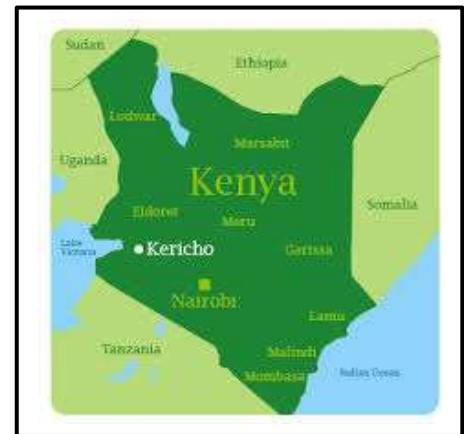




## Calamity in Kericho!

Dust was coming back to earth as we scrambled out. A discord of voices in panic. People lurched from the smoking mess to hug each other; thanking *The Almighty* for the fortunate continuation of their lives. Upside-down, I struggled to release my seatbelt, then crawled through shattered glass, to safety, bleeding and in shock!



It was a balmy day. We had just passed *Kericho*, in the tea-growing hills bordering Rift Valley Kenya. Minutes earlier, myself and the other eight passengers had been chatting



and dozing as we raced towards Nairobi. Then out of the blue came a slumber-jolting bang! A tyre had blown; the car out of control. I watched as our driver fought valiantly with the steering. The car won the battle, parting company with the

tarmac and moving gracefully into an airborne barrel roll.

Those few moments changed bliss into nightmare; anticipation to despair. As the car soared serenely into the air, I remember morbid thoughts flashing across my fertile mind. Could it be the last few seconds of my earthly existence, paradoxically happening in striking distance from where humankind began.

“*Jesus Christ!*” I cried out (on reflection, not the best profanity to utter, when surrounded by God-fearing Kenyans}, but from my middle-left seat vantage point I could see the driver had a serious problem. Enough of a problem to warrant my untimely indiscretion.

Fortunately, Jesus heard my plea (or at least I hope my fellow passengers saw it that way).

Our *speed taxi* - as they were known - only managed half a barrel roll before coming back to earth on its roof, with one thunderous crash! The effect was to crumple the body, shatter the glass and compress the upper section of the vehicle



to about half its former height. We had landed with one earth shattering din and a whole lot of dust, in a grassy gully next to the highway.

It's amazing how disoriented one becomes: upside down, arms and legs everywhere (both yours and other people's); it takes time to identify with the re-aligned world around. But considering the fate which had befallen us, there was remarkable calm amongst my fellow passengers. Perhaps it's part of the African psyche to withstand traumatic events with aplomb; God knows, they are used to them.

Scrambling as quickly as possible for an exit, I was certainly making more noise than most. With some difficulty I slid through a diminished window space, garlanded by cut glass. It was thoughts of a petrol-fuelled explosion which scared me most. What was now just a disfigured metal box, with four wheels still spinning on the top, might suddenly become an inferno, in this otherwise calm African setting.

Minutes after the crash I sat on a nearby grassy knoll, surrounded by a crowd rapidly gaining football ground proportions. They stared, emitting constant chatter in the local Kalingen language. Those closest – with ringside seats as it were - even pinched and

pulled my skin, perhaps checking I was still alive. They could see the upside-down wreck of crumpled metal a few metres away, and maybe they were right, by the look of that corpse I should also have been dead!

-----  
Duncan Gregory

[www.whittlingourniche.com](http://www.whittlingourniche.com)



## *The perils of road travel in Kenya*

*It took me too long to work out that travelling by road in Kenya is still fraught with risk; I have met many families scarred by road accidents. Death and injury stats come in at X10 Europe ... or more. There are basically four main reasons for this: poor roads, poor vehicles, poor drivers and ineffective police. Thus, the carnage is hardly unexpected!*

*In the early 2000s, when this story was written, perhaps the most dangerous of all the road monsters was the infamous 'Speed Taxi', often a Peugeot 504 which travelled at incredibly high speeds to get from A to B in the shortest time, thus to bring maximum returns for the owner. Unfortunately, I chose one of these vehicles to return from Kisumu in the far West, to Nairobi. And I forgot to check the tyres!*

*In the end I was lucky. A passing bus took me to a private hospital in Kericho, and though bruised and shaken, after a couple of hours I was pronounced OK to leave. Then what did I do? I boarded yet another 'Speed Taxi' to continue my journey! Unbelievable! But at least that second time round I made sure to check the wheels.*

*I've had a number of near-death instances in my life and the memory of this one is still very vivid 20 years later, so that whenever I do drive at speed on a rural highway those visions from the Kericho crash always come flooding back.*