

Saturday June 30th

Over bread and coffee with the Brothers, we discussed Sudan. The consensus seemed to be that Juba was filled with all kinds of international agencies that contribute little, drive up the price of everything and teach the Sudanese to be “beggars.” Ironically, as we said our goodbyes, I snapped a picture of Catarina, the skinniest cat I’ve ever seen. She gets a little food from the brothers but lives on rats and snakes, which is the same approach the church takes to working with the Sudanese: it gives assistance but without making them dependent.

On the way out of town we got lost yet again, this time for 35 minutes. I saw a billboard for Juliet Beauty Soap and the beautiful model smiling down on us was white; we heard Celine Dion blaring from a marketplace loudspeaker (Tim has a cousin who writes music for her); and — once we found the city’s only bridge over the Nile (one of the two lanes had collapsed some time ago) — we inched across behind a truck filled with gasoline.

As we left the city, we stopped to get pictures of the sign warning people to stay on the road because of land mines, and we had to veer around a small herd of goats lying down in the middle of the road.

Having been on the road about an hour, I went to put my notebook into my neck pouch and experienced a moment of acute panic. I couldn’t find the pouch, which held my passport, money and Ugandan media ID. After ransacking my luggage, which only confirmed what I already knew, it was painfully clear I’d left it behind on my bedside table. It was right beside my knapsack and, when Andrew picked up that, to be helpful, I never thought of checking the area for anything else. I couldn’t believe my own stupidity!

About 20k outside Juba, we had to turn around. If it had been 20k at home, it would’ve been bad enough, but this was 20k over some of the worst roads we’d driven! The other guys were very gracious, and I’m grateful I twigged to the mistake before we got all the way to the border.



As we got back to the dilapidated span over the Nile, we heard a Sudanese cell phone go off. The ringtone? London Bridge Is Falling Down. Thankfully, we found our way easily to the Comboni Mission and the pouch was right where I’d left it. After a 46k setback, we started out again. When I told the others I was going to record my stupidity for posterity, Andrew said, “You’d better get a bigger notebook.”

With all the jolting and jarring we underwent, our on-road experience was more like the off-road

experience SUV owners at home can only dream about. The novelty wears off quickly, especially when you're getting thrown around like a cowboy on a bucking bronco.

It cost us three hours, even though Dave made excellent time. At least the sun stayed hidden during the morning, keeping things cooler. En route, we passed a posse of six large brown monkeys about the size of a goat. Otherwise, we had the road to ourselves for hours. If there had been rebels, we would've been easy pickings.

When the road improved a bit, we made 64k in an hour, sometimes reaching a speed of 90 kph. Dave's a superlative driver but, even so, every once in a while a crater would come out of nowhere and the car would feel like it'd been hit by a shell.

We reached the border by 3:00 and had no trouble on either side. We were all very glad to be back in Uganda where it's cleaner, friendlier and far less repressive. Even people at the side of the road smile and wave at the munu (white guy.) We had planned to go to Kitgum via Atiak, which would've saved us some time, but the bridge to Kitgum was out. so we had to go via Gulu.

As we drove through Atiak, we saw some women carrying babies on their backs with gourds over the children's heads, to protect them from the sun. We stopped and bought some bread since we'd skipped lunch. In this village, most of the huts were covered with grey tarps, to protect them from the rain. From that really small outpost, we drove past Pabo, the largest protective camp in Uganda. At one time, some 70,000 people lived there in mud and grass huts just steps away from each other, for miles and miles.

We rolled into Gulu at 5:00 and, as soon as we had cell service, we called Lachor to see if there was room at the Guest House we used last time. It was full, so Dave checked with a contact and we ended up at the Roma Hotel where we got two rooms.

When I opened my luggage, the plastic tub of laundry soap I'd packed had come open and dumped blue powder all over my clothes! I had to take everything out and clean the suitcase. Either that, or I could've just added water, closed the top and shook it for instant laundry washing! This just hasn't been my day!!

After showers, we walked to a nearby cafe run by Dave's friend, Catherine. We had fresh passion fruit juice, or Krest bitter lemon soda, with a meat pastry called sumbusa. Dave and Catherine got caught up and then we talked about the war, how things have changed for the better now that Gulu is booming, and the hope everyone has of peace coming soon.

After a very pleasant visit, we went in search of more food and ended up back at our hotel. The chicken was tough but the rice, millet bread, bo (green vegetables) and sweet potatoes were excellent, though most of us had time finishing. As we sat eating, we saw a BBC report that a man at Glasgow Airport had doused himself with gasoline and set himself afire.

Back in our rooms, I put these notes into the computer. As I write, there's a humungus generator labouring noisily right outside our window. If this keeps up, we're not sure we'll get any sleep. But, by now you know the motto: It's all part of the adventure.

...the Bending Spears Team, Rick and Dave (Andrew, Tim)