



Hotel Causarina,
Lamu,
Kenya.

Jambo Bwana!...Habari,

21 April 1997.

...Hi, all is well. My third week here in Lamu now, its not that I am stuck here just reluctant to leave more than anything else!...as a result of a lucky encounter I have been crewing for these past two weeks on a 40' sailing dhow with one South African (the owner) and two locals, taking well-heeled tourists out on day charters to fish and snorkel around the Lamu archipelago. Consequently I have indulged myself in a total immersion in the local sailing culture that still thrives in these parts. This coastline, through its preeminence as a major trading route was one of the densest melting pots of races and peoples known and from this meeting of African, Islamic and eastern traditions, Swahilli culture emerged with Islam as the driving creative force...Nowhere else on the vast continent of Africa do the centuries jostle and elbow and rub shoulders like in the souks & bazaars of the fabled 'spice coast'. Every morning beneath my room window at the Causarina it is the same daily routine all along the wharves and jetties. Local fishing boats dodge the bigger ocean sailing dhows as they load and unload their cargoes of cotton, mangoes, tamarind, sim-sim oil, charcoal, cashews, mangrove poles not to mention all the ivory, rhino horn, hippo teeth and shark fin being traded for brown sugar & hashish between here and the Malabar coast in India...Lamu- founded in the 14th century by a Shirazi trading fleet from Persia is one of the last and most intact of the old Swahilli ports that litter the east african coast from Kismayu to Pemba in Mozambique. A place of cool sea breezes, palm fringed tropical landscapes and slow & easy living, it is truly a place to lay down your heart!(if not your pension plan!!) During these past two weeks I have sailed through every mangrove and around every beach-head in the Lamu archipelago from Kiwaiyu island to the Ziwayu rocks on the 'Retingy' (a Zulu word meaning I will come back!)- a humdinger of a boat built on the beach at Ibo in Mozambique and sailed up here by the skipper, Chris Sykes from Durban(a sound skin)...capable of taking eight people at twenty dollars a day per person who get to flap around gazing at the coral and lunch on red snapper, cocanut rice and mangoes, its an easy yet lucrative way to make a living...however now it is the close of the season. The winds have just shifted from the 'Kusi's (southerlies that blow from sept. to april) to the 'Kaskazi' winds - the N.E. monsoons that bring the 'long rains' in from the Indian ocean. Anyone on their way to the Horn or the Red sea will have left by now but theres always the odd straggler coming thru from the Comoros islands or elsewhere. Yesterday evening coming back from a trip to the Takwa ruins over on Manda island we saw a massive Somali dhow called the 'Takhfif' anchored off the south jetty in Lamu, she left after nightfall, probably en-route to Kismayu with a load of fresh qat or miraa or electronic contraband from Mombasa...

~~OTHER~~...Other than your basic in-out day sails we did one return trip down the coast to Watamu to pick up a payload of vegetables for a group of Muslim shopkeepers who chipped in to hire the Retingy. Three days down and two back, we saw Zebra and 4 elephants on the beach near Sadani in Ungama Bay on the leg back. It was a great sail except for the last day when we had to 'tack' heavily from Tenewe into Lamu bay...that night I did a Frankie Gallagher by getting mad drunk on kenyan rum and 'Howlin Hyenas' (a concoct of double whiskies & amarillo) and proceeded to make a scene about absolutely nothing at all!!!...I escaped however, badly hungover but otherwise unscathed...Frankie would have been proud!!!... From here?...who knows- destination undeclared yet I think I'll 'dhow plough' down the coast to Mozambique...HEARD of a great train ride through the jungle from Nampula to the Malawi border... also near a town called Mueda are the Makondi people, pygmies, hunters & gatherers who speak no human language but chirp, sing and chatter like the fauna around them, reportedly shy and friendly folk partial to a bit of ceol, caint agus craic aswell... ..thats all for now, will be in touch, regards to all and ...to the African renaissance!...D.K.

Footnote;...of all the chat and banter that I had to listen to about sailing boats in the Swilly and beyond, noone ever seemed to mention the one thing that intrigues me the most about sailing the winds and that is of how is a boat...