

Egypt Travel journals

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[Date: monday 9 jan 2006](#)

[Location: Bar-sur-Loup](#)

[Country: France](#)

The day before the flight to Cairo, we are in a mood that could best be described as "the day before the exam". We know we have everything packed from a long list we worked on for months, we have the passports and visas, we have had the medical checks and vaccinations, so we could not be better prepared. But still these moments of doubt, checking the list again. Our plan was to do a walk in the mountains, but the weather was not favorable, cold with a nasty wind from Italy. On top of that we felt not too motivated anyhow, so gave up on the plan. Last minute our laptop gave problems, and we still needed to make our back-ups. So we did not make it for our planned "drop-dead-time" and went to bed at midnight, for a couple of hours of sleep in our comfortable beds, that we sure will miss on our 100 cycling days!

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Date: tuesday 10 jan 2006

Location: Bar-sur-Loup->Nice->London->Cairo

Country: France->Uk->Egypte

Today we took the BA flights to get to our starting point, the Piramides of Cairo. Our good friend Al Roemer brought us to the airport in our car with the huge cartons with our bicycles, and our neighbour Martine locked the house. Just 1 km before the airport we got a warning to be very careful. An accident had happened between a cyclist and a car. It looked rather nasty, we hope the best for our fellow cyclist.



Our biggest worry was the total kilos we needed to check-in, the boxes with the bicycles (with extra parts, tent, chairs) weight 60 kilos going up to almost 90 including the bags! The combined allowance is 46, so we counted on "some" Euros to pay. Our mitigation plan for this risk was 3 fold:

1. Al would take 2 of the small bags and wait for us until we finished checking.
1. We have a letter from Plan France, explaining that we do this trip for a humanitarian purpose.
1. Use our charm offensive, letting them know we do this crazy 12.000 km bicycle trip through Africa.

It worked out well, these boxes were taken for granted. What almost did not work was the visa for Egypte, or actually the absence of it. We were informed that you buy the visa at entry in Cairo, but the fact that we enter Egypt by air and leave by bicycle confused the person responsible for getting us on the flight. She had to call 3 times someone else in

order to get the green light, it took us close to 45mins to get our boarding cards! This is the interesting part of live, you worry about having to pay excessive kilos and you get surprised by a very precise checking of the visa! Al, our "chauffeur" got worried as well, looking to us from a distance, but we were all happy when we got our boarding cards, we can tell you. The flight was quick and easy, we celebrated our departure with a glass of wine, what else can you expect from some francofile Dutchies! The wine had a very appropriate name, Dusty Road.

Heathrow! Those that have made an international connection know that it takes time to go from T1 to T4, but we were not pressed for time, so we enjoyed looking around, meeting people, like an old colleague from Digital that I hadn't seen for say 10 years, and a First Aid guy on a bicycle! Could not have been more appropriate, we asked him if he could join us on the trip. Just before boarding we checked if all our 4 pieces of luggage were on board, we were told the bags were on, the bicycles not, so we waited boarding to see what was happening and got the relaxing message that they are on the plane. We also met two other cyclists from England when boarding, they recognised us from the webpage, we start to become famous!

The planeride was rather long, we boarded on time, but left almost one hour later due to traffic congestion, we love Heathrow! At the airport in Cairo, we met 2 other participants, one from Denver and one from San Fransisco. The 6 of us went into the bus of the tourist company and got our first impression of Cairo, hectic situations on the road, people passing left and right, pedestrians crossing and narrowly escaping to get their toes cut

off (or worse), so a good warning sign for us getting to meet this traffic on our bicycles soon. Around midnight we arrived in the hotel, got our keys after we paid our room cash in American Dollars and decided to get a drink and some food in the bar. That ended up being a good plan, more cyclists joined and also our tourleader Randy. A nice little group was formed. During the conversations with our fellow riders, we felt good that everybody had the same anxiety about the feasibility of being able to complete the tour. We ended up going to bed at 3:00am, a good start of our holiday.

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Date: Wednesday 11 jan 2006

Location: Cairo

Country: Egypte

A lazy morning with a gorgious breakfast and then getting a taxi to get to fetch our box with 10 kg of spareparts (see first Newsletter). We called Albert, who now lives in the house of Charles he explained where he lives and after an adventourous drive through Cairo we where able to fetch our box. The story with the box does not seems to have an end! We took a taxi back, but the driver could not find the hotel. With the help of the receptionist of the hotel that we called, we finally made it. Then the driver had no change, so Jenny stayed in the taxi and I got change in the hotel. We got out of the car and last minute Jenny cried "The box is still in the car!" That would have been a disaster, after so much effort to loose the spareparts like that!



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Date: Thursday 12 jan 2006

Our last day of complete rest before tomorrow riders meeting and saturday's departure. We played the tourist, first going to the pyramids and after to the Egyptian museum. We went with 11 other riders in 2 taxi's to a place in Giza where we were told to get on a camel- or horseback. We did not fancy that, wanted to have some exercise and decided to walk. Tall Michael (2.20 meter) and his son Cory joined us. We got the advise to buy a normal and a student ticket, but that did not work out, the lady at the control point did not allow that unless we showed a student card, and it has been a long time since we had that!

The security of the tourists is a major concern here, so everywhere you have metal detection gates, in the hotel and at tourist attractions. Sometimes the control is tight, but often the security guard does not even look up from his newspaper when the alarm goes off. I could take my Swiss Army knife everywhere inside for instance. But back to the pyramids, they are impressive to see from so close by. Our Lonely Planet advised not to go inside, as their is not much to see, so we strolled around and took plenty of pictures. Cameldrivers followed us several times, trying to get us on a camel but our standard answer was "maybe later" and their standard answer was "I will wait for you here, my name is Ali", must be confusing that everyone is called Ali here.



After an excellent pizza in a Pizza Hut (Yes!), we reconvened with the rest of the group and headed off to the museum. We were not allowed to bring camera's and were searched on metal objects twice before entering. The museum is impressive but old. There is so much to see, but after the 50th sarcophagus, we decided that we saw them all and wanted to see the mummies, impressive to realise that these kings died 4600 years ago, but wouldn't it have been better to leave them in their pyramids where they wanted to be buried?

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Date: Friday 13 jan 2006

The morning we used to prepare our luggage in order to be ready for the early departure tomorrow. We meet the riders that arrived later, we are 43 riders and 4 staff members. The majority are Canadians (14), South Africans (9), Americans (6), there is one Newzealander and the rest is from Europe, 4 from Switzerland, 3 from Holland (or actually one and us from France), 2 from the UK and 2 from Ireland, 1 Belgian guy and 1 Hungarian. 14 of us are women, 29 men.

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Date: Saturday 14 jan 2006

Stage: Cairo to Sukhna (Red Sea)

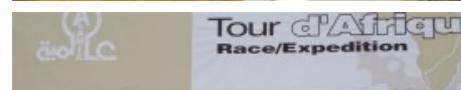
Distance: 148km

Time: 6 h 45 m

GPS at destination: E 32°21'39" N29°33'20"

We did not sleep long the night before, first of all because we had a dinner on a Nile cruise boat. Jenny went belly dancing, she was almost forced into it by the entertainers.

Secondly we needed to get ready with all the luggage and thirdly we were a bit nervous for the start. We were told that our luggage needed to be loaded on the bus at 07:00, but we are in Africa, so the buses were late, but with the help of almost everybody we got them loaded on time and left for the first 9 km's to the pyramids, where officials did a short speech, Jenny was interviewed by the press and off we went for 12.000km to Capetown.



For the first part we were in hectic traffic, but after about a hour we came of the major highway and headed for the Red Sea. Police is all around us, in cars, on motorcycles and on the side of the road. They love to show off sounding their sirens.

We had expected to do 130km's that day, but the police did not approve the campsite and we finally had to do 148, not something we liked, but we are in Africa you know. The campsite was alongside the road, between some unfinished buildings, one of which was inhabited by some dogs, who welcomed us. Nice, but unfortunately they decided to continue with that until we left the next morning.

There were no toilet and washing facilities, so we cleaned ourselves with wetties and had our first camp dinner sitting next to the bus. Before that we had Randy announcing the winners of the

day, Peter and Joan, and the tour for tomorrow. Because we cycled more today, we will only do 140 km tomorrow . Never believe a tour leader at first sight!

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Date: Sunday 15 jan 2006

Stage: Sukhna (Red Sea) to Ras Gharib (Red Sea)

Distance: 170km

Time: 7 h 45 m

GPS at destination: E 33°02'55" N28°21'02"

The routine was not yet there, we got on our bikes 5 minutes after the racers left, needed to adjust Jenny's saddle and gear 3 times, so Kees got pissed as we were cycling in last position. We promised ourselves to do this better tomorrow and get up earlier. We have our small hiking tent with us, so we should get more organised and we will!

The 140 km took us along a major highway along the Red Sea, with beautiful scenes of mountains, sand and blue water. Never understood why we call the sea red really! We were told that 35 km's after the road to the Monastery Antonios we were going to find our campsite at a Red Cross station, which btw is not a cross but a crescent. Indeed, we found the place, but nobody was there, so 35 became, 40, 45, 50, 55, and we really wondered if we missed camp. 8 km's before we got there the minibus pulled us over, the police had again decided that the campsite needed to be near a checkpoint, so 8 km's more to do! The promised 140 became 170 this way. Well, there are only so many km's between Cairo and Luxor, but 170km was pushing the limits for both of us, despite the nice tailwind we had. We found a good place for our tent in the wind shadow of a building and slept well that night, despite the rattling of the roof and the noisy brakes of trucks that had to stop for the checkpoint.

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Date: Monday 16 jan 2006

Stage: Ras Gharib (Red Sea) to Desert Camp

Distance: 110km

Time: 4 h 53 m (4h 32m riding time)

GPS at destination: E 33°33'41" N27°31'14"

It can be cold in January in Egypt, the wind continued blowing the whole night and the morning was cold, so we left as soon as we finished breakfast, 10 minutes before the official start. Our plan to get up early (5:30) worked. Like yesterday a good tailwind, so we got our lunch stop already at 10:30. Although we did not feel hungry, we tried to get our calories into our bodies and off we went for the finish at 13:00. Our timekeeper Rita told us that again the police wanted us to go further, but that she managed after 45 minutes of negotiating to get a wonderful campsite near the sea. The captain of the police even arranged for a campfire before, during and after dinner.



Before dinner, many of us took a refreshing dive into the sea. The scenery here is beautiful, with all kind of colours of sand and rocks, with the sea near by, we will miss this till we end up in Namibia! The dinner next to the campfire was excellent, a kind of lentil's stew with bread. After 3 days pedalling, we wonder where wildlife is, we see no villages either, only checkpoints. The people are quite friendly, they salute you when you pass, trucks and cars are honking when they overtake you and often wave at you. The scenery of the roads so far have been a western movie (sand, dunes, rocks) on the right and most of the times the sea on the left.

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Date: Tuesday 17 jan 2006

Stage: Desert Camp to Safaga

Distance: 96 km

Time: 4 h 04m

GPS at destination: Not recorded, town of Safaga

The night was windy (again!) but the sunrise was beautiful, we left 10 mins early to get warm, standing in the open field having breakfast with a chilly wind blowing your socks of, is not our cup of tea!

We were passed by the group quickly, but just before the checkpoint saw them standing on the site of the road.

Phillipa from South Africa was on the pavement, she collided with Irmie while cruising at 35km/h, crashing her helmet and rim. At first it looked bad, but fortunately she was able to continue on the bike of Jon, the nurse.

Finally we saw some wildlife: Camels! Everybody stopped to take video and pictures.

The finish in Safaga came earlier then expected. With a couple of other folks we went to a nearby hotel. Our luggage was put into the little van and we followed by bike. A policeman did not want us to continue, but we really felt that we had enough of police intervention and we ignored him. The force of the masses! I also got a chance to test the Dazer, it worked like a marvel! A mad dog immediately stopped his attack when I pointed the machine with the ultrasonic sound on him!

We had a nice quiet afternoon, did the washing, dried it in the room (what a mess!) and had a buffet dinner in the



hotel with the others.

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Date: Wednesday 18 jan 2006

Stage: Safaga to Pumpstation on road to Oena

Distance: 140 km

Time: 8h 5 m

GPS at destination: E 32°53'21" N26°19'41"

Quite a difference to wake up in the hotel rather than the tent, even if it is at 6 o'clock. Randy came to pick us up with the minivan to collect our luggage and we drove behind the bus again to the camp so we could bike together to the start line, at a checkpoint outside Safaga.

We were told that today was going to be a difficult day as we first had to clime 40km to 600 meter and then still 100 km to the finish. Jenny and I found the climb was easy and when we reached the lunch stop at 50km we spend quite some time to lunch, chat and take photos.

Perhaps we should have been more careful, because when we reached the extra tea stop we realised that we still had to do about 50km and that time was running out on us to reach the finish before the deadline of 30 mins before sunset.

Especially the last 20 km were a bit hard, as the roads where straight and we had a rather strong headwind. You can image how glad we were when we finally saw the white flag and Rita at the campsite, a pump station in the desert.



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Date: Thursday 19 jan 2006

Stage: Pumpstation to Luxor

Distance: 91 km

Time: 4h 58 m

GPS at destination: Not recorded, town of Luxor

An unexpected cold night and morning here, but no wind for a change. Jenny and I left early, despite the fact that we did not hear the alarm of the watch. We were both freezing and thought that starting to pedal would get us warmer. It did, but only after 1 1/2 hours when were past the town of Quena and in the valley of the river Nile, the river that we will follow upstream for a couple of weeks.

Because we left 30 min before the official start, we pedalled alone on the road. After 10 mins a police car pulled us over and told us that we had to wait till the rest had joined us. We did not really fancy that, standing in the cold and fortunately could convince them to let us continue while they stayed behind us.

Driving through Qena and along the river Nile, we felt like the king and queen of Sheba! Everywhere we were cheered by mainly scores of children, sometimes asking for "money, money", but most of them just shouting, "hello, hello!" and waving. We got good arm exercise waving back.

Traffic was from time to time heavy, so we stayed in single file, passing other local cyclists, people with donkeys and minibuses that where loading passengers. After our "lunch stop" at 10:30 we got our first flat tire, a small piece of



metal on the side of the road nicely emptied the air out of the back wheel. With the help of Gerco, the Hungarian cyclist, we were back on the road in 15 mins.

The finish was again at a checkpoint, of which we have seen many since we left Cairo. Many bumps in the road and plenty of cars waiting to get through. At each end of the checkpoint there is a tower, with a policeman with a gun. From the tower he can pull a cable, blocking the road with some sort of mattress of iron nails that would cause flat tires for a car that would like to get through. We hope he will not accidentally pull it when we pass, it would not only cause flat tires, but ruin our rims; the nails are at least 10cm!

After the finish we had a short 4km's to the campsite where we could take our first rest of the day, which we celebrated with beer and our 2nd lunch. Jenny got a good massage while we were waiting for our friend Iris. Actually can you know beforehand that someone is your friend when you have only exchanged email and sms? We got to know her through the Dutch tourist organisation ANWB. Like us she is a volunteer, who helps Dutch tourists when they have difficulties and need assistance from the ANWB. We thought it would be nice to meet each other, and it was.

She also turned out to be helpful to some of our cyclists: Rita, the timekeeper, needed to find a therapist for her back, Sam and Pieter needed sport massage, and Phillipa needed to see if a local bicycle shop had a helmet and a new rim, which was broken during the crash on the 17th. Iris managed to help them all before we went to a brand new hotel (also organised by her) where we were the first guests.



It's a beautiful five star hotel that just opened. We were welcomed with a glass of juice made from the flowers of the hibiscus, and to our surprise invited by the manager for dinner in a really wonderful decorated dining room, where we had a very nice meal.

But before that we went to see a therapist and a doctor, Jenny's left knee started to cause problems and she wanted to check that before we get the rough roads in Sudan. We also wanted advise for our lips, despite using protection our under lips are swollen from wind and sun. The doctor, Safwat S. Riad prescribed some medicines and told us that one of us has transmitted an infection to the other, so no more kisses for a while!

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Date: 20 jan 2006

Stage: Rest day in Luxor

We had a quiet night in the super hotel arranged by our friend Iris, and went for breakfast. This was the most luxurious breakfast we ever had, 12 (twelve!!) people were waiting on us, the table was laid out with spices as for a king and a queen (and a couple of princesses as well, too much). From carrots nice figures were made and put on the table as well. Just to give an example how this went: Jenny asked for more tea, waiter number 1 took the tea pot, to give it to number 2 who brought it to number 3, gave it back to number 4 and that waiter gave it to number 1 who put the tea pot on our table!



We went to see Iris in her apartment, the driver Mohammed told us to go to the 3rd floor to the left. We knocked on the door, nobody answered, we knocked again, and we heard some Arabic, so that was not the right door. We called Iris and found out that we needed to be on the 2nd floor on the right!

Jenny and Iris started a conversation about their favorite topic, Reiki and Kees went to Internet. That was an experience, when the document (the previous newsletter) was almost finished, the power went out!

As you all know, the newsletter and photo's finally made it and we went for a lunch on a nice terrace overlooking the Nile and the west bank.

Jenny liked to get some more massage, so we took the taxi with Mohammed and went to Kate, who did a marvelous job while Iris and Kees were on the terrace (again!) taking a drink. We also got new photos from Christopher, our grandson, he is growing fast. When we see little boys along the roadside we often think about him and how he soon will be as tall as them.

In Luxor we did some shopping, and smelled the local atmosphere here, and then went to see a temple where they are performing a sound and light show. Very nice indeed, although the last part was a bit too long winding in our opinion.

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[Date: 21 jan 2006](#)

Stage: Luxor to Idfu

Distance: 115 km

Time: 6h 02m

GPS at destination: E °32'52"58 N24°58'43"

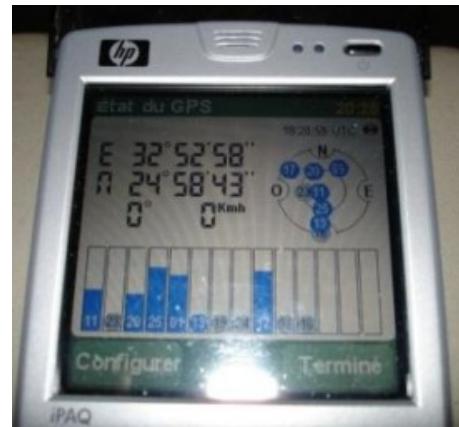
Today brought us along the river Nile, a really beautiful trip with very scenery landscapes. Plenty of children shouting Hello, Hello and sometimes Money, Money, but also a car that slowed down and started a chat with us, asking what we were doing and where we are going. Very friendly people indeed.

We encountered a very bad piece of road, they were putting new tarmac on and our bikes got really dirty because of that. Later Kees had to do a 2 hours cleaning job of the 2 bikes.

Shortly before we arrived in Idfu, we were accompanied again by a policeman on a motor cycle, in the evening.

We celebrated the cleaning of the bike and our second last day with a glass of wine and had barbecue with everybody in the evening. Our camping was on an old football field, next to the river Nile where plenty of cruise boats were moored.

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Date: 22 jan 2006

Stage: Idfu to Aswan

Distance: 112 km

Time: 6h 0m

GPS at destination: E 32° 53'07" N24°03'52"

Waking up at 5:00 from the loudspeakers of the minarets, announcing the start of the day is not our preferred way! We might better get used to it in the countries we go through where the Islam is the most spread religion.



It was not cold this morning and we had the same policeman driving next to us over the bridge back to the main road to Aswan.



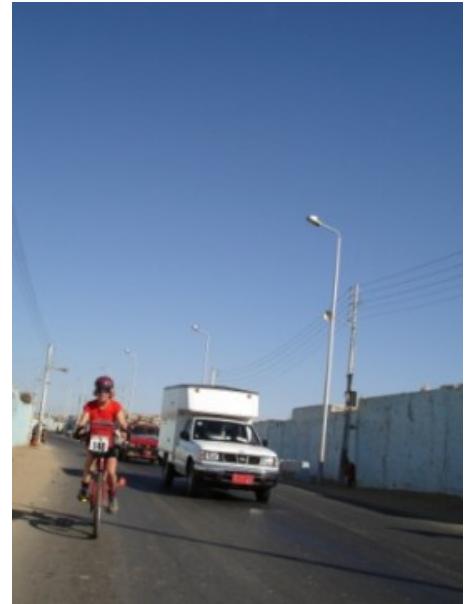
A lot of traffic today, especially when we got close to Aswan, sometimes we got close to the river Nile and there we saw the sailing boats and could make postcard pictures and video.

The harvest of sugar cane is in full swing, so plenty of cars with mules and also trucks. Close to Aswan a large factory was working full speed.

Our camp was a bit difficult to find, but with the help of some locals we came there in the early afternoon, took a cold shower, did our laundry and headed for the Internet Café to send this report.

Tomorrow we are going on the boat to Sudan and the day after tomorrow our real African experience will start as we are going to hit the difficult roads in the desert!

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[Date: 23-jan-2006](#)

[Stage: Aswan to ferryboat](#)

[Distance: 17km](#)

[Time: 0h 45m](#)

[GPS at destination: not recorded](#)

Country: Egypt

An easy morning, we only had to leave camp at 11:00 to go to the port at lake Nasser, the artificial lake, that has given Egypt his economical advantage over some of the neighbouring countries. The High Dam, as it is called, is almost 4km long and over a 100m high; according to the Lonely Planet, 451 people died making it. The project manager probably did not do proper risk management!

We left in convoy with police escort and climbed the steep ascent to the first dam. "Go as fast as possible", we were told, would the dam break otherwise? On the 2nd, major dam, the speed was not an issue, so we could enjoy the scene of a beautiful lake to the right and mountainous desert to the left. Randy told us not to take pictures, but in the center of the dam there were plenty of Chinese tourist taking one snapshot after the other. Probably a matter of baksish (ed. we think this means bribes).

We were all prepared for a long wait at immigration, but it all went rather smoothly, the lessons learnt from last year, when the group was sent back from Abu Simbel to Aswan, to take a barge from there to Wadi Haifa for 44 hours, had paid off.

Two boats were in the harbour, a Nile cruiser and a old steamer that probably was used by the makers of Out of Africa, it looked like it had had more miles on the Odometer then we will have at the end of our trip all together!

First passports were handed out to us with a boat ticket and a voucher for a meal, but our passports were immediately taken back, we will get used to it! Loading our bicycles to the upperdeck was an adventure, we went over to barges, entered the ship, went through the 2nd class, loaded with passengers already, up the steps and attached our bikes to the railing next to the lifeboats. Now we had to unload our bags from the Emeco bus, roughly a 100 bags and plenty of spareparts, like the tires for the rough roads. It is difficult to describe the chaos on the gangway, best described as two streams of ants, but not as disciplined as they are! A lot of shouting and arguing took place when someone with a big, heavy piece of luggage tried to get his load into the ship and those that just delivered theirs tried to get out.

Three trucks, full of boxes with food, were still to be loaded, so we had plenty of time to install ourselves and to find a way to avoid locals to get in our quarters, as the cabins could not be locked.

Dinner was special, each got a plate with pitta bread, beans,

tomatoes, piece of cheese and as a "dessert", a bit of marmalade. Coke was about the only thing we could get, even Jenny drank two bottles! As we still had connection with the mobile network, we chatted with our daughters for a while and then the ferry left for Wadi Haifa.

People are very friendly, we tried to have a conversation in English with more or less success.

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Date: 24-jan-2006

Stage: Ferryboat to Wadi Haifa

Distance: 3km (Boat 19km/h, 18 hours, so ±342 km)

GPS at destination: E 31°22'06" N21°47'42"

Country: Egypt --> Sudan

Sleeping on the boat is our favourite hobby, it's so nice to sleep and the sound of the engine and the splashing of the breaking waves.

The sun came up at 6:38 and immediately after we passed the impressive temple of Abu Simbel, the 20m high statues that escaped the rising water of Lake Nasser in the 60s, due to the help of Unesco.

We stopped to disembark the Egyptian customs and then tried to kill the time we wrote this report. We also starting to get worried about the time left to disembark, clear customs, transport our luggage, drive to the camp, repack our luggage in the famous red boxes and prepare our bicycles for the rough roads! Insjhalah!

Disembark the passengers and their luggage created a reality show for us, hanging out of the porthole we had an excellent view of all the different kind of people leaving the ship. Luggage is leaving the ship in different ways: with the passenger, pushed through a porthole, and thrown from the upper decks to a receiving person on the shore.

We waited until the locals had left the boat, got a form to leave the ship and started to unload our luggage and bicycles in an organised way, copying the process of throwing it from the upper deck.

A truck managed to load all the bags, spareparts etc. in one load, loosing 2 bags on the way to customs. There we had to fill out 2 more forms, basically repeating information that we provided already 3 times. We waited 2 hours at customs before we could go to the campsite, pfff! Our modified visa went unnoticed, so we entered Sudan.

It was already very late, but we needed to change our bikes before dark, change the fork to a suspension fork and change the tires for the big 2,25" version. Those that had to do less, helped the others and we also needed to put all our belongings in the famous red boxes, or actually all the stuff we needed for camping, the spareparts etc. we could leave in the so called permanent bags, those were put on the top of the two trucks from AfrikanTours and are only accessible during the rest days.

Tomorrow the real Tour will start on the rough roads!

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