

# A JOURNEY TO THE ROOF OF AFRICA

## The Highlands of Ethiopia



A journey to the roof of Africa takes you into the heart of Ethiopia both literally and figuratively. This land of ancient history is the home of a burgeoning population of 91 million people living on the edges of the mountains and economic security.

The country of Ethiopia is massive and spectacular. Terraced mountains and valleys move across a contrasting landscape of dramatic beauty in the highlands of Africa, the headwaters of the Nile River flowing North to the Mediterranean Sea. These mountain lands are called the roof of Africa and have a long and venerable history.

More beautiful than the landscape are its generous, open-hearted, loving and hard working peoples. From many tribes and languages, they welcomed the group of us traveling with Dr. Dennis and Beulah Carlson and son, Dr. Andy Carlson. At every turn in our fascinating journey of discovery across the northern highlands we felt accepted and welcomed.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's teeming capital city greeted us first where we met our team from the Kossoye Development Program (the KDP), who hosted us over ten powerful days. There we also "met" Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*) our 3.2 million year old ancestor and a first mother of the human race. In a more modern world we also met our guides and had our first taste of the magnificent food of Ethiopia based on Injera bread and flavorful sauces.



Quickly we journeyed from there to the cities of Axum, homeland of the ancient Kings of Ethiopia, Lalibela, the site of the famous rock-hewn churches of the Ethiopian Orthodox Coptic Churches, and finally to Gondar, headquarters of a marvelous project of care and compassion which was the object of our travels. The Kossoye Development Program is helping shape the future of this region and of the entire country in its efforts to help local people achieve food security.

At each site we gained deeper respect for the complex history and long story of a proud nation and magnificent people who have accomplished so much through a sustained and remembered history over the millennia. In Axum we saw the spiritual and political roots of the Ethiopian Kingdoms as they spread South to consolidate a nation. We witnessed the living and vital faith of its now largely Orthodox Christian population and learned of its roots in ancient Judaism. Deeper still we journeyed to its shrine site of Lalibela where the churches are carved deep into the rock of the mountains and where faithful pilgrims come daily in a steady stream to worship and pray. We were also welcomed and blessed as fellow pilgrims who shared in its iconic beauty.

From there we traveled to Gondar nestled in the green mountains, near Lake Tana, headwaters of the Nile River and jumping off point for the magnificent Simien mountains and reserve which shelters unique African wildlife. From that historic city we witnessed the near miracle of loving practical compassion founded by Dr. Dennis Carlson in league with trusted Ethiopian colleagues, and now under the aegis of Dr. Andy Carlson in partnership with the University of Gondar to provide food security for the rural and urban populations of Ethiopia through practical training in intensive, organic vegetable gardening.

Founded less than a decade ago, the Kossoye Development Program has caught hold (if not fire) and is spreading from hand to hand, person to person, village to village starting from demonstration gardens in the region of Kossoye and Gondar. There training is provided by local teams who teach children and adults alike to become food independent. Individuals, farmers, and whole villages, have accepted these practices and now raise the much needed vegetables which will meet the nutritional needs of a booming population. The results are evident everywhere.



Under the careful guidance of Drs. Dennis and Andy Carlson and their Ethiopian counterparts, they have succeeded in creating a respected, fast moving and flexible agency which can respond effectively and quickly to the changing needs and challenges of food production in rural and urban communities.

We were privileged to watch this small organization at work to effect large, powerful and dramatic changes in the lives of real people using local resources. Armed with seeds, their expertise, and a passion for teaching and training average people in sustainable gardening practices, this organization is having a dramatic impact on the region. Its popularity is spreading and many individuals from all levels of society are taking up the cause and working to become food independent, self-sustaining practitioners of organic gardening and farming. It works! It is effective!

Not only are ordinary (and some very extra-ordinary younger and older) gardeners growing crops, local people are raising enough for themselves and to sell to their neighbors, and then, most importantly, are raising seed for sustainable gardens in future seasons. The KDP ignited this movement for food sustainability by providing free seed and then training without cost to local people. Through teamwork they have continued to give guidance and training as there was need over multiple growing seasons. Local governments and the University of Gondar have embraced the work. There is now a collegial relationship between the University and the KDP that is both pragmatic and practical which is becoming a model for all of Ethiopia and perhaps other African nations as well.

It was a privilege for us from the affluent West to witness the promise and possibility of such effective servant leadership at all levels for the good of Ethiopia and the world. If ever there was a mission to support in helping to create a sustainable world with all of its challenges, this is it. Those of us who saw it all with our own eyes are its patrons, and we shout from the roof-top of Africa—join us in helping spread something so powerful and effective for the well-being of such a beautiful nation and its people. In the end, remember we are all Ethiopians! Our ancestors came from Ethiopia and now we have returned to help and support the homeland.



LB

*On behalf of the second group tour  
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