



Peace Corps Response Volunteer Dot Burrill conducts a focus group with PCVs and their counterparts in Jamaica. The first non-RPCV to serve as a Response Volunteer, Burrill helps provide counseling service to children and adolescents and their families.

GOLDEN YEARS FROM PAGE 1 ■■■■■■■■▶

nered with AARP, an advocacy group for people 50 and older. The partnership is meant to encourage AARP members and all people 50+ to consider serving with the Peace Corps.

The two organizations are also encouraging RPCVs and AARP volunteers to serve together in their communities.

In January, the Peace Corps also opened Peace Corps Response to anyone with at least 10 years of work experience and required language skills.

Dot Burrill, 73, is the first non-RPCV to serve as a Response Volunteer. She is working with a local community center that provides counseling service to children and their families to help establish an anti-bullying curriculum for troubled youth in the provinces sur-

rounding Kingston, Jamaica.

“I’ve been in love with [the Peace Corps] since I heard of it,” said Burrill, who has three grown children and six grandchildren.

Bernard “Bernie” Cheriff, 81, of New York, N.Y., recently completed his service, working as a youth and community development Volunteer in central Ukraine. Cheriff helped an English language school grow from one student to more than 100 students. He also helped develop a business plan and accounting system for the school.

Cheriff recommends Peace Corps service for every age group. “Would I volunteer for Peace Corps again? The answer is yes,” he said. “If I needed something, I would point and just keep smiling, and it worked.”

“Mr. Cheriff is a superb example of how all Americans can make an impact

in a developing country at any stage in life,” Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams said of the octogenarian.

Arthur Goodfriend of Honolulu, Hawaii, was the oldest Volunteer in Peace Corps’ history. He was 87 when he completed his service in Hungary in 1994.

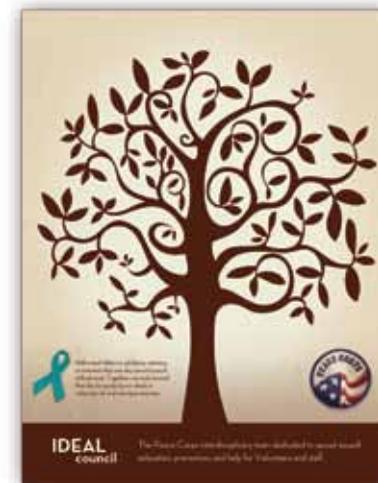
For PCVs over the age of 50, Stout offers a word to the wise: “Relax and enjoy this time away from the ‘rat race.’ Be glad you have fewer worries related to career, home, and family.

Indulge in the simplicity of living with less and relying more on your mental, emotional, and physical strength.”

And for those Volunteers who have not reached that magical plateau of 50+, Black concluded, “Don’t think it’s over at 50-something or 60-something. The older we are, the more we have to give back.”

IDEAL COUNCIL FROM PAGE 1 ■■■■■■■■▶

uation of an upcoming online staff training tool; and the shaping of agency policy, including the interim policy of immunity from Peace Corps disciplinary action for victims of sexual assault and other crimes.

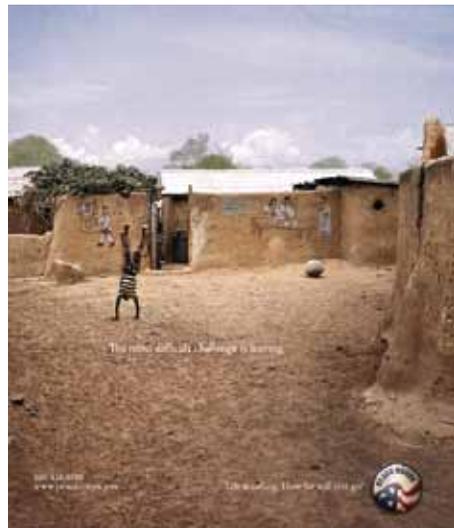


In April, the IDEAL Council helped organize a series of events as part of National Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month, including a Tree of Hope that was displayed at Peace Corps headquarters. Volunteers and staff members were invited to add a teal ribbon in solidarity, memory, or intention that one day sexual assault will not exist. The response was global and heartfelt.



Future projects of the IDEAL Council include: assisting in the development and fielding of an anonymous Volunteer crime survey; conducting a situational analysis of crime in-country; and evaluating findings of, and continuing training for, Volunteers and staff in sexual assault prevention, awareness, and response.

Social Media Corner: PSA Poster Receives Record Response



The Peace Corps recently posted on Facebook a public service announcement poster from a 2007 recruitment campaign. The poster shows a boy in a traditional African village doing a handstand and reads, “The most difficult challenge is leaving.”

While many old posters frequently find their way to our social media sites, this one sparked an unusual outpouring of responses, with 1,859 likes, 451 shares, and 166 comments. Many of the responses were from returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and while some disagreed with the statement, the over-

whelming sentiment was that leaving really was the most difficult challenge to come from service.

“This picture of a little African boy doing a cartwheel was all over people’s Facebook walls, and once I clicked on it, it definitely spoke to me as an RPCV. There are so many awesome things about serving in the Peace Corps, as well as many tough things, but the toughest thing was leaving, and missing things like that little boy doing cartwheels,” said Angel Velarde (RPCV/Cameroon, 2007-2009).

The Peace Corps’ Facebook page is

a great place to share and interact with fellow Volunteers, RPCVs, and fans of the Peace Corps who are interested in learning about the real experiences of Volunteers. You can even learn more about what your fellow Volunteers are doing in the field and connect with people who understand the unique experience of being a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Not a fan yet? “Like” the Peace Corps on Facebook to join the conversation! www.facebook.com/peacecorps

That Was Then ... This is Now

Training Methods Change, But not the Message

Brazil RPCV Richard Sanders, who would later gain fame as an actor and screenwriter, recalls a training session in 1966 that included instructions about the proper way to wring a chicken's neck. "I don't think Les Nessman would have made a very good Peace Corps Volunteer," he told *People Magazine* in 1981, referring to the character he played on the 1978-1982 series "WKRP in Cincinnati."

It's unlikely that Nessman would have even made it through training in the 1960s, with daily 12-hour sessions focused on language, cross-cultural, technical, and physical endurance training, all conducted in venues ranging from the slums of New York City to the rain forests of Puerto Rico. The Peace Corps has long been a pioneer in experiential intercultural learning, immersing Americans in overseas cultures to create long-term "learning by doing" opportunities.

Today, Peace Corps training is undergoing a major overhaul through a strategy called Focus In/Train Up (FITU). It takes the promising practices developed throughout the globe over the past 50 years to a new level. The approach calls upon the Peace Corps to scale up highly effective Volunteer projects and work activities to maximize the agency's impact.

Through this strategic effort, the Office of Overseas Programming and Training Support (OPATS) and the Office of Global Health and HIV is leading the agency in the development of global core and sector competencies, standardized training materials, and indicators for Volunteer

reporting worldwide.

These new worldwide global core competencies prepare Volunteers to:

- Integrate into the community
- Facilitate participatory community development
- Exemplify professional Peace Corps service

Additionally, under this new approach, each Volunteer receives training in global sector competencies aligned with his or her assignment area. For the remaining training, overseas posts will have a wide variety of training materials to choose from and localize.

FITU materials have been developed in conjunction with the field and the three Peace Corps regions: Africa; Europe, Mediterranean and Asia; and Inter-America and the Pacific.

FITU will ensure that no matter where a Volunteer serves, each will receive a high level of training that includes sessions on monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Standard sector indicators that will be used across the world have been created to enhance qualitative stories and help the Peace Corps see and share its impact on a global level.

JJ Di Bella, Focus In/Train Up project leader, says overseas and headquarters staff and Volunteers have contributed to a highly collaborative process. "We have gathered and vetted overseas posts' promising practices and, with the help of our colleagues, created Peace Corps global core and sector training materials. Staff no longer will have to 'reinvent the wheel,' but instead work globally to 'improve the wheel,'" she says, adding, "We are now looking



to create an online system to continue to enhance these materials and connect our informal communities of practice. Through FITU, we are enhancing Peace Corps' ability to be a true learning organization. This is a very exciting time to be at the Peace Corps!"

Overseas staff and trainees report exceptional success for FITU. Following are just a few samples of the early feedback:

- "I've now piloted two of the four M, E, and R (monitoring, evaluation, and reporting) training sessions ... The timing, pace, and level of complexity/detail were spot-on."
- "The M, E, and R session has been the best session so far and this is why I joined the Peace Corps."

According to Sonia Stines Dere-noncourt, director of OPATS, Focus In/Train Up is a game-changer for the agency. "At its heart, it aligns what Volunteers have been doing best for 50 years with what countries are asking for today and provides support to train Volunteers to these standards. It is laying a foundation for another amazing 50 years."

ICE Provides Valuable Resources For PCVs

Are your classroom lessons starting to feel a bit monotonous? Are you struggling to build a working relationship with your host country counterpart? Or, how about help with understanding institutional capacity-building?

All this and more can be found in Peace Corps Information and Collection Exchange (ICE) publications. Currently, about 65 publications are available in print format. Also, the CD-ROM Sharing Promising Practices contains over 160 current and historical ICE publications in full-text format. If you did not receive the CD during training, send an email request to iceorders@peacecorps.gov.



Or, talk to your Information Resource Center (IRC) manager. Peace Corps IRC managers connect Volunteers to resources and welcome your questions. Country-specific information is also available in many of these centers, and taking the time to become familiar with your IRC manager can make your service more productive.

Many ICE publications have been developed by experts and Volunteers who have faced the same dilemmas today's Volunteers face. They found inspiration from former Volunteers and enhanced their projects with ideas from the past. Take the opportunity to join that network by perusing ICE's vast collection.

A selection of recent ICE publications are available for download from the public website at peacecorps.gov/library/publications.

Ideas for publications that may serve future Volunteers are also welcome.

Considering Service After the Peace Corps?

Is your service coming to a close? Have you considered serving in another country with the Peace Corps? Peace Corps Response has many great short-term high-impact assignments that will begin this summer and fall. Go to peacecorps.gov/response for a complete updated list.

| | Start Date | Position Title | Required Language(s) |
|------------|------------|--|----------------------|
| Ukraine | October | Fundraising/Public Relations Specialist at LGBT HIV-service NGOs | Russian, Ukrainian |
| Ukraine | October | Fundraising/Public Relations Specialist | Russian |
| Ukraine | October | Fundraising/Public Relations Specialist at HIV-service NGOs | Russian, Ukrainian |
| Fiji | October | Healthy Lifestyle Promotion Training Advisor | English |
| Madagascar | November | Disaster Response/Early Warning Systems Specialist | Malagasy |
| Jamaica | November | HIV Program Specialist | English |



Agency News

Conference of Mayors Passes PC Resolution

The U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution to support the Peace Corps during its annual meeting on June 16 in Orlando, Florida. The resolution was originally sponsored by Eugene, Oregon, Mayor Kitty Piercy, an RPCV.

“Peace Corps has a key role in building international understanding and friendship, as well as providing on-the-ground practical service to many around the world,” said Mayor Piercy, who served as a Volunteer in Ethiopia from 1964 to 1966. “Less recognized, perhaps, is what this experience contributes to communities here at home. I know that I have taken that experience and knowledge to inform and guide me as teacher, state legislator, and now mayor ... I have no doubt that Peace Corps Volunteers represent a vast and talented resource for this country as we struggle out of a difficult recession and prepare ourselves for a better future in a complex and ever smaller world.”

The resolution calls on mayors from across the U.S. to recognize the work being done by Peace Corps Volunteers worldwide and to encourage local citizens to consider Peace Corps service. Through the resolution, RPCVs will be urged to support city initiatives in their hometowns and local educators, and community groups are prompted to utilize free resources available through Peace Corps programs.

President of Liberia Visits Headquarters

Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams welcomed President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., on June 11 as part of the Loret Miller Ruppe Speaker Series. More than 3,910 Volunteers have served in Liberia since the program was established in 1962.

President Sirleaf discussed how the Peace Corps is helping Liberia to enhance its educational system, particularly in the post-conflict era. “The work of Peace Corps Volunteers in Liberia is a potent reminder that the agency’s mission is still in high demand after 51 years,” said President Sirleaf. “Volunteers have a very active role in the post-conflict reconstruction of Liberia, and they could not have returned to my country at a better time.”

There are currently 45 Volunteers serving in Liberia, including 15 Peace Corps Response Volunteers. All Volunteers work in the education sector.

President Sirleaf is the 24th president of Liberia and the first elected female head of state in Africa. She is serving her second term and in 2011 was one of three Nobel Peace Prize Laureates.

The Loret Miller Ruppe Speakers Series honors the agency’s longest serving director and is a forum for distinguished individuals to speak about issues related to the Peace Corps’ mission.

Director Welcomes 21 NHLI Fellows

Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams welcomed 21 Fellows from the National Hispana Leadership Institute (NHLI) to Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., on June 21. The Fellows, aged 18 to 24, had lunch with Director Williams and learned about the benefits of Peace Corps service.



Liberia President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf speaks to staff members at Peace Corps headquarters on June 11 as part of the Loret Miller Ruppe Speakers Series.

“Both Peace Corps and NHLI have a lot in common, as we both seek to find our leaders of tomorrow and provide training and professional development opportunities,” said Williams. “It is my hope that in the future we’ll be able to identify National Hispana Leadership Fellows who are interested in making a difference at home and abroad through Peace Corps service.”

Director Williams highlighted the important role Hispanic Americans have played in representing the United States through the Peace Corps. Currently, more than 600 Hispanic Americans are serving as Volunteers in countries around the world.

“Serving with the Peace Corps is not only an opportunity to cultivate leadership skills, but also a chance to become an active member of our global community by developing friendships and helping others,” continued Williams. “It is very apparent that many of you have the skills and determination necessary to help promote peace at home and overseas, which is what we look for in

our Peace Corps Volunteers.”

Peace Corps Names Eight New CDs

Eight new Peace Corps country directors recently assumed their posts in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Jordan, Mongolia, Rwanda, and Vanuatu following a swearing-in ceremony and three weeks of training at Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps headquarters. Six of the new country directors are returned Volunteers.

“Peace Corps country directors are on the front lines, working directly with Volunteers and staff to address specific challenges and opportunities in each post. They also work diligently every day to find creative and innovative ways to inspire and support our Volunteers,” said Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams (RPCV/Dominican Republic, 1967-1970). “Each of these new country directors brings years of management and leadership experience to their work, and I am thrilled to welcome them to the Peace Corps family.”



Career Corner

Determine Your Digital Footprint?

submitting applications, you will get “googled.”

So what will employers learn about you when they research you online? The next time you find yourself at a keyboard, do a quick search for your name and find out.

(Note: You can also set up a search alert with various search engines so you’ll automatically be notified when new entries referencing your name are added.)

In 2011, over 80 percent of employers were utilizing social media platforms to hire new employees, and with that comes digital scrutiny. The importance of having a solid online reputation has never been greater; luckily, this is something you can affect.

Writing about your Peace Corps experience through a blog, a letter to the editor, or a guest column showcases not only the unique life you’re now living, it also provides you with a professional and poignant writing sample for employers to find, should they go looking (and they will).

Creating your own content allows you to build your brand and exercise control over your digital presence. One way to develop a personal brand is to incorporate many social media platforms into your job hunt. The choices are many, with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs among the popular options.

Make sure to exude professionalism in all of your online communications

and ask yourself, “Would I want my grandmother and my future employer to see this?”

When making initial contact with a potential employer, Twitter and LinkedIn can be great avenues to use, but make sure not to ask for a job outright. Instead, connect with the contact on a personal level by inquiring about their career path, research, or job duties. Once a connection is made, ask for an informational interview which, if done well, can help seal the deal.

The qualities and skills you have as a Peace Corps Volunteer are highly sought after by many organizations and employers. Best of luck with your service, happy blogging, and let us know how you fare at rvs@peacecorps.gov.

Whether you’ve just started your Peace Corps service, are getting ready to leave, or are somewhere in the middle, the question—“What will I do next?”—has surely crossed your mind. You may be thinking about employment, graduate school, or something else altogether. Whichever direction you head, you can be fairly certain that once you start



NOTES *from the* FIELD

A Brief Look at Posts and Projects

LIBERIA

New Library is
Talk of the Town

Volunteers Kristin Caspar (2011-2013) and Charlene Espinoza (2011-2013) worked with their local community to turn a dilapidated classroom in a local school into a full functioning library, complete with a librarian, computers, and children's section. Each day, 20 to 100 Liberian students utilize the library.

Supplies for the library were donated through a local organization. Current funds are generated through computer fees, with teachers, community members, and students providing contributions for the weekly and individual computer classes. The library has sparked an interest in reading throughout the town and teachers have seen a dramatic increase in student enrollment.



Shown is a library that was converted from a dilapidated classroom in Liberia. Twenty to 100 students use the facility each day.

MALAWI

Cookstoves Save
Environment, Dollars

Volunteers Johannah Murphy (2010-2012) and Brian Smyser (2010-2012) are working to reduce the impact of deforestation by introducing fuel efficient cookstoves to hundreds of community members. The environmentally friendly stoves not only cut wood consumption in half, but also produce less indoor air pollution, cook food faster, and save money. Last summer, Smyser led 15 weeks of training on the use and production of fuel efficient cookstoves, with a focus on the stoves as environmental, health, and business solutions for sustainable development.



Volunteer Brian Smyser and local Malawian villagers hold components of fuel efficient cookstoves that will help the community reduce the impact of deforestation.

SOUTH AFRICA

Boys Club
Engages Youth

Volunteer Charlie Merrow (2011-2013) leads an after-school boys club in his rural South African community to engage youth in the issue of identity development and healthy lifestyle techniques. Topics covered during the weekly meetings include challenging gender roles, HIV/AIDS awareness, and arts and crafts. In addition, permaculture workshops led by local permaculture trainers are held during club hours to teach members sustainable gardening techniques that allow them to create their own food gardens at home.

CAMBODIA

550+ Participate in
River Cleanup

Volunteers Kaija Bergen (2011-2013), Jenn Ozawa-Hanson (2010-2012), and Jake Hanson (2010-2012) organized a community river cleanup in their southern Cambodian village. More than 550 community members and local students divided into three groups to collect plastic bags, paper, and other litter from a 3-kilometer (1.8-mile) stretch of riverbank. Following the event, Volunteers Erik Mahan (2011-2013) and Katie Strong (2011-2013) distributed educational materials on the importance of environmental awareness.



Children clean the riverbank near their community in southern Cambodia. The event was organized by three Peace Corps Volunteers.

BELIZE

PCV Creates Computer
Language Training Program

Volunteer Nate Thompson (2010-2012) created a computer program to provide accessible language learning software in the primary native languages of Belize. The program is available for download and will be used by local businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and schools. The user-friendly program applies a combination of interactive pictures, text, and audio to teach users basic language foundations in a fun learning environment.

Prior to Thompson's program, few Belizean-language resources existed. This initiative ensures that the primary languages of Garifuna, Q'eqchi', Mopan, and Kriol will continue to thrive in Belize. The program features native speakers

and offers local residents, as well as newcomers, a chance to improve their language skills.

MOROCCO

Innovative Eyeglasses
Help Hundreds See

Students in need of corrective eye care received a shipment of 800 pairs of glasses through the help of Volunteers Philip Eubanks (2010-2012), Caity Connolly (2010-2012), and Katy Howell-Burke (2010-2012). The glasses allow users to simply turn a dial on the side of the frames to adjust the lenses.

Peace Corps Volunteers and host country nationals have been trained to screen and distribute glasses to students in a matter of minutes. As a result, many students with imperfect eyesight may now see a blackboard clearly for the first time.



A student in Morocco shows off the glasses she received through the help of three Peace Corps Volunteers.

ECUADOR

HIV Testing Benefits
Pregnant Women

Health education Volunteer Caitlin Leach (2010-2012) provides HIV counseling to more than 200 pregnant women each day in the largest public maternity hospital in Ecuador. Patients visit Leach before and after receiving an HIV test to learn about HIV prevention and transmission during childbirth. Leach also educates patients and their family members about HIV through lively activities and discussions. With the assistance of a licensed psychologist, Leach recently helped create a support group to encourage HIV-positive mothers to take medication.

ARMENIA

Gender Equality
Workshops Spread

Nine Volunteers worked with over a dozen community members to hold a workshop on gender and development. Focusing on gender inequality in Armenia, the event received funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development and focused on methods for youth empowerment and illumination of gender-based violence and stereotypes.

Workshop participants will conduct gender-related seminars in their respective communities, targeting at least 50 people each.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

'We are Women'
Continues to Expand

Peace Corps Volunteers from 27 communities throughout the Dominican Republic came together to host the 2012 "We Are Women" regional conferences.

Nearly 80 Dominican women participated in two three-day events, focusing on empowering women to become leaders by enacting positive, sustainable changes among their communities, organizations, and families.



Participants gather after one of two "We Are Women" regional conferences in the Dominican Republic. Nearly 80 women participated.

Volunteers discussed health issues, small business initiatives, and communal networking. "We Are Women" was started in 2010 and continues to expand each year.

PEACE CORPS | *Times*

A publication for Peace Corps Volunteers serving worldwide

Staff

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Maureen Knightly | <i>Director of Communications</i> |
| Kristina Edmunson | <i>Deputy Director of Communications</i> |
| Mark Huffman | <i>Editor</i> |
| Gregory Wilson | <i>Writer</i> |
| Eileen Conoboy | <i>Writer</i> |
| Kelly McCormack | <i>Writer</i> |
| Claudia Kuric | <i>Staff Contributor</i> |
| Bethany Poteat | <i>Staff Contributor</i> |
| Amber Smigiel | <i>Staff Contributor</i> |
| Kate Leisner | <i>Staff Contributor</i> |
| Juan Carlos Polanco | <i>Design and Layout</i> |
| Theresa Welling | <i>Design and Layout</i> |

We welcome all Volunteer submissions and suggestions. Contact us at:

Peace Corps Times
c/o Office of Communications
Paul D. Coverdell
Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526
or email
pctimes@peacecorps.gov

FPO FSC logo



By CHUCK ADAMS | PCV Ethiopia

Minutes after walking away from the oldest coffee tree in the world, Silje Heyland, a German college student studying fair-trade coffee practices in Ethiopia, had a sudden urge to go back. “Perhaps we can eat lunch under the tree,” she suggested. The rest of our expedition party—wet, tired, muddy, hungry—looked at her with unsympathetic eyes and decided it would be better to eat lunch at a nearby village, where there were primitive huts to duck into for shelter against the afternoon thunderstorm.

But as we hiked away from our goal for the day, known locally as Mother Coffee and located in the Makira wild coffee forest, I could sense Heyland’s disappointment. After five more minutes of hiking, we stopped at a junction and she blurted out an apology.

“I get irritated when I’m hungry and dehydrated,” she said. And then she wolfed down a package of crackers brought from home.

It’s not as easy as one might think to see the oldest known coffee tree in the world. It takes more time than you expect, so you might not pack adequate food and water. The trail is steep, sloppy, and guaranteed to give you blisters. So once you eventually reach the tree itself, you may be tempted to linger, but not for long.



From left, Andualem Alemeyahu of the Kafa Culture and Tourism Bureau shows German college student Silje Heyland and South Korean researcher Ohsoon Yun local “yayo” beans.

Coffee trees, you see, rarely grow much larger than a bush; their trunks no wider than an adult’s forearm. Mother Coffee stands approximately 20 feet tall and 8 inches thick. It’s noticeably larger than the surrounding coffee trees, but much smaller than, say, an average-size apple tree.

So why hike nine hours through some of the last remaining Afromontane cloud forest in Ethiopia in order to visit a tree that isn’t even big enough to protect you from a light downpour?

It’s a good question, and one that the Kafa Zonal Office of Culture and Tourism was hoping we could answer when it invited our party of researchers and Volunteers to visit Mother Coffee last year. Andualem Alemeyahu, a wiry young man working with the zonal office, would be our guide.

The Kafa region, in the southwest corner of Ethiopia, is commonly regarded as the birthplace of coffee. The flimsiest proof of this is given as vernacular: the English words coffee, café, and caffeine all seemingly derive from “Kafa.” The best proof of this is the Mother Coffee tree, visual proof that *coffea Arabica* has been

Volunteer Life

The Road to Mother Coffee

Coffee Trails Open Kafa Biosphere Reserve to Tourists

growing in this region for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Yet, of all the spectacular places to visit in Ethiopia—much less Africa—why visit the birthplace of coffee? Why visit a tree in the middle of the jungle?

The glut of tourists has more to do with infrastructure and development than a preference for luxury. Arriving in the regional capital of Bonga, the site of a national coffee museum under construction, independent travelers simply wouldn’t know where, or how, to start exploring.

All new destinations begin without tourist infrastructure and a population who rarely sees a foreigner. These challenges, however, can be met and overcome. This is allegedly what the Kafa region of Ethiopia is hoping to do, taking steps toward development without sacrificing that off-the-beaten path allure.

And so this is why I crossed a 60-foot deep gorge, walking on nothing more than four mud-slick logs: To see what Mother Coffee had to offer.

At dawn, fellow Volunteer Laura Harrington (2011-2013) and I gulped down tea at a café in Bonga, bought some bread for a snack, and hopped inside the Kafa Zone’s SUV. We picked up Heyland and Ohsoon Yun, a South Korean coffee tourism doctoral student, at a scenic lodge on the outskirts of Bonga that caters to package tourists and researchers.

The first leg of the trail to Mother Coffee is, thankfully, all downhill for 30 minutes to a remarkable natural bridge where a jungle river tunnels underground for about 50 meters.

We decamped under the natural bridge for photos. The rocks were slick and made for treacherous climbing next to the rain-swollen whitewater. This, I mused, could easily pass for the unexplored wilds of the Congo.

In June 2010, huge tracts of the remaining wild forests of Kafa were designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in honor of its intact biodiversity and unique cultural heritage as the origin of *coffea Arabica*. (See, even UNESCO says it’s true!) However, international protection does not automatically mean the forest will be preserved. Yun had sharp words to discuss with our guide about illegal wood harvesting she witnessed in the region. She admonished him to get his government to set up more roadside inspections.

The next segment of trail took us out of the “core” zone of the Biosphere Reserve and into the “transitional” zone of mixed farmland, forest-in-repair, and wild coffee cultivation. We met a local farmer, and our guide translated a question Yun had about a type of bush that yields a fruit very similar to coffee. Dubbed “yayo” in the local Kafinoono language, Yun believes this plant to be a predecessor to *coffea Arabica*. In her words, it’s the “missing link” of coffee evolution. The farmer disappeared into his hut and returned with a handful of yayo beans. Yun snapped photos of the beans and bagged them for research.

Our guide, Andualem, carried a journal that he never cracked open. Traveling light and fast, he didn’t even bring water. This may be the reason he was far ahead of us, beckoning for us to hurry. I kept feeling like we’d reach a fork in the trail and Andualem would go to the left and we’d go right, ending up in South Sudan.

Thankfully he stopped at every major trail hazard, such as the tree-bridge, the mud-slick scramble up a ridge, and the small village in a clearing, where farmers, children, and goats stopped what little tasks they were occupied with to stare at us. Luckily, I’d picked up

enough Kafinoono greetings to assure them our presence was friendly.

The extended family occupying this clearing are the sole caretakers of Mother Coffee, assuring its location goes unmarked, unharmed, and unknown to all except those with the best intentions. Being with a government official helped, and before long we were pointed in the right direction, leaving the main trail and going into a dense thicket of wild coffee trees.



Chuck Adams (Ethiopia, 2011-2013) stands next to the Mother Coffee tree.

After walking down a game trail for a few minutes, our guide pointed out the Mother Coffee tree, but it took awhile for us to see it. It took, literally, until we were an arm’s length from the tree to recognize its relative girth, its moss-covered branches, its strange split halfway up the tree—appearing like two arms reaching for the sky—before reality sunk in: This is one Huge Coffee Tree! Brewed coffee, a commodity that practically made the modern world what it is today, may have started with this tree. I kept looking around to see if any goats were wandering around in a buzz ...

Like Heyland, the German student, I was also hesitant to leave the birthplace of coffee, but for different reasons. Instead of slogging back to the Land Cruiser, dehydrated and drained, I wanted to rest in the afternoon shade and stay the night in the local village. To wake up the next morning to villagers making the “thud-thud-thud” sound of pounding fire-roasted coffee, to drink the traditional three cups of espresso-like buna, and to make the return journey wide awake and refreshed: These are things travelers dream about.

Instead, we made the four-hour return trip shortly after a lunch break, tired and delirious with dehydration.

We made it back to the Land Cruiser just as a rainbow grew over the biosphere reserve. I’ve heard that some Ethiopians believe it is bad luck to look at rainbows. I just hope they see the beauty in what they have, preserve it, manage it, and find a way to share it with the world without compromising it.

There is talk of improving the coffee trails to make them safer and less steep, of training local forest rangers to act as guides-for-hire, of setting up villages for trekker accommodation, all of which is fine. But the ultimate reason any traveler goes anywhere is to be in an environment unlike any other place on Earth. For now, the Kafa region of Ethiopia has that unique sense of place. By the time mass tourism arrives, it’ll hopefully have figured out the rest.

(Chuck Adams is an education Volunteer from Astoria, Oregon. He is scheduled to complete his service in 2013.)