

John and Betsy go South!

September 2008

1.09.08 Timbuktu (first attempt)

The weather forecast was not so good, but we started off early, direction Timbuktu, which is attainable over a bad road, approximately a 215km distance.

At first, the drive went well and we had enough time to take photos of the surroundings.

This mountain which lay ahead of us was very impressive. All of a sudden it became the end of our drive. The water barricaded our advancement. At a closer look we realised that there was no chance to cross through that hip- deep water.



Alright then, return to the camp and do some re- planning!

Actually the time was ready to give Betsy an overhaul service (it was well overdue) At a nearby garage, although without any modern resources but with the owner's effort, Betsy had an oil change including new filter and a thorough check- up.





2.09.08 A day to forget (specially for Heinz)

The guide arrived at the agreed time, 6.30 in the Morning. After a short drive on a sandy piste, Heinz's LKW started playing up. As he tried to turn around, the back wheels sank into the sand. No problem for us, the experienced "sand- rabbits" A little bit of shovelling, laying sand sheets under the wheels and everything was fine again . The joy was of short duration!

At the crossing through a riverbed, Heinz got stuck once more; some more shovelling, sand sheeting and the problem was solved.

A steep climb was to be overcome at the next village which brought us up onto a plateau where a stony way continued



Soon we had to cross a river once more, or what was left of it, anyhow. We checked it out at first for its water level and the right track of direction we would have to take.

With full speed Heinz drove towards the river. He didn't get far though, the left side of the truck sank into the ground and he stayed stuck in the mud.



The shovelling in the sand earlier was like “honey licking” to what we had to get through this time. More often than not we had doubts if we would make it. After 3 hours of intensive shovelling and putting sand sheets under the wheels we succeeded in getting the LKW out of the mud, to everyone’s joy. We had numerous on-lookers!



The damage to the plain gives an idea of how deep the vehicle sank into the mud. After that experience we decided to return to the camp. We had had enough for the day! But the bad luck wasn't over for Heinz yet. A puncture brought more sweat and hard work for us. By 2⁰⁰ pm we managed to get back to the camp, having done nothing special, except shovelling, shovelling and shovelling and.....



3.09.08 Second attempt to Timbuktu

We just wanted to try our luck once more! In the last few days, no rain fell in this area and the chances to cross the river were much better. That what we guessed!! As soon as we arrived at the river we had to admit that the water was still too deep and would make the crossing impossible.



Still exhausted from the previous day we sadly had to give up and forget the visit to Timbuktu altogether. We had another option and it was still enough time to fulfil, a drive to Bandiagara. We settled in at the camp on the outskirts of Bandiagara at a reasonable time. We booked a guided tour to the “Pay des Dogon”, starting after a good days rest in the camp.



To be continued.....

5.09.08 – 7.09.08 Visit to Pays Dogon

In the South East of Mali, at „Falaise de Bandiagara“, you’ll find a wall of rock, approximately 200- 300 meters high and 140km long, which lies at the edge of the desert.

The Dogons, which have their own genealogical tree of Nomads, colonized that region in the 15th century. The previous settlers, the Telems, who built their small houses high up at the cliffs were forced out. They only could reach their houses with the help of ropes. The Dogons themselves were building their first villages directly below the houses of the Telems, but still high up against the rocks. New villages were built later on at the bottom of the cliffs. The Dogons pursue the agriculture at all times. They have cows, goats, sheep, chickens, everything what serves their self- sufficiency.

Maize, Mil, Beans, Peanuts and onions are planted in the rainy season. They have to work fast, because the rainy season only lasts 4 months.

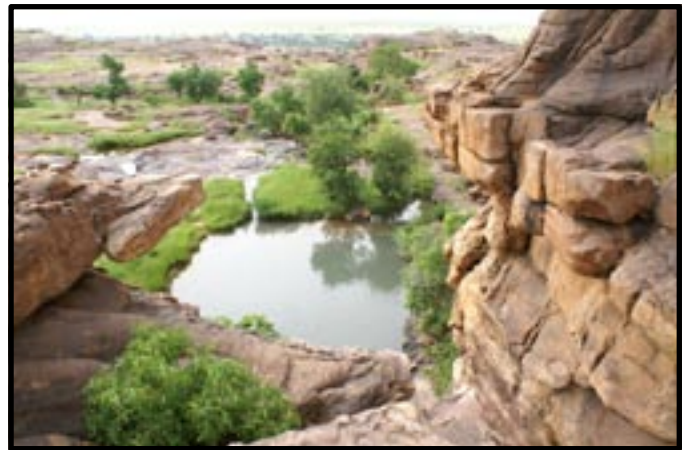
The villages are only connected by narrow paths, and, because of it, one visits these area’s best on foot.

We decided to book a tour lasting 3 days with staying over for 2 nights at a camp.

A taxi took us to the starting point of our excursion.



Our guide, Napo led us along the cliffs to the village which lied below.



After a quick break and exploring the village we carried on along the cliffs, direction Teli.





One could see the houses of the Telem's and below them, the first built houses of the Dogon's.
It was worth while climbing up the rocks to view the matter at close range.





A glance at the village was also a magnificent impression.

After an 11km Hike we reached the village at which we spent the night.

The Innkeeper, Ali, looked after us well. The washing facilities were clean. There was also a nice garden set-up. (Unfortunately, there was only one cold beer!) We slept on the roof under the sky with its stars shining upon us. The only thing which was supplied, was a mosquito net to cover oneself.



The next morning we had a stroll around the village which looks like that.



Our hike continued along past a wall of rocks, but upwards! On our way, we came across some basket-makers who made some beautiful wickerwork.



We enjoyed a welcomed rest in the shade after the mount to avoid the mid- day heat



We saw the sights of the village which were most interesting, the church was one of them. Muslims, but also Christians live here (Was this pig here because of it?) A dealer with lots of caboodle and rifles was also present.



The country below shows the desert which mirrors in the nicest green in the rainy season. The Dogon men are far away in the desert during that time.

The greenery is of short duration and soon the country will change into red sand.



On our hike, we past farmers, who were busy planting onions. Onions are a very important part of their agriculture. The sales of the onions are very good in the whole country and so, the farmers get the necessary small change to purchase lots of needed things (471, 472, 474)



A few impressions of the magnificent region. (Actually, one had the feeling of being in Switzerland)



We slept in a simple lodge at the border of the village which Abraham manages. Behind the coloured towels is the shower and the toilet. To be able to have a shower, one uses a bucket full of water which you pour over you. A hole in the ground is serviceable as a toilet.



One experiences the cooking in a absolute different way in these open- air kitchens. Fresher you can't get it! This chicken was still walking around 10 minutes ago!



Somehow, Abraham's kids liked me a lot and they loved it to be on the picture with me.



I never will forget the lukewarm beer I was served on my birthday! Abraham hasn't got any electricity and therefore no fridge! But in spite of that, it was a nice atmosphere and our sleeping place on the roof was again something special.

The next morning, we viewed the village with its church. The women were busy with grinding the Mil. We met Alphons here, who had been at Abraham's place as a guest the night before. He works for the Caritas. We had some good discussions about the development of the country.

A picture with his family.

A glance over the wide district with its huge sand dunes lets one have an idea how it will look in about 2 months.



There were just another 4km to overcome today. No problem for us at all!

The beautiful regions we came across were enchanting.



These round plants are not eatable but are created to beautiful bowls.



Towards lunchtime we popped up at a resting place by Alpha.

A woman appeared carrying bowls full of fresh milk on her head. That is her way of making some money for a living.



At 2°, a taxi fetched us and brought us back to the camp at Bandiagara. An extra ordinary experience ended after done 34km hike.

Still a picture of the team.



8.09.08 Resting day at the camp

Aba, our taxi driver, who was the previous president of the town, showed me around the school. His wife manages it with money given by charities (donation). 120 children, or more, get free accommodation and food, with that, they are able to get schooling, classes from 7- 9 grades, where otherwise they wouldn't have a chance to attend school.



With the utmost pride he also showed me an old mill which they received as a present. At least here, the women don't have to grind the Mil with the stick. The manager, Eric of the camp brought the ultimate proof that the peanuts definitively are grown like the potatoes, in the ground. They taste quite good!



10.09.08 Drive direction Burkina- Faso

Our visit in Mali came to an end. Today we headed towards the border. At first, the road went quite steep down, along the rocks. We already did that before, on foot! The concrete road and lots of other paths are a part of a development programme of Germany. The inhabitants try very hard to make the roads passable during the rainy season.

Of course, we encountered some uneven pistes once more. The donkey path, which was next to it, was in a much better condition to drive on then the regional street, which I used anyhow!

Heinz's LKW was too broad, so, if he wanted to or not, he had to use the pot- holed street (Ha,Ha,Ha)

We arrived at the border near lunch time where all the bureaucracy went smoothly.



Retrospect – Mali

Mali has to offer a lot of beautiful things and we really enjoyed all the highlights. The people in this country are doing the best in their power to be able to survive. That is mostly agrarian products which only thrive in the rainy season. Unfortunately, it is a battle, and lots of energy is needed for that short period. There is no extra time for a more extensive development, and also, there are no means available. The same problem occurs to the sand people in Bamako.

They just about work day and night and never get out of their misery.

For me, the hike to the Dogon region was a real highlight, outstanding in other words!

A few facts:

Driven km	2360
Stay	24 days
Break downs	none, Betsy goes and goes.....

10.09.08 Entry – Bukina Faso

We managed to go through the customs at Tiou without any problem. We headed to the nearby town, Ouahigouya, where we pulled up into a camp for the night. To put up the camp in the middle of the town, in a huge square was indeed very special. That of course redeemed big interest of the population, and we were sure of on-lookers (spectators). A tour around the town confirmed our first impression we had. Surprisingly, the town was clean.



We spent a quiet night there. The next morning we left early. Another impression was the mosque at the exit of the town.

The capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou was our next destination. We had to cover a 165km of distance to reach “Ouaga”, here, the inhabitants christened the capital in their own words. Although, the country presented itself rather barren, and the villages were of medium quality.



We overtook a motor- cyclist, on board with 20 live chickens. They hung upside down and decorated the bike all around it.



The lodging, campsite of Ouaga is just a phantom of what it used to be at one time.

We didn't stress ourselves to look around further in finding another camp after the long trip behind us, so we stayed in spite of the ugliness!

11.09.08- 12.09.08 Ouagadougou

We entered the town just for one reason. Both of us were expecting a parcel from Switzerland, which was sent by TNT. It had arrived and somehow we were astonished that we didn't have to pay any custom duty. The two Swiss chocolates which we gave to the officials were most likely the reason for it?!

We found a nice camp which was situated in a beautiful park next to a hotel. (It was free of charge) It was obvious that we had supper there in the evening.

13.09.08 Drive direction Ghana

The drive proceeded more or less without any complications. Here are some impressions: Shortly, before the border, at Po, we left the main road to visit the village Tiébélé where the houses are most interesting to view.





We stayed for a night at the “Auberge Kunkolo”. Pièrre, the manager does his utmost to beautify the park with its plants and flowers (618, 609, 610)

Here are two pictures of the lavatory which one normally encounters in the camps.



There is the shower, handled with a bucket, and the hole in the ground is there for THE purpose.....???



Something for the more technical minded visitors. Lots of old machines are scattered all over the place, which are partial still in working condition (649, 650, 651, 652, 653)



14.09.08

To cross the border from Burkina Faso to Ghana went smoothly.

Retrospect – Burkina Faso:

This country would have deserved a longer stay. Because of the rainy season we were limited in many ways, conditions of the roads, and all the game- reserves were closed. The country is politically relatively stable, but is one of the poorest regions.

Our highlight was the visit of the village Tiébélé.

A few up- dates:

Driven km	660
Stay	4 days
Break downs	none

14.09.08 Drive from the border at PAGA to TAMALE:

The 200km distance to Tamale was interesting. In fact, the more South you travelled, the greener the country became and also the growth of the trees appeared to be more dense and bigger. That of course was a definitively a sign that we had left the Sahel- countries and neared the more tropical regions. After a short drive we crossed the river Volta which is dammed up further downstream and because of its square dimensions is known to be one of the biggest reservoir worldwide.



We also encountered pretty villages on our way.



Quite often we drove past huge piles of bags filled with charcoal. That is the only income in various regions. Fresh fruits of all kinds are also presented in stalls along the road. A Banana here, picked ripe of the trees tastes much better than a Banana which was picked green and was kept in cold storage before being delivered to the shops, like we experience that overseas.



On and off one comes across accidents or some break downs of which one is exposed to while travelling. It makes one think about all the risks of what could happen on the road if one is adventurous like us for example.



We didn't have to search for long to find a Hotel with a park where we were allowed to park our cars and set up camp for the night. As usual, we ended the day with eating supper in the hotel's restaurant.

15.09.08 Drive from Tamale to Kumasi:

We left early the next morning. Luckily we did so, because we completely underestimated the distance from Tamale to Kumasi. It took us the whole day for the 400km drive by doing an average speed of 50km/h, it took us approximately 8 hours in all!

Once more we set up our camp for the night in a hotel's back yard with a swimming pool where I took a dive.

16.09.08 Drive from Kumasi to Accra:

Because of the oncoming elections in GHANA, posters of various nominated candidates were hanging on pillars along the road. Until now, everything went peacefully. The people do hope of course that the elections eventually will go smoothly too. GHANA is politically the most stable country along the West-coast. It presents itself in best order. ACCRA, the capital town is very clean and nearly up to European Standards.



Southwards of ACCRA we camped directly at the beachfront.



AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!!!!!!!

We will end our overland trip in ACCRA and put our cars on a vessel.

I am sure you are wondering “WHY”.

Heinz, my only companion made the announcement quite some time ago that he was thinking of shipping his car from Accra to Namibia, South West- Africa. From there, he wants to continue his adventure as soon as his car will arrive there (His wife flew back to her country earlier to finish her studies)

There are lots of reasons WHY---just to name a few:

- NIGERIA isn't safe to travel through at the moment. Heinz's son is working for ABB in Switzerland and ABB advised their employees in Nigeria to only move around under police supervision. To be able to get a Visa for Nigeria is just about not possible.
- ANGOLA is another country where one will have big problems to get a Visa.

WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE ME?

Right at the start of my adventure I had said although I travel alone in the car but I never would undertake the overland tour without any other companion, meaning other vehicles involved.

Heinz and I had to admit that somehow we went the wrong time of the year. We came into the rainy season and there were no other Overlanders on the road. I did not have the chance to hook up with someone else in Ghana and the risk was too high to carry on by myself. I had no other solution whatsoever as to put Betsy into a container to be shipped to Durban, South Africa. The trip ended here in GHANA.

I have to be honest, somehow, all the exertions which the adventure brought to light with its tropical fates by 35° Celsius and 80- 100 % humidity were exhausting for the human body. I was perspiring 24 hours a day, very discomforting. On top of that, I had caught a Virus which reflected in a way that little cuts became inflamed and had festered, so they wouldn't heal.

17.09.08 - 25.09.2008 Getting our cars ready for shipment:

On our first day in Accra we started to look around for a shipping company which we found in no time. The marine "MAERKS" is an established shipping company known worldwide.

The clarification about our affairs was indeed time consuming. Every day, we went back and fourth to their offices to sort out things (paperwork) (What a bureaucracy!!!) (Sorry, but we are in Africa)

To dispatch Betsy wasn't really a problem because she fitted into a 20foot container without any measures. Heinz's car gave as more headaches. With a width of 2,5 meters and a length of 7,3 meters, the car had to be put onto a "Flat Rack", which is a reinforced basis of a 40foot container, but hasn't got flanks. Unfortunately, these flanks don't just lie around and are not ready at hand. It took the marine literally up to the last minute to obtain such a flat rack. I don't have to underline the point that there wasn't any time left to explore the country.

25.09.08

We started with the packing of the cars at 8 o' clock in the morning. The container was ready for Betsy to be driven into. All the gesticulations to have an officer of the customs before the loading turned out to be a nightmare.



Although I was sure that they had to check the car's chassis number before it was driven into the container. They didn't take it seriously though, as a fact for them everything was in order. So we went ahead with the loading. To my annoyance, two ladies of the customs turned up in the afternoon and they insisted on checking Betsy's chassis number. All of a sudden they wanted to know if the number corresponded with the papers. To satisfy the officers, the container had to be opened up again, breaking the seal etc. I squeezed myself in, along the side of Betsy to be able to open the bonnet(hood). I can assure you, after a very short time I was soaking wet because of the temperature in the box. It was pure sauna. Poor Betsy, she will have to endure that heat for a long, long period!

There were more problems with Heinz's "MAN". Because the "Flat Rack" is about 60cm high and no suitable ramps were available to manoeuvre the "MAN" onto the platform. He only managed to fulfil the task with utmost improvisation and some high risk. But, eventually, he ventured the task to our relief.

We had booked a flight for the very same day to Johannesburg SA, which left at 23°° at night. After all the hard work at the harbour we took a Taxi to the airport. Heinz flew out of JHB straight to Switzerland and I boarded a flight to Port Elizabeth. Anne and some friends welcomed me in P.E.

A glance back: GHANA

Before we even entered GHANA it was clear to us it would be our last destination of our overland trip. When you read through the travelogue you'll realise that we drove from the North of GHANA to the South only in three days. In other words, just about non-stop through the country. As I had mentioned it before, we were fully occupied with all the bureaucracy and the loading of the cars. To go through all the procedure of that took up most of our time spent in Accra. In a sense, we were bound, so much, that we were unable to tour around and visit interesting places. It is and was a disgrace, but somehow we never really got hold of the grip about GHANA.

A few updates:

-Driven km	900
-Stay in the country	12 days
-Break downs	none, Betsy goes and goes

BYE; BYE GHANA - HELLO SOUTH AFRICA

A big THANK YOU to all my friends and travel companions who followed up my homepage and entered my guest book with all the good wishes etc., or the various e-mails I received. All that gave me encouragement to continue the up-dates which were bound with some expenditure. The challenge in having done the trip (even so, I only managed about half of it) was advantageous. I hope though, my travelogues allowed you to have an insight into my adventure.

A very big THANK YOU to my son Steve who constructed (arranged)(set-up) the homepage. Last but not least, a big THANK YOU to my companion, Heinz. Without him and his experiences and knowledge from his previous adventures on roads, I would never have come that far. His future trips will take him a long time until he made it around the world. I wish him only the best and also a wonderful time in doing that.

PLEASE STAY PUTT!

New travelogues will still be entered for a certain time.

- Arrival in SA
- Port Elizabeth's surroundings
- Our present home
- Arrival of Betsy at the harbour in Durban
- Drive from Durban to P.E

Till Later!

26.09.08 - End 2008

Hi folks. I'm back again! Sorry it took soooolong but at one time I even was thinking of giving up "feeding" my homepage.

Because of all the feedbacks and all the encouragements of my true readers I have decided to do my utmost in continuing my reports! I also try to shape the contents in an interesting way.

Actually the trip came to an end, but at the same time there will be enough material to offer to all my loyal visitors of my homepage.

As you know my last entry was on 25.Sept. Betsy was put into a container at Accra and I flew out to Johannesburg, then down to Port Elizabeth.

Port Elizabeth and its surroundings

26.09.08 Arrival in P.E (Autumn)

As I climbed out of the airplane a cold wind hit me, which nearly blew me off the ground. Voilà, here I am again in the “friendly City”, but also called the “windy City”. It was much too cold for wearing shorts, which I of course was, coming from the northern part of Africa where they fulfilled good purposes.

28.09.08 Welcome Party

On Sunday, Anne invited a few friends to celebrate my arrival properly. A good braai was just the right thing to have for this occasion.



The first few weeks in P.E.

As Betsy was still in Accra at that time, my trips around P.E were mostly combined with shopping in Anne's car. Port Elizabeth has changed quite a bit over the years and of course grown a lot as well. At my first glance I realized the huge shopping centers which were newly built over my absenteeism.

Our home in Sandton Manor

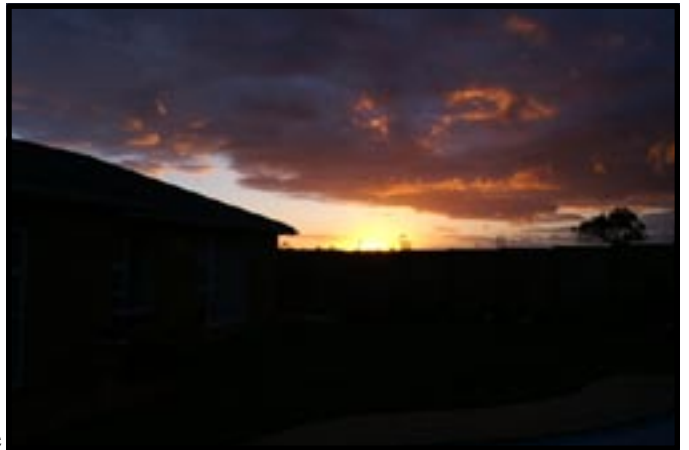
A few impressions of our home. Anne really did a great job and has put lots of hard work into laying out the garden since her arrival in P.E, (end August 2007). As you can view from the pictures the result looks wonderful.





The first job I accomplished was putting up the flag pole we had in our garden back in Thunstetten. The flags are hoisted every morning, that means if the wind isn't blowing too strong (otherwise we have to pass it)

We really can enjoy great sunsets from our garden.



P.E lies at the Indian Ocean and one can gasp at the magnificent beaches. Here you can have an eye full of the Kings beach.





FIFA WORLD CUP 2010

If anyone wants to try his luck you have the opportunity to do so at the casino at the boardwalk.



In P.E preliminary rounds and quarter- final plays will be carried out. A new stadium is built. I visited the construction area a few times already to get an impression of the ongoing building. It is an eye opener, but , will it be finished for the Confederation Cup, which will be in June 2009.

A few pictures how the stadium will look like. No comments, I leave it to “Sepp”.

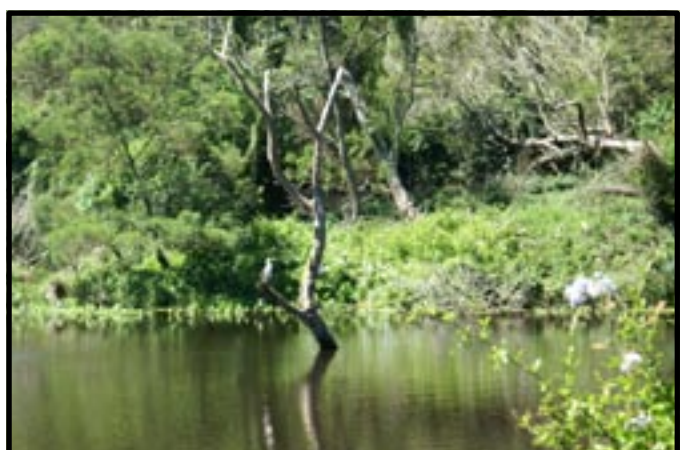
In the meantime I heard there won't be any "Confederation Cups" playing in P.E, so there is still plenty of time for completing the stadium.



Visits at the various, nearby game parks:

There are 2 smallish game parks not far from town where one can see wild animals. It is at all time an experience to drive through, although the cheetahs and the lions are caged in but even so it is worthwhile the drive.







Where is my Betsy?

Betsy should have left Accra by ship on 4.Oct.08 and arrive in Durban SA the 22.October, “should have!!!!”. I all the time have to tell myself that I am in Africa and everything works differently and much slower than back in Switzerland! The tracking of the where-abouts of the container in the Internet was becoming a torture, because the time- table kept on changing shipping Betsy out. Eventually I was informed that only a few ships are sailing up the South African coasts and dock.

Slowly the year 08 ended and still no definite date of shipping out of Betsy from Accra. What now??

Armin (a very good friend of ours) lent me his (Roller) scooter in the meantime, so I was free to move around and that improved the situation a lot. It didn't take me long to realize that getting around by scooter was great. The best means of transport (conveyance) you can think of to get from one place to another place, and quicker too! An opportunity turned up to get one of my own. Here is the Chinese Beauty in full splendor!



The legend about the arrival of Betsy still continues into 2009. I will write about it shortly.

Music (Band):

I know my music friends back in Switzerland are wondering how I tackle my music hobby. Adrian, who joined my band as a youngster in the 80's inherited some music sheets of mine when we left the country in 1986. He carried on playing in various formations, mostly Umpah- band. No sooner I arrived here in P.E, there were 2 events I was asked to help out.



The big Military Orchestra doesn't exist anymore. It is also very difficult to find a band to your liking, what music is concerned. There are some discussions about the matter what we could do in the near future. What happened next will follow. So be patient!!!!