



The

SOLAR RAY

A Monthly Publication of the School for Outdoor leadership, Adventure, and Recreation (SOLAR)

March 2009

SIMIEN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK, ETHIOPIA

Story and photos by Winnie Chrzanowski

Lammergeyers floated effortlessly on the thermals above Ethiopia's Simien Mountains. Aside from an occasional screech from these huge vultures, the quiet of the Simien Mountains National Park intensified the extraordinary panoramas of one of Africa's most breathtaking geological sights. In a country where people are seemingly everywhere and the sight of a carload of faranji (foreigners) causes mass pandemonium and requests for birr (the local currency), the remoteness and silence of the place added to its enchanting quality.



The overland journey from Debarq through numerous small towns and majestic landscapes barely prepared me for the dramatic landscape of the park itself. Skirting the massive valleys and outcroppings of rocks resembling mountains of the moon, the circuitous, rocky, unpaved roads

took us slowly upward to about 3,000m. The trip allowed for kaleidoscopic views of the wild landscape and for the occasional flat tire. Small inconveniences like that gave me the opportunity to experience the area even better as I was able to walk part of the way to the destination.



Although relatively unknown in the U.S, the Simien Mountain range is one of Africa's largest and boasts at least a dozen peaks topping the 4,000m mark. The Simiens



are made

up of several plateaus separated by broad river valleys and are the result of massive seismic

activity that took place about 40 million years ago.

Subsequent erosion left behind today's jagged landscape.

This fabulous region provides homes to exotic flora and fauna—many of which are endemic to Ethiopia. Three of Ethiopia's endemic mammals inhabit the Simiens: the gelada baboon, the



large



Thick-billed ravens and hadada ibis also inhabit the park along with about 50 other species of birds including the impressive lammergeyers with their 10 foot wingspan. The landscape is studded with the beautiful and endemic Abyssinian wild rose as well as a wide variety of plants such as wild iris, mint, everlasting, lavender, thyme, Lady's Mantle, and flat top acacia trees.

A few of the local Amharic villagers met up with our group toward the end of our road trip through this magical place offering to sell us a variety of handmade items—hats were the particular specialty. For 30 birr (or USD3) I should have bought several. As it is, you may see me on the trail one day in my native Amharic headgear.

Although I didn't get in much trekking on this trip (with or without the hat), trekking this off-the-map landscape remains the best way to explore the area. However, I was on a tour with a varied itinerary and a specific time schedule, so the road trip in a good 4x4 allowed me to get a good feel for the scenery and the wildlife of the Simiens. A return trip with time to hike in this awe-inspiring place feels like a good plan to me.

Walia ibex, and the Ethiopian wolf. Only the gelada baboons cooperated in making themselves available for photos. They're protected within this UNESCO site and are so comfortable around people, close up photos are the norm rather than the exception.



A group of SOLAR people have been devoting considerable time this winter to building West Greenland Kayaks Replicas. This endeavor was lead by Chuck Smith who rented a basement workshop and supplied machinery. Here is a pictorial montage of the progress made, there are 16 boats under construction.



SOLAR MARCH 2009

CALENDAR

www.solaroutdoors.org

MARCH ACTIVITIES

1	Tues.	Monthly Meeting	Colony Hall	Cindy Taylor	SolarPresident@SolarOutdoors.org
1	Tues	TBD	Colony Hall	Janet Duncan	SolarPrograms@solaroutdoors.org
3/8	Sun	American Lung Assoc. of MI Climb Detroit	Detroit Renaissance Center	Lisa Boose	elbows6000@att.net
1/7	Sat	Hoedown	Livonia, MI	Margaret Martin	mpluscat@hotmail.com

MARCH CLASSES

(con't) 3/11, 25	Wedi	Adventure Racing	TBD	Pamela Riehl	pariehl@gmail.com
1/7	Sat	Wilderness First Aid Re-certification	Redford, MI	Mary Egan Price	mathildet@sbcglobal.net

APRIL ACTIVITIES

4/2-5	Multi	White Water Rafting	Ohioyle, PA	Charity Loring	charitymarie@yahoo.com
4/7	Tues	Monthly Meeting	Colony Hall	Cindy Taylor	SolarPresident@SolarOutdoors.org
4/7	Tues	TBD	Colony Hall	Janet Duncan	SolarPrograms@solaroutdoors.org
4/5-12	Multi	Return to St John USVI	Maho Bay Camps, St. John, USVI	Jim Gessner	gessnerj@comcast.net

APRIL CLASSES

(con't) 4/4, 8, 19	Multi	Adventure Racing	TBD	Pamela Riehl	pariehl@gmail.com
4/9, 16, 18, 23, 25-26	Multi	Beginner Backpacking Spring Class	Oak Park Community Center	Mike Banks	slywolfe52@yahoo.com

MAY ACTIVITIES

1	Tues	Monthly Meeting	Colony Hall	Cindy Taylor	SolarPresident@SolarOutdoors.org
1	Tues	SOLAR Elections	Colony Hall	Janet Duncan	SolarPrograms@solaroutdoors.org
5/1-3	Wknd	Wildflower Weekend	Metamora, MI	Margaret Martin	mpluscat@hotmail.com
5/22- 25	Multi	Starved Rock and Mattiessen State Park Hike and Camp Weekend	Utica, IL	Leslie Cordova	lesliegene@aol.com
5/23-6/1	Multi	Off-trail Canadian Backpacking Expedition (more information at http://therucksack.tripod.com/trips.htm)	Lake Superior Provincial Park	Michael Neiger	mneiger@hotmail.com

MAY CLASSES

(con't) 5/7, 15-17	Multi	Beginner Backpacking Spring Class	Oak Park Community Center	Mike Banks	slywolfe52@yahoo.com
(con't) 5/9, 30	Sat	Adventure Racing	TBD	Pamela Riehl	pariehl@gmail.com
5/16-17	Wknd	Scuba Diving – Pool	TBD	Tom Hayes	sarcaptin@yahoo.com
5/28, 6/4, 11, 18, 25	Sat	Open Water Kayak Skills	Harley Ensign Boat Ramp	Chuck Smith	cbryansmit@aol.com

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Fall 2010	Multi	Gaelic Adventure	Ireland	Jim Gessner	gessnerj@comcast.net
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5/28, 6/4, 11, 18, 25	Sat	Open Water Kayak Skills	Harley Ensign Boat Ramp	Chuck Smith	cbryansmit@aol.com
6/6-7	Wknd	Scuba Diving – Open Water Test	Bowling Green, OH	Tom Hayes	sarcaptin@yahoo.com

If you would like to plan/lead a SOLAR activity, contact our Activities Chairperson, Samantha Schafer, at SolarActivities@SolarOutdoors.org.

If you would like to teach or suggest a SOLAR class, contact our Education Chairperson, Allen Duncan, at SolarEducation@SolarOutdoors.org.

SOLAR HAS A NO-REFUND POLICY. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO ATTEND AN ACTIVITY, YOU MAY "SELL YOUR SPOT" TO ANOTHER CLUB MEMBER

CHAIN O' LAKES STATE PARK JULY 2 - 5, 2009 HIKING, CANOEING, KAYAKING, CAMPING, SWIMMING, AMISH COUNTRY - KID AND DOG FRIENDLY

Come join us July 2 - 5, 2009. We are going to drive 3 - 3.5 hours to Indiana. Eight connecting lakes will be the center of your adventure at Chain O' Lakes State Park. Paddle through the chain, hike the 10 miles of trails, attend a nature program in the park's "old school house" nature center, relax and go swimming. At nearby Rome City, you can visit the Gene Stratton-Porter House. Also, Shipshewana (Amish County) is only a 30 minute drive.

We will spend 3 nights camping, and exploring. Saturday night will be a traditional SOLAR potluck. There are 7 individual campsites reserved, in this modern campground with showers and flush toilets.

All this fun can be yours for a mere \$18 per person.

Contact Leslie Cordova to reserve your spot today. lesliegene@aol.com or (248) 547-5626.

SOLAR BOOK CLUB NEWS

"Three Cups of Tea" was the topic of the last book club discussion in November. We enjoyed discussing the author's quest to fulfill a promise to the remote villagers who saved his life, while eating delicious burritos. I was curious about what had happened in Pakistan and Afghanistan since he wrote the book so I did a search and found a forty- page photo journal update. Go to the website for Greg Mortenson's foundation, The Central Asia Institute to find it called, "A Journey of Hope." His commitment to build school in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan and to make education accessible to girls has inspired me to implement a program at a school I teach at to educate my students about the Middle East and start a penny drive to support Greg's efforts in 2009.

The burritos were almost gone and we still did not have an idea for the next adventure book for March. So we ended up with a classic, John Steinbeck's, "Travels with Charley." Anyone who has ever embarked on a road trip or enjoys traveling with their dog will enjoy this book. Steinbeck heads out on a trip around the United States in the early 1960's with his dog, Charley, in a "search for America." His observations are timeless. Plan to attend the next book club meeting, Tuesday, March 3, before the SOLAR meeting at 6 p.m. at Chipolte on Evergreen, just a few miles north of Colony Hall. Bring your favorite dog traveling story and photos or just come and enjoy the food and company!



2009 SOLAR T-Shirt Contest

What:

- Design a new t-shirt for SOLAR members to purchase that expresses the essence of what SOLAR is about (last time we did a new t-shirt design was 2005)

Design Rules:

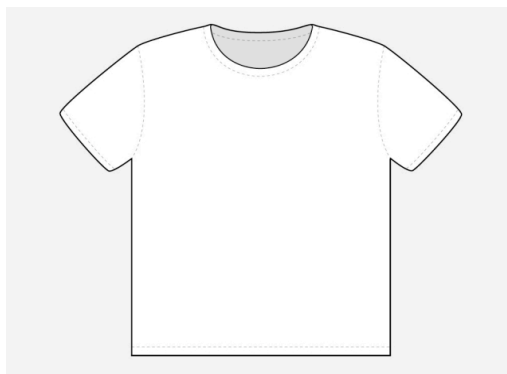
- Maximum of three colors
- Must include the name SOLAR somewhere in the design, but does not need to include the SOLAR logo (this will be placed somewhere else on the shirt)
- Design must work in both cotton and polypro materials

When:

- Submit original artwork to Pam Riehl Szakal by February 27th
- Voting for the most popular design will be by the membership at the March General membership meeting on March 3rd

Questions:

- Contact Pam Riehl Szakal at either (248) 756-7002 or email pariehl@gmail.com



WHAT IS SOLAR?

SOLAR is a non-profit club with 400-plus members dedicated to the intelligent enjoyment of nature and outdoor pursuits.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is only \$40 a year per person (\$55 per family) and includes discounts to a number of retail outfitters, access to club-owned equipment, a monthly newsletter, and a chance to meet hundreds of other like-minded adventurers drawn together by a common love of pristine lakes, breathtaking vistas, virgin forests, scenic shorelines, and the experiences to be found there.

MEETINGS

Our monthly meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month in Southfield at the Colony Hall, 21780 Evergreen (between 8 & 9 Mile Roads) at 7:30 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend.

SOLAR RAY NEWSLETTER

The SOLAR RAY is a monthly publication of SOLAR and is available online at www.solaroutdoors.org. To receive a copy in the mail, please contact Mary Price at membership@solaroutdoors.org.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions for the SOLAR Ray are due on the Friday two weeks prior to the monthly Steering Committee Meeting (June 13 for the July issue). Electronic documents only, Word is preferred and please attach your images. If you have any questions, please contact Pete Lamb at rayeditor@solaroutdoors.org.

STEERING COMMITTEE

President: Cindy Taylor	Vice President: Carol McCririe
Secretary: Sherri Doebel	Treasurer: Michelle Delaporte
Activities: Samantha Schafer	By-Laws: Chuck Smith
Education: Allen Duncan	Equipment: Sherri Doebel
Historian: Debbie Zuchlewski	Membership: Mary Price
Programs: Jan Duncan	Public Relations: Pam Szakal
Ray Editor: Pete Lamb	Webmaster: Willi Gutman

PRESIDENTS AT LARGE

Mike Banks | Leslie Cordova | Al Fylak | Steve Gardner
Bill Halvingis | Cindy Harrison-Felix | Tom Hayes | Doug Lanyk
Larry Martin | Joan Hettinger | Tom Oloffo | Lou Szakal
Joan & Bob Westbrook

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Steering Committee meets on the last Tuesday of every month at 7:30 pm. These meetings are usually open to the general membership. Anyone who is interested in learning what topics are discussed, the decisions being made or contemplating running for a position on the Steering Committee, is welcome to attend. If you are interested in attending the Steering Committee Meeting, please contact Cindy Taylor at president@solaroutdoors.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit our website at: www.solaroutdoors.org.

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE SOLAR RAY ASSISTANT EDITORS

Winnie Chrzanowski, Kathy Drewyore, Sheila Hardy, Pam Schmelzer, Carol McCririe, Elizabeth Schwab.

Visit our website: WWW.SOLAROUTDOORS.ORG

SOLAR

33228 W 12 Mile Road,
P.O. Box 220
Farmington Hills, Mi, 48334

