

An African adventure on trucks, canoes and buses

by **ROBERT FISK**

rfisk@london.newsquest.co.uk

Instead of bleary-eyed bus journeys to work every day, one 28-year-old man decided to do something very different.

Ian Packham travelled 25,000 miles in 13 months, crossing 31 African nations, to discover for himself the daily struggle of living in and travelling through the continent.

With no vehicle of his own he crossed the continent in battered minibuses, bush taxis, on the backs of flatbed trucks, over rivers in dugout canoes and in a van which was delivering meat pies.

A book chronicling his African adventures entitled *Encircle Africa: Around Africa by Public Transport* has now been published.

Among the stories highlighted in the book include him being forced to fight off thieves in Senegal, getting mistaken for an undercover UN official during Liberia's presidential election, being refused entry into the Democratic Republic of Congo, and getting tear gassed while visiting a museum in Sudan.

But overall he said he loved the adventure, that started in 2012, and returning to the UK

last year after the trip was very difficult.

Croydon-born Mr Packham, who is now 30, said: "It was a very positive experience.

"Everything I knew about Africa from the news was turned on its head by the kindness of the locals, and travelling on public transport made them interact with me."

The former John Fisher School pupil said: "The first month seemed like a holiday, the second month was quite hard and I felt lonely and it was coming up to my birthday.

"Then it just clicked and I interacted and did not feel lonely until I came back.

"I have absolutely no regrets and it will be great if more people want to repeat the adventure to see for themselves rather than believe what the media outlets say."

Mr Packham, whose family live in Oval Road, Croydon, said the trip cost £15,000, which the scientist raised by working for two years.

While his bank balance is recovering he is thinking

Off the beaten track: Ian Packham waiting for transport at the roadside in Djibouti and, inset, a four-wheel drive bus stuck in mud on the north-south Liberia highway



about where to go on his next adventure.

He wants to either walk or cycle around some of the Indonesian islands that are off the tourist trail.

Go to encircleafrica.org for more details of the book.