

James Alexander

Worked with EO	from 1983 to 1992
Age on joining EO	26
Nationality	British
Role at EO	Leader/Driver, Hotseat
Expeditions/Brief Encounters etc. led or taken	Most expeditions
Why did you want to work for EO?	
Occupation before joining EO	
Occupation after leaving EO	Coach driver, European Cycling Circuit
Now living in	Deceased (6 December 2007)



James Alexander leading the Africa Live pilot safari 1991



Australian cyclist Michael Rogers (Tour de France) and James 12 July 2006



L to R Martin Blackgrove, Ian Stevenson, Leanne Edwards, James Alexander, Lance Thomas, Mick Larkin (seated) January 2004

Memories or anecdotes

The following eulogy to James was written by Moira Welikanna, 11 December 2007

James Todd Alexander joined the overland expeditioning company Encounter Overland in 1983 to train as an expedition leader/driver. In those days there were more astronauts in the world than professional, commercial expedition leaders. It was a time when the term "Adventure Travel" meant just that, not the lukewarm watered-down version it has become. Making it through his training he was fairly quickly earning his reputation as a fully fledged expedition leader of some distinction. He went everywhere that Encounter Operated during his career, I have lost count of the times he crossed the Sahara, negotiated the very hard terrain of Zambia as it was then, building and repairing bridges as he went, long before Michael Palin led the world to believe he was the only white man to complete the great Trans Sudan train journey, James had done it, without the aid of a full BBC team, and being fully responsible for the well-being of 20 other people, his group, the clients. Most of the time he would be driving his beloved Bedford "adventure machine" as they were affectionately known, James and the vast majority of his colleagues at the time were "Supermen" and "Superwomen", not only did they drive their groups thousands of miles over difficult terrain, and through primitive countries, negotiating en route with corrupt border officials, repairing and servicing their "adventure machines", they were ambassadors, negotiators, psychologists, accountants, they had to think of safety, group dynamics, managing the "team" health issues for themselves and others. I could go on. James achieved this with a modest aplomb, which became his hallmark. His groups loved him; as did his colleagues, many became firm friends and were still in touch with him until his death. He had a formidable reputation. A quote I received today "James was my inspiration".

James worked all over Africa, South America and Asia, he drove from London to Cape town, from Cairo to Nairobi, around the great game parks, across the deserts, through the jungles, crossed the great rivers. In South America, he drove the entire circle of South America, Rio back to Rio, both north bound and Southbound finding himself at Carnival on more than one occasion. He loved that. In South America his versatility as a driver extended also to driving coaches, he had an excellent safety record.

Asia was a similar story, he drove the strait route across Europe, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India to Kathmandu, in both trucks, coaches and once in a mini bus, he also did the route down through Europe and Turkey Jordan, Egypt Syria and up to Asia through Iran, Pakistan and India to Kathmandu. If my memory serves me well, he also combined Africa with Asia, travelling from Nairobi to Kathmandu, always with his groups, all enjoying themselves immensely. He was a natural leader of men, and women. Though he was always too modest to acknowledge this.

A considerable part of his career was driving charter groups from Hong Kong, around Europe and Russia, in luxury coaches, he thoroughly enjoyed this for a "rest " as he said, the groups loved Mr. James. I think he just enjoyed the food. Wherever he went he had his favourite watering holes, whether Nurullas in Delhi, The Everest Steak House in Kathmandu, Carnivores in Nairobi, and a hundred others worldwide, he could be found with his feet up a beer and a large plate of food at his side, at the end of an arduous expedition, he deserved it.

This lifestyle was, obviously far from simple, but James relished it. Sometimes he would have to strip to his underwear to get under the truck in the severe bogs that littered Zaire; I have seen pictures of him looking like a big mud baby. In South America, he and his group were held up by bandits, despite a pistol-whipping James cool head got them all out alive minus a few belongings. He very rarely spoke of this, and never gave himself any credit for his bravery, and composure.

During his longer than average career as an Encounter Leader Driver, our dear friend James passed on his Knowledge and expertise to many new recruits. His driving was of the highest standard. His people skills superb, finally he came into the office to run what was commonly known as Hot Seat, for a year he became the trouble shooter for all the guys and gals out on the road leading expeditions, his phenomenal knowledge helped many, many people to avoid or get out of trouble.

He left Encounter in 1992 to pursue other things, and eventually commenced work in the European Cycle world, but he still came back to Encounter in his time off and led a few trips, until he had finally had enough.

I had known James 22 years, he was one of the most respected men in the Overland Travel business, known widely in many countries. His life though sadly short, touched hundreds if not thousands of people. Many will agree that the experiences he shared with them changed and enhanced their lives. He did and achieved more in his precious 50 years than most do in a long lifetime. The term most widely used to describe James is "A TRUE GENTLEMAN". Hurrah to that, but so much more.

James will never be forgotten; his stories and adventures have already been passed on to another generation.