

## IN PERSON

# 'THEY WERE THROWING PLANKS OF WOOD WITH SIX-INCH NAILS STICKING OUT OF THEM IN FRONT OF THE CAR TO TRY AND GET US TO STOP'



PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM JEPSON

**T**HERE can't be many people who travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo for fun. The country has been at the centre of what has been called Africa's World War for five years, with rebel forces pitted against the government, resulting in a humanitarian crisis in which an estimated three million people have lost their lives.

Despite the poverty, however, it has jaw-dropping scenery and stunning natural resources. "It is a beautiful country. You just need to put a pencil in the ground and it grows," says Tim Warrillow. One of the men behind Fever Tree tonic water, the 35-year-old – like the intrepid Victorian plant hunters 100 years before him – was seeking out the finest quality quinine in one of the world's hardest-to-reach corners. "The history of quinine is quite extraordinary," he says. "All the Victorian plant hunters – when they realised quinine has properties that can fight malaria – went to Peru in pursuit of the fever trees, because it is contained in the bark. Then they smuggled the seeds back so they could grow it themselves.

"The most valuable source was planted in the Congo, where it is still prospering today. But it is still a relatively small plantation and typically the preserve of the pharmaceutical companies. We're the only soft drinks company to be using this quality of quinine."

Modern air travel may mean his journey was slightly easier than that of his Victorian predecessors, but getting there was no mean feat. "I flew to Nairobi, then you fly to Kigali in Rwanda and drive the length of the country to the border with Congo, at Bukavu, which is where the plantations are based. It was really an extraordinary trip and my first time in Rwanda, which I felt was 'real' Africa until I got into the Congo and suddenly Rwanda felt like the south of France.

"The difference really is very marked. You get to the border and the Tarmac runs out, quite literally. Life on the other side, in Congo, is rudimentary to say the least. It's an extraordinary place, but very underdeveloped."

However, the lack of even basic facilities was nothing

compared to the pervasive sense of danger. "Within a few miles of crossing the border we were stopped at a very rudimentary road block where they were trying to get money out of us. Then another few miles up the road they were throwing planks of wood with six-inch nails sticking out of them in front of the car to try and get us to stop, to get more money. On the side of the road there were young guys leaning against their Kalashnikovs and AK47s. At one point, when I was getting out to see one of the plantations, there was a very young guy – maybe about 14 – carrying a rocket launcher."

His partner Charles Rolls, 52, has had his share of travelling adventures, though his are of the more prosaic kind. "I had a rat in my bed," he says, matter-of-factly. "I was staying with this wonderful family in the Ivory Coast and, as soon as I saw it, it darted out of the bed and rushed off somewhere. It was very dark – the electricity just runs on generators so the light is very poor. In the end, my hosts sent a couple of locals in who found it and gave it to the dog to play with."

The company sources fresh green ginger for its ginger beer from the former French colony. "The ginger needs to be harvested within 24 hours, ground up and processed into this oil," says Rolls. "It has a fantastic freshness, almost a citrus edge, like a lime flavour."

Fortunately, though, it's not all guns and rodents for the pair's travels. "We went to Sicily together," says Warrillow, "which was certainly much easier. We went to see the first pressing of the lemons."

And in the autumn they'll be off to India, to source another type of ginger called cochin. "Also, we're coming up with a new product that uses a lot of ingredients that come from around the Mediterranean shores," says Rolls. "Now this isn't wild bushwhacking but it's none the less fantastic to be able to go and see these fields; it's a lovely part of the business." ■

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RUTH WALKER

## ARE YOU A... WORLD CUP WINNER

**1** The football event we've all been waiting for is upon us, and the Scotland team has failed to qualify (again). Do you?

**A** Behave as if the whole sorry affair is beneath you. Football? What football? You have more important things going on in your life, you tell the barman, while sobbing into your Saltire.

**B** Support a team, any team, that is playing against England. They may be rubbish and have no chance of winning, they may also have taken your place in the tournament, but you don't care. Anything is better than sitting complacently by while Rooney and co win.

**C** Choose a country you feel the greatest affinity for after Scotland – and the one most likely to come out on top, of course – then support them as though you were born there.



**2** You can't face the thought of England doing well in the tournament. Do you?

**A** Moan continuously to anyone who will still listen – family, friends, randoms at the bus stop – about the fact that Scotland didn't qualify. Those losses against Holland weren't just a crime against your country. They were a crime against humanity.

**B** Wear your Scotland strip every time England are playing. Team it with significant items from your national dress. OK, so it won't be the most stylish look going, but this isn't about style. It's about blood and guts and tears and, oh dear, when will this travesty end?

**C** Get down to the bookies and put a bet on Spain to win. They are the favourites, after all. If Scotland can't come out on top, you might as well pick a team that is in with a chance.

**3** Failing to qualify isn't going to stop you from having a good time. What is your next step?

**A** Book tickets to see your local team play on the day the tournament starts. You have bigger fish to fry. OK, they are actually smaller, but...

**B** Boycott all English products over the course of the tournament. Trade between your two countries may not come to a standstill, but it'll provide you with endless amusement.

**C** Throw a global football party, with all teams represented in the form of an international array of hors d'oeuvres. Decorations should consist of national flags hung as bunting around the room.

**Mostly As** You are the Rab C Nesbitt of the football world. It's the Tartan Army or the highway, boyo.

**Mostly Bs** Everyone may have blasted Andy Murray for supporting anyone other than England, but he's a hero in your eyes.

**Mostly Cs** The United Nations would be impressed, even if everyone else thinks you've lost the plot.