

Dear Friends

With the current season drawing towards a close, TESFA is working with local communities to extend the chain of community trekking sites.

In Meket TESFA is assisting two more communities to construct accommodation sites, and on Abuna Yoseph work has started on the first site outside Meket. Clients will be able to trek from Lalibela town and use this site as a base for exploring Ethiopia's 3rd highest massif.



Timkat at Mequat Mariam (Mark Chapman)

Meket Community putting their tourism profits to good use: Mequat Mariam, the first community tourism site in Ethiopia, has begun to set up a grainbank to support its members through periods of grain shortage and high prices.

To set this up the community is using more than 80,000 birr from its profits to buy cheaper grain from Gojam to set up the bank. Until now small amounts have been used to pay members' land taxes or to provide micro-credit (itself generating interest). This is the first time that a large chunk of a communities profits will be used. Save the Children UK and Meket Woreda Cooperatives Office are providing technical support to the community.

Ambassadors' Wives Fund supports work with new communities.

In response to numerous comments from guests and to reach out to new communities in between the existing community accommodation sites, TESFA is starting to develop lunch stops.

Up until now guests have been given a very basic picnic to sustain themselves through the day's walk, but now TESFA will train small groups of women from communities in between the accommodation sites to prepare a spread of vegetable dishes served on traditional *enjara* bread, with the local *ambasha* bread for those who do not like *enjara*. Following the food a coffee ceremony will be prepared, one of the highlights of the Ethiopian experience. This will not only improve the service to guests, but will provide an important source of income to vulnerable households in another community. TESFA wish to thank the Ambassadors' wives fund for the generous support allowing TESFA to develop the first of these lunch stops between Mequat and Wajela, and Wajela and Aterow.



Making enjara bread (teff pancake) the traditional staple food (Mark Chapman)

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Experience the Real Ethiopia



Timkat at Mequat Mariam

Timkat is the most famous of Ethiopia's festivals. It celebrates the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. The literal meaning of Timkat is Baptism, but it is often called 'Epiphany' (see Newsletter Vol 2).

This year Mark accompanied six guests on a Timkat Special. They spent two nights at Mequat Mariam so that the whole day of celebrations could be enjoyed.

On Timkat eve Mequat's two tabots (replicas of Moses' tablets of stone) were carried to a sacred glade of trees on the cliff where they spent the night in the company of many of the parishioners, drinking local beer. Each tabot is dedicated to a saint - Mequat's main tabot is Mariam (St.Mary) but it has a second dedicated to Gabriel.

On Timkat morning after mass, the whole community was led in a procession to a nearby spring, whose water was blessed with an old cross (above picture). The head priest took great pleasure in throwing water at everyone. It was a joyous moment with huge smiles all round. Back at the sacred glade, in the company of the tabots, more food was eaten and beer drunk, before the tabots were processed back to the church with great pomp and ceremony. The church yard was then the scene of further dancing and celebrations, into which the guests were joyfully thrust.

The next day is the feast of St Mikael, any Mikael tabots stay an extra night at their sacred spot before being processed to their church. We managed to reach one such Mikael procession just before it left a small flat area beneath a cliff.

Having been sprayed liberally with perfume (blessed for the occasion) and after a special display of dancing by the debtara (unordained clergy trained in church music and rituals), we were then invited to accompany the procession up the steep slope to the plateau top.



Back on top of the escarpment, a number of horsemen of various ages gathered, most on horses that were decked out with colourful pom poms. At a given signal they galloped round the procession three times and then raced off, chasing each other into the distance. After a while we left the procession to make its way across the fields to the church and we resumed the trek along the escarpment to the Wajela community site.

It had been a Timkat I will never forget - so wonderful to spend it as guests of the community joining their ancient pageant.



Horsemen celebrate Mikael the parish of Meskal (Mark Chapman)

Due to the rainy season (*Krempt*) the Meket community sites will close in mid July and re-open in late September. However there is a risk of rain anytime from now until October.



Experience the Real Ethiopia

Community Tourism making a real impact

TESFA conducted a series of impact assessments last September to see how the CbT income is benefitting individuals. One of the cooks interviewed was **Dassash Enanaw** from Mequat Mariam, aged 30, who lives with her father and two brothers. Unusually for the area she reached Grade 7 at school.

"As a cook at Mequat Mariam for around 3 years I earn 5 birr a day. I have used this income to purchase items for household consumption (eg: spices, salt, coffee, vegetables such as onions and garlic, and grain). I have also used the money to buy clothes for my family and I. My life has seen good progress from before. Previously I faced shortages at home of food items for the family, but now such shortages are reduced. I have also been able to avoid selling property such as chickens, sheep and grain." [Translated from Amharic]



Dassash (Suzie Grant)

When asked regarding who benefits from the CbT activity in the community, she said that "all members benefit regardless of gender and age." When asked about what from her training she has implemented at home she stated that she has cooked:

"Chicken in the way learned from the cooking training, but not rice due to its high price. I also now practice the hygiene that I learned."

Summary of bookings & community incomes from Oct 06 - Mar 08 - in Ethiopian Birr

Period / Quarter	tl guest	nights	guest	Total Fee	Total Income	Total Expenditure	CTE Total Profit	25% CTGE	15% TSU	No Grps	Av Grp size
Total for Q4 06	63	58	151	39,960	25,442	9,305	16,137	9,225	5,535	19	3.32
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 last 6 months	360	451	1010	284,790	170,631	65,387	105,244	70,148	42,089	93	3.87
Total last year	448	549	1218	344,870	209,157	83,651	125,507	85,498	51,299	126	3.56



Haystacks near Aterow (Mark Chapman)

Bookings & income up to March 2008

This was the best 1st quarter ever, although compared to the last quarter of 2007 there has been a small drop off in bookings. Bookings could have been a little higher but there were times when there were not enough guides since up to 2 guides had to be off work at one time. TESFA will train more for the coming season.

We at TESFA, and the communities we work with, wish to thank our donors for their invaluable support over the last year: Irish Aid, Save the Children UK, British Embassy, German Embassy, Responsibletravel.com, Tresillian Trust, Ambassadors' Wives' fund, ICAP and a number of private individuals.



Experience the Real Ethiopia

The Gelada Baboon (*Theropithecus gelada*) is the last species in a once great dynasty of grass-grazing primates. Some three million years ago several species, one as large as a gorilla, ranged throughout Africa and into India, but all except Ethiopia's gelada vanished as the African continent warmed and its grasslands shrank. Only in the cool mountains of northern Ethiopia did a gelada friendly habitat survive. Today it is believed that up to 200,000 geladas remain. Although they are not endangered, geladas are considered threatened because of their fragmented habitat and Ethiopia's growing human population and expanding farmlands. Pastures and fields now encroach on mountainous afro-alpine environments. Elsewhere geladas live alongside farmers who use almost every available metre of land.



Mequat Gelada, courtesy of Malcolm Smart

The Ethiopian Gelada Baboon, like the Hyrax (featured in the last issue) is the last of its kind. They differ from other primates in their diet and social behaviours. Geladas live in mountains grazing in fields and meadows, sleeping on the rocky ledges of cliff faces, whereas most other African primates live in forests or low-lying savannah. Like their closest relatives, the *Papio* baboons, geladas live in societies with tight female bonds: a female-centric social organization. The gelada sisterhood is organized around family units of between two and eight related females, their offspring, and a primary male, called the family male. While other subordinate males are often attached to this basic unit, only the family male mates with the females and none of these males have any say in what the family does from day to day. Instead, the females decide everything: how long and where to graze, when to move, where to sleep. They also choose the family male and are not shy about demanding what they want from him, whether it is grooming, fighting on their behalf, or sex.

Today large groups of gelada can be seen in many afro-alpine mountains, the best known being the Simiens, but also in Abuna Yoseph behind Lalibela. Smaller groups can also be seen near escarpments across Wollo. The Wollo Gelada has a more chocolate coloured mane, as compared with the sandy colour of the Simien Gelada. They are easiest to see once the harvest has been collected as while there are crops in the field the farmers keep the gelada away to prevent them raiding the crops.

What the Meket Guests are saying about their experience with the communities:



Tasting fresh enjera (Mark Chapman).

Hilary Spriggs (Canada) said: "I just wanted to say a big thank you. The TESFA trek that my friend and I did last week was the highlight of our two weeks in Ethiopia. I was amazed by the scenery and very impressed with the organization and professionalism of all the local staff.

I would also like to heartily commend our guide. I have been on many guided trips and have come to realize that guiding is an art-form;.....It is a talent that is not easily taught and takes a unique personality. [Our guide] was one of the best I have come across!

Once again, thanks to you and all your team for an unforgettable experience!" April 2008

Dan Hedley emailed us to say: "Thank you so much for arranging an amazing and life-changing trek for me! It was a wonderful experience from start to finish and the highlight of my holiday in Ethiopia. I will be recommending a TESFA trek to everyone I know! Please send my thanks to everyone involved!" Mar 07

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