



Dear Friends,

Welcome to our first newsletter and thanks to you all for your support of TESFA and the Meket communities over the last year and more. This support that has enabled us to assist three communities to set up their community tourism enterprises (CTEs).

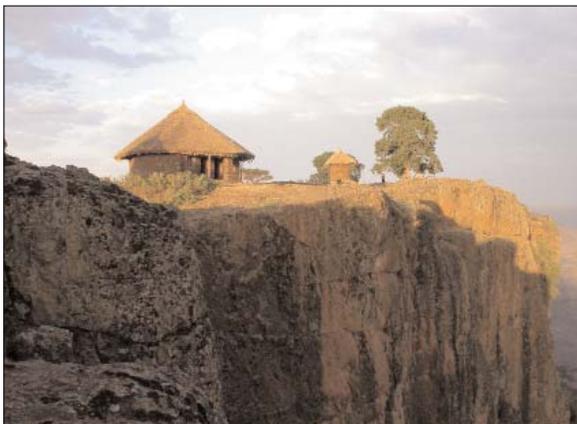
*Read on to see how this support has translated into money for the Meket Communities. See inside pages to see how TESFA's work is progressing, plans for future developments on Abuna Yoseph and across Ethiopia, and on the back page to see what Meket means to Mark, and what some visitors from the tourist industry say ..*



Monkey Business - The Mequat Gelada Troop, taken by Malcolm Smart. One of the best photographs taken by one of community's visitors in 2006 that we have seen. Please send in yours for the next issue.

The three communities are now earning incomes that were previously out of reach. The first of these communities: Mequat Mariam has earned a total of almost 36,000birr (over \$4,000US) between the first visits in 2004 and June 2006. The three communities together have earned over 60,000birr (almost \$7,000US). Some of this money has been spent on salaries and wages for community members, another part on purchasing food stuffs and other consumables for hosting visitors. A considerable part of this is spent on produce from within the community or in the neighbouring communities. Of what remains a portion will be kept for reinvestment and to cover asset depreciation, leaving a healthy chunk for the communities' profit.

The communities themselves are very excited about the prospects of using this money for their own benefit, and have already used some as micro loans to assist communities' members to buy livestock when prices are low. They are now planning to use their profits to buy grain from surplus producing areas of Ethiopia, and to store it in their community for the lean times long after the harvest was collected.



Mequat Mariam camp as it was in 2004

TESFA is now working with a fourth community, Yadukalay to assist them to develop the infrastructure to host visitors and learn the vital skills they need to host them and run their business. We hope that this site will be open for business soon after Easter.

#### Visitor Statistics:

From Jan04 to Dec 6, the three communities had received a total of 515 guest nights from a total of 249 individuals. Guest numbers are still increasing - in the period July-Dec05 there were 41 guests with 86 guest nights, between July and December 06 there were 63 guests and 151 guest nights. Even in Mequat Mariam, the most established site, guest numbers increased from 41 to 51.



The Mequat View-across to the border of North Wollo, South Wollo and South Gondar (thanks to Malcolm)

**An infrastructure to ensure community tourism's success:**

TESFA is developing a 'Guiding Enterprise' in Lalibela which will provide professional trained guides to take the visitors along on the trek and link them with the communities.

These guides themselves are local (from Lalibela and the surrounding area) and will be on hand to escort visitors from Lalibela to the communities. TESFA plan to have this office up and running before Easter 2007.

This operation will ultimately be funded through a percentage of the revenue generated by visitors' fees and from sales of handicrafts made by people in and around the community sites.

**New Addis Office:**



Hanna in Lalibela

TESFA has also opened a Technical Support Unit (TSU) in Addis Ababa. TESFA's newest recruit: Hanna, having fallen in love with Meket on her first visit accompanying two groups of guests, and walked up hill and down dale, is now assisting would be visitors with their enquiries and bookings.



Mequat Sunset - (thanks to Matt Walker)

In addition to bookings and marketing the TSU will provide the field staff and communities with on going support in the field and oversee the development of the project.

The TSU is also looking to provide technical support, marketing and a bookings service to other nascent community tourism endeavours in the country. See page 3 for more information.

The development of both of these new offices has been made possible by a large grant from the Irish Embassy and a further grant from the British Embassy Small Grants Scheme. Additional funding has come from Responsibletravel.com and other private donors. However funding is still extremely tight and TESFA are seeking additional funds for a variety of operational requirements.



October flowers at the Aterow Escarpment



**The vision for future development of community trekking on Abuna Yoseph:**

The potential of this form of community-based tourism (CbT) to develop in Ethiopia and transform the lives of many more rural communities in Ethiopia is enormous. This is a very exciting time for TESFA and the young CbT project.



Leanne, Waldi and Mark, on a recce trip, on the peak of Abuna Yoseph - Rim Gedele- 4,300m

If TESFA can secure some funding we plan to extend the work onto the adjacent Mount Abuna Yoseph, whose 4,300 meter peak rises above the surrounding afro-alpine habitat of the Ethiopian Wolf, giving breathtaking vistas over northern Ethiopia. This is an environment that is under threat from over grazing, and yet is a jewel within a days walk of Lalibela! TESFA will link with Frankfurt Zoological Society to ensure that the work benefits the environment and its important flora and fauna.

We are looking to link the trekking and communities in Meket, with the potential on Abuna Yoseph and the areas nearby. Hopefully 2007 will see TESFA begin work on this beautiful mountain ... Watch this space!

**Across Ethiopia**

However TESFA's ambitions do not end with North Wollo. TESFA see the enormous potential for community tourism in Ethiopia and its potential to generate incomes for host communities. Hence TESFA was excited to be asked to host a cross visit from the Karo people in South Omo.



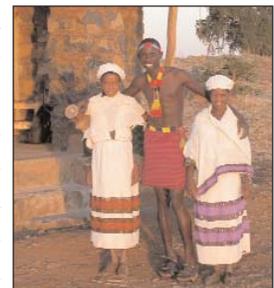
The Karo and Mequat people dance for each other

Local NGO-ORDA (Omo Rural Development Association), with the support of PACT Ethiopia asked TESFA to help organise a trip for a small group of villagers from Korcha in the Karo lands bordering the Omo river, to visit a couple of the community run sites in North Wollo to see for themselves how they are benefiting from tourism and managing their own tourism businesses.

Six Karo people, along with the manager of ORDA and two PACT staff spent one night at Wajela and one at Mequat Mariam, doing the seven hour trek between the two. In the process they had a chance to discuss with the communities about how the income is used to benefit the communities as a whole and how the communities have organised themselves along business lines.



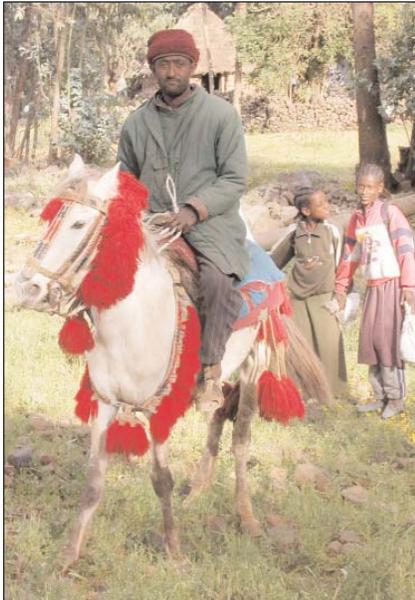
In the evening at Mequat Mariam a bonfire was lit and the Mequat and Karo communities sung and danced into the night. TESFA and ORDA look forward to a time when communities from across the length and breadth of Ethiopia can come together to share experiences regarding their tourism enterprises, and have fun showing each other their varied and wonderful songs and dances.



Shoma, in traditional Karo dress with the cooks at Mequat



Experience The Real Ethiopia



**'Each picture tells a story' by Mark**

I have been going up to Meket since 1999. Each time I do the drive from Lalibela, cross the Tekeze river, and head up towards the Meket Plateau I feel excited and something inside me soars like the Lammergeyer. I never know what experiences await me, but I know they will be full, real and colourful.



A Lammergeyer seen over Mequat in October (while drinking a beer)

Recently we were invited into one of the Senbete groups at Aterow. These are social groups linked to the church that meet after major saints days and Sundays to discuss and drink local beer (K'orefi) with some bread. One of the group proudly showed us his horse bedecked as it was with red pompoms.



Sharing local beer at a Senbete - Aterow



Just in the last few weeks I discovered a small falls with the most exquisite rainbow - and learned that a rainbow is known as Mary's sash' in Amharic (YeMariam Mekenet).



In October, for the first time since 1999, I revisited a fascinating little cave church called Akat Markos, and went through the woodland around the church of Akat Abo. Giant Juniper, Acacia and Olive trees surround the quiet church, a sure sign of age. Here Hanna and Rosanna are on an ancient Olive tree. Every time I have to leave, I know there is something of me I have left behind!

**What the tourism professionals say about us:**

**Justin Francis - MD of responsibletravel.com & Trustee of The Travel Foundation:**

"Having been superbly looked after on my recent trek I'm writing to say important your work is in both the context of Ethiopian tourism, but also far wider as an example in tourism destinations in developing countries .... Congratulations on your work, its vital that you continue to make it a success as it's the model for so many others to follow."

**Roxanne Besse of ATG (Alternative Travel Group) Oxford UK**

"Wonderful! Compelling way of understanding life in the Ethiopian Highlands"

**And a comment from one of our Guests: Sarah Woodrow, a physician from Canada**

"Experience of a Lifetime"

The Ethiopian Millennium approaches: 10th September 2007 by the Gregorian calendar is the last day of 1999 by the Julian or Ethiopian Calendar. Ethiopia will be celebrating throughout the Millennium Year 2000 ..... Why not join in?