INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GJ-11
Ethiopian Safari

March 15, 1971
Box 21262
Nairobi, Kenya

Mr. R. H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
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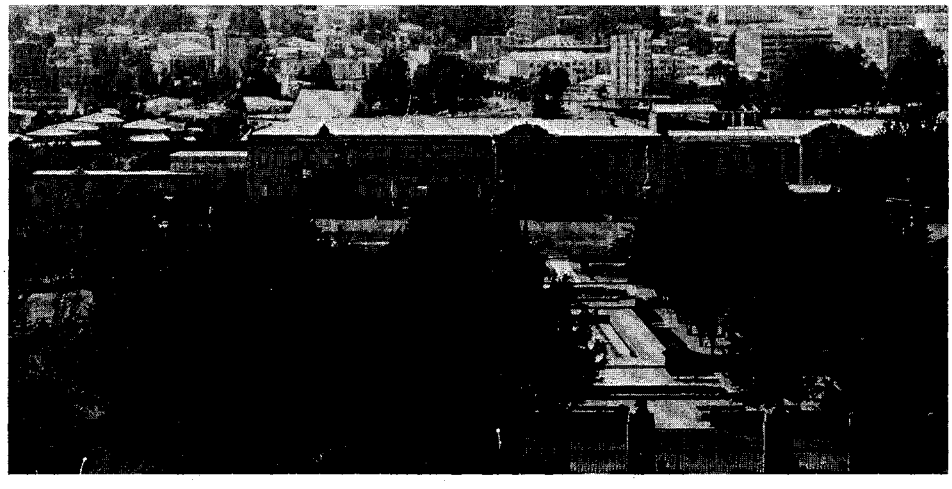
New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

My being in Ethiopia was almost like attending a smorgasbord: I faced the choice of either filling up on one limited area of interest or being content to sample a host of varied curiosities. In view of the time limitation and because of my general unfamiliarity with Ethiopia, I chose the latter course of action. Hopefully there will be other opportunities to visit Ethiopia in order to focus in depth on more subjects.

The name Haile Selassie has been synonomous with Ethiopia over the past forty-one years. During his long reign as Emperor and King, His Imperial Majesty has observed and participated in many changes in Ethiopia--a country which boasts of a 3,000 year old culture, and which is said to have the longest continuous dynasty in Africa. Ethiopia is the tenth largest country in Africa. Its population of 24 million and land area of 472,000 square miles make it over twice the size of



the royal palace

Kenya. The economy of Ethiopia is heavily dependent upon farming. Agriculture accounts for 80 percent of the country's exports, with coffee as its major crop. As one travels around the countryside of Ethiopia and sees the fertile soil, it is not hard to believe that over 90 percent of the people derive their livelihood from farming or from activities directly related

to farming. In many areas, however, the continued use of primitive cultivation methods and the lack of transportation keep farm production at a subsistence level. Although rich soil covers much of the land area, a great portion of Ethiopia remains rugged mountainous terrain. As many writers have noted, the farm lands framed in by imposing mountain ranges give one the illusion of being in Switzerland.

A little more than a decade ago, the government instituted a program of land development. This program, organized with the idea of introducing new and improved farming techniques, is made available to people according to need in the form of land, money, manpower, and technical assistance. In addition to this direct assistance, to promote as well as to keep people engaged in farming activities, the government also sends Community Development Workers into the field--their main tasks being to build more schools, instill better teaching methods, help construct more usable roads, excavate safer drinking wells and, finally, help establish community cooperatives. Numerous trips to the outlying regions of Addis gave me a first-hand look at the results of these farm promotional activities. It appears that the farmers who have taken advantage of the government's lucrative offer are not only producing more crops than the traditional farmer, but are also much freer to enjoy social and civic activities of the community. These new farming procedures also are allowing young people to spend more time participating in school activities. Work on the farm for them is no longer a sun-up to sun-down activity.

The family unit in Ethiopia, like that of many other African nations, is one of the basic elements of cultural development and solidarity. The closeness and concern linking each family member have been and remain fundamental. Many people I talked to felt these bonds, although still strong, have waned as an aftermath of the war entanglement of 1936 and the accompanying dislocation of families. Epidemics resulting from the lack of proper medical programs during the war years have also had negative effects on families by killing off key members. Between 1936 and 1941 organizations such as the Ethiopian Red Cross Society and the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Organization were set up explicitly to keep families intact as much as possible. Immediately after the war and during subsequent years, many of these programs used the self-help concept to assist family togetherness. However, in spite of programs such as the Rehabilitation Training Center for the Handicapped (which provides job and skill training for needy persons) and schools for the blind and the deaf, unemployment, poverty, and all the concomitant conditions are prevalent in many parts of Ethiopia. One cannot help but be struck by the number of handicapped people as well as rural people seeking employment who roam the streets begging for money and food. Almost reading

Some of
the beautiful
Ethiopian people.

the thoughts going through my mind as we toured, accompanying Ethiopians usually responded with: "...takes time--you should have seen conditions ten years ago." In retaliation I was generally asked to account for the 20 million Americans living in poverty.

The future of Ethiopia will be shaped by its developing educational system. The school population has grown from twenty thousand in 1942 to over 686,000 currently. School for the youngsters in Ethiopia begins when they reach their sixth birthday--they are usually enrolled in a church-sponsored school where they are taught the 300 characters of the Amharic alphabet. Upon successfully mastering these symbols, they enter the first grade; grades 1-6 represent the primary level. The national language, Amharic, is used in all grade levels; English is offered between the third and sixth grades as a foreign language. Grades seven and eight, called the Junior Secondary period, are devoted mainly to practical training. The Junior Secondary program was instituted under the insistence of the Emperor in order to prepare school-leavers for the eventual job market. The training includes work-areas such as agriculture, commerce, industrial arts, and for girls, home-economics. The remainder of the normal school continuum, grades 9-12, constitutes a college preparatory curriculum--this period of time is called the Senior Secondary. At the completion of grade twelve, students are eligible to sit for examinations for entry into the University. The exams consist of eight different subjects of which five must be passed. Of the five it is mandatory that the individual get a passing score on the English, mathematics and Amharic sections. Schooling, including the University level, is free for all Ethiopian children. Over 17% of the government budget goes for education. For many centuries education was the sole responsibility of the church. After learning the Amharic alphabet, the church insisted that one master the Psalms and the Gospels. The change from the religious context did not come about until 1908.

According to many historical accounts, the most shattering era in the history of Ethiopia and especially amongst its educated young occurred during the Fascist occupation between 1936 and 1941. During these five years all schools were closed; education for Ethiopians was terminated. In addition, the reports indicate that over 75% of the young graduates and students whom the Emperor had nurtured were massacred. It has taken the country a long time to live down this excruciating event and once again build up a reservoir of future leadership for the country. Immediately following the war years, the government assumed the responsibility for outlining a school curriculum which extended into the private, church and community sectors.

One of the major educational problems since occupation has been the shortage of qualified teachers. As an interim measure to meet the need the Ethiopians had to recruit teachers from other countries such as the United States, Canada, England and China. However, given the heavy stress on teacher training the numbers of expatriate teachers are dwindling substantially. In view of the increased teaching manpower, evening classes (free of charge) are offered to all the adult population of Ethiopia. The Emperor in the third five-year national plan has given top priority to eradicating illiteracy. During 1962 over ½ million people were taught to read and write. Television and radio have been most instrumental in promoting literacy. Educational material is given priority over many of the strictly entertainment programs on both T.V. and radio.

Entertainment in Ethiopia has become very organized--the theater, the art shows, and drama festivals dominate much of the urban social life. The discotheque is very popular with the younger age groups, while dining and dancing are enjoyed by all. Ethiopian cuisine is not only tasty but interesting--especially their native dish, injera and wat. Wat is the name given to a variety of sauces--of which the base is berbera, an Ethiopian pepper--mixed with individually minced portions of beef, chicken and mutton. Injera is the bread made mainly out of a cereal called teff. Injera is spongy looking (like foam rubber) and comes in different colors, red, black, yellow, or green depending on the type of cereal used. The bread is usually cooked in a special pan over a eucalyptus wood fire. Eucalyptus smoke supposedly adds to the flavor of the injera.

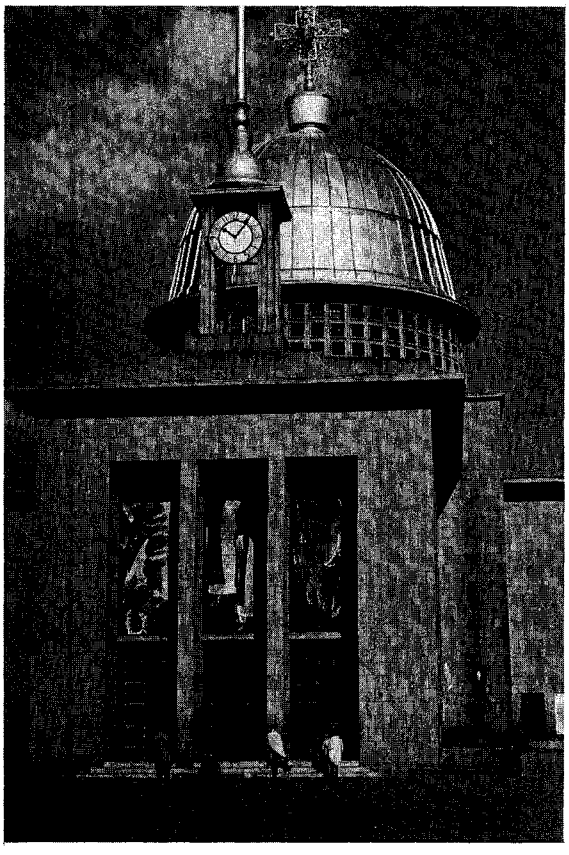
Eating out is a treat not only because of the tastiness of the food, but also by reason of the ritual involved. The local restaurants are usually made up of several small dining areas in one huge round room. In the center of each area there is a huge reed basket affair, shaped like a giant mushroom, in which the injera is placed. My own initiation into the eating habits of the Ethiopians was quite an adventure. When the waitress brought us a ewer and basin with which to wash, my companions and I, trying to be worldly and not look touristy, looked around to see how others were handling these initial ceremonies. We found ourselves performing alone. Forging ahead, we rolled up our sleeves and began scrubbing away--with no reaction from our audience. After drying and still no reaction, we felt satisfied that we had passed the preliminaries. We found later that the home folk simply wash the finger tips of the eating hand. Strike one. The next ritual takes place with a host of waitresses bearing

covered dishes of sauce, placing several portions--five different types--on the injera. The skill in eating hinges on whether one can with one hand break a portion of injera, fold it properly, scoop a portion of sauce and then "pusha," (place) it in the mouth without spilling or messing. Strike Two. Failing to test the different types of sauces by first sampling them, I very quickly found myself with a mouthful of liquid fire and nothing with which to wash it down but warm coca-cola. Strike three. This experience was fun, inexpensive, but trying.

On special occasions such as holidays and festivals, the Ethiopians serve raw steak. The meat is hung on racks, conspicuously displayed, so that as guests pass through the eating area they can select a portion to sample. With a sharp knife, they carve out long slices and then dip the meat in a very hot sauce--supposedly hot enough to kill the potential hookworm. The meat is then ready for eating. Having had a verbal description of the raw meat delicacy and being under no social pressure, we passed it up.

Because Addis Ababa is centrally located in Ethiopia, my companions and I were able to visit conveniently many surrounding historical spots as well as some of the local places of color. One impressive drive in particular was to the Blue Nile Gorge. After winding up the Entoto mountains which hover over Addis, we were overwhelmed by the great vastness of the Rift Valley as it unfolds for hundreds of miles. The lushness of the land, the beautiful mountainous terrain and the very beautiful people we encountered along the route were breathtaking. Although we overanticipated the effect of the Nile--it is actually very muddy and not blue at a close distance--we were pleasantly surprised by unbelievable architectural masterpieces along the way, such as the monasteries of St. Michel and Debre Libanos. Built as tributes to the royalty of Ethiopia, these buildings are truly monumental memorials. The monastery at Libanos was founded in the 14th century. As the story is told, the monastery was founded by one of the famous Ethiopian saints, Tekla Haymanot, who stood meditating in a cave until one of his legs dropped off.

In Addis proper, one of the most spectacular sights is the Mercato Market. There one finds the beautiful Ethiopian women dressed in their colorful native costume (shammas) and the stylish men decked out in their jodhpur-style trousers and shawls (netella) along with the shabbily dressed street people buying products ranging from antiques to spools of cotton thread. This "new market" is a maze of alleys and open areas filled with thousands of stalls. If you are not adverse



Debre Libanos

Vocational training school

A stall at the Mercato Market

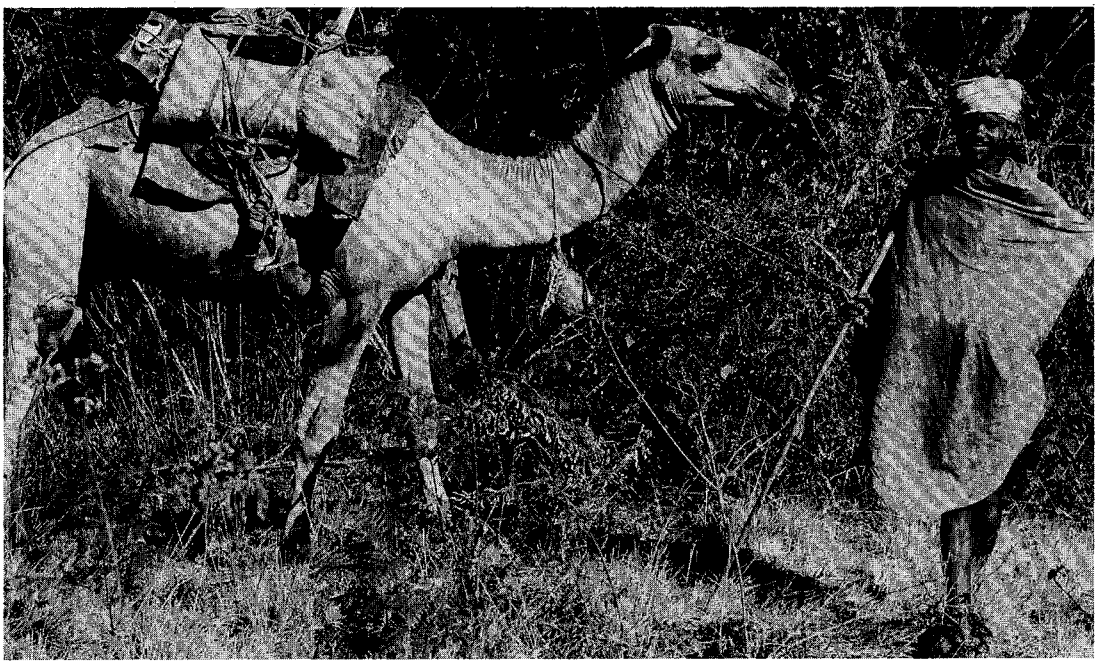
to bargaining and spending time being jostled about, you will find some exciting buys. It would take two days to see the market in its entirety. The young salesmen--ages 9-12--were most impressive; their ability to size up customers and feed the ego was outstanding. The average tourist very seldom escapes without having purchased several Coptic crosses, a pictorial representation of the story of the Queen of Sheba, or an ancient Coptic Bible.

As is true in most agricultural countries with large urban centers, patterns of living and personality traits noticeably change as you move out into more rural parts. After having flown to Addis, my two companions and I drove back to Nairobi, more than a thousand miles. The six days enroute gave us ample opportunity to meet the rural citizens of Ethiopia. The trip back was an exciting experience in itself.

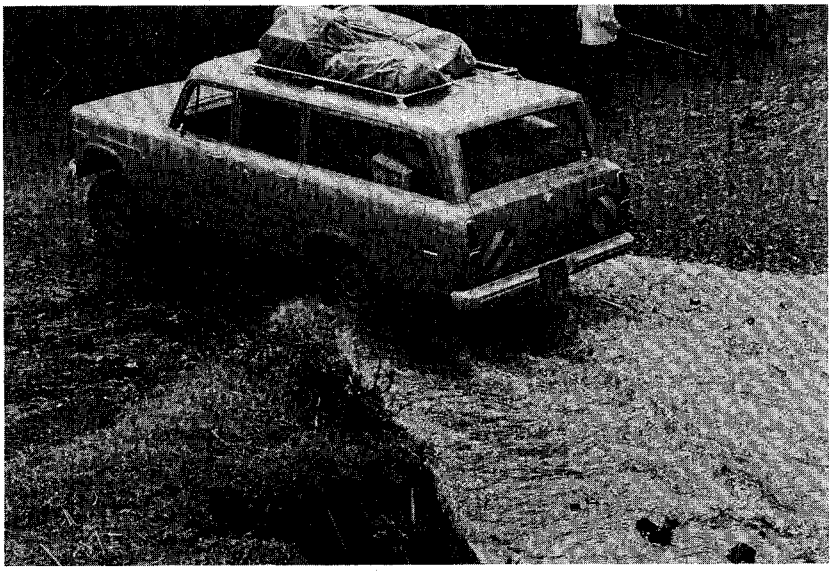
Because of the scarcity of accommodations along the way, it was necessary for us to pack our four-wheel drive vehicle with enough provisions and equipment to last us through normal conditions as well as unforeseen emergencies. Camping is certainly not a new activity for me, but when we began counting and sorting our equipment I suddenly felt like a novice: 6 petrol jerry cans (5 gallons), tow rope, tool box, spade and pick combination, 2 pangas, 4-man tent, sleeping bags/air mattresses, ice chest, 2 canvas water bags, table, two butane gas lamps, compass (which we couldn't find and had great need of, utensils for cooking, skillet, boiling pots, coffee maker, plates, cups, cutlery, hunting knife, 2 flashlights, wash basin, toilet paper, soap (detergent and face), sponge and dish towels, can opener, bottle opener, camp chairs, matches, grill, foot locker, first aid kit, Tanganika jack, spanner wrench, 4 fan belts, 2 water hoses, puncture kit, 3 inner tubes, tire pumps (foot type), 2 spare tires with wheels, 4 boxes of candy and 10 pounds of dried snuff (used in lieu of money for help along the way!). In addition we had to plan and purchase food for 5 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 5 dinners. When we departed the Addis Hilton where we were staying, the porters, guards and other personnel who had gathered to wish us bon voyage were taking bets that we would not reach the outskirts of town before total collapse. As we inspected the flattened rear springs, the odds grew even higher. Rather than throw out the 15 cans of pork and beans or the ten cans of sardines, however, we decided to take a chance--and had no trouble. With the exception of a little swaying and a little difficulty seeing over the front fenders, 259 kilometers and four hours later we arrived at our first destination most comfortably. Needless to say, the scenery was quite lovely and the traffic sparse--27 cars, 13 buses, 50 trucks and 1 camel. Most of the houses along the way were made of mud and wattle with corrugated tin roofs. It was also interesting to note that most of the houses thus far on the trip had electricity.

The second day after travelling approximately 8½ hours, we camped at a spot which could have been mistaken for paradise. Although it was in the middle of nowhere, as far as the eye could see we had a panoramic view of the majestic Rift Valley. After a hard day of driving, mainly through roadless, mountainous terrain and after fording bridgeless rivers, we were pleased with this serene campsite. Sitting round the fire we began to discuss the excitement of the day which occurred in a little town called Dilla. Although no one there spoke any languages which we understood, I think we could have run for a public office by the time we left. As you can well imagine, not too many travelers pass through these small places, and accordingly, when this overloaded vehicle with three Americans came to town, all hell broke loose. It began when I attempted to photograph (Polaroid) a little girl, intending to give her the picture. The little girl, no doubt frightened by these strange creatures, began crying and ran for protection. A very courageous man standing nearby immediately volunteered to have his picture taken and subsequently got himself a beautiful color photo. At this point, at least 25 people had gathered and when they saw this one-minute colored picture, the aahs and oohs brought the remainder of the village, including the little girl. After being jostled around and not being able to continue, we climbed on the car and made feeble attempts to make people understand that the camera could produce only one picture at a time and that it would be economically impossible to fulfill all the demands to have pictures taken. Almost like a voice from heaven someone in the crowd said, "Can I assist you? I speak a little English." Finally through our new-found interpreter we were able to shoot a few more shots (Including the little girl) and then make our get-a-way. All the clamor of the day, coupled with the long hard drive, made us tired enough to forget the threat of wild lions and hyenas that we had been warned against during our earlier briefings.

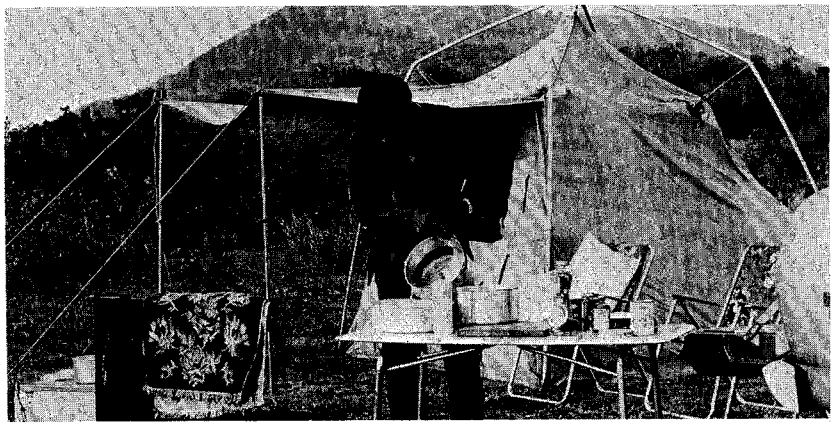
For the next two evenings of camping, we forewent the wilds and stayed at guarded compounds. The first evening (Mega) we camped in the front yard of a Scandinavian missionary. We were well guarded that evening by a huge German police dog who could distinguish guests from intruders, and because he didn't err during our stay, I didn't press the issue as to how he managed these finer distinctions. After dinner we braved a tour of the town. It sounds normal enough as I write about it, but at the time it seemed adventurous. There were no lights, nor streets, nor people who spoke English. However, before we returned, we had met several people and had even crashed a dance in progress in the backyard of someone's house. We were there for several minutes before being challenged (all one could see were silhouettes); but after having established the fact that we were not Somalis, we were welcomed and offered some of the local brew. We had a few



A welcomed interlude during our safari



Forging a stream prior to entering the town of Dilla



All the comforts of home--almost

anxious moments as our identities were being established. The next evening, we stopped at a Catholic mission in a little town called Sololo. Before bedding down for the evening, we were told by one of the Catholic priests to check in with the Police; they (the police) wanted to have a record of any visitors who remained in the area. When we arrived at the police compound, we were questioned briefly and then told that it would be better if we stayed with them for the evening. So we pitched camp in the middle of the police compound. After sharing a few drinks with some of the local off-duty constabularies, we were guaranteed extra-special protection for the night. After securing the the evening, the only sound we heard was early the next morning when six Islamic policemen chanted their prayers facing the rising sun. Except for meeting a band of 25 men performing intricate rituals along a desert stretch (whom we later found out to be possible bandits) and a simultaneous blowout on one front and one rear tire, the remainder of the trip proved to be enjoyable but uneventful.

In an attempt to reflect and to summarize my travels in Ethiopia I am left with many unanswered questions which I feel important in order to begin to understand the dynamics of the country. The whole question regarding the impact of the Coptic church upon the political system--though many feel the importance of the church to be declining--would be worth pursuing. Also, the whole political reorganization would be an interesting undertaking in itself. The distribution of responsibility by His Imperial Majesty to the newly appointed position of Prime Minister (1966) must at any rate have caused changes within the government. It would be important to see the relationship between the national government and the locally constituted administration--whether autonomy exists and to what degree. It would also be fun to return to Ethiopia in order to show the doubters at the hotel that we did complete the journey--intact.

Sincerely,

George Jones

George Jones

Received in New York on May 14, 1971