

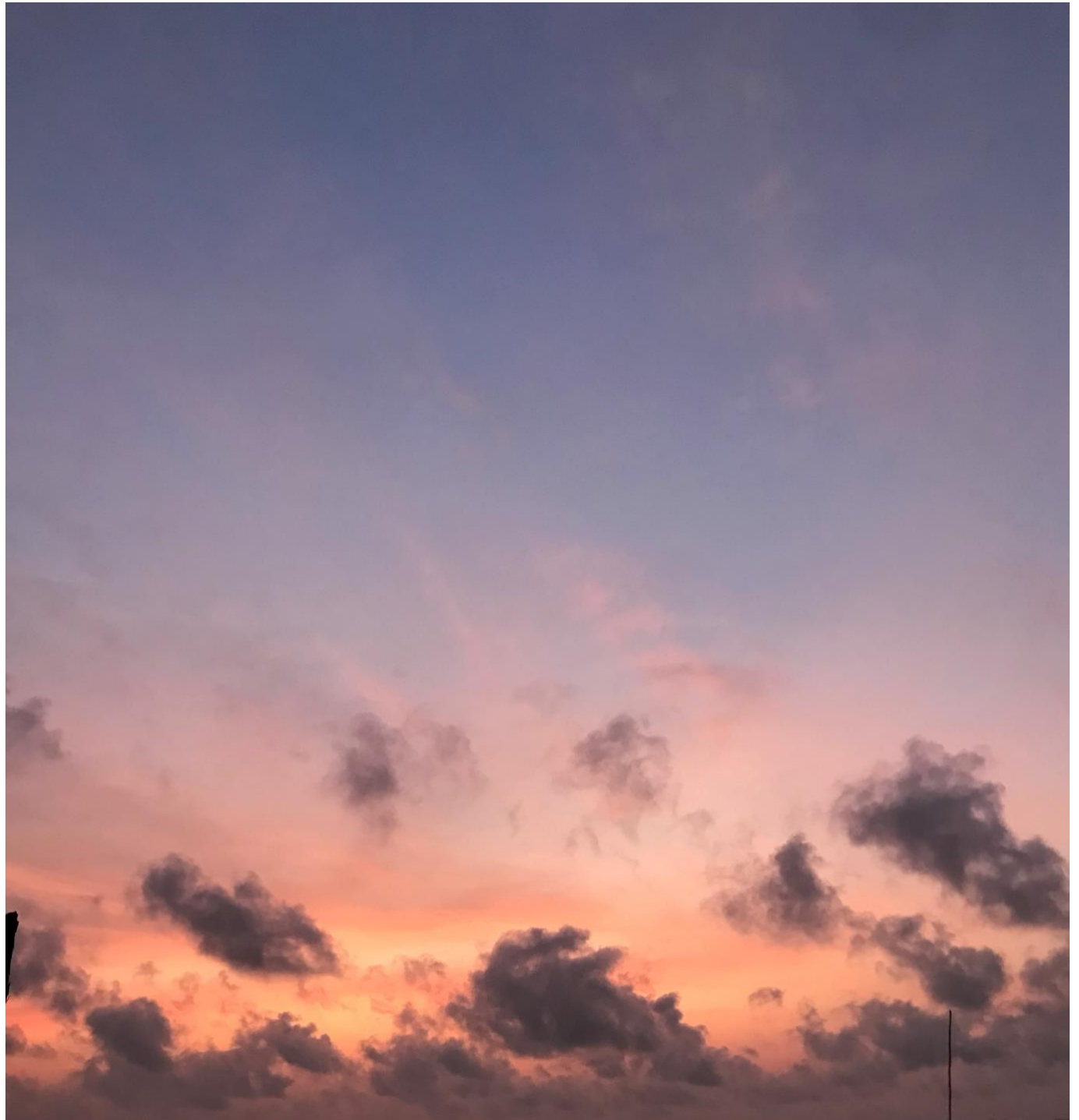
West Africa Bikepacking



The stories and photos that follow tell some of the adventures I had during my bike ride in West Africa. The trip was from September 27th to December 11th, 2022, during which I covered 2,000 miles of dirt, mud and tarmac. This report also includes some of the planning and preparation that went into the ride. In addition to fulfilling the requirements of the exploration board and City and Guilds trust who helped fund the ride, I hope that this report inspires others to explore this part of the world for themselves.

This trip would not have happened without the financial support and advice of the Imperial College Exploration Board. Thank you to Phil Power, Lorraine Craig, and the rest of the team for giving feedback on my plans, lending equipment, and having patience with receiving this report. Thanks also to City and Guilds for financially supporting the trip.

Most importantly, thanks mum and dad for supporting me and always being there to help with last minute preparations. Thanks mum for driving me round Bury and Cambridge in the weeks before I left, driving me to the airport, and for supporting me on all of my travels and adventures.



Foreword

It's taken a long time for me to finish writing this report. It doesn't feel as simple as just writing about what I did. So much of the trip was about the connection I made with people, places, and myself. What I have eventually written in no way does justice to the experience but it's as close as I can get.

There are a lot of privileges associated with being born and raised in England, and the fact that I was even able to go on this adventure is one of them. Despite having some understanding of past and current relations between West Africa and Europe before I left, I saw completely new perspectives during my time there. While it would be simpler for me to only write about cycling, being hot and eating new foods, so many of the interactions I had were influenced by this history.

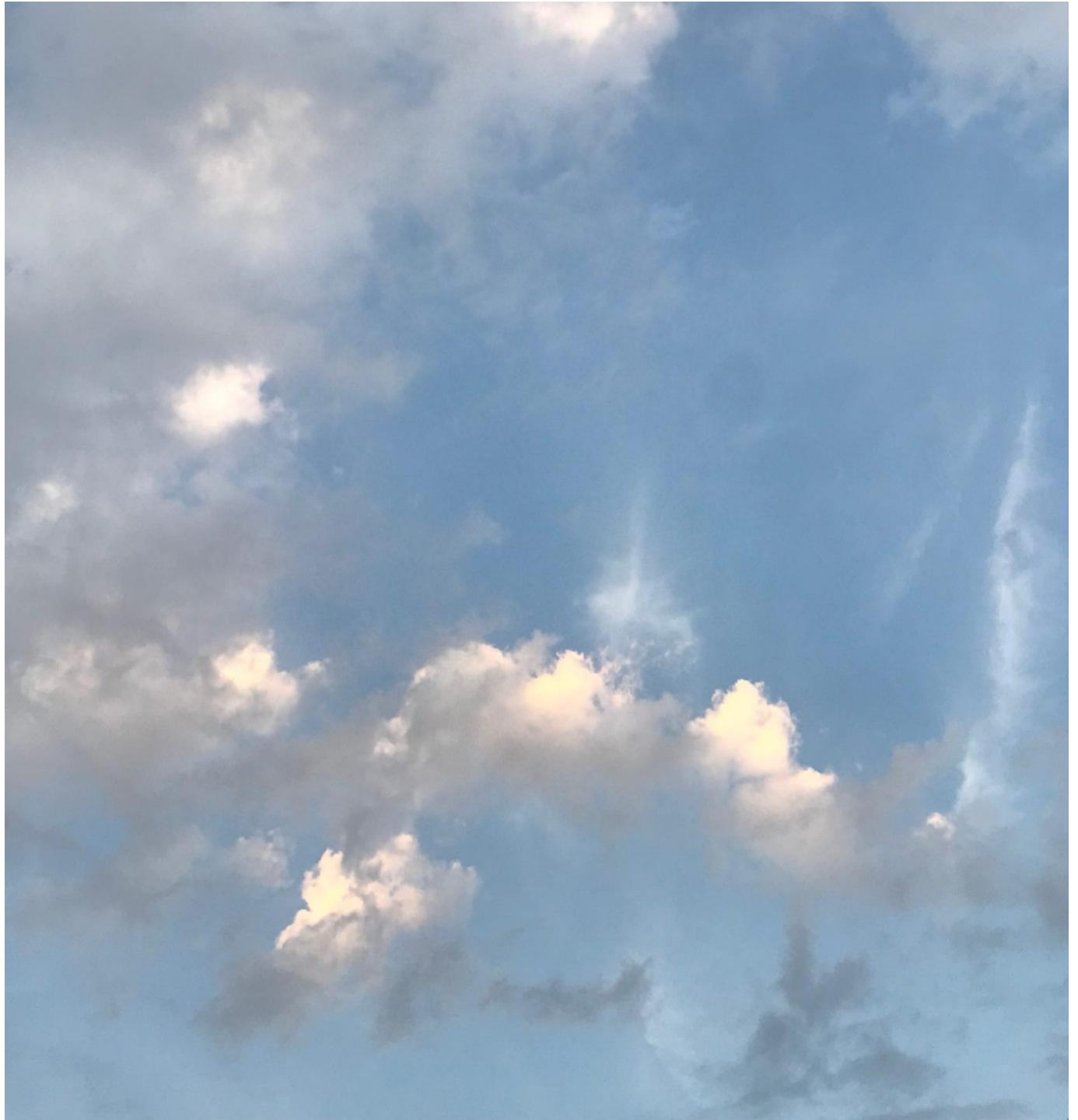
Throughout the report I have tried to portray the difficulties I experienced and some of the things I was thinking about. There are some books below which may help give a better understanding (and are all very good reads!).

Homegoing **Yaa Gyasi**

Things Fall apart **Chinua Achebe**

Half of a Yellow Sun **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

How Europe Underdeveloped Africa **Walter Rodney**



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Previous trips

After getting my first road bike and gradually increasing the length of my rides I realised that I could cycle anywhere and cover any distance I wanted. Possibly in an attempt to test this, my brother and I planned a route and cycled from Lands' End to John O'Groats (with mum driving the support car). The following year I cycled around Iceland, this time by myself carrying my tent, sleeping bag and stove on the bike. I have also been on several solo backpacking trips in Scotland and on Dartmoor.

When I first started riding, I could never have dreamed of planning or completing a bike trip outside of the UK but the gradual increase from short rides to longer, multiday rides, further from home coupled with a love of being outdoors gave me the confidence to look for bigger challenges.



Administration and Logistics

Before leaving I only needed to organise flights, vaccinations and accommodation for the first few nights in Sierra Leone. I got all of my visas either at the border or in embassies along the way.

Flights

London to Freetown	£629.87
Lagos to London	
Flight Change (Lagos/ Cotonou)	£200

Visas

Sierra Leone – Visa on Arrival (VOA)
Liberia – Embassy in Freetown
Cote d’Ivoire – Embassy in Monrovia
Ghana – Embassy in Monrovia
Togo – VOA
Benin – e-visa
Nigeria – Visa denies

Funding and support

Exploration Board:

Funding: £850 + £100 first aid + £200

Borrowed equipment: Katadyn water filter, portable solar panel, Primus stove, 2x alu pans

Old Centralian’s Trust: £750

Communication

I purchased a sim card in each country. These were cheap and relatively easy to get at markets and in towns. Coverage was generally good with at most a couple of days offline.

Medical Arrangements

Main hospitals were few and far between. I carried a good first aid kit and have received first aid training. Thankfully throughout the trip there was no need for medical attention.

Summary of Expenditure

As everything was paid in cash, it is difficult to report how much was spent each day and on what.

The main costs aside from visas and flights were food and accommodation in towns and cities. There some small costs for taxis within cities when I stayed for multiple days.

Food typically cost less than £2 for a large meal of rice, fufu, kenke, pasta with meat. Fruit and other snacks from the stalls on the side of the road were around 20 pence. Many times when I stayed with people I was fed with no expectation or acceptance of payment.

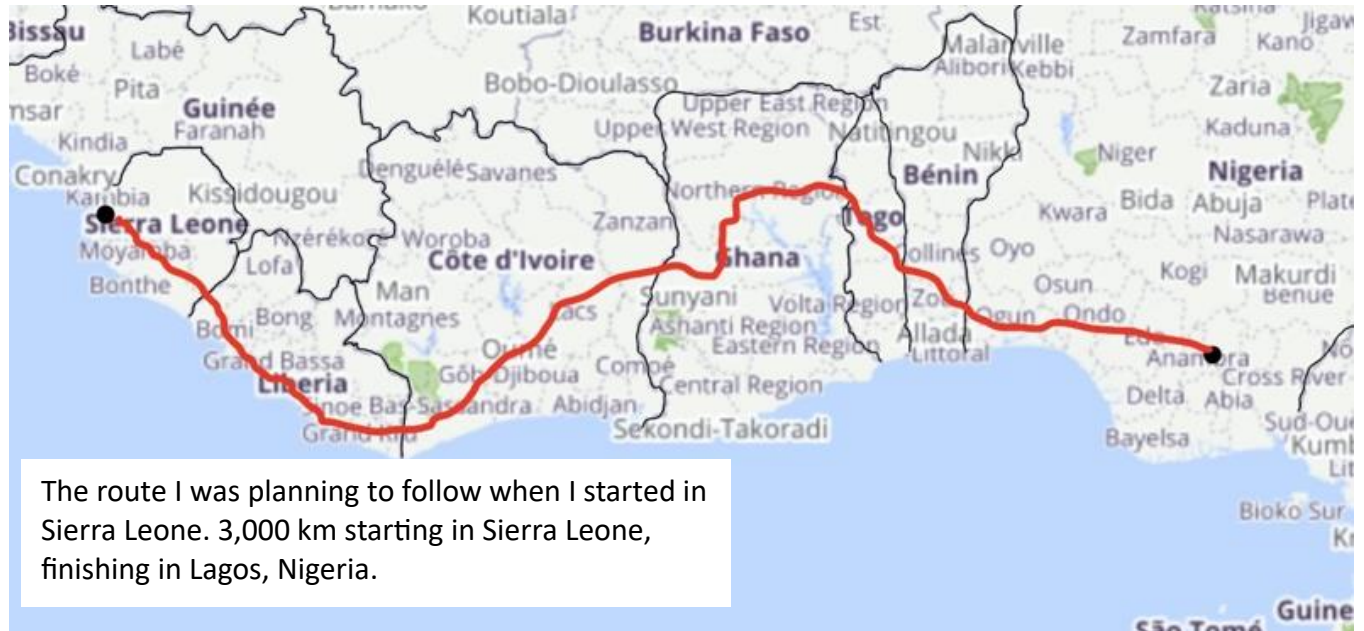
As with trips I had organised before, planning included route, gear, food, and budget. In addition, to secure the funding I needed aims, a risk assessment, and an emergency action plan (see appendix)

The aims in my original plan were:

1. Cycle from Sierra Leone to Nigeria covering a distance of 3000 km.
2. Report experiences during the expedition to inspire other travellers.
3. Develop a greater personal understanding of countries that I had only previously seen through western media.

These aims were motivated by my interest in expanding my experiences and the people I interact with and to build my own understanding of countries I had mostly only learned about from the Western view/ education.

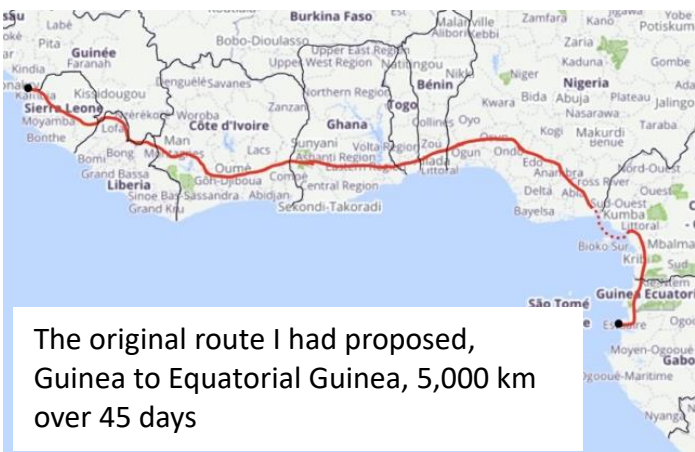
During the planning I proposed multiple routes and time frames. Under the guidance of the Exploration Board, I settled on a challenging but realistic plan.



The route I was planning to follow when I started in Sierra Leone. 3,000 km starting in Sierra Leone, finishing in Lagos, Nigeria.



My actual route covered in 2.5 months (45 cycling days). Starting in Sierra Leone, finishing in Cotonou, Benin.



The original route I had proposed, Guinea to Equatorial Guinea, 5,000 km over 45 days

Sierra Leone

After a fourteen-hour journey, I landed at Lungi Airport, Sierra Leone. I stepped off the plane into the humid, tropical air and smiled. I bought my visa, waited to get my passport stamped, collected my boxes, waited with everyone else tutting and complaining about a new security protocol where everyone's bags had to be scanned, paid the new airport security tax, fended off airport security who claimed I had to pay extra for my bike, went back to find my backpack that I had forgotten by the scanner and followed a new friend I had picked up as he showed me to the counter where I could buy the ferry ticket. From here my boxes were taken by a group of guys and I was waved to a minibus.

I sat down in a spare seat, tired from two days of very little sleep but glad to have made it into the country. The minibus bumped along small dark roads for fifteen minutes before arriving at the ferry. Ten minutes later, another van arrived with my bike box and various other bags and boxes belonging to other passengers. We walked along the jetty and onto the boat that would take us across to Freetown. There were only enough lifejackets for half the passengers and several people were sick, but the forty-five-minute journey went quickly, and we were soon docked at the port in Freetown.

Everyone else on the boat seemed to have a car waiting for them (something which I didn't plan for). Thankfully there were a couple of taxis

nearby and with help from one of the boat hands, the bike was in and we were driving to the hotel I had booked a couple of days before. For dinner I had my first taste of West African food – *chicken stew with plenty rice*. After eating I put my tent up on the bed (there was no mosquito net) and slept.



Freetown

For my first few days in Freetown, I had a to-do list to work through. After a breakfast of rice and sauce in the hotel I took the bike out of the box, reattached the handlebars, pedals and wheels and pumped up the tyres. I needed to go to the Liberian embassy for my visa and I wanted to save money by cycling instead of getting a motorbike taxi; what I hadn't factored in was the very big, very steep hill between me and the embassy, the 26°C heat and the 90% humidity. The woman in the embassy took one look at me dripping on the floor, laughed and turned on the AC. I gave her my passport and eighty USD, filled in the form and was told to come back in seven days to collect my visa. The rest of that day was spent exploring the roads around the hotel, swimming in the sea, buying a local sim card and trying lots of different foods.

I had arrived in the last month of rainy season so every afternoon would have one or two hours of warm, heavy rain followed by bright sunshine. For lunch I had rice with fish stew and for dinner I had rice with beef and cassava leaf stew.

Almost everything in Freetown, and everywhere else I travelled in West Africa, was paid for in cash. I needed to save most of my USD for visas and the ATMs were few and far between so roughly every five days I had to try and get money out of an ATM. This would often require trying multiple machines and sometimes waiting several hours while they refilled the ATM.



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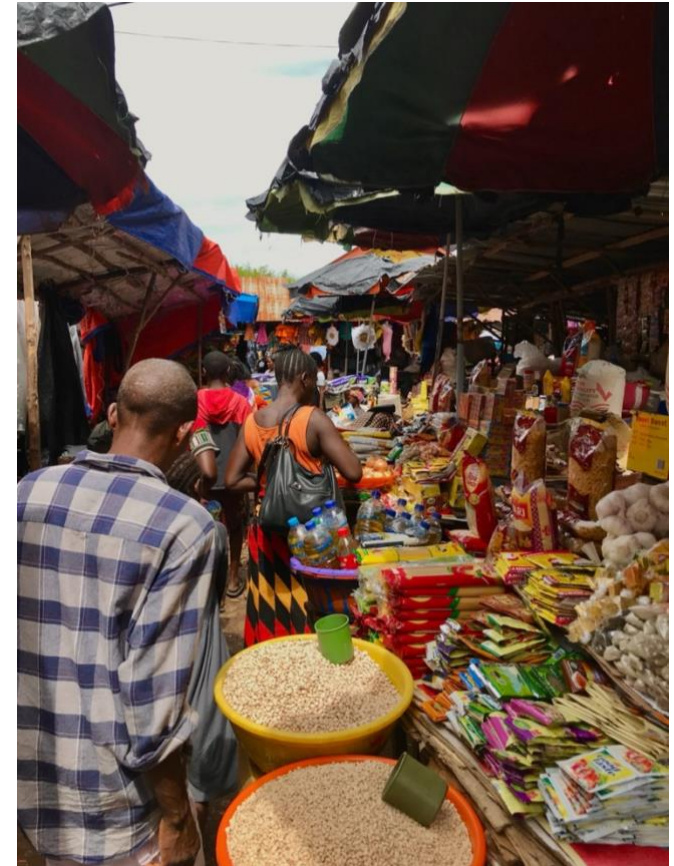
The next day I went for a longer ride to test out the bike and make sure everything was working and comfortable. It was too late to actually change much but at least I would have an idea how the next few months would feel. The 20 km route was on tarmac roads with a decent number of large potholes and continuous rolling hills, the bike felt good, and I was comfortable, no rattles, squeaks, twinges or aches.

As I was walking down the path to the beach someone called me from inside an empty house. He asked where I was from and why I was in Sierra Leone, told me a bit about himself and then as I was leaving, he told me I needed to pay a guy standing next to the road before I could get to the beach. I wasn't sure I believed him but they both said I needed to pay and that it was a private beach. After I gave him a few Leones I walked down to the beach. A little further down another guy came up to me and told me it was a private beach and I needed to pay. This was an interaction that would be repeated throughout the trip on beaches, boat crossings, road blocks and many other places. People saw I wasn't from there and so assumed I had money and would happily part with it without asking questions. I respected the hustle and although it was sometimes tiring it didn't annoy me. Most times when I talked to the person about what I was doing the charge would disappear.

After a few hours reading and walking next to the sea I cycled back to a beach near the hotel. While I was sitting reading Almamy came and sat down next to me. He introduced himself and we talked for a while. When I got up to leave he asked if he could ride my bike, promising he was good at cycling and wouldn't crash.. to be fair to him I didn't warn him how sharp the brakes were. Luckily, he wasn't injured at all and the only damage to the bike was a bent saddle, how hard can that be to replace? That was the first and last time I let anyone ride my bike during the trip.

3

The main task of the day was to get a bag to hold my water bottle on the handlebars of the bike. I also wanted to walk around the main market in Freetown.

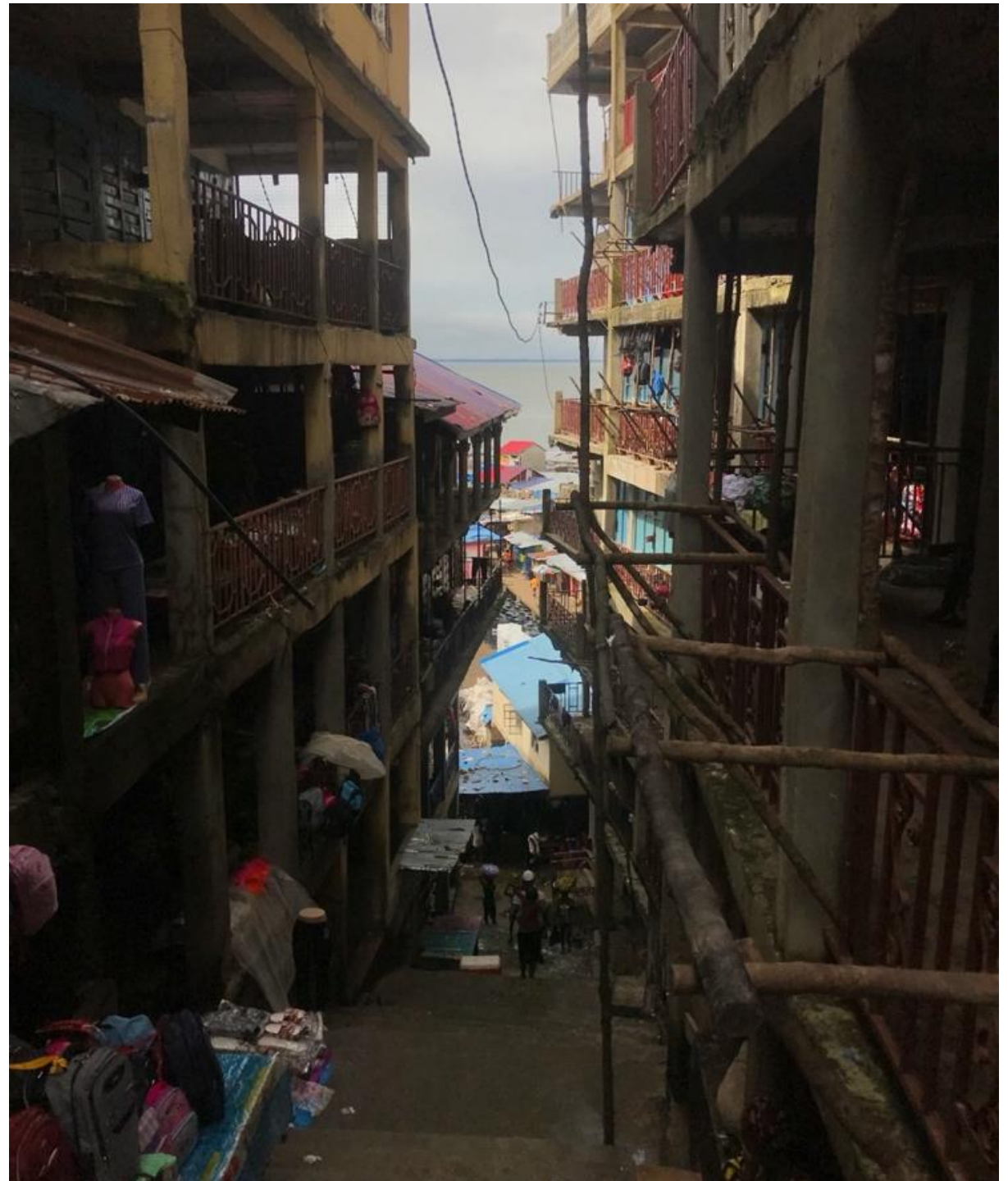


Not wanting to leave my bike locked up I opted to leave it in my room and take a *moto* or *okada* (motor bike taxi) from outside the hotel. I had checked the normal price at the hotel lobby and negotiated with the driver before climbing on the back.

After twenty minutes of swerving around cars, bikes, and people he dropped me off at the market. The first stop was a large warehouse filled with rolls of material where I picked up some fabric. I then wandered around the market, walking down any alley that looked interesting, letting myself get swept up and lost in the colours, smells, and life of the market.

After a while I came across a few stalls with people sitting behind sewing machines and colourful bags, clothes and fabrics hanging everywhere. One of the guys nodded to a seat and I sat and watched while he finished the bag he was working on. When he was done, he looked up and asked what I needed. I showed him the bottle, the fabric and where I wanted the straps and the pieces of Velcro I had brought from home. Twenty minutes later I was happily inspecting the completed bag. I paid and continued exploring the market.

Walking down a steep set of stairs I came out onto a clear area bordered on one side by the sea and on the other by a group of corrugated iron huts. A few fishing boats were pulled up on a bank and a group of boys were kicking a football. The whole area of land was made up entirely of rubbish, presumably an old tip or landfill. One of the boys ran up to me and asked for one of the bags of water I was holding.







I took a *moto* (motorbike taxi) back to the hotel and spent a couple of hours working on the bike - attaching bottle cages to the forks and trying (in vain) to seat the tyres properly on the rims. This was conveniently timed with the afternoon rain, after which I went down to meet Almamy at the nearby beach and joined the daily football games on the sand. Safe to say I was the worst player there and retired after a couple of games with a badly bruised toe.

My remaining days in Freetown were spent with Almamy, my friend and tour guide. He took me to the place where he lived with his sisters and Auntie who cooked the fish we had bought from two boys on the beach. We went to his church together where I was quickly spotted as a new face and asked to stand and introduce myself. After the service we took a *moto* across town to the house of the pastor (his uncle) where I was given *casava leaf and plenty rice*. He took me on a tour of Freetown, the market, council buildings, police station, and museum. It was Independence Day the same day so we weaved through the packed streets to see the boys and girls of the local schools parading, playing drums and carrying flags.

While individual ethnic groups have their own language the most widely spoken language in Sierra Leone is Creole, a form of pidgin English – a legacy of colonial British rule in the country. After a few days there I could understand most things when spoken slowly but couldn't say much more than greetings.

8

After a week in Freetown, today was the day I would begin. I woke, took down my tent and packed my bags for the first time. After a careful sweep I said goodbye to the air-conditioning, put my bike outside the room and went upstairs for breakfast. Having learnt from the first day I left the bike in the hotel and took a *moto* up the hill to the Liberian embassy. The guard smiled and nodded me through the gate. After checking my passport and the newly acquired Liberian visa I thanked the clerk and went back out to the street.

By now, I knew the main roads so opted to walk to Almamy's, stopping to buy some roasted casava, the last items on my list – bar soap and washing powder, and some plantain for Auntie Efe. Winding through the narrow streets, ducking under rusty tin roofs, avoiding chickens tied to strings, saying “good morning” and “*how di body*” to aunties and uncles, I came to a building with a woman sitting outside preparing food. I handed her the bag of plantain and she told me Almamy had left earlier. I sat on the wooden bench under the shade of the overhung roof and read my book while I waited for him to return. It was early afternoon when I got back to the hotel. I changed into cycling shorts, packed the last few bits into my bags and set off.

I had hoped to make it well out of Freetown but hadn't realised how long it would take to get through the traffic, so I was just reaching the outskirts of the city as the sun started to go

down. I didn't fancy riding in the dark, especially on the first day, so I found a small motel and paid for a single room with a fan. I put my tent up on the floor and inflated my mattress before heading out for food.

When I asked someone in the motel where I could eat, I was told the same thing I had been told at the last hotel. It's not safe for me to go out at night, they would go and buy the food for me. I hadn't felt unsafe at any point so refused the offer and went in the direction they pointed. It was dark but the streets were busy with people sitting out and kids running around. I found an auntie selling rice and stew at a stall, ate and headed back to the motel.

9

After a very warm night, I packed my tent, filled up my bottles, changed, and carried everything downstairs and out the gate. The first full day of cycling was ahead of me, and I was excited to get out of Freetown.

I started on small side streets that became larger roads choked by traffic. I passed gas stations and the inter town bus stations. As the size of the road grew, the number of people, houses and cars decreased until I was on a dual carriageway. After passing a large toll gate I stopped at a roadside stall for some food and shade. A few kilometres later I reached my turning. A wide, bright orange dirt road stretched away into the distance. I stopped and checked the map, it was the right road. This was it, the start of the

adventure, my first taste of the dirt roads I had seen so many pictures of. I pedalled on, a huge smile on my face, it felt like all the planning had been for this moment. I was finally at the unknown and setting off into it.

In the following hours I passed through several villages and towns, separated by rainforest, tall palm trees and grasses. The whole way the orange gravel stretched before me, disappearing up and over a hill, round a tree covered bend, splitting into several small paths between huts and then flowing together again. The weather was hot and the hills were steep but it was exactly what I had come for.

The air had started to thicken and the dark clouds I had been cycling towards were suddenly overhead. With everything safely away in waterproof bags I kept cycling, the heavy waterdrops warm and cool against my skin.

Although I was enjoying the rain and it was a pleasant change from the sun, it made it difficult to see so I stopped in Rotifunk and waited under the overhanging roof of a building. Every place I had been through people watched me, they would often call out, asking me to stop or simply greeting me. As I waited, a couple of kids ran over and sat a few metres away watching me. A man on his way to the mosque for afternoon prayer stopped and talked for a while. When we said goodbye, the rain was stopping, I checked the map, waved to the kids who were still watching, and continued on my way.



Before long I decided it was time to find somewhere to sleep. This would be my first time asking and I wanted to have enough daylight to try multiple places. I came into Mofarnah town and stopped in front of a hut with a man sitting outside. After introducing myself and explaining what I was doing I asked if it would be okay for me to sleep there. He told me to get some money and come with him to see the chief. I was unsure of how much money was needed. After asking, he looked at the money I had in my wallet, took out a couple of Leones and then led me to another building along the road.

Mohamed was sitting outside talking to a few other people, he was younger than I expected a chief to look. He pulled a t shirt over his white vest as we walked up, and the man I was with repeated what I had said to him and passed the money across. Mohamed welcomed me and asked what my mission was and how long I would stay. I said I would leave in the morning and just needed some space to sleep outside. From here I was given a meal of casava *fufu* and stew made with small river fish and crabs and then shown where to wash. With no pumps, taps or wells, all the water for the village came from a nearby stream.

I took my bucket of water, cup and bar of soap into the shower – a privacy curtain of palm leaves with a floor made of small stones and scrubbed away the dust and sweat covering my body. After changing I was given another bucket of water to wash the clothes I had been wearing.

A group of boys fostered me for the evening, they spoke creole to each other and a couple of them spoke some English to me, enough to understand each other. As the sky turned orange, they showed me to the room where I would sleep and then all sat down on the floor. Notebooks came out and one of the boys stood up and started copying equations from a textbook onto the blackboard. A bit later one of them left and came back carrying large bowls. It was the same food I had eaten earlier, and we all sat around and ate out of the same bowl. Using your right hand, pinch off some of the fufu then dip it in the stew, spit out any bones, repeat. When you are full "I am okay".

After we ate, I showed them how to play hangman and we all took it in turns until it was time to sleep. All of them left apart from Alex with whom I would share the room. I inflated my airbed, untied the mosquito net and lay down.



10

Cockerels are the first sound of the day, swiftly followed by women bent at the hip sweeping the sun-baked ground between buildings, the rhythmic swishes clearing the leaves, footprints and play of the previous day. The sounds of the morning spread until everyone is up, fetching water, lighting stoves, and preparing food. Despite crossing rivers, borders and ethnic groups, mornings hardly changed across my whole journey, it was the first ritual of the day. It was comforting and familiar even in those first few days.

I spent the morning with the same group of boys. We walked up to the school, and they showed me around the classrooms and then played football until we stopped to eat a bowl of fried casava with pepper sauce. Wanting to set off before the sun was high, I packed up and started filling my bottles to leave. As I was saying goodbye Mohammed came up with a plastic bag, inside were unripe guava and cucumbers, a gift for me to take on my journey. I was surprised and delighted with the fruits and started tucking them into my already full bags. With contact details exchanged I set off on the same road I had come in on.

As I rolled out of the village, all the stress of planning the journey, the emotions of finally being here, and the overwhelming generosity I had just received all released and tears came pouring down my face.

Thirty minutes after leaving, I started going through all the things I might have left behind. Ah.. tent poles. Double check the bag, yep not there. I weighed up cycling back 10 km up and down the hills I had just covered and not having a tent for the next two months. I sighed and turned back. As I came into Mofarnah I could see the woman who had cooked my food last night coming out of the building I had slept in, waving the tent poles at me. Smiling she passed them to me. I said goodbye again and set off.

11 - 15

Over the following days in Sierra Leone, I settled into my new routine. The sounds of people and animals along with the colour of the sky and position of the sun became times of day and told me when to wake, pause for the rain and find somewhere to sleep. Setting off each morning, I knew which direction I was going in but not how far I would get or where I would eat or sleep.

As I passed through villages calls of *"how di body"*, *"how di morning"* greeted me, and children shouted and waved and ran alongside me on the road. I was often asked what my mission was or if I was a peace corps, my response was usually met with surprise or disbelief, often accompanied by a laugh.



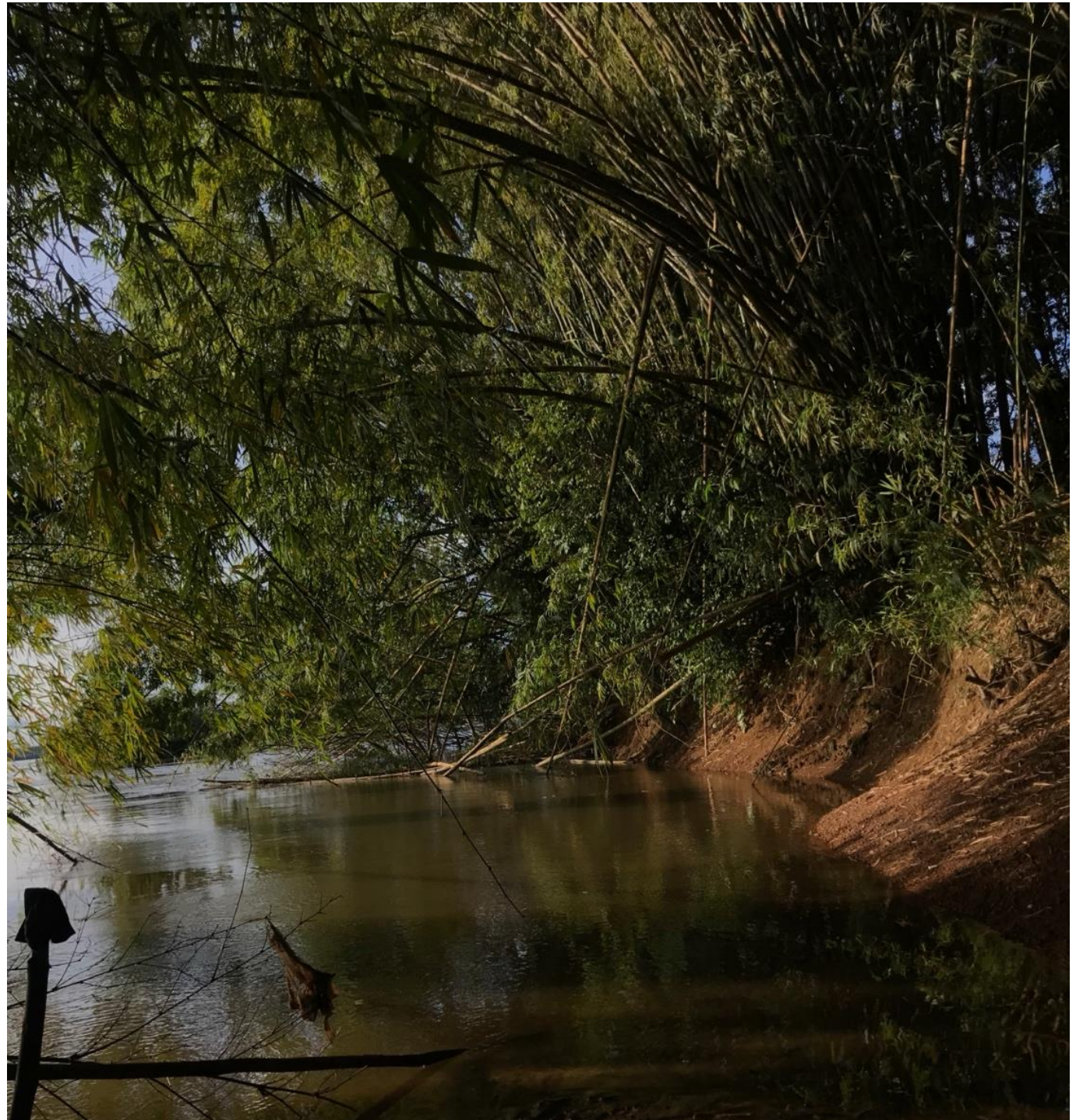


In total, I rode 75 km on tarmac and 312 km on dirt roads. The roads varied although most were in very poor condition making it difficult to average over 16 km per hour. Steep rolling hills meant that going uphill I was often in my lowest gear with the front wheel lifting and going downhill I was hard on the brakes because of the road condition. Often sections of the roads were covered by small streams that created sticky, sandy mud.

I had a range of river crossings; from the map it was hard to tell what I would find. In some places the dirt road would transition into a very new tarmacked road and bridge which would quickly turn back into dirt after the river. Shallow rivers and streams usually had a concrete ford, excellent places to clean mud off the bike and my legs and fill up water bottles. The more exciting bridges were just a couple of planks of wood reaching from one bank to the other. There was one bridge across a very wide and fast flowing river which ended ten metres short of the bank. To get across I had to remove all the bags from the bike and make several trips across, wading slowly across the thigh-high water carrying the bike and then bags over my head. For the wide rivers there would be wooden dugout canoes that would take me across for a small price, my bike balanced across the front.

The final river crossing in Sierra Leone would take me across the river Moa. On the map, I could see the road ended before the river and that there was another road and village on the other side. From this, I was pretty sure I could find a boat and someone who could paddle me across.

Just before the river I came into a small village and found some people working on a motorbike engine. I asked if there was a way to cross the river and I was told to sit in one of the chairs. A short while later two young men came up, we walked down to the river, and they paddled me across in a long dugout canoe.





Liberia

Opting for the shorter of the two routes, I turned onto a bumpy dirt road and after negotiating the price, crossed lake Piso in a canoe. As we landed on the beach there was a small group of Liberian Drug Enforcement agents checking bags who briefly looked me over before waving me on.

Robertsport is a small town in western Liberia. In Robertsport everything is fish. Catching fish, buying fish, selling fish, roasting fish, frying fish, smoking fish and cleaning fish. Delicious, but a piece of chicken or plantain is needed once in a while. One can get too familiar with fish!

While I was there, I saw one of the ways they caught fish. A canoe would go out and lay a net in a semicircle from the beach, two small teams would then work together for around thirty minutes to pull the net in from each end. After helping pull in two nets I can say it is exhausting work and sometimes the catch is very small.

Robertsport is also one of the best places in Liberia to surf. The surf school creates jobs for local kids and also gives scholarships to help with school fees. They have international competitions that attract surfers from across the country. Eli, one of last year's winners used his prize money to buy a canoe which allows him to fish and get a regular income. There is a massive shortage of jobs in Liberia, so it was amazing to see a movement that supports education and provides jobs for young people.





Down the coast from Robertsport is a shipwreck that has been there since 2016. Stories say that it's an abandoned illegal fishing boat, an oil tanker or that it was stolen by pirates. Although no one knows for sure where it comes from it was amazing to see and sits on a wild and empty beach an hour from any buildings

The ride from Robertsport to Monrovia was 110km along tarmac roads. With a few hours left it started to rain but I enjoyed the warm water on my skin, and it was getting dark soon, so I decided to carry on. I arrived just as the last light faded but the water had made deep painful wrinkles in my feet.

I stayed two nights at an Airbnb before moving into the compound belonging to Landis and Kent, a couple I had met in Robertsport. They were Canadian but ran a not-for-profit in Liberia and had several spare rooms. I ended up staying with them for six days while waiting for my visas for Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Erick and Erin both worked with the not-for-profit. Erick would cook for the other staff each evening and taught me several of his dishes.



To get from Monrovia to Côte D'Ivoire you can either take the *coal tar* road to Danane or travel 600km on dirt roads towards Harper. Liberia has notoriously bad roads, so I had planned to cross at Danane. However after reading a glowing report from @bas.idsinga_ who took the dirt road in 2019: "The many rain makes most of the roads nearly inaccessible. But hey, if you like real raw adventure, this might be the place to be," I stocked up with some second hand brake pads and a new saddle and left for adventure.

The roads I passed in the following eight days made Sierra Leone's roads look easy. For many of the days the whole day was spent on steep and long hills one after the other with no flat sections in between. In an effort to save brake pads and increase my average speed I stopped braking coming downhill, this also helped me a few metres up the other side and gave me a constant adrenaline rush. On one of the descents, I didn't see the big drop at the bottom and both wheels came off the ground.

Although Liberia was coming to the end of rainy season, sections of the road were mud pits. With the bicycle I paid the price of shoes full of mud, but I could always pass. In two places there were lines of trucks and cars which had been waiting over a week for the yellow machines to come and fix the roads.





One of the most memorable roads was the one up to Newtown. With dense jungle on both sides, it was not wide enough for two motorbikes to pass without stopping. Five minutes in and the rain broke, turning the road into a slippery river. I spent the following hour in my easiest gear, slipping and sliding up and down the hills.

Most days I would wash the bike two or three times. If I crossed a shallow ford or a bridge with easy access to the water, I would spend five minutes clearing off the worst of the mud.

On one occasion I had stopped next to a larger village and had just got off the bike when a man came up and said he would clean my bike for me. I said no but he kept asking and then started helping. I explained that I didn't have much money to spare but he said it was okay. After I finished with the bike, I set off again.

A few minutes later, at a junction, I reached for my phone to check the map, but it was gone. Racing back to the bridge I asked around for the man and one of them pointed out into the bush. Minutes later he came back denying any knowledge of my phone. I told him I knew he had it and offered to give him money. Eventually, as a crowd grew around us, he went back into the bush and returned with a bundle of clothes, unwrapping them to reveal my phone. He asked for \$100 dollars but after talking and some help from onlookers I managed to leave with my phone after giving him the money I had put in my wallet for that day's lunch.

One night when I was camping in a village, I was woken by something biting me. Looking outside I could see the ground moving, a thick black mat of ants surrounded my tent. Titus, whose house I was sleeping next to, heard me moving and came out to help move the tent. A circle of petrol and motor oil around the tent prevented any more visitors.



These were the hardest eight days cycling I have ever done but I enjoyed every second of it. I felt as though I was living all the rainforest, jungle, explorer adventures that I dreamed of as a child.





Harper was my destination as I cycled through Liberia, it had been recommended for the architecture and 'end of the world feel'. To me it felt like a city after the tiny villages I had travelled through to get there.

In larger towns and cities, it is more difficult to find places to sleep as there is often nowhere to camp and hotels are expensive. In Harper I went to Waves for Change, a charity I had heard of from Landis in Monrovia. I asked if I could sleep in one of their buildings but was quickly whisked away to sleep in the house of the security guard.

I was immediately welcomed into the family and after being introduced to his wife, the twins Davie and Dave, Security the dog and the other family who lived there, I was fed large amount of rice and palm butter soup (fish, crab, and small sea snails that you suck out of the shell). The following day, Ricardia, the auntie who owns the compound, showed me around the town and market. This included several stops to see friends, brothers, and sisters where I was introduced as her stranger and often offered food.

As I hadn't had a day off cycling in eight days, I asked to sleep there another night. The next morning, rested and very well-fed, I left my new family and set off for Côte d'Ivoire with a bag of freshly fried plantain and fish safely stored in my bag.





Cote d'Ivoire

The Cavalla River marks the border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. As always, I asked several people how much the boat costs and was told prices between 300 and 500 CFA. When I arrived and asked the ferryman, he told me 1,000 for me and 1,000 for the bike. Ten minutes later I was getting on the boat having paid a total of 700 CFA. On the two-minute journey the man driving the boat told me I needed to pay him and the person I had paid before was nothing to do with the boats. I called his bluff, laughed, and held out my hand, he shook it and laughed back.

Stepping off the boat marked goodbye to Liberia and bonjour to Côte d'Ivoire. Hearing everyone speak French was a stark reminder of West Africa's colonial history, which had been easier to ignore in English-speaking Sierra Leone and Liberia.

A month of Duolingo was apparently not enough to learn French so the next ten days were spent laughing and being laughed at a lot and practising my miming skills. If you had told twelve year old me that one day I'd be in a forest in Côte d'Ivoire with no Google translate, asking someone if I can sleep by their hut I might have paid more attention in French class... but then again, I probably wouldn't have.

While it creates jobs for people in the area it was sad to see the huge palm, plantain, cocoa and rubber plantations that have replaced the rainforest and stretch over the horizon. The sterile plantations and long stretches of rough, half-finished roads (my least favourite on the trip) covered me in dust and made cycling very difficult.

Thankfully coconuts, pineapple and mango make everything better and there were plenty being sold along the road!



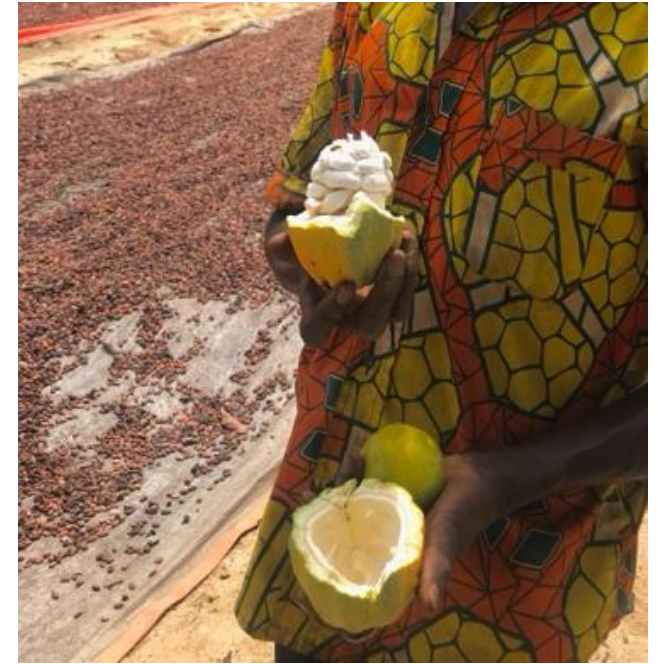
In Cote d'Ivoire the first place where I asked to sleep was a small village of two or three families. It took over half an hour, the help of a woman who spoke English and me emptying out all my bags before I was trusted and allowed to sleep there. After the woman left, I mimed to get

some water to wash and use the toilet and later was given rice and fish. The children who weren't busy playing with the fire were very entertained by all the different whistles and noises I could make.



To make rubber, latex is collected from rubber trees in small cups, the dried latex is then carried to weighing stations by three-wheeled motorbikes where it is loaded onto huge lorries and taken to factories. The latex smells like a mix of burning rubber, armpits and old football boots. Not good.

Valentin showed me how the white pulpy cacao seeds are fermented and dried so that they can be made into chocolate. Despite chocolate being a billion-dollar industry, cacao farmers are not fairly paid and see very little of the profit.





After a tiring day on bad roads, I stopped and was allowed to sleep in a village. Susan brought me a plate of rice and fish followed by a large papaya. She said I reminded her of her son who was living in another country. After showering and washing my clothes, I was called over by another family to eat and *“talk small”*.

In the morning, I noticed that a few people had chains locked around one ankle. I asked Susan about it, and she told me that it was a camp where they treat people with psychiatric problems using traditional African medicine. I hadn't realised but the night before I had been talking to the prophetess. While it was disturbing and upsetting to see people in chains

it's not necessarily worse than how patients are treated in the UK.

After hours without seeing any villages or markets, I came to a small village and stopped to find food. The first person I asked led me to a small *chop bar* and paid for me to eat a bowl of Attieke Garba (cassava couscous with fish).



Ghana

Kenke, Banku, history, beaches, waterfalls.

The long, wide Ivorian roads and my lack of French had proved more of a challenge than the mud of Liberia and by the time I was approaching the border I had been looking forward to entering Ghana for a few days. I also had an image in my head of cities with more shops and I was looking forward to replacing some parts on the bike. Having slept close to the border I crossed early in the morning while the light was still soft. After having my Laissez Passer carefully inspected I was stamped out of Cote d'Ivoire and passed over the Tano River into Ghana.

Breakfast bread and the excitement of a new country fuelled me for several kilometres but sooner than usual I was looking for somewhere to eat and rest out of the sun. A stall on the roadside offered a chance to try a new dish. Banku, made from fermented maize had replaced fufu and was served with small fried fish, tomato and *black peppeh*. This was one of my favourite foods and I wouldn't get tired of eating it every day for the following eleven days. For dessert, I bought some oranges (greens?) from another woman under the shade of the same stall. We had been talking while I ate and when I went to pay, she gave me a bag with many more oranges and didn't take my money – to give me energy for my ride to Nigeria. Smiling, I waved as I cycled off.





Despite the oranges I was still feeling drained, despite it being barely afternoon I decided to look for a place to stop. Looking at the map I could see I was very close to the coast – a short 5 km detour would take me to sea and somewhere to rest and sleep that night. As usual, turning right off the coast road meant turning onto loose sand, after slipping, sliding, and walking for twenty minutes I came to a narrow river. Usually there would be someone waiting with a boat or *float*er who would take me across for some *small money* and so I expected the same from the woman paddling towards me on a long dugout canoe. Instead, she stepped out of the boat, picked up her shoes and walked past me in the direction I had come from. With no one else in sight I took off my shoes, walked into the water and set my bike across the front of the boat, I then turned it round, sat in the back and picked up the short wooden oar. With the length of the canoe, it was a mix of punting, sculling and paddling but I made a pretty straight line across to the other bank. I hadn't realised that the previous year's white-water kayaking would come in handy during a bikepacking trip! Stepping off at the other side I walked the bike the short distance to the beach and leant it against an old, upturned fishing boat.

Looking around I took in the wild Atlantic waves crashing against the sand, the tall leaning palm trees, the small huts of the village and the long beach disappearing into the Sandwind. Having followed the coast for the whole trip this was far

from my first West African beach, but it felt new and wild and peaceful. I spent the rest of that day being shown around by Prince. He showed me how to climb the coconut trees and laughed at my hugging the trunk and sliding down more than I climbed up. That evening we walked around the village and ate yam fufu together. Prince showed me to the school and asked Dennis, one of the teachers if I could sleep there. Dennis said no and showed me to his house with a room and a bed I could sleep in.



47

After forty-six days the constant sand, mud and rain had finally caught up with my bike. Spraying water from my bottle onto the chain kept the grinding noises at bay but I started to notice the pedals were not always engaging. Towards the end of the day the rear wheel was making horrible noises, and it was hit or miss as to whether pedalling actually did anything. That night the woman who I brought food from offered me a spot to sleep on her son's floor. After showering I spent the evening eating yam and being introduced to people around the town.

In the morning as I went to load my bags on the bike, I found a puncture in the rear wheel, then, after pulling out several pieces of wire and wrestling the tyre back on I saw that the freewheel had completely stopped working. My hopes that a night's rest would have magically fixed the bike had sadly not been realised.

The wheels were newly built before the trip, so I had not expected to have any issues with them and had not brought the very specific tool needed to take them apart. I was shown to the town's bike mechanic Joseph. However, as it was Sunday he was at church - "he should be back in three hours". Back at the house I accepted an invite to join the family at their church and, as in Freetown, during the service, I was asked to stand and introduce myself. On the way home we ate fried yam and drank Malta.

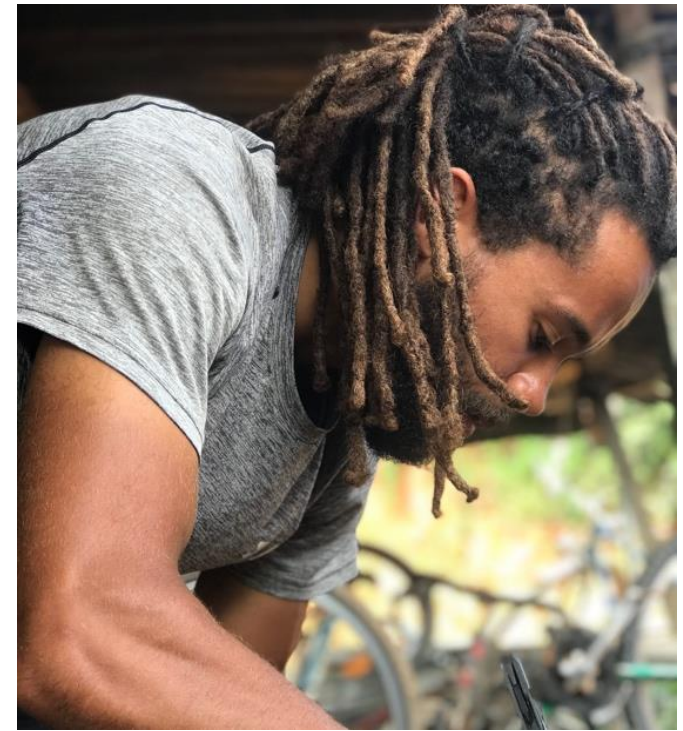
As it was a different type of wheel to most of the bikes there, we had a few disagreements on how to open the wheel, however, to my surprise and relief, through a combination of pliers and wrenches we got the wheel apart. While I used some diesel to clean out the grease and rust Joseph cut a new spring for the freewheel and in less than an hour the bike was working again.

48

Ghana's coast has several major trading ports initially established by the Portuguese to trade gold, mahogany, and other resources. In the 1600s these ports became guarded castles where enslaved people were held in underground cells before being taken through the gate of no return and loaded onto ships to be sold in the Americas.

Cape Coast Castle is now a museum and was one of the few places I knew I would visit while I was planning my route. As I arrived, I joined a group of tourists who were on a day tour from Accra. I hadn't realised it until then, but I had not seen tourists for several weeks, possibly since Freetown, and it gave me reverse culture shock. They also seemed intrigued by my appearance which was fair as I had not shaved or much more than glanced in a mirror since leaving home.

The tour was very impactful; it's one thing to read about the history of slavery but seeing the actual cells where people were held and the ground that they walked on was very powerful.



Volta Region

Over the following days in Ghana, I spent some time in the capital Accra before heading north towards lake Volta (the largest artificial reservoir in the world). My route out of Accra involved a day of climbing very steep and rocky 'roads'. After the relatively flat roads of Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana this was a bit of a shock, but it was something to focus on. I slept in a community centre, a classroom occupied by bats, the front room of a school headmaster, and in the courtyard of a very friendly elderly couple who didn't speak English. I was fuelled by Waakye, mangoes and frozen yoghurt.

From the Volta region I went on to Wli, there was a waterfall walk that I had read about and wanted to go on. I would need to leave my tent and bike during the day, so I booked into a campsite for the night. The next morning, I woke early hoping to do the walk before it got too hot. I carried some food I had brought the night before and could see a rough route on my offline map. The trail took me up through long yellow grasses that covered the foot of the mountains. From there I could see the waterfall in the distance falling two steps before disappearing into the trees.

My map showed that the river at the top of the falls lay on the border with Togo so when I reached a fork in the trail, I turned and headed for the water.



After walking across and standing in Togo I wanted to see if I could get to the top of the waterfall however, after twenty minutes of walking through the water and climbing over and around fallen trees the water went through a gorge with high rocky sides that couldn't be easily passed. I headed back for the main trail which took me down to the top pool.



High rocky walls and tall trees stretched up from the water with sunlight only just reaching the topmost branches. The falling water pulled air with it creating a wind that rushed down, disturbing the leaves before following a fast stream out over the second falls.

After a swim in the cold water, I followed the path back up the way I had come in and then down to the second pool. Spider webs stretched across the branches and butterflies warming in the sun fluttered in front of me as I walked. I ate breakfast by the second pool and swam again before heading back to the campsite. The rest of the day was spent eating and reading my book.

There was not much information available about crossing from Ghana to Togo. I knew it was possible to get a visa at the border, but I didn't know which borders could provide them. The plan was to start at the closest border to Wli and head south, checking each border I came to.

The night after leaving Wli, I had asked at a school if it was okay for me to put my tent up and sleep on the field. They told me I had to ask the headmaster and pointed me towards his house. After we talked, he agreed that I could put up my tent on the field. I pulled my bike up to his porch and went into the village to buy food and some soap. There was another football game that evening and the headmaster invited me to sit with him in his front room and watch the game. When it finished, I got up to set up my tent and he stopped me and told me to sleep in the front room.

I asked at the Ghanaian emigration if I could get the Togo visa there and one of the soldiers at the post got on his motorbike and drove off to ask. A few minutes later he came back and told me I could get it after I had been stamped out of

Ghana. There was no queue and after a couple of minutes I had the Ghanaian exit stamp in my passport. I was pointed to a narrow road and walked the bike through the soft sand towards Togo. A chain across the road, a small hut, and a desk under the shade of a tree marked the border. This was by far the nicest and most relaxed border I have ever crossed. I sat on a wooden bench with the sun on my legs, watching a couple of bikes come and go carrying people returning home after work. I was allowed to pay in USD and set off on the sandy road, sliding into the fifth country of the trip.

With only the few CFA (*seeffa*) I had managed to exchange in Ghana I headed to a small town near the border to find an ATM. As I rolled down the main road looking for a bank one of the men from the border came up next to me on a motorbike, the bank wouldn't accept the dollars I had used to pay for the visa. He told me to follow him to an ATM so I could get CFA out to swap for my dollars. He drove off and a few minutes later I saw him waving from the side of the road in front of a bank. I pulled up and withdrew the money for him and for the time I would be in Togo and took back my dollars.





Togo

The plan for Togo was to continue heading north. I wasn't sure how far I would get as I had read that the northern regions were not recommended due to the coup in Burkina Faso earlier that year.

A couple of hours after the border I came into a village and stopped by a school. Togo is French speaking so I figured the school would be a good place to find someone who spoke English. It was the end of the school day and I spoke to one of the teachers as they were leaving. I was allowed to sleep on the concrete outside one of the classrooms, so I sat around to wait for everyone to leave but was quickly surrounded by school children who seemed a lot more interested in me than in going home. A while later some older boys came by and told me I could stay in their place.

We walked for fifteen minutes through the forest, between houses and past another school and it was getting dark as we came to a walled courtyard. They showed me into one of the empty buildings and introduced me to my neighbour for the night. After putting up my tent we walked for another ten minutes to get some food. We tried one of the wooden huts next to the road, but the food was finished. We went next door instead and they taught me some French over our plates of rice and meat. Back at the compound I asked for a bucket of water and washed away the sweat and dust of the day.

I had seen Cascade de Kpimé on the map which would be my first stop of the day. Pulling off the main road I came to the reception (a table under a tree) and was asked for 5,000 CFA, we talked, and I paid 3,000. "The first waterfall is just round the corner, there is another one not far, you can go on your bicycle". The first falls may have been good in rainy season but now it was a rock face with a few small trickles coming down. Not worth 3,000 CFA. I had become well practised at deviating from my route so was happy to spare some time to see the second falls after all it wasn't too far.

Forty-five minutes of steep, rocky climbing later I came to a small building. I could see no waterfall but there was a dam with a nice view. Slightly underwhelmed, I turned to go back to the road and noticed another path going off. At the end of the path there were a few holiday cabins, a small shop and a reception. I asked about the waterfalls, and she told me some boys would come and show me the way. After a short walk between coffee trees we came to a larger waterfall. One of the boys took my phone and the other led me up through the water fall to a higher pool. Back at the shop, I bought a drink before rattling my way down to the main road.

The road for the rest of the day was smooth tarmac and I was enjoying the speed, cooler temperatures and small changes of scenery that came with a new country and moving further north. Rolling down a long hill I stood up out of the saddle and held my arms out to the side.



There were two women walking along the road and one of them saw me and started running with her arms out copying me. I had found that things like that were a sign of a good place to sleep so I stopped in the village to buy food.

Two days later I packed up my bags, said goodbye to my friend Junior and the family that had been looking after me and continued north.



63

Having spoken to the chief the night before it was decided I would stay with the person in charge of development in the village. I had noticed the change from the mostly Christian areas I had travelled through to the predominantly Muslim villages I had been seeing in Togo. The Adhan (call to prayer) was a new sound during the day and added to the cockerels, sweeping, motorbikes and birds. As in most places, I had been very well looked after and I left feeling excited for the day.

The dirt was well packed and smooth, and my legs felt strong, so the kilometres ticked by. Around the middle of the day, I stopped by a river to fill up my bottles and found that the plastic water bag that I needed to filter water was missing. I had either forgotten to tie it down and dropped it on the road or left it in the village that morning. I didn't have much choice but to go back as I wouldn't have clean water without it. The prospect of cycling back the distance that I had pushed through that day did not interest me so at a police checkpoint I left my bike and after waiting for an hour I found a *moto* driver to drive me back to the village.

Two hours later we were back in the village. People waved as they saw me, and I was relieved to find the bag just next to where I had put up my tent. I said goodbye again and we drove back to the checkpoint, stopping for food along the way.

After a few more hours on the bike, I knew I was coming up to the Togo-Benin border. Usually there would be a checkpoint, metal gates across the road or at least a table under a tree but apart from an unmarked building I didn't see anything and when I checked the map, I saw that I was in Benin. As it was starting to get dark, I looked for somewhere to sleep in the first town I came into. I met Oliver while I was eating food and asked if there was somewhere I could sleep. After some confusion and me following him on his motorbike he said I could sleep at his place, and he would sleep in his shop where he sold motorbike parts. Oliver is Nigerian and cooked me yam fufu.



Benin

The following morning, I said goodbye to Oliver and started heading south. As I hadn't got a stamp in my passport the first stop after breakfast and a sim card stall was the border in the next town. I had to explain to the Benin immigration what had happened, and they let me go through to the Togo immigration post. When I got there, I explained again and after they asked a few questions I realised they were asking for a bribe to stamp my passport. I had plenty of time so got off the bike and got some food out to eat while waiting, when they saw this, they stamped my passport and let me go. With a second stamp at the Benin immigration, I officially entered the country.

That night I met a group of boys around the same age as me, they had come from Togo to find somewhere to work. It was just three or four houses next to the road so there was nowhere to buy food. The boys had some Gari – ground dried casava that you mix with water and sugar which they shared with me. It's very cheap, fills you up and tastes quite nice but it's not very nutritious. After we finished, we shared the pack of noodles and tin of sardines I was carrying and went to bed.

66

Abomey was the capital of the kingdom of Dahomey and houses the royal palaces. When I arrived at the main palace, I leant my bike under a tree and joined two couples on a tour around the grounds. The king of Benin was going to be there for a ceremony that week so there were lots of people around the palace preparing for his arrival. We were shown statues, paintings, armour and maps of Dahomey.

As we got to the end of the tour we were told about a ceremony later that evening. It was only midday and I had planned to continue cycling but after hearing about the ceremony I decided to stay for the night. I went to eat with Elsa and Patrik, one of couples on the tour and they recommended the place they were staying. I went and booked into a room before doing some washing and going to walk around Abomey.

None of us managed to find the ceremony that evening, I ended up buying food and talking with two kids running their mothers stall before going back to my room.

In the morning, I ate breakfast with Elsa and Patrik. I had only spoken to a handful of people from Europe since starting the trip and it was nice being able to share experiences and discuss some of the things I had been thinking about over the past couple of months.





Later that day I was cycling on a very overgrown gravel path next to an old railway track. It seemed like a path through the middle of nowhere, but it eventually led to a village market full of people. I stopped to buy food and look around then continued to look for somewhere to sleep. In the first village I asked they told me the chief had gone away on a trip so I would not be able to stay. At the next place they didn't speak English or French but pointed me along the track. Eventually, I found a young man walking towards some huts and after speaking to him he told me to follow him to his father's

place. I was allowed to put up my tent on the concrete out the front and got given a bucket of water to wash with. There was a world cup football match on that evening, so we went to a hall with a tv and lots of chairs to watch the game.

69

I knew of several people who had not been able to get the Nigerian visa at the Embassy in Cotonou, but I had already paid for my flight from Lagos to London so needed to at least try and get into the country. Having learnt from previous embassies I put on my shirt, clean shorts and shoes and caught a taxi from the place I was staying to the embassy. When I arrived, they were open but not seeing visa appointments for another thirty minutes, so I went for breakfast with someone else who was also waiting to get a visa.

When we came back, they were open, and we were allowed in. After waiting for a while in the reception I was allowed in to ask for the visa. Ten minutes of talking and answering questions later and it was clear that I wasn't going to get the visa. They were polite and seemed to want to help me but there was nothing they could do.

Unsure of what to do next I went back to the place I was staying and sent a message to Mustapha, a friend I cycled with in London. Mustapha had told me before I left that he knew someone who worked in the Nigerian embassy in London and might be able to help with the

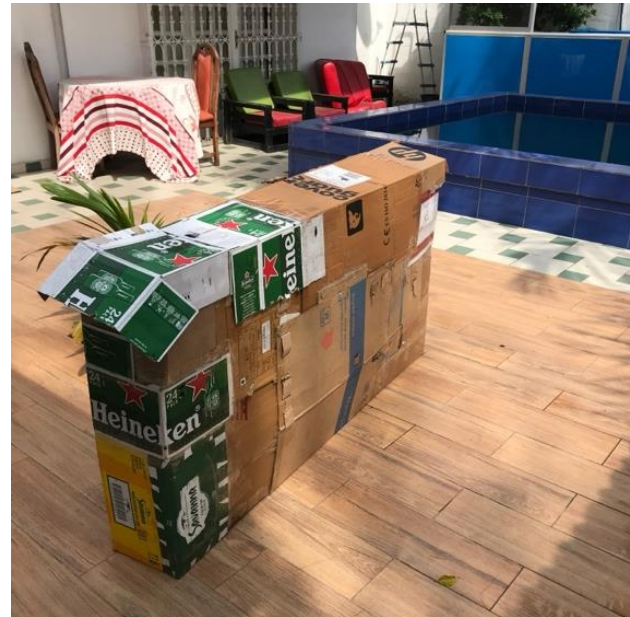
visa. He replied with a name his friend had given him and said that if I mentioned him in the embassy, I should be okay. I put my shirt back on, went back to the embassy, sat and waited and went in to speak to the same woman as before. When I gave the name, she went and came back in with a man. He was good friends with the person I had mentioned and had gone on his computer to try and get my visa through, but it was not possible. The only way I could get in was to fly back to London, wait a few weeks for a visa from the London Embassy then fly back.



70

The next option was to go to the airline office and try to get the flight changed. To my surprise it was not that expensive to change my flight. I asked several times if my bike would be allowed on, and they assured me it would be fine. With the flights sorted I felt a lot more relaxed. All I needed to do now was find a bike box and then wait around on the beach for a few days.

I had only seen one shop selling new bikes the whole time I had been in Africa so I knew it was unlikely that I would be able to find a proper bike box. Instead, the plan was to find as many boxes as I could and piece them together to make my own bike box.

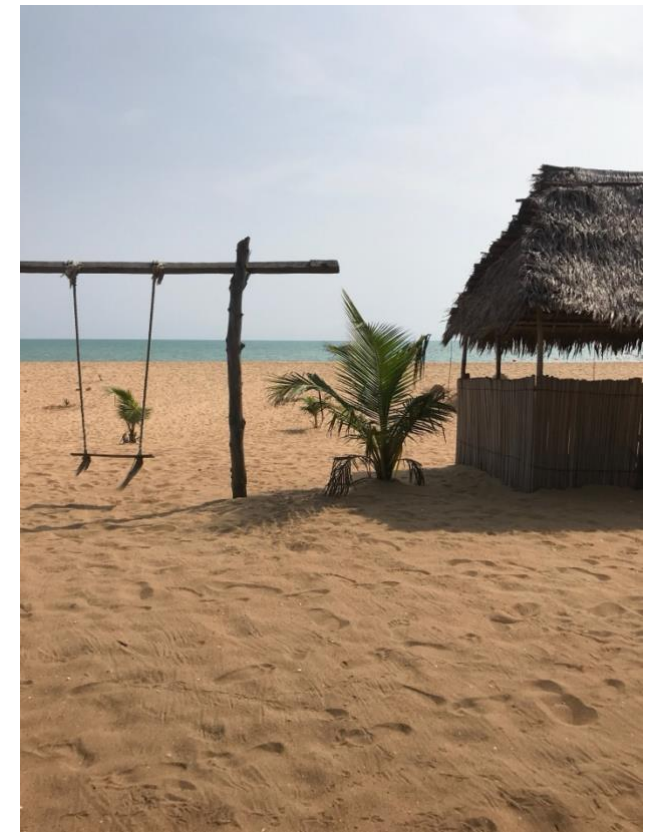


The first stop was a hotel near to the airport. The box would be quite large, and I didn't want to have to carry it far. After some confusion I was allowed to build and store the box in the courtyard next to the pool. I spent the rest of the day cycling around the city going to any store that I thought would have boxes. After several hours and many different shops, I had enough cardboard to make my box.

I came back the next day to build the box. I measured the cardboard against the bike then used my knife to make holes in the cardboard and looped strips of plastic bags through the holes to tie the pieces together. It was more secure than tape, but it took most of the day and two frozen yoghurts to finish the box.

I was staying at a spot along the beach, further up was a row of pubs, dance spots and food but I had set my tent up in a quieter area between bamboo huts. I spent most of the days reading with breaks to buy cold drinks, eat food, or walk along the beach.

While I was there, I met Shervin, an Iranian man on a similar journey to me. He was the first person I had seen also travelling by bike and we spent many hours over the next two days discussing details of logistics and how we had understood and processed our time there.



Ouidah is a town thirty miles along the coast from Cotonou. We had both wanted to visit, so on the day before my flight we took some of the bags off our bikes, planned a quick route and set off. During the transatlantic slave trade, Ouidah was one of the largest trading ports in the region. Now there are several museums, arts stalls, and memorials.

I really appreciate travelling alone and having space to interact with people without any influence from others but meeting Shervin at the end of my trip gave me an opportunity to understand and distil my journey and I was glad of our time together.

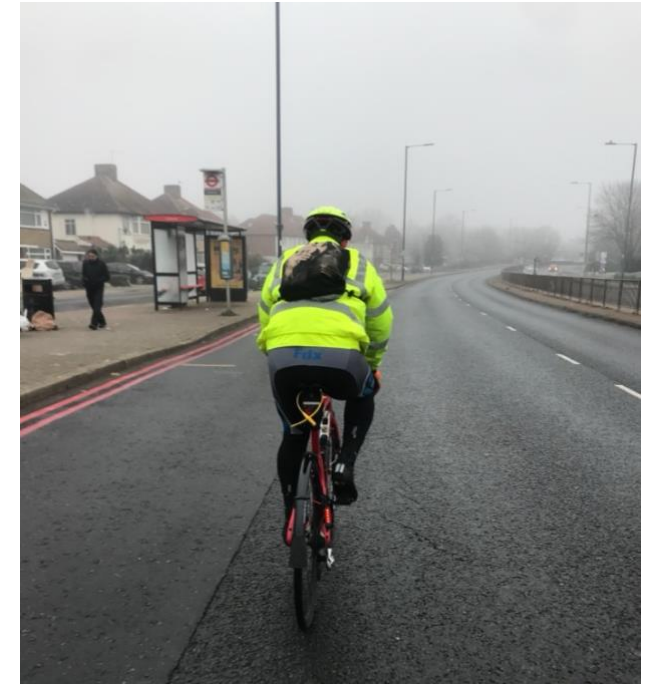


75

After packing up my bike for the last time I went for breakfast with Shervin and headed to the hotel to pack my box. I took off the front wheel and handlebars and used the bags as padding. I didn't have scales but assuming it would be fine, I closed the box and started carrying it over to the airport.

At the luggage check in desk, I was told I hadn't paid for a bike as part of my luggage and was sent to another office to pay for it. After twenty minutes of talking, showing emails and calling the office in town, I went back to check in. It turned out my guess of the weight was not very accurate, and I had to open the box and take out some of the bags. I had used up all the tape to close the box earlier and there was no time to go and buy more, I also had no cash left. The staff at the airport told me they didn't have any for me to use so I started using the same method as before, tying plastic bags through the cardboard. Eventually someone took pity on me and gave me a roll of tape to use. Thankfully the airport was not very large, and I got through to the gate in time.

After a delay to de-ice the plane in France we landed at Heathrow. I rebuilt the bike, packed my bags, and headed out to arrivals where I had some friends waiting to cycle into London with me. The mist, icy roads and negative temperatures were a shock, but thankfully Cookie had brought me some gloves to use.



Meeting up with my parents in Brixton marked the end of the trip. I put my bike in the car, and they took me to a café for a welcome home lunch.

In the week after returning, it felt strange being back in the UK, back in London. The things that had been important: mosquitos, where to get water, if I had a place to sleep, no longer existed. My little travelling house had been packed up and put away. I missed the people, the food, the weather. I missed the simplicity, the freedom and the adventure. I had never felt so welcomed or at home in a place I had never been. But there was lots to do, unpacking showering, kayaking, it was Christmas and in January I had a PhD to start.



Recommendations

Don't get overwhelmed before you leave. Planning and organisation can be very daunting, and you will probably have a lot of uncertainties but once you have everything (or most things) packed and you set off it will be a lot easier than you expect and you will figure the rest out as you go.

Make sure you are comfortable with basic bike maintenance. Regardless of where you're going, knowing how to fix a puncture and sort out your gears is essential (and very easy to learn from YouTube videos). Carrying the necessary tools and spares is also important. Puncture repair kit, spare tube, pump, multitool should get you through most issues.

For any trip but particularly when going to countries in the global south, it is important to read up on the history of the country and its political relationships with your own, and other countries. Reading fiction based in the country is also highly recommended!

Have a realistic and flexible plan. This will ensure you enjoy the trip and are not worried about how much distance you have to cover per day. This is especially important if there is not good public transport, or you have any ongoing injuries.

Test out your equipment before you leave. You don't want to be figuring out how to put your tent up for the first time in the dark after a long day on the bike.

Look for other people who have done similar trips. There are often useful blog posts and cycle routes even for very unexplored parts of the world. Resources such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups are also very good sources of information.

Resources

Freewheely - Switzerland to south Africa west coast

detailed map, extensive blog, very detailed stats and expenditure

<https://freewheely.com/category/nigeria/>

cape2cape - Norway to cape town, west coast

detailed map, extensive blog

<https://cape2cape.org/central-nigeria-border-cameroon/>

Around Africa on my Bicycle – Africa circumference

Book of detailed account.

Emi - cairo to capetown, solo female, east coast

<http://www.emiaroundtheworld.com/map-of-my-solo-cycling-trip-from-cairo-to-cape-town/?lang=en>

International bicycle fund

<http://www.ibike.org/africaguide/>

West Africa Travel FB page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/238116840281689/search/?q=borders>

Appendix

Risk Assessment

Hazard	Consequence	Mitigation	Likelihood	Severity	Risk factor
Repairable mechanical fault	Delay	Carry tools to repair most likely mechanical issues including puncture repair kit, spare inner tubes etc. Factor in possibilities of delays when deciding on the daily distance. All equipment checked prior to departure.	4	1	4
Irreparable mechanical fault	Severe delay, having to walk long distances or catch a ride to a town with repair services. Injury if fault causes rider to fall off at speed.	Ensure bike is kept in good condition by regularly cleaning and checking the condition of the wheels and frame. Factor in multi day delays into expedition plan.	2	3	6
Stove malfunction	Unable to cook	Carry food that can be eaten cold in addition to food that requires cooking. So if the stove breaks or runs out of fuel food will still be available. Buy precooked meals from shops, restaurants and vendors.	2	1	2
Bag damage	Hole in bag allowing ingress of water. Bag hanging off/ unable to be attached to bike	Carry repair kit (thread, needle, patch) in order to repair any damage to bags. Carry essential dry items such as phone, documents, medical kit, torch and sleeping equipment in additional dry bags.	2	2	4
Tent damage	Hole in tent allowing ingress of water. Tent poles snapping Hole in tent inner allowing insects to enter.	Carry repair kit (as above). Carry duct tape that can be used to repair snapped poles. Secure tent properly when pitched outside.	2	2	4

Navigation error	Taking an incorrect route leading to cycling through a dangerous area or adding significant distance causing delay	Ensure maps are followed carefully especially in areas of higher risk and close to borders and cities. Use paper and phone maps (with GPS) to ensure the correct location is known throughout the day.	2	2	4
Failure to cover expected distance	Not reaching expected accommodation for the night leading to either camping in unsafe areas, having to travel at night or having to catch a ride.	Ensure that in areas where it is unsafe to camp the planned distances are well within my abilities, factoring in unforeseen delays. Knowing times for sunset and leaving early in the morning to ensure cycling is only during the light.	2	3	6
Exposure	Heat stroke Skin damage due to long days without shade.	Wear factor 50 sun cream on any exposed skin, cover skin as much as possible. Wear properly rated sunglasses. Start cycling early in the morning to avoid intense heat, take adequate rest under shade if heat is too high.	2	3	6
Exhaustion	Unable to continue cycling. Having to take a multiday unplanned break - severe delay.	Ensure adequate food is carried for an unplanned camp. Ensure enough food is consumed each day to meet the body's needs. Carry high energy foods in the case of exhaustion. Allow adequate breaks during the day.	2	3	6
Dehydration	Headaches Organ problems Hypovolemic shock	Ensure sufficient water is carried to reach the next water source. Know locations of water sources. Carry water filter to ensure water can be made safe to drink. Carry electrolyte sachets to be taken if dehydration occurs.	3	3	9
Injury due to cycling	Chafing leading to sores and infection. Tendonitis Nerve damage	Ensure sufficient training has been carried out with the exact set up to be used on the expedition. Carry anti-chafing and antibacterial creams. Practise good personal hygiene to prevent infection. Carry support tape or straps and anti-inflammatory gels.	3	3	9
Falling off bike	Cuts, bruises, grazes, damage to bike	Take adequate breaks and ensure sufficient sleep is achieved to prevent exhaustion/ lack of focus. Choose a bike that is able to hand rough terrain. See mechanical fault, See minor injuries	3	2	6

Minor injuries	Infection, discomfort	Ensure all skin breaks are sufficiently cleaned and dressed in order to prevent bacterial infection. Carry necessary first aid supplies to clean and dress injuries. Monitor all injuries to detect infection early.	4	1	4
Major injuries - broken bones, concussion, severe bleeds	Termination of expedition Long term injury Shock Death	Travel as safely as possible at all times in order to reduce risk. (No cycling at night, stay off large roads, only cycle in cities where necessary) Contact emergency services as soon as is deemed necessary. Carry out expedition first aid training prior to departure. Carry first aid supplies that can help to stabilise major injuries.	2	5	10
Extreme weather - Flash flood, lightning, intense heat	Injury, stranded, damage to property.	Monitor weather forecast daily and do not cycle if in a safe location with extreme weather forecast, ensure all sensitive items are in waterproof bags.	1	3	3
Traffic accident	Major injury long term delays termination of expedition Death	Only cycle during the day and stay as visible as possible. Cycle to the side of the road, avoid cycling in large cities where possible, plan route to avoid large, dangerous roads.	3	5	15
Theft	Loss of belonging, unable to pay for food, accommodation, travel etc	Avoid large cities where possible, only withdraw money from ATMs during the day in public areas. Carry money in multiple locations to ensure there is enough to meet needs. Only carry the money required for daily needs on person. Do not show off large amounts of money or expensive items.	3	2	6
Kidnap	Trip termination government involvement international assistance required personal injury death	Only travel in areas that are safe according to government advise. Stay inside at night in highly populated areas. Only camp in areas that are safe. Try not to attract extra attention.	1	5	5
Detention	Delays	Follow all local and international laws at all times, ensure all legal documents required for entry into each country is correctly completed. Carry multiple documents that prove identity, plan and 'innocence'.	3	2	6

Animal attack	Injury Death	Avoid travelling in areas where highly dangerous animals are known to be present. Take necessary precautions when camping.	1	5	5
Phone runs out of charge	Unable to book accommodation Unable to contact family Unable to apply for visas Unable to contact emergency services Unable to navigate	Carry multiple battery packs and charging cables Only use phone for necessary tasks, carry back up paper maps. Carry satellite phone that is kept charged. Carry additional GPS navigation device.	3	3	9

Crisis management plan

In the case of major injury, equipment or loss of funds the expedition may have to be terminated and safe travel back to England will need to be organised. Detailed here are the steps that will be taken if this is required.

Step 1 Assess condition

- Am I in immediate danger? If yes go to step 2
- Is my condition worsening?
- Do I require immediate medical attention? If yes go to step 3
- Am I able to move?

Step 2 Remove immediate danger

- Take any steps necessary to reduce the immediate danger.

Step 3 Call Emergency contacts

- Call the UK embassy in the country and inform them of situation and location.
- Follow any advice from the embassy
- Call emergency services (ambulance and police) and inform them of situation and location.
- Call UK and local emergency contacts (parents, Imperial College) and inform them of situation and location

Step 4 Check situation and stabilise condition

- Whilst calling emergency contacts check current situation and take all possible steps to prevent condition from worsening.
- Check on food and water levels, phones and battery pack charge
- Prepare emergency shelter if required

Step 5 Organise transport

- Organise local transport (taxi, bus, motorbike) and travel to either a safe location (secure accommodation, police station, embassy) or to an airport with flights out of the country

Step 6 Update emergency contacts

- Inform contacts at home and in the country of current location, situation and plan. .
- Continue to update contacts on situation.

In the case of rapidly changing political situation that requires immediate evacuation:

Step 1 Call emergency contacts

- Call the UK embassy in the country and inform them of situation and location.
- Follow any advice from the embassy
- Call UK and local emergency contacts (parents, Imperial College) and inform them of situation and location

Step 2 Organise transport

- Organise local transport (taxi, bus, motorbike) and travel to either a safe location (secure accommodation, police station, embassy) or to an airport with flights out of the country