

Hey Colby ES!

Reporting live from the patio of the Jimma Central Hotel in Southwestern Ethiopia. After completing the first week of our journey, we want to fill you in on all that we have been up to! We started a week ago today flying from Portland to New York to Dubai to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. We only had one hold up in New York when Grey was stopped and questioned by security for having a 'suspicious' carry-on: after explaining that the aluminum rod wrapped in several layers of GIS maps was a butterfly net, the security officers all remembered their butterfly-catching days and waved us through with a chuckle.



A whopping 27 hours after we took off from The Hill, we were especially excited to check out the city of Addis, meet up with Ellen (who had been visiting family in Tanzania), and sip some of the famous Ethiopian buna (coffee). We did all of the above in style, slept, and took off the next morning for a long road trip westward to the Gambella Region. The 13+ hours in the car gave us an incredible opportunity to watch the landscape change between grasslands, Afromontane forests, highlands, and cleared areas for agriculture and villages.

When we rolled into Gambella Town, we were very happy to break from the car, and we were soon treated to the world-renowned Special Ful (pronounced “fool” and consisting of an amazing combination of mystery ingredients – but we do know there are beans and a slice of egg in it). As it turned out, Special Ful not only filled our bellies with special ingredients, it also provided an opportunity to meet the very special individuals who make up the Horn of Africa Regional Environment Center & Network (HoA-REC&N) team working on environmental conservation and management projects in Gambella. Members of this incredible organization were Ellen, Marie, and Grey's project partners during this past semester for the 2013 International Environmental Policy Capstone.



Our week working with HoAREC&N-Gambella began with a formal presentation of our Capstone research, which set the pace for a week of idea and method sharing. Discussing our research from this past semester allowed us to see how our work contributes to the specific projects and broader goals of HoAREC&N. During our time working in the office, Marie and Jacob focused on data analysis of new community surveys studying shea butter production and other non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in rural communities, while Ellen and Grey worked on GIS analyses of animal migrations and land use in the Gambella Region. Our team then came back together to conduct a training workshop with local university

students covering the installation and use of open-source data analysis software. Thanks in large part to Manny, the workshop was a hit!!

Later in the week we were able to get outside the office and visit local rural communities to learn more about the location of shea trees and the community production process of shea butter. Specifically, we conducted several transects through the 'bush' to map the current location and health of this resource. We then met with members of the only shea cooperative in Gambella, who walked us through the production steps, giving us insight into the time and energy required to benefit economically from this wild tree product. By testing data collection methods and establishing relationships in the field, we have begun to realize the incredible research potential for Colby students working in Gambella in the coming years.



The next phase of our Ethiopian Expedition will bring us northward to Debre Markos and Bahir Dar where we will spend the coming weeks checking out approximately 30 of the 7,853 church forests that Jacob and Ellen have coded in the GIS lab over the past two years. Marie and Travis will be sporting their matching olive green goulashes to test water quality in church forest streams as Grey puts his butterfly nets to use sampling insect biodiversity.

We hope all is good in Waterville and can say that we are not missing the frostbite and bursting pipes, but we will be back in couple weeks!

Much love,
Ellen, Marie, Jacob, Grey, and Travis



Trip Stats to Date

Pounds of injera consumed: 457

Number of military escorts: 2

Number of almost-hit cattle standing in the road: 117

Number of toothbrushes thrown into toilets: 1

Number of white-eared kob spotted: 0 (we'll keep looking, Colin)

Number of car trips during which Travis has fallen asleep: all of them