

When I drove out of Frontline Fellowship's driveway in Cape Town on my seventh overland trip to Sudan, there was one thing I knew for certain, and that was that anything could happen. It is impossible to ever anticipate what might happen on any given overland trip in Africa. Knowing this, we departed to the field completely relying on God. Relying on anything less would be a guaranteed letdown – or disaster. This became more evident as the trip went on.

Our long journey, with heavily loaded vehicle and trailer, began with a beautiful highway of clearly marked tarred roads with signs. This is wonderful, as the roads only get worse from here. This trip was rushed and we were aiming to get to Sudan as soon as possible in order to re-supply the mission base and to meet up with Peter who was to arrive by air in a couple of weeks. We did our best to make good time. The first two days of the trip, we drove as much as possible and slept maybe a couple of hours alongside the road. Upon arriving in Pretoria, we had to have our vehicle repaired.

After two days we were back on the road pushing to the Zimbabwe border before it closed. We made it just in time around 22:00 at night and surprisingly we passed through smoothly without any hassles from corrupt officials. Initially we didn't intend on going through Zimbabwe because there are often shortages of fuel as well as the political instability and violence. Zimbabwe has just recently declared itself a communist state and there have been a lot of problems with government sponsored "war veterans" confiscating farmland and invading factories, businesses and even schools. Nevertheless, we had some missionary friends who are living there that needed us to drop off some literature for them en route. It only took us a day to travel through Zimbabwe since the roads weren't bad and we successfully delivered the literature without any problems. The only danger we had was that we almost hit some cattle and kudu along the road while travelling through the night.

When crossing into Zambia, we drove for the day to eastern Zambia and arrived at Frontline's mission base in the evening. We were glad to see our friends, drop off literature and see the progress that they've made with their new Bible College there. The next morning we continued along a road riddled with potholes to the Malawi border. Crossing the Malawi border was a pleasure. The customs official was a Christian and was very friendly! Malawi is a beautiful country and very pleasant to travel through. Unfortunately, we travelled at night and couldn't enjoy much of its beauty.

The next morning we crossed into Tanzania. I was again grateful for not running into problems with border officials. They at times can be troublesome. Often they will cause delays or use various methods to extract a bribe from you. But not this time. Tanzania is also a beautiful country, which takes about two days to drive through. The road dangers are not to be underestimated though. Sometimes you find vehicles broken down in the middle of the road while coming around a bend – leaving little time to move out of the way. The only warning you get is that they sometimes leave branches in the road, which is a road hazard in itself! On a number of other occasions we have come within inches of head-on collisions from buses or heavy trucks trying to pass one another on bends and other low visibility places. Thank you for praying for our protection on the road.

On Sunday, we enjoyed some much needed rest in a decent *"hotel"* in Northern Tanzania. We expected to cross into Kenya and be in Nairobi the next morning, but it didn't happen. Before we got to the border we were stopped at one of the numerous roadblocks and harassed by a corrupt police officer about the insurance on our trailer. After about an hour of wasting our time we paid him a \$25 fine for which he gave us a receipt in local currency. Later when we worked out the currency conversion on the receipt we found that the officer got away with a good cut. This guy was shrewd.

That afternoon we made it through the border OK and finally got to Nairobi. We often call it *"Nai-robbery"* because of its many thieves. After a day and a half of organising things for the rest of our trip we were back on the road. Though the journey to Nairobi is already 5000 kilometres (3100 miles), it feels like just the beginning. This is because after Nairobi, the roads get progressively worse, along with even more problems.

Much like the Zimbabwe border, we arrived at the Ugandan border just before it closed. But this time we couldn't get through. The Ugandan customs official was suspicious of us arriving so late and insisted that we return in the morning. So that night we slept in the vehicle like usual. When morning came our battle with the customs official only started. He wouldn't allow us to cross without the proper transit documents for the Gospel literature and relief supplies that we were carrying. To make a long story short, it took us 10 hours, \$200 in taxes, along with a big headache to finally get across the border. But praise God we got through. We could have been stuck there for up to a week and it could have cost us a lot more if things didn't work out the way they did.

The Ugandan roads are also riddled with potholes and when we got to northern Uganda they turned into dirt and mud tracks. Because of this we had to continually stop and fix this or tighten that. Along the way there were a number of big trucks that were stuck in the mud.

When we tried to manoeuvre our way around them, we also got stuck in the mud. This happened on two occasions. The first time wasn't so bad and another vehicle could pull us out within half an hour. The second time we didn't just get stuck. Hansie, my teammate, literally buried our vehicle in the mud. I examined the situation and thought the best thing to do was to place a tombstone on the hood and walk home! I was hot and frustrated. It was easily 40°C (104°F) or more and the only thing I could do was start digging. By God's grace, there were other people around that helped dig and push us out. The road was so bad that it took us a day to travel what used to take maybe 2 or 3 hours. This wasn't the end of it. As the sun was setting, the axle of our trailer completely broke off. There wasn't much we could do. Hansie drove to the nearest town to organise a truck to come fetch the trailer in the morning and take it to someone with welding equipment. I waited with the trailer until he returned. It's not safe to wait next to a trailer full of valuable items in the dark in the middle of the bush in Africa, but there wasn't much I could do. When Hansie returned he said he organised the truck, but when morning came, and the truck still didn't arrive, Hansie explained to me that the man must have been too drunk to remember. Since that didn't work out, we then packed everything from the trailer into and onto the truck. This was after we had to clean everything off because some of our bags of flour and sugar had burst! The vehicle was very overloaded once we got everything from the trailer loaded. We were really short on time now and had to press on. At the next major town near the Sudan border, we found a decent place to stay and get some rest.

Morning came and we continued safely and without hindrance across the Sudan border. By evening we made it to Yei, one of the major villages. We wanted to continue travelling into the night, but were strongly warned by the local people not to. They said the roads were really bad and that there had been some shooting taking place down the road we were to travel on. A week previously there was a journalist in the area that was robbed at gunpoint along the road. We prayed about it and then pressed on anyway. Before we even got out of the vicinity of the village we got stuck in the mud again. We tried to use the winch to pull us out but by now the winch was burnt out and completely useless. The only thing I could do was to walk back to town and get someone to come and pull us out. We thought it best then to stay overnight in the village.

We continued the next day and within a few hours we were stuck again. We prayed, and within a few minutes another vehicle passed by and pulled us out. When night had come, we did our best to see how far we could progress. At one point, the road became like a swamp and we thought it best to call it a night and sleep in the car.

Sleeping in the car isn't too difficult. After driving between 14 and 20 hours a day you simply put your head on the back of your seat and close your eyes. Occasionally you might wake up to smack something that's crawling on your face and your legs usually go numb, but other than that it's quite comfortable. The only uncomfortable part is that your clothes start bonding to you in ways you didn't know were possible.

When it was light we could get a better assessment of the road. It was worse than we thought. The only way through was to start fixing the road! After a couple of hours work we attempted to get through and managed to get stuck again. After some time someone came to assist us out and we continued. It wasn't very long, however, before we managed to get stuck again. The water in the hole we were in was so high that it began to seep in at the doors. As quickly as possible we dug out the sides of the hole to drain the water to keep it from damaging our supplies. After some time a Dinka man named Phillip came by on his bicycle and I made an effort to cycle with him to get help but someone had already pulled Hansie out and he picked me up after about 5 miles.

The last stretch was difficult but we finally arrived. All in all we had travelled in 18 days over 7200 kilometres (4500 miles) through seven borders and 30+ roadblocks. We saw over 20 vehicle accidents and breakdowns along the way. We had to stop to make repairs on our own vehicle over 10 times. We got stuck in the mud 6 times and slept in the vehicle 8 nights.

By God's providence we arrived only 2 hours after Peter's flight. But what we arrived to was another story. The footbridge that crosses the Yei River had been seriously damaged because the flooded water level was higher than I've ever seen it. This bridge is the only way to access the airstrip and the hospital. This leaves us without any medical support as well as complicating any air evacuation if need be.

The only thing left of its largest section was one of the cables that were used as a handrail. We improvised a way to cross using a pulley and harness attachment. Getting people and bags across upon Peter's arrival wasn't too difficult even though some of the work had to be carried out in the dark across a raging river.

Getting the remaining materials the next day was next to impossible. The water had risen since the previous day and the bridge had been damaged even more. It was extremely unstable and

looked like it could break at any minute. I was given the task of crossing the cable using our attachment and then balancing on what seemed like a tight rope to go to the other side and fetch six boxes of Bibles and Christian school textbooks. Never have I been given a task where I was so aware that my life was in danger.

Upon crossing the cable I found that my rear end would hit the water in the middle of the crossing. Though I was fatigued from pulling myself across I arrived at the first pillar safely only to feel it moving because of its instability. That was the easy part. The difficult part was crossing the long broken areas without the aid of a harness or anything. Somehow I managed to get across, but I thought that it would be impossible for me now to go back across while carrying the boxes. I was afraid. I knew that it would be easy for me to lose my balance while carrying the boxes and be pulled into the river. I really had to trust that this is what the Lord wanted me to do and leave my safety in His hands alone. The Lord had given me a sense of mental control and peace that I couldn't understand. I remember that as I'd brought the boxes as far as the pillar and I looked out to see the great torrent of waters passing by me, my body was trembling but my mind was clear. Eventually, by some miracle, I'd gotten myself as well as the boxes of literature across the river. Once I was on safe ground some of the cables began to make noises and give way. Within a few hours, two of the pillars I was standing on were completely washed away, and the adjoining cables and slats were damaged to where you could not cross. I've since learned of several people drowned while attempting to cross the Yei River at the same spot.

I have a lot to thank God for in getting me here safely and providing for me in so many ways. I can also thank God for the many challenges and trials that I've faced, knowing that it has really developed my character and I can be a better servant for God because of it.

At the same time I know that my challenges have not ended but will take on a new form. Right now, I'm a teacher at the Christian Liberty High School here in South Sudan. I'm also working with the local children doing child evangelism as well as seeking to train others as child evangelists. Many of my challenges will be with building relationships and communicating effectively. Much of this will be done on my own as Hansie is travelling around doing film evangelism and working on much of the renovations of the mission base. This is a lot of responsibility and I really need prayer that God will sustain me in this. God has been faithful and exceedingly gracious up to this point and I appreciate all of your prayers on my behalf.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you ..." Isaiah 43:2

Your brother in Christ,

Timothy
Field Worker, Frontline Fellowship

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