

Michael Donkin

Worked with EO	from July 1987 to Sept 1989
Age on joining EO	30
Nationality	British
Role at EO	Expedition Leader
Expeditions/Brief Encounters etc. led or taken	Ch-ch-chinese Charters with Sundowners. Baby sitting Brit EMs who flew over Iran, across Turkey Long time trainee, Cairo – Nairobi – London London – Nairobi Egyptologist, Middle East etc London – Nairobi - Cairo
Why did you want to work for EO?	To see Africa & get paid to do so. Ha!
Occupation before joining EO	Merchant Navy engineer Bus driver British Telecom engineer Canoe instructor Bogs & Bins Bum
Occupation after leaving EO	Ski Hotel manager Watersports centre manager IT Support techie Group Head of IT Own IT Support company
Now living in	Chorley, UK trying to retire to Northumberland

Then photo(s)	Now photo(s)
 <p>Not taken at EO, but a few weeks before joining.</p>	 <p>30 April 2018</p>

Memories or anecdotes

1. My favourite EO memory is from my trainee trip with Les Ferguson as LD. We were arrested in Bangui, Central Africa, as one of our group had found it amusing to set off numerous big, loud, Indian bangers under an Exodus truck. They'd been keeping the whole campsite awake all week with some raucously loud, rowdy parties, but had all gone to bed early on their last night, before a pre-breakfast departure. Rather than pitch tents most of them were sleeping in the truck when, around midnight, it sounded as if World War 3 had just erupted. Very, very funny sight of panicked people running, mostly naked, out of their truck, with bangers still going off.

But, we didn't realise how twitchy the CAR authorities could be, especially as the president was in town that night. Army, police, militia, vigilantes all arrived, some with guns, some with bows & arrows or spears. Only the French Foreign Legion, who actually ran the place, didn't bother. Too busy beating up the locals, I'd guess.

They dragged off some clown from another truck who, very pissed, made such a nuisance of himself that they arrested him. We had to bail him out the next day, but only by admitting that one of our number was the guilty party. So, they arrested our whole truck.

As they couldn't accommodate us all in the cells they made us camp in the grounds of the police station. This was way better than the campsite (and free!), as there were no toilets to overflow and raise a foul stench. We had to listen to the screams of the real prisoners every couple of hours though.

The cops would come and drink beers with us, play chess, etc. While we were sat around one day a young lad, of about 10, walked proudly up the steps of the police station and disappeared inside. 2 minutes later he was racing down the steps and across the yard, with a very large pair of shiny shoes in his hand. Hot on his heels was the cop who presumably owned the shoes! Neither the lad nor the cop were wearing shoes, but the kid was able to skip across the sharp gravel at speed, while the cop was dancing like a cat on a hot tin roof. The sight of which made his mates, who were watching this with us, wet themselves laughing!

That night we had quite a party, which the police were happy to join. Dozens of empty bottles ended up being piled up beneath a table and 3 of our guys slept in the cook tent. Next morning we found the tent had been cut open, someone had managed to climb under the table, over the bottles and steal all of the 3 guys kit, leaving them with only the undies they'd slept in.

The cops were very unhappy and very quickly found most of the gear, including cameras, for sale in the market. This meant the cells became even fuller and the screaming from inside even louder!

We were allowed to go after a few days, with a "fine" of \$250 or so, and a promise not to let off any more bangers!

2. On an African southbound I chose to avoid one of the main borders into Nigeria as I'd heard it could be tricky, and I headed for a tiny little road and hopefully tiny little border post. We presented ourselves first thing in the morning.

The guy in charge took all the passports off us and meticulously looked as if he knew what he was doing. Which, it turned out, he really did.

"Why have your people not obtained their visas in their own home countries?" he asked? I had no idea what he was on about. The Nigerian visas would have been mostly obtained in London.

He explained, "If I wish to visit England I must get my visa in Lagos and only in Lagos. If I travel first to Paris and apply at the British Embassy there, they will tell me to return to Lagos to get the visa, because I am Nigerian. All of you non-UK people can go back to your own home towns and get your Nigerian visas from there. Good day!"

Oh dear. I could see his logic. I then spent the entire morning smoking my ciggies with him, drinking his coffee and pleading our case. To no avail. At noon he announced that he was off for lunch and he didn't expect to see us again. He came back at 2.00 pm, after what must have been a liquid lunch and he wasn't as pleasant as he'd been that morning. So, we smoked my cigarettes and he drank his coffee and I watched as he calmed down and became quite smug, convinced as he was of his own case.

I guess a few dollars would have eased the tension, but I didn't ever pay a bribe in Africa and I was keen not to start! I was trying to figure out the possibility of being allowed back into Niger, to try a different border crossing, but without much faith that we'd get back into Niger with visas that were now no longer valid.

Once we got to 5.00 pm he announced that he was going home. I went for broke.

"Am I allowed into your wonderful country, as I did get my visa in London, the capital city of my own country?" I asked.

"Yes, yes, of course", he testily replied.

"Then I will have to go to Lagos to discuss the situation with your authorities. And most of these people will have to wait here."

"Alas, that is so", he smiled.

"OK. I will have to leave the truck as they have everything they need to live on it and I will have to hitch hike to Lagos, which may take me 10 days. Let's say 3 days to sort the problem and 10 days back".

He laughed at this thought, the smug bastard.

"So, every night, for over 3 weeks, 20 people will each shit on your door step."

He looked at me very strangely, frowned, then burst out laughing and suddenly started stamping passports with entry stamps! And he was good enough to shake my hand as we left and to wish me bon voyage as he kept laughing.

3. When I say I never paid a bribe in Africa there was maybe one.

We were in Morocco when I asked Barry, a big, burly Aussie farmer, to go into town and to buy sufficient beer to last the truck the 3 weeks we'd expect to spend in Algeria. I knew it would be harder to get beer in Algeria, but also that we were allowed to import an amount for our own use.

Barry proudly appeared with 2 taxis, loaded with cases of Heineken. Of course, these had to be sampled that very night, so we opened a few around the fire. It wasn't long before someone realised that there was something fishy about this beer.

"Here", he said to me, "What does 'bière non alcool' mean in English?" Barry had bought 60 cases of piss.

Obviously, he took some stick for this faux pas, but we didn't have time to return it to the shop and we decided it would still be useful as we crossed the desert, so we headed for the border.

The border guard's eyes lit up in delight as he saw all this "beer" on the floor of the truck. We had a discussion about how he had to confiscate it all, with my counter argument that 20 people, in Algeria for 3 weeks, could quite easily need that much for their own consumption.

He was down heartedly agreeing with me as he signed us off, so I generously offered him a case for being such a great guy. He thought it really was all of his birthdays come at once when I upped the offer to 2 cases. He managed to whoop loudly as he ran back to the border post offices with his booty to show his mates, as I floored the truck and got going fast!