

2007 RIVERS OF WEST AFRICA
MALI, SENEGAL, GAMBIA

Friday, January 25, 2007. There was nasty traffic leaving Sandy Springs but after that I got to the airport and the Elite Business-Class lounge with little trouble. Martha and Dowell were there to meet me and we spent about an hour helping Dowell get online so he could send a bill for a consulting job he had. He has just retired from Proctor and Gamble. Martha and Dowell have taken off from their donkey farm to join me.

As my readers know, I was in West Africa last winter when I came to visit my granddaughter, Constance Harrell, who was in Senegal on a Fulbright. I had wanted to get up to Mali and see Timbuktu but Constance couldn't get the time off. Thus when a travel brochure crossed my desk from Travel Dynamics promising Mali and also the Calisto (the delightful ship on which I was shipwrecked when I did the Adriatic), it had my name on it.

The flight for Dakar left on time. Since it is only a seven-hour flight, I planned to forgo dinner and sleep but that wasn't to be. Fortunately my seatmate was very interesting. She has worked for the embassies in Africa and is on her way to Lesotho on a consulting job. She and I exchanged travel stories.

Martha had given me a special cable to hookup my computer to the plane's electricity. After searching in vain for the cigarette lighter plug, the stewardess pointed out I had a regular 3-pronged socket in my seat to plug in. The newer aircraft all have them in business class.

www.donkeys.net

www.traveldynamicsinternational.com/

Saturday, January 27. When we arrived in Dakar at 5:30AM, there was an announcement that if we were going into downtown Dakar that we should be aware of the demonstrations planned for later in the day. (They must be expecting me!) As it turned out we saw neither hide nor hair of the demonstrations.

There was a swarm of porters clamoring for the privilege of carrying our bags. I am sort of a sitting duck with my white hair and cane. However we did need help getting our 8 pieces of luggage to the Novotel jitney bus.

I wanted to change some money but the bank was closed. A helpful man said there was a bank upstairs. I clambered up the stairs only to find he was the "bank". He said he would give me a very good rate. Not knowing what a good rate might be I declined. I'll solve the problem by changing money at the hotel. Meanwhile I handed Dowell a handful of dollar bills and put him in charge of the tipping the numerous outstretched hands. The rate at the hotel was 475 CFI for one dollar.

Since our flight to Mali wasn't until 3:45PM we had a long layover. I had wanted a day room near the airport and we were put at the Novotel. It turned out to be next-door to the Sofitel Teranga in downtown Dakar. Since it is almost an hour to get into downtown Dakar and another hour back to the airport, I wonder if it was worth it at \$175 a night! Our one room had a double bed and a couch so at least we got to lie down and have a bath in the less than 4 hours we were there.

We had to catch the noon jitney van back to the airport. Needless to say we had had nothing to eat so we had the hotel make us some sandwiches. Soon we were stuffed in the hotel van with four other men and their baggage. It was a long drive back to the airport, partly because of the construction on the new highway and partly because of the usual collection of cars, buses and horse carts.

A representative from the Sofitel helped us get through check-in and showed us the way to emigration, which was a big help.

The waiting area had the same hard seats I remember from last year. We ate out long overdue lunch and then explored our surroundings. There were a few tourist type stores. I was also amazed to discover a Business Class lounge. When I had asked Delta about one, I was told there wasn't one in Dakar. If I had known this, I would have bought a business class ticket on Senegal Air to Bamako and avoided those hard seats and perhaps even the expensive hotel. Delta has only been flying to Dakar since December so they probably didn't know.

It was a one and a half hour flight to Bamako, Mali. A Travel Dynamics representative met us. Some big wigs had arrived on our plane and they set off behind a police escort. Our driver was not shy and turned on his blinkers and joined the convoy. We reached the hotel in jig time.

I have a pleasant room on the fifth floor overlooking the 1700-kilometer long Niger River. This river rises in Guinea and loops north to Timbuktu before turning south to Nigeria and the ocean. It is the lifeblood of Mali. Commerce travels up and down the river and the river also provides fish and water.

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There are two bridges over the river here. The first was built in 1960 and is called the Martyrs Bridge in honor of the people who lost their lives in the battle for independence from France. The newer bridge is called the King Fahd Bridge after the Arabian King who donated it to the country. The city is covered with a mist of dust from November to March. This is because of the Harmattan, a wind that blows south from the Sahara at this time. It makes everything look somewhat ethereal.

We had a lovely dinner in the hotel dining room and went early to bed. Unfortunately there was a fancy wedding going on around the pool. The drumming and amplified music permeated the hotel. I debated going down and joining them but was too tired. The party wasn't over until 2:30 am.

<http://www.sleepinginairports.net/africa/dakar.htm>

http://www.novotel.com/novotel/fichehotel/gb/nov/0529/fiche_hotel.shtml

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/countries/ml/index.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamako>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger_river

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/harmattan>

Sunday, January 29. At 9:00 am our tour manager, Richard Koegl, gave us an orientation talk and introduced us to Elliot Franklin, a Smith College professor who will be our ethnographic lecturer. More than two thirds of the group is with an Audubon Society tour and they have with them a senior birdman, Wayne Mones, a Vice President of the Society, who is traveling with his wife, Holly. There is also a small Smith College Tour. Travel Dynamics caters to alumni and museum groups.

Bamako has two million inhabitants. While all of Mali speaks a language called Bambara, the official language is French. There are many small ethnic groups each with their own language.

Mali achieved independence from France in 1960. It was under military rule until 1991. Now it is a democracy with an elected president. None of the rulers claims the title for life so there have been several different presidents. Mali is one of the five poorest countries on earth.

The name Bamako comes from the word "bama" meaning crocodile and "ko" a small river.

Our goal this morning was the National Museum founded in 1953.

The first room was devoted to Mali's archaeological past. Since archaeology research has only been done in Mali since 1963 with only five sites uncovered so far, the bulk of this collection were pieces that had been confiscated by custom officials. Although the provenance was lost, these pieces attest to Mali's rich past.

There were the usual Neolithic artifacts, fishhooks and arrowheads etc. There were also head supports that bore a close resemblance to the ones used in the early Chinese dynasties where the ladies needed to protect their hairstyles while they slept. These had been used to support the heads of dead people in Malian culture.

There were huge jars which were used to bury people and ceramic artifacts that came from Tunisia.

One interesting statuette was a figure covered with snakes.

The next area was devoted to Animism and its fetishes. Although Mali is 96% Muslim, there is a strong animist background and many of the people still pray to the fetishes for fertility, protection and so forth. A huge stork is used when people die. A Dogon "Adam and Eve" represented the ancestors.

There were also masks to ward off evil spirits. There are secret societies for the men in Mali who use these masks in their rituals. The masks are supposed to frighten people and some are pretty fierce to look out. One was a crocodile,

The last area was devoted to the textiles of Mali. Mali exports her cotton crop but buys the worked cotton back in the form of cloth. They use several methods to dye it. In one, tiny stitches are sewn into the cloth. After the dye process, the stitches are removed and the pattern appears in white.

There is also the mud cloth where the cotton is dyed with mud and then rust is applied to make the design. When the cotton is washed, the design appears where the rust had been applied.

Another exhibit showed how long strips of cloth are woven (perhaps 3 inches wide). These are stitched together to make blankets and so forth.

I poked my head into the museum shop and was interested in the small doll figures that had been made from reclaimed tin cans. When examined closely you could tell what soft drink the cans

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had held. From a distance they looked like the Kachina dancing figures from our Hopi Indian culture.

Everywhere you look in Bamako is a photo op. As in Senegal, the ladies often wear their colorful bou bous. Small stalls along the road sell everything imaginable.

We were taken to Santoro Restaurant decorated with the arts of Mali. The first course was plantains wrapped around pieces of fish and onions then lightly sautéed. It was delicious. I did not care much for the other course. It was a bony greasy lamb stew. Actually I wasn't very hungry due to the malaria medicine I am taking. Doxycycline leaves me feeling slightly nauseated much of the time. At least I can tolerate it unlike the other malaria medicines that make me very sick. It is absolutely necessary to take this precaution in this part of the world.

The program after lunch was to visit a market but I talked Richard into making a stop at the hotel. Perhaps ten of us got off the bus.

I napped for a bit and then went to the Business Office for a half-hour computer session. Unlike the Sofitel in Dakar, I only have dial-up service in my room.

At six Elliot gave his first lecture. He told us how the whole region south of the Sahara was known as the Sudan, which means black. It is also called the Sahel, which means coast. Africa has few high mountains and the whole area is a savannah of grasslands.

There were three great Empires in Mali history: The Ghana Empire from 4-11 Century AD fell to the Mali Empire, which in turn fell to the Sanghay Empire. The last lasted from the 15th to the 16th century. As we saw in the museum there is a rich heritage still to be discovered.

Wealth was in trade and salt, copper, tin and horses were brought from the northern part of the country to be traded for gold, slaves and ivory from the south.

As many slaves were traded north across the Sahara as crossed the Atlantic. However the slave trade north was mostly in women. England was the first to abolish slavery in 1807 but a form of slavery still exists in the form of women sold into bondage in the Middle East.

Elliot pointed out that it was not just white people who captured blacks for the slave trade but also the blacks themselves would sell their captured enemies in exchange for guns and other goods.

While most Malians are Muslim there is a strong animist background and people believe there are spirits everywhere.

The average income is \$250. Infant mortality is 121 out of a thousand. In our country it is 2 per thousand. Life expectancy is 45. However, the HIV rate is lower than in most African countries. The main crop is cotton. However, in the US cotton is subsidized so it is hard for a Malian to get a good price for his crop.

That evening we went to the Montecristo Restaurant owned by the Dougou Dougou Travel Agency which is handling our arrangements. Dougou dougou is a kind of bird. It was a very good vegetable soup followed by a grilled chicken, washed down by fine French wines.

We were entertained during dinner with a band and one of Mali's famous musicians, Maugaha Kamera. He was a compelling entertainer in his signature hat and cowry necklace and bracelet.

www.audubon.org

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bambara_language

<http://www.native-languages.org/kachinas.htm>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahel>

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/medmaster/a682063.html

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animism>

<http://www.bamako-culture.org/lieux/index.html>

Monday, January 29. We had to pack a small bag for our trip to Mali and leave the rest in the hotel for our return in three days. We got to the airport and cooled out heels for an hour and a half. Our chartered plane had a flat tire.

Finally Richard managed to get two smaller planes and we flew to Mopti. Since the air blowers didn't work too well on our Russian built plane it was a warm hour and a half flight. Looking out the plane window I could see we were following the Niger River coiling like a snake below. The land was very parched, nothing seemed to be growing and there were no signs of habitation most of the way. I could see occasional ponds that were later explained as being sources of water for the rice fields.

We stepped off the plane into a sea of hawkers. The Fulani conical leather hats were tempting but I don't know what I would do with one after I got it back to Atlanta.

Our guide, Macaloo, had come with us and in Mopti we acquired a second guide Temmy who is

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Dogon. We have two mini buses.

Mopti is a town of 150,000. It was founded in the 16th century and is a major trading center on the Niger. The Hotel Kanaga is more like a motel, albeit an attractive one. We had lunch (inevitably it included a tough chicken dish).

Then it was back into our small buses for a visit at a Fulani house. The Fulani Tribe are herders of cattle, sheep and the ever-present goats. A man can have 1-4 wives and each wife has her own room in the compound. While the Fulani have black skin it is noticeably lighter than the other Africans.

Dago, wife number one, posed for us with her huge gold earrings. We looked into her tidy room. The only furnishings were a bed and cupboard. Her calabashes and cooking wares were neatly on shelves. She had pictures showing that she had been a real beauty in her day. She is still very striking looking and has the dark tattoos around her mouth that is characteristic of the Fulani. She has had 8 children but only one, a daughter, has survived childhood. I sat beside her for a photo and she put her huge earrings on me. They were surprisingly lightweight for their enormous size. They are gold plated over silver.

We asked Temmy if he intended to have more than one wife and he said it was very expensive to maintain more than one. He is 31 and has been married since last October. His wife is 23. She is still with her own family being educated and will only join him when she has her second child. The first child stays with her family to replace her. Since Temmy is well educated I imagine her education is to make her more his equal. His parents selected her. He only met her a year ago.

We then walked to Mopti Mosque. It is made of mud and was built in 1930. Infidels (non-Muslims) are no longer allowed to go inside since some tourists made a demonstration in one a few years ago. The mosque is made of mud with distinctive wooden beams protruding from the sides so the muezzin can climb up to the minaret. They are also for support. Each corner of the mosque was decorated with two ostrich eggs on a spindle denoting purity. Mosques are decorated with these eggs or the crescent half-moon, which is also for purity.

We were then taken to a market and on the second floor, above the fly strewn vegetables and meat, found a tourist bazaar. With Dowell's help with the bargaining I bought a small pendant. It is like the one given to a boy when he has his circumcision ceremony.

We stopped at the harbor. Mopti is at the confluence of the Niger and Bani Rivers. Salt is brought down from a mine north of Timbuktu and traded for fabrics or foodstuffs. The salt is interesting. It comes in two-inch thick meter square slabs that gleam almost as if they were marble!

The river is also where everything is washed. We saw not only laundry, but also cars, children and animals being washed in the river.

We then returned to the motel for a short break and were delighted to find our luggage. It had traveled the 300 odd miles from Bamako in a four by four. (Four wheel drive, four wheels).

We crossed the road to board our pirogue, a long almost canoe like boat with a motor on the back and a canopy above and went for a sunset cruise on the river. Dougou Dougou Travel owns our boats, the same travel company that supplies our guides and owns the restaurant in Bamako. Our goal was Daga, a Bozo fishing village on an island in the Bani River, a tributary of the Niger. The Bozo tribes are fishermen.

This was not a bit touristy. The buildings were made of mud bricks and there were some more basic buildings made from basketry. When the river floods during the rainy season they must move these to higher ground to escape the flooding.

Life in the village was fairly basic. One woman was pounding her millet in a huge mortar and pestle. Since she was only 15 she would keep working for some 15 minutes. Martha tried her hand at it but only lasted a couple of minutes!

A small girl attached herself to me and when I sat down on my cane seat she climbed into my lap!

We had arrived in time for the weekly shouting fest. The women meet once a week and share a meal and pool their money. A different woman each week decides what the money should be used for. There was obviously a lot of disagreement about what it should be spent on!

We walked a bit to see the sheep and cattle herds and then returned to the hotel for a buffet dinner. The best part was the custard.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mopti>

<http://www.danheller.com/mali.html>

http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tonywheeler/my_lists/experimenting_with_hotels_1/

<http://fulani.tribe.net/>

<http://www.mama.org/masks/mali.html>

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirogue>

Tuesday, January 30. We drove to Djennè (pronounced jayni). It's about two hours from Mopti but the road was good. Outside of Mopti we came to a checkpoint, a sort of customs point. Oil drums blocked the road.

We were shown the millet fields where the people make small mounds and plant 4 or 5 seeds. They sprout during the rainy season and provide the staple of the Malian diet.

Djennè is on an island and we had to board a funny old ferry to reach it. Also on board were numerous hawkers for the ten-minute ride. Everyone in Mali is either trying to sell you something or is just begging.

The original settlement of Djennè dates from 250 BC. It is the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa.

The mosque is the largest mud brick building in the world, 75 meters to a side. It is amazing that it has stood since 1906. In 1988 it was made a World Heritage site. Before the rainy season the men bring mud mixed with millet straw and the women bring water so the building can be plastered to strengthen it before the rains come. It is built in the same style as the Mopti Mosque with wooden beams bristling from its sides.

Our walking tour circumnavigated the building and then took off to see the unique architecture of the city. The temperature must have been well over 100 degrees. Soon my heart started pounding and I was short of breath. Macaloo escorted me back to the restaurant where I found Jan Roberts waiting. She has a walking problem and did not try the walk at all. She was having trouble with her new digital camera. I felt like such an expert in that I could show her how to see the image through the back!

When the group returned we had lunch. More tough chicken!

Three years ago the American Government built big septic tanks for the city so that sewage no longer flows into the river.

Then we drove to a museum where they had rather old and faded photographs of the archaeological dig in Djennè-Jeno, the ancient site of the town. An American, Roderick Macintosh, a professor from Rice University started the museum 30 years ago. He is coming back next year and I hope he sees that more sponsorship is needed! In the 14th century the town was deserted perhaps because of the advent of Islam and the people moved onto the island where Djennè now stands. Other exhibits were models of buildings in Djennè. The city of Djennè-Jeno was known for its terra cotta sculptures.

Our last stop was at the seven-acre archaeological site itself. I was so exhausted from all the heat I did not get out of the bus. Martha said I didn't miss much. The people moved from this site to the island hundreds of years ago.

I was so tired when I got back to the hotel that I ate dinner and fell into bed.

<http://www.sacredsites.com/Africa/mali/djenne.html>

<http://www.archaeology.org/online/features/mali/djenne.html>

Wednesday, January 31. We had a wake-up call for 5:00. I either slept through it or they forgot me for at 5:30 Martha was knocking on my door. I dressed and breakfasted and made the 6:00 am departure. We have a new mini bus. The air conditioning seems to work much better. Also we are only 12 people since some people elected to sit out this excursion.

We drove into Dogon country. When the Muslims came into Mali, four Dogon couples moved into the Hamburi Mountains because they did not wish to forgo their animist religion. They had to cross a river of crocodiles to reach their mountain and so the crocodile became a sacred symbol. They also went into a cave to look for bones of their ancestors and found a snake. Hence the snake is considered an intermediary between them and their ancestors.

These four couples were the founders of the four clans of Dogon: Arou, Demnon, Dyon and Onon. As these clans increased they expanded onto the escarpment and finally into the valley below. There are now about 800,000 Dogons. They are very proud of their culture and interested in preserving it, although they have had to bow to reality in a country that is 96% Muslim and have converted to Islam. However, they still practice their animistic religion.

Temmy is Dogon and he appeared in Dogon dress. A muslin top over green and white patterned pants. He told us about his life. He did well in school and was selected for higher education. He is obviously well educated. Still he yearns for the village life. Songa, the first village we visited was fascinating. Stonewalls, shoulder high, defined the narrow street and over them we could

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see the houses and the distinctive granaries. A man and his wife have separate granaries. His is mostly used for millet and other foodstuffs but she may keep jewelry and other personal items in hers. Female granaries have one door, male ones two. A witch's peaked roof of thatch distinctively tops each one. Many of the Dogon doors are highly decorated with symbols to protect the family.

We stopped by the healer's house. This medicine man had several moth-eaten and desiccated jaguar skins hanging by his door for he uses their hair in his cures. Traditional medicine is well beyond the means of most families.

Our goal was up a steep rocky hill beyond the village. I don't know how I would have made it without Elliot's help. However the climb was worth it. Here under a rock overhand, in mysterious hieroglyphic symbols, was the history of the clan. Young boys between the ages of ten and twelve are brought here for their circumcisions. This is the right of passage to manhood. Older men keep them here and teach them the things they need to know for two weeks. Their mothers may bring them food but are not allowed any real contact. Meanwhile the elders are studying them to see who will be the future leaders. They are also taught the traditional music of the clan. In a nearby cave were many calabash instruments that are only used during this time. Using them at other times will cause all the expecting mothers in the village to abort. Our guide was very careful not to let the one he showed us make a sound.

Between the ceremonies that are held every three years, no young boys or women are allowed at this sacred spot. The blacksmith of the village does the circumcision and we were shown the water trough where the blood is washed away. The boys are not supposed to cry or complain or they lose their honor.

After the ceremony there is a footrace down to the fields and back. The winner gets the right to marry the prettiest girl in town. Second place gets a granary of his own and third is awarded a ram. After the circumcision the boy no longer lives with his mother but with his father until he establishes a family of his own.

I understood they no longer do female circumcision, but we were told some villages still practice this barbaric act. Girls are taught by their mother's how to be women.

We drove for over an hour to reach the next town. Chicken sandwiches were served for a snack and we made one stop for "technical" reasons. Girls to the left rocks, men to the right.

Another stop was to examine the lush patches of green that are in sharp contrast to the rocky barren landscape. Here the Dogon have dammed their river to supply water for the onion fields. The onions (actually shallots) are planted in a sort of paddy about 2 feet square and liberally watered. The Dogon sell them in Mopti and earn money for the other essentials that they need such as millet. We saw one place where they were being dried to preserve them. Instead of bridges there were fords our buses had to cross. Most Dogon know how to swim for the roads are impassable in the rainy season.

When we reached our destination we were led through a huge natural tunnel so that we could look down on the remains of the ancient settlement. Houses were clustered next to the cliff face reminding me of the cliff dwellers of our four corners area of the west, These old buildings are now used as burial places.

Ogul was bigger. In fact it is composed of ten small villages. We toured upper Ogul. The most interesting part was the town square. On one side is the original house in the village. The oldest man in the clan is the chief and he lives in this house alone where he cares for the fetishes. He can have visitors, including his wife or wives, during the day but at night he is left alone so the sacred snake and the ancestors can come to him.

There was an open structure with a thick thatch roof in the square where this Old One decides legal disputes. Also nearby is a small room where the naming ceremony takes place for the Old One gives each child his name. There is a basket of rocks, each representing one of the former chiefs.

We were pleased to actually catch a glimpse of this important man who was wearing a long robe and a turban. He is called the Hogan.

Then we walked down into a nearby field where the women were doing the first threshing of the millet. The first threshing is done outside the village proper because the outside kernel is not good to eat. Only after it is removed can the grain be distributed among the family group. Everywhere we have gone we see the women pounding the millet, which is the staple of their diet.

The heat started to get to me so I did not get to go to lower town where the group visited a

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blacksmith. There is a caste system in the village and the blacksmith can only marry into another blacksmith family. The blacksmith has his trade and does not know the rest of the Dogon life so his wife would not fit in if he married anyone else.

The Fulani people come to Dogon country to sell their meat. However they are not permitted to come into the town and must camp outside.

One of our group was actively ill from the heat and a couple of others also gave up the walk.

We were served a lunch with a delicious eggplant dish. It was followed with rich and guess what, tough range fed chicken. I am becoming a vegetarian!

We poked around the shops. I bought a small fetish and Martha and Dowell found a granary door with a donkey on it.

Then we were driven down to where we saw a performance of masked dancers. It was one of the best performances I have ever seen of this type. The men were dressed in a sort of short hula skirt over their pants. They wore a sort of suspender made of cowry shells. Some of the dancers were on high five-foot stilts and did a credible dance on them. Some of the masks had a ten-foot top and it was amazing to watch them bow to the four directions and even to spin the headdress around to represent the universe. All was done to a drum band.

Small children came to watch and even practice the steps but they were shooed away each time they were spotted. They are not allowed to see this ritual until they are older.

Afterward we had all the masks described to us. The head dancer wore a mask with a huge female figure on it. She represented the first woman to witness the dances. The rabbits were the youngest men in the troupe. Jackals were the next step. Everyone makes his own mask and there are infinite varieties. One wore a monkey mask and so forth. The ones with the ten-foot structure on their head represent the sacred snake. The stilt dancers represent the birds that brought the Dogon people here. This particular show was the dance that marked the end of the mourning period and is held every three years. Everyone makes masks and dances in the square to show reincarnation.

Martha and Dowell managed to buy a wonderful calabash decorated with cowry shells that had been used by the head musician. Lakshmi Crane, the best bargainer in the group was the one who made the deal. Her Indian ancestry makes her really enjoy making a bargain. I bought a piece of blue cloth with the dances depicted on it.

And so we drove the three hours back to Mopti arriving at 7:00. I can't believe how strenuous this all has been. I have spent two long days, jammed into a mini-bus running around on gravelly rocky roads and I am still alive to tell the tale. The program hasn't let us have as much as a half-hour at leisure. It's been tough but I wouldn't have missed a moment.

<http://www.sacredsites.com/africa/mali/dogon.html>

<http://www.dogon-lobi.ch/dogonalbum.htm>

<http://homepage.mac.com/melissaenderle/mali/pages/dogon.html>

<http://www.mysteriousplaces.com/index2.html>

Thursday. January 31. TIMBUCTU or Tombouctou as it is known here is considered the most remote place in the world. The "Place of Bouctou", is named for a woman who had a well here. Women have more stature in Tuareg society than in other societies in the region.

Due to the diseases on the coast and the tortures of crossing the Sahara Desert, western explorers did not reach it until 1826, when Major Alexander Gordon Laing became the first European to get there. However the town has a long history. Tuaregs founded the town on the northern bend of the Niger River and it became a wealthy trading center for these desert nomads. Salt was carried here by camel caravans from the north and exchanged for gold and ivory from the south.

We had another early rising and found our charter plane waiting. What a joy to just walk out and get on the plane with none of the security procedures that we have become accustomed to. It is a 40-minute flight and Mali Air had a beverage service in flight. Flying north we saw the landscape become more and more barren.

We debarked and were immediately aware how much dryer the already dry climate had become. The earth has turned into powdery sand for we are now in the Sahara Desert.

Timbuktu is constructed of sand colored bricks and shows its Moroccan heritage. The Tuaregs are thought to be descended from the Moroccans. The most dramatic part about the buildings is the doors that are wood embellished with tin designs. The town was once much larger but today only 35000 people call it home. Most of the people are of the Songhay tribe.

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Because of a drought in the Sahara which killed most of their animals, the Tuareg men now leave their families and work for three or four months in the city each year to earn money before returning to their nomadic life. For a Tuareg boy to become a man, after the age of 11, he must go on three camel caravans to the northern part of Mali to bring back salt. Each man takes fifteen camels. These ships of the desert can go for days without water. There is an oasis in the desert about once every 100 kilometers. The caravan travels at night to avoid the heat, guiding itself by following the stars. Each journey takes 45 days. Tuareg men wear elaborate turbans that cover most of their faces to keep out the dust and the sand. Interestingly enough, the women do not cover their faces.

We walked through sand to reach the Ahmed Baba Institute. Ahmed Baba (1556-1627) was one of the great scholars of his time. Timbuktu was once an important intellectual center. The Institute, with the help of South Africa, is cataloging and restoring the 250,000 manuscripts in its collection.

We were shown some of the beautiful manuscripts that represent the collection. Our guide had not been to a Koranic school but he intoned some of the verses that make up the Koran. The Koran is written in Arabic and is unchanged from the days of the Prophet. It is really poetry. There are also medical and jurisprudence texts in the library. It is a treasure trove of history. While most of the documents are in Arabic, there are other distinctive scripts and languages.

We were shown the computer lab where the books are being catalogued and scanned. Also we were shown where the manuscripts are restored and placed into protective boxes. They are wrapped in a special Japanese paper so the document can be handled without hurting it.

Leaving the institute we walked through town admiring the doors. We saw the Dungeybern Mosque where 15,000 people come to worship each Friday. The Aga Khan gave money to pave the streets near the mosque.

We saw the house where Laing had lived. Also the houses of other early explorers. We also saw people making the doors. One family from Yemen has been making these doors since the 14th century.

Then we came to the Peace Monument a modern arch-type structure, which commemorates the rebellion of the Tuaregs who wanted the right to return to the desert after they have lived in town.

Next to the monument was a huge nomad encampment. In fact, we had seen scattered nomad tents all over town. These belong to the slave caste of Tuaregs. They moved into town when the drought came and have no desire to go back to the desert.

Another word should be said about the donkeys. We have seen hundreds of working donkeys in Mali. Some pull carts, some carry people on their saddle rump, some are true beasts of burden with loads of firewood and other goods. We even saw a sorrel donkey, which Martha tells us is a natural recessive gene. There was another black donkey. However most of them are the traditional gray.

We were then driven across the sand dunes, perhaps a mile or two, to a Tuareg camp in the desert. There were several tents but our guide pointed out that the Tuaregs have twenty-five family villages spread over a wide section. The village was named Teshok.

There were ladies all in black who chanted and did a sort of dance. Periodically some men would jump up and do a sort of sword-display while dancing. Behind them serving as a backdrop were three supercilious camels. We were offered the sweet mint tea, which the nomads drink,

Because it must have been 110 degrees or because the only place to sit was a rug spread in some very light shade, my interest soon left and I went and sat in the van.

I returned to look at the bazaar and bought a bracelet and a Tuareg passport. The passports are interesting for each silver ornament bears marks that identify the village the person is from. However I was really fleeced for instead of change they offered another bracelet, which they clasped on my arm. It was only later that I discovered the bracelet was defective.

So I was not left with a good taste in my mouth about these people who had long interested me.

We then went to a hotel and were presented with 3 lambs that had been grilled on a spit. One carcass was filled with couscous. The lamb was so tough you could hardly cut it and I ate very little. Actually I have not felt very well for two days. I think it is the heat, but perhaps it is just that I am very tired. About a third of the group is also sick with varying degrees of Montezuma's revenge. This has been a VERY strenuous trip. Not at all what I expected.

We had word during lunch that we would have to refuel in Mopti so we hurried to the airport and boarded our charter plane. After the stop in Mopti we continued on to Bamako and at last checked back in to the Sofitel.

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The group went to a fancy restaurant with a singer, but I didn't. I spent the evening trying to convince the hotel that they needed to come and repair my security lock. Martha tried to help me but she is also sick.

I finally reached Richard about 11 pm and he told me all I had to do was push the button in the handle and no one could enter.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timbuktu>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sahara>

www.southafrica.info/africa/timbuktumanuscripts.htm

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuareg>

Friday, February 2. We didn't have to check out until 11 so I lay in bed for a long time. Martha brought me a banana and some bread. None of it tasted very good.

I finally got up and went down to the business center for a last episode with the computer. If I don't do this periodically the mail really piles up at the rate of 40 or so a day!

After I checked out I went to the lobby and downloaded Dowell's pictures of Dogon Country. They are so good it will be hard to edit down to a manageable number.

The group had a luncheon out around the pool but I had a coke in the lobby. Then we were loaded on our buses and went to the airport to catch an Air Ivoire flight to Dakar. On the flight I was served some sort of potted meat sandwich and to my surprise I actually felt like eating it. I must be recovering! One problem I have had with being nauseated is that the doxycyclene I am taking for malaria makes me queasy. It is hard to know whether my nausea is that or something else. I really believe that with all the bad food we had in Mali we got something that wasn't good.

Once in Dakar we had a wait for our bus, which was stuck in traffic. I don't understand why Richard kept us waiting outside in the heat. At any event it did eventually come, but the traffic was so bad we were over an hour getting to the port.

And there was the Calisto, dressed in a new coat of navy paint. She is just a wonderful as I remember with lots of brass and bright work. The Captain Ionnis Stupakis met us at the gangway and after a welcome drink we were shown to our staterooms. I had booked the cheap seats, which were down near the oars. I was very pleased with my cabin that is actually a triple so I have lots of room.

At dinner I learned the hotel manager, Ionnis Liapodimitras and several others had been on the ill-fated voyage four years ago when we were shipwrecked. I had a delicious dinner of seafood pasta and fell gratefully into bed. So much for my birthday!

At our briefing we learned that the State Department has issued warnings about the Casamance area but we are assured that where we are going there is no problem. The problem is that some of the people who live in this remote part of Senegal would like to secede and form their own country. The Casamance lies between The Gambia to the north and Guinea-Bissau to the south. It is a land of palm groves, mangroves and paddy fields of rice on both sides of the Casamance River.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casamance>

Saturday, February 3. I woke early and was on deck to see us enter the Casamance River. This is a major river in the southern part of Senegal. The entrance is treacherous and I could see the surf breaking over the reefs. Atlantic bottlenose dolphins escorted us into the river. We rolled a bit in the swell but our new stabilizers kept us on course. Another improvement on the ship is a hot tub on the sun deck.

The channel buoys were interesting. The red port ones looked like a tall stick stuck in the water. The green port ones were a different shape altogether, being small pyramids.

We anchored and were put into lifejackets and loaded into Pirogues. These were not nearly so nice as the Mali ones. Heavy planked frame, wooden bench seats on each side and no covering. At least Senegal is not as hot as Mali. We skirted Karabane Island observing birds roosting in the mangroves. There was the African Darter who is also called the snakebird because of his long twisting neck. We saw a Palm-nut vulture. The Pied Kingfisher can actually hover. There were Eurasian Oystercatchers and Royal terns. We spied an osprey. The Blue Cheeked Bee-eater is a very dramatic bird of a beautiful blue color. Since 75% of the group is here with the Audubon Society, there was a lot of excitement in the group. We were to see all these birds many times again, but the first sighting is always exciting.

We finally beached at Kachouane but it was a wet landing. As I was preparing by removing my

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shoes and rolling up my pants, one man picked me up and carried me to the beach.

Here we found a group doing a dance for us. They were all men and boys but there were ladies on the side applauding the act. Some of the men wore "castanets" made from old tin cans strapped on their legs. With this they could enhance the beat done by the drum that was played by an old man.

We then boarded an assortment of safari vehicles. We ended up in the back of a pickup truck with the John and Alison Steadman and Lyn Mair our cruise director.

We drove to Djembereng to visit the private Catholic run "college" and were taken into a classroom where we were offered seats at the two person desks. Two students and two of us (one was Martha) volunteered to stand in front of the group and answer questions. This allowed the children to practice their English. They wanted to know about our government. One of the students was asked if she liked school and she replied in halting but good English that she liked going to school for without an education she would not be able to get a job.

The children start in a primary school then come to this "college". The students graduate from here and then go to Ziguinchor, three hours away, for three more years of education. After that they can go to the University in Dakar if they qualify.

The Women's Center was selling rag dolls to support their school and Martha bought one. I already had a doll from Senegal that Constance had given me.

We went further down the sandy rutted road to the Sangawatt Open-Air museum. Kafir appeared in a chief's costume. A red stole was wrapped over his shoulder toga style and he wore a black skirt over dark pants. He explained this was a chief's costume.

Then he took us for a tour of his museum that explains aspects of the Joola Tribe animist culture. First we stopped by a tree that encompassed a grotto with animal skulls in it. He drank from a bottle and told us the ancestors were giving us all a blessing.

Further on we came to a huge manikin depicting a woman. Women are revered in this society.

Further on there was a large kapok tree. One side had exhibits of clothing used by boys as they passed through the various stages of puberty. Wrestling is a favorite sport to show a man's strength.

On one side of the tree was an exhibit of pelts and fishing gear that represented a man's life. Kafir pointed out that they do not kill for pleasure but for food. The only animal they do not eat is the crocodile that is a symbolic protector.

The last exhibit by the tree showed the various basketry that was used in a woman's life. I was particularly impressed by the large basket that could act as an umbrella.

At the end we were offered palm oil wine. We had seen them collecting the oil in bottles strapped to the trees. It was served in a wooden cup. I decided not to try it since my digestion is now back to normal.

Back in the convoy we continued on to Cap Skirring a resort area on the ocean. Here at La Pailott Hotel we found a lovely oasis of tropical greenery and a delicious lunch. A shrimp and heart of palm salad was followed by a plump and delicious chicken breast (it wasn't range fed that's for sure) and rice in an onion sauce. Desert was a rich coconut torte and coconut ice cream. Delicious but I could not finish it.

Then we were given an hour rest period! This tour has given us no rest until now. I sat in the shade with my book. Dowell went for a swim. Wayne Mones organized a bird walk. In short everyone did their own thing.

Then we got back in our vehicles for the ride to the beach where our pirogues awaited us. After all day climbing in and out of the pickup I was too stiff to climb into the boat and was promptly picked up and carried on board. It was an hour and a half back to the ship. It was interesting to see the oysters clinging to the mangrove roots,

Calisto stopped one time to clear with the authorities and then went into a village where they had part of an old effluvium house, the traditional architecture from this region. It was a circular building large enough for an extended family and their animals to live. A trough ran through it to carry water. It was nice and cool under the thatched roof.

Then we continued on looking for birds. A pink-backed pelican stood sentinel on one sandbar while oyster crackers pecked in the shallow water beyond. There were other birds as well. Our last one was a Goliath Heron who stood majestically on a sandbar.

I was glad to reach the ship at 6:20 pm. After a shower I dressed for the Captain's dinner. A dance group had come on board to entertain us. Three drummers marked the beat. The cast of ladies demonstrated a couple of their traditional dances. They seemed very athletic with fast

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footwork. Lahksmi told us that traditional eastern dancing concentrates on the feet, with the stomping an essential element to the dance.

Finally we went in to dinner but after the smoked salmon and a tomato salad I excused myself and went to the cabin to catch up on my journal.

www.seaworld.org/infobooks/Bottlenose/home.html

<http://www.oiseaux.net/oiseaux/pelecaniformes/african.darter.html>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/palm-nut-vulture>

<http://www.mangoverde.com/birdsound/spec/spec89-89.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurasian_Oystercatcher

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i0650id.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue-cheeked_Bee-eater

<http://www.world66.com/africa/senegal/capskirting>

<http://www.birdingafrica.net/page38.html>

Sunday, February 4. We sailed to Ziguinchor, a town of 206,000, and the largest in Casamance. There we were loaded into two very sorry buses. My seat was not only uncomfortable, but the seat next to me had the stuffing coming out and you could see it had no springs. Since there was no way to get into it because the seats were so close together, it really didn't matter. We had what my friend Bob Hunter used to call four-forty air-conditioning: 40 miles and hour with four windows down. The only problem was that we never got close to 40 miles an hour. These were the best buses in town. At least we didn't go far.

Our first stop was at the memorial to the ship La Joola. When you travel from southern Senegal to Dakar you have to take the overnight ferry. September 26, 2002, the ferry was shipwrecked off the coast of Gambia and 2000 passengers lost their lives. Everyone in Ziguinchor lost relatives in this disaster. The monument was very simple but demanded respect.

The Portuguese settled Ziguinchor and we were shown old buildings whose architecture reflects this influence. The town itself is fairly typical of the area with people selling goods from small stalls. Lush tropical vegetation with the bright colorful flowers that one sees everywhere in the tropics.

We went on to the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Anthony of Padua. There are 20 parishes in the dioceses.

It was Sunday and we arrived during a mass and had to wait until it was over. Mass is celebrated in French but there are many dialects used by the parishioners. Each Parish has its own carnival day and today was St Antoine's. Yesterday they had fun and games for the children and a church dinner. Today everyone dressed in their best to attend the services. There was quite a variety of dress. I saw one woman in what looked like a bridesmaid dress and another wore a spaghetti strap evening gown.

Then Abbe Jean Marcel Sambou greeted us and ushered us into the building. It has a wide nave and an arched ceiling painted in blue. The cathedral is very simple with light painted walls giving it an airy appearance.

The choir loft was still full of people after the congregation left and they burst into rollicking music and clapping to native music. Augustine, our local guide hopes to get us a CD of the music. (He never did).

The Abbot apologized for his poor English, but introduced us to Lenny Baker who came to Senegal with the Peace Corps many years ago and followed it up with a career working in Africa. When he retired 13 years ago he came to Ziguinchor to live.

He told us that the church was built in 1888 and is an historical monument. There are many Catholics in Casamance and they live amicably with the Muslims. Sometimes there are both Muslims and Catholics in the same family.

Ziguinchor means city of tears in Portuguese. French, English and Portuguese colonized West Africa. They then swapped some of their holdings with each other. The English had Goree Island but were given the Gambia in exchange. The Portuguese ceded this southern part of Senegal to the French.

We were told a bit about the schools. It costs about \$150 per year to go but the school is open to children of all faiths. They look for sponsors for the ones who cannot raise the money to attend. I asked for the Abbe's card and plan to look into sponsoring a child when I return home.

Back on the buses we stopped to watch a boatyard where they were building pirogues. They are built of African mahogany boards. After all the material is assembled construction takes just a few

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weeks. A rubber material is used to cover the seams on the inside. Tar is used to fill the cracks from the outside. The boat is delivered unpainted to its new owner who applies his own decorations. I noted that square headed nails were used in the construction. Some of these boats were huge. They were big enough to go to sea and fish for several days.

We went on to our restaurant, which was right on the river. We ate at the usual long table. I wish that we could break into smaller groups. It was very hot and I was glad we found seats on the end where we could feel the breeze that came off the water. After lunch we had an hour to kill and the trick was to find a comfortable seat in the scarce shade. I found a shaded pavilion but it had no breeze. After reading awhile I decided to do something else and investigated the small shop that went with the hotel. They had some nice things. I was intrigued with the ivory carvings made on what to my amateur eye thought was a steer horn but which the proprietress told me were rhinoceros. I would never buy something from an endangered animal.

At last it was over and we boarded our pirogues for a trip down the river to a fishing village. It was extremely hot and the bare board seats did not look inviting but I hate to miss anything. They were also lacking in any shade. They divided us into two boats. One was for the hard-core birders, the rest were in the eco group. Since we moved in tandem, the only real difference was that they were in the boat with Wayne. However, we found Sandra Fowkes, the naturalist was just as knowledgeable.

Perched on some anchored boats were some Little Terns. These birds look like their larger cousins and have the same habits but they are only 22-26 cm big.

We passed the Ile des Oiseaux. It is really a series of sand bars that at low tide appear above water. This is a Mecca for the birds who like to eat from the bottom. We saw egrets and herons.

We entered a tributary of the river and followed the mangrove shore close enough to look for more birds. Each time one was spotted the boat stopped and the cameras clicked and the binoculars homed in on the bird. It got hotter and hotter and I was very glad after an hour and a half to reach the fishing village of Djilapao.

Interestingly enough there were some private yachts here. Many are brought here for the winter.

There were two brothers whose wives had left them. They removed to a spot fairly far from the village and built two houses. One was unique in that it was two stories high. The brother who built it was also an artist and using clay he made bas reliefs to cover the walls. They are almost life size and painted in bright colors. They showed all aspects of village life, even an orgy was shown, and a naked lady decorated the bedroom. Some of the displays were of fish. If the bas-relief was of the front of a lady in one room, in the one behind you saw her back with the baby being carried in a sling. It was all quite interesting.

The tragedy is that a fire burned part of the building and some of the bas-reliefs are now exposed to the elements. Restoration is under way but the rainy season is due in another couple of months.

We walked into the village and Erma invited us in to see her tidy home. There was a central room with a bedroom off to one side. The only furniture was the bed. The other rooms seemed to be storerooms for kitchenware, tools and other things.

We told Sandra that unless it was some really unusual bird we wanted to go straight back to the ship. What we really should have done is come full speed down the river and go more leisurely back, for it was now cooler and there were many more birds to be seen. We saw pelicans and a big flock of flamingos.

I was so tired when we reached the ship I really wanted to skip dinner and go to bed but it was Greek night and on a Greek ship I knew the food would be wonderful so I ate. After mezzis (small bits of things like dolmas, olives, calamari etc) I had a delicious shrimp dish.

During the day I drink gallons of water and have trouble going to the bathroom when I have a chance. I think I must sweat it out. Then at night I am up all night getting rid of the excess water in my system.

<http://www.senegalaisement.com/senegal/ziguinchor.html>

<http://www.travel-images.com/casamance.html>

<http://www.pbase.com/mgpimages/senegal&page=all>

Monday, February 5. I decided to take a morning off and spent it up in the library checking out my mail on the WIFI connection and working on my journal.

The group went to Djibelour to see a botanical garden and then to visit the Alliance Francais there. They also went shopping.

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After they came back aboard we set sail for the Gambia. During the afternoon Wayne Mones gave two lectures. The first was about eco-tourism and ways the Audubon Society is trying to maintain a number of endangered bird areas in the world. The locals cut the trees for fuel or slash and burn and the habitat is ruined. He also touched on what the impact of global warming will be. Even a two-foot rise in the ocean would swamp a lot of West Africa and destroy the habitat of many birds. I also found out there are a lot of organizations working with one species or another to save them from extinction.

After a break he gave a second lecture on identifying the raptors.

By this time Calisto had reached the ocean and was battling her way north against a strong wind and sea. Some of the passengers didn't make it to dinner. It was too bad for it was a lovely tomato soup followed by roast duck. Desert was pistachio ice cream served on a poached apple. I'm so glad I don't get seasick!

Tuesday February 6, 2007. We got to The Gambia during the night and after clearing customs anchored off the village of Tendaba.

The Gambia sticks like a thorn in the side of Senegal, cutting the country almost in half. Senegal was colonized by the French, and The Gambia by the English. The two countries don't like each other. You need a visa to cross The Gambia. Since the country is the smallest on mainland Africa straddling the Gambia River, you can see what a pain in the neck that can be. The alternatives are a long drive around or to take the overnight ferry. Hence Constance and I didn't get to the Casamance last year. The Gambia is also the fourth most densely populated country in Africa with a population of 2 million. Nowhere is the land more than 100 meters above sea level.

We went ashore before eight to take advantage of the cooler weather. When we climbed on the dock they were just sorting out the fish that had been taken that morning and I tipped one lady to get her picture with the fish balanced on her head.

There is a different feel to the country. It seems to have much more vegetation than the Casamance and it also appears more prosperous. Everything is very neat, reflecting the English occupation.

The town of Tendaba is small and consists of some compounds where extended families live. Fishing is their livelihood. There was no sign of anything to buy and no one trying to sell anything, which was a welcome change. The only other sign of commerce is the plant where the peanut crop can be loaded into ships.

Our safari vehicles were a large truck with padded leather seats with backs and two pick-ups with minimal comfort and in which we would sit sideways. The big truck was for the serious birders, the pickups for the ecology group. A number of the birders decided to go with the eco group, which promised to see more of the villages and culture. I decided that creature comfort might be better than culture and cast my lot with the birds and the comfortable truck.

Our guide Abraham really knew his birds and before we had gone 20 feet the truck stopped by some plastic bag strewn land where we could see all sorts of birds. Everyone got out his binoculars and about 15 minutes was spent identifying them. Then we moved about 20 feet and stopped again! This was the pattern all morning.

I enjoyed looking at other things like the windlass over the town well and the girls carrying buckets of water back to their houses. There were also 3 baby goats scrambling down a hill. Baby goats are very engaging.

The countryside was lush with pasturage and large shade trees made it look almost like the western world.

After a while we stopped and everyone got out to take a bird walk through the bush. It looked like difficult walking and I guess the four of us who stayed behind thought the walk might take as much as a half-hour. It was the wrong decision. It was well over an hour before they came back.

Meanwhile the truck moved on over mud flats and parked at the airport. There was a battered sign that announced Tendaba Airport Terminal 3. Behind it were two log benches for the waiting room. A superstructure suggested that in rainy weather they might throw a tarp over it to shelter the passengers. The bus driver told us that 4-seater planes flew in perhaps once or twice a month. Abraham later corrected him to say it was more for helicopters. It is also a seasonal airport for during the rainy season the whole area is flooded.

While we waited only two vehicles came by. One was a horse cart with the black-hatted driver prodding the animal to a gallop. The second was an ox cart loaded with bags of rice. I got out and walked and stretched a bit. I even tried lying down on the beach seats. I desperately wished for

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a book to read.

At last Abraham led his flock back to the Promised Land and they apparently had seen many birds. We drove through a village with a Mission station. It looked like a tidy farm with thatched roof buildings. The thatch rather undulated instead of just lying flat. Casava was growing in a walled field. Children waved as we passed. After we had covered about a half-mile from the dock we reached heavier vegetation, taller than the truck. It thrust its long tentacles into the truck as if to caress us. However one tentacle gave me good thwack with its thorns so after that I leaned into the truck each time we passed a bush. We did see some raptors and a canary. Parrots flew overhead. We never did get as far as the Kiang West National Park but the group that did reported it wasn't much different from what we had seen

It started to get hot and at last Lyn told the driver to turn bad. We rode straight back to the dock and soon I was in the cabin exchanging my sweat soaked shirt for something dry.

After lunch on board we again boarded our pirogues. Dowell advised that we should hang back and wait for the one with the padded seats. This was another bad decision. Our boat, the Tendaba Queen, not only leaked, the outboard needed a new filter and kept stalling out. After fussing with it, they decided to load all of us into the other pirogue. It was very crowded with 28 people. Another group had commandeered the only other workable boat.

We crossed the river and entered one of the Baobalong Wetland Reserve's bolons. A bolon is a local word for a mangrove creek. The narrow waterway was beautiful with reflections of the lush foliage on either side. Birds were there in profusion. Terns, egrets, storks, and darters swooped over our head and led us on our way.

We spotted a huge hammerkop nest, which is so large that other birds sometimes nest on top of it. The hammerkops are gray birds about the size of a pigeon.

At one point Abraham spotted a huge monitor lizard hanging in a tree.

The tide was high so we were able to go through a narrow channel into another bolon to get back to the Gambia River.

One of the nicest parts of the day is to get back on board the Calisto and shower and wash my hair. I yearn for a soaky bath but letting the shower water pound on my back feels very good. This is the only trip I have made in a long time in which there has been no opportunity for a massage!

<http://www.gambia.gm/>

http://www.hiddengambia.com/adventure_holidays/gambia_photos.asp

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Kiang_West_National_Park

<http://www.honolulu zoo.org/hammerkop.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monitor_lizard

Wednesday, February 7. The ship had returned down the river to Banjul, the capitol of the Gambia, which is on the ocean. Modern, air-conditioned buses awaited us for our 8:00 am departure.

We were taken to the Abuko Forest Preserve. This is the largest and most rich example of semi-evergreen forest in the country. An easy walk through it found us soon spotting a troop of Chlorocebus more commonly known as green vervet monkeys who seemed unafraid of us. The red collubus monkeys were shy but we could see them clearly in the canopy.

Abraham, our local guide, took us to the Darwin interpretative center where a shaded porch afforded a great viewing point of the lagoon beyond. Lots of birds and using the scope we really got a close-up view. I'm getting so good at bird watching I can spot a hammerkop 100 yards away and I hadn't even heard of one until yesterday!

Then we divided into two groups, eco and bird. I had no problem deciding to be ecology. We set out behind Adama our guide but the group became strung out along the path and somehow became separated. Adama raced around getting us back together and explained we were not going to see the orphanage because the lion had escaped! While we digested the impact of this on ourselves, he went on to explain that the authorities came and since they had no stun guns ended up shooting the poor thing.

There was the inevitable bazaar as we left the park. I bought a mahogany bowl from the carver Elijah To. He kept pounding on it to show me how hard it was. I kept hoping it would not scratch!

We then went on Makasutu where the director greeted us and told us how the Makasutu Foundation is busy identifying the thousands of species, both animal and vegetable, that are found in the Gambia. They also are trying to educate people about the rich biodiversity to be

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found here. Two Englishmen acquired the acreage, fenced it and started reforesting it to protect all this natural wonder. However, he pointed out, after getting the Foundation started, they left and now the foundation is in need of more funding. The only way they have to raise money at present is through admissions and the sale of some T-shirts and postcards.

We were then boarded on pirogues and taken down the bolon. These pirogues were dugouts, made from a kapok cottonwood tree. Equipped with seats they could handle about 20 people. My back was bothering me and of course the seats had no backs so I sat on the floor of the pirogue and used my seat as a back support. It was not the best solution but it worked. We had no engine so our two "captains" paddled us down the bolon as if we were a canoe.

We stopped at a sandy beach and disembarked to walk through the woods to an area where we could see where the villagers had vegetable patches in one section of the rice fields. One lady was watering her lush looking tomato plants from water drawn from a nearby well. Some of the plants had wide leaves and Adama told us these were the "bitter tomatoes" and we would have some at lunch.

Then it was back to the boats and a short paddle to the Base Camp. This was the first development that the two founders made. It is now equipped with cottages that are for rent. Then it was a short walk through the woods back to the entrance where there were modern washrooms equipped with toilet paper!

We were seated in a picturesque area in chairs with low tables and invited to the buffet where they had many local delicacies. There was a peanut sauce to put over rice, some fried rice, a big assortment of vegetables including okra, and amazingly potato salad. Then there was some strange looking fish and chicken. I tried everything but the chicken and found it interesting. However, I could not get my fork in the cassava so will never know how it tasted. Desert was a small banana that had a different sort of taste.

While we were eating an army of Guinea baboons kept running through the area hoping for a tidbit. The waiters would shout at them and turn hoses on them but they kept coming back. One mother was running with a baby clinging to her underside nursing. I thought they were sort of fun but obviously the park would rather they subsisted in the wild instead of on the tourist's lunches.

While we ate a troubadour walked through the tables playing his kora. This is a 21-string instrument with the base a calabash covered with cowhide. It is played like a harp and makes lovely harmonious music. He passed the hat, to which I anted a dollar. Then I bought a newsletter listing all the species the park has found. I felt I should make some sort of contribution.

Also in the park was an artisans shopping area. I checked it out but did not buy anything.

Then there was an exhibit of dancing. It was the same drum and stomping we saw before but this time there was a costumed person covered to look like hair and with a long trunk. I learned we were looking at a kankurang, the ceremony used with the circumcision rites. As in Mali, the adolescent boys of the Mandingo tribe are taken off into the bush for three weeks of training on how to be a man and then brought back for this rite of passage into manhood.

We were then taken back to Banjul to the National Museum. The yard was full of school children having some sort of competition but it wasn't very clear what they were competing in.

The museum is small, on three levels. In it are jammed many dusty exhibits. One area dealt with the prehistoric time. Another had exhibits from the British Occupation. There were exhibits on Natural History and old photographs. In short there was something of interest for everyone. I hope it survives for it is certainly not being held in the best condition. Dowell told us at dinner about the weapon collection.

We were back on board before 5:00, which was wonderful. I actually had time to bath and relax.

Then Lyn announced we were to have a concert in the main salon. Baba Suso had come aboard. He comes from a musical family. His father wrote the National Anthem. He himself is a Griot. Griots are the storytellers who can recite the history of the country or person. It is only in recent times that things have been written down so the griots are very important to learn about the past.

Baba Suso brought with him a beautiful kora, which he had made himself. A kora is a calabash covered with a stretched goatskin. He apologized for some of his 21 strings made of fishing line had broken, but he still made wonderful music for us to enjoy. It is held in front of the musician and played like a harp. It was very melodic, a pleasant change from the other music we have heard. He had written the music himself. He also brought three drums called jimbays of graduated size that he had made and demonstrated the sounds each could make. He got everyone singing in the Mindinko language and some even danced. Martha was great at the foot

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stomping!

Dinner was a barbecue. We ate with the John and Alison Steadman who are from Washington DC where he is a Circuit Judge. The other couple was Peter and Alison Janss who have a ranch in Idaho.

I haven't talked about the people on the tour but they are an interesting collection. We have several doctors and lawyers. Pat Numann is a surgeon and she buys all sorts of silver jewelry. What she doesn't like she gives to the Syracuse museum to sell. The Browns, Don and Michael, have lived all over the world in Don's service career. She is interested in genealogy and collects old silver. We range in age from 93 year-old John Flick who is a biochemist to 37-year old Jenny Weil who is traveling with her mother, Gloria. She is a journalist with Star Magazine! An adopted child, she has the beautiful classic face of an Inca for she was born in Ecuador. Most everyone is as well traveled as I am. They have been enjoyable to be with.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banjul>

<http://www.gambia.co.uk/docs/excursions/abulko.aspx>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_green_monkey

<http://web.missouri.edu/~flinnm/courses/mah/factfiles/redcolubus.htm>

http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makasutu_Wildlife_Trust&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=3&ct=result&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dmakasutu%2Bfoundation%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26hs%3DRJD

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinea_Baboon

http://www.unesco.org/culture/intangible-heritage/36afr_uk.htm

<http://www.ncac.gm/banjul.html>

<http://www.onegambia.com/1gamgal/displayimage.php?album=search&cat=0&pos=1>

<http://www.onegambia.com/tribes.php>

<http://www.kora-music.com/e/frame.htm>

Thursday, February 8. We actually got to sleep a little later for the Calisto did not enter the Saloum River until about 9. We have returned to Senegal. We were taken ashore in pirogues to a pier that is obviously (from the guano) the favorite roosting place for the many sea gulls. We found a modern pink bus awaiting us for the one and a half hour drive to Joal.

A long peninsula of sand and salt marsh separates the Saloum River from the ocean. It is a somewhat monotonous drive but we paused to look at birds a couple of times. There were many baobab and acacia trees. When there were villages the houses were made of non descript cement blocks and had thatched roofs.

We did stop at the town of Sambagia where they were holding a colorful daily market.

The raised dirt road crosses a lot of flood plain where nothing grows. The Serer tribe lives in this part of Senegal and they are fishermen. They collect salt from these flats to preserve their fish.

We spotted three jackals. I have no idea what they were hoping to scavenge on the barren land.

At last we arrived in Joal. The first president of Senegal, Leopold Senghor, was born here. Our goal was a hotel where we could use the restrooms and then we were loaded into the worst pirogues yet! Ours had two boards across the gunnels on which to sit. These seats were perhaps 3 feet wide and we had to share. I felt very insecure and often grabbed hold of Arlene Flick with whom I shared the seat. We were poled through the shallow water to the granary island.

Joal's sister town of Fadiout was subject to fires and rats and so the grains were moved to this nearby island where raised platforms held a sort of basket topped with a thatch roof. They are not used much any more but the young people have to come to the island and learn to make one so they will know their heritage. If a farmer has a bad year, grain is donated from the other farmers to help him out. Millet is the choice of grain for it is much less expensive than rice.

Then it was back in our pirogues to be taken to the shell island where there is a large cemetery. Our guide, Jean Marc, told us how the Muslims are wrapped in shrouds and buried with their head toward Mecca. The Christians are buried in coffins. The mound of shells in which they are buried looks to be twenty feet high and covers a wide area. There are three graves of special note. One is of a monk who died but could not be taken back to France. One is of the first girl in the town to become a nun. The last is of an African American woman who asked to be buried here where she felt her ancestors are. She lies in an anonymous grave.

We walked across a long wooden bridge to Fadiout. This island is unique in that it is 90%

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Christian! It is also unique in that it was created by using a polder system. The dykes were filled with the ever-prevalent shells.

The town is divided into four districts, each with a small shrine to its patron saint. Each district also has a tribunal-meeting place where the men gather each day to settle disputes. There were people ready to sell us souvenirs but they did not pester us. The town also has fixed prices, another welcome relief. In the center of town is the sacred baobab tree over 700 years old. The people think it represents their ancestors and make offerings to it. Jean Marc told us how the griots are buried in baobab trees rather than the ground for it is thought they should not ever touch the earth. The main street of the town is called the Champs Elysee commemorating the fact that it was turned Christian by Catholic monks 150 years ago.

We then walked a very long wooden bridge back to our buses. The bridge was built by wood from Gabon but it went to France where it was prefabricated before being brought here. They think it will last 100 years.

Everyone was very quiet during the drive back to the boat. I'm sure we were all very tired. There was also dust in the bus, which made breathing unpleasant. As soon as we were back on the pirogues the sea gulls left the water where they had been squawking at us and reclaimed the pier!

Lunch was served right after we got back and then we had our disembarkation talk. They were then going to show "An Inconvenient Truth" but I have already seen it.

This was followed by Wayne's last bird lecture but I skipped it. The birds have been interesting but a little too intense.

The Captains cocktail party and farewell dinner ended the day.

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:SN-Joal_Fadiout.png

http://www.au-senegal.com/decouvrir_en/geo_saloum.php

http://www.hansrossel.com/fotos/fotografie/senegal/se_s7.htm

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joal-Fadiout>

Friday, February 9. We said farewell to the Calisto and our guide Lemine and Sandra escorted us to the ferryboat "Beer" for the trip to Goree Island. The boat was crowded and two ladies squeezed into the seats with us. Their purpose soon became clear. It was to entice us into their shops. I did end up later buying a necklace from Maam.

On the island we first went to the slave market. It is just as poignant as ever to see the horrible conditions in which they were kept. They were treated like cattle. One cell was used for the men who did not make the weight limitation so they could fatten them up.

Then we walked across the island to the old fort, which is now a museum. It is very nicely done. A half circle of small rooms with each one featuring some aspect of Senegal from the prehistoric to modern day Islam.

We walked back to the small hotel for lunch. It started with peel your own small shrimp, which are not only messy but leave you with the feeling you have eaten nothing! This was followed by a fish brochette and rice. The best part was the banana for desert.

I succumbed to buying a small kora. It only has 7 strings instead of 21 but it makes a lovely sound.

Then it was back to the mainland where we said farewell to Sandra. Lamine took us to the University of Dakar where they have an art museum. The first collection we viewed was of contemporary Senegalese artists. I have difficulty with modern art finding it difficult to envision one in my eclectically decorated house. However, I could see that there was a lot of talent represented.

The other exhibit was very interesting. There were life size dioramas of various masked rites among the tribes of West Africa. Some of the animal masks are amazing.

We finally reached the Sofitel Taranga at 5:00 PM and were given an hour to rest before dinner. It was wonderful to have a soaky bath after two weeks of nothing but showers.

The farewell dinner was held on the terrace. My lamb was very good. Then I went back to the room and slept until almost midnight.

<http://webworld.unesco.org/goree/>

Saturday, February 10, 2007. I got up at 11:45 PM and found Wally waiting for the six of us who are on the Delta flight scheduled to leave at 4:30AM. He had the same large pink bus we have been using and since there was no traffic at this hour made it to the airport in record time. Delta

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hadn't even opened up!

There were swarms of people trying to get on various planes and our first hang-up was when we stopped to get the bags weighed. Jan was flying in coach and apparently her bag was overweight. We finally separated her from the rest of us and got weighed only to stand in another line. They took us one by one into Delta's security and then opened and rummaged through all the bags. I don't know how I would have managed without my cane seat.

At last I was checked onto the airline and then the problem became how to get to passport control. Masses of people were also trying to get through. I couldn't even figure out where the end of the line was! I pleaded with the guard about my old age and infirmity (waving my cane) and he consented to let me into the line reserved for cripples and people with small children. There was no one else there and I walked right along until the x-ray machine letting me into the airport waiting room. It was only then that I realized I had somehow missed the little detail of getting my passport stamped so I guess I am still in Senegal.

I climbed the two flights up to the premiere classe waiting room and after drinking the better part of a bottle of water got out my computer and enjoyed the WiFi. After a long interval Gail Spertzel finally appeared but there was no sign of Martha and Dowell. They finally arrived as Delta announced they were loading the plane.

Before getting on the bus to take us to the plane we had to go through even more security as they wanded us. I don't know what was going on but there must have been some threat. It was business class that got the business. Coach passengers seemed to be handled normally. . Dowell made the comment that the Dakar airport should be called a "destination."

We finally got in the air and were served breakfast. I then went back to sleep. However, the flight was very bumpy. We fought a head wind all the way across. At one point it was so bumpy the stewardess refused to let me use the toilet.

A snack was served before we got to Atlanta. The flight had taken almost 10 hours