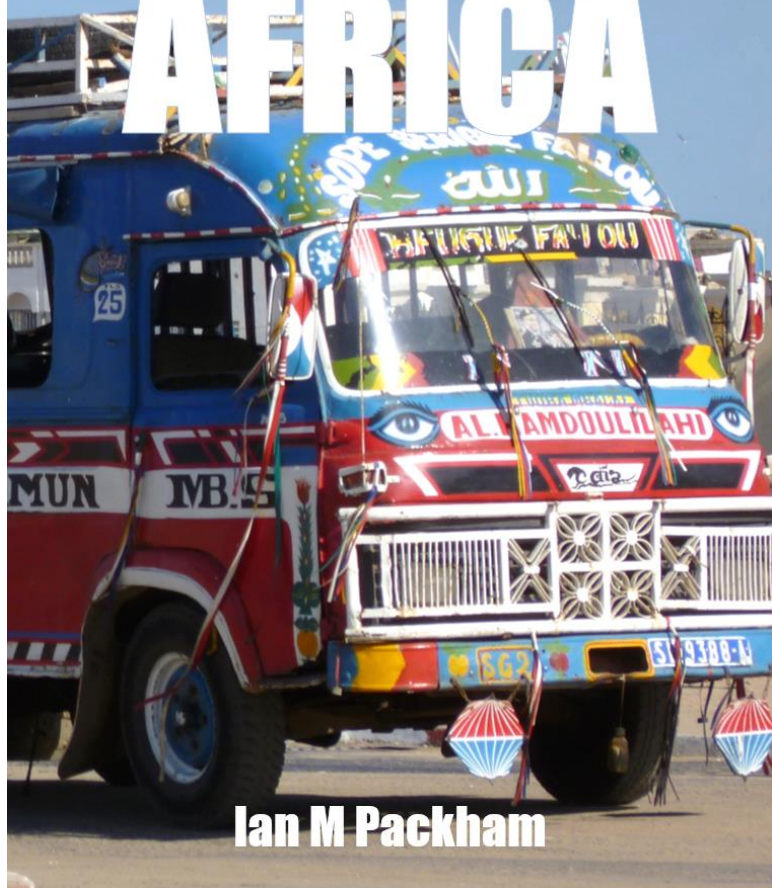


# ENCIRCLE

**AROUND AFRICA BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

# AFRICA



**Ian M Packham**

Ian is an adventurer, after-dinner speaker and award-winning travel writer. Since being named a runner-up in *National Geographic Traveller (UK)*'s travel writing competition in 2013 he has contributed to two Bradt travel anthologies, a myriad of major websites, magazines including *Adventure Travel*, and London's *City AM* newspaper. He has discussed his life in adventure to a wide range of enthusiastic audiences, from schools and travel groups to the Royal Geographical Society's London headquarters.

In addition to circumnavigating Africa by public transport, Ian has travelled the length of the Sri Lanka's longest river, walked the coast of the Isle of Man and the length of Hadrian's Wall, and travelled through Scandinavia using a guidebook dating from the 1960s. His most recent adventures saw him travelling 1,000 miles through North Africa and Italy retracing the steps of his great uncle during World War II, and walk 670 miles across Bangladesh.

Visit [encircleafrica.org](http://encircleafrica.org) for more.

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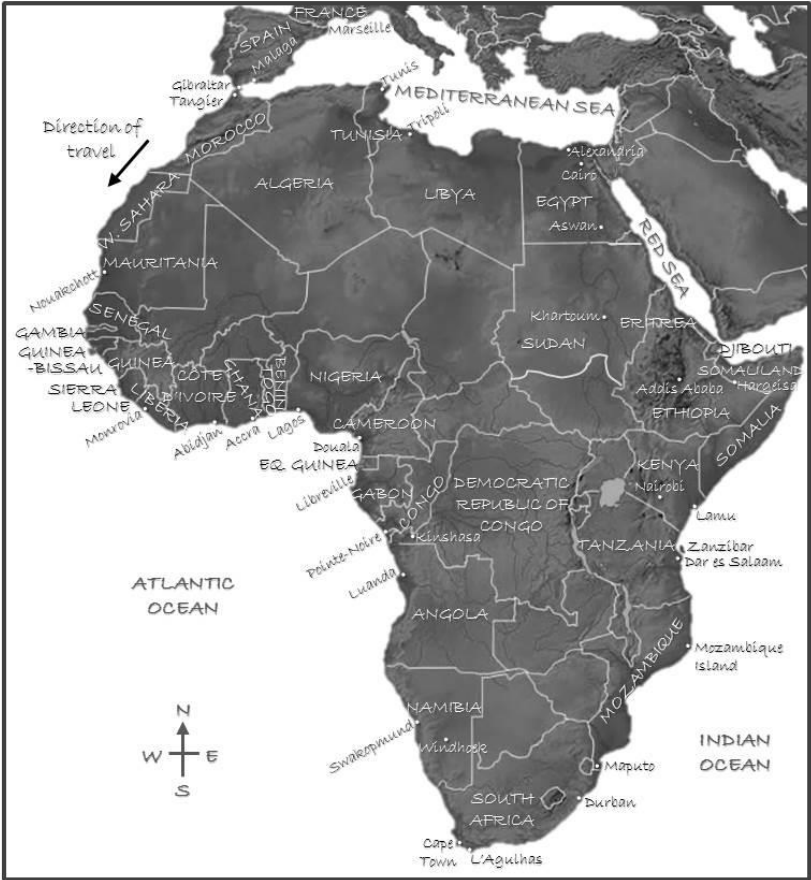
## Author's Note

Almost exactly five years after it was first published, I find myself smiling at the re-remembered events of the extraordinary 396 days described within the following pages.

On returning from encircling Africa I underwent a different type of journey that challenged me just as much, of which *Encircle Africa: Around Africa by Public Transport* was the result. Save for minor editorial amendments intended to rid it of some embarrassing spelling mistakes, this new edition remains entirely faithful to the thoughts – and writing abilities – of that time.

I remain immensely proud of the result, and only hope that you enjoy reading it as much as I struggled to write it. But above all I hope just some of the joy, vibrancy, fun and kindness of this hideously misrepresented continent comes through as a powerful contrast to the rare moments I was in over my head.

Ian M Packham  
London, England



## Gibraltar

The summer Mediterranean lies before me in all its magnetic blueness. Somewhere out there, beyond the blue throbbing line of the horizon lies Africa

Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*

‘I normally tell people to have a good holiday,’ he says, passing me a bundle of clean banknotes. ‘But in your case, have the time of your life.’

As I stand alone at Europa Point facing the oldest continent on earth I’m not sure how I should feel about the journey I’m about to begin, though I know I’m the most nervous I’ve ever been. Africa has a reputation for darkness; one I hope to dispel. Describing my plan to circumnavigate Africa at the currency counter of a Post Office in suburban Birmingham is suddenly very different to actually standing at the very edge of Europe with Africa such a short distance away.

The continent looms back at me through the candy floss cloud that hides the upper reaches of Jebel Musa, thought to be the southern ancient pillar of Hercules. It was from here the hero tore Europe and Africa apart. At Europa Point, Gibraltar’s southernmost, only 14 kilometres of strait separates me from a journey of 13 months and 40,000 km following Africa’s coast.

Captured from Castile in 1704 and ceded to Britain in perpetuity by treaty nine years later, Gibraltar is a British territory immediately distinct from Britain. Its 300 years of cultural fusion has produced a peculiar Anglo-Andalusian

atmosphere that pervades peninsula living, best represented by locals dropping sterling onto the collection plates of Roman Catholic churches.

I find its heart along Main Street, midway between the border with Spain to the north, and the Rock. As I make my way through Landport gate, a series of tunnels and fortifications as unlike a simple gateway as I could find anywhere, heading away from Spain and towards the towering limestone outcrop, the final dose of bright summer sun is beaten back by a heavy rainstorm raging in from Africa. Within the echo-ing tunnels West African immigrants crouch on their ankles wordlessly hoping for loose change, looking as out of their depth as I feel.

I reach the base of the Rock as the sky clears. A cable car journey means I'm all too quickly rising beside its steep flanks and meeting with its famed Barbary macaques – Europe's only free-living non-human primates. Invisible from the city below, the macaques cling to a small area of nature reserve on the upper Rock, leaping onto anyone who dares to stand still. I keep moving, unlike the macaques, who never wander far from the constantly replenished piles of neatly chopped fruits and vegetables on the roadside.

The paths eventually lead me back to the Rock's crowded lower reaches, via natural caves, hand dug siege tunnels and an ancient Moorish castle. I am spurred on further only by the pungent scent of late summer blooms picked out by the earlier heavy African rain. Building after building relates Britain's military presence on the peninsula and Gibraltar's shifting cultural identity, marking the ease with which the perception of cultural and national frontiers as solid boundaries changes. The Rock remains ever present as I pass officers' cottages and the Trafalgar cemetery to one of the largest places of Islamic worship in Europe. The calm of the late afternoon is suddenly broken by the sound of British fighter jets tearing around Gibraltar Bay in tandem.

At the Ibrahim al-Ibrahim mosque the waters of the Mediterranean at the strait are still. Africa unravels ahead of me. Even with the cloud blotting out much of its coastline, masking Ceuta to the east, and the Punta Cires promontory with Tangier to the west, it seems to stretch on indefinitely. A journey of 40,000 km suddenly seems a long one.

My plan for the journey pretty much comes down to ‘turn right at Tangier and keep going until you reach Tangier’: heading west around the continent, I only have to keep salt water on my right hand side to get back to where I begin. I cannot get any closer to Africa without setting foot there.

The first thing I have to do to get closer to Africa is walk away from it. The road signs north of Main Street on Gibraltar’s sole north-south artery show a series of roads spanning out from the territory. *SPAIN SPAIN SPAIN* stands out from them like a warning. It seems right to begin a 13 month overland circumnavigation by reaching Africa without recourse to air travel, and so my inevitable rendezvous with public transport begins at a bus station a short distance away in La Línea, beyond Gibraltar’s border with Spain.

The ease with which I cross the border – the polished Spanish policeman giving my passport only the most cursory of glances before waving me on – belies the troubled relationship between the neighbours that ensured this frontier was not fully open until I was two years old. I board a bus travelling to Algeciras, across Gibraltar Bay, for one of the fast ferries to Tangier, and Africa.

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