d - Setting up the Volunteers)

Before a student beekeeper can readh and establish others in his area as beekeepers, he must set an example and manage his own hives successfully, on his own local funds and resouces. He must establish himself by his exertions, and persuade others by his example.

Although he has been trained, one could doubt the potential for continuing onwards, due to lack of funds and resources. I wish to deflate this argument as follows. First, the project is to be carried along by the enthusiastic, since lack of interest or project paternalism will lead to terrible hardship or failure. Besides, this project's budget is designed to be sparse, so outside backup is just not possible. In any case, if the student beekeeper can hack it locally, all the more reason for his own pupils to be able to, and believe it when he claims so. Second, "poor people" have more resources than one might suspect; to illustrate, were all the Muslims who made it to Mecca subsidized or not? This principle can be extended to the local community as a whole. Third, the necessary beekeeping equipment, when adapted for this project's needs, is very easy and cheap to make: just a modified box with a tim roof, a piece of clothing, a fancy hat and a homemade smoker. The equipment can be made at Fada at low cost, sold, and trucked out at low cost, or better yet, the student beekeeper will make his own or contract with a local artisan to make it for him. The construction technology is very basic, and local difficulties will be solved in different ways. Thus, if one surveyed the various artisans all over Gourmantche who filled the equipment contracts, and compiled it, one would have wonderful insight into the art of making beekeeping equipment cheaply. The results would be a documentation of adaption and evolution, which means that the locals develop their own systems, and Fada is spared the task of production and marketing research.

Therefore during the student beekeeper's first year most effort will be on establishment, and a refining and reinforcing of the skills learnt while at Fada Bible School. Obviously there will be extension help from Fada, to check up on progress and assist where necessary.

e - Volunteer Expansion, and Advanced Training)

Once the student beekeeper is well-established, expansion will begin; this is where the real thrust of the project should take place. This

description is meant to tie in with its parent process at Fada - see Section b) for this.

I- Volunteer Expansion)

It is assumed that everyone in the student beekeeper's locale will know of his bees, both from hearday and from his own lowkey advertising as he does his evangelical work, or whatever. His process will sound familiar: after a survey of beekeepers, interested people and the local honeyflow, and after his own trial-and-error, he will teach and set up others. In so doing, he will draw upon the simplified technology he learned at Fada, and in teaching it, he will have ultimately mastered it. Again, the process is familiar: natural selection will determine his students - interest, fear, time - so he will not waste time on dead-end tasks. In time, the new students will go with him to the local artisan, who now has a new market to invest in, or they will make their own equipment if desired. Raising the needed cash is up to the villagers themselves. it is not possible for the Fada project to do this, as it is very expensive and paternalistic. Although Fada could make hives and other equipment and truck them out to help special cases, on the whole it would help local artisans if they could get the business and use their own initiatives. In teaching and establishing beekeeping locally, it is hoped that the volunteer's zeal will make him reach all those who wish to keep bees. The aim of the project is to teach and establish, and so on outwards. This is also an excellent base from which to witness.

II- Advanced Training)

Ideally, this could be minimal, as the first course at Fada is designed to promote beekeeping advancement and development by the student alone. Yet, this may not occur. As the student progresses in the task of establishing local beekeeping, the teacher from Fada will visit regularly to teach the finer points, for if this had been done earlier, the student would have become very confused. These lessons are ultimately passed on to the locals; in this way, technology seeps down bit by bit.

These continuing visits are helpful to the teacher as well: they maintain contact with former students; advanced training only comes when needed or deserved, the waste of unprofitable areas or students is avoided, and the total area of Gourmantche is always being observed.

In terms of overall development, or disease, the teacher will be able to get feedback, which when interpreted is vital to the style or teaching at Fada.

f - Phaseout)

In one sense, this project will not phase out; yet in another, it will. As long as the Fada Bible School continues to operate, it will be helped income from its bee project, and it will turn out a number of beekeeper-evangelists each year. It will be many years before the length and breadth of Gourmantche is full of beekeepers. Since the underlying aims are so grassroots and so far reaching, the project is more of a <u>movement</u> than a project, for production for cash crop is not a central concern here - the aim is for <u>everyone</u> interested to have their own bees and honey. The Gourmas will carry this movement themselves, for once the student beekeepers have pushed enough, the rest is mere inertia. However, some parts of the project must and will fade out. This is in the realm of personnel and services.

I- Personnel)

It is absolute that the Gourmas will run this project, in all its parts; the role of expatriate is to set up, teach, establish, and get out. There is much literature on the art of handing over, so it will be assumed and n xxxxxxxxxxx covered here. Once handover is done, it is up to the Gourmas how they operate and above all, replace the Fada bee staff: those who manage the income honey project, those who spread beekeeping in the Fada area, those who teach the beekeeping course each year, and those who tour Gourmantche for the advanced training. This staff can be as small as two or three workers - <u>fulltime</u>, though.
If by chance the Bible School shuts down, and the Fada bee work stops, this is no problem, assuming that there are enough volunteers dotted around Gourmantche; the project had become a movement, and the spirit of bee-keeping with the people, where it should be.

II - Services)

This is applicable with regard to the teachers, and those they are educating. The principles of teach, establish, advanced trainin., and get out still apply. It is the teachers who educate, but the students to motivate. There is not nough money for paternalism, or time for

fooling about with unwilling students or locals. This project is all teach and establish - what follows is up to enthusiasm.

If bees become as common as millet, then there will be no phaseout at all, as a movement, and the project, will have been successful.

COSTS

This project is designed to run on a low budget, since the emphasis is on teaching and establishment, not subsidy and cash-cropping. There are four main areas to the project that will incur expense: the income honey project, the outreach to the Fada area, teaching student volunteers and the advanced training/ volunteer establishment.

a - The Income Honey Project)
I- Materials. The following are needed, assuming that 100 hives are to be set up. Most equipment already at hand.
One homemade, petrol-driven table saw. Very easy to make - 20,000 cfa. Wood, paint, nails, tin for one modified Kenya Top Bar hive, about 4,000 cfa. For 100, 400,000 cfa. This will be less if materials are bought wholesale.
II- Labour) One fulltime beekeeper at least is needed to run this part of the project. Although payment could come in the form of his friends or the Church hoeing his millet-fields for him, or payment be made in grain , this can lead to difficulty. Therefore a salary for one fulltime or two part time beekeepers should be considered.
III - Transport) It is hoped that the Bible School's Pugeot 404 could be borrowed occasionally for local runs. Therefore the cost of petrol and maintenance would be shared.

b - Outreach to Fada Area.
Materials: none, since the locals will deal with that.
II) Labour. A second beekeeper, paid in same way, possibly on half time.
III) Transport: motorcycle.

c- Teaching.
I - Materials) The hives and local beekeepers are already there. Main expense is in teaching aids, such as charts, posters etc., and handout materials such as mimeograph sheets and notebooks.
II) Labour. Either one of the two beekeepers.
III) Transport. The 404 again.

d- Volunteer Establishment/Advanced Training.

I) Materials: none

II) Labour: the third beekeeper, who will be wandering all over Gourmanche, with a salary.

III) Transport: one motorcycle, if possible, cost depending on the deal.
IV) Living Expenses. While "on the road" and in lodgings, if necessary. Cost not known, but guess at 25,000 cfa per year, or more.

Funds for these needs can be met from honey project income, Gourma Church support, S.I.M. support, or other external funding. In any case, monetary cost is minimal, assuming that the three beekeepers are the only salaried workers on the project, and that all other beekeepers finance their own hives and equipment off their local artisans. With less motivation, more dependence, more workers and a centralised system, the cost would rise very sharply.

PROBLEMS

No project is problem-free: listed here are some issues that may cause difficulties in time; naturally, this list is not comprehensive.

a- On the Church's Role in Beekeeping.

Some might object to the Church being involved in beekeeping development, and this concern may be justified if the project deviates from its goal of teaching to one of using bees for income. Of course, the present project at Fada does not count.

In fact, the church's role here is to act as a catalyst for independent grassroots development in beekeeping; at the same time it will be demonstrating and proclaiming the Gospel through the witness of the student volunteers. It is anticipated that these volunteers will be lay workers with the gift of helps, rather than pastoral or church-building students from the Bible School.

b - Workers and Salaried Positions.

With the exception of the three beekeepers at Fada, there should be no salaried positions; this increases the budget, ruins genuine enthusiasm and incentive, and leads to paternalism. This project must avoid the temptation to expand so as to appear impressive.

c - Bee Failure

Since the bees provide a second income for many, there should be no total expectations placed on income. After all, bees can fall prey to disease just like millet,

d - Vandalism

This has already happened to some of the Fada hives; therefore, it is hope that thorn hedges can be planted round individual beeyards.

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e - On a Fall in the Honey/Wax Market

This does happen, so there is a need to provide room for stockpiling, till such time as prices rise again.

f - Sharing of the Bible School's 404

If this becomes an issue, then it may be necessary to find a vehicle for the bee project. This can be discussed when the time comes.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus far, I have discussed the steps necessary to set this beekeeping project up, and some of the methodology behind it. However, there remain some points I would stress, lest they be overlooked; indeed, they are important.

Although the word "project" has been used many times, this enterprise is just what the title says it is: the establishment of beekeeping in the Gourmantche area, and more. The stress is on teaching, and establishment by enthusiasm. Teaching requires a teacher, not a handout; enthusiasm drives both student and teacher to their goals. However, this task is not just an attempt to leave Gourmantche dripping in honey, with its beekeepers unmoved; in another way, it is not to be seen as a convenient carrier from which to witness Christ, while leaving basic material needs unmet. In short, I see this work as an example of the wholistic and incarnational ministry , meeting the needs of the whole person. The spirit of God blows over men and women as it will, yet He also speaks through those He sends; in the same way, flowers are fertilized through use of wind or the agency of the bees. Therefore, this task is somewhat appropriate, for the volunteer beekeepers are, in effect, God's pollinator If this task is kept simple, enthusiastic, with the people and for their whole needs, then it will be successful, even if it appears otherwise.

"My son, eat thou honey, because it is good, and the honeycomb, which is sweet, to thy taste" Proverbs 24: 13.

Respectfully submitted by Stephen Van Wyck, September 1984.

S. Van Wyck. Magazine Article on Travel by Bush Taxi.

"West Africa on a Spring and a Prayer--An Outsider's View of Travel by Bush Taxi."

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For nine months, beginning in June 1984 I worked in rural development as a beekeeper and handyman in Burkina Faso and Niger, West Africa. When the need arose, I decided to travel by bush taxi instead of by internal air or bus. Out of those prolonged and dusty trips came a closeness to and perhaps a better understanding of the Africans with whom I rode--their way of thinking and living, their stories and their silences. Above all, there was a vivid impression of the land in a time of drought.

In West Africa, any suitable vehicle can be used as a bush taxi, provided it can survive the rough and pitted roads. In Burkina Faso the standard bush taxi, or taxi de brousse, is an old Peugeot 404 pickup truck. In fact, a very old Peugeot. When the trucks can no longer pass inspection in France they are given one last refit and shipped down to the coastal ports of West Africa and thence inland, or they are driven across the Sahara Desert into Niger and then westward. It is a long journey into a very hard retirement service, but the Africans have incredible genius in maintaining the taxis and coming up with the parts to keep them running. If they cannot get them they take what is available--or wait. Indeed, tney have to improvise with local resoueces-- welding together steel plates to make a top and body over the flatbed of the pickup, for example. If something is outdated, unservicable, unfashionable and even prohibited in the Western world it may well end up in West Africa: this is true with welding tools, gas tankers, sewing machines, surgical instruments, agricultural sprays, textbooks... and pickup trucks. Perhaps this is one reason why many Westerners choose not to ride, thinking it takes an intrepid or daring spirit to travel the pitted roads on old wheels. For the traveller who is willing to put up with delays, dust and some discomfort the rewards are great, as the experience provides a unique intimacy with tne land and its people. My travels by bush taxi helped show me a glimpse of the soul of Africa, and it is the journeys themselves that tell their own story.

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By eight in the morning the June air of Ouagdougou, Burkina Faso is heavy and in the eighties. The streets of the already busy city are full of people but they are unnoticed from the back of the motorcycle that darts through traffic on its way to the bush taxi station. There are sounds of wheezing motors and the call of marketplace boys selling something unseen. A quick glance to the right, and a flash into a shop and a man looking out from behind a pile of draperies. He disappears. The motorcycle leaves the traffic and heads down an unpaved road, speeding up so that the dust covers the toes only and not the whole body. The houses begin to separate and before long the rider reaches the bush taxi station at the edge of town. Around some thatched shelters stand several Peugeot pickups and a few Toyota minivans, their doors open and nobody in them. From

under the front of one stick a pair of legs. I walk over to the shelter to negotiate the fare, for it is said that there are three price ranges on the market--the African, the white, and the American.

"When is the next taxi to Fada?"

One of the men under the thatch points to the legs that stick out from under the Peugeot and says that it will be fixed in a little while. In the meantime, the price is agreed upon. Since I could pass off as a Frenchman I payed less, about three dollars for a two hundred mile trip.

The bush taxi depot is quiet--very quiet; there is the sudden realization of being alone in a strange place. From the doorway of a house across the street several children stare then run inside. It is not an unfriendly place but certainly an unfamiliar one. The men under the shelter beckon and before long are sharing cups of tea and asking about America, then continue to talk of the drought, what work is available down in the Ivory Coast, and the price of millet. During this time the driver of the Peugeot crawls out from under his taxi and starts the engine. The six travellers that have arrived do not rush into the taxi but continue to drink their tea.

When is the next taxi to Fada? Whenever it fills up.

It is now nine and outside the shelter the air is headache hot. Even the flies stay under the shade. The engine seems to be running smoothly enough and the depot falls into hardened silence when it is allowed to stall...

There is no rush, no push to get things moving. Those that try to do so fatigue and burn out quickly, and everyone from the men down to the dog lying in the dust under a tree know it. The extra passengers come to the depot one at a time and rest under the thatch. The Peugeot looks hotter and hotter under the sun. Another bush taxi from the countryside west of Ouagadougou pulls into the depot and drops off a knot of travellers who are continuing east, and with that the driver of the Peugeot starts collecting money. Baggage is thrown up to someone on the roof who ties it down, and fifteen people cram into the cab and on the enclosed back. If the starter motor is broken or lost, the passengers get out and push the vehicle to jump start it. With a last toot of the horn to call one last possible passenger the bush taxi struggles onto the road and the adventure begins...to stop at the police post at the edge of town. Papers are checked and the policeman takes particular interest in the one blue passport along with the green ones. The idling motor dies and is replaced by the sticky sound of sweaty legs moving on imitation leather. Low voices in a local dialect drone on. Eventually the policeman comes out to return the passports or travel passes while the wire is lowered. After a few persuasive startups the taxi heads into the countryside.

Compared to the parts of Africa that many Westerners visit, Burkina Faso and Niger are dry, dusty and largely flat. Of the two however, Burkina Faso receives a better rainfall and is thus greener during the short rainy season. The land each side of the long black road is flat and partly covered with scattered scrub and thorn trees, or fringed in dry grasses. The red laterite soil that is used as a

road bed can be seen everywhere, and there are patches of the more fertile soil that surround small hamlets. The rainy season has not yet begun and the millet fields remain empty and bare. In the midst of the bush stands the ocaisional baobab, known as the "upside-down tree"; indeed, their branches look just like the roots that should have been in the soil, and not in the air. The road remains long and straight and the bush taxi continues at a steady forty miles per hour. For an hour or two the land is the same combination of bush, hamlet and millet field with which the Africans are so familiar, yet to the visitor it is new and fascinating.

The road passes through small wayside towns that can be seen from afar, or appear suddenly around a bend. The driver gives long blasts on the horn to alert those in the market or bush taxi depot, and if nobody waves the taxi to a halt it passes right on through. Soon it is back in the open country again, and the passengers turn their gaze inwards to talk of the famine or the availability of millet in the country. For long stretches they may say nothing, looking at the floor or the flapping canvas sides. With the heat of the day it is wound up and the air blows less hot upon their faces.

About forty miles further on the bush taxi slows down to come to a halt in front of another taxi that has been damaged in an accident. All of the passengers stand around the front of the minivan looking at the smashed radiator and what is left of the cooling fan, while in the dust further on lies a dying donkey that had crossed the open road and been hit at full speed. The land is vast and hard. Death is very much a part of life as an everyday occurence. Nobody pays much attention to the donkey behind them. Instead, they discuss what to pay the owner who has come out from one of the hamlets, and what to do about the broken cooling fan. The Peugeot is full and someone from the minivan has to go on to the next town, so one of the passengers gets off willingly with his baggage and joins the stranded party. Given the availability of parts and the time needed to travel on to the next town and back, the journey would take about a day. But this is not fatalism, and these are not fatalists; rather, there is an acceptance that life stretches on, and can be lived at a slower pace. There is much time to talk in the shimmering silence of the open roadside, looking up and down the thin black line that skirts across the bush. The Peugeot starts up, leaving the stranded minivan behind.

By noon the sun is overpowering, and the driver is tired of dodging the potholes that mark an otherwise excellent road. Without warning the taxi turns off the road and heads down a gouged laterite pathway and into the bush itself for several miles, apparently headed nowhere. A mudbrick house appears, then another, and suddenly the taxi has pulled into a busy village on market day to park in a cloud of dust next to a pile of tires. In very little time a small crowd of children and street merchants have gathered around to sell cooked food and plastic bags of partly cooled fruit juice, probably from one of the few antique refigerators in the town. The Africans on board get off and walk into the shaded parts of the market under the large spreading mango or thorn trees to sleep off the afternoon, and

interest in the newly arrived bush taxi peters out. The market returns to normal.

For three hours the bush taxi remains in the open under the afternoon sun while the passengers sleep on. Guinea hens, dogs and a stray pig sleepwalk over the dusted ground in search of scraps. Beggar children come to the window of the bush taxi in the hope of coins or bread. The place is still, so still as to be able to hear the spasmodic plop of a sweatdrop on the sticky car seat. Even the flies were quiet. A few other bush taxis can be seen through the shivering heatwaves--silent, bright and dust powdered. Under a sun-spun inebriation the town lies asleep, the people prone, spread out around the shade trees like doormice set out on a platter.

At three o' clock one of the drivers lifts up the bonnet of his bush taxi, reconnects the battery wires, and checks the water level too. Others begin to stir, and in twenty minutes the marketplace is active again with the call of merchants and the revving of already hot motors. The driver of the Peugeot begins to blow long on the horn to call the stragglers back and they scurry, bags of food in hand and traces of millet and sauce on their fingers, evidence of their common meal in a market kitchen. Everyone looks more alert as the taxi drives over the bush track and back onto the thin black line that joins towns accross a vast countryside.

As the day begins to fade the canvas front is lowered and some of the passengers huddle in what faded clothing they have. Much of their conversation is in local dialect, until they ask one young man if he were already married. He said no--he was still not old enough. How old? Twenty-two. Nonsense! and they prod one of the women sitting at the back and say winking that she would be happy to marry him. The humour continues for several kilometres and from time to time the driver glances back with a huge grin as he listens to the account that one of the men in the front relays to him. The woman sits in offended silence until it becomes apparent that the passengers are not having fun with the young man but with her, for she is an expatriate prostitute. After a time the driver calls a halt to the fun they were making of her and the taxi becomes quiet.

As the last hours of daylight pass by with the forgotten miles the taxi begins to approach Fada n' Gourma, and with the sunset it speeds down the avenue of shade trees and into the center of town. The market is in the process of closing down slowly as the driver stalls the engine for the last time that day. After shaking hands with the driver and waving to the the other passengers it is time to go over to a waiting bed at the end of the day and the beginning of an assignment. While walking across the barrage of the town's catchment dam in the caress of the evening breeze it is all one could do to marvel at what had been seen and felt that day. I knew that there would be other trips ahead, and throughout the days and weeks of work with the beekeeping project I would dwell on this little seen side of Africa, wanting to see more. . .

In time I left Burkina Faso and the beekeeping project and moved

to neighbouring Niger, where I worked as a repairman for several months at the edge of a large town. There were thirty-five thousand people in Maradi with many more coming in from the northern desert every day as the famine became worse. During that time I journeyed often by bush taxi. One such journey ran from Maradi to the capital at Niamey and then on to Diapaga, back in Burkina Faso. It took between one and two days to cover the seven hundred miles over the bush and glimpse, only glimpse, a part of that vast, beautiful land.

It was December and the guard at the police roadblock at the edge of Maradi stood shrouded in a black cape. Nearly in his sleep, it seemed, he gazed into the papers and the curious blue passport, then let down the wire. Most of the passengers promptly fell asleep again as the Toyota minivan ran westwards into the thin black line that appeared out of a dimmed semidesert. The long shadow of the minivan shot ahead over the black road as the sun arose behind to reveal a land that was under famine and drought. Indeed, it was by bush taxi that a traveller could get a clear sight of the famine, as miles of countryside passed by, and the awakening passengers looked out in silence. Nobody spoke much during that trip. The few scattered trees should have appeared green, yet they were without leaves and frosted in egrets. They would shed like dandruff from the branches when the bush taxi passed by and return with the silence of its departing. All along the road the fields gave their own account--millet and guinea-corn standing burnt, yellow, dry, headed and empty of seed. It was the precursor of a greater famine, one that had not been experienced for decades. In many places the ground sprouted plants of six inches or less, where the farmers had tried to replant after the first crop failure. They were yellow, bent over, and still. The only water seen constantly was the mirage at the end of the thin black line, that always fled away on approach.

The character of the land changed towards the town of Galmi, but not so the impressions. The soil became stony and the form almost mountainous. Some thatched houses sat upon a slight slope in solitude, with only the stones underfoot, the wind without and the sky above. As wilderness it was spectacularly wild , yet here was a wilderness in which people were trying to live and raise a crop. A few distant patches of green in a valley sat precariously mounted in a frame of red stone and vast distances. As the minivan drew near, the green patch turned into irrigated onion fields.

Galmi is famous for its onions, which are sold in many markets throughout Niger. As the minivan stopped in the midst of the busy marketplace the familiar scene that is so much a part of roadside Africa was repeated. Street merchants and beggars of all ages ran to the side of the bush taxi, showing their wares or offering their cupped hands. Some of the boys had parcels of onions tied up with strips of palm frond atop their heads which seemed as though glued to their hair. The driver called a half hour halt for a late breakfast at the market kitchen, and everybody clambered out.

Part of the adventure and pleasure of travelling by bush taxi is in the eating. Most of the places people eat are outside, since it

rains so rarely. In the heat of the day the benches are moved under shade trees or sunshades made of straw mats stretched over a pole framework. Some of the housewives from Galmi come to the marketplace each morning with millet they had pounded into flour the night before, along with a chunk of goat meat or a few guinea hens. By noon and the expected arrival of several Niamey bush taxis their few cauldrons were ready. One was full of millet cooked down to a thick porridge. The next held rice--long grain, polished and imported. Although some rice is grown in Niger, it is very popular and much is brought up through Nigeria. The last cauldron held a sauce made up of the meat and whatever greens were available that day. Several enameled tin plates were stacked on a packing crate table with a few spoons nearby, while on the ground were a few large bowls. Some of the Africans in the bush taxi were travelling together, so after washing their hands in the water a little boy poured from a plastic kettle, they ate out of the same bowl, rolling the millet into plugs with their fingers and dipping it all into the side dish for sauce. Every so often, someone would reach a little deeper to search for a piece of guinea hen. The meal was unhurried and the men ate in silence. When there remained a little food in the bottom of the bowl they passed it to the boys that sat nearby, waiting.

A few women walked past with jugs or plastic buckets atop their heads on their way to the nearest well. Their waterskins were very small when ranged against the coils of rope necessary to reach the bottom of the well. As the drought became more severe the water table dropped in noticable amounts, and this was partly due to the drying up of Lake Chad far to the east. Some wells were so deep already that a stone took five seconds to fall to the bottom in a faint splash. Around the open hole was no guard rail for children, but the edges were framed by three logs which were deeply scored with the passage of countless ropes. Pulling water is exceedingly heavy work for the wives who carry it home to the compound every day. It is also delicate since the well shafts are usually unlined and sensitive to collapse. As the women poured the water into buckets they had to kick away the goats that crowded around for a chance to steal a drink. This daily occurrance was so entrancing that the surrounding countryside became forgotten--until someone from the bush taxi came near and called me back to the road.

With a last call on the horn and smoked splutter the driver managed to get his minivan started and out of Galmi, his roofrack loaded with onions to sell in the Niamey market, and his dashboard crammed with pepper dusted goat kebabs wrapped in packing paper. Every few miles he would pull off a morsel and eat it, until the pile had vanished. By then Galmi was several horizons behind. Niamey would not come in sight for a long time yet and most of the passengers fell asleep. Outside, the burnt land reappeared with the same story of yellowed millet stalks, and the hardships of travel by bush taxi revealed themselves in cramped seats and various bodily smells. Sometimes the driver would seem to nod off, but never for long. There was a brief halt in the middle of nowhere at prayer time,

and several of the Muslim passengers got out to unroll their mats towards the east. A few feet away from the minivan, the vast country began and stretched beyond sight. A shout, several backfires, and then another cluster of hours on the thin black line across the semi desert. With the nightfall came Niamey, and after the day in the open it was a relief to be sucked into the black hole of the marketplace, many new faces, the waiting cab and a night with friends at the guest house. This rest was welcome before continuing on with the next leg of the journey by bush taxi--from Niamey back into Burkina Faso and the town of Diapaga.

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Each Friday night two bush taxis leave Niamey and arrive at Diapaga, Burkina Faso on Saturday afternoon. Everyone there knows about these two taxis and the crew that runs them, for each week they are packed out to the roofs with people and baggage. The vehicles are both Toyota trucks. The back of the first has been extended and welded up to resemble a bus, and the second has had the sides of the truck bed built and boarded up to about sixteen feet, so that it can hold vast amounts of loose odds and ends. In many towns in Burkina Faso there is a great shortage of basic plastic containers such as buckets, salad oil bottles, bags, fifteen-gallon jugs as well as tin cans, pails, rubber tubing, short lengths of piping and the like. In addition to working in Niger, there are many housewives who make the trip specifically to pick up items lacking at home, as well as the usual bush taxi travellers.

There was only one entrance to the passenger part of the homemade bus, and all the windows were barred. In addition to that, the center seat folded down over the aisle when the seats behind it had been filled, so that it was impossible for anyone at the back to get out easily. This was done to pack in the maximum amount of people. The seat at the front right next to the door seemed best. Above the window that looked into the driving cab was the only light, dim and flickering from the uncertain battery up front. Although the housewives had stowed their heavy baggage in the other truck there remained much that went into the bus with them--bags of food, a few bundles of clothing and finer cloth, water jugs, and several screaming children. After the fifth row of seats the coach became effectivly dark, packed out with groping bodies and the ocaisional windmilling of a flashlight. The middle seats were lowered down as the bus filled up, and I looked closely at the bars on the window to see just how easy it would be to crawl through them. There was a splutter from the engine and then no activity for thirty minutes. The heat at my back became palpable.

There was a scuffle and the driver mounted the steps and flashed a light into the bus to see if it was full enough. He was surprised to see me in this part of his bush taxi and explained that there was a seat in the cab with better ventilation. It took no more persuasion to move up front into the cab between the driver and his riding partner for the night.

When the driver said the cab was ventilated he was not joking.

The diesel clattered to a start and it became apparent that there was no dashboard or partition between the cab and the engine. It took several hours of driving before one's ears became accustomed to the extra sound. Hardships like these are common on many bush taxis. In any case it was better than the black hole behind.

Both of the Toyotas were old and had had an easier service in their former country, yet they managed to climb the gradual gradient out of the Niger River basin. It was impossible to sleep in the cab with the diesel in third gear for miles on end and the driver trying to have some conversation with his partner. The light caps were undusted and this made the road up front less easy to see. Perhaps it was the late hour as well, for the truck weaved all over the road with the turns or to avoid donkeys that appeared out of nowhere. For many Africans these journeys are not joyrides, but one of the necessities of travelling cheaply. In the back a child was wailing but everyone else seemed to be oblivious in sleep. The Africans have an incredible tolerance for noise.

At about midnight the last police checkpoint in Nigerien territory was reached and the trucks pulled off the road to join several others in a beaten earth parking field. No vehicles were allowed to cross the border at night, and as the passengers got out of their seats they were directed to the police tent to hand in their papers. Again, the police scrutiny of documents and the curious blue passport. The bus part took a long while to unload but it finally was done, and the seats stood empty. Around the bus and the other trucks people unrolled their straw mats, lay on them and stretched blankets over their curled bodies. Some curled up together to keep warm for the next morning, for it was the cold month of December. Inside the bus it was still and empty, and with one of the middle seats folded down there was enough room to lie down straight. The benches were hard and convex, and throughout the night the air became steadily cooler. Outside could be heard the periodic splash of falling water from near the tires. It was invitation enough, but not enough to force one to go out for relief in the total darkness. The night was spent on those seats, the body and ears tired but the mind awake and waiting. Every so often it seemed as if the sky had lightened up a little but no, not yet.

The morning rose out of unconsciousness and an aching back to a feeling of being chilled and shivering. The urge to get up and walk about was powerful. No more bench-joy in this bus.

It could have been a scene from war. Around the bus lay dozens of bodies, stretched out and totally shrouded in sheets or white blankets. Nobody moved. The air remained cold and still, there was a light mist over the ground. The flag in front of the police station clung to the pole. Several vultures stalked about the taxis in silence. Nearby, a few dogs fought over some scraps. Nothing else stirred. This suspended vision remained for a long time as the sun began to grey the eastern corner of the horizon. There were sounds from across the road of people and the clash of enamel dishes. Food. That in itself was sufficient. By now others were unshrouding

themselves from their sheets and wandering towards the kitchen.

African road food at five in the morning can be very similar to what was eaten at seven the night before. In fact, it is the same. The millet is allowed to set and in the morning it is patted into pancake-like flats and cooked in boiling oil. Pieces of chicken in the leaf sauce are reheated in the cauldron over the open fire and served over what rice remains. Everyone was eyeing the pot that held the tea; actually, it was a two-gallon oil tin with the top cut out. When it began to boil someone picked it up with heavy rags and set it upon one of the outside tables. From there the tea was ladled into waiting cups, given a shot of thick condensed milk and another of sugar, and then handed to the customers as they began to arrive from out of their sleep. The chicken, millet fry ups and rice were also carried onto the tables out of the smokey leanto to be eaten and people began to revive and talk again. The vultures became bold as the eaters threw out bones and gristle onto the dust. One came too close and had stones thrown at it. The change from a death like sleep to a busy, chattering crowd had finally come with the heat of the sun and in time everyone went to the trucks to pack away what was left on the ground, and then to claim papers with an exit stamp from the police. There was no post at the border, so all business was carried out here. A final scamble and the bush taxis left as soon as they were ready.

The cab of the Toyota remained noisy but somehow familiar. Way down the thin black line another truck was approaching. As it passed there was a great crashing sound and the windscreen became white and starred. The rest was reflex and as my face went between my knees, the glass was flung against the back of the cab.

The driver stopped the truck, unhurt but shaken, thankful that he had been wearing glasses. His partner had been able to raise his hands over his face, and they were lightly cut. There were little square bits of glass all over the floor and seat of the cab. Stepping out of the cab one could see the glass over the road, and the faces of several people behind as they came out of their shock to ask if anyone was hurt. Some were hysterical, thinking that someone had been killed. There was no sign of the stone that had hit the windshield. The driver of the other truck drew up and helped to pull away the rubber gasket that had held in the windshield and swept off the glass parts with a handbroom. This was a light accident; sometimes taxis have crashed and burned. In fact, the police have a grim way of reminding travellers to be more careful on the roads: crashed vehicles are left on the roadside as a sign to others, and every few hundred miles one can see a rusted hulk on the roadside.

When all the glass had been removed the truck was truly well ventilated as it crossed over the border with Burkina Faso. At that point the paved road stopped and was replaced with one made of red laterite gravel. There was no sign of any customs, nothing save a broken down thatched cottage, as the driver began to dodge holes in the road with experienced ease. The border post was at the first town, nine miles and half an hour down the laterite strip.

Kantchari is the turn off point for those going down to the south-east corner of Burkina Faso and beyond that, to the abutting country of Benin. There were other bush taxis waiting to pass customs that day and the police staff was small. After passport control the passengers went into the marketplace until such time as their trucks came up for inspection. The sun grew hot as many retreated under shade trees or went into the bar for a Fanta. The room stood largely bare with a few old posters on the walls and an ancient refrigerator in a corner, which was packed with Fantas and Sprites. Not much sound save the scuff of feet and the rasp and bounce of bottle caps skidding over the counter and onto the floor. People rested in the shade, saving strength for what was to come.

The trucks and other bush taxis were inspected before continuing out of Kantchari. It was well known that the housewives who rode the Niamey-Diapaga taxi carried odds and ends to sell at a profit in their home towns, so everything was unloaded out of the baggage truck and spread on the ground, inspected, some of it taxed, and then returned to the truck. During this time a few European travellers in four wheel drive, trans-Sahara vehicles passed the customs in a matter of ten minutes. When the two Toyotas were reloaded and on their way out four hours had passed. To the Westerner it appears long and taxing, yet to many Africans patience is a part of life, and one that is necessary and works well in a hot climate. When travelling by bush taxi, one should not set up too many itineraries--if any at all.

Ultimately, the trucks arrived at Diapaga to let off several passengers and then continue onwards down the laterite strip to Mahadaga and beyond. This trip was over and the square in the middle of Diapaga seemed empty, as at the departure of friends. Travelling by bush taxis actually made up a small part of the time I spent in West Africa, yet some of the strongest impressions of that vast land came from what was seen from those windows, bouncing over the red strip or the thin black line. It is an experience open to anyone willing enough to desire it.

S. Van Wyck. "In Search of an Orchid." To Elizabeth.
1a

Tiffen sat up with a start and burst out of his nightmare. Silence. His eyes stared into the dark room and waited for the grey fuzz of shapes to show up, for his eyes to accommodate. Nothing. He saw nothing yet felt surrounded, almost choked by the presence of the unseen room. The blood hissed in his ears as he waited for last night's table and the walls he had memorised to appear. Still nothing. There was not even the clicking of gekkoes or the rippling sound of their sucker toed feet as they ran across the corrugated tinpan roof in search of insects. It's night, that's why, he thought. Tiffen groped and found the candle and box of matches, taking pleasure in drawing out a match and holding it just so. He tapped the head slowly and softly at first watching the minute point of light dance about the unseen match head, then he struck faster and harder, and harder, and harder. . .

The light burst as the phosphorous caught and blinded Tiffen for a few short seconds. Squinting, he lit the candle. It caught and he flicked the match across the room, leaving an arc of faint smoke that mingled in his nostrils with the smell of cobweos and chicken droppings. He raised the candle to the table beside his mattress and balanced it carefully. The walls bounced back the light through the dust and fly spots while a solitary cobweb dangled motionless from one of the beams.

Tiffen froze upon his bed thinking until the heat from the candle began to tease the strand and arouse him out of his fear of the room. At this hour the police curfew would still be in effect and he wondered when he could leave the compound and walk on the road. An hour ago several donkeys had called out in the night and woken him up, but it was still too early. He listened again but heard nothing, so he gave up waiting and began to dress, stuffing a few posessions into a leather satchel. The other clothes he abandoned in the corner of the room, where they would stay until later. You could wait, you know, and get a ride down to Mahadaga on Thursday. Don't make Betty afraid for you. Why do you want to walk it?

"I have to," said Tiffen, as he breathed in the cool December air that seemed to draw him from the room.

He thought about the last several days on the road. A week ago he had finished his job in Maradi as handyman and after leaving his friends for the last time he had begun the long ride by bush taxi along the southern fringe of Niger to the capital at Niamey. The next bush taxi had taken him back into Burkina Faso and the Gourma province he had worked in before starting at Maradi. He arrived at Diapaga on the second day, tired, dusty and almost out of money. Alone in the streets of Diapaga he wondered why he had forgotten to cash a cheque in Niamey. He thought of Betty and Pauline at Mahadaga who had invited him over to their bush hospital for Christmas and realised he would have to survive somehow at Diapaga for five more days until one of them passed by and picked him up, or take the chance of walking to Mahadaga with just enough money to buy whatever food he could afford.

Tiffen weighed the options. The hotel was little more than a shelter with a bed in it and he did not care about comfort, but it was too expensive and would deplete his last pocketfull of coins in three days, not including meal expenses. There was no telephone line to Mahadaga either. He chose the hotel for one night.

"I have to," he said again, as he hung the satchel off his shoulder and blew out the candle. The room began to swallow him again but he walked out, shut the door on his fear and locked it for good.

At the edge of the compound a short track led to the road. Tiffen stood there and by the light of the dimly grey dawn peered up and down it to see if there were any policemen around. Surely curfew must be over by now, he thought, but he was nervous. For the next thirty minutes he stood still sniffing the air, as the sky continued to lighten up and the stars snuffed out one at a time. Finally over several walls a woman began to pound millet and with that Tiffen stepped out into the road. The dawn air remained fresh and cool, a relief after the night in the room.

There was a police station in Diapaga and Tiffen had cleared his papers with the gendarmes the previous afternoon. They had thought him crazy to be walking to Mahadaga. Tiffen knew he wanted to see how far he could walk in a day but he had been ashamed to admit he was also doing it for lack of money. After passing the central clearing he followed the line of kapok trees that led out of town, past a milestone that read in chipped paint Arly--75 km., Mahadaga--50 km. You really are mad, he thought. Why are you really going? No, not the walk, but the whole idea? What is there at Mahadaga anyway?

The promptings of his conscience angered Tiffen but he reflected on the last time he visited Mahadaga, and why he really wanted to return. Last July he had been in Africa for about five weeks, working for the mission as a beekeeper on a development project. Half a day's drive over the bush his friend Elizabeth worked at the bush hospital in Mahadaga as a lab technician. Until then Tiffen had felt the satisfaction and frustration of living with the Gourmas, working on the beekeeping project and enduring culture shock. Yet there had been no close friend from home to speak with, and he had been unable to totally confide in his new friends at Fada. With the offer of a ride to Mahadaga Tiffen saw his chance to visit Elizabeth. . . They worked at the hospital, trying to make sense of their experiences as beginners in Africa. After a day of maintenance work about the compound, Tiffen would walk across the now quiet waiting room and watch her spinning blood plasma in a hand cranked centrifuge. After several days the time came for Tiffen to begin his assignment in Maradi and for Elizabeth to return home to America at the end of hers.

Six months later, Tiffen was again tired from long days and lonely for lack of fellowship. That Elizabeth was thousands of miles away made no difference to him that day, as he sought to see her memory at the end of a long road. . .

The kapok trees ended suddenly and with them the houses. A dirt track meandered to the right towards the airstrip, while the road ahead stretched on into the distance, straight and hemmed in by grass

and scrub. The air lay fresh and dewey when the winter sun rose over the trees and began to warm the side of Tiffen's face. He was glad to travel now and not during the hot season, when nobody would have walked the roads for a whole day. Tiffen marvelled at his apparent speed as his canvas boots marched over the red road in confidence, crunching the laterite paving and leaving little clouds of dust behind. For the next hour he heard his footfalls, the regular splashing in his water bottle, as well as the sounds of the bush to each side of the road. There were not many birds that appeared and most of the sound they made came from their subtle rustling in the thickets. The breeze would come and play with the grassy tufts, and the leaves on the trees fluttered and flashed as though tickeled. The vastness of the land and his constant steps became mesmerising and he forgot the flow of time.

Before him the land changed dramatically as the road went through countryside that had recently been burned over. He walked on, looking at the destruction. Tiffen thought the local commissariat did this to keep the growth down and the sides of the road open, but wondered. There was a death penalty for burning the bush illegally--at least that was what Camarade Gilenli had said at the bar in Kantchari. Occasionally though the farmers did it to catch what was left of the wild animals. Some of the trees smouldered faintly, and in places the distant bush shivered through heat waves caused by isolated fires. A few were heading off into other thickets and Tiffen wondered if would have to return to Diapaga to alert the gendarmes there. Look now, he thought, the fire is several days old and everybody must know about it by now. He looked down the stretched ribbon of laterite and continued walking, picking up pebbles and casting them in low arcs at charred stumps. The ashes were deep and the falling pebbles puffed up the dust.

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1b

After a quiet lunch with Tiffen, Tony and his wife Liz sat back in their chairs to gaze out at the empty compound and relax in the noonday heat. The children who had played and dug in the dust all morning had left to escape the sun. Their sticks lay strewn around the hole and every so often a part of the rim would cave in, sending fountains of fine dust into the quiet air. In spite of the heat it was cooler inside and the windows remained closed. For a while nobody spoke as they just gazed and wiped their already dampening faces.

"Is it always this hot in October?" asked Tiffen.

"Usually," replied Tony. "During the rainy season the heat is somewhat reduced, but at the end the rain tails off while the heat remains. That's why I have been taking it easy. In a week or so the grain for the villages we visited in the bush will be available, and we will have our work cut out then."

He looked out into the compound as he continued speaking. "I wish we would get some rain! We might as well consider the millet crop failed and lost, but if we could have some rain there might be some greens for fodder."

(60)

"But is there even enough time for that?"

"Yes. You'd be surprised how quickly things sprout up when given a chance. It's the same with the trees--give them enough steady water to get the taproot going and they go."

They sat around the table saying nothing.

"Tony, would you please go to Benjamin and read him a story?" asked Liz. "He has felt sick all day and wanted me to ask you to read something."

Tony went into the bedroom and looked at his children. Mellissa lay asleep in her cot as he sat down beside Benjamin and took out a book. Tiffen could see them from the dining room table and he forgot the heat of the day, as he unfolded his imagination and listened with Benjamin.

A car coasted into the courtyard and Tiffen's consciousness and he realised Liz had left the room to meet the unseen visitor. He listened into the kitchen and snatched fragments of Liz's conversation through the steady flow of Tony's voice in the bedroom. How?. . . dead?. . .when?. . .the well. . .at Soura? He looked again at Tony through the open door but could not juxtapose him reading a fairy tale with what he heard in the kitchen. It doesn't make sense, he thought. The two don't go together. They can't. They shouldn't. The edge of Tiffen's imagination seemed to collapse inward as sounds were muted and he felt himself shrouded in cotton wool.

Liz came in and sat down quietly.

"Gordon was killed in an accident at Soura this morning."

There was silence as they sat at the table looking at each other. After a minute Liz glanced in at Tony, then at the table and their glasses. Taking one of them she waited, turning it slowly round and round, drawing designs on the condensation with her fingertip.

Tony came in and stopped when he saw his wife's eyes.

"Tony, there was an accident at the well. Gordon is dead."

"How?"

"They were lowering a well-ring and Gordon was directing it from the bottom. . .something broke and it fell on him. . . The funeral will be at Tsibiri this evening."

"But how. . .and why?" asked Tony. "He would never have done something like that. It was not like him. I only spoke with him yesterday afternoon about well work."

"I don't know why," said Liz. She sat down on the couch and motioned for Tony to join her. They said nothing as they stayed together for the rest of the afternoon.

Tiffen watched them for a while, not knowing what to do. He wanted to be alone and quiet in his room. Saying nothing, he left through the kitchen door. As he crossed the compound to his bungalow the dust spurted from under his feet.

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2a

As the sun became warmer Tiffen took off his hat to shake out the cotton flap sewn into the back and put it back on his head. He could see it flapping in the breeze by watching his shadow. Without