WHAT I DID ON MY NON-HOLIDAYS

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Categories: Africa, Mission

Waiting in line for passport control at Bole airport in Addis Ababa, I had plenty of time to talk to my neighbours; a couple from Manchester who were on their way home after a few weeks touring the country. They told me that they had done the *usual tourist trail* visiting Gonder and other exciting places. Meanwhile, I had just spent two weeks in Addis, most of it sitting in a conference room listening to people talking. They'd had a much better time of it than I - or had they?

No doubt my tourist friends had seen lots of interesting and exotic Ethiopian cultural sites; most of them arranged for the benefit of paying visitors. I, on the other hand, didn't see much like that. But when I did see coffee made in traditional fashion, it was being made by a friend who had invited a group of us round to her house for lunch. Friends from other countries and cultures are one of the most precious gifts I know.

On another occaission I ate Ethiopian food, not in some anonymous restaurant, but in an open air canteen surrounded by workers from the surrounding shops and offices. There with Alex and Doug (an American, I first met in the UK) I tore off lumps of injera (Ethiopian bread) and dipped it into the firey meat and vegetable sources. Great stuff.

Of course, life wasn't all eating injera and drinking coffee (wonderful coffee - as befits the country where it was first roasted), I was there to work. But, you know, work isn't all that bad. Sitting with Bible translators and administrators; Ethiopians, Americans, Brits, Germans and Finns trying to work out the best way to ensure that the Scriptures are translated into local languages isn't a bad way to pass the time. Basically, my job boiled down to listening to them talking and then asking a few well placed questions that would help them to think through issues more deeply. We talked about training translators, developing the next generation of leaders, how to get the Ethiopian church more involved in translation - what more could I ask for?

Small group discussions, brainstorming, reflecting on the Bible and praying together - the time went quickly. I received a nice complement from one colleague who said that when I'm facilitating a discussion by asking questions, you hardly realise that I'm there. That's exactly

the situation that I try to aim for - though I'm sure that some of you who know me in other contexts find that hard to imagine.I didn't get to do an interesting tour of Ethiopia, but I did get to share in the lives of people who are deeply commited to the country and who are working hard to see God's word available to all of the different language groups in the country. It is a huge privelege and I wouldn't have swapped it for the world. Not only that, but a charming young lady took pity on my bald head and gave me a very nice (though somewhat ineffective) parasol



There are more pictures of my trip in the photograph gallery if you want to see them.