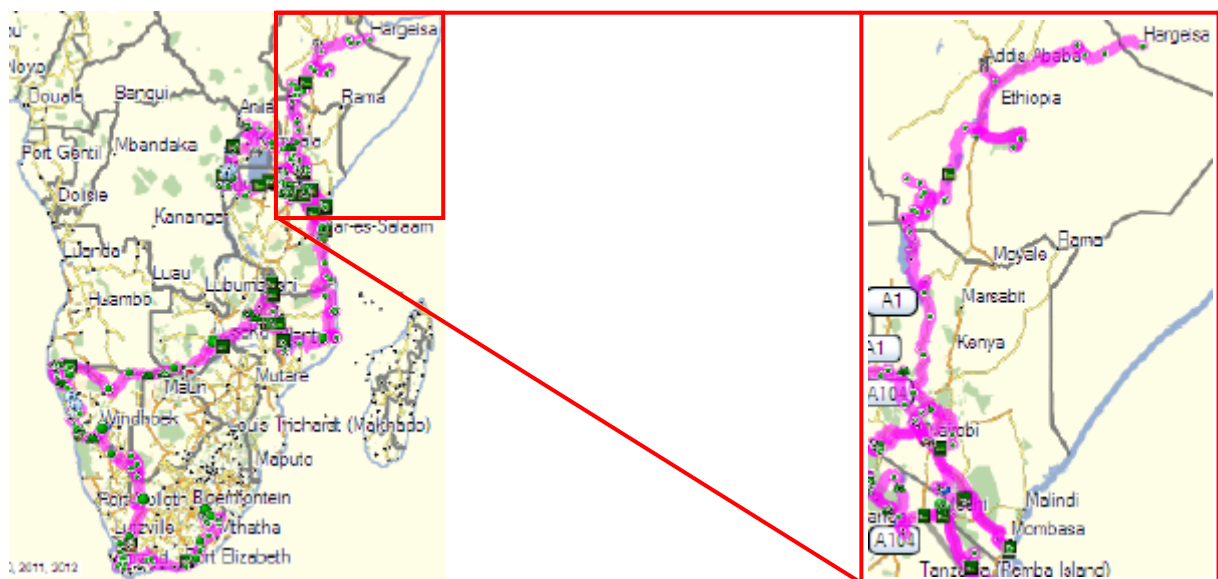


Dear All,

It's pretty cool here – at least concerning temperatures, we're at 2600 m altitude. Meaning we're definitely no longer at the beach in Mombasa. Around us lots of rather crazy guys – the younger the crazier. Their English is rather limited, literally limited to *you you you* and *money money*. Of course the money issue is understandable, it's named after a famous drink composed of water, malt and hopes, but misspelled – Birr. Currently we're sitting in a rather ugly bar in Lalibela, a town famous for its rock churches, approx. 700 km north of Addis Ababa, trying to warm up with beer.

As promised in an earlier edition, we thought we're only able to start establishing a well balanced rotten grape barometer once we've tasted the famous Ethiopian wine (but to finish it, we still have to taste the Egyptian and Turkish wines!). Well, we did taste the famous Ethiopian wine. Its name is Gouder, it's produced by the Addis Chemical Industries (the same that have a licence to produce Bayer's famous Baygon *Kill Immediately All Insects Spray* and the guys who have supplied in the past Saddam with all kind of nasty weapons). Nevertheless, the label has a seal proofing its quality has passed the criteria of the former German Democratic Republic in 1990 (*steht für hervorragende Qualität*). Instead of giving direct comments, rather let the barometer assess this outstanding product – you'll see the results later.

Enough of the present, let's turn to the adventures since we have left the beautiful beaches of Mombasa. You remember, we closed the last newsletter in Kenya with the verdict of the Ethiopian Embassy allowing us to visit this beautiful country.



After the lazy days in Mombasa we drove back on the highway of the million of lorries to Nairobi. On the way we had a night in a small town, exchanging with the locals on beer prices, politics, corruption and the latest girlfriends. Back in the proud capital we still had some formalities to fulfil before leaving the country. As we wanted to take the road along Lake Turkana, a road where there is no immigration or customs officer on the Kenyan side, we were supposed to get all important exit stamps in Nairobi, nearly 1000 km south of the Ethiopian border. The exit stamp in the passport only took half an hour. The officer trusted that we would leave the country by this strange route – and explained us that from now on we would be considered illegal within Kenya. Knowing our present status, we proceeded to the next challenge.



Nairobi has very modern Government skyscrapers with very tight security to protect its public servants - from its citizens and from Al Qaida. The Kenya Revenue Authority, authorised to stamp out the Carnet de Passage for our car was in one of those buildings. Meaning: standing in a very long queue of people wanting to enter the building and waiting to be checked by security guys, standing in another similar long

queue and being registered of having entered the building and being issued with a pass only valid for the office you wanted to go. Unfortunately, nobody knew which office may stamp our carnet. We discovered that the office that was maybe supposed to stamp out the carnet has moved. It took us approximately another hour to find the correct office; we could cheat the security guys to access it without changing the entrance permit - but unfortunately everybody important here was in an even more important meeting. We explored the other floors and the outside of the building and learned after another hour that the carnet only will be stamped after having inspected the car. Well, the car was at the hotel; due to the congested Nairobi traffic we came with a taxi...Anyway, we got our stamp, but it took some time. After this happy event we were fully aware of being illegally in Kenya and by now we also had exported our car out of the country – that all in the CBD of Nairobi. Fortunately these issues are called administration only, so they had no link to any reality and therefore there was no visible advantage or disadvantage to our status or the one of our car.

We left Nairobi and headed towards Lake Turkana with a first stop at Nyanhururu. Due to our long Ethiopian visa procedures our South African friends already had left – too keen to explore Europe – and we were all on our own. The next day of driving the tar ended – at least for the next 1200 km; we knew just plain gravel and rock roads lying ahead of us all the way up to Ethiopia. The landscape and people slowly started to change as we headed down into the Rift Valley as we entered the country of the Samburu warriors.



Maralal, still on top of the rift, was the last bigger town in Kenya before reaching South Ethiopia. We enjoyed the last rains at the campsite, the cool climate, the green surroundings and the hot shower.



But the more we went down into the rift valley the drier the landscape got.



Next stop after a long day of driving - 7-8 hours for 200 km - was South Horr, a road sharing its way with a riverbed, some houses dotted along the sides and populated by a great number of these Samburu warriors.



In the evening, thirsty and dusty, we highly enjoyed the ice cold beer on top in the campsite's tree house. Understandable, during daytime the temperature reached 37 degree.



From South Horr we continued to Loyangalani, at the shores of Lake Turkana – another 8 h for some 170 km. Most of the road gravel or sand or gravel and sand combined – of course heavily corrugated, but we also had to cross some of the dreaded lava fields with their sharper than sharp stones prone to puncture any tire – whatever brand. We did it without puncture and got the first glimpses of the jade sea, resp. Lake Turkana

and finally the hamlet of Loyangalani, the place we planed to stay for the night.



Here we definitely left the country of the Samburu warriors, entered the hemisphere of the Turkana and especially of the El Molo tribe. We found a very nice campsite in the oasis of Loyangalani. The only disadvantage being the temperature of 45 degree during daytime, but decreasing to a somehow more supportable 42 degrees in the evening – even the cold shower in the evening was terribly hot. As it was definitely too hot to sit around, we headed for a village of the El Molo tribe. Some 30 years ago these fishermen along

Lake Turkana survived in 2 villages only, their population decreased dramatically as they could absolutely not imagine any marriage with other tribes. Some time ago they made a worldwide population census on El Molo, probably they googled the results and concluded that with globally a total number of only 900 proud El Molo they could not survive. Consequently they changed their tribal laws and allowed marriages with Turkana. Currently there are again some 4500 El Molo - Turkanian inhabitants in these 2 villages and when googled the results look promising again.



After our visit to this El Mokanian and Turkmolo village (depending on whether the father or the mother is El Molo) we spent our night listening to heavy winds which are quite common along Lake Turkana. The tent survived, we got up early, still with a certain need to rest,



manufacturers.

but continued our way to Ethiopia some 400 km away. So gravel, sand, rocks and corrugations continued. To change this monotony we had either to remove the cobble stones from the streets (probably from the last demonstration of unruly Turkmolo students) or to cross more and more of these lava fields which were especially laid out to test the promises of the different tyre



In the evening we arrived at the research station in the Sibiloi National Park, where we could put up our tent. This station was especially built for Kenyan students to study the arid environment in the North of their country and for foreign students to feel as a combination of Livingstone, Schwarzenegger and Djinghis Khan on their way to Nirvana. Nevertheless, we decided to do the middle between these

groups and just pitch our tent and have a beer at the shores of Lake Turkana. We suppose there has not been anybody else around for a long time. We went to the lake – each with a can of beer, imagining a romantic sunset at the lakeshore – just with our beer. Only one problem arised: dozens of huge crocs at the lakeshore looked very, very hungry... so we preferred to have our beer at some distance from the water and instead of an awesome swim in Lake Turkana to have an odd shower in the rundown bathroom.



The next morning: Every body knows you should never, never take the road to Ethiopia by Lake Turkana without a 2nd spare tire as well as with a 2nd or even better in convoy with a 3rd car. Now we are on this road for 5 days, definitely with more than 2 spare tires – but no puncture yet – but definitely without any 2nd or 3rd vehicle in case we suffer a cardiac attack of our car. And still: 200 km to Ethiopia – definitely thru no-mens and no-womensland – and the tracks got smaller and smaller...

Further and further we went, no problem and even the GPS told us that we crossed the Kenyan - Ethiopian border. However, where was it? Few km later we discovered a rope across the nearly invisible track. To make it more visible somebody fixed a few old plastic bags on it. Nevertheless it looked impressive, so we stopped. We met a nice guy and asked him whether he was Kenyan or Ethiopian. He assured us that we crossed the border and that we were in Ethiopia. Finally, no longer illegally in Kenya and another opportunity to import our car into a new country. But to do this we still had to drive a few km.



Well, good to know; now we entered the zone with probably the most diverse ethnics in the world. No longer any Samburus, Turkanas or El Molo - Elmokanians, but many other fascinating people living in the lower area of Omo River in Ethiopia.



In Omorate, a tiny village at the Omo River, we had to go through immigration and customs. It seemed we were the first people within a month or so, everybody was very nice and very much interested in our trip. There seem to be interesting villages to see around Omorate, but as it was impossible to change any money – don't even think about a bank or an ATM - we had to reach the next bigger village. Hence, we drove along a perfect gravel road to Turmi to set up our tent below huge mango trees at the riverside. The local shop, normally selling water, biscuits, matches, etc. finally could change money and we got lots of Birr to pay for our beer.





Turmi is the center of the Hamer people and visiting one of their villages was on our itinerary: You take a guide – respectively you are discovered by one of these species, you pay entrance fees to the village, you pay the parking fees in the village (remember they have not yet installed park meters); then you are shown around and everybody asks you to have his picture taken in exchange for 1 or 2 Birr. If you have no small money you only can take group photos and will make some interesting observations on how the concerned are sharing the money among themselves. Don't worry; all of them are still alive.



The next day was market day in a nearby village which we did not want to miss. Local people, package tourists, overlanders, all gathered for this special occasion. Martin had an opportunity to taste the local beer made out of sorghum and Monika was busy taking pictures – and thinks, looking at the local heroes, Martin should dress up a little bit more.





During our visit to the market we even discovered some very special issues: e. g. the 2 guys with the feathers on their head, they just proofed that they have reached their stage were they may marry (poor guys – that remark was definitely Martin!). Some days before they had to walk over the back of a dozen of bulls – and as they did not fall, by now they may look for their bride. Everybody (females only) interested may immediately travel to Key Afer in Southern Ethiopia. Please note that we may not directly handle any of your application.



After this adventure we headed further north towards Jinka. We thought further north means less rain but there's Murphy's Law that proofed to be true – it was raining constantly and the whole town was completely muddy – unfortunately we gave away our nice Rwenzori rubber boot. As camping in these conditions is not very comfortable we headed for a super cosy room out of the mud.

From Jinka you can head on west towards Mago National Park. The park itself is not very interesting, people were too hungry and most of the animals were poached, but there is the famous tribe of the Mursi living just outside the park.



Still as a youngster women of the Mursi tribe perforate their lower lip, which enables them to insert a small disk, which gradually will be replaced by bigger and bigger discs. There are several explanations to this phenomenon; still none of them is proofed. Rather easy to explain is the influence of the former Soviet Union's weapon industry – quite a lot of the smart ladies use an AK 47 – Kalashnikov- to defend themselves...



As the women were so beautiful Martin immediately had to get a new girlfriend. Of course Monika was furiously jealous. Nevertheless, she always wonders on how Martin would kiss this smart lady – a mystery probably to remain unsolved.

Enough of these smart ladies (we did not show you all the men!!!), the next day was the time to head back to Turmi. But this time we took a different road along one of the salt pans of Lake Stephanie – just to see some more hamlets and meet some more women and men of the tribe of the Arbore.



It was a nice drive back through suddenly very dry landscape along the salt pan, then over the Hamer mountains to Turmi. We planed to camp. As usual in South Omo, it was just a matter of approaching the village as it started to rain. So, no camping, we rather went to the most luxury lodge in this area. Maybe not that much of luxury; except for its rates.

Next day the last visit to a village, some more of these girls so beautiful that men could not sit under a tree and solve the problems of the world.





Enough of all these villagers. Not only that we had to go back to solve the problems of the world, but we also had to continue our trip.

So we went on to the small town of Karat-Konso – just to visit some more



villages and a chief who has been supported for a long time by GIZ. First he showed us a number of pictures of him together with Prince Albert of Monaco; then, as he was so enthusiastic to find a guy working with GIZ, the mother of all development cooperation, he left us for a few moments just to return in his coronation dress. Of course we had to digitalize this historic moment. And

– of course we have to send him a copy of this picture convinced to find ourselves with the chief in the collection together with this guy of Monaco.

After villages and chiefs we left the area of all these tribes and moved northwards towards the Bale Mountains. We already climbed the highest mountain of Africa – Kilimanjaro, we already climbed the muddiest mountains in Africa – Rwenzori; now it was to our car to drive up the highest motorable road in Africa – 4380 m. Our car reached this point without any problem. Of course, in exchange he/ she/ it will get some extra heavy oil in his next load of Diesel.

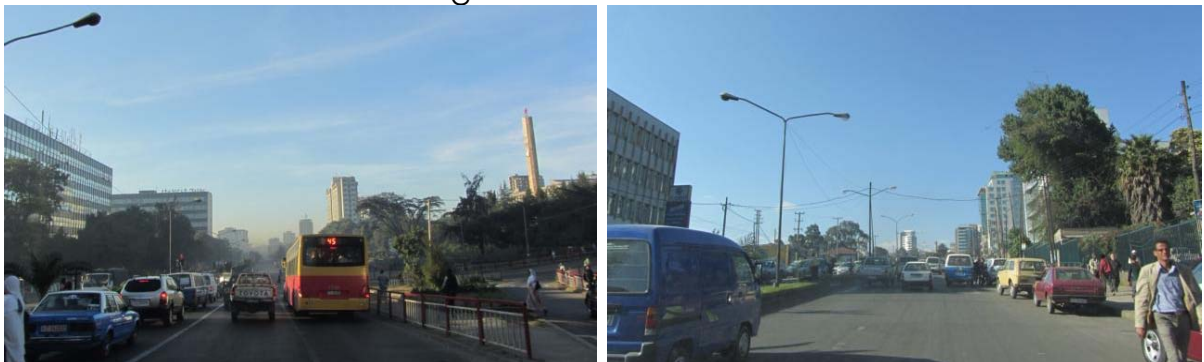


This area is also the place where you still can find some of the endangered Simien wolves; and we were lucky to see some of them (from inside the car).



After this high altitude adventure, we moved onwards to Hawassa at the eponymous Lake. Nothing special, but a nice beer garden also serving braaid fish.

Finally we arrived in another proud capital – Addis Ababa. Probably most of you know how it looks like – to us like a mix of nowadays Maputo and Moscow during Soviet times with quite some elements of Bangladeshi suburban areas. Forget the odd Soviets, Maputies and Bangladeshies. Addis is still a reasonable place to have the car checked, to get some visa for onward travel and to know the latest news about forthcoming adventures.



We stayed at Taitu Hotel – a former palace of a princess, then taken over by the Government and by now in a state of disrepair difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, it's the social core of at least a great part of the town. Addis was also a great place to make our car a little happier – new oil, one new tyre for the one we scarified to Lake Turkana and a new brake cylinder. All together only for a simple 1000 USD - probably just a sign of the rapidly diminishing value of the Greenback. Nevertheless, money has to be spent to keep the economy running. Additionally we got a visa for Egypt and the one for Somaliland, one of the few non-existing or non-recognized countries in the world, having worldwide only one embassy – the one in Addis.



After all this mechanical and administrative success stories we drove the 500 km to Harar near to the Somaliland border. A very old historic town and the fourth holiest place in the Islamic world. We spent the whole day strolling thru the small alleys, admiring the old houses and visiting the markets of the different tribes.

We stayed in one of those old Government hotels and it proofed to be the right choice: at least they had a generator. There was no electricity and no running water in the whole city. So back to cold bucket shower at an altitude of 2400m (brrr!!!).





The next day, tired of all these old stones – and cold water, we moved on to Hargeysa, the capital village of the Republic of Somaliland. As this country is a part of former Somali and not recognized by any other country in the world, except Ethiopia, we were really curious to visit this non-existing state.



So we arrived at the border – at a first glance the village looked like other small towns at borders: more plastic bags in the scrub than inhabitants and goats. The Ethiopian border formalities were fast and friendly as were the Somali ones. You did not have the impression, that you entered a non - existing country. Maybe a little strange: the Somaliland immigration takes a picture and fingerprints of you when entering as well when leaving the country.

Maybe an anti - terrorist measure or simply an action against the neighbouring Puntland pirates, or, even worse, the Al-Shabab fighters in remaining Somalia. Who knows, it was surely a justified measure. The other slightly strange issue was the stamp in our Carnet de Passage without keeping their own copy for customs. No problem for us, it's theirs. So we entered with our car - from a custom's point of view a car ready to sell without paying taxes to the non - existing country. After a few hundred meters we got stopped by police, immigration, customs and national secret service at a road block. We showed them our (probably not valid) entrance stamps in the passport, the proof of legal importation of our car (without any trace in their own admin. system) – and off we went. This important procedure repeated itself another 5 to 6 times until we finally reached Hargeysa – the proud capital village of the non - existent nation.

This important place could be discovered from far by a huge cloud of dust rising high up into the air and by a sharply increasing number of plastic bags hanging in all bushes and trees. Finally a few hundred meters before reaching the very CBD of Hargeysa we could even discover the first houses. Some of them architectonically quite interesting: multi storey buildings, the facades blended with silver or golden plates and blue windows (kind regards from China). Even our hotel looked pure Chinese, but has been in the hands of a

Somalilandy family for ages. There we met the first real tourist, a Taiwanese - American, happy to see another tourist and we exchanged our experiences.



In the afternoon we explored the market and the most important buildings of the capital, amongst others the hero monument: an emergency landed MIG 21 airplane the former dictator Sidi Barre sent to Hargeysa to bombard the secessionist Somalilandies. Probably the poor pilot sold too much of his fuel before he started in Mogadishu. Running out of fuel he had to opt for an emergency landing near Hargeysa. History may confirm rumours that he hit a goat when landing on the scrub fields nearby. Unfortunately the pilot could not agree with the farmer on the correct compensation for the poor goat, so the secessionist army confiscated his plane – and due to lack of a competent pilot among the Somalilanders' army they had no other choice than declaring this MIG 21 a national monument. At least this could explain the monument – other theories may exist. Kindly let us know if you have further information.



The following day we went to explore the famous camel market, however, due to the approaching festival of Tabaski, camels were more or less replaced by goats.

We would have liked to explore a little bit more of Somaliland, but unfortunately different people had extremely different understanding and interpretations of any

existing or non – existing regulation regarding travelling by foreigners. This culminated in an intense conflict over phone between the Ministry of Tourism which tried everything to expel immediately any tourist from their territory (probably because tourists just lead to more work for them) and the Police Headquarter (probably because tourists just mean a way to finance survival). Maybe this is just an interpretation; nevertheless we ended up in complete confusion and found ourselves driving on the direct road back to the Ethiopian border. Still, we're convinced that our wise decision avoided another civil war – this time between the police and the Ministry of Tourism.

Back on the Ethiopian side we continued as far as Dire Dawa, the second biggest city of the country and border to the desert and Afar country.



There we could also observe big efforts to fight HIV&AIDS. Of course we took a picture especially as an idea for Ntate Tsuinyane. According to our interpretation in Ethiopia they seem to promote a full body condom – not only for the slightly more challenged parts. As far as we could understand this is much safer, keeps you warm and additionally it is probably suitable for diving in the sea.

From Dire Dawa we started our journey towards the North of Ethiopia and its famous churches. However, the journey proofed to be long and we had a first break in Awash, a rather dull street town filled with plenty of lorries on their way between Djibouti and Addis. But before reaching Awash we discovered a wonderful and colourful market in Mieso and absolutely had to stop there.



We will tell you more about our onward journey towards the North in our next edition.

In the meantime best regards,



and

