

My experience on the Hudad plateau – April 2017

Perhaps the words “life-changing” with regard to an experience are overused. However, in my case, it is an apt description of my experience in Ethiopia. I had travelled once to Ethiopia about twenty years before on a cycling adventure. That was a wonderful experience and left me with a taste of the country. My recent experience on the Hudad was a totally different kind of engagement with the people, culture, and landscape....and one I am looking to repeat.

The most wonderful element of the experience was being brought right into the community of the Hudad, seeing how they live on a daily basis, and working side by side with them toward the goals of bettering their community and increasing the opportunities for their children. This is by any notion a poor and isolated community of people. They have very few material goods or wealth resources and live pretty much as they have for hundreds of years. Subsistence farming, living close on the land, and very little material support from the outside (until FOTH came along) are the hallmarks of life on the Hudad. I was frequently amazed and humbled to have the opportunity to meet, work, and live with these folks for a short period of time. They were wonderful in that they greatly appreciate the support that FOTH is providing and themselves are amazed why rich foreigners would come all the way around the world to their little corner to help. Kindness, laughs, and common emotions across the cultures ruled the day on the work site. It was hard, dirty, challenging work much of the time, but this is their life and I found it very meaningful to be reminded of the common threads among people....regardless of their circumstances of wealth or privilege. Meeting the “elders” and hearing of their experiences about living an entire life nearby on the plateau and engaging with the kids that are going to be the greatest beneficiaries from the school was all meaningful and made the hardship much more than tolerable.

I spent most of my time working with locals to get the water system initially hooked up from the supply springs to the upper reservoir. This was just an interim step, but a major one for the people to see and understand. Women have typically have accessed water by walking to springs that run into small depressions in the ground, scooping the water out with a pitcher, transferring it to a 20 liter jug, and carrying it home on to their families on their backs. At the end of the “water team” work in April, we sent water, via buried plumbing, to the reservoir, stored more than they could really imagine, and were able to deliver clean water to a stock watering trough and a water supply station with the turn of a valve. It was an emotional and celebratory moment for us all when we saw that clean, cold water gush out of the system. Now, we have to install a pump, solar panels, a controller, and finalize the pipeline from the upper reservoir to the lower reservoir. Then, we will be ready to deliver the same safe abundant water to the school. I have worked as an Engineer for all of my career, but this was something special for me to have an opportunity to use my life skills in such a direct way to support people in the

betterment of their life. The fact that they appreciated it so much and were so delightful to work with was simply icing on that “experience” cake.

The final wonderful element of this experience was simply the beauty, remoteness, and the unique aspects of the setting. It is an incredible place, as the pictures illustrate. A tough, but interesting area with exciting views, flora, and fauna abounding. Every day, as I was working, I would have to take a moment of reflection, look around, and remind myself how lucky I was to be laboring in such a place. It was like working in a National Park. We saw amazing birds, large groups of baboons, and a variety of other animals as we performed our daily activities. They were not there to be “viewed” but just part of the everyday experience of the Hudad.

As I stated earlier, this experience has been a very significant one to me and I am planning to return for more in October 2017. My wife is coming with me to gain her own experiences and insight. We hope to observe the school progress substantially and if all goes favorably, to have the water system ready to deliver water to the school.

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