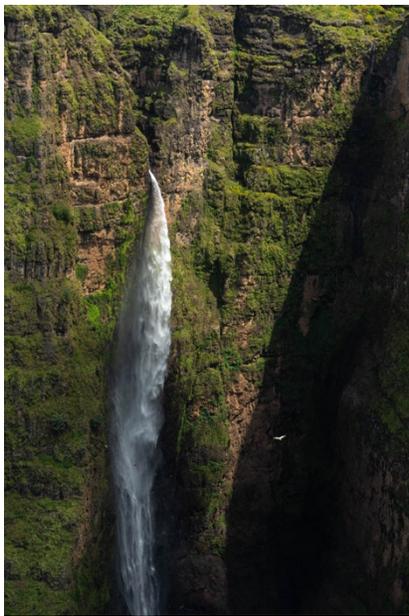


Ethiopia is complex & mysterious with the richest history of sub-Saharan Africa. Boasting 70% of Africa's mountains, rugged topography defeated many invasions, making Ethiopia one of the few African countries to escape European colonization. Missionaries penetrated, however, and in the 4th century the Axumite kingdom converted to Christianity which remains the majority religion today. Ancient rock-hewn churches and ornately frescoed monasteries dot the countryside, and the unique sect has a distinctive emphasis on the old testament. Islam is also common and Judaism, while rare today, is important historically with the Queen of Sheba returning from Jerusalem, bearing King Solomon's child and the fable Arc of the Covenant.



Our first trek, in the Simien Mountains, climbed along a huge escarpment whose verdant cliffs reminded me of Hawaii's fluted precipices. Waterfalls tumbled 1700' into deep green gorges, while Bearded vultures soared thru the mists above. Guarded by scouts toting Kalashnikov rifles, we climbed through several distinct ecological zones: scrubby Erica trees draped with moss gave way to open belts where bands of Gelada Monkeys foraged amongst heather tussocks spiked with 25' high towers of giant Lobelia and Seuss-like Red Hot Pokers. We saw Klipspringer antelope, spotted a pair of rare Ethiopian wolves hunting mole rats, and higher up we

spied herds of ibex clambering across the cliffs. We climbed several peaks, including 15,000' Ras Dshen, the tallest mountain in Ethiopia and 4th highest in Africa.

After touring the 11th century stone-hewn churls of Lalibella, we did a second trek in that region, eating dinner by the fire in a thatch roofed, mud-walled hut with two donkeys, a cow and chicken also in attendance. Later, we did a game drive in





Awash National Park, which included witnessing a dominance contest between two bull Oryx and watching a family of Spotted Hyenas emerging from their den at dusk, stretching, and then loping off to hunt.

Perhaps it is trite to say this, but my strongest memory is of the people – they are so incredibly friendly and welcoming, whether it is the spice shopkeeper today who laughed as he identified and explained his wares to us

ignorant visitors – or the schoolchildren who flock to us when we cross through their village, excited and eager to practice English. The people are incredibly poor – the vast majority practicing subsistence farming far from roads without even a tin roof and certainly no electricity. All fields are tended by hand or with the use of oxen, and the plows and threshing forks are all bespoke, hand crafted affairs. Many children have to walk 3 hours – each way – to get to primary school, where they sit on the earthen floor in a class of 70 or more. Some hounded us for pens or money for food, but overall they were wonderful (especially so our guides, drivers and scouts). Their smiles are so genuine and beautiful.



That said, there is some political and religious violence with 64 killed in the past few days. As a result we have abandoned our trip to the Bale Mountains and instead fly to Tigre. More soon.

XO

D+M

PS Look carefully at the fire-side scene. One of the Donkeys is behind and to the right of the white-shirted man. The cow is harder to spot – behind the man to the left of the white shirt. Bottom picture is school kids running to say hello.