

ENFLASH

JANUARY

2000

VOL 9

Dear All,

A VERY AUSPICIOUS, REWARDING AND HAPPY 2000 TO EVERYONE EVERYWHERE

WHERE ARE THEY NOW

THE WELL DESERVING OTHERS

- Arrows - Celebrated the Millenium with Nic Branch, Fumi, and PL's on holiday at the Himalayan Encounter's mountainside party outside of Pokhara orchestrated by Tony Jones and his ever-willing sherpas. She is currently accompanying Warren Brewer on a GSI and will return to UK on 7th Feb to leave again for Zurich to do a presentation for SSR on 8th/9th February.
- Wendy Bock - Is escaping from the sales team to do Peru & Incas with Simon Froggatt on the 20th February – it is time she did an EO trip, isn't it!!!
- Lee Sutherland - Heartfelt congratulations on passing that much dreaded PCV!! As soon as Lee got this under her belt she was off to South Africa to have an operation and will return to EO with a set of bionic hands. Meanwhile she is living with the obvious inconveniences of no hands at all! She leads us to believe she is recuperating by studying mechanics manuals and acquiring a First Aid Certificate.
- Frank Reeters - Sadly, his mother died. He had to make an emergency return to Holland while he was doing his gophering stint and is now on compassionate leave. Our sincere condolences go out to him, and we look forward to seeing him back early in February.
- Mark Spitzer - Returned just in time to step into the gophering gap and is managing it quite well, considering! In this role he has been a welcome addition to the sales team manning the travel shows – its quite useful having a real life P L instead of a cardboard cut-out. He has just finished an NGR with Adam Lowe on Q128 NTN. An interesting part of the world made more so by one of the PM's developing a clinical mental condition. Spitz has added to his long list of attributes and is now an expert mental care nurse as well.
- Graham Wayling – Arrived back safely back in the UK on the 23rd with the sad old Q572 NPP under difficult conditions and bad weather. Not a nice job at all, but a job well done.
- Sarah (call me Babs) Wolf - Babs has been offered a position with EO in a non-driving role, as sadly she didn't pass her PCV 2nd time around. We don't want to lose her considering her previous job qualities, her time with us at Wren Park, and her obvious enthusiasm. More and more Encounter is needing to include a 2nd person in a courier-type role, particularly on the Brief Encounters. Shorter trips put greater pressures on PL's and Brief Encounters attract EM's looking for more of a holiday. So we need her 'people' skills, and she will operate much like Alison Moore with Pete Getgood now, and the way we have utilised Heather Russell with Phil Harwood. Check out Marketing later.
- Freddy & Crew - Excelled themselves with their production of the EO Christmas Party. The office was transformed and the safari scene set for the UK-bound staff with an atmospheric tented venue. The usual 'de rigeur' theme-dressing meant that

everybody was able to fulfil their fantasies and come in the clothes they liked best. The whole cast enjoyed a fabulous three course meal with the usual amount of EO 'spirit'. A resounding THANK YOU. And Freddy, you're booked for next Xmas!

Brendan Gibbons- Graced us with a visit in between his interests here and his 'un-stately pile' in La France when he was over here from Saudi. There was the good excuse to have a well supported get together with some old mates at EOL

Jacko Hargreaves – Back from Kathmandu on the 27th January, just in time to celebrate his birthday with us! He has been supervising and assisting with truck turnarounds in Kathmandu. He assures us that the view from under the truck there is much the same as it is at Wren Park.

Cathy Chuter - Returned from Aussie to start her training at Wren Park, for those of you who do not already know her, she has defected from the EOL sales team in favour of the 'sharp end'.

Fumi - Arriving at EOL on the 4th February for 10 days to up-grade the computer system in general, and in particular for the new brochure. I suspect the real reason he has organised his visit at this time of year is because of VALENTINE'S DAY! Last year he discovered he had many admirers!!! Pity we won't be able to introduce him to another pagan rite of ours – Leap Year! So it's the ladies' privilege to propose marriage to the objects of their desire!

Tony Jones - Flying in from Kathmandu on 2nd February, destined for Destinations at Olympia - amongst other things. Could they possibly include Valentines' and Leap Year too!!

NEW SECTION – OLD CAMPAIGNERS

Several of our number have had the dust blown off, the wrappers removed from them and sent back on the road again to cope with the shortage of leaders.

Warren Burton - Found himself leading the EAS 19th Dec ex-Nairobi at a moment's notice, and going on to do the Mountain Gorillas. He had a very successful trip and we are glad to say it looks like we could again offer this unique experience with some confidence. See 'Words from Warren' later.

Mike Stephens - Agreed to offer his special services to operate an EEN ex-Cairo 6th February and a relocation for 6 weeks.

Johnny Patterson – Agreed to offer his special services to run the EHI ex-Addis 5th Feb

Alison Bennett - Agreed to offer her special services. Back again at EOL to help John deal with all the 'crap' that lands on John's desk. For those that don't know her already she was Tony Jones's start-up partner in the 60's, and that's very handy because nothing really needs to be explained to her when it comes to dealing with John's particular commodity!

Welcome back!

THE JOINERS

Katherine Tory - Started on the 20th December at EOL taking care of enquiries. Katherine did an NGR last January with Chris Manley and is a very enthusiastic member of the sales team. She is also a computer whiz so Fumi is bound to fall in love with her. Vital statistics withheld

THE GONERS

John Haywood - Is bowing out after three years on the road - he has been an excellent PL and

a pleasure to have around. What he plans to do next is a BIG secret, but the clue is that it has something to do with the fairer sex. We wish you the very best John, in whatever you do. Keep in touch, we will miss your inimitable style.

- Roland Foster - Joined 4th January as a trainee and left 22nd January without letting us know, or saying goodbye.
- Stuart Arch - Left behind a smoke-screen - travelling via Asia & Nepal back to Queensland.

So, Adios!

VISITORS

- Ian Stevenson - Passing through on his way to the USA to see his parents.
- Will Fell - Passing through on his way back from investigating Cuba.

GOSSIP

- Lionel Kleinot - Got married! The deed was done on 5th January '00 with Annalise, an Aussie, in Gibraltar Registry Office and they will be living in Spain. Moira and Brendan desperately tried to get a flight out to Gib to gate crash the ceremony – but failed.

HE Millenium Party – At Tara Top 3056m outside of Pokhara. Freezing cold enough to keep passions running cool, but apparently not cool enough when under the influence of “Khukri” rum at altitude. Ten different nationalities contributed to the ‘bonhomie’ in the tented venue. Certain ‘scoundrels’ appeared from nowhere and threatened to spoil the happy atmosphere. Jeremy (John Clark’s nephew) gallantly tried to save the day and got severely punched in the face. But a wonderful time was had by all!

MARKETING

The year has started with plenty of enquiries and interest. James Chetwode has had a heavy schedule of film nights at 267 to back up the successful Daily Telegraph Adventure 2000 Show on 14th-16th January at Olympia. As ever we attracted a lot of interest at the stand with the public, happy ex-EM’s, and also with the rest of the trade who love to come around and have a drink on our highly sociable stand. Then James was off to Glasgow on a ‘one night stand’ to do a promotional evening for STA along with some other operators. Next on the programme will be the London Arena Independent Traveller’s World Show on 28th-30th January in Docklands. Then back to Olympia on 10th –13th February, for the Destinations Show where, against all odds, James’s powers of persuasion has resulted in ‘permission’ to have a truck in the exhibition hall – don’t ask how! Could it be something to do with his inimitable charm?

Mike Travers has been coming into give the sales team some professional pointers for dealing with the rash of shows, and to hone up on telephone charm in order to get signatures on booking forms.

At the end of January we will have the new brochures ready to be sent out, this seems like an understatement considering how much effort behind the scenes goes into the production of our annual brochure. The emphasis has had to be on shorter trips, so we have introduced more Brief Encounters to satisfy the market demand for shorter projects. It includes some interesting new projects which we believe will maintain our reputation for being pioneers in the field.

Your preview –

NEW PROJECTS – Brief Encounters

Ruta de Maya	Mexico, Belize & Guatemala – 16 days	RDM
El Grande	USA & Mexico - 43 days	EGR
In the Footsteps of the Incas	Peru & Bolivia - 15 days	FIN
Jordan, Syria, Lebanon	Jordan, Syria & the Lebanon - 21 days	JSL
Central Asia Caravan	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan - 21 days	CAC
Orangutan Experience	Borneo (Kalimantan) - 6 days	OEX
Irian Jaya Adventure	Irian Jaya - 15 days	IJA
Holy Tibet & Kailash	Nepal, Tibet - 18 days	HTK

NEW PROJECTS – Overland Adventures

West Africa Explored	Casablanca to Accra (or V.V.) - 13 weeks	WAE
This is a sector of the GSA now being offered separately due to the political situation in the Congo		

RE-TITLED PROJECTS – Brief Encounters

Previously –

Peru & Incas	Peru, Bolivia - 28 days	PIN
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NOW

Incas & Andes	Peru, Bolivia - 26 days	IAN
Comprising of PIN now 19 days and FIN 15 days. As each itinerary includes the 4 day Inca trail these two projects will overlap for those 4 days, therefore 8 days are deducted from 34 day total of PIN + FIN.		

Previously –

A Journey into the Interior -Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia – 25 days	JIN
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NOW

Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia	- 25 days	BNZ
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Previously –

The Roots of Southern Africa – South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe	- 28 days	RSA
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NOW

South Africa & Mozambique - South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe	- 28 days	SMO
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WORKSHOP

Inundated – in a nutshell, Jacko has been missed! Bill McMann and his gang have managed to deliver an immaculately turned out truck for James every week, and lately, twice a week to support his promotions programme. Whilst, at the same time doing a two week turnaround on Tony King's Q43 MPP to go out on a GSA leaving here 29th January. What more can we say than, well done!

FROM 'ER IN THE BACKROOM

She says she's had 'er say. Moira hopes you've not used 'er Memo of the 26th January for any other purposes than for what it was intended.

WARREN'S WORDS

You'll all be aware of the Bwindi incident 1st March '99. Whilst that attack was horrific, Encounter has needed to constantly reassess the viability of re-visiting the region. In particular to re-establish the Gorilla Project. Consequently, after six months, we took the decision in August to go back having satisfied ourselves that the security arrangements in place were acceptable. Encounter has now successfully taken three groups in August, November and just recently in January. Another group is planned to go in February.

The following extracts of accounts written by some of the last group say it all –

Wayne Reeves (Australian)

Driving along the roads leading to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, I was lulled into an easy frame of mind by the friendliness of the local people, children rush from their houses as soon as they see the truck to wave and cheer as we pass by.

Entering the Buhoma Campsite in the National Park is a different proposition. It is an eerie feeling being in the very camp site where tourists were killed less than a year ago, engaging in the very same pursuits as we were about to undertake.

These feelings were dispelled however when we saw the security arrangements now in place. Armed guards sign the truck in, every excursion into the park is with an armed guard/guide and the gorilla trek is accompanied by four armed guards, two on view as a deterrent and two who remain mostly hidden.

At times this felt somewhat unnecessary, although completely understandable in view of previous events. At no time did I feel in any danger, real or perceived.

Maureen Mooney (Canadian)

While the road is long, dusty, windy and bumpy, it travels by rolling hills covered in a patchwork quilt of red soil and green tea. People are scattered throughout and cautiously peek out and wave as we pass by, obvious from years of political unrest and betrayal.

Bwindi's Impenetrable Forest is a wall of untouched shades of green. While the walk is steep, muddy and hard, leaving you hot sticky and exhausted; its all part of this 'once in a lifetime's experience', and those experiences by definition are always a challenge.

I stood meters away, separated by a few branches of bush from a wild gorilla twice my size. As the huge silverback dozed peacefully in the underbrush I'm sure it's heartbeat was no where as fast as mine. The baby gorillas rolled and play-fought, oblivious to our peering eyes and clicking cameras. The guide counted down our time with the gorillas all too soon, we had to leave, our privilege suspended for their protection.

There is no sign of the March '99 incident except that everything seems to have a fresh new paint job and there are a number of soldiers posted about. Soldiers accompanied us for any walks – but the atmosphere was casual and the added security was comforting without being blatant.

Richard Scherer (Canadian)

The people of Uganda seem very tourist friendly, and take the opportunity to wave and smile to tourists as they travel by. The countryside is very mountainous/hilly and is very beautiful despite the unrelenting encroachment of subsistence farming on even the steepest slopes outside protected areas.

The Ugandan authorities take the tourist dollar very seriously and openly display the military presence within the Bwindi National Park area in an attempt to assure tourists of their personal safety; this deterrent works very effectively!

The lush green and mountainous rainforests indigenous to Uganda are breathtaking, Bwindi National Park is bathed in natural beauty. The trek to locate the gorillas was less strenuous than I had imagined, although we were told that our timing and the proximity of the gorillas to the park boundary was very fortuitous. The guides and gorilla trackers were genuinely interested in the gorillas, were very knowledgeable about their habits and were very conscientious towards the balance between the tourist's US\$250 day cost and the need to preserve the gorillas natural behaviour, uninfluenced by man.

Spending one hour within 20 foot of a group of gorillas is something I will not forget and will relish for the rest of my life, they look so happy outside of a zoo enclosure! Our military escort was always present, but never stifling.

Jackie Scherer (Canadian)

I knew Bwindi was remote but was shocked when after days of driving through some of the most beautiful, awe-inspiring mountain passes and amazingly terraced landscape we finally arrived at the park gates. I found this remoteness reassuring. As with all things rare and special in this world you worry about man's encroachment and desire to capitalise on them.

The encounter with the gorillas was all that I thought it would be and more. I hadn't thought about the humidity and the steepness of the hills, and gained a real impression of the beauty of density of the forest. I also don't think I realised what I would feel when I stared into the eyes of a sleepy silverback, or when intently watching two juveniles wrestling. The stare back was so human-like, and their expressions projected emotions that I had witnessed a million times on human faces. They touched something deep inside of me and I realised how privileged I was to be able to spend an hour of my life with them. An experience that will forever be a highlight.

My impressions when I left Bwindi was of a quiet, safe, absolutely beautiful, remote corner of the world that unlike most corners has not yet been damaged by man. I know that seems odd after the events of March '99, but that's how it felt to me.

COMMUNICATIONS

This time last year Enflash tried to get the message across to everyone about the quantity and quality of our communications. The increasing use of e-mail seems to have spread an infection of verbal diarrhoea, and the problem is now worse than it ever was.

Important topics must be documented, some communications seem unnecessarily long, some are nothing but a maze of trivia out of which it is very difficult to pick out the important topics. Please remember all operational communications are supposed to be professional, please endeavour to be crisp, short and to the point.

All communications between PL's and EOL are available for discovery in law in the event of a serious complaint or claim. With that in mind I must AGAIN ask that you cease to use slang, nicknames sounding derogatory, swear words, and any other words or phrases which make light of, or could influence another person's view of how Encounter addresses any kind of problem, or it's clients. This applies to ERR's as well.

Faxes do not seem to encourage the same lack of professionalism as e-mail – so think Fax. And, spare us from having to search for the real point of the message.

INSURANCE

As a result of E.U. Regulations Encounter staff in London have been required to attend an insurance sales training session to be certified to offer travel insurance to Project Members (PM's). Ian Irvine of Campbell, Irvine Ltd came to do the deed.

During the course of this instruction several important issues came up directly related to Project Leaders (PL's) with groups.

You cannot recommend a particular operator that organises activities which are not included in the brochure. You can only advise the group that there are various activities available in which they can participate if they wish. If it is an activity, which is not part of the Encounter itinerary, it will not necessarily be covered by an insurance policy the PM may hold, no matter where it was purchased.

A PL cannot receive any commission on a group booking. This would make you and Encounter liable for any accident.

So if a PL organises or recommends an activity off the itinerary, or receives any commissions we are automatically liable.

This would apply in particular to these activities: -

- Parachuting/Sky-diving
- Paragliding
- Hang-gliding
- Micro-lighting
- Bungee-jumping
- Water sports in motorised vessels
e.g. Jet Skis etc

These specific types of activities are not covered by the Campbell, Irvine Policy which is designed especially for the overland business, so even less likely to be covered by a policy that PM's have bought with other underwriters worldwide.

A NOTE FROM J.C.C.

I would like to set the general attitude for the next year's operations by reminding you all that for Encounter to continue being the pre-eminent overland adventure company customer care must be at the forefront at all times. It starts the moment a client meets with Encounter and most of all at the pre-departure meetings. Get it wrong at the pre-departure meeting and that mistake will live with you for the duration of the trip, and possibly with us well after. We don't want to ruin what we have achieved, so really look after clients. YOU are in the position to turn the brochure into reality, make the trip they are on the trip of a lifetime.

I must emphasize to those on the road the need to keep to the itinerary in the brochure. If you don't we're in trouble! The law will not be on our side, clients are able to get substantial compensation in the courts if we haven't delivered the goods. I hope this message will not fall on deaf ears as we have suffered from litigation in the past – and lost! Your attitude, your attention to detail is critical, you could make or break us!

The other commitment we make to our clients is their daily welfare. Meals and food arrangements must be as stated in the brochure. If 'Key Facts' say, "Cooked breakfast, evening meals, picnic lunches, fresh food supplemented by truck supplies, all meals prepared by everyone on a rota basis." then that's how it must be. If 'Key Facts' say, "Local restaurants, cafes and market stalls. Camp cooked meals with group assistance during the camping section." That's how it must be, because this is what the PM's have bought and this is our contract with them. Any diversion from this should never be on a regular basis. If a decision is made for the group to eat in a restaurant outside of the brochure guideline it must be agreed to by everyone, and the basis of payment for the meal must be clearly understood and suitable to all concerned, and preferably planned in advance.

The reason for giving you this message is that the level of complaints from Asian and African trips over the last year on the subject of food and meal management has risen markedly.

You must remember that the way you run your trips must be as close to the brochure and it's 'Key Facts' as reasonably possible. Cross reference your 'Handbook' with the brochure and dossier. If anything is not clear refer to the 'hotseat' ASAP! Some of the complaints have been justifiable. Don't ignore what seem like petty grievances, sort them out or they can snowball. We should not be finding ourselves in the position of having to invoke our Conditions of Contract to deal with these kind of complaints, they are there for our protection in situations of serious consequence.

Encounter has always promised to provide its clients with unforgettable and life enhancing travel experiences throughout the world so thanks for taking this message on board. Keep up the good work, continue to deliver the impossible, and make miracles happen, it is much appreciated.

To all of you out there take every kind of care.

Very best wishes for 2000.

John