

**NIGERIA
CHAPPEL WADDI
APRIL 2010
By Karen Hauptfleisch**

8 April: Five minutes after stepping off the airplane in Lagos, I was drenched with sweat. It was hot. It was very hot. Luckily the arrival cards were made of cardboard, which we used as fans. After exchanging money, we took a very expensive taxi to Westtown inn. After all the horror stories we had heard about Nigeria, we didn't want to hang around anywhere unnecessarily, especially not since it was almost midnight.

In order to get our visas, I had to make a hotel reservation before the time and was told that two rooms would be \$200. I e-mailed back to say that we would be sharing a room and that the cost, according to their website, would therefore be \$100. I never received a reply back.

Dodgy room or not, the air-conditioning was pure heaven.

9 April: Breakfast was a dry omelet complimenting a piece of dry bread and we never received any change from the \$200 we had to pay as a deposit. The manager was right after all, the room was \$200. In hind sight we should have polished off the mini bar.

Another very expensive taxi to the motor park followed. We had changed our plans. Instead of flying to Abuja and taking a share taxi to Serti, we would take a share taxi directly to Serti. Seeing the bible lying on the taxi's dashboard and listening to the hymns being sung, eased my mind a bit. During the 90 minutes it took the driver to get everyone's luggage in, several arguments broke out. Sweating profusely, I tapped my feet to the rhythm of the hymns sung. I controlled my fear by imagining thoughts like "What the hell did I get myself into" floating skywards in a tiny bubble, before exploding. A long prayer by the driver and our 16 fellow passengers followed, and then we were off on our estimated 15 hour journey.

Exactly seven hours later, we stopped for a bladder break. Men and woman alike formed a line next to the road, their backs turned to the passing cars and emptied their bladders. I am proud to say, I was amongst them. It was only after Alan's sarcastic remark "Nice white bum", that I realized the Nigerian ladies were all wearing skirts. We were passed onto three more taxis before our journey ended in Makurdi by 23h00.

10 April: A motorbike ride to the motor park was followed by our first taxi for the day. Two kilometers further, we also had our first breakdown of the day. Several more taxis followed and we finally arrived in Serti at 21h30. A bucket wash at the "Gods time is the best" hotel followed before I hit the sack, amazed at how strong I still felt.

11 April: After arranging a chartered vehicle and guide at the Serti Tourist camp, we were finally on our way. The trip was not uneventful. Some roads have gigantic potholes, so it is quite common to see vehicles coming straight towards you in the oncoming lanes. Our driver was also adamant not to pay "toll fees" at a boom gate erected by locals and a fistfight was avoided when he tried to run the local over.

In Njawa, we were welcomed by Mr. Chronicle, the Gashuki Gumti's national parks' head. He generously offered us a bed in his house, washing facilities and food. People flocked to come and greet us and "you're welcome", "you're very welcome", were heard wherever we went.

Sunrise on Africa's Peaks: Nigeria

12 April: Being a porter on Chappel Whaddi is clearly not a popular profession. When Anthony, our guide tried to recruit porters, everyone scattered away. Unfortunately for them, Hebrew and 14/14 were too slow. Mr. Chronicle pulled them to one side and what seemed like an earnest talk followed.

Following Mr. Chronicle's instructions not to let Hebrew and 14/14 escape, Anthony set a heavy pace and we arrived at Jauro Hamasale village just in time to greet the chief. And then we were offered a lovely hut to stay in, maize, wild honey, sugar cane and a live chicken. The guides were extremely excited about carrying the chicken up the mountain and slaughtering it on top. My facial expression must have changed their minds. When I got back after a wash in the river, the chicken was slaughtered. I muted Alan and Anthony's snoring by stuffing toilet paper in my ears.



Mr Chronicle and his team.



The chief and his team.

13 April. The chief's extended family once again brought us too much food. We started our hike at 7h00 and got to our campsite at 11h30. I was eager to get to the top but Anthony was adamant to eat first and take a siesta till 15h00. When it started raining, he took one look at my panic stricken face and changed his mind. We made it to the top.

Once back, everyone was relieved to take a siesta while I explored the mountain.

The evening, sitting around the fire, we were all in stitches when Alan tried to convince the Nigerians that the dreadful Chinese Soya was proper food.

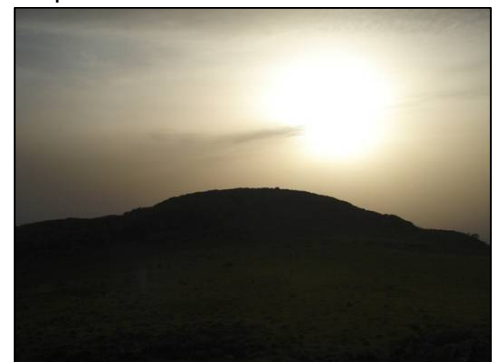


Measuring the height of the peak

14 April. A terrible nightmare about visiting the wrong peak resulted in my dragging Anthony back to the summit where I measured the other two peaks close by as well. Our early morning visit was rewarded by fresh milk from a Fulani who stays at the top and after breakfast, we started our hike back to Jauro Hamasale, where lunch awaited. After the obligatory dash was paid to the chief and the photos with his wives taken, Anthony led the stiff hike back.

Mr. Cronicle and his welcoming committee were waiting for us and insisted on carrying our day packs back the last 2 km to his home. After being offered food and a bucket of water to wash in, we started telling stories. By the time Hebrew and 14/14 were asked if they would take another group up, we were all hysterical.

15 April. 3 Motorbikes were needed to take us back to Serti and since there were no volunteers (maybe our big backpacks had something to do with it), Mr.



My first sunrise on a peak in West Africa

Chronicle's help was called for. Three very reluctant drivers were ordered to take us to Nguranje.

The journey through the mountains was not uneventful. Motorcycles had to be swapped to handle some of the steep uphill and eyes were closed on most of the steep downhill. Once at Nguranje, Alan refused to travel another centimeter on a motorbike and we chartered a taxi to Serti, where we were treated like big adventurers.



Our adventurous motorbike ride to Takum

16 April. When the Moslem prayers started, we were walking to the motor park, where it took 3 hours before the taxi was full. At Marabastad, Alan discovered that his daypack with some of his valuables was never transferred to our current taxi and arrangements were made to get the backpack back to the motor park in Takum. Another taxi transfer led to another adventure. AC our driver was singing along to a cassette of gospel songs with such immense pleasure that we all joined in.

Our first running water and electricity in days awaited us in Takum. It was pure bliss.

17 April. I suspect not a lot of tourists visit Takum. On our way to the motor park, we were paid by a local to have our picture taken. Alan's bag has not arrived yet and we were advised to return after lunch. While walking back peacefully to our hotel, feasting on the mangoes that have fallen off the trees, we were picked up by the security police and interrogated for two hours. It was obvious, Takum doesn't get tourists.

Back at the motor park, Al was informed that he had to go back all the way to Serti to fetch his own backpack, since it contained valuables.

An enjoyable 24 hours followed where I had a whole room to myself, a heavenly shower every 30 minutes when the heat got too much, and the best drink ever – an ice cold coke. At 19h00, I experienced a magnificent lightning storm before the rain poured down.

Al had an adventurous ride back to Serti where he was welcomed back like a lost brother. He endured the storm in a truck with no wipers.

18 April. I kept alternating between watching the lizards and taking a much needed cold shower to counteract the heat till Alan arrived back at 14h00. At 15h00, we were instructed by the immigration officer to go back to Lagos (a 2 day journey) since I was illegally in Nigeria. The custom official at the airport had stamped the wrong date in my passport.

Some pleading and tears followed, and after being kept in suspense for over two hours, we were told that we would not be allowed out of the country, but if we wanted to take the risk, we didn't have to return to Lagos. We took the chance.



Another bumpy ride on the back of a motorbike

A bumpy ride on the back of the motorbike followed and pygmy kingfishers, parrots and birds of prey accompanied us all the way to Bissaula.

Our drivers were extremely helpful and arranged accommodation and a porter for us before taking us to the health inspector and then the immigration officer. 21h00 was no time to sort out

problems in a small village on the border of Nigeria and Cameroon, and we were instructed to come back the next morning.

3 Minutes after entering our room and noticing the gigantic cockroaches and smelly toilet, my tent was pitched outside. Because of the heat, I was surrounded by locals sleeping on tables, chairs and even motorbikes. I felt very safe in my tent, protected from all the cockroaches, listening to everyone snoring around me.

19 April: The next morning, Alan emerged from the dingy room with horror stories about the cockroaches getting cozy in his sweaty hair. The immigration officer must have taken pity on us because our passports were stamped with no further questions. Thomas lifted both our backpacks on his head and by 06h00, our official Dumbo Trek started.

**NIGERIA/CAMEROON
THE DUMBO TREK
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Stops were few and far in between. At our first village, we met a Rastafarian who was kicked out of Cameroon. He believed he was Lucky Dube's brother and a prophet.



The dumbo trek

Mangoes that fell off the trees kept us hydrated since we sweated like crazy and because of the drought, water was very scarce. Just when I thought I could not lose another drop of sweat, it started raining. We walked in the rain for an hour before the sky was covered with flying ants. Two little boys carrying food to their village, who had joined us walking for the past 10 km, stopped to feast on them while we marched on.

When we reached the Sabongido village, Thomas had clearly had enough after a 12 hour hike. Our bags were promptly tied on to a motorbike and after protesting that we didn't have enough Naira to pay the driver, he insisted on paying for us. He has had it with the crazy tourists that insisted on doing the Dumbo trek, used only by smugglers after a perfectly good road was build between Bissaula and Cameroon.



One of the boys that joined us

Take 1 driver, 2 passengers, 2 85L backpacks, 2 small backpacks; put them on 1 motorbike on 1 extremely bad road and you have an adventure. Alan threatened to get off and walk every time falling seemed inevitable and I giggled nervously, thinking that it's a miracle that we hadn't fallen yet.

The arrival of two drenched, shivering and filthy tourists in Dumbo caused quite a stir. The immigration officer bought us a cold drink and because we needed his stamp for our passport, we tried to make small talk ignoring the vision of dry clothes after a nice hot shower.

Finally we were shown to a room and told we could pay the next day, after exchanging money. Grateful that we had a dry place to sleep, we accepted the bucket of cold water.