Geotourism in Afar and the Ethiopian Rift Valley

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Geotourism is a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on landscape and geology.

*Newsome, D. and Dowling, R.K., 2010*

The aim of geotourism is to make visitors aware of, and to gain some understanding of, the geological features that surround them.
EVERY TOURIST IS A POTENTIAL GEOTOURIST!

**Professional geologists** (These will generally have pre-arranged their tour and geological guide)

**Tourists with a particular interest in geology**; amateur geologists

**The general tourist with an enquiring mind** who is interested in everything he sees

**Special interest tourists** (other than geology): historical (60-65%), birdwatchers (10%), trekkers (10%), wildlife, coffee tours, cultural tourists (eg Omo region (15%)), etc

**Local vacationers** (eg Addis Ababa residents going to Debre Zeit, Awash, Langano, Wondo Genet for a weekend’s relaxation)

**Local Ethiopian visitors**

**Ethiopian “diaspora” visitors**
WHY DOES ETHIOPIA NEED GEOTOURISTS?

Tourism: an increasingly important contribution to the economy

Creation of jobs for local people: tour companies, drivers, guides, accommodation providers, food outlets

Although Ethiopia has beautiful and interesting wildlife, it cannot compete with the game parks of other East African countries

However, it has two big advantages over them: unique historical sites and unique and spectacular geology

Therefore promotion of Ethiopia’s geological attractions is important

Ensures that tourists appreciate fully ALL the attractions Ethiopia has to offer!

Conservation of important geological sites
WHAT DO GEOTOURISTS NEED?

Sites of geological interest: these abound in Ethiopia!

INFORMATION! What the sites are, where they are, how to reach them, and information about their geology.

As well as general tourist amenities:

- Access (roads, tracks, walking trails)
- Transport
- Accommodation
- Food and drink
- Guidance
- Safety
THE RIFT VALLEY LAKE DISTRICT: Continental rifting in action
Four lake basins, each geologically distinct, Dormant volcanoes, hotsprings, faults
Lacustrine sediments including diatomites Pumice tuff and ignimbrites
AWASH NATIONAL PARK: Junction of the Rift Valley and Afar
Dormant caldera volcano
Hotsprings
Tectonic fissures and fresh lava flow
Volcanic blisters in ignimbrite (unique)
Mysteriously rising lake
NORTHERN AFAR: the birth of an ocean
Fresh lava forms
Sulphur hotsprings
Salt plains and lakes
Permanently active lava lake
## GEOTOURIST FACILITIES IN THE RIFT VALLEY LAKES REGION, AWASH AND NORTHERN AFAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Food and drink</th>
<th>Security/safety</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Guide available</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Geo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rift Valley lakes region</td>
<td>Easy / Moderate</td>
<td>2WD / 4WD</td>
<td>Lodges, resorts, camping</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good / good</td>
<td>Yes: local guides or from Addis</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>( No)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awash NP</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>2WD / 4WD</td>
<td>Lodge/ camping</td>
<td>Yes/ BYO</td>
<td>Moderate/ moderate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>( No)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Afar</td>
<td>Difficult but improving greatly</td>
<td>4WD and foot/camel</td>
<td>Camping</td>
<td>BYO</td>
<td>Moderate/ moderate</td>
<td>Yes: from Addis or Mekele</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td></td>
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Lack of information is the first problem facing a potential geotourist in Ethiopia.

“This all looks very interesting – but what is it?”
Geotourism in Ethiopia
VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE
Geological displays (eg local rock types, posters explaining the geology)

Awash National Park Visitor Centre

Poster designed for Awash National Park
READING MATERIAL:
BROCHURES, PAMPHLETS, MAPS

(Comments please!)
INTERPRETIVE SIGNS

These can have problems

But can be very useful if carefully located in a protected site

AWASH FALLS

Have you noticed how different the Awash River looks upstream and downstream of the waterfall? And.......why is there a waterfall here at all?

Downstream of the Falls, the river is narrow and flows in a deep gorge.

Upstream of the Falls, the river is broad and meanders over a flat plain.

The Awash River never reaches the sea but ends in the salt lakes of the Afar lowlands. As it flows it steadily cuts down and back, trying to reach the level of these lakes. Somewhere north of Awash, many thousands of years ago, a hard layer of basalt slowed its backward cutting and formed a step, or nick point. The step and hence the waterfall have since moved gradually upstream as the river slowly continues to eat the rock away.

At Awash Falls the waterfall has also spread sideways along a line of weakness due to a fault, forming a spectacular mini-gorge at right angles to the main gorge.
GUIDES AND GUIDED TOURS

Plants, birds, animals: BRILLIANT!

Geology: ?
Descending the escarpment into Northern Afar

1974

2011
Hamd’illah, gateway to Northern Afar
“The whole guide and escort issue has become a real pain. We spend a lot of money and there are no real receipts, and then we face a battle with Inland Revenue which doesn’t accept it as an expense.

We (the Ethiopian Tour Operators Association) have had meetings with the Afar Region Tourism Bureau, but the agreement we reached about limiting the huge number of people we are obliged to hire hasn’t been adhered to by people on the spot. Sometimes we are even forced to pay for people we do not take, for lack of space in our vehicles”.

An Ethiopian Tour Operator
Dallol volcano and hotsprings: endangered by potash mining
Fragile hotspring formations at Dallol

Endangered by the feet of tourists
Ertu Ale – centrepiece of a Crater National Park?
Ignimbrite blisters at Awash: endangered by quarrying
PROMOTION OF GEOTOURISM

INFORMATION

AMENITIES

REGULATED INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

PROTECTION OF GEOLOGICAL SITES!!!
It’s ignimbrite – and a volcanic blister!
AWASH FALLS LODGE

Bed & Camping Services

Restaurant Service

Conference Room

www.elephanttour.com.oe

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Email: elephant@elephant.com
INTERNET

Awash National Park

Awash National Park is located 225 km east of Addis Ababa, the Park stretches 30km east to west and a little less from north to south. The terrain is mainly acacia woodland and grassland.

Wildlife
At all places and all times it is possible to see game. Oryx, Soemmerring's gazelle and wild pig are common. Slightly less frequent are the furred waterbuck which tend to appear near the river in the late afternoon. The tiny dik-dik, not easy to spot in the speckled shade of the acacia thorn, zebra grazing the plains to the west of Fantale, cheetah, serval and leopard are also there but it is not easy to spot them. Baboons, both anubis and hamadryas, kudus, lesser and greater, the giant tortoise, hippo, redbuck, warthog and caracal are also represented. Vulturine guineafowl inhabit the higher slopes of the mountain and curious hyrax peer at you curiously from behind their rocks. In the bottom of the gorge you can spot the black and white colobus monkey.

Birdlife
Over four hundred species are recorded for the park. (The check list is available at the museum at park Head quarters). They range from the great ostrich, frequently and easily observed, and the less common Secretary Bird and Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, to the flashers of brilliant pink which are the Carmine Bee-eaters, and the Abyssinian Roller with turquoise and purple wings. And between these two extremes, birds of the avenue forest, Coucal, Turaco, Go-away Birds, birds of prey, and birds of the savannah.

Attraction
The park itself is traversed by a series of well-maintained tracks, which take in the most spectacular of the many scenic attractions. It is possible, and perhaps advisable, to hire a park guide. To the north at Filoha lies the hot springs located in its groves of palm trees. It is reached by either one of two scenic roads which start around the town and cross the airy, wooded, soft and hilly slopes of the hills.
Means of providing information

Information centre / Visitors’ Centre

Brochures / Pamphlets

Map

Interpretative signs

Personal Guide/ guided tour

Internet
A SELECTION OF ETHIOPIA’S GEOLOGICAL ATTRACTIONS

- Semien Mts
- Blue Nile Gorge
- Debre Zeit volcanic field
- Rift Valley lakes
- Adua plugs
- N Afar: Dallol and Erta Ale
- Middle Awash archaeological sites
- Awash NP
- Sof Omar caves
- Bale Mts
Dormant volcano with caldera

Welded tuff plains

Welded tuff (ignimbrite)

Mysteriously expanding lake

Volcanic blisters

Fresh faults

Hotspring

Fissures

Waterfall

Fresh lava flow
AWASH NATIONAL PARK
Means of providing information

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