

Experience the Real Ethiopia

T.E.S.F.A. Newsletter

Volume 7 - March/April 2009 - *Megabit 2001*

Greetings and Happy Easter to all our customers and supporters

Easter is one of the most important dates in the church calendar but following the special mass that marks the end of the 55-day long Lenten fast, the festivities switch to the home where feasts are prepared and eaten with great gusto. The Ethiopian calendar has many other festivals. Many come in the month that follows Christmas. Timkat (the celebration of Jesus' baptism) is the most famous. This year guests of the communities were in the privileged position to join in celebrating Timkat on the 19th January and Mikael Timkat on the 20th. Others witnessed the special St.George's day festival

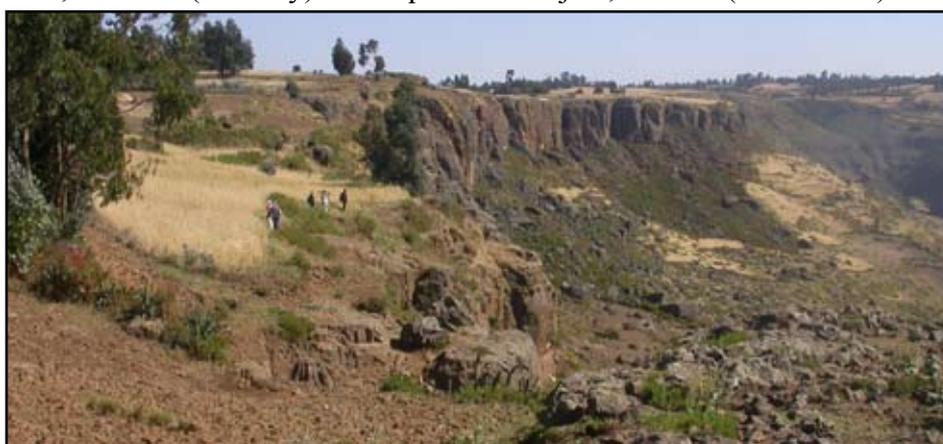


Spring water is blessed, Timkat celebration, Mequat Mariam (January 2009)

on 26th January and the special St.Mary's day on the 29th January. The high point of these festivals is the parading of the revered Tabots with all the church regalia on display.

As TESFA has established sites at many communities, each with their own church, it is easy to be in the right place for the right saint's day celebration: whether it be Giyorgis (St.George) at AinaAmba and Yadukulay sites; Mariam (St.Mary) at Mequat and Wajela; Mikael (St.Michael) at Boya or Abuna Gebre Menfus Kidus

(known as Abo) at Aterow. There are also other churches on the route and at the community sites where lunch is provided. While there is a concentration of festivals in late January, it is possible to plan a trip at other times of the year to coincide with a festival. The TESFA calendar is a perfect tool for such planning with all the important saints' days clearly shown on it.



Walking along the escarpment near Mequat Mariam (November 2008)

Experience the Real Ethiopia - on Film

T.E.S.F.A. has produced two films: one capturing the essence of a trek with the communities, the other explaining how it benefits the host communities. If you would like a copy please contact Mark or Hanna.

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For more information see www.community-tourism-ethiopia.com



Ethiopian Wolf (in Gwassa)

Abuna Yoseph - an alternative to a Simien Trek?

With its peak at around 4,300 meters, climbing the summit of Abuna Yoseph is a challenging trek. If you have a few days to spare is well worth a visit to this beautiful mountain. Mules can be hired on some sections to take the strain for those not feeling so strong (this is an extra cost, currently 100 birr/day).

As in the Simiens, you walk through high altitude moorland at around 4,000 meters, with the bizarre Giant Lobelia plants sticking out like cacti. Large troops of Gelada Baboons play on the steep mountain edges, although they are not as habitu-

ated to tourists as their cousins in the Simiens.

Best of all you have an excellent chance to see the rare Ethiopian Wolf, as our guides learn more about their movements and become more practiced at tracking them down. Sightings of the Ethiopian Wolf are however rare in the Simiens.

One big advantage that you have on Abuna Yoseph, is that your trip is all organised, with comfortable accommodation, hot cooked meals, guides etc. The costs are laid out in advance and all inclusive. Apart from drinks you just pay the daily rate of 450 birr. There is no need to rent a vehicle, because Abuna Yoseph is on Lalibela's doorstep. The local guides will meet you in town with a donkey to carry your bags, and off you go. Another big plus is that you also know that the money is going to the community.

T.E.S.F.A. is currently working out a mechanism for generating income for the mountain area as a whole to be used towards the conservation of the afro-alpine moorland and the wildlife that depends on it. This will probably mean visitors paying a conservation fee of 50 birr per day spent on the mountain, and the host communities paying a 'concession fee' of about 10% on their overnight charges. We will provide more information on this once the system is up and running.

T.E.S.F.A. plan to use this community tourism conservation mechanism, which we will pioneer on Abuna Yoseph, in other important areas of biodiversity such as Wof Washa forest and the afro-alpine moorland of the nearby Gwassa Menz - all in North Shoa.



Giant Lobelia growing on Abuna Yoseph

To book please contact Hanna at TESFA Technical Support Unit in Addis Ababa (see bottom of page 3). The charges are 450 birr per day, this covers accommodation, food, tea, coffee, pack animals and guides, but does not include bottled drinks and transport. Page 2



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Community based tourism is working for the people of Mequat Mariam:

As in previous years, the farmers of Mequat Mariam have had their land tax paid out of the profits from their tourism business. In addition the community is setting up a grain bank. While the construction of the grain



Mequat farmer surveys the landscape

store is being finalised, the tourism proceeds have already been used for a number of purchases. In September we reported on a purchase of maize the community made from a surplus producing part of the country to support their members. Since then they have purchased almost 14 tonnes of soya beans from their own community, which are grown as a cash crop. Later in the year, when prices are higher and using the fact that they have amassed a large quantity, they can sell at a higher rate. Similarly they have purchased more than 350kgs of beans from the community, with further purchases planned soon. The concept that a whole community is empowered to act as a grain merchant for their communal benefit is very exciting.

Summary of bookings & incomes from Jan 07 - Dec 08 - Income in Ethiopian Birr												
Period / Quarter	td guest nights	guest nights	Total Fee	Hosting Community (CTE)			125birr fee Guiding Biz	85birr fee Booking Op	25 birr lunch stop	No Grps	Av Grp size	
				Income	Expend-iture	Total Profit						
Total for Q1 07	66	63	137	41,700	25,995	9,194	16,801	10,425	6,255		20	3.30
Total for Q2 07	72	86	174	51,280	32,614	14,532	18,082	12,450	7,470		28	2.57
Total for Q3 07	16	12	34	8,800	5,912	3,731	2,181	2,900	1,740		5	3.20
Total for Q4 07	201	230	551	149,190	86,532	29,355	57,178	36,248	21,749		50	4.02
Total for Q1 08	159	221	459	135,600	84,099	36,033	48,066	33,900	20,340		43	3.70
Total for Q2 08	141	181	383	114,300	73,449	30,491	42,958	27,975	16,785		43	3.28
Total for Q3 08	35.5	51	116	34,800	19,523	11,713	7,810	14,500	9,860		8	4.44
Total for Q4 08	232	283	682	294,380	156,369	56,228	100,141	80,611	54,813	16,385	59	3.93
Total 2007	355	391	896	250,970	151,053	56,812	94,241	62,023	37,214		103	3.45
Total 2008	568	736	1640	579,080	333,440	134,465	198,975	156,986	101,798	16,385	153	3.71



Meket trekking, a big hit with kids who love the horses

Bookings & Income

Demand for community-run trekking has continued to grow. In 2008 the communities received 1,640 guest nights (increased from 895). The original three sites all had between 150 and 200 guest nights in the final quarter of 2008, earning record profits of 20-25,000 birr. Yadukulay, the 4th community has also now reached 100 guest nights and over 12,000 birr profit. It is likely that the global slowdown will begin to have a more marked effect on growth in 2009, but TESFA remains confident that the number of clients will continue to grow as more people discover the joys of this tourism - please tell everyone!

TESFA wish to thank Irish Aid for their continued support of the CbT development and to Save the Children UK and the British Embassy who funded the new Meket sites, the Ambassadors' Wives' fund for funded the lunch stops and ICAP for their funding of a new site linking Meket and Lalibela.

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Wildlife Spot



Gelada Baboon and a Klipspringer (Above Wof Washa)

Although guests do not come to Meket to see wildlife, there is much to see. Birds are the most obvious. The cliffs of Meket are a great spot to see raptors soaring on the thermals, including eagles, vultures, buzzards, kites, falcons and the mighty Lammergeyer. But it is not just size, there are stunning Bee-eaters and Sunbirds flitting among the surprising flowers by the escarpment. Even the parrot-like Black-winged Lovebird adds a



Black Kite

dart of emerald green to the proceedings. More comical are the Abyssinian Ground Hornbill and Hemprich's Hornbill and the Fan-tailed and Thick-billed Ravens that hang around the tukuls, one of which steals soap if you leave it out for a few moments! As evening approaches flocks of white billed starlings dart around the Mequat Mariam cliffs before settling for the night on the same precipices as the Gelada Baboon and Ruppell's vultures.



Hammerkop



The gorgeous Blue Busted Bee-eaters near Wajela, Meket. This is a special Ethiopian version with more electric blue on it.

As you walk across the meadows, where there is often some standing water, you can see the noisy Abyssinian Wattled Ibis,

Sacred Ibis and the odd shaped Hammerkop. However the noisiest of all must be Erckel's Francolin which is regularly flushed out along the escarpment walks.

But bigger animals are around too, the endemic Gelada Baboons, which are easier to spot after the harvest is over are all along the cliffs. Here and there are troops of cheeky Vervet Monkeys, and to my recent amazement I saw Hamadras Baboons up on the edge of Abuna Yoseph at over 3,200m. The local people refer to them as Netch Zingaro or White Baboons. Apparently they fight with the Gelada Baboons, and each use a different side of the ridge.



Spotted Hyenas, mostly nocturnal

Also easy to see is the Rock Hyrax, but I have seen Spotted Hyena below the cliffs near Akat, and the shy Klipspringer in Meket. Leopards live in some of the denser wooded areas, but no one from TESFA has seen them. The rarest site is the Ethiopian Wolf. Only some 400 remain, with a few on Abuna Yoseph, where sightings are quite common.

Feedback from guests about their community trek:

John and Liz Burton, (UK- Jan 2009), said: "Now we are back in the UK I just wanted to let you know how much we enjoyed the 5-day trek with TESFA. We had high expectations but they were completely exceeded by the fantastic organisation, the wonderful sites and the pride of all involved. The cleanliness of the accommodation, facilities and warm welcome puts all but the very best hotels in Addis to shame! The scheme is a brilliant model for community tourism and we wish you and all involved continued success. We will 'sing your praises' wherever we can. Once again many thanks."

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