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# An African Six Pack

by Robert Irwin

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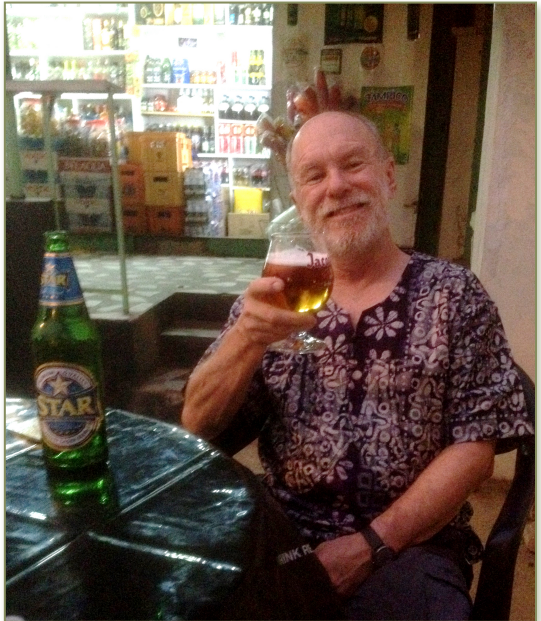
According to 'Old African Hands,' the only thing you can count on in Africa is the beer.

**1** Well, nobody told Stella - Egypt's national tippale. Determined to produce the frothy head from the advert, the waiter pours her quickly from a foot above my glass. Woosh! A mushroom cloud of suds explodes over the bar. Thirsty and discouraged, I head for Mali.

**2** On the Bandiagara Escarpment the sun is hidden by dust. After nine hours on foot, when I reach the Dogon village it is 50°C. The beer, still fermenting in plastic jugs, arrives by donkey. Using my teeth to filter out the millet, I rehydrate by guzzling five litres. Then under the stars, I dream of the Nigerian nectar: Guinness.

**3** From Kano's airplane-less Flying Club, I follow the expat beer trail across the tracks to a nightclub. Hausa businessmen grin broadly at me, lips frothy with the sweetness of *pure genius*. Elaborate, billowing boubous and gold Rolexes confirm their motto. And I agree. 'Guinness is good for you.'

**4** Next, Cameroun. Nine a.m. No power and no beer. Until a thirsty kindred spirit leads me by the hand. Through a mud brick maze we stroll, toward a back street shebeen. Mama unlocks the gurgling diesel fridge full of Bière 33.



*The author enjoys a cold  
Star beer: Accra, Ghana*

My guide removes his hat and gun. No longer the town cop, he's just the town drunk.

**5** Onward to the cool, colonial elegance of the Victoria Falls Hotel. *Shoes required after seven p.m.* Glancing down, the doorman approves my spotless Bata Safaris: *For the man who knows Africa*. At the bar, my feet are as cold as the chilled Castle lager. Near the end of my beer hunter's trail, I am literally on my uppers, my red socks poking through to the floor.

**6** Finally, the river beckons. The Congo steamer throbs through the night with the commerce of survival. Outside, the bar is awash. Inside, sweating, Monsieur Fils waves his empty bottle. Stacks of smoke-blackened fish and crocodile touch the ceiling. I share the lower bunk with Madame Fils. With her teeth, she pries the cap off another Primus. I tilt the bottle and welcome the beer's biting bitterness. From under the bed, a turtle waddles between my feet.

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*End of a long day: Magie Relp and Bob Irwin in Dori, Burkina Faso*