

SRMN Newsletter

HAPPY EASTER



Editorial

Travelling around the world has become progressively more complicated by paperwork, wars and terrorist activity.

Somehow or other overlanders still find a way to continue even if it means changing their schedule and their route.

Intrepid is the only word to describe these adventurers!

Clive and Ann Barker

Contact the Editors

We are
Clive and Ann Barker

Our email address is
clive@cliveandann.com

This is our truck called Nomad



We are back in the UK

Water

Finding water to fill up your water tank can sometimes be more difficult than attaching your hose to the nearest tap. Even then we have had the tap supply salt water on a couple of occasions.

Some of the places we have used include standpipes, mosques, artesian wells, rivers and streams, household storage tanks in Libya, car washes and fuel stations, hotels, a distillation plant and so on. Even a fire station as below!!

My Favourite Photos



100 litres of water in 90 seconds
at a fire station in South America !

Travel Tip

Take a spare water filler cap

A Brief Encounter

We arrived in good time at the Union Park Camp in Polokwane in South Africa and for once it was flat as a pancake with some shade. This municipal site was attached to the municipal game reserve with access included in the price of our overnight stay. While we sat and had coffee after a relaxed lunch we saw some eland wandering along the fence adjacent to our pitch. Eland are rarely seen although they are the largest species of antelope in Africa weighing upwards of a ton so we were very pleased to have had this opportunity.

This encouraged us to go for a walk that afternoon following one of the walking trails in the reserve. For a couple of kilometres we saw no wildlife at all. Then we came to a clearing in the bush and surprised a wildebeest which gave a snort and quickly disappeared. Shortly after we saw some ostriches which also quickly headed out of sight. Proudly standing on a hillock and staring at us was a large male impala which glowed a golden brown in a beam of sunshine while his women quietly moved away from us.



Seeing all these creatures without the fortress of our truck around us was somehow a much more intense experience but it didn't prepare us for the moment we came face to face with a big male rhino that had been hidden behind a bush. He was grazing and didn't see us for a few moments. This gave us time to notice a large female rhino and her calf grazing on the other side of the path. Its not a good idea to get anywhere near a young animal as large as a rhino and its protective parents!



The male rhino looked at us and then started walking down the path towards us. Nearer and nearer. We thought perhaps he was getting too close, so we retreated the way we had come but he seemed to be catching up with us. Using a bit of bush knowledge we had learned, we hid behind a tree (!!). It happened to be the only largish one nearby. Peeking around the side of the trunk we saw our friend had stopped to graze but he was uncomfortably close.

We crept away trying to keep the tree between us and the rhino but he saw us and started

following us down the path again. As you might imagine we were a little nervous by now but we kept walking as there were no more trees in view to hide behind. We came to the large open area where we had seen the wildebeest and thankfully our friendly rhino decided that grass had a bigger priority in his life than curiosity. So we gratefully hurried on back to the camp for a stiff cup of tea.

Country Information - Azerbaijan

E-visas have been introduced. These can only be issued through tourist agencies. A list of agencies can be found here.

http://mfa.gov.az/files/file/The_list_of_travel_companies_authorized_to_issue_e-visas_23.06.2015.pdf



I wonder how well you did with the Christmas Quiz. If you are still struggling here are the answers.

- 1 This is the Uxmal pyramid on the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico
- 2 The old railway bridge is the Sixaola Guabito Bridge between Costa Rica and Panama
- 3 He is using a head measuring device which records the shape of his head with punched holes on paper. It is then used to make a panama hat in Ecuador
- 4 The Inca salt pans near Cusco, Peru
- 5 The 100 ton gun, Gibraltar
- 6 Swaziland
- 7 A baobab tree (the common name for the genus Adansonia) or upside down tree as its branches look like roots
- 8 Ulan Ude, Russia, on Lake Baikal and a stop on the Trans Siberian Railway.
- 9 They are weaving the decorative straps used to hold down the felt outer covering of a yurt
- 10 This is the beach on the Red Sea in Jordanian city of Aqaba
- 11 This is not the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro – it is Cristo de la Concordia and is the largest Christ statue in the world near Cochabamba in Central Bolivia
- 12 Part of the Sikh gurdwara, Harmandir Sahib (or Darbar Sahib) which also incorporates the Golden Temple at Amritsar.
- 13 The Damascus Gate, Jerusalem
- 14a Guanaco, a camelid found in South America
- 14b An African civet
- 14c A Gelada, closely related to the monkey and more distantly to the baboon. Also known as the Bleeding Heart monkey
- 15 Shanghai looking across the Huangpu River to the Bund
- 16 Bunnychow originating from the Indian community in Durban, South Africa. A small version of the bunny chow that uses only a quarter loaf of bread, scooped out and filled with curry and topped with chick peas etc
- 17 Plov – a common dish in Central Asia particularly Uzbekistan.
- 18 Devali, a major Hindu religious festival which is held over the New Year period and is marked by feasting, gifts and the lighting of lamps. The lamps in the photo are to invite good luck into the house for the following year.
- 19 Reputedly the actual train robbed by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid
- 20 The Catherine Palace, Pushkin, Russia
- 21 Japan
- 22 Denmark
- 23 A crag along Hadrian's Wall made famous nationwide by the film 'Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves'
- 24 364
- 25
 - a Tooting
 - b Swiss Cottage
 - c Kings Cross
 - d Hammersmith
 - e Turnham Green
 - f Elephant and Castle
 - g Blackfriars
 - h The Angel
 - i Earls Court or Barons Court
 - j Barking



The Evolution of a Sprinter from mock up to overland vehicle

When my wife and I decided we needed a new van to do some serious traveling in, it started a design process that spanned a full year before we even started the build. Perhaps we are overly cautious or maybe I have a fear of commitment, but with construction and engineering experience I knew that building your own van would be expensive, time consuming and complex. Time spent up front would save costly mistakes.

We started slow. We visited two van conversion companies, Sportmobile and GTRV. Both California companies offered us factory tours. This was interesting and informative, but our impression was we thought we could do a better job ourselves and for a lot less money. The thing that most impressed us was the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van which both companies use as base vehicles. We found we liked the quality of the van itself a lot more than the conversion that was performed in the van.

Step two was renting a Sprinter. We found a company in Las Vegas. The one we got happened to be converted by Sportmobile. After a one week trip, we were convinced we could do a better job ourselves. The floor plan was poor and there was too much underutilized space. The Sprinter on the other hand had a very nice ride and seemed to be exactly what we wanted. It was looking like a Sprinter was in our future and we would definitely have to do the conversion ourselves if we were to get exactly what we wanted.

Continuing our information gathering we went to Portland, Oregon, where every spring there is a get together of Sprinter owners called Sprinter Fest. We spent the day there and it turned out to be very worthwhile. Most all were self builds in different stages of completion. Talking to the owners was a good education on what worked. It also provided examples of what not to do.

The next day I started design work on Google Sketch-up. Designing on a 3D cad program is fast and gives you the ability to make changes quickly and easily. Except this can also be a problem. It's so easy to move things around it's hard to know when to stop. The possibilities are endless. We knew what we wanted and needed, but squeezing it all in proved to be a problem. I had version A which was good but had no shower. Version B squeezed in the shower but felt cramped. Version C didn't have enough windows and so felt too closed in. Version D was better but didn't have enough storage and on and on.

I have designed and built many houses as a general contractor, but this was different. Every inch counts. All the components had to be built to the minimum size possible but still function properly. If we were going to live in the van for months at a time we did not want to feel closed in. In the end of course there is only so much that will go into a 6m long van.

Once I took the 3D cad program as far as I could, I had three versions that were strong contenders. We were still not willing to commit to a specific version. It was time for the final design process step, a full size mock-up. If you already own the van it would be a fairly simple process to assemble partitions cabinets, benches, etc. with corrugated cardboard and duct tape. Although if your design includes built in benches, it would be best to build them sturdy enough to actually sit on. Because we didn't have our van at this point (it was on order), I decided to simulate the van in an attic space above the garage. Built of 1x2, 2x2 and 1/8 inch thick MDF panels, it is an accurate representation of the inside of a short wheel base Sprinter 2500.

The mock-up enabled us to answer questions raised from the Google sketch-up models. Such as, is there enough room between cabinets to walk comfortably, is there headroom to comfortably get down and up from the bench seats, are the seat proportions correct? A computer model or a small scale physical model are valuable tools, but a full scale mock-up will answer all your questions. The material, finishes and details were not



dimensionally accurate what worked and what didn't. The mock-up went through several revisions. The actual van build did not begin until we were satisfied we had it correct, making the mock-up invaluable. I believe we saved time, money and aggravation, even though at one point I questioned why I was building what looked like a child's play house.



in place of course, but it was enabling us to evaluate. The mock-up went through



in place of course, but it was enabling us to evaluate. The mock-up went through



Another advantage of using a mock-up is you are actually building twice. The first time with cardboard and scrap material. The second time is the actual build. Some thought given during the mock up phase as to how you will put it all together is time well spent. During this phase you could be thinking about routing electrical cable, plumbing lines, gauge locations and electrical outlet placement. If you will have full height cabinets

can you get them inside when completed or will they have to be built in place? Door swings can be a problem, is there enough room for cabinet doors to open fully? These questions and many more can be answered during the mock up phase.

Even if you went through this whole exercise, got the mock-up completed and did not have to change a single thing I still think it would be useful. If that were the case it would be easier to move forward, confident in the fact that you had the design right, It's a lot easier to start drilling holes in your van and spending money on components, when you are positive of the outcome.

The next time I do this I will wait until I have the van and eliminate the step of having to build a play van in the attic. But I will definitely do a full size mock-up in the van. It answers a lot of questions and eliminates any uncertainties you may have. It is too valuable a step to skip.

Bill Rhodes

Fire and Gas Safety in an Overland Vehicle

If you never seen a motorhome on fire you may not realise how quickly they can burn down to the chassis. If you carry gas cylinders or have a tank of gas or petrol, these will quickly explode. At best, a fire in your vehicle can delay or ruin your holiday or worldwide journey. At worst, fire kills, maims and disfigures and causes financial loss.

It is unlikely that you have considered the consequences of a fire in your overland vehicle. You may have a fire extinguisher but is that adequate? Do you know what to do if there is a fire? Are you fully prepared? During 2011-12 there were 28,000 vehicle fires in the UK, with 1.3 fatalities per 1000 fires and 37 non-fatal casualties per 1000 fires. A fire while on a trip might well occur in an out of the way place with no fire services available. I hope this report will help you stay safe on the road.



Before going further I would emphasise that getting out of the vehicle to safety is the always the first priority. In the event that someone has clothing on fire follow the well published procedure:

STOP, DROP, ROLL

Sources of Fires

Fires can start when your vehicle is parked or on the move. In order to ignite, all the elements of the Fire Triangle have to be present. They are Heat, Fuel and Oxygen (or oxidising substance). A fire can be prevented or extinguished by removing any one of these elements. For example a fire blanket over a stove will remove the oxygen supply.



In order to continue burning, a fire needs a chemical reaction often called a chain reaction. This is represented in the Fire Tetrahedron which adds this to the other three elements of the Fire Triangle. Once a fire has started, the resulting heat producing chemical reaction sustains the fire and allows it to continue until or unless at least one of the elements of the fire is removed. This may only occur when the supply of fuel has been exhausted – i.e. the fire has burnt itself out.



Fires can start when your vehicle is moving or when it is parked. Here some things to be aware of or check out.

1. A pinhole-size leak in a radiator or heater hose can spray antifreeze on hot engine parts. Antifreeze contains ethylene glycol concentrate and water. When the water boils off, the remaining ethylene glycol can self-ignite when it reaches 417 °C. Check all hoses for firmness, clamp tightness, and signs of leaking at monthly intervals.
2. If your vehicle has any rubber fuel lines commonly used in older vehicles check all the lines and connections between the fuel tank and the engine on a monthly basis.
3. The engine and transmission run hotter when grease, oil, and road dust build up. The grime itself usually doesn't burn, but if combined with a fuel leak or short-circuited cable, a fire could start. Keep your vehicle's underside clean so that it will run cooler (and more economically).
4. A dragging brake can create enough friction to ignite a tyre or brake fluid. Some of the worst fires are those caused when one tyre of a twin wheel goes soft and bulges or goes flat. The scuffing on the other tyre or wheel arch could easily ignite the tyre long before the driver feels any change in handling. Look over each tyre whenever you stop. When the tyres are cool, tap them with a lump of

wood. Listen for a difference in sound from one tyre to the next which will often give you a guide to whether one is going soft.

5. Don't park in long grass which can be ignited by a hot exhaust pipe or catalytic converter. Not to mention the easy route it provides for invading small mammals and insects!

6. Carrying LPG or propane in tanks and bottles add a different dimension if you are involved in an accident or have a fire. Turn the gas off while travelling at the tank or bottle for safety while on the move.

7. If you store your vehicle, be sure to check the gas flue before starting your refrigerator on propane. Birds and insects can build nests and clog the flue, causing a fire or excess carbon monoxide to enter your vehicle.

8. Batteries produce explosive gases. Replace swollen batteries immediately. Keep the battery compartment properly vented and any source of ignition well away. Check your battery monthly.

9. Check all electrical connections before and after every trip. Most vehicle fires are caused by a short circuit.

10. Even if the flame on your cooking appliance goes out, gas may continue to flow and could result in an explosion. A cooker should never be left unattended or used for heating. Bear in mind that open flames release high levels of carbon monoxide.

11. There is less space in a motorhome so use even more caution than you do at home and keep paper towel, curtains cloths etc well clear of the cooker. A box of baking soda, a common ingredient in powder extinguishers makes a good substitute for a fire extinguisher for minor kitchen fires.

12. Make sure everyone knows how to disconnect the electricity supply – mains or 12 / 24v and how to turn off the gas at the bottle or tank

13. Emphasise to everyone aboard that stuff can be replaced, people can't. Never stay behind or re-enter a burning vehicle to retrieve anything.

14. Make sure that all your fire safety equipment is in good working order and that everyone knows how to use it.

15. Ideally you should have three fire extinguishers onboard, one by the door, one in the bedroom, and one outside in an unlocked compartment. The extinguishers inside should be placed at the final exit of the escape route.

16. Check the fire extinguishers monthly.

17. Invert and shake your dry-powder or dry-chemical extinguisher monthly to loosen the powder. The vibration of a moving vehicle tends to compact the contents which may make your extinguisher ineffective. This is even more important if you are driving overland on unmade roads and tracks

18. Carbon monoxide is undetectable, being invisible and odourless. It usually comes from exhaust leaks or misuse of heating devices. Put a detector in the bedroom on the ceiling or on an inside wall at least eight inches from the ceiling and at least four feet from the floor. The supplier will give more specific instructions.

19. LPG collects in low spots in the vehicle. Newer motorhomes are equipped with sensor linked to an automatic shut-off valve. If you have a leak, immediately turn off the supply at the bottle or tank.

21. It could well be vital to know your location so the fire service can find you (assuming of course there is one near where you happen to be).

22. Dry wheel bearings are a source of fire. Always use synthetic grease to repack them.

Fire and Gas Detection

A fire may easily occur when you least expect it. You may be asleep or a passing motorist might wave at you frantically. Checking and maintaining your vehicle will obviously reduce the odds of a fire but you need to be prepared.

You should have good detectors located in the correct positions. The detectors should be regularly cleaned and tested once a month. Overland travel often involves suffering very dusty conditions and some of that dust will end up in the detectors. It would be wise to change the detectors more frequently than normal in this situation. Keep a supply of the correct batteries during a long trip as you may not be able to find the right type locally.

All detectors should be placed away from draughts and fresh air vents.

Always follow the manufacturers installation instructions.

Smoke detectors.

These should be placed high on the ceiling. If you have separate areas in your vehicle then consider having more than one detector. Use the caravan type with the button to silence the alarm temporarily for 10 – 15 minutes. Smoke detectors approved for caravan use have to meet different standards compared to household detectors. They are tested at a wider range of temperatures and for longer periods of time and are tested against vibration and salt spray. Upwards of 75% of fires are electrical fires and these tend to smoulder for quite long periods.

Smoke detectors use 2 different methods to detect a fire. One is the photoelectric type which is sensitive to visible particles in the air from smouldering fires. The other is the ionising type which is able to detect invisible particles particularly associated with flames. Its best to use a dual system detector such as made by Kidde.

Install detectors manufactured to the appropriate British Standard (BS 5446 Part 1, EN 54-7) or one that has American UL (Underwriters Laboratory) approval.

Test the detectors monthly by using the test button.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon monoxide is only just lighter than air and will tend to rise with warm air currents. Its is colourless and odourless and is produced by the combustion of fuels. The initial symptoms of poisoning are similar to flu but without any fever

- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Nausea
- Irregular breathing

People also can such other symptoms or even none at all.



It is important to make sure you minimise the risks from carbon monoxide. It is vital that any equipment you use that burns fuel is properly maintained. Gas cookers for example burning a yellow flame will be producing carbon monoxide. This can be a particular issue at high altitude, for example driving over Tibet at altitudes over 5000 metres where the available oxygen can be reduced to half that at sea level. Good ventilation is vital.

Be careful where the exhaust from engines, generators or diesel heaters is going. Avoid being close to walls, snowdrifts and high vegetation which may prevent the exhaust from dissipating properly etc. Note that in an overland vehicle the requirement to have floor ventilation when a gas cooker is installed is at odds with the advice to seal up any holes in the floor to prevent the ingress of carbon monoxide from outside.

Do not sleep with a generator running and always open a window.

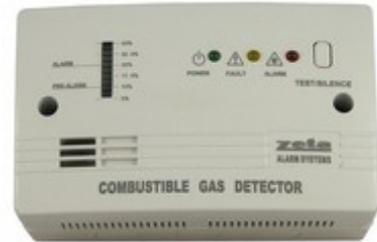
The usual advice is to mount CO detectors high up but at least 15 cms from the ceiling. If it must go on

the ceiling mount it more than 30 cms from any obstruction. In addition it is usually advised to place them in the sleeping area between one and three metres from a potential source.

You can now get smoke and CO detectors combined in one unit but I would suggest these are only suitable for smaller vehicles. You can also get detectors for narcotics gas. Narcotics gases are lighter than air so detectors should work well in combination.

LPG gas detector

This type are usually mounted about 20 cms from the floor. Better quality versions will discriminate LPG and LPNG from high humidity, hairspray, ammonia and alcohol based cleaners. Having false alarms is a deterrent to action when it may be essential.



The first thing is to have an Escape Plan. If you see flames you could have less than 20 seconds to get everyone out. However without detectors to give an alarm, most people are overcome by smoke while asleep, lack of oxygen, hot air or are too confused to find the way out.

Everyone travelling in the vehicle should know the different sounds of each type of detector. The reason for this is that you should leave the vehicle as far as possible by the least affected zone. When smoke and carbon monoxide detectors go off stay low while you escape, if you hear the LPG detector stay high. Knowing exactly what to do and doing it quickly can make a big difference in an emergency situation.

Decide on your escape routes – preferably have at least two, one for the front and one for the rear. Everyone should know how to open hatches and emergency exits. Your fire escape plan should include regular fire drills so that everyone can follow it automatically. The more “automatic” your response is to a fire alarm the better.

Make sure everyone knows where and how to disconnect mains and internal power supplies and similarly how to turn off any gas supply in the vehicle. Only do this if safe to do so.

Have a prearranged place to meet up. This could be simply simply agreed to be 30 metres ahead of the vehicle in the same direction of travel. This would provide some protection from following traffic if you are on the road. If camped up and this is not feasible agree some other suitable spot. Doing this will avoid unnecessary heroics trying to rescue someone who happens to have exited out of sight to the opposite side of the vehicle.

To begin your fire drill, start with everyone seated with seat belts on. From this position, discuss the different ways to leave the vehicle. These may be obvious but consider the alternatives. Next have everyone get into their sleeping quarters. At a given moment (a shout perhaps) start by getting out of bed and crawling low on the floor where the air is clearer. Go immediately to your pre-determined safe meeting place and make sure no one is missing.

Take advice if someone has special needs and if you have a pet, consider whether its life is worth more than yours.

Hopefully you will never need to put your escape plan into action but having spent time practising you will be better equipped to calmly get yourself and your companions out of the vehicle as a priority. Only try to extinguish the fire if you can do so without endangering yourself.

Fire Extinguishers

Don't wait until a fire breaks out to try and find how to operate your extinguisher. Knowledge will save time and time saved may make the difference between minimal damage and a major disaster. New extinguishers should conform to BS EN 3, which requires that the entire body of the extinguisher is coloured red. A zone of colour of up to 5% of the external area can be used to identify the contents.

The Parts of a Fire Extinguisher

Most portable fire extinguishers have seven main parts.

Cylinder

The cylinder is the container for the extinguishant and expellant gas. It is under pressure.

Handle

This is for carrying or holding the extinguisher. Lifting an extinguisher by the handle will not cause the unit to discharge.

Trigger

The trigger is usually a short lever mounted above the handle at the top of the extinguisher. Squeezing the trigger will cause the extinguisher to discharge.

Nozzle

The nozzle is located at the top of the extinguisher from which the extinguishant agent is discharged. It often has a hose attached.

Pressure Gauge

The range and effectiveness of an extinguisher is reduced as the pressure reduces. Check the pressure of on a regular basis. Have it recharged in accordance with the manufacturers instructions if this is possible. Not all extinguishers have a gauge

Locking Pin

All portable fire extinguishers must come with some type of locking pin or other mechanism to prevent accidental discharge. The pin must be removed for the extinguisher to be discharged.

Security Seal

This seal is to prove that the extinguisher has not been discharged or tampered with. It is easily broken when the locking pin is removed.

Fire Extinguisher Information

Fires are classified into different types and it is essential that the correct type of fire extinguisher is used to fight them. Details of which fires the extinguisher can be used for are on the Information panel along with colour coded panel.

Classifications of Fire

European, Australian and US classification differ somewhat. The fires discussed here use the European classification which is divided into six classes

- Class A** Fires involving flammable solids, e.g. wood, cloth, rubber, paper, and some types of plastics. An example of this type of fire would be a campsite fire.
- Class B** Fires involving flammable liquids or solids that can be liquefied, e.g. petrol, oil, paint and also some waxes & plastics, but not cooking fats or oils.
- Class C** Fires involving flammable gases, e.g. natural gas, hydrogen, propane, butane as in cooking appliances in caravans
- Class D** Fires involving combustible metals, e.g. sodium, magnesium, and potassium.
- Class E** Fires involving any of the materials found in Class A and B fires, but including electrical appliances, wiring, or other electrically energized objects in the vicinity of the fire, with



a resultant electrical shock risk if a conductive agent is used to control the fire. Once you turn off or disconnect from a landline and turn off the inverter or generator, a fire that occurs is a Class A or B fire rather than a Class E fire. This classification has fallen out of practical use on this account. Low voltage supplies (ie 12v and 24v DC) are not regarded as a shock risk

•**Class F** Fires involving cooking fats and oils. The high temperature of these types of fats and oil when on fire far exceeds that of other flammable liquids which means that normal fire extinguishers should not be used.

Types of Fire Extinguisher

Classification of fire extinguishers is by the type of extinguishant. They can be identified by a coloured band or label

- **Water**

Water extinguishers work by quickly removing the heat from the fire and are only suitable for fighting Class A fires that involve materials such as wood, paper and textiles. Water should not be used to fight Class B fires because flammable liquids could be spread by the steam from the water, neither should they be used for Class E electrical fires because water conducts electricity there is a risk of electrocution.

Colour coded signal red



- **Foam including AFFF Foam**

These extinguishers work by quickly removing heat and oxygen from the fire. Foam extinguishers are suitable for Class A and Class B fires. They are especially suited for controlling Class B flammable liquid fires because the foam has a blanketing effect that smothers the flames without spreading the fire.

Colour coded cream



- **Carbon Dioxide (CO₂)**

CO₂ extinguishers work by removing the oxygen element from the fire. Carbon Dioxide extinguishers are suitable for Class B and Class E fires, i.e. involving flammable liquids and electricity respectively. Carbon dioxide extinguishers should not be used in confined spaces because they reduce the oxygen in the air. Another point to note are the cold burn injuries caused if the nozzle is held during discharge as CO₂ is released at extremely low temperatures.

Colour coded black



- **Wet Chemical**

Wet chemical extinguishers work by removing the heat from the fire and by creating a barrier between the fuel and oxygen. They are suitable for Class F fires, i.e. cooking oil and fats, which can reach extremely high temperatures.

Colour coded yellow



- **Dry Chemical**

These extinguishers work by removing the chemical reaction of the fire. Dry chemical extinguishers are suitable for Class A, Class B and Class C fires, i.e. involving flammable liquids and electricity respectively. The usual one was halon but this is no longer available except for specialist use.

Colour coded emerald green

- **Powder**

Powder extinguishers work by removing the heat from the fire or by separating the fuel and oxygen. Powder extinguishers are suitable for Class A, Class B and Class E fires.

Colour coded blue



- **Dry Water Mist**

This type of extinguisher is a recent development in fire extinguisher technology. The extinguisher produces ultra fine droplets as small as 25 microns in diameter which creates an ultra fine mist that has superior fire fighting capabilities. The patented nozzle creates water droplets unlike any other extinguisher, producing mist that leaves almost no trace and no collateral damage. They are capable of tackling almost all common fires including class A, B, C, F and E electrical fires up to 1000 volts at a minimum distance of one metre (only with extinguishers marked as tested to 35Kv). The unique water mist has the normal cooling effects of water and creates a "mist curtain" cutting off the oxygen supply.



Colour coded signal red on a white background

Recommendations for Extinguishers for use in a Motorhome

Type

The fire extinguisher you choose should be manufactured in accordance with BS (EN)3 and tested and approved by the British Standards Institute (BSI). There are other similar standards – LPCB or BAFE. Dry powder extinguishers are very effective on virtually all fires but they are not suitable in confined spaces – they also make a great deal of mess.

The usual recommendation for use in a motorhome or overland vehicle is to use an Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) extinguisher. However the new dry water mist extinguishers are probably as good if not better a choice. All other types should not be used or replaced if already installed.

How many?

Don't take chances. In my opinion one fire extinguisher is simply not enough. Have at least two extinguishers, one near the door and one in the bedroom and if you have space, another one in an unlocked compartment outside.

Location

The general principle is to have an extinguisher at each point of exit on the basis that you have an unobstructed way out if you fight the fire. It should be readily visible and accessible and positioned at a reasonable height from the floor so that an average person can reach it.

Maintaining Your Fire Extinguishers

Extinguishers need to be checked periodically. If it has a pressure gauge check the reading. If it indicates empty or needs charging, replace or recharge the extinguisher immediately. Some extinguishers without gauges may have a test button (usually green or black). Press this down. If it does not come back up, the extinguisher has no pressure. Your local fire brigade may be pleased to give advice.

Do not pull the pin and partially discharge an extinguisher to test it. If you partially discharge an extinguisher for any reason have it refilled or replaced immediately. If you are disposing or refilling an extinguisher discharge the remaining extinguishant to get the feel of using one.

If you are using a powder extinguisher or dry chemical extinguisher (not recommended) invert the extinguisher monthly and shake it to loosen the powder. The movement of the vehicle while moving and particularly rough roads and tracks pack the powder down making the extinguisher useless for fighting a fire.

Extinguishing a Fire

How a Fire Burns

As noted earlier a fire needs four components to ignite and continue burning

Fuel

Oxygen

Heat

Chemical Reaction

If any one of these four components are missing, a fire cannot continue burning.

How to Extinguish a Fire

Fires involving electrical apparatus must always be tackled by first isolating the electricity supply. Similarly if safe to do so isolate any gas bottles or gas tank but only if from outside the vehicle.

There is a simple way to remember the steps to using your extinguisher to fight a fire - it's called the **P.A.S.S.** procedure. These are the four steps to follow

Pull the Pin

This unlocks the operating lever and allows you to discharge the contents of the extinguisher.

Aim Low

Point the nozzle or hose at the base of the fire.

Squeeze the Lever Above the Handle

Control the discharge of the extinguisher by squeezing or releasing the lever

Sweep from Side to Side

Take care moving towards the fire keeping the extinguisher aimed at the base. Sweep the extinguisher from side to side until flames appear to be out. Keep three metres from the fire while using an extinguisher. A properly maintained extinguisher should easily reach the fire from this distance.

Cooling the fuel which is the source of the fire is almost as important as putting out the flames. Flames occur on the surface so keep applying the extinguishant to cool the fuel as otherwise the fire could reignite. Having an additional fire extinguisher is important. If you use your only fire extinguisher to stop the fire without cooling it you may well have a big problem if the fire reignites.

Always leave large fires to the fire brigade, and only fight small fires that you can fight with your back toward a safe escape. An old adage is if in doubt – don't. If you have the slightest doubt whether you should fight the fire, don't attempt it! Get out of your vehicle as fast as possible and move away quickly to a safe distance.



If you have a fire involving cooking oil or in a frying pan don't use a fire extinguisher – use a fire blanket. The blast of extinguishant from an extinguisher can splatter burning oil or fat around the van or yourself and make matters far worse. Fire blankets work by smothering the flames and restricting the available oxygen. After using a fire blanket do not remove it from the source of the fire and do not move any pan until it has cooled down. Turn off the gas supply at source.

The fire blanket should conform to BSEN 1869, the latest European and British Standard. The older, plain glass fibre types can let flammable vapours through the weave. The latest types have a coating to minimise this problem.

Don't forget

Make an Escape Plan

Get out fast

Stop , Drop, Roll anyone on fire

PASS when fighting a fire

"Old men and far travellers may lie with authority."

- Anonymous

"All that is gold does not glitter, not all those who wander are lost"

- J. R. R. Tolkien "Lord of the Rings"

Roaming Rutherfords - to China and back from the U.K.

Chapter 4 - Across the Volga and into the 'Stans'. (10 April)

5094 kilometres travelled. Day 23

About an hour after I sent the last newsletter from Saratov [on the Volga River], I got talking to an English guy who was staying in the hotel where we were parked behind. He was an oil refinery fix-it person, and he had been all over Russia and many other places with his work. I was wondering why Saratov was there in the first place. Apart from being a very old trading centre and a strategic place for a river crossing, it apparently sits on very large oil reserves and that feeds the city. There is a very large oil refinery about 10km out of the city.

On the road we met several trucks with John Deere drills and cultivation machinery and wondered why it was going from the east to the west, and I can only assume it came up the Volga River by barge through a series of canals from the Mediterranean.

We have decided, along with the rest of the team, to have our midday meal in restaurants on the side of the road, which is a very good move because we get the opportunity to have contact with the locals as well as tasting the local food.

Without Luda (Ivan's wife), we would have a real problem as to what to order as the menus are in Russian and impossible to understand. The meal which is not that large, but sufficient, normally consists of mashed potatoes or chips with a piece of pork, leg of chicken, or a complete fish, about 20 centimetres long. No other vegetables apart from a salad of tomatoes and cucumber if you want it, all for about NZ\$4, or £2.

We went to the market and there were plenty of vegetables of all description, and one wonders where it all came from. The UHT milk cost about NZ\$1 a liter, but when you get an idea of the climate, you wonder how it along with the vegetables are produced here.

We haven't seen any stock at all, apart from two small mobs of cows; one in Holland and one when we crossed the border into Russia – those are the only farm animals we have seen in about 5000km of travel. Compared with New Zealand, the cows are very large, and of course kept inside all the time, apart from the odd stroll around outside their sheds.

We had a very interesting stop today when we stopped to get some water from a country village, and Luda had the conversation and told us about it later. A woman, who prior to Perestroika (1989) [the fall of communism], had two cows, 12 pigs, geese and hens, and she made and sold butter and pork at the local market. She had to sell the cows and the pigs because she no longer had a source of food, from a collective farm close by which was all part of the communist system but in most cases had been sold off, in many cases to foreign buyers [sound's familiar].

She lived very well then and had a good and happy life. She now gets 5000 rouble a month from the state, and it cost her 4000 rouble a month (about NZ\$160) for house expenses, and has 100 rouble for food and any other thing she requires.

She said she was considerably worse off, and this appears the same in all the country areas. There is a huge variety of things to buy in the shops and all the best of brands which you couldn't purchase before, but in general the people do not appear that happy. You can tell by the look in their eyes. It is probably fair to say that the young people who don't know any different think the new semi freedom and access to all the things you can buy in the shops is a great deal better than the past. But the older people who had the security of government support, and didn't have to think too much as everything was done for them, with no incentive to work too hard, are not so fussed about it.

As I said earlier, going over the Volga River was a milestone, as it meant leaving Europe and entering Asia, but there is some debate as to where the boundary is - the Volga or the Ural. Whoever is right, we have now crossed both rivers.

From here, it was on to another border crossing, when there is always a bit of apprehension, as you never know what to expect, or whether some bureaucrat will show his muscle.

This time we had a pleasant surprise. Leaving Russia we didn't have any problems, and the guards were very pleasant and helpful. They actually smiled, which I am sure is against the rules.

Then it was on and across no man's land into Kazakhstan. Here they were even better, to the point of being able to joke with them. I asked one of the very official women if she could speak English and she said a little bit, which seems to be the standard answer and I said I could speak a little bit of Russian. "Lada, Lada, Lada", which for the non-motorist is a very popular make of Russian motor car.

The Kazakhstan people look quite different from the Russians, with much darker skin and a more Asian appearance. We continued on over very poor quality roads. To all you 4WD people, you haven't done any decent tracks until you have been on some of the roads we have been on, though the scenery is not nearly as good. The Ladas just keep overtaking us, but we see a few stopped on the side of the road as well.

We stopped in Oral, about 100km over the border, to register our visa, and the police said to come back at 3pm. After about half an hour of negotiating by Luda, [in Russian which is their second language in the Stans] we were told that we could only register at a place called Almaty, about 2000km away, and we had 5 days to get there.

We left town and went about 100km, and camped for the night, only to be woken up at about 11.30pm by the police. So I opened the window, just to make sure, and then invited them in. The older one handled it OK, but the younger one was a bit embarrassed about seeing Liza in bed, but they just checked our papers for the third time since arriving in the country. In hind sight I should not have invited them into the motor home as one never knows if they are the real deal or not, and while they are outside and talking through the window one has the high ground.

We are certainly a novelty here and people much happier in this country, probably pleased to see the Russians leaving them to do their own thing. During Stalin's time he sent many Russian dissidents to the 'Stans', and the other non-Russian countries, but they are certainly not welcome now, and life is very difficult for them. The Russians can't get jobs and if they own a house, the local country native people won't buy their houses, and they leave with nothing. The price of historical political policies made by people many years ago.

Today we travelled over 600km (apart from about 50km) of excellent roads compared to what we have, and the land is very flat and dry, very similar to the country as you leave Omarama heading towards the Lindis Pass in NZ.

Tomorrow we travel to the Aral Sea, which is one of the biggest environmental disasters in the world. The Russians a number of years back decided to divert the main river flowing into the sea to irrigate the desert to grow cotton and rice. They apparently were well aware that it would cause the sea level to drop but carried on anyway and that is exactly what happened.

We called in at Aral, which has a population of about 35,000, and was once a thriving fishing village. But through the sea level dropping and receding it is but now a dusty town out in the middle of a very dry and barren landscape, which has been the case since we left the northern border. It was interesting to see boats high and dry tied up to a wharf with no water in sight.

The Aral Sea is now divided into two, with the level so low a weir and dam has been built across the division, with the idea that the top half will fill up back to the Aral town, and it will return to be a fishing town. It is expected to reach the town where it used to be in about 3 years time. I am not sure what the experts are going to do about the remainder of the sea.

We continued south as fast as the roads will allow us, through a very unproductive, barren landscape, with short native grasses. The only animals we see

are camels, sheep, cattle and occasionally some goats. It is interesting to see in most cases small mobs of animals, with a herdsman keeping an eye on them, and taking them back to the villages in the evenings, where they are put in a pen for the night.

We have about 800km to travel in two days over some very new and excellent roads, and some temporary roads that have been built while the new ones are being built which are very rough. A considerable amount of money is being spent on the main north south route through the country.

Well the last day in Kazakhstan was not without drama. Ivan got his motor home stuck when we wanted to get an early start, but a bit of shovelling and a pull from Sue's 4WD soon got him on the way. Our motor home, and Ivan's, are both built on Fiat chassis, with quite a long overhang behind the back wheels particularly Ivan's and are not that difficult to get stuck, as they are front wheel drive.

We have met some very friendly and likeable people however I had the pleasure of meeting a very unlikeable person. On the last day working to a very tight timetable, I was stopped by the traffic police, once again with no idea as to what he wanted, just to check the papers again I thought. However he asked me to join him across the road at his car.

I discovered with Luda's help that I was meant to have my headlights on (it didn't seem to matter that I had my driving lights that my Dutch manager Johan had fitted) and I was up for a 10 day loss of licence. Thanks to Luda's help once again we were on our way after about half an hour of very fast talking. Luda told me later that she had told him that I had come all the way from London to visit his beautiful country, and what was I to think if he was to be stopped all the time by the police. And I was never ever going to come back. I think he knew that we were in a hurry and had to be out of the country that day.

The group has had the view for a number of days that we were being tracked all the way across the country, as the border police would have alerted the police down the line of our movements. I also felt the same in Russia, but we were never stopped, but there were a number of check points and on at least three occasions when we went past the police, they were on their cell phones straight away. We arrive at the border at about 6pm on the last day, but we found that border was only for foot traffic, and we had to go another 100km at a very hectic pace to a truck border where we arrived at 10pm, which once again with Luda's help was opened especially for us.

Getting out of Kazakhstan was not too much of an issue, but the bureaucracy on the Uzbekistan side of the border was very tiring, and we didn't get through until about 2am. I was the last to get checked out and the immigration officer was called away and about an hour later he came back and put a stamp on a piece of paper and gave my passport and papers back to me and said "welcome to Uzbekistan". Time means nothing to these people and I wouldn't be surprised that it would take several days to get a truck across these borders.

It had been a very long day and the most tiring of the whole trip so far. We camped just over the border, and then on to a large modern hotel in Tashkent where we had to register, which remember, has to be done every five days. Tashkent is a modern city as it was severely damaged by an earthquake in 1969 with considerable loss of life.

After a couple of days looking around Tashkent we decided to travel in a westerly direction to Samarkand, and then on to Bukhara, but first we had to get some diesel, and we were in for a bit of a surprise as we couldn't get any. We were warned that this could be a bit of a problem, but because we were in such a hurry to get to the border and we couldn't find a money machine so we thought we would take the chance and a number of people had told us that it wouldn't be a problem. But we couldn't find any at all, so back to the hotel we went. Apparently the country sits on large natural gas reserves so the government decided that it was better to use that so they weaned all the trucks and buses off it.

That evening we were talking to an Australian, and he told us that his tour party were going to Samarkand the next day, and there was plenty of room on their bus, so we hitched a ride with our Aussie cousins, or four of us did. Ivan stayed back in Tashkent. On our way to Samarkand we had a "comfort" stop and there were a lot of people filling containers and tractors up with diesel so there is some diesel in the country. Any of the tour buses and trucks coming into the country make sure they have enough diesel to get back out of the country. We were also told that if we could find diesel the quality may not be very good so that could create another problem.

Samarkand was unaffected by the '69 earthquake, and is still very much in its old natural state, with many mosques, as is the case with Bukhara further west. Most of the buildings made out of mud mixed with straw and the streets narrow and roads in them mostly dirt. The people, in general, are very friendly and prepared to help you find your way, even if it is the wrong way. The Muslim religion doesn't appear to be as strict as I have seen in other countries, with none of the women wearing burquas, and only the older women covering their heads.

We stayed one night in Buxoro and then returned back to Tashkent this morning on the overnight train, which was a bit of an experience. Two to a cabin, with a seat come bed in each. We are in Tashkent at the moment, and tomorrow we will go to the border to return back into Kazakhstan, and go in a north east direction towards Kyrgyzstan and on into China.

The question has been asked as to how I am getting on driving on the right hand side of the road. We are fortunate that we have a left hand drive motor home for a start, as having a right hand drive would be a bit of a problem with the type of driving one encounters in some of these countries. I feel very relaxed with the driving, but I have to concentrate on what I am doing all the time, and that can become very tiring. If there is a gap, no matter how wide, or what I would call dangerous, there is always someone there to take it, and to date everything has fitted.

In the cities the cars pass you on both sides, which keeps you on your toes. Ivan had an unfortunate experience. With the rough roads a large piece of overload spring about half meter long had come off a truck. (I couldn't lift it with one hand). Ivan must have run over the end of it, and it came up and punched a hole in the front passenger door, then hit his retractable entry step about a meter further back, rendering it useless for the rest of the journey. Other than that and Sue picking up a 100mm nail in her tyre, the vehicles are all going well.

Tomorrow we leave Tashkent to return over the border into Kazakhstan the next day, a border we will be pleased to be over, as it wasn't a very enjoyable experience when we came over it a few days ago.

Chapter 5 - Kazakhstan (23 April)

8148 kilometres travelled. Day 39

Crossing the border back into Kazakhstan from Uzbekistan went without too many problems, even though it took about four hours. An added event to border crossings was that all vehicles have to be x-rayed. Not sure what they are looking for, either drugs coming from one of the major growing areas of the world Afghanistan and Pakistan, or possibly people. The machine that does the job is on tracks on either side of the vehicle and one has to park the motor home between the tracks. This thing passes along the side, with part of it going right over the vehicle and down to the tracks on the other side. We had to get out of the vehicle while they x-rayed it and we got a copy of the x-ray, so obviously we didn't have anything to hide.

Back into Kazakhstan, we continued along eastwards towards our final country before China, namely Kyrgyzstan, The road once again was a mix of a new concrete road (that in about three years will run the length of the country) and very dusty and rough detour roads while the main road was being built. For most of the way it was once again flat, apart from a pass that was over 1100m above sea level, a taste of things to come, as the pass into China is over 3750m.

We stopped the night about 1km down a side road. At about 6 o'clock we had visitors - a couple from France who were on their way to Mongolia in a large 4WD truck, with an old caravan on the back. The vehicle was 40 years old, and sounded like it too, but they were full of enthusiasm, even though they had about nine days to cover about 2000km and their truck tended to break down very often, and had a top speed of about 55km an hour.

They were on a sponsorship deal to go and teach at schools in Mongolia, but their visa ran out on the 7th of May, and were concerned as to if they were going to make it or not. They were parked beside the road and were woken up by the army, who wanted them to shift, but they pleaded couldn't understand, and the army left them to it. Luda heard it all but played possum otherwise we probably would have all had to shift. Apparently we were parked on a gas pipeline. We were parked about 20 meters away and slept through it all.

The next day we said our goodbyes to the French couple, only to find them about 10km up the road broken down with brake problems. We stopped to help but he had his head under the bonnet and she said the problem had happened about 20 times since leaving France and she was quite sure he had it all under control.

After a day's drive we were at the border into Kyrgyzstan, which once again was not too much of a problem, apart from the time it takes. Once again we were x-rayed. We are finding border crossings rather entertaining, providing you are not in a hurry, you don't try to cross in the middle of the night and you have the correct papers for the vehicle and yourself [not copies].

We camped for the night about 100 meters from the road and at about 5pm we had a visitor, a local farmer, who was armed with a bottle of water, a bottle of iced tea, and a bottle of vodka. The trick is to drink the vodka straight then the tea and then the water but after you have drunk several vodkas the order you drink it in comes all a bit blurred. We drank a number of toast to this, that, and anything else we could think of.

I reciprocated the festivities with a bottle of whiskey, which fortunately only had two nips in it. We had one each, and I don't think he had ever tasted whiskey, because he knocked it back just as they do with vodka, and it really made his eyes water. The problem we were told was when you accept a drink from people in this part of the world, is that they don't know when to stop and will not take no for an answer. Apparently alcohol is a major problem in these countries but we haven't seen very much evidence of this so far anyway.

With Luda interpreting we had a most entertaining couple of hours hearing all about how difficult life was after the fall of communism. They have had three presidents since then [20 years]; the first two were corrupt and stole a lot of money, but they are very pleased with the present one. Our farmer friend owned, with his brother, some sheep, cattle and horses, and life was good for him and his family of four children. A very sincere man and we really enjoyed our time with him. We said our goodbyes, and about 10 minutes later he was back with another two bottles of vodka, a present for Ivan and me. The challenges one has to put up with on such a journey!

We carried on the next day and stopped to get some water, which can be a problem to find at times. There are taps on the street which the locals had to use until quite recently, but now most have water on tap in their homes, so many of the outside taps don't work. However we found one that worked and stopped to fill up our tanks, and soon we had the locals arrive to meet us. I brought out some photos to show them what life was about with us and not to be outdone one of them went away and got his photo album of him and all his relations at various birthday parties and celebrations. He even had a photo of him and his wife (in a bikini) standing in a swimming pool, a rather buxom lass which I am sure such a photo wouldn't make the photo album in NZ.

Then we had to go and look at his local mosque. All very interesting and we are finding the people here in Kyrgyzstan as friendly as any we have met. He was telling us as we walked up the street, that during communist times the streets were all clean, with no rubbish at all. Now it was a very dirty mess, with rubbish everywhere. I thought at the time that if you make a mess you have to live with it, and with communism the people had virtually lost the ability to think for themselves. To make a better place for you and your family you have to do something about it yourself.

The street sign posts had been made out of steel and had all been stolen and sold for scrap metal when the Russians left because everyone was so poor. We see many remains of old factories where there were many industries but when the Russians left they took all the machinery and left the buildings behind.

We arrived in Bishkek, the capital, about lunch time, and we had to meet the company people that supply us with the guide to take us to the Chinese border. Why we need a guide I don't quite know, but I dare say we will find out when we go to the border on the 9th of May. We were told that the border could be closed that day because of some religious holiday, but after a number of texts, emails and phone calls, we were assured that it would be open. This was on Friday, and there was a big market at a place called Karakol, about 400km away, which we were told was well worth going to, so we left without seeing much of Bishkek unfortunately.

Karakol is at the eastern end of Lake Ysyk-Kol, and is approximately 1600 meters above sea level. To get there we had to drive up a very narrow gorge alongside a very fast flowing river, which I am sure would severely challenge the best jet boater.

We drove all day to get to the lake, and because it was such a long climb, we rarely got into top gear. We got to the stock sale at Karakol at about 8:30am, and it was very much worth a visit, with all the local farmers there to sell and buy sheep, goats, horses, cattle and horse gear. It seems the selling is all done by haggling directly with the buyer. All the stock were on the end of a rope being led around, or just standing about waiting for a buyer to come along. Even the Anglican ladies were there with their stalls, but the baking didn't look as inviting as it used to be in Dunroon. All this was going on in about an inch of mud, which made it all the more interesting, and the 4WD Ladas really had an advantage over the other vehicles. Along with the stock to sell there were all the service industry people such as vets, salt-lick salesmen, feed merchants, saddlers and rope salesmen, to lead the animals around. All the animals we saw arrived on flat bed trucks or trailers tethered to the sides of the truck or trailer and many left in the boots of cars. No SPCA here.

We arrived back at the motor homes to find that the rear plastic bumper bar had fallen off Ivan's, so he decided to go back along the road we had come to see if he could find it, and we have had the opportunity to do a bit of our blog.

While waiting we had another visitor stop to say hello - a large ex-Paris city bus, with two French families of about 10 in total on board. They had shipped their bus to Singapore then driven up through South East Asia to China, and on to here, and then were going on to Europe, via Iran and Turkey. (Editor - we met them in Vientiane, Laos!). It is always good to meet such travellers and swap stories about places each party has been to, as well as to talk to someone else that talks English, other than the people that you are travelling with every day.

I had better stop there as I think we have an opportunity to get this one and number 4 to you. Probably the next news will come from China.

Chapter 6 - Across Kyrgyzstan to the Chinese border (26 April)

8672 kilometres travelled. Day 42

Before we left Karakol, which is on the eastern end of Lake Ysyk-Kol still in Kyrgyzstan, we managed to find an internet café with Wi-Fi to send our previous two newsletters from, so I thought I could add a bit more of what we are about to do before we go into China.

Kyrgyzstan is an interesting country, a population of 5.4 million very friendly people living in very mountainous country. Some 90% of the land is at least 1500 meters above sea levels, and 71% is over 2000 meters, so the growing season is very short. The agriculture in the valley floors appears to be on very fertile ground and their farming is as good as any we have seen outside Western Europe. Irrigation is very important; most of the irrigation water is carried in concrete channels like a 'V', with sides about a metre high and each section about 4 meters long. There is mile after mile of these races, like structures all joined together end to end. In most cases the maintenance has not been kept up, probably since communism collapsed, and there are many areas that were obviously irrigated once, but are now not, and no doubt this is having a big effect on food production.

As has been the case in all the 'Stan' countries, the farming is done by peasant farmers, on small land holdings, with a wide variety of crops grown, all, I would imagine for the local market. I am surprised by the amount of lucerne grown, but with the winters pretty harsh because of the altitude, particularly in this country, all the stock has to be housed inside for the winter and fed on supplementary feed saved during the summer months as is the case in most of Europe and Asia.

The farmers are at present busy planting their spring crops, and in the case of potato planting all the family is on the job, as well as the neighbours' children

by the look of it. On all our travels since leaving Germany, about 7000km, we have only seen three late model tractors. Most of them are about 1960 vintage Belarus, and in most cases appear to be on their last legs.

We have a few days to spare before we enter China, so we decided to stay a night down by Lake Ysyk-Kol. To our surprise, once we got there and read up our books on the place, we found that where we were was an old Russian naval base where the Russians, when they had control of the country, used to test their torpedoes and their submarines on the lake. There isn't a great deal there now apart from many derelict buildings, and a couple of pretty large boats and two or three cranes on the wharf.

What a place to have a naval base! About 3000km from the nearest sea, very inaccessible, making it very difficult to cart all the machinery, torpedoes and personnel to it. I wondered in amazement how they got their submarines and boats (or should I say small ships) in there.

The lake, incidentally, is over 170km long and 70km wide, making it the second largest alpine lake in the world, so there was plenty of room for the Russians to play battleships. It would have to be in one of the most inaccessible places in the world as well, so the KGB and army wouldn't have too much of a problem keeping people away from the area. The lake is at an altitude of 1600 meters, and never freezes because of its depth, thermal activity and mild salinity. Around its very long shoreline many rivers flow into the lake, but there is no river flowing out of the lake. It is hard to imagine that just 20 years ago this part of the world was completely a no-go area for people from the western world.

We then carried on down the southern edge of the lake, heading west for a change, stopping one night near some very impressive red sandstone cliffs, about 15km up a side road, at an altitude of 2000m. Then we visited a waterfall, which was mostly just frozen ice, at an altitude of about 2300m. Further up the road to the waterfall in a no-go area is a gold mine, in an area of permafrost at an altitude of 4000m. The opencast mine was opened in 1998, and is estimated to have 700 ton of gold, and is worth 10 per cent of the country's gross domestic product.

While in Kyrgyzstan we had discussed the possibility of seeing an eagle hunt. This is a very old custom, where a man trains an eagle to answer his calls and teach it to fly from his arm and catch foxes, wolves, small deer and rabbits. As we travelled down the lakeside, we stopped at a small village, and Luda asked a man where we could find such a person with an eagle. The man hopped in Ivan's motor home and took us right to his house. After some discussion we agreed on a price of US\$50 for a photo opportunity, to show us the eagle doing its thing without any prey. The alternative was for us to come back the next day and we would go into the mountains and he would be on his horse. For US\$500 we would see the complete deal, although I am not sure how we were going to get into the mountains.

With Luda's interpreting help, which really made the show, he explained all about how the birds were caught just before they left the nest, usually by small boys down a cliff on the end of a rope. I don't know why they use small boys, probably because they are light and nimble to locate and get into the nests. The birds (females were preferred) were then trained until they were 2 years old, when it could see an animal up to 4km away.

Anyway he put on a glove made of cow hide, which went up to his elbow, and put a small hat like thing over the eagle's head and eyes, and placed the eagle on his arm, and we went out the back of the house. He then removed the blindfold from the bird, which is there to keep it settled, and let it go. The bird flew about 100 meters and then landed. It was having trouble flying because it was in the moult and as the hunting is done in the winter, when there is snow on the ground and it can see its prey better on the snow (and I assume can fly better because it has more feathers). I am pleased we hadn't gone for the full deal, as it would have been a bit disappointing when the bird was having trouble flying, not to mention the money it would have cost us! It was well worth the stop and most interesting. He was the 3rd generation in his family to have been hunting eagles.

We are at present camped beside a river in a gorge on our way towards the Torugut Pass, at an altitude of 1957 meters. Tomorrow we will be in Naryn, where we will stay for a couple of days before we go 'over the top' so to speak.

I am adding a bit more, as we are now in Naryn, at about 2000 meters in the mountains. We travelled over a pass this morning on the way here, and it was over 3000 meters. There wasn't too much snow, but I don't know what it will be like much higher than that. I noticed some Chinese trucks and cars coming down the road towards us, so the pass must be OK.

I hope to get this sent at Naryn, or if not it will be in China, probably in Kashgar, so will finish it now.

Seen on the Road



The Kindness of Strangers

It was New Year's Day 2007 and we were in the south of Chile near Porvenir. We had decided to follow the Circuito du Oro (Gold Circuit) which is an unmade track linking several disused goldmines. The area is a remote, windswept area of rock strewn hills. Driving along the track our van suddenly lurched to the left and came to a halt. Ann was unable to open the door and when I had scrambled out I saw that the van was sunk in mud to the extent it covered the bottom of the door.

Our first attempt to extricate ourselves was to start digging but it rapidly became clear that the mud was virtually liquid and kept flowing back as soon as some was removed. For some reason a pit had been dug and backfilled creating a reservoir for the water running off the hillside. The surface top had dried to a crust making the pit all but invisible. The van had only been saved from a worse disaster by the rear bumper resting on the edge of the pit.

We remembered that we had passed an estancia and after trudging about 9 kms we walked down a lengthy drive to the house to a very friendly greeting - and tea and cake. We were soon joined by Alix, his son Gonzalez and brother in law Pedro. After explaining our dilemma they started up their tractor and followed with them to the van in a pickup. They tried pulling the van from the back and then from the front but to no avail. "No problem - we will get another tractor" This came from another estancia about 20kms away. When it arrived the two tractors were joined up in tandem and again tried to budge our van. After a lot of unsuccessful attempts they had to give up. However they said help would come tomorrow.

After an uncomfortable night sleeping at a steep angle and wondering what help would come there was a knock on the door around noon. A guy was there and said "machina, machina" pointing up the hill. We could hear the sound of a large engine and a few moments later a Big Yellow Monster earth mover appeared. After clearing a path around our van avoiding the pit the BYM was soon hooked up to the front with steel cables and with a roar and lots of sucking noises our van was dragged reluctantly back onto the road.

As you may imagine we weren't too keen on continuing along the track so we turned round and waited while the pit was properly filled in. When we asked about payment we were told there was nothing to pay as it was the responsibility of the highways department. Since we still had a case of beer left over from New Years Eve it found a new home with our grateful thanks.

We stopped at the estancia as well and found a few gifts as a small thanks for the hard work and time the cattlemen had spent trying to get us out of our difficulties. Then we drove down the coast and stopped to watch the dolphins surfing the waves very relieved after our experience and so grateful to the strangers who had given us so much help.

Let us know your stories about the kindness of strangers

That's all folks!

The Small Print

This Newsletter is © Silk Road Motorcaravan Network and distributed to members only. Individual contributors retain the copyright to their own articles. This newsletter or individual articles contained in it must not be reproduced in whole or in part without the consent of the holder(s) of the copyright.

Any contribution to this newsletter is not intended to give legal, medical or technical advice. Members and any other readers of this newsletter should not rely on any statement made herein and should take professional advice on how any matter of interest may affect their own circumstances.

Overlanding can be a dangerous occupation and members and any other readers of this newsletter should take all appropriate precautions including risk assessment of their proposed activities.