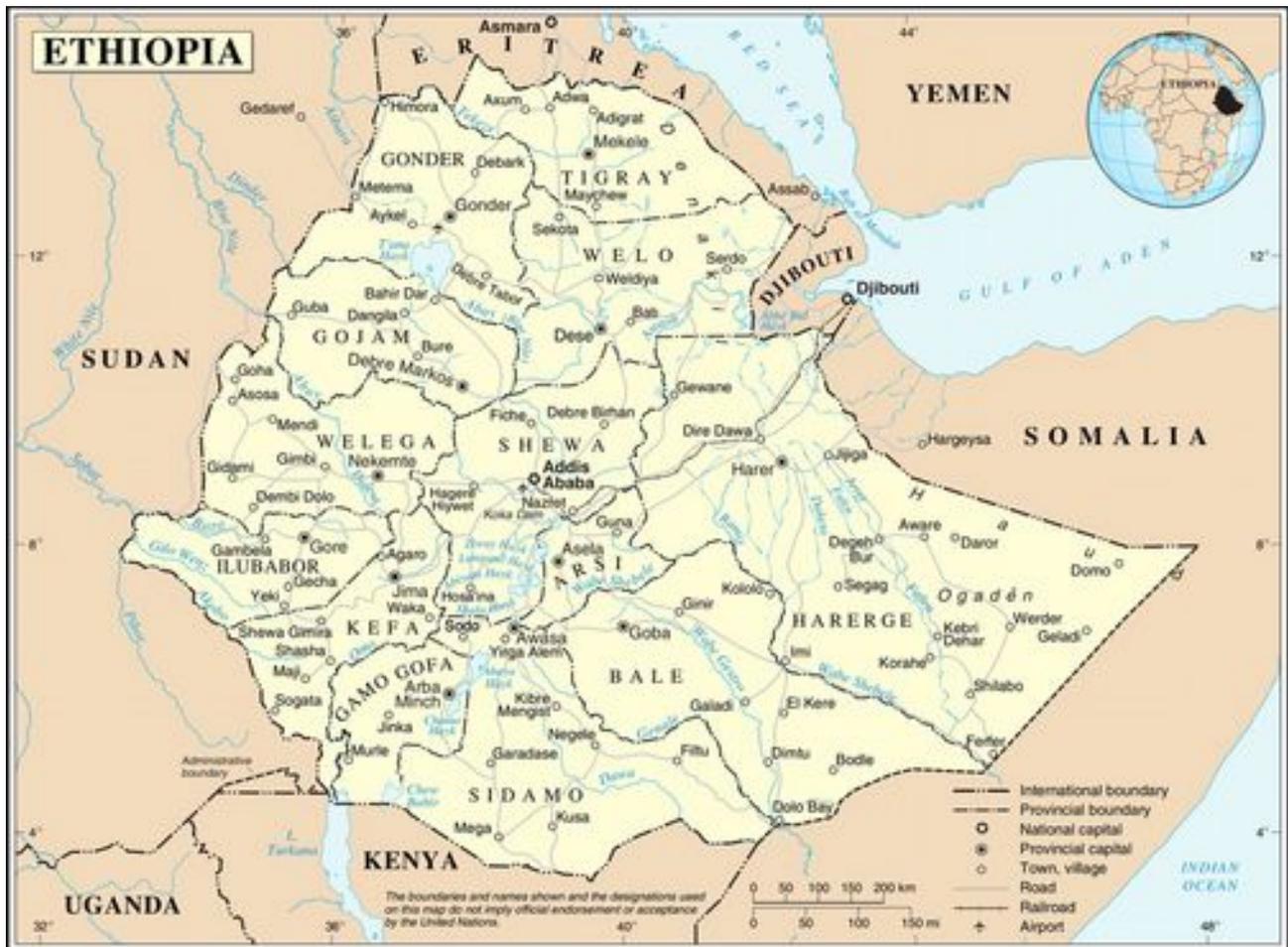


Ethiopia October 6th - 27th 2018

Map of Ethiopia



Ethiopia Day 17 Monday 22nd October 2018

Early sightings on our first day trekking in the Bale Mountains, all so exciting!

Mountain Nyala -endemic to Bale

- Red buck
- Wart hog
- bushbuck
- Mole rat
- Rock hyrax

- Augur buzzard
- Moorland Chat
- Stonechat
- Black headed Siskin
- Abyssinian Cat bird
- Yellow crowned canary
- Streaky seed eater

Brown rumped seed eater
Tacazze Sunbird
Baglafaecht Weaver
Ground scraper thrush
African stonechat
Blue winged goose - endemic
Mountain thrush
Slender billed starling on lobelia in Simien Mountains
Wattled ibis - very noisy in a group of 27

We started the day with a fetira with egg which was basically a chapati with fried mixed egg, served with honey. It was delicious with two cups of coffee.

We drove back to the park headquarters and met with our guide Awol who already turned out to be a gem. We do not need a scout here, so it was just we Four that set off. We first did a circuit around the headquarters and saw all the amazing mammals listed at the top - we were so close to them it was surreal, and they have no fear.

We began to see different plants including juniper *Podocarpus falcatus* and *Hagenia abyssinica* trees, and the a red flowered acanthus. AWOL knows all the birds, plants and mammals, so we are in good hands. The walking was really straightforward as we took trails through farmland for about 14 kms to our camp at Habera near the Fincha Habera waterfalls. It was a gorgeous wild camping site under the basalt cliffs. There were only five other people camping in two groups, but there were many cooks and muleteers.

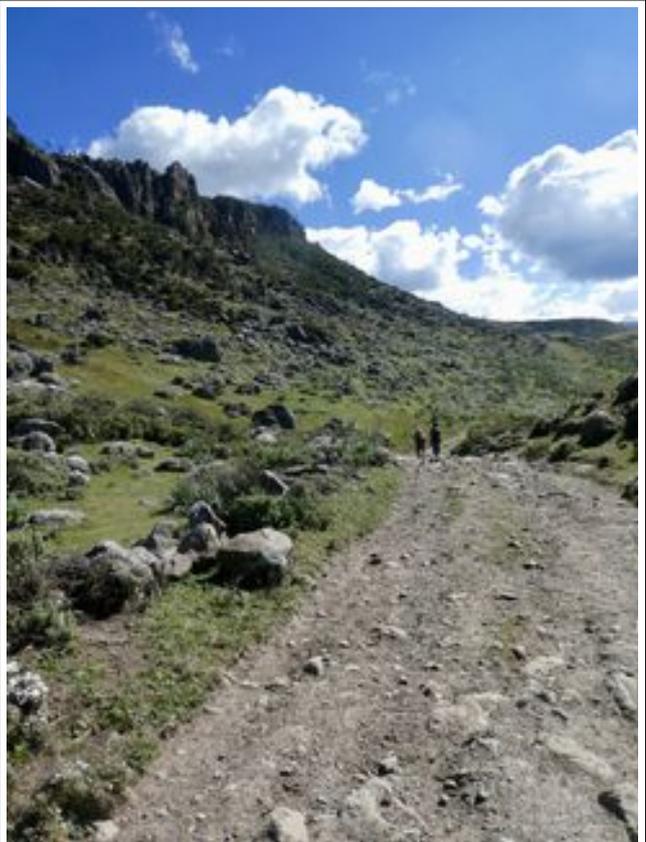
We were greeted with a cup of tea with cinnamon and biscuits, while Asre and Awol put up the tents. Time to relax and explore the neighbourhood. Awol came and showed us all the birds in the Horn of Africa bird book while we had a shower of rain. The rest of the day had been sunny and warm.

Supper was outside as the rain subsided enough, and we had a huge bowl of soup followed spaghetti with Vegetables and a tomato sauce. The portions were way too big for me, but it would not go to waste with the kitchen staff and muleteers.











Ethiopia Day 18 Tuesday 23rd October 2018

It was really cold in the night, which was particularly long as we all went to our tents at 7:30 in the cold. However we woke as usual around 6:15, and had time to be organised and have a walk before breakfast at 8 am with a huge bowl of porridge followed by pancakes and fried bananas. I had a great sighting of a Rouget's Rail on my early morning walk - this has a white bottom and cinnamon coloured foliage. It is a ground bird.

We unfortunately had rain for the first part of the 20 km trek today, so all waterproofs were worn, but fortunately we were able to slowly shed them all as the morning progressed. It was a wonderful walk up to Wasama, we rose to about 4000m, but the climbs on the whole were not too steep, and the scenery was wonderful. As we followed the Mararo valley, we had huge basalt Escarpments to left and right, it then would reach higher open plateaus, where horses, goats and cows were grazing, and most of these were owned by nomadic people who were living under the cliff edges with just a tarpaulin over the front. It has been interesting to see that in these groups the women are riding the horses up and down the valley.

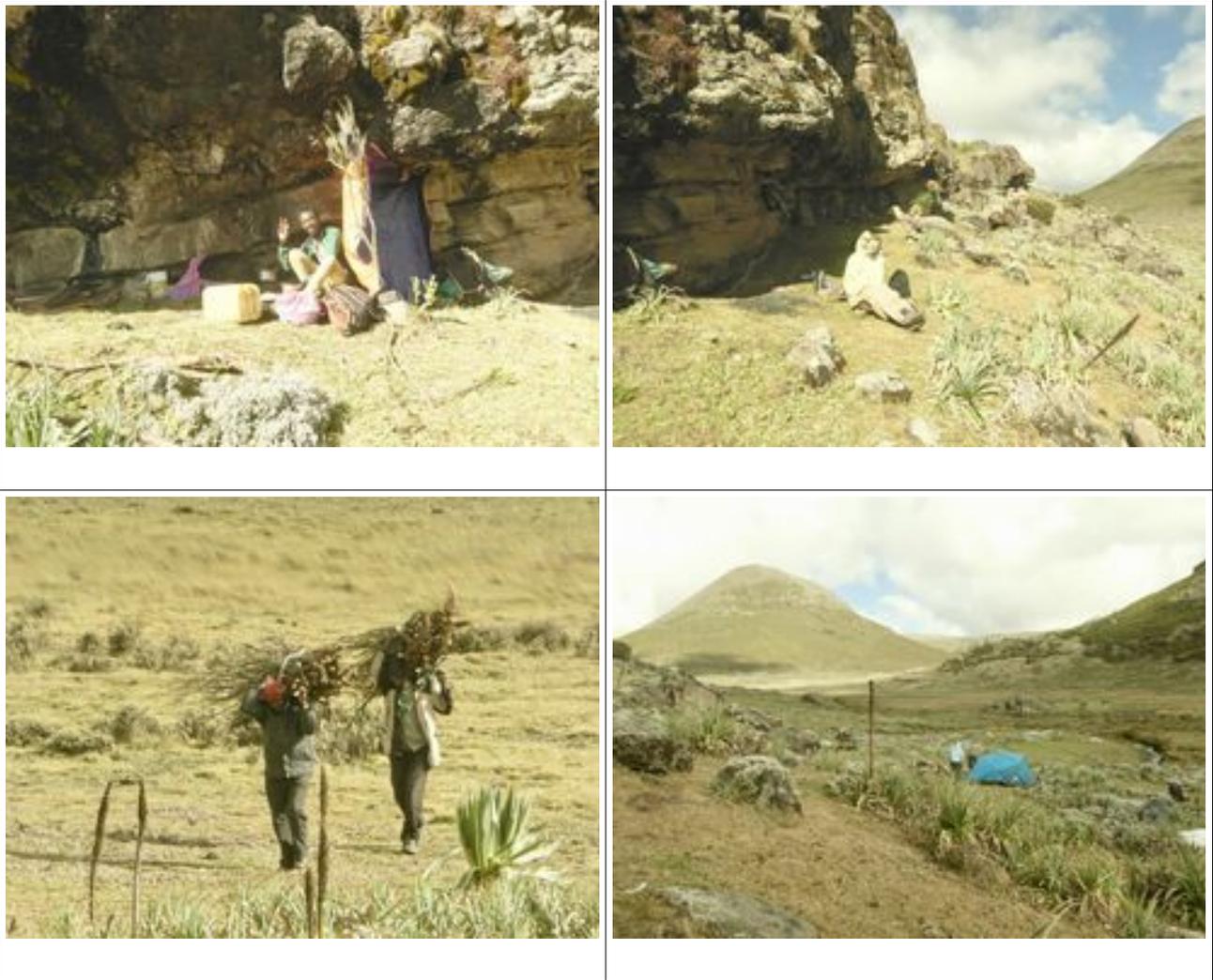
We stopped for our picnic lunch, and then it did not seem that far to our destination at Warama. This again is a wild campsite with the cooks finding a cliff to cook under, and our two tents set out below. It is dominated by Mount Wasama to the East which is 4400m

It was a really enjoyable day trekking, and given the altitude, even I managed to keep up with Awol who sets quite a pace. After tea and biscuits we got our tent organised and put on all those essential warm layers, such as thermal expedition underwear and polartec pants.









Ethiopia Day 19 Wednesday 24th October 2018

This was an amazing 21 km hike at 4100 m for most of the way to our campsite on the Sanetti Plateau. The weather in the night had been very cold, down to -5 degrees, but also wet and windy. Fortunately we were warm on our bags wearing all our clothes!

It was still raining hard in the morning when Awol brought us coffee to our tent, which was brilliant, and shortly followed by Ali the cook bringing us porridge followed by scrambled egg and chapati. It all tasted so good in the cold and rain.

We were late setting off on our epic day trekking, and unfortunately most of the day we were in the rain, so had all the gear on to combat wind rain and cold. We started by climbing up to the Sanetti Plateau through tree heathers, it once at the top it was such a different scene with very low scrubland and rocks. The plants were mainly two types of helichrysum, one low growing with whit flowers, and the other looking like our curry plant without the scent. The overall impression was a sea of grey. We could see the second highest mountain in Ethiopia, and several small lakes, and spotted a tawny Eagle,

ruddy shelduck, augur buzzard, lapwing, and Abyssinian Mountain hare, which were quite light in colour. There are always lots of rats around but we have yet to see the giant mole rat of which the Ethiopian Fox is so fond.

After six hours hiking at this high altitude we arrived at the more organised campsite which has a watchman resident. There was a group due to arrive as there were tents set up already, ours was put up in a shelter round the back which will protect us from the wind and the rain.

Just as we were having our welcome cup of tea the first Ethiopian Wolf appeared, or afraid of us at all, and we got really close - what a splendid creature, with a very pointed nose and beautiful bushy tail - we were mesmerised. Further exploration revealed some large geese, but quite bleak we are in for a very cold night again.

Dinner in the Tukul with an assortment of people gathered round a fire preparing chat, roasting coffee beans and exchanging stories. The watchman was dressed more like Wilfred Thesiger in the desert in a long robe with thongs and a red Arab scarf wrapped around his head. The man preparing the chat was called Ibrahim, and was apparently studying the Egyptian wolf. Others who. Amen and went all seemed to enjoy the fire and a chat. We ate our soup and pasta sitting on a bed in the middle of it all, grateful to be in the warm.

Our tent was under a shelter, which really did protect us from the wind, and rain, and we were pretty cosy for our last night.









Ethiopia Day 20 Thursday 25th October

On an early morning reconnoiter around the camping area in the cold, cloud and mist we saw several hares, a wold, blue winged geese and even pigeons. We had porridge and pancake in the Tukul with lovely coffee before setting off to walk up to the main road where we were picked up by a minibus. The dirt road was quite rough after the rain, but the road had been built by the Derg, and traversed the plateau all the way down to Goba, where it became metal. It took us around one and a half hours to get to Robe where our driver from before was waiting and we said goodbye to Awol our excellent guide and Ali our cook. We certainly would recommend them for the Bale Mountains.

The rest of the day we spent driving down out of the mountains and out onto the plains. The journey was pretty spectacular all the way, with rural life of such great interest, and all the animals grazing, then later the villages and towns. We stopped for
Inch in Dodoma, and then headed to Shashamene, which is at a major crossroads between north and south as well as East to Bale, it it has another claim to fame.

This is where the 300-odd Rastafarian settlers from The Caribbean and elsewhere, came to live on a tract of land donated to them by Haile Selassie. We actually went to find the area and ended up at the Zion Train Lodge, which is run by an Ethiopian French couple. It appeared to be a haven of peace with lots of greenery and animals. It would certainly be a place to chill out!

On we headed to Lake Ziway, seeing Maribu Storks and sacred ibis among other birds. We had one false start at a hotel where there were lots of foreigners and they would not let Sheilagh and I share a room! To find the Bekelle Molla Hotel which is a haven full of birds.





Ethiopia Day 21 Friday 26th October

Last day in Ethiopia, and it did not disappoint. We started with breakfast of omelette in the garden, watching the weaver birds and mouse birds, it then we drove down to the jetty on Lake Ziway, and what an amazing sight to behold. In the swamp area there were hundreds of birds, and we were so close to them all. There were many Maribu Storks, Sacred Ibis, Hammerkop, ducks, geese, storks, kingfishers and many more, it was just so hard to know where to look. It was really stimulating to be right in the midst of them all. The lake itself was quite choppy, and fishermen were setting out in their boats hoping for a good catch.

The next stop was at a shoe shiner - my boots were so full of Bale Mountain mud, I was quite ashamed. Asre had his done at the same time, and what a thorough job, laces out, a good lather with saddle soap, a rinse, then put to dry, then buffed and a waxy polish put on with the fingers, and a final buff. They feel like new, and the cost was less than 60 pence!

Before leaving for the drive to Addis-Abeba we stopped for a coffee ceremony, and then began the long drive back into the big city. We did stop at the last town before the freeway for some samosa and coffee, but then we were on our way back into town for 1:30.

Along the way we passed a lot of poly tunnels where roses and cut flowers are grown for the European markets, and vineyards exist for the local Rift Valley

wine. We reflected on the differences between north and south, the south being predominantly Moslem with mosques in every small village, and the north being mainly Orthodox Christian.

Asre and Abre the driver dropped us at Tanya's and we promised to send feedback to Asre and to look out for the book 'the birds of the Horn of Africa'. Tanya was home to welcome us, and allowed us to do all our internet, as well as lots of chat. We went out to Gustav's Trattoria for supper and all had asparagus soup, Sheilagh and I sharing a pizza to follow, while Tanya had fish. She has just been shortlisted for a big regional job based in Kuala Lumpur, so hopefully for her she will soon be on the move again.

I had a brief rest, then was Picked up to go to the airport at 10:30, the flight is at 0:50, so here endeth a wonderful three weeks in Ethiopia, so many adventures, first with Beth and then with Sheilagh, and lots of memories to be cherished.









Important contacts I would recommend

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