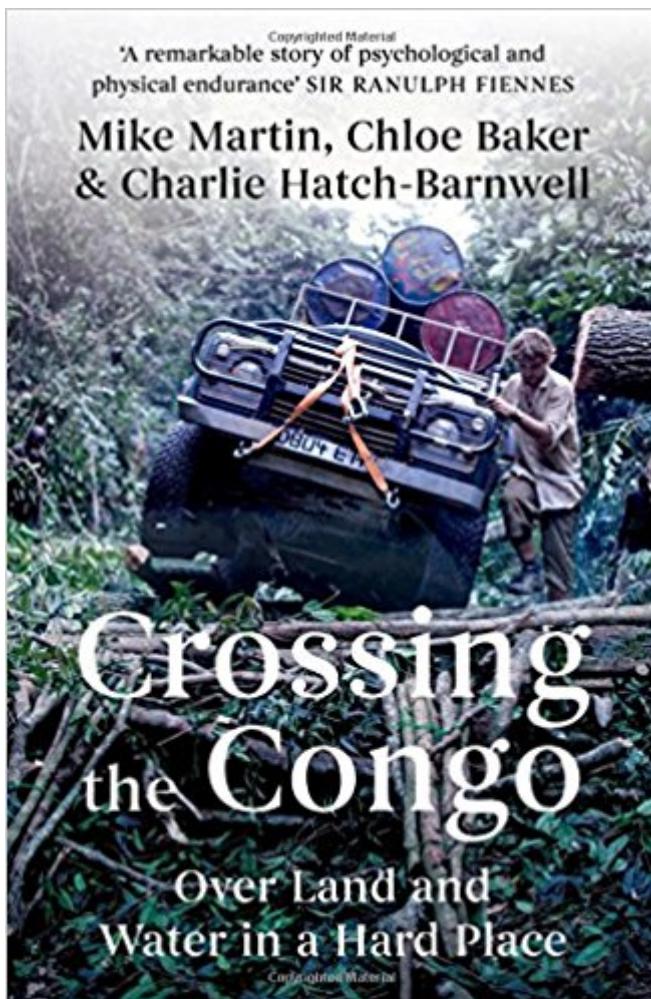


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# Crossing The Congo: Over Land And Water In A Hard Place



## Synopsis

\*\*\* Shortlisted for the Edward Stanford Travel Writing Award 2016 in the category of Adventure Travel \*\*\* In 2013, three friends set off on a journey that they had been told was impossible: the north-south crossing of the Congo River Basin, from Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Juba, in South Sudan. Traversing 2,500 miles of the toughest terrain on the planet in a twenty-five year-old Land Rover, they faced repeated challenges, from kleptocracy and fire ants to non-existent roads and intense suspicion from local people. Through imagination and teamwork -- including building rafts and bridges, conducting makeshift surgery in the jungle and playing tribal politics -- they got through. But the Congo is raw, and the journey took an unexpected psychological toll on them all. Crossing the Congo is an offbeat travelogue, a story of friendship and what it takes to complete a great journey against tremendous odds, and an intimate look into one of the world's least-developed and most fragile states, told with humor and sensitivity.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Their success, as it unfolds in this lively narrative, reflects a unique combination of skills - an Army veteran of Afghanistan to deal with logistics, a doctor to look after medical issues and a photojournalist to set it down for the record in a splendid set of illustrations." - Geographical Magazine "Crossing the Congo gives you a deeply, brutally honest view of what it is like to complete a great journey. At times they were lucky to survive." --Robin Hanbury-Tenison, OBE, DL, Dsc, Dhc, MA, FLS, FRGS. President, Survival International "A remarkable story of psychological and physical endurance, and a compelling account of what pushes people to embark on impossible

journeys."--Sir Ranulph Fiennes OBE

Mike Martin is a former British Army officer who has worked in Afghanistan, Somalia and Myanmar. His previous books include *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict*, and he holds a PhD in war studies from King's College London. Chloe Baker is an anaesthetist working in critical care and emergency medicine. She has previously published research conducted in Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Togo, and recently received the Ebola Medal for Service in West Africa. Charlie Hatch-Barnwell is a photojournalist. He was UN Winner of the prestigious 2014 Moscow Photo Awards (Portrait Category) and has been shortlisted twice for the Travel Photographer of the Year Award.

During their utterly challenging journey the authors of this excellent book demonstrated incredible levels of dedication, courage and creativity. This book especially struck home for me, because 36 years before the authors I travelled overland through Africa (south to north) as part of a group of young westerners seeking some adventure. We travelled in a truck owned and operated by a company called Encounter Overland. Without a doubt the Congo (then called Zaire) was easily the poorest African country through which we passed. We took a different route than the authors--we entered the Congo from Rwanda in the east, passed through Kisangani and eventually left the Congo at its border with the Central African Republic (which then called itself an Empire) in the north. We faced many obstacles during our trip, but the problems that our group faced (except for one harrowing experience) were much less difficult and numerous than those facing the authors of this book. Sadly, I cannot help but conclude that during the intervening years the Congo has dramatically declined economically, politically and morally.

A Fantastic adventure read. I couldn't put it down.

never review books and have read a lot of overlanding ones - this is one of the best. really interesting subject and perspectives. brutally honest.

This book is about three people from the UK, two of which have overlanded most of Africa in an old Land Rover 90. They set out to tackle one of last remaining difficult road trips through the Congo. They have to deal with vehicle breakdowns, government corruption and insane road problems. This book is a quick read and if you are thinking about overlanding this book will be of interest to you. I

enjoyed it.

Great adventure in 'hell'...this book is interesting for people who are fascinated with developments in various parts of Africa. I also read 'Walking the Nile' by Levison Wood...highly recommended,too

In 2013, two well-educated Brits, a physician, and her fianc , a former British Army officer with a PhD, and an Indonesian-born friend, an award-winning photographer and London kebab shop owner, set out on a 2,500-mile north-south crossing of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in an old 1986 Land Rover 90, which they called 9Bob (apparently from English slang "as bent as a 9 bob note," meaning something shady). The story of their journey is mostly written by Mike Martin, and the stunning photographs that help to make the book are by Charlie Hatch-Barnwell. Exactly why the three became so determined to make this two-month journey isn't completely clear, except that they saw it as an adventure. They also wanted to "improve their French," they say (French is the official language of the DRC, a former Belgian colony, although some 250 languages are spoken in the country, which has a population of more than 80 million and is about one-fourth the size of the continental U.S.) Martin and his fianc , Chloe Baker already had driven some 20,000 miles in Africa and elsewhere, though Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire. They then recruit Charlie, an old friend and international travel mate of Mike's, to join them for the DRC part of the trip. What they found, and essentially what the book recounts, is a country with incredibly bad roads, corrupt officials, extreme poverty and a population that, in part due to the effects of its colonial past, to recent civil and guerrilla wars, was for the most part inhospitable (though it was only through the kindnesses of a number of people that they were able to complete the journey.) The journey also was a psychological as well as physical and mechanical test. Mike and Chloe break up during the trip, and at times their friendships unravel. More than anything, though, the success traversing of the DRG is a tribute to the ingenuity of the three travelers and to the engineering of the old English-built Land Rover. The three travelers were amazingly creative in building bridges and rafts to cross rivers and in making their way on roads that defy belief, often with pot holes deep enough to swallow a truck or with muddy ruts so high the Land Rover would fall over on its side. I have driven some bad roads in Central America, but none even begin to compare with what Martin, Baker and Hatch-Barnwell faced almost daily. They also were geniuses at finding parts and cobbling together repairs to the Land Rover 90. None of the three was particularly mechanically inclined. They learned how to repair the Land Rover by reading manuals and by just figuring things out. Although this is a true adventure story and a travelogue of a kind, it is not one that will make you

want to travel to this part of Africa. Local people constantly try to charge the travelers 10 times the fair value of food and parts. The travelers have to be on constant guard against theft. Anytime they stop, crowds appear out of the jungle and persistently beg them for everything they are carrying. Even the missionaries in the Congo try to rip them off, once demanding \$500 to spend the night at a mission (the travelers end bargaining the price down to \$30). The adventurers are constantly ill from tropical diseases and the water, bitten or stung by insects and fearful of attacks by rebels or by illegal blood diamond and other miners.. Everyone is suspicious of them, partly because -- they find out too late -- that in referring to themselves "tourists" in the local French a tourist is "conservationist" -- someone in the DRG to exploit the local people and the country's resources. If there's a hero in the book, though, it has to be 9Bob. The diesel Land Rover 90, broken down by so many miles through impossible terrain, keeps plugging through places where other vehicles could never go, and somehow, miraculously, a fix is always found for the many broken springs, steering boxes, axles and wheels. One can only admire the three adventures and the Land Rover for making it through the Congo.

This book is a fascinating and compelling one - I became engrossed and finished it in a couple of sittings. Part adventure story, part history lesson and part travelogue, I was both entertained and educated as I made my way across the Congo from the comfort of my living room. Since finishing the book, I've been inspired to delve deeper into the history of the Congo and also to seek out my own next adventure. I've recommended it to my nearest and dearest and don't hesitate to do the same to all of you.

A very useful book and also very interesting to read. This is truly an epic journey. Mike, Chloe & Charlie finally managed to cross the Congo from south to north through a route that for decades no traveler had traveled by car. A journey that is at the limit of the impossible in which they have struggled to move forward for weeks, literally passing through the jungle, crossing rivers on makeshift rafts, etc... Anyone who likes to read about this type of travels will doubtless like to read this book, and in addition this book will be undoubtedly useful also for those who dare to try an adventure of this type in the Congo.

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