

Life on the ferry! Hmmm...

I had gotten a “*pullman*” for accommodation, and this can only best be described as a hostel. There were about seventy or so men, to share about six toilets and two showers! The first night, I had my shower around 4 am, which was the low period for the showers, ☺ !

I spend most of my time with Angelo, Cinzia, Aldo and Lory, and we share stories and all.



Angelo, Aldo and myself



Myself, and Aldo's Lory

It's so interesting to hear that even though they are Italian and live in the “*developed*” world, where most people are better educated and “enlightened” than in Nigeria, the opposition to riding from family and friends is still there. And the arguments are still the same! The days pass more quickly, and I hear from them that the cabins are not so bad. Hmmm... Nevertheless, I can imagine that if I was in a cabin with a stranger, it would be quite similar to being in my “*pullman*” seat. I use this to console myself, and vow to make this trip again with someone I can share a cabin with, ☺. We transit in Barcelona, and Marco, Carlo and Andreas get off! We take a picture together before they depart, and wish each other all the best.

It's so amazing the way we all have just “flowed” with each other, even when the language was a slight barrier.

Then it's on to *Tangier*!

We say our goodbyes, and I promise to send email and updates. Then I go below to the car deck to get ready to disembark.

Mine is the first bike off the ferry... I have made extra effort to be. I have the furthest to go! Riding off the ferry, I go to Customs, and am processed pretty quickly... again, bikers appear to be given priority. Change the remaining Euro I have into Moroccan currency, and I hit the road.

The road *does* look completely different in the opposite direction. It's a much cooler day today as I approach and pass by Marrakesh, and I make good progress. It is mostly an uneventful ride, except for the stops I make for the pictures I had made a note earlier to take on my way back.



I arrive *Tiznit*, my goal, at dusk, and the Centre Street is where all the action is. I ride to a filling station and fill up... don't want anything to delay my departure in the morning. Next stop is one of the hotels on the main street. Underground secure parking is available for my bike, and I even have an A/C in my room. As it is really quite cold this evening, I wonder what I will need this for, as I am shown my room, and an attempt is made to turn it on.

Room sorted, now the hunt for food. As I step out of the hotel, I am approached by another Mohammed. *He* sells jewelry, and is dead-set on getting me to his store to sell me some necklace or bangle. Sadly, I am so tired that I cannot move after settling into my chair at the nearby café. We chat as we eat (he accepts my offer to pay for his dinner), and he explains to me that all the

life here in Tiznit starts from about 9 pm during the Ramadan. The buses I see in front of my café are also en-route *Casablanca* and *Rabat*, and would be departing shortly.



Most will run their route half-empty, with half-priced fares as well! Business is that bad.

We chat some more as Mohammed tries to get me to promise to see him in the morning. But my priorities are slightly different from his, and we part with the promise of seeing whenever we see again. I go up to my room, have a shower, and try to get some sleep. But sleep isn't coming so easily tonight...I wonder why!! Aahhh!! There is so much noise... OK, *Tiznit* has come to life, as the people come out after the day's fasting. I look out of my window, and I am shocked at how much activity I now find on the streets below. Truly amazing! So, I shut my windows and try again... with success. Tomorrow is another day, and should be my longest day yet!

August the 8th.

Tiznit to border!

Distance covered- 1,293 kilometres

I wake up really early today! I have a lot of kilometres to cover, and even if I ride fast, it's still going to require a lot of time! The day starts off pretty cold, and I thank God I have my insulating "Airshell" jacket beneath my riding jacket! This along with my new gloves, insulates me from the cold! I make progress, and it's quite an uneventful ride!



The landscape doesn't change much, riding along the coast!

Shortly after Tan-Tan, I pass a group of cyclists... no support vehicle in sight, but the group consisted of about twelve riders, all weighted down by heavy side bags! I gave them a wave, and they waved back enthusiastically! It's so nice to meet fellow travellers.

Every 200 km or so, I fill up my tank and hit the road!

Duwane Sheriff and I!

A stop in *Laayoune* for drinks and snacks to fuel me up... the Ramadan being during this period means everywhere that has to do with food is more or less closed! The time passes, as do the kilometres, and eventually I am at *Hotel Barbas*, my destination! Apparently, it's not such a bad choice, as *The UN* use it too, ☺!





I get a nice room for 150 DH, and have a shower. It takes about 10 minutes for the hot water to come, seeing as the hotel uses solar heaters, and the hot water needs to flow through the whole length of pipe to get to me. Also interesting was how salty the water was. Oh well, I need a shower, and the salt water will do! Shower done, I go to the open courtyard, and have a wonderful dinner! I also spend some time using the Wifi, then I find my way back to my room and my bed. Don't really need an early night, but as I started very early, I have more recovering to do! The border opens at 9 am tomorrow, so I plan to leave at 8 am. No hurry!

As I look at my helmet, I notice that there aren't any insects to clean off the visor again! I think back and recollect that this was also the case on my trip out of Africa. There are absolutely no insects! That says a lot about the effect of the lack of vegetation. I spend some time pondering on the apparent emptiness out here, as I eventually drift off to sleep!

August the 9th.

To Border and on to Nouakchott

Temps: low- 18° | high- 38°

Distance covered- 529 kilometres

Unbelievable! The queue of vehicles exiting Morocco has completely taken over the entire road! Both lanes, plus a 3rd lane by the side of the road! And about 1 km long! Good for me I'm with a bike! I breeze right up to the gate, and am in! The reason for all this is the Ramadan! The border control opens late (9am), and closes early (3am). I take the *fiche* at the border gate, fill it in, and join the queue! Passport done, it's time for Customs. As usual, my bike's registration is a source of intrigue, and the officer confesses that he has never seen this type of "*matriculation*". There is this constant alarm sounding... The X-ray machines are working overtime scanning the trucks!

Three checks... Passport Control, Customs, and just before the exit gate, Gendarmerie registration! All done in about 1 ½ hours, and I'm out!

Now it's no-man's land territory, I end up getting stuck in the sand!



From out of nowhere some guys appear and push me out... for a fee! The key is to stick to the left side of the “*track*”, where there are rocks! The right side hold a promise of movement, but it's based on loose, fine sand! The loaded GS with her now-balding tyres are no match for the fine sand!

Mauritanian Passport Control, and I am done in no time! Hit the road with 450+ km to go! And now, it is hot! The heat doesn't let up, and there is no respite. It is steadily rising, and soon enough I see 38° C! It's ok though, because I know soon I will get to “*Gare du Nord*” and get some fuel, for the bike and for myself!

Interesting is that the road *does* appear different now that I am moving in the opposite direction! Well, on and on I go, and pretty soon, the fuel station!

I fill up with fuel, noticing that the cost is more or less as in Nouakchott (unlike what some folks have mentioned on some blogs)! Then I scout out the minimart, and get a drink and some cakes to eat! I am surprised to meet Didi, a friend of the store keeper, who also speaks good English. He tells me that he studied English at the University in Nouakchott, and plans to get a job as an interpreter. But for now, he has travelled over 200 km from home to take up a job at another store close by, as the Storekeeper. Things are not easy for young people... anywhere!

While I am wolfing the cakes down, I hear the distinct sound of a bike. I step outside and see a BMW! With Edwardo and Anna on it! We take pictures as we exchange some stories. We agree to ride together as we are both going in the same direction.



We ride on to Nouakchott, stopping at all the checkpoints together. Soon enough we are in Nouakchott, and I lead the way to the *Sahara Auberge*! Edwardo wants out, and I can understand... not the best accommodation for a luxury cruise with your mum-in-law! We part, and vow to look out for each other on the next day. He is also going to Dakar and will be passing through *Rosso*.

I also happen upon Sebastian. We recognize each other from the border crossing earlier in the day, and spend the rest of the day talking. It's so good to have someone to talk with in English! The company is really good, and as Sebastian has passed this route several times before, he offers me some useful tips! We go for dinner across the road, and talk some more. Several more travellers come through, and stop at this same point. More stories are shared.

I find out and have decided that as the first ferry to Senegal leaves at 9 am, I need to be at the border at 8:30 am. This means I have to leave *Nouakchott* at 6:30 am at the latest. *Rosso* is a little over 200 km away, so I figure it's doable. Tomorrow being a Friday might also have the border closed for midday prayers? I just don't know, and really don't want to find out. So with this plan, we bid each other good night, and I head to my room and to my bed!

August the 10th.

Nouakchott, Mauritania to Bakel, Senegal (via Rosso border)

Temps: low- 28° C | high- 36° C

Distance covered- 663 kilometres

I am aiming for the “dreaded” Rosso Border! With my experience at *Aflao* Border, I am looking forward to the “challenge”. But I have a plan! Unlike others who have gone before me, coming out with nasty experiences, I have decided that I will not re-invent the wheel! I will get a “*facilitator*” as quickly as possible, and have *him* do all the legwork! I want to be at the border as it opens (so as to have enough time should any eventualities arise), so I am out at 6:30 am! But not before a photo with Sebastian...



Nice, cool ride out of *Nouakchott* to the border, and I am there at 8:20 am! Locate Dauda (also David)! (0022246476883)

He is my designated passage agent (or *facilitator*), and he explains all that I need to pay. Ferry cost- 5,000, Passport- 1,500, Customs- 4,000, Tax communal- 2,000, Embarkment with police- 2,000, Police- 1,500; Total- 15,500! I miss the first ferry, but I am on the second! And as is always the case, the bike goes to the head of the queue!



On Senegalese side, 26,000 CFA- laissez passer- 2,500, Police- 3,000, Tax- 3,000, Custom Station- 10,000, Port *Sortie*- 5,000.

I have more details of this experience [here!](#)

And all was going well, until the police find that I don't have an exit stamp from Mauritania in my Nigerian passport! Talk about mastery and pedantry! Obviously, the guys here have no training on handling people with dual nationality! And they will certainly not take a crash-course from me! Well, 10,000 CFA magically transported my Nigerian passport back to Mauritania, and back in an instant with an invisible exit stamp that their 'specialized' police eyes could see!! And all completely legal, as I had to also send my other passport, and show the original exit stamp. Hmmm!



While waiting for the stamp, I observe that every ferry trip is bringing a trailer-load of onions! Apparently Senegal imports onions, even though they also grow them. The home-grown onions are not only more expensive, but also don't have the visual appeal of the imported ones. So local industry destroyed for imports! But then again, what's the local industry doing wrong?

Passport stamped, all customs/police issues resolved, and I am wondering why this border is so dreaded! I can't imagine doing 100 km for 3 hours on account of 50 Euro or so for "*processing*"! And there were some Indians on my ferry... They were processed without issues! I think the only "*delay*" is with the Customs for the vehicles! Perhaps 10 to 20 minutes per vehicle. But that is nothing compared to other borders I have passed!

I take the right fork to Richard Toll, and start heading east... towards the Mali border. It's so refreshing to see greenery on both sides of the road! Not to see the road ending in the horizon because there is nothing else to see! The road makes its way, and I notice that Senegal is a much more developed country compared to Mauritania!



Donkey-drawn carts and livestock flourish! I stop in *Matam* to buy fuel, have a drink, and something to eat. With the Ramadan on, it's virtually impossible to find cooked food before evening and I have resorted to eating biscuits for brunch! As the vegetation around me increases, so does all the other animal life, and soon I begin to see casualties. I have three bird strikes... 2 on the bike and one on my shoulder!



I have a look at my map and decide to aim for the next “big” town, *Bake!* I have about 1 hour of daylight left, and about 140 km to go! Ok, let's do it! For the last 100 km or so, the road has taken on the character of an exam! The course is “*avoid the holes!*” As the sun sets, I struggle to maintain high scores! *Bakel* in sight, and I am happy to see what could only be street lights from the distance!

Ride into town and observe that the town consists of a couple of streets; but not to worry, spot a sign for a hotel, and move towards it! Ride in, and am pleasantly surprised to find it's not bad at

all... with A/C, and even wifi... but alas, without a room for me! I meet Ben there, an American doing some work towards getting his PhD, and he tells me there's another hotel in town. I get directions from him, and am at *Hotel Islam* in no time! I secure my accommodation for the night, a nice clean room with A/C but no window, and dash back to Ben's hotel for dinner and conversation!



We have dinner... rice and onion stew. This is typical Senegalese food, and it is very, very nice. Then we stay up and continue talking for quite some time. But as usual, the time is never enough, and I have to say goodbye, and ride back to my "hotel". The receptionist insists I bring the bike round the back and into the building... who am I to say no?! So Blanks sleeps indoors, and I sleep upstairs!

August the 11th.

Bakel, Senegal to Bamako, Mali!

Temps: low- 26° C | high- 30° C

Distance covered- 663 Kilometres

Started early without any knowledge of what the border crossing would be like! *Bakel* is about 65 km from the border, and the road is in very good condition! It's quite cloudy, a sharp contrast from yesterday's sunny day! The road has quite a number of twists and turns, as it winds its way through the hills that seem to surround *Bake!*

I am upon the border without even realising it! I begin to see familiar things; the tyre repair guy where we tried to patch Baba's tire, the shop I bought drinks from, and the fuel station! Yes! Time to fill up! But I don't remember this much traffic! There are so many trucks! It's almost impossible to squeeze through!

The Control Post tells me I have missed the “*police*” so I need to go back about a kilometre to it! Fantastic!



Breakfast while the officer fills my entry! This is the first time I have seen food being cooked since I got into Africa in the morning... Ramadan!

I am cleared, jump on the bike, and am off! There is nothing to do with the Customs, and I am on the bridge that separates Mali from Senegal!

The traffic is out of this world, and I squeeze and inch my way closer to Mali! Finally I am off the bridge, but the trucks don't relent! Eventually I go off-road, and shortly arrive at Mali Customs!





5,000 CFA get me a receipt and my *laissez passer*. I ride a bit further on to the Police for my passport's stamp. The guy asks for my yellow card! Check! He then tells me I have to pay 10,000 CFA for the passport stamp into Mali! My outburst of laughter caused everyone to turn and look in our direction! Long story short, I get my passport stamped for free... as it should be... and I am on my way again!

The cloudy skies darken, and I realize that pretty soon it's going to rain! Stop and put on my rain gear!



Just as I am rounding up with it, the rain drops start! No problem! I am insulated, and ride without any encumbrance! However, this downpour is like nothing I have ever seen! No wind really, but the amount of water pouring down is so great that visibility reduces to about 150 metres! This is a

first for me, and I slow down! But as my pilot friends' words resound in my mind ('*weather*' rarely lasts more than 30 minutes), I get encouraged. And true to form, after about 10 minutes only of this driving rain, respite! I only know because my visibility starts to improve! Eventually, it's slowed down to a drizzle, and I smile to myself as I give myself a prize for passing through this! The further I ride into Mali, the more lush the vegetation. Eventually Bamako beckons, and I ride directly to the coordinates for *Toungatours*. Ring the bell, and Ann opens the door!



Sadly and on account of the political problems, the tourism industry has collapsed and she has had to close shop! Sad, sad, sad! Black Africa has so many problems... and they are mostly brought on by ourselves! Ann directs me to *The Sleeping Camel*, which is only a couple of metres away, and I get a fantastic room with A/C and all the wifi I can use! And all for the budget price of 15,000 CFA. Yes! Business is *that* bad! The tourism and associated industries simply collapsed from one day to the next. Settled in, take a shower, and off to eat! Of course their restaurant has also been closed because of the same crisis!

Have a table by the road at "*Nadine's*", which is about 500 m. from *The Sleeping Camel*! I eat a refreshing meal... I deserve it. When I'm done, I sit watching people as I have a drink! Two fellows approach me and start talking! I have grown very partial to English speaking people. Soon enough, I realise they are not scammers, and invite them for a drink! As we drink, *Seck Dolo* fills me in on what's happening in Bamako and Mali! Sad stories! But Africa is full of them!



I do learn that Mali is a wonderful place, and I wish I had more time! Would have taken two or three days with Seck and seen the Mali people! Well... Next time!



Say my good bye, and am back to *The Sleeping Camel*, and shortly asleep!

August the 12th.

Bamako, Mali to Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso!

Temps: low- 26° C | high- 29° C

Distance covered- 564 kilometres

Bright sunny morning as I wake late. Start and leave Bamako feeling quite sad at the situation in the country! I would definitely be coming back, and to spend some time too!

Stop at Bamako outskirts for my roadside breakfast of egg sandwich and coffee, and I am good to go! Pass through the border uneventfully, and am in *Burkina-Faso*! The further I ride in, the denser the vegetation gets! It's a slow and leisurely ride to *Bobo-Dioulasso*. It's Sunday, and that's probably why the traffic is so light! It occurs to me that I have never ridden this route before, and the road *does* seem different when moving in the opposite direction!

Locate *Iba Hotel*, which is on the main road out of *Bobo*, and ride in! It's beside *Saby Hotel*, where I stayed on my outbound trip, but it's much bigger, and as I expected, more expensive! The price read 42,500 CFA for a single occupant room! Wow! That's almost double the rates at Saby! But it *is* a more posh hotel, with more luxurious facilities! There's even a pool!

At the reception I meet Yusuf, and his English is so much better than my French, so we talk in English! I ask for a discount, seeing as I am low on cash! After some negotiation, I get the room for 27,500 CFA! And the room is fantastic! I love the down-filled pillows! And the hot shower is just what the doctor ordered! Fantastic! Ride into town to a "*bar*" for dinner... grilled fish and chips. That's done, and I am back to my room! I tuck myself in after doing some washing, and I sleep off almost instantly!

August the 13th.

Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina-Faso to Techiman, Ghana.

Temps: low- 23° C | high- 28° C

Distance covered- 653 kilometres

My target today is *Kumasi*! So I wake up bright and early, and head to *Hamale* (BF)/*Hamile* (GH) border! Leave BF, and the asphalt ends there!



Ride into Ghana, and have finished with the Immigration formalities in minutes... now it's time for Customs! And it was TIME for customs!

It just so happens that there is a meeting going on of the entire Customs team! Means no processing of any sort! The wait lasts about 2 hours, till the meeting is over. By this time the

queue has gotten longer, although I am still at its head. With courteous apologies, an attempt is made to process me! Until the report comes that *"the system is down"*!

Another wait for the *"system to come up"*, and the border ends up costing me close to 4 hours! And 36 *Cedis*! That done, and I am on the road again! The dirt-road that is the road out of *Hamile* border. This lasts for close to 45 km, and ranges from 1st gear slow moving to 100 km/h in 6th! Then it's Tarmac! My mind goes from time to time to my rear tyre as I consider if it will get to Lagos. It's done about 15,000 km already!



I try to make up for lost time at the border, while keeping a speed low enough so as not to aggravate my wearing tires! With just a stop for a drink, 18:16 hrs finds me leaving *Techiman* with over 120 km to go to *Kumasi*. I counsel myself and make a U-turn back into *Techiman*! Don't want to be riding in the night if I can avoid it! Not if I can avoid it! Dymns Hotel is closest, and with rooms available for 30 *Cedis*, I stop for the night, a warm meal, and much needed sleep! Tomorrow is another day!

August the 14th.

Techiman, Ghana to Accra, Ghana!

Temps: low- 22° C | high- 25° C

Distance covered- 389 Kilometres

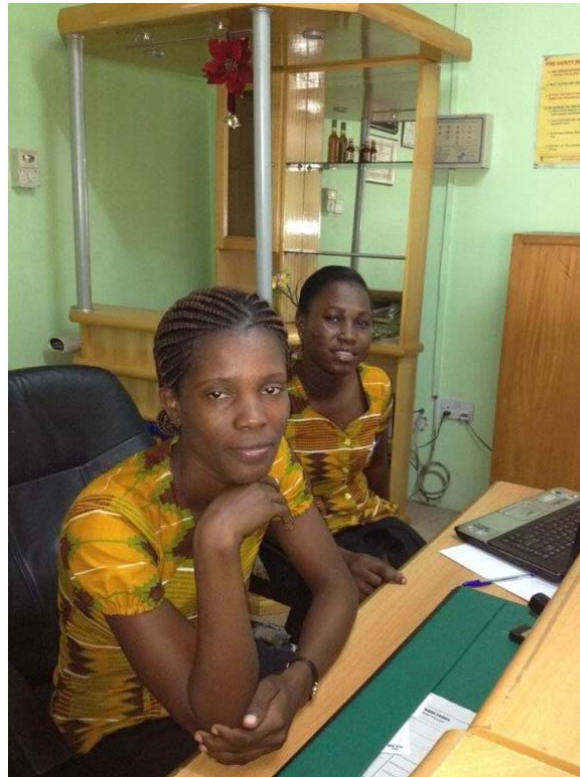
It is so cold this morning! As cold as it was during the coldest days in Europe... 22° C! I don my *Airshell*, and hit the road after having the complementary breakfast at the hotel restaurant!

I watch the thermometer, expecting to see a rise in the temperature, but no such luck! Eventually, as I exit *Kumasi*, I get 25° C. This is as hot as it gets for me for this day!

The rumble strips, speed tables and speed bumps make progress slower than usual, but the traffic keeps things interesting! Until about 40 km out of Accra, where some construction work starts. The road has been torn up, and it basically does not exist as a road now, and the GS suspension and tyres are tried over and over again on the “off-road obstacle course” that the road has become!

Eventually get into *Accra* and start my hotel hunt! I have one day to get my tyre, and sort out the Final Drive, and I am also thinking of taking a rest day! We will see!

My possession of limited funds and time lead me to *Apaade Lodge* in *Tesano*! For 70 Cedis (after discounts), I get a fantastic room and bathroom! The lodge is in a really quiet part of *Tesano*, and offers a swimming pool, nice restaurant, and modestly priced rooms and services.



The lady at the reception, Joyce, and her colleague, Likia, welcomed me, and all the staff I came in contact with were so warm and nice! As far as I am concerned, one of the best kept secrets in *Tesano*! I look at my tyre some more, and realize I must get a tyre from Lagos.

I get to Victor, who organizes everything for me, so I can have my tyre flown in from Lagos, and ready for pick up tomorrow. So no more tyre worries for me! I drop my stuff off in my room, then it's time to get to an ATM. End up without cash, but in Accra I am more or less at home. Call

Martey (a biker brother of mine), and soon I have some cash. He invites me to his house, where I meet his family, and enjoy some fufu and Banga soup, ☺! I recount some of my experiences, and we all have a laugh! As it gets late, it's time to go back, and he drops me back at my hotel, then it's off to sleep for me! Tomorrow I sort out my bike and tyre issue. The day after that, I have decided to take as a rest day, and will just loaf around doing nothing!

August 17th.

Accra, Ghana to Lagos, Nigeria!

Last leg today, and I already feel at home. After my two days in Accra I am well rested, and head out after a hearty breakfast. With a new tyre from Lagos as my pillion, I find my way to *Tema*.



I stop outside *Tema* for Walter (another Biker brother from Accra) to meet up with me. We have had some misunderstanding, and couldn't see earlier.



The time passes quickly as we talk, and soon it's time for me to leave. On to *Aflao*, where I process my exit briskly. I also meet Lizzy as I round up. Lizzy is my "*facilitator*" again at this border. Cross out of Ghana and sort my paper work in Togo.

We have passed this border so many times that the officials are mostly familiar to me, and we all exchange pleasantries.

I pass through *Lomé*, and on to Benin. Nothing spectacular, and I am in Benin and on to Cotonou, and then the *Seme* Border. I am finally in Lagos, and at home about 80 minutes later! Man, it's good to be home! Yes, there's no place like home! Thirty-six days after my journey started!

Yeah, what can I say? Been there, done that!!

And my tyre made it!



Where next??!!