

**BENIN
MAY 2010
By Karen Hauptfleisch**

4 May: I was the unlucky recipient of the worst seat in the taxi. Five agonizing hours later, a passenger disembarked and I could change seats, relief written all over my face. Four hours later, we were in Kara. It did not take Codliver long to smell a tourist, so whilst Alan and myself were sipping a cold beer, he first tried French, then English. He returned with another local, who could not speak English. The third time, he returned with Amen, who we both liked immediately. Since no one knew where the mountain was, it was going to be quite an adventure.

5 May: I was losing my sense of humour with Codliver but Al gave him some dash and he disappeared. Alan, myself and Amen had some very sweet coffee before deciding that chartering a taxi to Mt Sokboro was our only option. According to Peakbagger, the mountain was only 20 km away, but we had no clue what to expect in terms of roads and transport.

Amen, our guide was a tonic. He jumped out of the car to give a road worker some dash and had everyone in a great mood, stopping at all the villages asking the way. We had to pay dash to the Togo border guys as well as the Benin guys but Amen just told me to relax, which I did. Following the GPS, we



Amen paying a roadworker

entered a village before the heavens opened up with rain. Yobara, who had just returned from school and could speak some English, welcomed us into his home. Ten minutes later, he opened an umbrella and we all hiked to the mountain, including the chauffeur. Lots of laughter followed and it didn't take long to reach the top, where, on everyone's request, I had to climb in a tree for the picture to be taken.

More laughter followed the descent and back at the village, we were offered food. Yabara was so grateful when we gave him some money and a peaceful ride back followed, where no one insisted on getting more dash from us. We couldn't believe how lucky we were to have

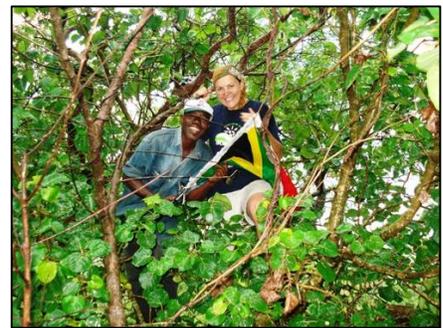
found the peak and, since it was a very remote village, we decided that chartering the vehicle was our only option.

Back at Kara, we had to try the African gin before going to the market to buy food. Amen promised me a pizza but the cheese was very expensive so we decided on a traditional dish instead. Before heading for his home; we stopped at the shebeen for more gin. Codliver was there and told Alan that he liked him very much but



The market

that he disliked me. Alan refrained from telling him that the feeling was mutual. When I was kissed by an old lady that's had been sitting in the shebeen since we arrived, I thought it was time to go to Amen's home.



The tree on top of the mountain

We all hopped on motorbikes to his home where his daughter Bella cooked a vegetable soup for me before adding the fish for the rest of them and everyone had more gin. Amen gave me mangoes and two of his drawings before taking us back to the hotel. The two of them were still feeling strong and left for more drinks at the

shebeen.

It is so heartwarming to see how generous he is, especially since he had not had a steady job for over three years. He lives in a tiny room, yet he never demanded anything and just offered us his laughter, food and love. Yet another amazing day in Africa

Sunrise on Africa's peaks - Benin

6 May: Amen fetched us at 6h00 and I finished packing while they went for their first African gin before going to his house for breakfast (coffee, bread and mayonnaise). By 8h00, we were on our way to Burkina Faso.

At one stage, three passengers were ordered to get out and by now, we expected them to join us once we've crossed a police patrol. Problems with the door followed and the helper used the window instead. Then the taxi made a terrible noise and the helper had to push us. Then he had to jump out of the window and run to the police patrol giving the taxi's official papers, jumped on another taxi and met us at the garage, where the chauffeur had to stop to have the engine seen to.



Supper at Amen's place

We finally took motorbikes across the border to Burkino Faso



Another day, another interesting vehicle in Africa.