

Cameroon's Knowledge Legacy

Lucy Wenger

Rainforest Skilled Horticulturist, Eden Project

October 1st-October 17th 2014



Intercropping, Buea Farmer



Planting of the leafy vegetable *Solanum scabrum* (Huckleberry) seedlings by Buea Farmer

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Introduction

This visit to Cameroon was made to observe community-based projects and gardens focused on agroforestry systems; to study economically important, local species grown and their local uses.

As an educational charity, the Eden Project houses and cultivates plants from all over the world to teach our visitors about humanity's relationship with nature. My mission is to create a fascinating and contemporary exhibit in the West Africa section of the Rainforest Biome. This will offer visitors a real insight into current issues and focus on the positive potential for change in the West African region, by showcasing cutting-edge agroforestry techniques.

As a horticulturalist in the Rainforest Biome, I am primarily responsible for the West Africa exhibit; selecting and sourcing species appropriate to the exhibit, propagating, planting, maintaining, researching and participating in the exhibit interpretation. Presently, this section of the biome is being transformed to highlight the importance of agriculture's role in sustainable economic development in one of the poorest regions in the world.

Since starting at Eden 14 months ago, I have immersed myself in the transformation of this exhibit, this trip allowed me to develop this further by gaining valuable local and first-hand knowledge. This will enable me to create an accurate, interesting and educationally engaging display.

Having never visited West Africa, this trip gave me a real insight into the cultivation of widely consumed crops that meet the needs of local people and are important resources for everyday life. Visiting in October would coincide with the transition from wet to dry season, which is harvest time for many fruits and vegetables.

Aims and Objectives

Aims:

- To gain the knowledge and contacts enabling the creation of a fascinating, contemporary and positive exhibit within the Eden Projects West Africa section
- To establish collaborative relationships with other horticulturalists, botanical institutions and agroforestry promoters
- To gain experience in conservation and restoration work, creation and running of community forestry projects
- To expand knowledge of tropical West African plants by observing them in their natural habitat
- To gain knowledge and personal experience in an area in which I primarily focus upon

Objectives:

- To gain the knowledge and contacts enabling the creation of a fascinating, contemporary and positive exhibit within the Eden Projects West Africa section
- To establish connections for future collaborations
- To research further into agroforestry techniques and association planting to assist in improving collections, to benefit the garden aesthetically and to improve collections, and to improve public knowledge of West African plants
- To observe a range of species of West African plants in their natural habitats and try to identify potentially successful species to grow within Eden's Rainforest Biome
- To document digital images for display
- To produce a report for the benefit of relevant funding bodies
- Visit local botanic garden collections, gain knowledge in economically important, local species grown and their local uses
- To exchange horticultural techniques with specialists at Limbe Botanic Gardens and ICRAF Nurseries
- Visit small-scale community agroforestry based projects, gain horticultural techniques to enable growth of economically important local species

Itinerary

Date	Activities
Wednesday 1 ST October	-Introductory visit and tour of Limbe Botanic Gardens (LBG) -Visit Muea market eve, research NTFP's with research assistant
Thursday 2 nd October	-Visit Muea market day, research NTFP's with research assistant
Friday 3 rd October	-Traceability of Prunus africana meeting -Organize trip to Prunus farms and MOCAP -Organize trip to Bamenda Highlands, NW region
Saturday 4 th October	-Investigative visit to Limbe Botanic Gardens
Sunday 5 th October	-Rest Day
Monday 6 th October	-Organise trip to Prunus farms and MOCAP -Organise trip to Korup National Park
Tuesday 7 th October	-Visit Prunus farms and MOCAP
Wednesday 8 th October	-Visit Limbe Botanic Gardens, continue investigative work into local uses of NTFP's -Visit CENDEP project, run by Eric Wirsey
Thursday 9 th October	-Travel to Korup National Park
Friday 10 th October	-Visit Korup National Park
Saturday 11 th October	-Travel back from Korup National Park
Sunday 12 th October	-Travel to Bamenda via bus -Work planning meeting with Paul Mzeka of ANCO
Monday 13 th October	-Visit to agroforestry projects (RIBA, MIFACIG)
Tuesday 14 th October	-Visit 2 ANCO community-based projects, Kintashi Womens Group of Dom, Women & Men Bee Farmers of Nkor
Wednesday 15 th October	-Debriefing Paul Mzeka of ANCO on trip to Bui -Travel overnight from Bamenda to Limbe
Thursday 16 th October	-Write short report of trip -Presentation of report
Friday 17 th October	-Return to UK

Trip Summary

Wheat? You grow wheat? In Cameroon? Chris and Irene's jaws drop, where? Can we see it? Chris is bouncing in his chair raring to leap into the driving rain awaiting us in his enthusiasm to explore what I'd considered a regular crop. I'm unimpressed, not only is it cold, and incredibly wet but I've just travelled for two long days from steamy lowland rainforest to a praised agroforestry organisation high in the mountainous North West. Yes, it's wheat that's sent the Cameroonians I am travelling with into frenzied excitement!

I'd yet to realise this would be the pinnacle of my trip, an outstanding example of a highly skilled farmer working on life-changing horticulture - income generation - sourcing a highly sought after and productive crop, suited to the local climate, harvested in the off-season and grown in small quantities by locals. Although George Kangong showcased pioneering aspects of Riba Agroforestry Resource Centre, I'll never look at wheat in quite the same way.

Cameroon was an ideal spot to immerse myself in the heart of West African agroforestry as I delved into the challenges faced - most notably deforestation, loss of watershed and protection of endangered species. From grassroots initiatives such as George Kangong's RIBA organisation to a Ministerial level collaborative pilot scheme into the traceability of CITES listed *Prunus africana*, the trip was a smorgasbord of sustainable opportunity.



Njie Peter's (left) agroforestry farm, the largest in the Buea cluster, working with Mbeng Handerson (middle) Mount Cameroon National Park staff and Prunus Management Common Initiative representative, Ekati Joseph (right)

I was able to navigate the language divide, exploring the uses of the Cola species, from a cultural welcome throughout West Africa and symbol of the spirit of sharing, to the growing technique and all-important preparation of the tangled forest vine eru (*Gnetum africanum*).

Brain buzzing I explored the Limbe Botanic Gardens, ably assisted by Yves Nathan Mekembom, Limbe's Technical Officer observing the origins of the non-timber forest products (NTFP's) I'd seen in the market, noting their habit, form and quizzing Nathan on potential localities of natural populations.

Leaping out of the 4x4 at regular intervals, look! Njangsang! Cacao! Ngongo leaves! I eventually made it (complete with presents from many friendly farmers) to Korup National Park 'one of the best refuge forests in the World'. Tracing fallen shells of bush mango (*Irvingia wombolu*) to the currently leafless canopy, observing swathes of *Palisota* jostling for position in the dappled shade lining the sandy path edges. This firsthand experience of a classic natural rainforest habitat was made all the more memorable due to George, a highly skilled local guide and Chris Fominyam's formidable horticultural knowledge.

Continuing to the Bamenda Highlands and leaving thick humid jungle behind, I reached the savannah grasslands, travelling with members of Apiculture and Nature Conservation (ANCO). We bump and swerve to yet more inspirational projects, including ICRAF initiatives. Irene, training to take over ANCO gives two very important lessons during this time, 'You're not teaching something new, 'just want to improve on it' she intonates as I jump into the driving rain to grab a photo of *Tephrosia vogelii* , broadcast sown, here in the North West village of Belo, championed by agroforesters as a nitrogen-fixing tree species.

The idea of diversification through the integration of trees in cropping systems, providing training facilities or sustainable alternatives such as apiculture and vegetable production, embodies vast potential for change across the country.



Members of ANCO's Kintashi Women's Group, on their vegetable garden in the North West subdivision of Noni

Irene's second lesson arrived as we sheltered from the storm, 'If you don't integrate you'll not succeed.' Addressing areas such as conflict management and group dynamics provides a sound grounding to move forward and troubleshoot from. An aspect which, up until now, I'd underestimated. In two sentences Irene had summed up the lessons I'd learnt in Cameroon leaving me with a legacy of knowledge for my time at Eden.

Future Plans

I have returned to Eden armed with the tools and contacts to create an accurate, interesting and educationally engaging display, exhibiting current, successful agroforestry methods used within Cameroon as well as enabling the collection to thrive within the conditions of Eden's Rainforest Biome. Development will continue through links strengthened with Limbe Botanic Gardens and ICRAF, as well as those made with ANCO, RIBA, MIFACIG and Regional Delegation Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife SW.

Budget Breakdown

Flights	£656
Accommodation	£370
Transport	£690
Guide/Support Staff Fees	£762
Living Costs	£562
Misc. (visa, vaccinations, tolls etc.)	£566.86
Total	£3606.86

Grants Received

Royal Horticultural Society, RHS Coke Trust Bursary Fund	£1,200
Eden Project	£385.86
Merlin Trust	£500
Kew Guild, Dallimore and general Award Funds	£1521

Signed.....

Dated.....

Acknowledgments

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Trekking through Korup National Park