

Liskas Tell of 40,000-Mile Trip in Africa by Cycle, Boats

By Tom Allan

The uninvited dinner guests who became a main dish before the night was over.

A passel of rock-throwing Arabian youngsters pacified and delighted by a Czech drinking song.

The death of evil spirits at 50 miles an hour.

Fear of becoming a member of a sultan's harem.

A hundred nights of mystery and beauty punctuated by blood-curdling cries and sounds.

All these and many more are the thoughts and experiences brought home this week along with 11 thousand color slides by Danny and Arlene Liska, the Niobrara couple with itchy feet and adventure in their souls.

Ended is their incredible 15-month, 40-thousand-mile journey by motorcycle, land rover and river boat from North Cape, the northernmost tip of Norway, to South Cape, the southernmost extremity of Africa.

Last week's foot-deep snow in Chicago prevented the couple from arriving in Omaha in the style to which they have been accustomed—atop their baggage-laden motorcycle.

Instead they chugged into Omaha in a cloud of steam and smoke in a 1947 pickup truck purchased for the final homeward-bound leg. They expect to arrive at their Niobrara ranch today.

They'll spend the next few days cataloging their slides for a winter of lecturing and writing on their experiences. Some of the stories will appear in The World-Herald's Magazine of the Midlands.

If Arlene double-checks her dinner guest list, it will be understandable. She's happy to be alive after one uninvited guest incident in the trackless southern area of Ethiopia where tribe-seeking tribes make death one of Africa's cheapest commodities.

She'd been unnerved earlier in the day when a truck just ahead of their motorcycle ran over a cobra in the grass. The snake lashed at the truck and then, still writhing wildly, blocked their path, its huge hooded head ominously seeking another victim. But they escaped.

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Seven-Footer

That night as Arlene finished supper over their campfire the uninvited guests arrived.

"I thought the noise was the Ethiopian driver of the truck we had been following and I called him over to get something to eat," Arlene said.

She looked up to find two naked seven-foot, bushy-haired, spear-carrying tribesmen close by. Frightened, she started working industriously. One stooped and with his bare hand stirred up the hot ashes and motioned he wanted something to eat.



Arlene visits Masai in Tanganyika . . . Other tribesmen became an entree in Ethiopia.

"Our supplies were limited," Danny said.

Attempting to calm Arlene, he joshed her with:

"You invited them. How are you going to get rid of them?"

A moment later there were blood-curdling screams Danny says he will always remember as the "voice of Africa." Rushing toward them in the dim firelight came three warriors, spears outthrust.

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'Awful'

They were rival tribesmen after the first two supper "guests."

"They caught them a few feet away in the thorny bush," Danny said. "It sounded like a giant alley cat fight. Arlene dashed for the truck and locked herself in."

Moments later just two tribesmen emerged, talked a moment with the Ethiopian truck driver and went away.

"The driver pointed to our motorcycle helmets and told them we were police from the capital at Addis. Abbaba and would turn them in if they didn't leave," Arlene said.

"The rest of the night we lay in our sleeping bags listening to the hyenas eating our uninvited guests. It was pretty awful."

It is this intertribal savagery that leads Danny to believe that "it is almost impossible to understand Africa."

The Liskas were not a bit surprised at Tuesday's news bulletins of the riots and killings in the Sudan between the Arab Moslems of the north and the Negro tribesmen in the south.

"It was inevitable," Danny said. "We saw it coming when we were there."

"We forget that you can't judge some of the African na-



—Photos by Danny Liska.

Danny and Arlene . . . 40 thousand miles of adventure.

tions by our standards. To me, Africa is a man walking to town carrying his shoes around his neck. They are a status symbol. When he arrives he puts them on. When he leaves he takes them off and reverts to the primitive. He applies the white man's culture only when it's to his benefit."

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Haunted

The Liskas, who many times rode with the threat of death and danger in rebel country and sometimes through recently ravaged villages, said "strength is the one thing universally respected" by the savage tribes.

"To them kindness or generosity is a sign of weakness. But they respect the strong. Why is it that they kill the women and children and the men like missionaries and doctors who have attempted to be the kindest to them? Many are afraid that if they

kill a strong man, his spirit will live to kill them. What some tribes do to bodies of their victims is horrible and incomprehensible to us. But our standards do not apply. To them the grisly trophies are a mark of honor, an emblem to be worn by a woman of their choice with pride."

The Liskas credit their safe journey to the fact they were unarmed, rode a strange-vehicle, that Arlene—wearing coveralls and a helmet—was mistaken for a man, and that they traveled at unexpected times and on little traveled routes.

"I'm sure if we had a gun it would have been different," Danny said. "Also, if we had something they wanted. By the 'bush telegraph' they knew all we had was our cameras."

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Theory

They also had their wits and Danny's incredible gall.

He proved his strength-versus-weakness theory in the face of an angry crowd around a water hole in Uganda on the Congolese border.

"They became angry at Danny taking pictures," Arlene said. "I told him to be careful but he kept on taking pictures. Suddenly three tribesmen brandishing clubs rushed him. I thought this was it."

Husky, 220-pound Danny dropped his camera.

"It was just one of those things that comes to mind in a time like that," he said. "Before I knew it I was charging them brandishing my fists and shouting. They stopped and walked away. We got out of there fast."

Knowledge of their native Czech halted a stone-throwing barrage in Shibam in Southern Arabia.

"This is Moslem territory and we were obviously Christian infidels despoiling their soil," Danny said. "The youngsters followed us throwing rocks as we walked the streets. Pleas to elders and police did no good. Once during a barrage I turned and shouted, 'Hey kids, let's sing' and Arlene and I started singing 'Pivo, Pivo, Pivo Cervený,' or 'Red Beer,' an old Czech drinking song.

"All kids like music and in a moment the street was full of dancing Arab kids singing and dancing like crazy."

Arlene added:

"Late that night we could hear the echo down the deserted streets, 'Pivo, Pivo'; maybe we started something."

* * *

No Sale

She admits one of her greatest concerns was during a visit with a sultan. Danny, a rancher, had become intrigued by how many cows a woman brought on the market.

"He'd been kidding me that he was waiting for a good offer, but at the Sultan's I was scared he hadn't been kidding," she said. "I guess I wasn't fat enough to bring a good price."

Journeying home through busy American traffic, Danny is reminded about all the evil spirits he helped "kill" for African tribesmen.

"They'd wait till we were just about on them and then dash across in front of the motorcycle," he said. "I thought they were crazy till I asked. They were merely trying to kill the evil spirits they felt were tagging their coat or loincloth tails. After that I helped them. I'd hit the gas tank with my fist and scream when they dashed in front of me. I'd look back and they'd be beaming with relief and happiness.

"Now since I'm back I'm wondering if some of these American drivers and pedestrians also have evil spirits on their coattails."