

Get in the van, you are all under arrest!

I am often asked about the Whiteknuckles team and their arrest history.

I will try and list them all in time. Here is one.

N.B. Two players have a long history of friendship so it will help to understand some background or this story loses a lot of meaning. When Emmy first started driving for me we joked about my position in my small country and he took to calling me “Your Excellency”, part respect and part in fun. I often responded with “My good man” or similar. It naturally followed, to him anyway, that my wife got referred to as “The First Lady!” This continues to this day and we enjoy the joke (and some surprised looks from eavesdroppers!)

So, to the story:- In most good stories there is often an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman.

Well we could not manage that but we did have a Swiss living in Rwanda on a South African Passport, a Ugandan and a native Tanzanian plus myself with my Manx Passport.

To add to the mix the incident took place in that sensitive part of Tanzania close to the Ugandan border that Idi Amin had invaded in 1978 and from where the Tanzanians counter attacked and toppled Amin.

Our party had planned to bird in the rich environs of Minziro Forest and so had established our base in Kyaka at the Katekere Comfort Zone Motel for a few nights.

Anxious to make a good start we set off to obtain the permits for our planned forest visits that we knew would be needed from Forest HQ and to meet our local guide.

The permits for entry can only be obtained from Forest HQ which, being Africa, is located inside the forest. So one must enter without a permit in order to get the permit to enter! We were assured by our Tanzanian driver that this was no problem.

So off we went with “First Lady” choosing to remain behind as this was planned to be only a brief visit.

On entering the forest we were very impressed by the birdlife and of course stopped from time to time to check something out as one does. Turacos, Malkoa and various Tinkerbirds.

During one stop we noted a Forest Jeep pass by but the driver merely waved which we of course acknowledged. Then he passed by going in the other direction and driving faster. Shortly after he returned one more but accompanied by another truck in which sat four Rangers armed with AK47s. This time he stopped and summoned us for a talk in kiswahili about “What were we doing?” “Where were our permits?” Of course we explained that we did not have them but were on our way to collect them. Next it was “get in your car and follow us, you are all under arrest.”

So the procession drove off and we pitched up at Forest HQ where animated discussions commenced between our driver and several guards with Emmy and our Swiss friend adding answers as required. Passports demanded which we did have and the Bwana Mkubwa commenced writing details in the ubiquitous exercise book with his stumpy pencil.

Lots of questions back and forth in which I took no part other than to explain where the Isle of Man was located and it seemed to be going to take forever in the Tanzanian way.

Eventually I got fed up with this and said to Emmy in my 'posh authority' voice “Emmanuel, What is going on? It is getting dark and the First Lady will be worried all alone in the Hotel if we are not back soon!” Emmy of course responded, as I knew he would, with “Your Excellency, we have been arrested for looking at things without a permit!” I responded with a laugh and said “well sort it out soon. Never heard such rubbish!” but the effect on the “Scribe” was immediate.

He stopped writing and asked Emmy what he meant by “Your Excellency!” to which Emmy responded, dead pan as always, that “The Bwana is Vice-President of his country Isle of Man!”.

Without more ado the pencil was put down, the exercise book containing our misdemeanours was firmly closed, and our passports returned with much smiling and handshakes.

We returned to our car and headed back to base with complimentary permits for the next three days birding.

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“Looking at things without a permit”. Forget it when you are a VP.

There is an interesting sequel to this tale involving a damaged car, a penniless priest and a car chase.

Saved for next time.