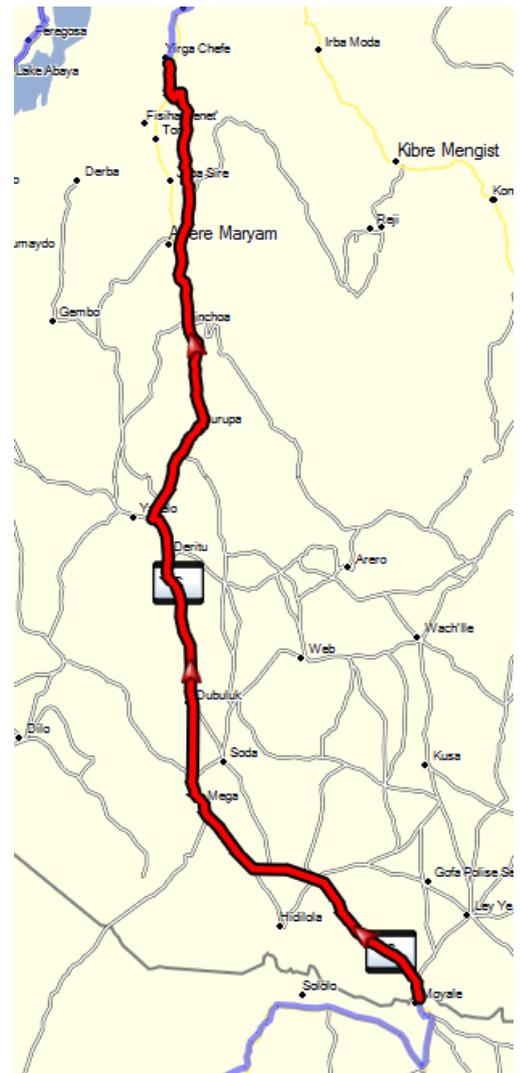
We stop for a quick lunch just as the tarmac ends, its here where the bikes make perfect sense and we end the day with 80km of off road mountain gravel, racing into a setting sun.

Another perfect day. Well perfect until the soldiers sharing our hotel turn into dick heads. Raised voices, curses and fresh air punches follow before hotel staff and a sergeant intervene.

Hide in our rooms or beer o'clock?

Bars open and it'd be rude not too.

Great days indeed.





Termite hills as far as the eye can see



Take your partner by the hand, and round and round we go



Man down!



Our steeds parked outside our rooms

## Day 29 Yirga Chefe to Lake Lagana, 200km

Our friend singing prayers in the Orthodox Church starts his call at 4.30 and he's still at it when we get up at 7.

It's a later start as is not going to be a long day; it's also our last real day.

The mornings cold enough in the shade to see your breath and hot enough in the sun to burn, perfect.

Our hotel is a hovel and suffers from Ethiopia's disease, nothing works and no one really cares. It's been another night sharing our beds with nits, ticks, lice and mosquitos. The toilets don't work and the whole place smells of shite. It's a shame because it's a beautiful country which could be so much better. Too many people don't care and the one's that do talk of getting out.

We're straight onto gravel and it lasts for 150km, it's a dusty bus and donkey dodging riot but it's also close to home and no one wants to do something stupid at this stage.

Though stupid is as stupid does. So we spend the whole time just cocking about, jostling for position, taking the same overtakes and seeing who ends up in a ditch, one hand, no hands, vee's and the rest, it's hilarious and how we don't end up in casualty God only knows.

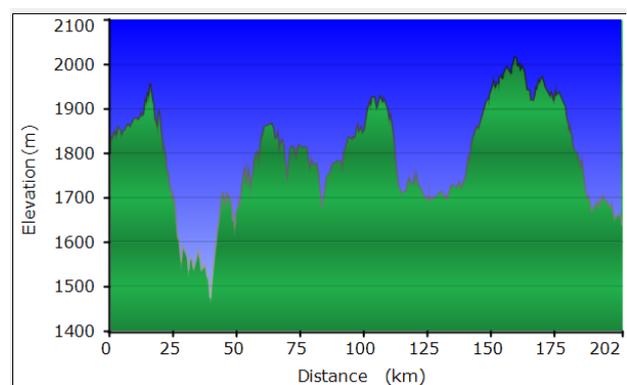
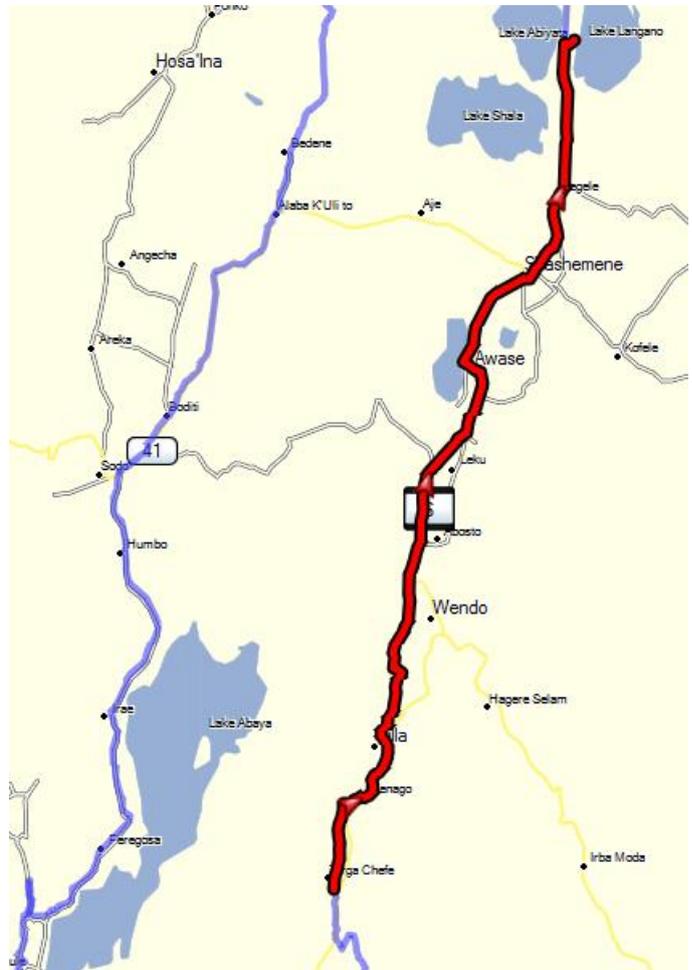
We stopped for a late breakfast before the final A road blast to our hotel.

We arrive at our five star resort for the first piece of luxury in what seems like forever, we have hot and cold water and a toilet that works and clean sheets. Bliss.

The best part is that we have the place almost to ourselves but the worst part is that we have the place almost to ourselves because of the protests which we haven't seen but it's keeping people away. It looks like paradise on the shores of a lake but all around lodges have been torched in protest.

It's got to be one of the most idyllic places on earth but because of where it is no one will come.

C- could try so much harder.





Perfect lunch stop with a view



View of Lake Awasa



Our last meal on the road – a real treat - luxury

## Day 30 Lake Lagana to Addis Ababa, 205km

Final day blues, we wake in a fantastic lakeside resort but we can hear the fat lady warming up. We have time for breakfast and a lazy pack before we hit the road. It's straight onto A road dusty straight, it's only 200 KM to Addis and we've come too far not to make it now. Before we set off we reminded each other that it's not over until the wheels stop turning, it's all business, be careful.

There are constant reminders of what can happen, carnage on the verges as we pass vehicles on their sides or embedded into each other.

It's steady Eddie until the finish but it's not easy, Mutley and me head for the dirt as a lorry swerves across our lane and we nearly end our trip embedded in his radiator.

There are also signs of protest as we pass burnt out vehicles laid like mile markers counting down to Addis.

But none of these distractions will be what we take from Africa. Last night we sat over a beer and each of us offered our individual highlights of the trip, the choice of memories was endless but the results were surprisingly similar. We all picked examples of kindness and hospitality, of sharing people's lives. An evening on the Omo river or bonfire night under the gaze of Mt Kilimanjaro.

Dick and Donna, Caleb Joanna and the kids who treated us like family when we were so far from our own. Godfrey in Uganda. Ruth from the Frog at Kibale, Jimmy in Rwanda.

Danny in Tanzania. Brendan and Valerie at Karencamp Nairobi. Rose in Kenya who's dedication and determination to make a difference humbled us all.

When we left home we all knew that there was a risk that we could leave our lives in Africa but instead we've left part of our hearts. Yes, news reel Africa is there but it has a narrow lens, you need to live it to see the rest, it's dramatic, beautiful, it's green, diverse and it's as full of hope.... as it is of despair.

Never doubt the kindness of strangers, yes, adventure has its risks but life is a privilege and should be lived to the full.

And then we're here Addis!! engines are off and wheels have stopped, relief is written on all our faces, none of us would have put money on this a few weeks ago.

It's been a team effort,

Flavio Bonaiuti from Africa riding Adventures, who was our guide for money but a friend for free.

Jerry "The Pockets" Allen without who's organizational prowess we probably wouldn't have made it out of England let alone back to Addis.

Peter "Penelope Pete Stop" Hall, my comedy partner and our ideas adjudicator.

Martyn " Mutley, Bait, Silverback, Holiday wife " Hanson who has been the butt of more jokes than seems fair and who has had to dig deeper than all of us to finish this trip but still finished in style.

And "ME" invited along for the comedy value but learnt to type on the way.

These are the days that should happen to you.

Great days indeed.

And playing us out is ...

Africa by Toto

"The wild dogs cry out in the night

As they grow restless longing for some solitary company

I know that I must do what's right

Sure as Kilimanjaro rises like Olympus above the Serengeti

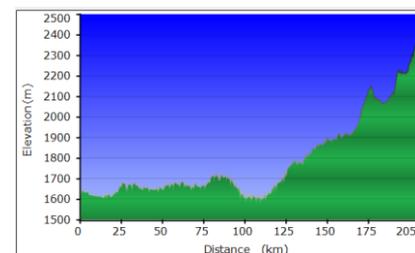
I seek to cure what's deep inside, frightened of this thing that I've become

Hurry, boy, she's waiting there for you

It's gonna take a lot to  
drag me away from you  
There's nothing that a  
hundred men or more  
could ever do  
I bless the rains down  
in Africa

Gonna take some time to do the things we never  
had"

Th th th thaaaat's all folks !!!





We mount for the last morning.



We're going to miss our lunch stops



Fill up for the last time



and it's all over!

