

Hike, December 1967, Kurubonla to Jaiama-Sewafe

December school break in 1967. Time for another hike. I recruited a larger team this time. In addition to my fiancé Gracie Scott, we had two of my students, Abu and Dominic, to help navigate the rural bush roads and, because they could speak the local languages, they could ask directions. Abu had been with us a year ago and agreed to come again. Bill and Beverly were Peace Corps teachers in another part of the country. And, finally, Davy Jones, a British VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) teaching with me at Kabala Secondary School.

We boarded a lorry in Kabala and bumped along for a few hours to the end of the road, Kurubonla. We spent the night there. The next morning, we packed our gear into our back packs and started down the path, accompanied as usual by several village children.



The trail was a typical bush road, well traveled, through natural vegetation and some cultivated land. We passed a granary for harvested rice, a mud and wattle cylinder on a woven platform a couple of feet off the ground. A bundle of un-threshed rice was tied to a post beside it.



This part of Sierra Leone gets very dry during the dry season. It can support only one crop of rice annually. It is extremely important for the subsistence economy that this crop is protected. It must last all year.



We also passed a stand built of bush sticks with a ladder. Boys would sit on the stand with slingshots and keep the birds away from the rice crop. The rice grown in this part of the country is upland rice. Much more year round water is required for lowland rice which can produce multiple annual crops.



We continued on the trail to the first village and a welcome rest. As we looked to the hills beyond the village, we realized that our destination was well beyond them. These were the Loma Mountains with Bintu Mani as the tallest. We walked through elephant grass in the borderland savanna to the next village and our stop for the night. When we entered a village, we would seek out the chief. He would arrange for a family to host us for the night.



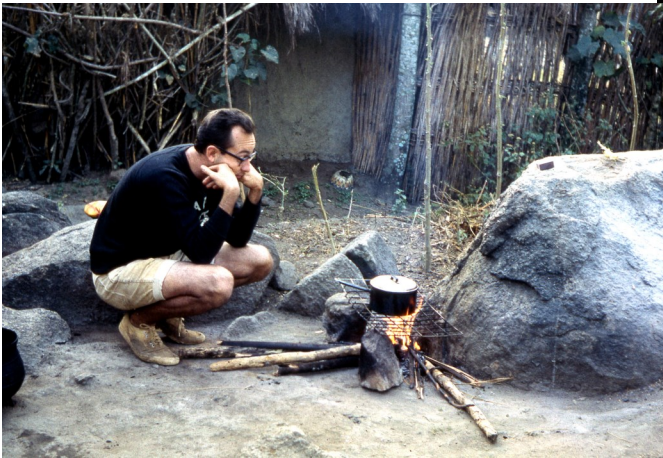
Elephant grass can grow 9 to 12 feet tall. One could easily become lost trying to make way through it without trails.





The villagers were very accommodating. When they heard that Bev was from Texas and an experienced horse person, they brought out a fine specimen to test her riding ability. She passed. We settled in, got out our cooking gear, found a fire and prepared our meal, under the watchful eyes of the village.

Most cooking in this area is done with three rocks with a small easy-to-control fire between them. We were always offered the use of a fire.



Bill boiled water so we could refill our canteens for the next day. The water came from the nearest stream or river and must be boiled to safely drink.



After the meal, it was my turn to wash up the dishes and pots. Again, under close supervision.



Morning arrived, we were up, got washed and brushed out teeth. The village gathered as we prepared for our departure and gave us a happy sendoff.



We tried to bring minimal food with us but enough for the trip. Any extra added to the weight on our backs. We would sometimes buy a chicken from a villager. There were no stores or markets. Often, as we left a village, we would be presented a gift of rice for our next dinner.

This day's trail took us across a number of simple log bridges crossing streams. We scrambled up and over boulders. The bush road was well traveled and we were sometimes joined by local villagers on their way to the next village.



The villages share the responsibility of maintaining the bridges. The ones we crossed always seemed to be in good repair and relatively safe to cross. But you needed good balance.



The trails were well maintained and clear. But just a couple of steps off the trail and the bush took over. It was thick. Not jungle but thick savanna. Sometimes there were stray banana plants close at hand. And the mountains loomed above us all along the way.



The sun was brutal. I had a very fashionable hat. Bill did not. He decided to borrow a frond from a banana plant to improvise a sun visor. And we continued on.



The Loma Mountains were a looming presence along the entire trip. On a previous trip, I had climbed to the peak of Bintu Mani on Easter Sunday. The sun was directly overhead. There were no shadows or shade and I got a bit burned.

We made a rest stop in a village. One of the villagers took a net slung on a large hoop and gathered oranges from a tree. He shared the oranges and we had a delightful refreshing snack before continuing on.



We spent the last night on the trail in another village at the foot of the Loma Mountains. Again, we received a warm welcome and were entertained by local musicians. The whole village came out to greet us.



Bill had to prove that he still had some energy left after the rigors of the trail.



As we loaded and shouldered our packs the next morning, the village gathered to say goodbye and to send us off with some wonderful rhythms on the standing drum and balange. The balange is a xylophone with wooden tone bars. There is an appropriately sized hollow gourd under each bar. This one looks exactly like the one I brought home from Sierra Leone.





We ended our trip in Jaima where Bill taught at the secondary school. Apparently, Bill's feet took a beating on the trek, but he survived in fine shape.

This trip was over 53 years ago. The photos were shot as slides. Gracie had a Kodak Instamatic. The camera I brought to Sierra Leone broke down the year before on my big trip around West Africa. I can't remember what I bought to replace it. Not many used cameras available.

The slides are badly faded but I was able to somewhat restore them and retrieve the wonderful memories they preserved.