

A good man

BTN spoke with **Alan Reid** who looks after the corporate travel programme for BP Southern Africa and learnt about 4x4ing, amazing rescues and the Wild Bean Cafe. By **Kim Cochrane**.

If he's blowing out bubbles or breathing in dust, **Alan Reid**, BP Southern Africa commodity manager, is happy.

When he says this, he's referring to his love of scuba diving and 4x4ing, which he's been able to combine with his philanthropic need to help people.

Reid is part of the Off-Road Rescue Unit, a highly trained crew of unpaid volunteer 4x4 owners who work closely with local, regional, national and international emergency medical services, disaster management and aviation authorities, among other volunteer organisations.

"I've always been a bush bunny so when I joined the unit around ten years ago, it meant I could visit the bush, go 4x4ing or diving and help people at the same time. Everyone needs to be involved in the betterment of humankind. Some people knit jerseys or raise puppies as guide dogs. I'm a qualified medic from my days in military service and registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa so this is what I do, whether we're helping out on the 94.7 Cycle Challenge or rescuing missing hikers, etc."

Reid's volunteer work does put strain on his time – especially since he's also a regular business traveller – and on his family when his phone goes off at 02h00. "Two of our members have died on call-outs trying to rescue others so what we do is serious. It's fun, it's dedicated, but it's serious."

His hands-on involvement in rescue work hasn't dramatically affected the way he approaches travel, he believes, but it has added to the way he looks at things from a health and safety perspective. His view is that corporate travel managers in SA probably don't place enough emphasis on traveller safety. "You have to understand and fully appreciate the value you place on

peoples' lives. I don't want to be the corporate travel manager who has to explain to a family why their loved one is not coming home because I put him on a cheap marginal airline, in a cheap hotel or in a cheap car. Can you imagine how you'd feel if a traveller died because he didn't have an airbag? In his personal capacity, it's a traveller's call as to what car he drives. When he moves into the business travel space, it's my call. But it's also about empowering your people to make judgement calls if they feel unsafe and more importantly, it's about not putting them in a place where they should have to feel unsafe."

As commodity manager, he's adamant that the group's travel policy must dovetail with safety and security protocols. "Everyone goes and comes home safe."

It's partly because of this safety ethos – and the fact that BP's safety culture has become more than a policy and is now a way of thinking and doing for employees – that the Gulf of Mexico oil spill affected everyone at the company so emotionally, he says. "Our safety policy is simple: no harm to people, no accidents and no harm to the environment. It's hard to describe, but everybody has felt so personally hurt that this has happened and it's really knocked the wind out of our sails."

For these reasons – and to keep life simple – Reid doesn't give people choices in travel. "You say you want to fly from JNB to CPT on Monday morning to return on Tuesday. That's it. You don't get to choose your airline or hotel. We're getting soft by letting people choose a car-rental company – Hertz or Europcar – because it's basically the same price. Our travel policy is

the KISS principle taken to the nth degree, as I've taken out all the admin around approvals. Everyone books directly with Carlson Wagonlit Travel (CWT) who has a straightforward mandate: find the cheapest fare at the time of booking within the basket of fares (including corporate rates) that are available. We don't book 'use it or lose it' fares, as some 35% of our travellers make some change post-ticketing. We could go cheaper, but we don't want the restrictions that mess our travellers around. We don't use online booking unless it's an emergency. We are clear in the mandate to CWT: these are our policies, work within them. Don't make up your own and don't interpret ours. If policies are too complicated, then people start interpreting. If you keep it plain, there are no misunderstandings."

Reid has been managing travel at BP for five years now and this approach has been consistently applied. "People don't question any more. Those are the rules and the only people who change them are myself and the chief executive to whom I report on travel. I don't think I can ever sit back and say 'I'm there', but I believe I'm at a point where it's easy to manage. Am I on top of it? Possibly."

From burgers to coffee beans

Going forward, Reid began work on an e-procurement project with mymarket.com about 18 months ago, which was put on the backburner due to the FIFA World Cup. His aim is to finalise the solution so it can be piloted this year.

"Together we've developed a hybridised version of the mymarket.com system that will work in the BP context. Our online solution will incorporate and automate requisitioning and approval systems but humans will do the fulfilment and feed that into the global system. I believe that by speeding up the approval process, we'll be able to enhance the capture rate of the cheaper classes of airfares, which we're missing out on due to the delays in getting internal approvals prior to being able to issue the ticket. In addition, it will further improve our safety and security travel protocols and communication."

Reid – who is actually a chef by trade, born and brought up in Zimbabwe – is humble about his achievements over the years.



Pics: Shannon Hill

"It's a long story but I went from making and buying food to managing food at hotel restaurants. After a stint in the UK and Europe working as a tour coordinator for Contiki Tours, I moved to SA in 1982 which is when I went to work for the Southern Sun and Holiday Inn brands. From there I moved to contract catering company, Fedics, and then on to join McDonald's SA as their procurement and quality assurance manager when the group arrived in the country in 1995. I spent a few years there and enjoyed it, especially because it was so different. So very nineties. International companies and global partnerships were new to us because of everything that went before 1994."

He adds: "I was then later approached by BP who wanted to create a fresh food and coffee offering for their convenience stores and two years later the Wild Bean Cafe was launched in 2001. From there I got services to buy, then travel and so on. Now I focus on travel, services, marketing, HR, legal, accounting etc. I love it. It's a role made for me".

As to what his travel role entails more specifically, Reid and his colleague **Leeann Watkins**, sourcing specialist – services, manage "everything from Tanzania and down Southern Africa through various partners".

He clarifies: "They all run the same policy and report into the same system, but we do have the challenge of aggregating each country into this one system. To get better pricing, we also do a lot of work for BP Angola, which is a separate division and not part of the Southern Africa business unit. There's very little negotiating power on the Luanda-Johannesburg route because everyone wants to fly it so we work the Johannesburg to Europe legs. In addition we have an allocation of seats on the

World Airways charter known as the *Houston Express*, which is a joint venture between SonAir, ExxonMobil, Chevron and BP. It is a fully business class configured Boeing 747 that flies between Luanda and Houston three times a week".

He says travel does receive a disproportionate amount of interest within the unit considering that it's less than 0.5% of total third party spend.

During the volcano ash crisis in Europe, it was really 'tough' for some of our travellers who got stuck in the south of Spain. I usually get stuck in Pofadder or Gaborone!"

The spend in SA is about R30m on direct travel spend (air, hotel accommodation, car rental). "We don't really track other hotel/restaurant spend, as it's too difficult but we can use our Amex report if we want to. Our total budget for travel in the Southern Africa unit is R50m and we spend that and more. This year, we had an additional R90m of FIFA World Cup-related travel."

» turn to page 10



NOW MORE THAN EVER,
YOU NEED EFFECTIVE
TRAVEL MANAGEMENT.

Global expertise and local understanding make us a valuable resource in more than 150 countries. So you can take your business to new heights.

**Carlson
Wagonlit
Travel**

www.carlsonwagonlit.com



For more information contact sales@carlsonwagonlit.co.za or call Samantha 011 628 2300 • Anthea 031 582 2700