

Notes from African trip, May-June 1998

What you are now reading was written as I traveled in Africa during May and June, 1998. These thoughts were put down some weeks ago (I returned to Hong Kong on July 1, Handover Day + 1 year), but I was not easily able to word-process my journal entries while on the road, although checking e-mail proved simple enough.

My decision to travel to Africa was not an especially difficult one. Why not go there? After a futile search for an academic position (I was even turned down for a post-doc at UCLA because I did not fit into their funding categories, whatever that means), I realized it was time for another career change. I think my next career is retirement; in any case, I headed to Africa. My trip was to be fairly straight forward, traveling South, flying into Cairo and out from Cape Town. I find moving in one-direction with a definite goal to be motivating, but nothing was planned for in between entry and exit. I realized I would have to avoid places of unrest or revolution, which meant flying a few times, but I prefer trains and boats.

Egypt, 1-15 May. Egypt, second only to India, is one of the most fascinatingly complex places I have ever visited. China is, of course, complex, but I have never felt it to be unfathomable. I don't know much of China's history, literature or arts, but I still feel I understand the way the place works. I can say the same about most places I visit. Egypt I don't pretend to understand. It is layers of history - the Pharaohs, invasions from the Middle East, Romans, Ottoman Turks, and the British to name a few. I would describe the current civilization as secular Islamic, but if the past helps us to foretell the future, that will not last for long. (I expect that as population and poverty increase people will turn away from politicians and toward religion; I think that eventually Egypt will become an Islamic Republic, a theocracy.) Egypt's layers of history are piled one on top of the other. Aspects of earlier periods float up to the present. All in all, it is a fascinating place.

When I was there, few tourists were to be seen, as Americans and many Europeans had been scared off by the murder of German tourists at Luxor last year. Not having the company of many other tourists has its plusses and minuses. Accommodation, transportation bookings and restaurant seats are easy to get, and prices have dropped substantially as a result of the declining demand. In fact, Egypt eliminated entry visa fees altogether. On the down side, however, is the fact that you, the tourist, are more in demand. Everyone wants a piece of you, and you are seen as a walking dollar sign, an open billfold, especially in the tourist culture. I use the term 'tourist culture' to denote the culture that tourists see. Many of the people a traveler meets are directly involved in the tourist business. This, of course, is not a representative sample of the population. I have found that in most places the tourist culture differs from the overall culture, so one should be careful about making judgments based on a sample that is highly skewed. And in Egypt, tourist culture (even when there are many tourists) is stifling. Touts are tugging on your shirtsleeves; everyone seems to be trying to sell a package tour or get you to try their hotel. It is virtually impossible to move around certain sections of Cairo without being harassed by the tourist culture. All in all, Egypt (like India, and unlike China) is not an easy or especially pleasant place to travel. People are emotive and friendly; this I find to characterize Islamic culture. But virtually anyone who starts up a conversation with you has a bottom line. I'll give you an example.

One day, as I was heading to Cairo's Museum of Islamic Art (which I recommend), I was reading the map as I walked down a street. A man came up to me. We got to talking and went for coffee. He held two jobs, tailor and barber and had managed to put his 5 children through university. He had taught himself English; so conversation with him was generally possible. He insisted on showing me his mosque. I was late for the museum, but I thought a guided tour of the mosque was an opportunity I could not pass up. We toured the mosque and as we were about to leave he insisted we visit the grave of the mosque's benefactor. He instructed me that it was customary for me to leave a donation, sliding it through the bars of the crypt. I put in the equivalent of US \$2 but he thought that was not enough. I ended up putting in Egyptian pounds to the tune of US \$7. He then said something about charity, and his sick mother, and foreign exchange, hospital bills, tuition costs and other things; at his request I handed him five U.S. dollar bills, and I still can't recall how exactly it happened. From then on I decided not to take much cash (especially not greenbacks) with me since I have a knack of being talked out of it.

For various reasons, including in order to protect tourists from terrorists (or to make tourists feel they are protected from this unseen threat), Egypt has created a Tourist Police. These officers wear special uniforms. They are not difficult to locate; a covey stand in front of every (EVERY) legitimate tourist accommodation, as well as museums, embassies, etc. The main office of the Tourist Police is in Cairo; I had occasion to visit when I filed my complaint against Amigo Tours, an outfit that is certainly not friendly to tourists. I used Amigo Tours in order to take a felucca down the Nile from Aswan in the direction of Luxor. The felucca is a traditional single-sail boat that has not changed much in design for thousands of years. My particular felucca trip was supposed to take me 75 km. downstream, but the captain (who had been paid in advance by Amigo) apparently didn't like to sail. His excuse was that the river conditions were not right for sailing, in other words, he did not like strong wind that required tacking. A group of 7 Czechs, an Australian and I arranged the trip with Amigo. The Czechs especially suffered, with diarrhea probably due to the fact that the dishes were cleaned with Nile water (the Nile is the longest sewer in the world). We went only 35 km and then were put in a 'service taxi,' a private hire vehicle, that is common in Africa. Part of the trip in the service taxi (we sat in the back of a pick-up) was very dangerous. We were required to take a police escort (mandatory for all foreigners entering Luxor from the south) which tailgated the pick-up in order to make the driver go faster. (We were already going twice the posted speed limit for trucks!). In developing countries (which is what Egypt is called, although socio-economic development was not clearly visible to me, unlike China, and Egypt is better described as undeveloped or less developed) public transportation is so undeveloped that an informal system springs up. People scrape together enough for something that has 4 tires and an engine and room for passenger sardines. Traffic accidents must be the leading cause of tourist deaths in countries like Egypt. I am surprised I survived the four-hour journey.

When I got back to Cairo, I word-processed a 1000-word complaint at the Nile Hilton (I was staying at a backpackers hostel in a single room, for US \$10 a night, just a few hundred meters across Midan Tahir, close to the Antiquities Museum.) The next day, I went to the Ministry of Tourism to file the complaint, and the ministry officers sent me to the Tourist Police for further filing. There I had coffee and was told to wait. I was there for about 4 hours, taking a break to go to the GPO to buy a stamp for my former student who collects stamps with maps and flags. (I go to every GPO in every capital city of every country I visit; these visits serve as good ways to

compare countries). Anyway, the Tourist Police - I dealt with General Mohammed something-or-rather (I am told that about a quarter of all Egyptian males are named Mohammed) - were very accommodating. They took my complaint seriously. I alleged that Amigo was mismanaged and had deals with so many agents around the country that no one - not customer nor agent nor vendor - could agree on what was being promised. The general got on the phone with the president of Amigo and each of my points was discussed. All of us on the felucca (the Czechs and Australian were apparently hunted down) were given refunds. Maybe the system works well, or maybe the current dearth of tourists in Egypt leaves the tourist police with so little to do that they made a concerted effort to handle my complaint.

The best aspects of Egypt were, for me, its food and its antiquities, especially the tombs and ruins in Luxor.

Eritrea and Ethiopia

15-17 May, Asmara

You wonder where Asmara is? It's the capital of Eritrea (pronounced air-ri-TREE-ah). You wonder what Eritrea is? It's the newest country in Africa, having split from Ethiopia at the start of the decade. Now it's coming into focus.

Ethiopia, next to Somalia at the rhino horn that sticks out of the east coast of Africa, you know as the land of starving children on the nightly news. Somalia is where a U.S. mercy mission went and for its effort, American soldiers were killed (or murdered depending on your view of whether or not we were participating in a war). Actually, Ethiopia has rich farmland in the south. Eritrea, which is in the north-east, has little farmland and is perhaps the poorest country on a very poor continent. Africa has 55 countries, more-or-less, if you include the few remaining colonies that seem to be self-governing. The poorest of the poor form the bottom dozen. Among them is Eritrea. Eritrea fought for independence and, as the Ethiopians might tell you, it got what it deserved. Not many tourists go to Eritrea. Which is a shame because it has virtually no tourist culture. A few independent travelers come across Eritrea, but there are no tour groups. No one tries to sell you anything, so it is a pleasure to be able to walk around and FEEL that no one really cares about you. Most prices are the same for tourists as for locals, except for tourist goods where bargaining prevails. After Egypt, the absence of a tourist culture is a very good feeling. I spent two nights in Asmara, bedding right across from the Catholic cathedral in a pension where only locals stayed. No one spoke English, which was also a relief. It was nice being back in a country where I could not communicate (one of the most endearing features of China).

Most tourists I see on my trip are in fact backpackers. Some I met were appalled I was traveling at such a quick pace (It's Friday, must be Eritrea). My defense: three days in a place is better than none. Asmara town (I would hardly call it a city by African standards) looks like it belongs in Italy, for the architecture in the older part of town, on one side of the main drag, is rather Italian. The Italians were here for a few years, but Ethiopia/Eritrea was not generally colonized by any Europeans, unique in Africa in that regard. The Catholic church tolls on the quarter-hour and competes with the various mosques, the latter enunciating their calls to prayer several times a day (the most memorable being around 4:30 a.m.).

Eritrea/Ethiopia lie on the border between Islamic and Christian Africa, where the religions seem to live in harmony. People are darker skinned than Egyptians but lighter than Africans to the

south. As an independent traveler, with only the vaguest of plans, I spend much of my time looking over the backpacker's *Bible*, a hefty book called *Africa on a Shoestring*, published by Lonely Planet. I have used LP books in about a dozen countries. Imprinted January 1998, my volume is sorely out of date, but I would be rather lost without it. For example, it suggested I take red public bus #1 from the airport for the equivalent of US \$.10, rather than a taxi for US \$7.00 (in taxis the locals have to pay the same as tourists, the rationale being that anyone, local or foreigner, who has to fly can afford a taxi. Taxis in the city are cheap (US \$.30 a ride), but I found the town walkable. I like taking local transport (I keep my valuables stored deep in my backpack or daypack, having learned a lesson when my wallet was pick-pocketed on a Shenzhen bus last year). So most of the travelers I meet (average age 25) also carry around a copy of LP. (LP has almost a monopoly in Africa. I used *Rough Guide* in Egypt and prefer to use *Let's Go* (from Harvard) but they cover very few places in Africa).

I spend a considerable amount of time figuring out where to stay, where to eat and how to get from one place to another. This is part of the backpacker's lot. So food tends to be very important. I am so fearful of becoming an obese American that in Africa - where I am not exercising or swimming much - I generally try to eat each breakfast and only one other meal. So I look forward to lunch/dinner and will walk miles to find what I think will be a worthwhile eating experience.

Eritrean/Ethiopian food is basically globs of stewed vegies or meat served on a sourdough pancake that is about 2 feet in diameter. One eats with one's right hand (Islamic culture does not use toilet paper but provides a cup of water and the left hand is reserved for matters of..you get the picture). I enjoy Ethiopian food in moderation (once a month is sufficient); eating it every day would be restaurant hell. On this trip, I often seem to view Africa through the eyes of a Chinese resident, and I could easily eat Chinese food every meal and not feel eating was repetitive. I could say the same about Egyptian food (which is the best Middle Eastern food I have ever had), but as you travel south in Africa, quite frankly, the food deteriorates. It might be better on the West coast through Francophone Africa, where perhaps cuisine is more influenced by French than English tastes and methods.

As you might recall from a small news item hidden in the bowels of the western press, Eritrea and Ethiopia declared war in May. The exact month I was there. When I was in Asmara, people were worried about the tense border situation. I was ticketed on Ethiopian Airlines to fly from Asmara to Addis Ababa (the capital of Ethiopia), but the day I arrived in Asmara Ethiopian Airlines was denied permission to fly in Eritrea airspace. I spent a few hours over a few days arranging to leave Asmara. My ticket was eventually accepted on Egyptian Air and I flew into Ethiopia on Sunday, 17 May.

A few words about the current Eritrean-Ethiopian war. One might be able to present rather rational arguments against the creation of an Eritrean state, but what's done is done. For all the charm of its capital town and the pleasant nature of its people, Eritrean doesn't have much place in the global economy. It doesn't export much of anything, probably cannot grow sufficient food to feed itself and depends on foreign aid, projects like the Peace Corps and VSO. NGOs and multi-national agencies are everywhere. In any event, Eritrea is a full state, I assume with its own UN seat. After independence it did not print up its own currency, but rather continued to use the Ethiopian birr. Then about a year ago, the government recalled birr from its citizens and gave them their new currency, the nakfa, on a 1 to 1 exchange. Nothing else was going to change.

The nakfa would be used for business with Ethiopia, which exports a lot of food to Eritrea. Ethiopia took notice. All of a sudden its neighbor, its former province had doubled its money supply. Ethiopia told Eritrea that this was not acceptable. Eritrea was an independent state; from now on, Ethiopia said, all transactions between the two countries would be in foreign exchange. Since the Eritrea nakfa is not a convertible currency, exchange would have to be in US D. (Ethiopian birr is not a convertible currency either, but Ethiopian banks will exchange it for US dollars, but not vice-versa. It is worthless outside the country). I suspect this currency dispute is the reason for the current war. The immediate cause of the hostilities (soldiers have been shot and the Ethiopian air force bombed the Asmara airport - about two weeks after I had used the very same airport) was an encroachment into the no-man's land by Eritrean soldiers who started planting crops in unused fields.

Borders are not always agreed upon. China and Russia (also China and India) print up maps that show different borders and the disputed area is a no-man's land. Similarly, the Eritrea/Ethiopia border is not very fixed. The overall lesson here, for wantabe countries like Quebec and southern Sudan, is that statehood is not easy, is not cheap and it carries responsibilities. Eritrea was able to survive for almost a decade on foreign aid. There is no way it can survive on its own resources and develop an economy that has a global fit. Wars are a good way to divert the public's attention from domestic problems.

17-19 May, Addis Ababa

As much as I like Eritrea, I take Ethiopian's side in this dispute. That is not to say I found anything in Ethiopia more pleasant than in Eritrea. By the time I arrived in Addis Ababa, I had had my fill of Ethiopian food (6 meals in Asmara, which is a half-year's worth, given a tolerance level of one meal a month). And Ethiopia has a tourist culture that by contrast makes Egypt's seem tame. A decade of war (civil war between communists and non-communists, and a war with Eritrea) has left the country looking war-torn. There must be more beggars per capita than any other place in the world, except perhaps Santa Monica. The capital is filled with beggars of all ages and people missing limbs. I never saw these scenes in Asmara, but Addis Ababa is a city of refugees. But it doesn't look even like a city. In the middle of downtown, within several hundred meters of the GPO, are fields with goats. There is a lot more 'there' in Oakland than in Addis Ababa.

I figure that Sunday is the best time to arrive in a capital city, because that's when it is officially closed and more at peace with itself. I took a cheap mini-bus from the Addis Ababa airport and got off where I figured downtown to be. While I was reading my LP map, a young man stove up beside me and offered to take me to my accommodation, recommended by LP, not by him. We got to the hostel, which was a converted home, run by the family who lived in some back rooms. The home had once been much larger, but property had been confiscated when the Marxists implemented land reform after they took control from Haile Selassie. I suggested that the young man, who was a high school senior and spoke extremely good English, come back and show me around town, in exchange for which I would buy him dinner. He, along with a friend, took me to the Museum of Ethnography and then we went out for dinner.

Afterwards, they suggested we go to see some traditional Ethiopian dancing. As nightfall was approaching I wanted to go back to the hostel, but we ended up going into the suburbs to a walled compound with a lot of music and shaking and clucking that I assume was traditional

Ethiopian dancing. One of the dancers asked me to buy her a drink. I asked how much that would cost and never got an answer. When the next one asked, I refused. I told the students I was ready to leave, and as we were leaving I was presented with a bill for the equivalent of US \$ 45 for 4 drinks. I realized I was quite outnumbered and a number of people were insisting that I pay.

Foreign exchange (in other words US D) was acceptable, they said. I opened my wallet and showed them how much money I had with me, the equivalent of about US \$10. (I had taken out all my US D before I left with the students, as Cairo was still fresh in my mind). I said that if they wanted me to pay the rest of the bill I would have to go back to the hostel. The bar manager wanted one of the student to remain at the bar, as a sort of hostage I guess, but I insisted that both students return with me since they had both come with me. So we left the compound, which probably was a brothel, and all got into a cab. After we arrived at the hostel, the students disappeared (we had exchanged names and addresses earlier). Once the bar manager and I got into the hostel, I told the owner to call the police so they could settle a dispute on my being overcharged. The bar manager miraculously disappeared. The lesson: find out, before experiencing, what traditional Ethiopian dancing entails, and if something's not listed in LP, forget it.

The heart of Africa

19-23 May - Nairobi, Kenya and Arusha, Tanzania

When most people think of Africa (which Americans do quite seldom), they think of big game animals, tiny villages, bushmen (the Gods Must Be Crazy), famine, poverty, AIDS. This is the part of Africa I am now visiting. The continent might be divided into three sections. Islamic Africa covers the top end (bottom end if you are oriented in the southern hemisphere where the South Pole is considered 'up') and goes down (or 'up') the east coast. The opposite end of the continent is Southern Africa - the Republic of South Africa and its 5 neighbors, with large numbers of white people and first-worldish living standards. In between these two collections of countries, below the Sahara and between the tropics, lies central Africa, which this century was colonized and abandoned by Europe and more or less ignored by the rest of the world.

I flew into this heart of Africa at Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, which has the highest standard of living in the region. At the airport I was checked for my Yellow Fever vaccination certificate and was told at the information desk that the train to Kampala, Uganda, which I was planning to take that afternoon, no longer existed (despite the high recommendation it received in LP). I misled you in my previous correspondence. True, I don't have day-to-day plans, but I do have an overall picture - I am trained as a planner!) I had prepared an itinerary that included train and ferry travel. I had planned a boat and train circle that took in parts of Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania, Burundi, Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika, Kenya and Zanzibar. Busses and informal arrangements were to be avoided at all cost. The LP had disendorsed Nairobi, describing it as a place well worth avoiding. It now seemed I would have to spend time there so I could figure out how, when and where to go next.

As cities go, Nairobi has everything, most of which you don't want. Most travelers stay here just long enough to book safaris or accomplish the type of chores for which big cities are useful: banking, postal services, e-mail, booking your passage out, etc. I found downtown Nairobi to be very British. Businessmen and women are probably more formally attired on the downtown

streets here than in central London or Manhattan. I stayed in a hostel within a few minutes walk of downtown, but on the 'other side of the tracks.' It was a lively area, with people singing and dancing on the streets until the wee hours of the morning. This is the type of atmosphere, often accompanying high unemployment, I would expect to experience in Latin countries and have in fact seen in the Philippines (and in Hong Kong on Sunday when the Philippina domestics congregate downtown to socialize, barbecue on the sidewalk, cut each other's hair, etc.)

For the first time in Africa, I used my mosquito net. I had started taking a weekly Larium tablet, a malaria prophylactic, the previous week. Not all travelers take such precautions; I met several backpackers who had been laid up with malaria and I met several Africans (white and black) who had been in comas due to the illness. Malaria, according to a man I met who was a director of a local clinic, is the major disease addressed by the health system (in his case, rural Zambia). Not AIDS. Once a patient is diagnosed with AIDS, he or she is sent home to live out life (often in their hometown villages) and they no longer are given professional medical care. Thus, you don't see obviously sick-looking people on the streets. I had figured Africa would have an AIDS-related death look, but as a tourist you don't see the dying. Ironically, AIDS has decreased the burden on the health systems, which won't treat individuals once diagnosed as HIV positive.

I stayed in Nairobi several days and took the bus to Arusha, Tanzania, which is one of the gateways to the game parks. To backtrack: every Thursday night, Hong Kong television has a wildlife documentary; on and off for the past ten years I have been visiting via TV places like the Sahara, the Serengeti, Mt. Kilimanjaro, the Kalahari, the Skeleton Coast, etc. through BBC and National Geographic films. These film-makers have set for me levels of expectation, about the abundance of game, the closeness to the animals, the vivid colors of the bush. Over the years I must have seen thousands of big cats hunt their prey, millions of wildebeest and antelope (the snack food of many predators) on their annual migrations hop-scotching over crocodile-infested rivers. The African skies are so filled with birds of color that you think you are in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Therefore, the first thing I did when I got to Arusha (after I settled into a hostel where a private room cost a few bucks and my laundry was hand cleaned for about US \$.10 an item) was to try to book a trip to Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater. I mean, who could go to Tanzania and not see these sights? They cannot be visited cheaply, however; daily costs run up to US \$100, given the distances that must be traveled and hefty park entrance fees (about \$25). I made several inquiries and put my name on various lists. Nothing materialized. The minimum number for a Landrover excursion is about five persons, in addition to the cook and driver, and none of the agents I contacted could arrange a trip within the next day or two. (I was visiting in the off-season, only weeks after the rainy season when visible game are scarce (then game do not have to depend on the water holes that tourists frequent) and in between wildebeest migrations (the go north-south, then turn around). Then I got to talking with folks who had been on these trips, and I was given a litany of horror tales. One company stranded their passengers for several days while they went off to fix the vehicle. Another company changed the itinerary without notice (Money is all paid up front, and unlike tourist-friendly Egypt there is no Tourist Police for complaints). The worse story came from two New Zealanders who had been deposited for several hours at a campground while the driver and cook took the vehicle to check out a mechanical problem. The day after their trip, the Kiwis discovered that much of their cash had been stolen right out of their backpacks, which had remained in the vehicle while they had been dumped in camp. When the vehicle had returned, they had noticed that their packs had been shifted and that one of the

buckles was undone, but they had thought nothing of it at the time. All in all, I figured that a trip arranged by a local operator was not worth the various risks involved. In fact, most everyone I have talked to who had a pleasant experience opted out for a multi-week trip in a larger 'overland' vehicle, with the trip arranged by companies which have offices outside Kenya and Tanzania, e.g. London. Anyway, I can see game elsewhere. But, for the moment, I may have been one of the few tourists to Kenya and Tanzania for whom the only cat seen was domesticated (a tailless tabby) and the only game animals observed were in posters.

Well, I couldn't see animals yet. At least I could enjoy the food. As I suggested earlier, however, eating is not the height of a central African visit. The food (at its best) resembles American southern cooking at its worst (which my birthright allows me to criticize at will): grits and collards. In fact, the staple in this part of the world is maize meal (it assumes various local names), which is cooked cornmeal and water, the texture of potter's clay without the taste. Or one could order French fries, which is considered upmarket. At least in the American South you get grits with gravy. To be fair, there is local African fare, especially seafood, that is quite tasty. But the average meal I experienced was not a delight. Previous to my visit to this part of the world, I had always marveled at why backpackers, especially Europeans, so often opted for restaurant meals of spaghetti or curry beef, rather than the more exotic and localized fare. Now, I know why. I also better understand why Chinese delegations abroad try their best to avoid local fare. They insist on Chinese food which although inferior to the cuisine back home is at least Chinese food in essence. I like Chinese food too much to try it much outside China, for it rarely impresses me in other countries, where too often it becomes American-Chinese or Japanese-Chinese or Australian-Chinese food. Where ever I have tried it, it is not bad, but it absorbs local essence and, for my taste, no longer remains Chinese food. How did I solve the eating dilemma in central Africa: in Kenya, I went out for Ethiopian food. In Tanzania I had Egyptian food.

I hope these reflections do not sound too negative (I mean, if you want a good meal, go to France, Italy, China, Japan, etc.). So far, I have had a great time traveling, and I expect by the end of the trip to have mostly fond memories of Africa. I would suggest just about everyone should visit this continent. It is an exciting and interesting experience, and cheap as travel goes. Few Americans come here. Thus far I have met only a handful of US citizens among the hundreds of backpackers I have encountered. The largest number come from Europe, especially Holland, Denmark and Germany. During the spring KLM had a promotional fare, US \$450 round-trip, Amsterdam to any one of a dozen cities in central Africa. Travel from the US, at its cheapest, is about three times that. I paid about US \$900 return from Hong Kong. My whole trip, by the way, is extravagantly budgeted at under \$100 per day, including air and surface transportation (about 1/3 of the cost), safaris and gifts and a health contingency fund. I hope to spend only half that.

China in Africa

Africa time - Kenya, Tanzania including Zanzibar, Malawi, Zambia

If you want to see China at its best, come to central-south Africa. Here, the Chinese presence in the third world is not like the U.S.'s - military support or television programs or McDonald's. Chinese occupancy takes a more long-term view of a very practical nature. It is low key. No highway signs (with appropriate national flags) saying 'a gift of the people of the United States of America,' or a 'project funded by the European Union' or 'joint cooperation with the

Government of Japan.’ The Chinese know what they are doing; they need not broadcast. China is here for business and long-term investment. Foreign government or non-government organizations (NGOs) need not worry. The idea of a giveaway is very un-Chinese.

In Africa, if you want affordable, quality goods, you go to a ‘China Shop,’ which sells everything from tape decks to underwear, all labeled ‘made in China.’ These shops abound in central and southern Africa, even in small towns. Now I know where the container loads of bicycles and black-and-white televisions my former students sell to Africa end up. Africa, so it seems, doesn’t really produce much of anything (Either does the U.S. but at least it survives on service, high technology and information delivery). Living as I do in the most developed section of China where even the smallest village runs an enterprise churning out toys or clothes for the American and European markets, I was struck by the absence of manufacturing in African towns and villages. African villages seem to run on a non-money economy. When people are not farming, they relax. Once in a while a truck dumps a few sacks of sugar or salt on the side of the road, and someone from a village picks up the supply needed for a few months. Africans are about the most relaxed people I have every met. They are not concerned about time, which leads foreigners to comment derogatorily about ‘Africa time,’ which is a euphemistic way of explaining why schedules and appointments are so rarely kept. Villagers grow what they need to eat and barter for the rest. Perhaps feudal China was that way several permutations ago, but now the PRC fits snugly into the global economy. (I believe that in the next decade China, not America/Europe, will be calling the shots in the global economy and that the renminbi [people’s money] will replace the American greenback.) Over the past two decades China has discovered how to improve its people’s quality of life. The key terms are gaige (reform) and fazhan (development). Sure, there have been derailments and setbacks, but does anyone actually believe that the quality of life for the Chinese a hundred years ago was better than that today? I am afraid, however, that Africa’s past was indeed better than its present. One hundred years ago, with the cessation of slavery and before colonialization became too rooted, the quality of life for the majority of Africans was better than now. Granted, life then was simple, society was traditional, and Africa was not linked to the international community. People did not live long lives, nor did they read or write. You had a lot of children because most died young. There was no television, or running water, and almost no cities. There were no NGOs handing out free money. Modernity has not brought an improvement in quality of African life. Relative to the rest of the world including China, illiteracy is high. People still have a lot of children and today most of them live, given improvements in health. There is over population. The population is young. Today, the average male in Malawi, for example, dies around 46 years of age. Perhaps this is an improvement over a century ago, but it certainly doesn’t seem very ‘modern.’

The Chinese benefaction in Africa is not like that of the NGOs or USAID or the multi-nationals that put in infrastructure projects around the continent. This is not the ‘Chinese model;’ I am not sure there is a Chinese model for aid to Africa. If there were one, however, it might take the form of government (PRC)-subsidized ventures. I visited a Chinese joint venture health clinic in Dar es Salaam, the capital of Tanzania. An apartment with a handful of PRC nationals on assignment served as a sales area and infirmary. The clinic was struggling to get off the ground. The doctor I talked to said that it might take a few decades before Chinese traditional medicine caught on in Africa, but she was convinced it would take root..eventually. My impression is that this was, in reality, an aid-project that the PRC subsidized, but it took the form of a business.

That is what it is designed to become. The Chinese assist in infrastructure, but their projects have pretty clear objectives. I have been told about Chinese engineers (and even road crews) working on improving highway transportation. And then there is the famous TAZARA, or Tanzania-Zambia Railway, which was built through Zambia and Tanzania with Chinese help, to open up the copper fields of Zambia so that the ore could be transported to the coast of Tanzania for shipment to China. (Given rural electrification, you can imagine the copper needs of the PRC). My impression is that the Chinese think out their projects as long-term investments. The partnerships they are developing in Africa put them in the older sibling role. This contrasts with how the countries of the developed world relate to Africa. The developed West is more like the rich aunty to whom one gives sycophantish attention only in order to get a hand-out. The influence of foreign aid is pervasive and insidious. An example: the streets of cities and town are lined with stalls that sell used clothes, charitable gifts from Europe and America. So there is no need for Africa to have a clothing manufacturing industry. Most of the population can get shirts and other hand-me-downs from rich aunty Europa/America; and if you have the cash and want something new, you can buy it in a China shop. I have not seen figures that reveal total NGO and foreign government support, but I would not be surprised if the poorest countries in Africa actually receive more foreign aid per capita than they produce themselves in goods and services. These countries' GDP is around US \$150 per capita (e.g., Rwanda \$110, Eritrea and Mozambique \$120, Tanzania \$160, Malawi \$180).

I came away from central Africa with the feeling that the people there deserve more than hand-outs from the West. From earlier colonialism and enslavement to its present manifestation through foreign aid, intervention from the developed world has meant that the people of these countries do not control their own lives. Yet, the Africans I talked to see it different. Their take on their countries' plights was that they, Africans themselves, were to blame. I was told by blacks: 'We Africans are too traditional, too tribal.' White Africans I talked with often deplored the lack of initiative and entrepreneurship among black Africans who, according to one man, 'just don't care about making money.' 'Time is money' certainly does not apply here. (Look at all the businesses run by ethnic Indians in African cities. They represent a tiny percent of the population but they appear to dominate the retail and banking sectors in cities I visited). In the Westernized cities black Africans look in admiration at the Western model of urbanization (a model which China seems to be successfully copying). Black African politicians seem to want an Africa that fits into the world economy. In fact, they look in envy to China. But an urbanized Africa means the end of tribalism, the essence of the African way of life. I don't know if this is so good. Tribal culture is what Africa is still about. In contrast, Chinese culture is being greatly affected by urbanization and modernization; the culture is growing and changing accordingly, and I don't see development making Chinese culture any less Chinese. But Africa? I just don't see how tribalism can 'grow and change' if Africa were to urbanize. Even at present, tribalism makes national statehood more or less irrelevant for much of the population.

I can only fantasize: an Africa without foreign aid or intervention, where Africans take care of themselves. As it is, I see no future for Africa. Life quality might get a bit better, or it might get a bit worse - male Malawians might gain or lose a year of life, but the fundamentals of the economic system are not likely to change. I talked to a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi, one of a hundred in that country. She told me: 'Yes, we often wonder if we're doing any good. The Peace Corps has been here 25 years, but is anything better?' I do think that individual Africans

probably benefit from the various forms of aid given, be they employed in an infrastructure project or instructed by a VSO teacher. But, overall, the picture is bleak. As a traveler, I have never perceived such bleakness in other parts of the so-called Third World. I am, of course, bullish on China's future. I can discern a future even for India, where poverty is so visible. It may take generations, but my gut feeling is that India will survive. I cannot say that about Africa. This bleakness takes its toll on me, the traveler. As I travel about the African continent, most of the descriptors that spring to mind are synonyms of 'sad.' There are many lovely sights and fascinating aspects of diverse cultures and societies, but the memories that will linger are those of dying civilizations, a dying continent.

Doing the tourist things

Africa time - Mostly Malawi

For me what makes traveling interesting is probably not what especially interests others. Many tourists feel accomplished if they have crammed in as many 'scenic spots' as their waking hours can accommodate. I think of myself as somewhat a cultural tourist. Cultural difference was the area of research I focused on, recently as an academic, when I examined the Chinese higher education system from a western perspective (The book that took me several years to research and write is still awaiting a publisher). This visit to Africa has highlighted cultural differences, not so much between the U.S. and the various African nations visited, but rather between those countries and China. This was brought out in the previous e-mail. So, it's fair to say that I see Africa through China lenses, as worn by an American. Thought I have not lived in the U.S. for over a decade, I am still an American through-and-through, for better or for worse.

For most travelers to the central part of the continent, Africa means game safaris. As I mentioned earlier, I had not had much luck in booking a safari in Tanzania. I figured to see animals in Malawi, one of the poorest of African countries, which certainly doesn't suffer from the slickness that masquerades as professionalism in the game tourism industry in Kenya and Tanzania. Malawi has somewhat understated game parks. The one I chose to visit is reputed to be one of the country's best - Liwonde National Park, which I had passed on the bus between Lake Malawi and Blantyre, the commercial capital of the country.

Malawi held a special significance for me. Almost 30 years ago I had been accepted as a Peace Corps volunteer for Malawi. I had been sent a plane ticket for training/induction, but several days before the flight, the program was scrapped because of a dispute between the US and the government of Malawi. It happens that a PC volunteer had sent a post card to a friend in the US in which Malawi was described as poor and backward, or something equivalent. As it turns out, 20 years and two failed careers later I did leave the US; I ended up almost my chance in China. I must wonder what would have happened if I gone abroad as I had originally planned, if my career paths would have been different. Of course, we'll never know.

To backtrack a bit, I had ended up in Blantyre after having spent four days on the Ilala, a ferry boat that plows Lake Malawi. I had ended up on the Ilala because I managed to get to Chilumba, at the north end of the lake, on that very day once a week when the ferry was scheduled to arrive/depart. That day happened to be a Sunday. I had spent the previous night in a road house at Kyela on the Tanzania side of the Malawi-Tanzania border (single room, mosquito net, its own bath or rather a room that had toilet and a long-out-of-use shower. A tub of water was provided for bathing and flushing). I had managed to get a mini-bus for the 12 km trip from Kyela to the

border and then another from the border to the closest Malawi border town, Karonga, about an hour's drive away. I then ended up in Chilumba after a harrowing all morning, under 100 km. ride in a matola, which is the term given to the unofficial transport that serves areas where legitimately licensed vehicles fear to tread. This was the equivalent of the 'service taxi' that I took to Luxor, Egypt; such private-hire trucks seem to exist everywhere in Africa and are called different names in different countries. The matola I took was a flat-bed truck (bigger than a pick-up but shorter than the truck that can haul a full-sized ocean-going container). These types of private hires leave only after they have filled up with passengers/freight. Of course, being filled up is in the eye of the man collecting money. I had figured that the flat bed was filled when it was actually considered only half-full. We still had 25 more adult natives to go, along with 20 50-kilo sacks of grain (we had to adjust ourselves so the sacks could go under our bodies), a few chickens and, of course, babies. This pick-up was deemed to have run out of room when a sufficient number of passengers were suffering leg cramps, hemorrhoids, and other infirmities associated with this mode of travel.

Let me comment on babies. I know I am digressing, and I promise to get back to the safari. Babies, I think, are Africa's main product. Producing them is what Africa does better than anywhere else. People in Africa have been treated as commodities for some time (remember the slave trade). A family's wealth today seems to be figured on the number of babies you can produce. The more you have, the wealthier you are. Africa, I am told, exceeds the rest of the world in fertility. If you were a sightless visitor (a blind person in politically incorrect parlance), however, you would never know about Africa's baby boom. These little people are quiet, never crying. Older children never seem to be fighting or playing as children do in North America or Asia (Chinese babies are also pretty quiet, seen but not heard). They don't really seem like children. And babies are everywhere. On the Ilala, for example, at any one time, there were a dozen in steerage, the lower deck where the natives sat (I was in a cabin, quite comfortable, if not the Titanic). The Ilala is primarily a means for those who live in the villages on the shore of the lake to get themselves and their cargo from one place to another - the ferry doubles as a tourist boat, with cabins for about a dozen people. I mentioned that the babies do not make much noise. Each is held to its mother, wrapped in the cloth that forms one of the woman's outer garment. Sometimes the baby rides on the back; when it is hungry it is slung around front for nursing. I use the third-person pronoun, for the baby, to me at least, seemed like a genderless commodity. Not a commodity in the sense of something being traded in a marketplace, but as an item with a worth if not a price. And with few human manifestations. These babies, however, do not live forever. Some grow up; others die. I was made aware of this reality, for when the Ilaya docked at Nkhaka Bay, an unmarked sedan pulled up after the passengers had alighted. A stretcher fully covered by a sheet - a stretcher too small for an adult, perhaps even the sheet I had slept on the previous night - was carried off with what I assume to be the corpse of a baby or a child whose voyage had been terminated before its time. No crowd had gathered. It was as if this death was so routine, it did not deserve notice.

Back to the safari. Blantyre, being Malawi's commercial center, seemed an ideal place to find someone to arrange my safari to Liwonde National Park. The Lonely Planet wrote about entering the park by canoe amidst hippos and crocks. The park's rangers arranged guided tours. The park is just off a major national road; there's budget accommodation (US \$20 / night). The hostel I stayed in at Blantyre was an expatriate-run oasis, but they were not able to arrange a park tour.

Now that I think about it, little of the tourism I had seen in Kenya and Tanzania had been run by black Africans. Indians controlled the foreign exchange operations. Brits ran the e-mail centers. Australians or South Africans (white) ran the backpacker places. But in Blantyre I found the premier travel agency - run by locals - and asked about their arranging a one-day trip to the nation's premier park. The agent spent the morning trying to put together such a trip (which was mentioned in their glossy brochure), but it turned out that the minimum number of people needed for canoe entry was two. I was one. So no safari in Malawi. Better luck in the next country.

Malawi, according to travelers I met, is the nicest place in Africa. The people are the friendliest. There is almost no tourist culture. No touts. Unlike Kenya and Tanzania, the streets are hassle free. It is about the cheapest country to travel in. Backpacker places have cropped up. These are oases, walled with security guards, run mostly by expatriates or aging hippies that provide western food and drink at Malawi prices. And, according to LP, the country is one of the most crime-free places in Africa. Unfortunately, this bit of information is out-of-date. I heard more horror stories from fellow travelers about Malawi than any other African country. I met a Dutch travel writer who in the last 15 years had been robbed only once. You guessed it, in Malawi. He was staying in a single room in a hotel in a town on the Lake. When he went out for the day, he left his room key with the manager, as requested. When he returned, he decided to get some of his money. He carried US hundred dollar bills, as do most backpackers in Africa (In some countries travelers' checks are worthless or carry heavy commissions by the few banks that will accept them (Barclays Bank in Zambia charged me US \$5 or a US \$ 50 travelers' check). The Dutcher told me he always kept his cash inside an envelope inside a novel inside his backpack, which he left in his hotel room, securely fastened, but never locked. On his return he discovered that one of his five hundred dollar bills was missing. He confronted the manager, who said such a theft could not have taken place (which was true, unless the manager happened to be the thief). A German tourist reported that he had met several locals on a minibus. They invited him for drinks. He woke up two days later, with his valuables missing. His Fresca had been drugged. Two Australians I met had their daypacks stolen from canoes they had hired. While they were doing errands in one of the villages on the lake, they were watching the canoes. For about 30 seconds their vision had been obscured by someone they were talking with. That's when their packs were stolen. On the Ilala I met a British volunteer doctor, who had come to Africa for two month's service before doing her residency. She disembarked when we landed at Nkhotakota. During the next few days I ran into several people who told me that youths who had helped her at the lakeside pier had stolen her daypack, which contained her passport. When she and other travelers from the Ilala reported what had happened to the driver of the pickup, he was not surprised. 'You mean the thieves. You must be careful.' It was common knowledge among the locals that Ilala passengers had their bags stolen, but this didn't seem to cause enough concern among the locals, who never warned travelers. Malawi remains a pleasant traveling experience for most travelers. Perhaps I just encountered by chance those who had experienced crime.

The real Africa

I guess you might be getting tired of reading tales from 'the dark continent.' At least e-mail doesn't waste paper! I don't know how many more of these correspondences there will be, but in this one I want to comment on the real Africa. The tour book referred to Zambia as the real Africa. There is little tourist culture there, and only a few people go out of their way to visit the country, which is for most travelers not on the Cairo to Cape Town route. Most who touch down

in Zambia do so at Victoria Falls. (But the Falls are shared with Zimbabwe [formerly known as Southern Rhodesia], which gets most of the tourists).

I took the TAZARA rail which runs from Dar es Salaam, the coastal capital of Tanzania. The east-west track ends in the Zambia copper belt and the whole project was financed by the Chinese government and built several decades ago. It gets prominent mention in the civics books used in Chinese schools. As well it should. I remember reading about the TAZARA when it was under construction, called by American journalists as the red railway that was to bring the devil communism to Africa. Well, it didn't really do that. Various African states experimented with socialism, but these directions had less to do with China than with the tragic economic conditions that various politicians had left their states in by the time they had been expelled from office. Socialism didn't last much into this decade.

Generally, traveling sparks my curiosity, which is why I took the TAZARA. That's also why, once I finish my African trip, I will get some books that tell me about this Chinese-built rail. This is one of the fascinating infrastructure projects of the 20th century. Zambia was determined to break her dependence on the then white-run Rhodesia, on which it relied for transporting its copper for export. The U.S. and various multi-nationals such as the World Bank and the United Nations had a vested interest in the Rhodesian transport network and refused to help Zambia establish/upgrade its own rail system. China came to the rescue. The TAZARA is nicknamed 'friendship railway' or 'freedom railway.' Except for access for copper - which China paid market price for - China received mostly intangibles for designing and helping to build the system. It gained respect in Africa. Unlike the USSR or the USA, China did not try to force ideology as a condition for receiving foreign aid. Construction started just after the Cultural Revolution, when China was cut off from the world; the project was China's substantial foreign investment to commemorate its reentry into the world. At this time China also began trading with African countries, establishing a small but significant market for consumer goods. Perhaps most important, China showed the world its engineers were not second rate. They accomplished a feat of engineering at about the same time that China's nuclear scientists allowed the country to join the nuclear club.

I did not take the TAZARA all the way into Zambia, however. I got off at the Malawi border so that I could travel down through Malawi (south on the Lake on the MV Ilala - MV, I think, means marine vehicle, but I am only guessing). The train, built in China with carriages that resemble their Chinese counterparts, is an overnight trip, passing through a game park (at night, unfortunately, so I could still see no game) and rural Tanzania, which is what most of the country is. The train feels Chinese, except that during this trip there were repeated jerking motions, as if the engineer momentarily let his (unlikely her in Africa) foot off the pedal and then slammed it back down. I have never felt such a jerky motion on an otherwise perfectly smooth ride. It occurred about a half dozen times per hour and I attribute this to 'engineer error.' The Chinese do not operate the trains; they merely trained the first group of African personnel. The track, which was laid only 20+ years ago, provides a much smoother ride than that I felt on other African trains, which are vestiges of colonialism.

I entered Zambia after having spent a week in Malawi, much of it on the lake cruise. The last city I visited was the Malawian capital, Lilongwe. I had wanted then to go to Zambia and directly to its capital Lusaka. According to LP, Stagecoach (the Malawian equivalent of Greyhound) used to run direct service between capitals, but now there was only a private bus that picked up anyone

who waved his/her hands along the road. The trip took 24 hours, with pit stops only for petrol. Such a ride on a hard seat seemed more than I could bear, so I opted to break up my trip and stay in a back packers retreat that was just outside the gate to South Luangwa National Park, considered by LP as Zambia premier game park. This is where I was going to see the animals. Thus, I left Lilongwe early one morning, took a minibus to the border, rode in a pick up truck over the 20 km 'no man's land' between border stations, and then, once in Zambia, a private vehicle that called itself a taxi (the we-leave-when-we-fill-up variety) to the closest town of any size, Chipata. From there I took the once-a-day Land Rover that made the 100 km, 6 hour trip to the National Park. Parked by the main bus station, it took several hours for the Land Rover to fill up. Fortunately, I was one of the early arrivals and, although I had to wait an hour plus, at least I had a seat. The Land Rover was built to sit five persons on either side of the compartment, a driver and passenger in the cab up front. Talk about overloaded! We had 25 persons aboard. Seven across each side in the back. Three plus driver up front. The rest squatting in the rear aisle and several people hanging out the rear door. This was not the most uncomfortable ride I had in Africa, although my lower body fell asleep despite it being bounced along the way. Zambia roads, I am told, are the worse in Africa, but I saw little difference between this road and ones in Malawi or Tanzania. For some reason local take pride in saying how horrible their roads are (Perhaps they feel unable to boast about anything else). This path had once been paved, probably by the British a generation back. It had serious corrugation. Corrugation is certainly bearable; the type I had experienced in northern Australia was uniform, something to which car and passengers could adapt. Here it was different; the pot holes that cohabitated with the corrugation were the killers. This road, in the national budget, is supposed to be graded monthly (pot holes first being filled) after the wet season, but it seems funds never materialize, and no road work had actually commenced in the eight weeks since the rains had ended. The road was a disaster. Anyway, somehow I got to where I was going.

So I arranged to visit Zambia's premier game park. For US \$ 25 (plus \$20 park entrance fee, payable in foreign exchange) I was given an experienced driver, in an open Land Rover so I could see the animals in their native habitat. I was the only passenger during our four-hour park tour, for this was the low season. We passed only two other vehicles. Zambia's premier park gets a high rating because of its 'roughness' and 'lack of polish.' Everything was run by native blacks. The park itself is not as 'civilized' (e.g., portable potties at road side) as those in the richer, more tourist-driven countries of Kenya and Tanzania. The roads are not sealed, and theoretically at least one can get as close to the game as the driver believes to be safe or the game is willing to be gotten close to. The adventure was extremely interesting, but terribly sad. (That's how I would describe black Africa, in general). I was able to see some game, especially troops of elephants and hippos which are in such abundance that they overflow from the park and into the campsite I was staying (Until the massacre at Luxor, wandering hippos were the leading cause of tourist fatalities in Africa). The pachyderms are in such abundance that they must be routinely culled to prevent them from destroying too much vegetation (you can imagine how many trees the average elephant consumes each day). The highlight of the 4-hour excursion was seeing herds (numbering in the hundreds) of buffalo and antelope, whose youngsters serve as the diet of the big cats. I saw about a half dozen zebra and giraffe but no where near the thousands I expected. And no cats, although it was rumored that some South Africans in their own vehicle had seen a leopard. During the height of the dry season, more game are visible, for they frequent this part of the park, with its access to water. But the time of my visit was shortly after the rainy season had ended,

and much of the game had migrated away from the tourist area. So I decided against a night safari or a walking tour, guided by a park ranger. At this time of year, neither was good value.

The reason I say South Luangwa park is sad is that poachers heavily influence its operation. The rhinos, which were abundant just a decade ago, are now extinct. As my guide told me, 'there's no reason to reintroduce them, for the poachers will just kill them.' Rhino horns in ground-up version appear in the Asian market as an aphrodisiac. It is estimated that about 1,000 lions remain in the park, but it also estimated that poachers are taking out about one a day. In several years, therefore, there will be no lions. At the present there are tons (literally) of elephants, despite poachers' killing them for meat. Various NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund are doing what they can to monitor the situation, but they basically are involved in surveys to record the depletion. For each species, there is an established quota, on which culling is based. Professional hunters (PH) buy these quota. For example, it costs about US \$3,000 per day to track game - on land or in the air - and it takes PHs about a week or ten days before they bag anything. All this is done under the supervision of NGOs, and part of the proceeds are plowed back into conservation. Zambia, however, does not have enough park rangers to keep the poachers at bay. They are outnumbered and outgunned. The poachers are so bold that they light fires to flush out the game. NGO spotters can do nothing but show up a few days later. When poachers are caught, they are often shot on sight, their corpses left to feed the very animals they were gunning for. Most poaching nowadays is done for meat; it probably directly relates to the country's poverty. I don't see how that issue can ever be addressed.

I certainly don't regret going on safari even in such an out-of-the-way park. Fortunately, I didn't have to take private hire transport to get back to Chipata. I got a lift and the corrugation did not feel so bad sitting in the front seat of a new Land Rover, with plenty of leg room. I took a luxury bus (three persons to a lightly padded bench) from Chipata to Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. This was one of the prettiest stretches of highway I have seen anywhere in the world. The countryside is rolling hills, and the road was continually lined with small villages, whose huts were interspersed among clumps of trees. The tour book said to avoid Lusaka at all costs. If one were forced to visit the city, it said, take only taxis. In fact, I found Lusaka to be little different from other African capitals. It had a small town feeling, like Dar es Salaam. I walked around during the two days I was there. (I did not tempt fate by walking at night). Crime is obviously a problem, judging by all the security measures taken by locals. Individual homes employ guards; every house seems to have a guard dog and walking down a neighborhood sounds like a trip through a kennel; industrial strength razor wire is looped atop the 6 foot walls around compounds. I heard several tales about day-light robbery in the heart of the city, but I suspect the situation is no worse than in, say, Nairobi, or anywhere in Malawi. There are few tourists - an occasional backpacker but never a busload of pensioners. I had a good meal, featuring local cuisine, in what must have been the city's five-star restaurant. All in all, Lusaka and Zambia in general did seem like the real Africa, away from the tourist culture. They were certainly worth visiting.

The greatest sights in Africa

Without a doubt Victoria Falls, Zambia; Zanzibar island, Tanzania; Fish River Canyon, Namibia; and the Valley of the Kings, Luxor, were the supreme tourist spots I visited in Africa.

What makes a tourist spot successful? Much depends on one's mood and immediate environment and company during the visit. Also important is how one views a sight. For example, statistically speaking Fish River is second to the Grand Canyon in depth and thus one might assume less impressive. But Fish River is in the middle of Namibia, a small country itself off the beaten tourist track. I had hired a Mazda Midge with two Australian back-packers to see the national parks in the south of Namibia. These places don't get tour busses, although they are on the itinerary of backpackers who pay megabucks (about US \$75 per day) for multi-week overland safaris that go from the Cape to Cairo, avoiding the numerous countries which experience civil wars. We visited the Canyon in the afternoon, at dusk and again at dawn. There were few other tourists around. All I can remember about the Grand Canyon, which I saw several decades ago, was how commercial it felt and how obnoxious American tourists were. I am sure the Grand Canyon would have been something to behold a century ago, but today it is a recommended miss. Fish River is what the Grand Canyon would have been like pre-tourists.

Victoria Falls was much the same aboriginal experience. I saw Vic Falls from the Zambian, not the Zimbabwean, side. Most people see the Falls from Zimbabwe, which charges a hefty admissions (many times that of Zambia) and where you are provided raincoats. The Zambia side is au natural. Sealed paths go right to up the cliff, 50 meters from the other side of the abyss where the water rushes down into the Zambezi River. There are no guardrails. In order to get as close to the falls as possible, you must cross a swinging bridge (metal and concrete) that is inundated by spray. You get soaked to the bone. But once on the little island that is in the Zambezi River (about 100 meters above it) and right across from the falling water, Vic Falls is in your face. It's wet. It's cold. It's what the first explorers felt, although they did not have the benefit of a concrete and metal bridge. In approaching Vic Falls you can hear it for several kilometers before seeing it. Then you can see the clouds of mist before actually seeing the falling water. The spray forms in sheets that move in apparently unordered intervals. At another viewpoint on the Zambia side, you can see the slight flow of water that goes 'past small wooded islands and smooth rocks.' One author (Moorehead, *Blue Nile*) describes this better than I ever could. '... then abruptly the stream vanishes in a tremendous white downpour that thunders as it falls. Looking down from the top one sees far below a narrow gorge filled with racing water, and it twists and turns until it is finally lost to sight in the surrounding cliffs. The spray flung up from this gorge creates a perpetual soft rain which is blown upon the hillside opposite.' The statistics are impressive: 120 million gallons of water pour down the mile-wide ledge of the Falls every minute. The clouds of mist are visible from 20 miles away. We visited after the rainy season had ended and when the flow was at its peak. I saw Vic Falls in the company of a few backpackers who were staying at the same hostel. Again, no tour busses, no obese tourists. I think I have visited Niagara Falls, but I don't really remember it. I hope I never forget Vic Falls.

Another memorable tourist spot was the Island of Zanzibar, in the Indian Ocean about 30 miles off Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In the 1960s a revolution on the island toppled the Sultan's Arab government and Zanzibar joined with what was Tanganyika to become the United Republic of Tanzania. Zanzibar is noted for its cloves and other spices, as well as various ruins where the sultan kept his harem. I took a day-long spice-tour, walking through the bush with a guide finding and picking various fruits, leaves, stems, nuts and whatever makes spices. It was like walking through a botanical spice garden and being able to sample the goods. A tour like this lasted all day; there were seven of us; and we had lunch cooked by village locals. We then swam

in the Indian Ocean. We spent several hours in the Land Rover on dirt trails that ran along clumps of villages. A power line ran alongside the trail. None of the villages we passed, however, were electrified. The line apparently served a tourist hotel (which fortunately we never saw).

[I am now off to cycle in Hokkaido, Japan, so these tales have come to their end]