

A Day in the Life of Bob Dierk

When Bob Dierk, Customer Service Director with Tekelec, left his home in Cary, NC (USA) on Friday April 16th, little did he know he was about to embark on an epic, eventful journey throughout European skies and roads. An experienced traveler - Bob flew to Europe a number of times, with trips to Italy, France, Netherlands and London. However, he had yet to discover the Italian capital, and how his patience and determination would be put to the test. Well, several tests, actually. All aboard!

Dierk's plans were to travel to the Mulhouse (France) office and then the Amsterdam (Netherlands) office for an IAS conference, a number of internal meetings and for a customer meeting with Dutch operator KPN. On Thursday April 15th, it was reported that the volcanic eruption in Iceland was impacting flights in and out of UK airports. Bob's original flight scheduled through Heathrow on the 16th was cancelled. As this was initially viewed as a short term event, he worked with Tekelec's travel agent to find another route to Europe and was able to find a flight through Rome, Italy. From there, he arranged for a car with navigation to travel to Mulhouse.

The flight arrived in Rome on Saturday, the 17th, in the morning. While a car was ready, the navigation system was nowhere to be seen, so Bob was given a (paper) map of Italy instead. Since he had been on a plane the previous night, he decided to spend Saturday night in Rome before driving 1000 km (600 miles) to Mulhouse on Sunday, the 18th. Driving in Rome proved quite an experience. He says: "Without the navigation system, it took me 3 hours to find my hotel. I found it only after driving down a sidewalk."



Bob's smatterings of Spanish were somewhat helpful in Italy, as the languages sound very similar, so driving from Rome to Mulhouse on Sunday went more smoothly. This time, he studied a map of Rome in order to get back on the highway. While driving through Rome, a scooter tried to pass between his car and the one next to him. Unfortunately, there was not enough space. Fortunately, the scooter hit the car next to him, and not his!

He recalls: "After 45 minutes, I had made it out of Rome and was on the highway toward Firenze (Florence). Once on the highway, I learned that the road signs are marked a bit differently than they are in the USA, where all the road signs refer to numbers and compass directions (e.g. Interstate 40 West, Exit 45, etc.). In Europe, you need to know the name of the next city for that highway. As such, I needed to learn to follow the signs for Firenze, then Bologna, then Milan, etc. Fortunately, I figured this out and arrived in Mulhouse late Sunday night."



The IAS Summit Meeting scheduled for Monday the 19th and Tuesday the 20th by Product Marketing Director Lane Liley, had been cancelled. Marc Wagner, Design Support Engineer, kindly arranged a conference room for him, and Technical Operations Senior Manager, Sylvie Neveu got him a temporary entry/exit badge. With these things in place, he was able to work in Mulhouse as if he was in his US office in Raleigh.

On Wednesday the 21st, Bob planned to travel to Amsterdam in the evening to prepare for his meeting with KPN. His flight to the Netherlands's capital was on British Airways and, again, through Heathrow airport in London, UK. As Heathrow remained closed until Wednesday morning, he changed to a direct flight into Amsterdam via the low-cost EasyJet airline company. But it turned out to be not so easy. After over an hour's delay, caused by the check-in system, the plane left Mulhouse for Amsterdam, where Dierk experienced his first "touch and go" landing attempt, as the plane hit the runway hard, bounced and took off again! Fortunately, the second attempt went much smoother.

The KPN meeting went very well and Bob was prepared for the final leg of his trip home on Friday the 23rd. Needing a late departure from Amsterdam, he had plans to travel to London, then to New York and then back home to Raleigh. After Bob boarded the plane in Amsterdam, the pilot noticed a minor mix-up with baggage, but said that the flight would be underway in a few minutes. Over an hour later, clearance was given for takeoff. Apparently, two bags were incorrectly placed on the plane. It took over an hour to determine which container they were in and then to retrieve them. With this delay, he arrived in Heathrow with only 30 minutes to catch his connecting flight to NY.

He literally had to run, first catching a bus (10 minutes) to a different terminal, then going back through security (fortunately no line) and then running again to his departing gate, located at the farthest point in Terminal 3. He says: "I was quite excited when I arrived at the gate 5 minutes before the scheduled departure, only to learn that the plane

had left the gate 5 minutes ago.” Since the next flight to NY arrived at the same time as the last flight to Raleigh, Bob was then stuck in London until Saturday the 24th. Fortunately, British Airways put him up in a nearby hotel and his flight back to Raleigh the next day was uneventful.

After this epic journey, Bob drew up a wise list of “lessons learned” when under such adverse conditions:

1. *Be flexible when traveling. Many events could occur during a trip, so you need to be prepared to make alternate plans.*
2. *Always pack at least one day of clothing in a carry-on bag. If your baggage is with you, your plans can change easily.*
3. *Make sure you have all the contact phone numbers you need when traveling. For example: the travel agency, your hotels, etc. Make sure you understand the different country code dialing and that your phone is enabled for international calls.*
4. *Ask local colleagues and friends about what to expect when traveling in their country. I received very helpful information from my colleagues in Mulhouse and my cousin in Zurich, Switzerland. Advance information on how the roads were marked and how the toll systems worked in different countries was very helpful.*
5. *Avoid driving a car in high density cities that have good public transportation. If I had to do it over again, I definitely would have taken a train or taxi from the Rome airport to the city to avoid the gruesome traffic conditions. I would have also considered a high speed train (TGV) to travel through France, but in this case did not have the time to investigate.*
6. *If you are driving in a foreign country, get a GPS navigation system. If you own a portable one, consider buying the appropriate maps and bringing it with you.*

It’s funny to note that, very often, pizzerias bear the name of volcanoes (e.g. the Vesuvio, the Etna...). But “Eyjafjallajokull” does not have the same ring for some reason.

Many other Tekelec staff may have similar stories; feel free to share your story and lessons learned!

On a lighter note, enjoy the following:

You can view a few impressive pictures taken on the day of the eruption (April 14, 2010) here:

http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2010/04/icelands_disruptive_volcano.html

Enjoy a tour of Rome on a Vespa scooter (from the 1953 film Roman Holiday, starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jITw1fREQtQ&feature=related>

Despite the dense traffic, Rome does have much more to offer:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8ApUUI6NTU&feature=watch_response

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