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BEYOND BOUNDARIES

e-magazine with attitude

EDITION
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**ACTION
124 PAGES
PACKED**

**THE 3 SALAZES
TAMING THE DRAGON**

**CLIFFHANGER: AUSTRALIA
ROCKS, RUTS, RED DIRT & DUST**

CAPE TOWN TO KATHMANDU

A JOURNEY OF 17,000 KILOMETERS & 19 COUNTRIES

Mauritania

BOUNDLESSLY



By: The Dennig (text)
& Michael Dennig (photo)

ON THE MAP IT IS JUST A STONE'S THROW FROM DAKHLA TO THE MAURITANIAN BORDER, BUT IT TAKES HOURS TO GET THERE. THE NAVIGATION SYSTEM INDICATES THAT WE SHOULD ARRIVE AT AROUND 3 O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON, BUT OBVIOUSLY THE NAVIGATION SYSTEM DOESN'T TELL US WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE AT THE AFRICAN BORDER CONTROLS.

FOR HOURS WE HAVE BEEN STANDING WITH A CROWD OF WEST AFRICAN PEOPLE IN FRONT OF THE OFFICE DOORS, WAITING FOR JUST ONE STAMP IN OUR PASSPORTS, ON THE VISA, AND ON THE REGISTRATION DOCUMENTS OF THE VEHICLE, AS WITHOUT ONE OF THEM THERE IS NO INSURANCE OR WHATSOEVER.



The Iron Ore Railway, a single, 704 km railway line linking the Iron Mining centre of Zouerate with the port of Nouadhibou

It does take hours for the officers in uniforms seated behind crooked wooden tables, to enter our data in large books and on loose papers. It's chaos, which really does not make sense to us. We would have been lost though, if we had not agreed to deal with him.

I must have immediately caught his eye as I walked across the concrete floor from one office to the other on the wrong side of the line to get the right documents. The heat was killing me, as inside it was over 32 degrees. And I didn't pass the security-guys with the x-ray machines.

Foreign country He jumps into our Unimog, wearing his black hoodie, which hardly stands out from his skin color, and speaks to me immediately. He guides us while we drive across this 'No Man's' land, of which we know is full of mines. We carefully follow his outstretched hand, which he uses to guide us through this maze of tracks in the sand, past car wrecks, in which nothing is left. Meanwhile he is telling us to not hand our documents to others. Our gaze focuses on the end of this field of sand, on those buildings, abandoned barracks, more car wrecks and in a wink of an eye I notice two white UN vehicles to my left.

On the Mauritanian side, a second younger guy, jumps in on my side, which worries me: who should I follow? To whom do I trust our documents? At the end of it, both of them manoeuvre us through this chaos of officials asking many questions about our route, to we scribble the answers on a piece of paper.

One of them starts to complain that he can't sleep with the noise level from praying people as some already call it a night. The other, like a miracle, grabs our documents which we handed him hours ago, out of a huge pile of documents, and gives them to us. It's close to 19.00 o'clock in the evening when we do have our stamped visa's in the passports, the papers for the car insurance, a handful of blue banknotes and a telephone card in our wallet, and yes!, we are free people, 'free men' as he told us hours ago too.

No matter where we look, how far we turn around, here the Sahara resembles a huge flat pancake. No elevation, no landmark to focus on. A horizon as drawn with the ruler. The noise of a deep hum in the far distance. As it's still dampened, we know that we still have time to drive along these railroad tracks until one of the longest and heaviest trains will pass by.

This is the 'Iron Ore' railway, which we saw on the first evening after we wondered about this inexplicable noise that we did hear since we followed the tracks beside the railroad. It seems that this 'Iron Ore' railway runs from the coast hundreds of kilometers straight to the East. We stop next to the tracks and witness three huge locomotives, all combined to be a large workhorse, pulling countless tons of heavy wagons, in staccato past us, shaking the earth beneath our feet and leaving this metallic groan of steel on steel in our ears.

As we move on, here and there on the tracks, shanty towns above which the whole year round the sun shines merciless. On the ground, garbage and animal bones. Above them ravens circle like vultures. No wonder it's hard to survive here. It's like the Mad Max movies, only this the reality here.

On one afternoon we suddenly see the steep towering rock of Ben Amira, here we get our drone airborne, to film and take photos from a bird's eye view, on which we later do see on our laptop the huge monolith looking like black rock island in the bright sand. We go for a hike to take a closer look, it look like a great basilica, and we wonder how Earth's history has created such a massive wonder. To complete the day, we have a nice BBQ, with some great wine, enjoying the wonderful scenery and watching the sunset next to our parked Unimog in this desolate desert.

Against the sun

Endless tracks in the Mauritanian desert



The beauty the huge monoliths, the ancient history of our Earth, and the boundlessly of Mauritania



In Choum, we do reach the tar road and witness on Africa in clichés. Garbage is lying around, goats everywhere, and we are surrounded by begging children. When we do stop at the only gas pump, we are immediately surrounded by young men who all want something from us, but what we need is diesel, and in large quantities, not just a few liters from a Jerry can, that nobody has. I have the camera in my hand, but I don't take photos. What does such a photo show?

It's a long track. She winds through the sand with desert grasses that look like the foam crowns on the sea waving in the horizon. Rabbits and desert foxes are jumping out of our way in front of us, we continue through sand dunes which are treacherously soft, over a long series of shallow peaks and valleys, which extend with their desert sands and rocks for as far as they eyes can see. And suddenly, like a 'Magical Mirage', the dormant 'Tenoumer' volcano crater appears. Half an eternity later we are there, driving towards the crater, it looks like its rises from the plain covered in stones, and has grown bigger and bigger. A crater just of stones, and hardly any sand. Its rugged and desolate, and the edges protrudes into the sky.

Not A Soul



The dormant 'Tenoumer' volcano crater



Later, as we are in our beds, outside there is a disgraceful wind which makes our Unimog shake constantly. Looking outside the window, we see car headlights that are driving on the to the smuggler trails that we have passed on these last sluggish kilometers to the crater rim. Over and over again, we have stumbled upon these innumerable exuberant lane grooves.

Days pass into nights and days again. We don't see a single soul and the wind creates new landscapes within seconds. There are hours when we roam with seventy kilometers per hour over smooth sandy trails, the moments where yesterday is before us, even the shapes and colors of the desert repeats themselves and we cry 'and daily greet the marmot' and the moments where we remain abruptly, with unbelieving astonishment about what the wind has created with the desert sands. The dune by our side, a grace whose long wave crest rises out of nowhere. Gold beige and covered by a delicate white, just like her sister on the opposite side. When I look at them I see a beauty, infinite filigree and completeness. A beauty we won't forget anymore. It is as if a higher Power had summoned the wind out and the butterflies that flutter around. Later, 2 ravens join in to play their game. Perky & curious, but shy. The wind, which uses power again at dawn the next day, reshapes its flowing silhouette. Just for his pleasure.

In the ancient desert town of 'Chinguetti', which is constantly threatened by desert sand, we fall into another time. The town and its inhabitants look as if the clocks had stopped ticking years, decades ago. We are sitting in the only restaurant in the city, wait on the terrace for our tea and listen to the soft murmur of music coming from the inside. I look into the main street, just sand, and no tarmac, I do see a women with black lace gloves that reach her elbow. She has placed the handle of her little handbag over the angled forearm, rummaging almost slowly across the road, past 2 Africans, who submerge their laundry in cut-up yellow plastic barrels and pull them out again with uniform movements.

In Fairy-Tale Sleep



Creating some dust!

Tine Dennig 'pushing' their Unimog without any hesitation through some Fesh-Fesh, a fine sand that looks like solid ground but behaves like soft mud



The Taxi, an old Mercedes 190 in a deplorable state that goes back & forth, from one side of the city to the other, seems to be a fiction. The Old Town was buried almost entirely by sand, so the inhabitants had to build a new city on the other side, where the young Tuareg, who had previously approached us on the street, is now sitting at our table. While having tea, he willingly tells about himself, of the caravan with which he came from Mali, of the fact that they ran at night and rested during the day, of the war in which his country.

Despite this armed conflict, he is optimistic that within two or three years tourism in the South will return, that he will then have work as a tourist guide. A work that brought him his good English. Guided by the bright blue of his robe, the kind of clothes that the Tuareg have always worn, he leads us to the old district with its dilapidated stone houses, through one narrow alley after the other, to the Mosque built in traditional stone architecture from the 13th century. The Stone minaret rises up to the sky. No stone seems to have fallen out of his wall. The place in front of it is deserted. Everything is quiet.

Behind us there is the semi-arid desert. Before us: even more of it. On the top of a flat elevation we can see our destination: in the middle of the great desert are elephant-sized rocks. As we get closer we see a herd of elephants that have been put together. They are brown-grey Giants, twenty meters tall, with powerful hulls that they tend to Earth. They're not moving. Some push their back so close together that it looks like they're protecting each other. With the fall of darkness, we hear the grilling chirping and strange barking from the animals that roam through the night.

We drive on, far to the East, where the desert becomes greener, passes into a Steppe, in which huge herds of camels and cattle roam, where after a hundred kilometers at the same pace, we roll over tar back into the western direction, with the harmless traffic flowing. We notice that the roadside is full of garbage, the poorest dwellings, cadavers of animals & donkey carriages that got ran over. Here in the far South-East of Mauritania it's so poor that it hurts. The East-West connection in the country is called 'The road of Hope' by locals. Through our eyes, it's like the backstage of a theater.



Police officers show their pride and salute us by putting their hand to their forehead. One, decorated with medals, continues to blow into his trill whistle, making a big gesture to us through the crowd. Donkeys as bleak, do not even look up if we avoid them while honking our horn passing them by. A goat attached on a rack on top of a car, its thin, long neck and head fluttering back and forth at a neck-breaking pace. Stranger people wave at us with a smile.

Just a short distance from this street Mauritanian Wild-Life: two large and real crocodiles (not made of stone, like elephants in the middle of the desert) lie completely motionless, as if they were dead, on the shore of this way-too-small pond. Their jagged, inactive tails shines green black in sunlight. Very different from the other eleven. With their eyes staring at us, they glide with head first back into the murky water.

Small prey like rodents, only with stunned tails, scurry around the rocks around the water hole. At the other end of the gorge, where the cows, donkeys and goats quench their thirst in the water, small flock of birds fly up. The mooing of the cattle, tormenting the steep, sandy slope out of the gorge, echoes in the ledges of the rocks.

It has been some great weeks in Mauritania, but it's time to set our navigation directions back to Europe ■



Our last night in Mauritania, before heading back to Europe