
Subject: Re: Out of Africa

Posted by [Craig Markwardt](#) on Wed, 27 Jul 2011 04:21:37 GMT

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On Jul 25, 1:01 pm, David Fanning <n...@idlcoyote.com> wrote:

> Folks,
>
> I've returned from Ethiopia and just wanted to give a short
> report on my adventure of teaching IDL classes in Africa. As
> usual in third-world countries, it is a combination of good
> news and bad news.
>
> First of all, let me say that I think *everyone* should have
> the opportunity to travel to a third-world country. It is
> eye-opening, to say the least. Ethiopia is booming, at least
> in Addis Ababa, where much construction is going on and the
> economy is growing in double digits. Alas, inflation is
> out-pacing the economy.
>
> One of the problems with global markets in poor countries
> is that farmers find it much more lucrative to export their
> products to richer countries who can pay more, and the poor
> in their own countries find it harder and harder to afford
> food and other goods. Government tries to help by implementing
> price controls and other measures, but the governing power
> there, as in most countries, resides in land-owners and
> businessmen whose wealth depends on growing the economy, not
> feeding the masses.
>
> Eastern Ethiopia is suffering from a 10-year drought. Little
> or no help is coming from the government. Rather, the government
> relies on International Aid efforts to help with the problem.
> When I toured the Afar region east of Addis I saw cows that
> couldn't possibly be any skinnier. If rain doesn't come soon,
> I don't see how the pastoral Afar people, and many like them,
> can survive.
>
> Education has recently become a government priority, and
> the good news is more people are being allowed to attend
> the universities. The bad news is there are no additional
> teachers, facilities, or support for the additional students.
> I had lunch with the directors of the Institute of Technology
> at Addis Ababa University, and they told me they had planned
> for 750 students and had received 3500. They have NO idea
> how they are going to teach this many students with their
> current staffing budget. Their current plan is to video tape
> a lecture in one class, and show it in 15 others!
>

> I was teaching IDL in a classroom that could perhaps hold
> 20 students comfortably. I had 47 students in the classroom.
> Each had a laptop that needed to be plugged into one of the
> three outlets in the classroom. If any of us moved, we were
> in danger of being electrocuted. Add to this the certain
> power outages whenever the thunder and lightening started
> (it is the rainy season in Ethiopia!) and you have conditions
> for a most interesting and challenging classroom!
>
> Still, the students in the new Institute of Water Resources
> were terrific! Very engaged. Very hard workers. No one complained.
> Everyone just got on with it. We moved slowly, but we moved steadily.
>
> Addis is an incredibly safe and interesting city. I moved freely
> in it and never felt the least bit threatened. I didn't move around
> too much after dark, but not because I felt afraid of people. Rather,
> there are few street lights in Addis and there are gapping holes
> in the sidewalks that lead directly to the sewer 10 feet below.
> There are no barriers or warnings to alert the unsuspecting walker
> to these holes, so walking at night in unfamiliar territory
> is **extremely** dangerous!
>
> Ethiopians are invariably friendly and open people. But, be careful.
> The most friendly of them, especially those who engage you on the
> street when you are walking along minding your own business, are
> hoping you will repay their friendliness and helpfulness with money.
> You get a sense for this after you have accumulated a couple of
> especially good friends you hope you don't run into again!
>
> I had many interesting experiences in Ethiopia, but two stand out
> in my mind. I stayed at the Bilen Lodge east of Addis in the Afar
> region, along the Awash River. This is dry, dusty country, but
> perfect for birds, which is what I was after. The "Lodge" is
> slightly misnamed. It is a primitive place with screened-in grass
> huts, basically, to stay in.
>
> One night, about 2AM, I was awakened from a deep sleep by a
> lion roaring about 15 feet from my unlocked screen door!
> Goodness! I jumped up and looked out my window in time to
> see him moving away from me (thank goodness!) in the light
> of the full moon.
>
> In the morning, I wondered if this had just been a dream, so
> I went out to investigate. No, sure enough, it was a lion, as
> big cat prints were everywhere outside my hut.
>
> Later that morning, I also saw a cheetah moving in the dry river
> bed below the Lodge, along a path that during the day carried

> a never-ending stream of people, cows, and goats. Before I left
> the area I had seen spotted hyenas, a jackal, and a crocodile
> in the river.
>
> And, of course, birds. In four days I had identified about 40
> new species I had never seen before in my life time, and probably
> saw two or three times that number, which I wasn't able to identify.
>
> The other interesting experience was attending a local Muda
> celebration in the Bale Mountains. Ethiopia is about evenly
> divided between Christians and Muslims, but a surprisingly
> large number of local people still follow their traditional
> African religious celebrations. The Muda celebration is one of
> these.
>
> It appeared to me to be a combination of a Southern Baptist
> revival meeting and a rave. It was held in a two-room smoky
> hut, about the size of my kitchen here at home. There were
> 60-70 people in attendance, all dancing and singing around
> the small fires set on the dirt floors in the center of the
> rooms. Two drummers provided the trance-like atmospheric
> effects. The idea, it seemed to me, was to sing and dance
> yourself into an altered state of reality, or maybe just
> religious ecstasy. It brought my own Pentecostal religious
> upbringing back to me in a very real (and surprisingly
> pleasing) way.
>
> The celebration started about 8PM, with the singing, dancing,
> clapping, and drumming being interspersed with short quiet
> times where various individuals offered prayers and short
> speeches. Occasionally there was a break for specially prepared
> foods. The celebration went on until 4AM, when I was finally
> able to catch a few hours of sleep. What a way to experience
> the real Africa!

Hi David-- It sounds like you had quite an adventure!

Who knew that Ethiopia was such a hot-bed of IDL-using water resource analysts!

I'm also curious to know if authentic Ethiopian food is anything like what you get at home in the States.

Craig
