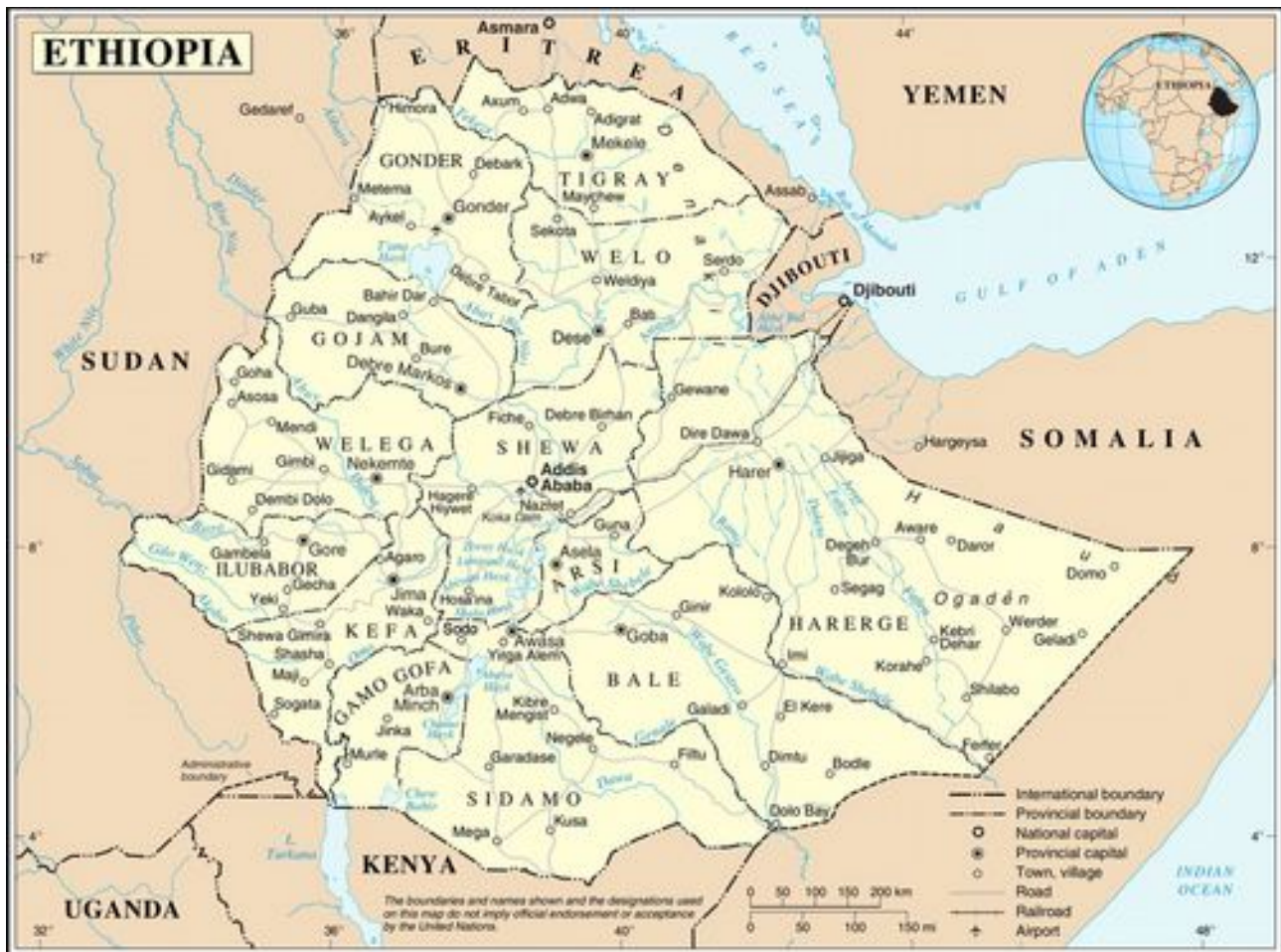


Ethiopia October 6th - 27th 2018

Map of Ethiopia



Ethiopia Day 9 Sunday 14th October 2018

Addis Ababa- Gondar

Beth departs for Windhoek, Sheilagh and I set off on our adventure we met at our hotel for an early morning shuttle to the airport.

It got a bit chaotic, but we made our flight which was just 50 minutes away. Our trekking guide Asresahegn Molla was there to meet us, he looked a little different with longer hair and a beard, and had a friend with him.

We took a local taxi to our little guest house called the Sycamore Pensyon. As it was still early morning the courtyard was draped with sheets, and major washing was going on!

We spent two hours or so wandering around the town, which was peaceful on a Sunday morning and full of people dressed beautifully coming back from church. Of course we went to a coffee shop, and indeed had a few photo opportunities before coming back to rest at the Pensyon. Asre went off to meet a few more clients. We will meet for lunch and then a city tour.

Well, we met for lunch at Master Chef restaurant, where we had a bowl of soup, and then met our cook and another couple who are joining us for part of the trek. They are both from London, Naem is a Bulgarian Turk who works in the travel business, and Rahsan is Turkish. They have just been travelling in the Omo region of the south.

In the afternoon we repeated the tour of the main sites I had seen last Sunday, from the Castle area with all the palaces to the wonderful church, and then the baths. I did not mind going again, and this time we took a taxi and had a local guide called Philomen who filled in some of the details I had picked up last time. We had paid Asre, so we think he was away organising things for our trek

Time to relax in our room at the Sycamore Pensyon before meeting everyone at the Four Sisters restaurant for dinner.









Ethiopia Day 10 Monday 15th October 2018

Gondar – Debarq – Sankaber Camp (3,200m)

3-4hrs driving, 11.2 kms 3 hours walking

We met Asre at the hotel around 7:30 and walked around the streets to breakfast at a hotel overlooking the central square. We were joined by Anita, a young German who is joining our trek for a few days. Back in our minibus which had been hired for the day to take us into the Simien Mountains.

We picked up Naem and Rahsan from the AG Hotel which had been very noisy as it had been for Beth and I. We all set off in the mini bus for Debarq where supplies were picked up, and the park permits were bought while we five had the coffee ceremony at a local coffee house watching the world go by.

We finally were dropped off to start walking around 12:30, beyond where Beth and I had turned around. The walk was wonderful, hugging the cliff edge, and so many wild flowers to identify. Asre is pretty good and between us we identified many. The views were wonderful, we had baboons along the way, and so many birds of prey, which are almost impossible to identify, but Asre is pretty good. We saw various buzzards, vultures and the big billed raven. Many species of plants and birds are endemic to Ethiopia.

We sighted our camp from afar and climbed up-to Sankabar at 3250m. It is the first camp in the park, and has one or two round cooking places as well as one disgusting loo. There were lots of other groups there, the worst being a very large and noisy French group whose tents were all around ours as they arrived late. We had a convivial meal in the circular building, and of course had tea, coffee and popcorn on arrival. Sheilagh and I have a good tent, and the sleeping bags provided by Asre were fine and warm, and we slept in our thermal underwear. We were warmed by our soup and vegetable spaghetti dinner. Slept spasmodically because of our rather loud French neighbours.













Ethiopia Day 11 Tuesday 16th October 2018

Sankaber (3,200m) – Geech Camp (3,600m)

Walking 8.5 hours 18.5kms

After a hearty breakfast, we set off trekking along the ridge with stunning views over the foothills 800m below. For the first two hours the trail passes through low bush of Giant Heather, soda apple, Abyssinian rose, St John's Wort and Globe thistle. The highlight of the trek from Sankaber to Geech is Genbar Falls, an incredible 500m sheer drop. From the viewpoint opposite, you can watch the falcons, augur buzzard and lammergeier bearded vulture soar on the thermals below. We made plenty of stops to admire the views, flowers and birds.

From the Genbar falls, the trail passes drier dustier land, where cattle, goats and were being grazed. We descended to a smaller river and falls, but because it was the rainy season it had to be crossed by walking through it or taking a mule. Rahsan and I opted for the latter! On the other side we had our picnic lunch before having a two hour climb up to the Geech Camp. Unfortunately it was raining for this part of the journey which made the trail particularly slippery in places, but we were rewarded by the first sighting of the endemic giant lobelia. At first sighting it looks like cordyline foliage with an echium giant flower on the top - quite amazing.

We made it to the camp for 4:30 and were welcomed by flasks of tea and coffee and bowls of popcorn. The site is spectacular and very high up, so spectacular views will be had, but it is oh so cold. Sheilagh and I arranged for a small bowl of hot water and did a spit wash in the tent before changing into thermal underwear. I am wearing my polartec pants from Taiwan days, and my Point Five duvet from the 1975 Overland to India trip.







Ethiopia 12 Wednesday 17th October 2018

Geech (3,600m) – Imet Gogo (3,926m) – Siha Gorge – KedaDit – Geech (3,600m)

Walking 5-6 hrs / 11.6km

I was bright and sunny but distinctly chilly as we sat out for morning coffee and breakfast. Our trekking day started at 9am, and the first two hours were along a grassy plateau with countless unusual giant lobelia plants, these are indigenous to Ethiopia and only grow at this high altitude, with Asre standing at the side, we figured they grew up to around 24 feet. They take 7 years to flower. We continued steadily upwards until we came to an incredibly rocky promontory called Imet Gogo, which was a real struggle to climb, especially in the mist, but when we reached the top we were assured that normally there is a 360 degree view of the Simien Range from our height of 3926m. We settled in for a while in the hope that the mist would clear, and we were rewarded with spasmodic views of utterly spectacular scenery from our rocks the mist rising and falling it reminded me of Chinese paintings. One of the most bizarre events was that Naem had brought a drone all the way up and was able to launch it to capture some of the views as the cloud and mist rose and fell. Toys for the boys, It buzzed like a bee!

As the chill set in we headed back, and with everyone's help, I made it up and down the difficult bits. We had a long grassy walk, mainly down with another

view opportunity over the Siha Gorge, and although we stopped for lunch, the rain set in, so we hiked back to camp for around 3:30pm. Tea and popcorn awaited us.

We spent awhile chatting and Berhane produced a pizza for afternoon tea which was a surprise as we thought it was for dinner. We had a good sighting of a vulture at camp and some very colourful birds on the lobelia flowers. Some new flowers today at this high altitude all to be identified later.





Ethiopia Day 13 Thursday 18th October 2018

Geech (3600m) – Innatye (4070m) - Chennek (3,620m)

Walking 7 -8hours / 17kms

'Today is the longest and arguably most spectacular passing close to the ridge most of its length. After breakfast you will head back on the path towards Imet Gogo before detouring SE towards Inatye. The path drops into a forest of Giant Hazel before following the ridge on open grassland. The climb to Inatye (4,070m) rewards with stunning views. Inatye roughly translates as "mamma mia" and the terrifying vertical drop here justly warrants the name! After a picnic lunch the path follows mostly downhill through open grassland and giant lobelia towards Chenek with a number of stunning viewpoints along the way. Chenek camp is superb for wildlife with both Gelada Baboons and Wallia Ibex common here. '

Well, that was the description of today's trek! The day started with us already packed for breakfast at 6:30. The tent and bags were being transported onwards, this time by a 4 x 4 as Berhane, Niam, Rahsan and Anita were leaving us at Chenek camp.

The early morning was very clear so we had good views, and were accompanied by a mule just in case I needed it! The climb was pretty tough for me because of the altitude, but with frequent stops I did make it with everyone else. Anita, Rahsan and the scout were always looking out for me. We climbed into the clouds and only got brief glimpses of the stunning views. Layers of clothing came off, and then came on again as the trees were dripping with water. We saw more giant lobelia and knifophia as well as some of the lower growing alpine, there were several baboon troops along the way, and this morning we saw a pair of red fox from the campsite.

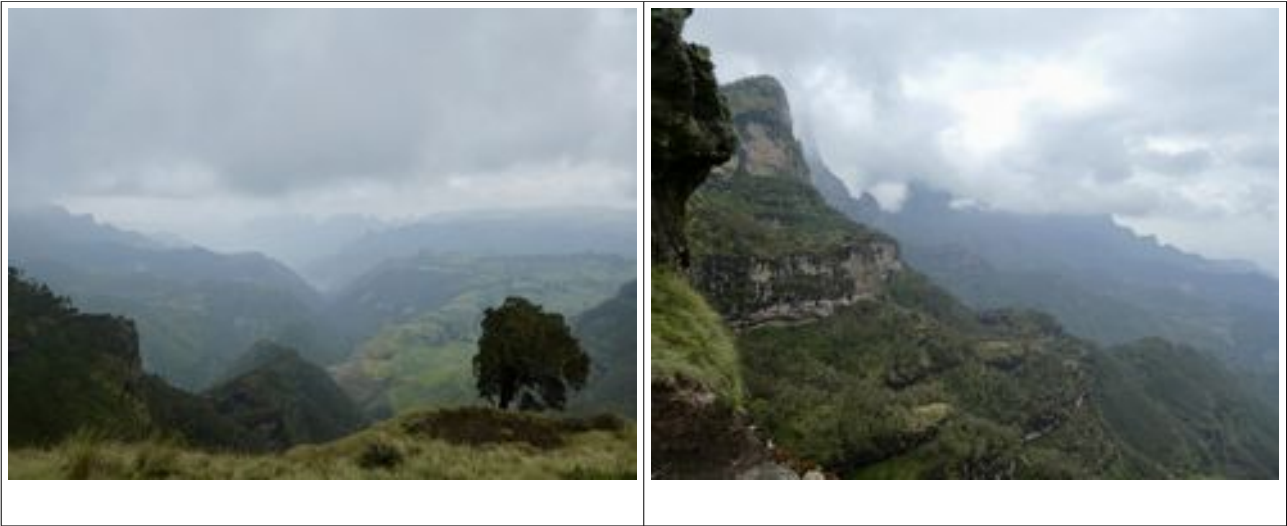
When there were views they were of sheer drops of at least 500 meters which was pretty amazing, and way down below we could see villages on high plateaus, which in themselves would be amazing to get to. It really felt like an achievement to get to the very top. Lunch of an egg sandwich followed by Rahsan's kitkat never tasted so good.

It was downhill all the way, following contours, and then some rocky steep bits, but we made it down for 2:40, which was amazing. We all had popcorn and coffee, and then presented the tips to all relevant people before Berhane took the leavers for a last trip by road near the summit of the mountain we are to climb tomorrow. Suddenly there was just Sheilagh and me left with our tent. The Assistant Cook has become our cook, and we have one day and two nights before we return to Addis-Abeba to begin the third part of our trip.

We had dinner in the round hut with lentil soup followed by vegetables and rice including aubergine, and then a really good fire with no smoke. Asre provided a bottle of wine for the last night in Chennek which was very kind. The people who live in the remote mountain villages of the Simien have no power, but do have wells and at this time of year copious water from the mountain streams.







Ethiopia Day 14 Friday 19th October 2018

Chennek (3620m) --Mount Buahit(4430m) –Debark

Relatively dry in the morning. We had breakfast in the round hut like the night before, and the cook had made some really good thick porridge which was perfect. We set out from the camp at 8 am, feeling quite strange with just Asre, Sheilagh, Ali the Scout with his gun and me. It was a steady climb into the mist, and as we were going higher than ever before, we needed frequent stops to catch the breath. I was pleased for lessons learned many years ago when climbing Yushan in Japan about concentrating on breathing out through the mouth and in through the nose.

We did get some great views as we climbed up a ridge, but the biggest excitement of the day was seeing a herd of the rare Walia Ibex, which only occur in the Simien Mountains and until quite recently were down to very small numbers. There were several young in the herd, which mixes with the Gelada baboons, so we thoroughly enjoyed watching them for quite awhile.

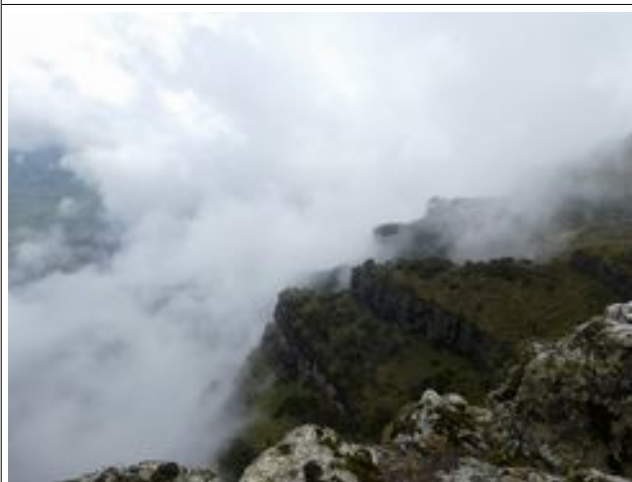
Asre had carried coffee up with him, and after we had stopped for a drink at around 4200m we reached the decision not to go any higher, partly because it was shrouded in cloud and we would not have had a view and also we had no need to just do it for the sake of going up as we had already achieved so much. We all enjoyed the downward walk, able to chat along the way, and getting down in time to eat our picnic egg sandwich before the lift down the mountain came for 1 pm. A lovely coincidence was that we bumped into Teddy from Addis who had just brought up a group to the Simien for the day from Debark - he looked so neat and tidy, but what a warm reunion.

The journey was on a spectacular dirt road, quite challenging at times up and over the mountain gains for 2 hours, and quite difficult because of all the rain. We saw parts of our trail from the first two days, but again had a lucky wildlife sighting of two Klipspringer, which are a small antelope with very limited numbers in the park again. So with this, the 'red fox, which is the Ethiopian

Wolf, the Gelada baboons and the Walka Ibex we have been really lucky.

Back in Debark, Asre had found us a hotel with hot water. It is on the main drag, called the Jasmine Hotel and although pretty basic it does indeed have hot water, so we are completely cleansed which feels so good. We look forward to having clean clothes after our visit to Tanya in Addis tomorrow.

We went down to the bar restaurant which was full of people having a beer out on a Friday night. We ordered a spicy fasting injera, and were pleased when Asre and his friend came and helped us finish it!





Ethiopia Day 15 Saturday 20th October 2018

Debark -- Gondar ---- Addis Abeba

We had a leisurely breakfast of coffee and scrambled eggs, repacked, and then went down to the Saturday market which was full of people, animals and activity.

We were picked up just after 11 to drive to Gondar where we had a bowl of soup for lunch before heading out for the airport and our flight to Gondar which went via Aksum. The flight was almost entirely full of locals with three Chinese. We landed in Addis around 7pm, and Asre had arranged a car to take us to Tanya's flat. As the airport is right downtown, this makes timing very

Overnight with Tanya Cotter in Addis, a British Council colleague of Sheilagh whom I had met in Rwanda. She had a spacious flat, and looked after us so well with a great supper and hospitality. Late to be after a welcome hot shower.



Important contacts I would recommend

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