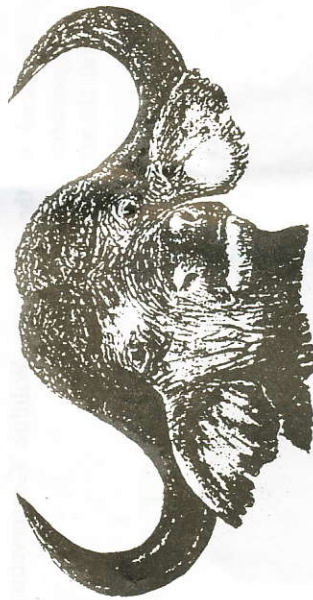




MAGO NATIONAL PARK



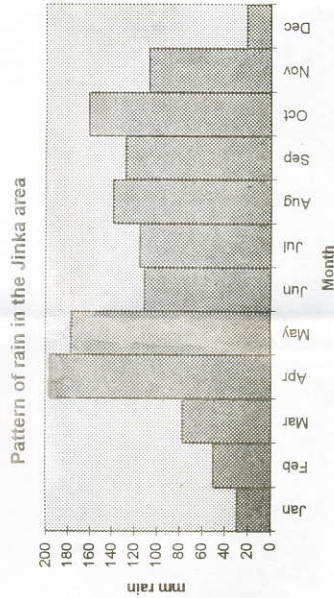
One of Ethiopia's great National Parks

deeper than at present. Today the lake is less than 4,000km² and most of the basin is dry. The western edge of the Mago valley is delimited by the Nyalibong or Mursi hills.

The soils of the park are derived from ancient lake sediments combined with eroded material from the surrounding highlands. These have given rise to moderately fertile sandy clay loams and vertisols.

CLIMATE

The rainfall in the Park averages about 900mm a year ranging from 1000mm in the north to 500mm at the southern end. The wet season is March to June with a second wet period in September. It is impossible to drive around the Mago valley for much of the wet season. The main dry season is December to February. The highest temperatures are 36-39°C in December -February and the lowest temperatures are 20- 21°C in April - June.



WILDLIFE

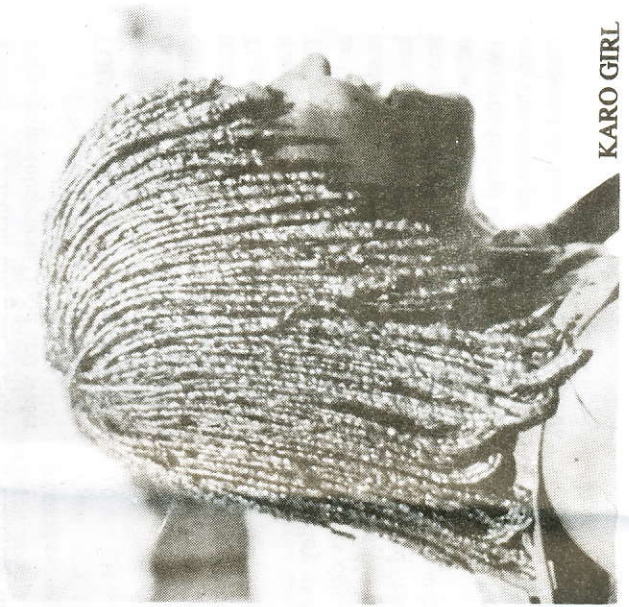
Vegetation: The park lies in a region of arid eutrophic savannah characteristic of soils of medium fertility and annual rainfall of less than 1,000mm. The Mago valley vegetation is predominantly bushland with limited savannah bushland and small patches of savannah grassland. A narrow band of riverine forest occurs along the main watercourses, and the Nyalibong escarpment supports a low forest in the steep valleys.

There is a wide variety of birds with 257 species recorded of which 2 are endemic.

SURROUNDING PEOPLE

The Mago valley lies in one of the most culturally diverse areas in the whole of Africa where many elements of ancient nomadic life styles are still practised just as they were centuries ago. Seeing these colourful people is a rare experience for people from urban cultures.

To the south-east is a large ethnic group, the Hamer, who speak a south-east Omotic language. They cultivate sorghum and millet in the hills east of the Mago valley and also keep large herds of cattle and goats. On the north-east edge of the Mago valley are the Benna, closely related to the Hamer with many cultural similarities. The Hamer wears a variety of colourful ornaments and decorates their hair with coloured mud. At the south end of the Mago valley are a small offshoot of the Hamer-the Karo. They cultivate the Omo riverbanks and keep flocks of goats and some cattle. The Karo are noted for their colourful body painting. Adjacent to the Karo, where the Mago joins the Omo, are an even smaller group, the Muguji. These people also cultivate sorghum along the river, and keep goats and hunt and fish.



KARO GIRL

General

The Mago National Park is situated within the Great Rift Valley system in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. It is one of the principal but also the youngest National Park, established in 1978 with a total area of 21,620km². The Mago National Park is located adjacent to the Omo National Park in the south-eastern part close to the Kenya border.

The Mago river and the Mursi hill range form the western boundary. The Mago hot spring and Mago Mountains form the northern boundary. The Park as it is with Omo National Park has always been known for its wealth of wildlife varieties and is perhaps comparable to those of East Africa. Among big mammals, Buffalo comprises the highest population as compared to other conservation areas in Ethiopia.

PHYSICAL FEATURES

There are three major physiographic features of the country around Mago National Park: the Great Rift Valley, the Lake Turkana basin, and the Ethiopian Highland massif. The Rift Valley, the faulting and volcanic activity associated with it are the principal determinants of the park's physical features. The steep escarpments that surround the park to the north, east and west mark fault lines and volcanic extrusions associated with the formation of the main Rift and the small subsidiary Rift, the Omo Trough. The south-eastern stretch of escarpment south of Jinka exposes Precambrian crystalline basement rocks 600 million years old. Most of the other scarps and hills are volcanic basalts that were extruded over the basement rocks before the Rift itself formed some 13 million years ago. The older basalts to the north (40 million years old) mark the southern extremity of the vast basalt dome that makes up the central highland massif of Ethiopia. There are also more recent miocene volcanics (e.g. Mount Dime and Mount Mago) some 20 million years old. The Mago valley that is the core of the park is made up of lake sediments deposited over the basalt and crystalline rocks after the formation of the rift valley. The oldest of these sediments are some 4 million years old, while the most recent may only be 5,000 years old. The Mago valley is part of the huge Lake Turkana basin that was at its highest a vast lake some 160,000km² in area and 100m

To the west are the Mursi, a small tribe of some 5,000 people based on the Omo river. The Mursi cultivate Maize and sorghum on the river levees when the water level is low, and also in fields away from the river. They supplement their livelihood with large herds of cattle from which they get blood and milk. Their livestock are their main preoccupation and in area where the rain is both scant and erratic the Mursi are frequently on the move in search of pasture and water.

Like most nomadic people the Mursi are very colourful with a lot of body decoration and ornaments. Their most remarkable characteristic is the lip disk for which they and their relatives the Surma are famous the world over. A young woman's lower lip and ears are pierced and enlarged by inserting ever-bigger clay disks that eventually may be more than 12 cm in diameter. The bigger the disk the better a woman's chances of securing a wealthy husband.

Along the Omo live a small, somewhat mysterious group of less than a thousand people called the Kwegu. The Kwegu live by the river environs where they assist the Mursi to cultivate the river levees each year when the flood recedes. In addition to growing sorghum and millet the Kwegu fish and hunt.

In the Jinka highlands north of the park are the Ari, a group of sedentary agriculturalists speaking a similar Omotic language (Araf) to the Benna. Numbering about 100,000 they are the largest group neighbouring the park. The high rainfall of the highlands allows the Ari to grow a wide range of crops-wheat, barley, sorghum, maize, teff and millet as well as beans, peas and root crops. They also grow coffee, chat, fruits and vegetables. They also keep livestock and are active honey collectors in the park.

Animals: The Mago valley supports a wide range of savannah species, so far 74 species of mammals are recorded. With Omo, it is the only park in Ethiopia where herds of elephant and buffalo can still be seen. A variety of antelope inhabit the valley, notably lesser kudu that with those of Omo constitute one of the world's most important populations of this species. There are small numbers of greater kudu in the south and on the hills. There is a large population of tiang that with Lelwel's hartebeest, oryx and Grant's gazelle move up and down the valley with the seasons. Gerenuk are common in the southern half of the park. Along the rivers and streams waterbuck, bushbuck and duiker are common. Klipspringer can be seen in the escarpment cliffs. There are warthog, bushpig and carnivores including lion, leopard, cheetah, wild dog, caracal, bat-eared fox and many species of smaller mammals in the park. The riverine forest has many colobus and grivet monkeys. Baboons are very common.



ACCESS

Road: The Park is 815 km from Addis Ababa by road via Shashemene, Arba Minch and Jinka. The road is asphalted from Addis Ababa to Arba Minch and it is gravelled to Jinka. From Jinka to the park HQs at Neri is 34km by dry weather road that descends a spectacular escarpment to the floor of the Mago Valley.

A network of 300 km of tracks gives access to all parts of the Park. These are four-wheel-drive standard only and it is not advisable to try to visit the park during the wet season, as many tracks are impassable after heavy rain.

Air: Jinka is served three times weekly by Ethiopian Airlines from Addis. A charter flight is also available from the capital. Your tour guide can meet you in Jinka or at the park airfield a few km from your camp.

ACCOMMODATION

Hotels: Hotels in Jinka on the escarpment above the Park offer rooms with own bath with prices starting at 20 birr per person per day. More spartan hotels in Turmi or Omo Rate offer basic accommodation. The town restaurants serve traditional Ethiopian food.

Camping: There are 10 attractive campsites near the park HQ along the Neri river. Sites are cleared and have a toilet and rubbish disposal. Visitors should bring their own camp equipment, food and water.

TOURS

Inside the park: The best area is the central Mago valley around the Neri river to see wildlife. There are tracks on both sides of the river that provide access. There is also a track down the west side of the Mago River.

There is a rough track into the upper Mago valley as far as the hot spring at Maki. Some beautiful hikes can be made up Mt. Mago or along the Nyalibong hills but one has to consult the warden first. Experienced bush travelers with appropriate equipment may have many other interesting destinations.

Two roads lead out of Mago - one to the south via Karo and the other to the west to the Omo River and Omo National Park.

HEALTH

There are both vivax and falciparum malaria in the Rift Valley below 1,500 m and visitors should seek advice on prophylaxis before traveling to Mago. There are tsetse flies in the Park but no sleeping sickness. There are hospitals and pharmacies in Jinka. There are clinics at Turmi, Dimeka and Omo Rate and first aid at Neri HQ.

LEGISLATION

A leaflet describing Ethiopia's wildlife legislation and commitments under international conservation conventions and agreements is available from EWCO or park headquarters. Please respect the regulations governing the use and care of our national parks and help to keep them in good shape.

INFORMATION AND FEES

Park entrance and camping fees are payable at the park headquarters. Professional photographers are welcome but should first obtain a permit from EWCO and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional Agricultural Bureau, Awassa. For the latest information on fees and the weather and road conditions in the park, please contact:

The Wildlife Conservation Organization

P.O.Box 386, Addis Ababa.

Telephone: (251) - 1 - 151477 Fax: (251) - 1 - 514190,

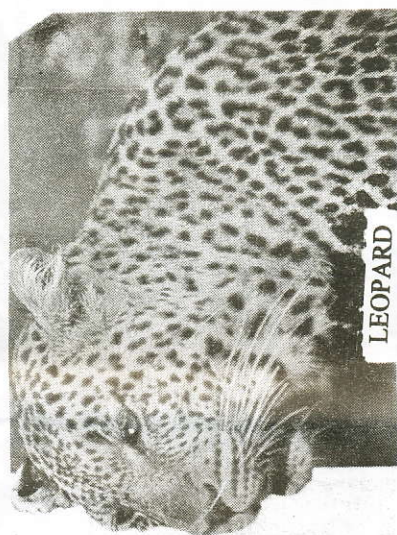
E-mail: ewco@telecom.net.et.

The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State Agricultural Bureau,

P.O.Box 80, Awassa, Telephone: (251) - 1 - 200163

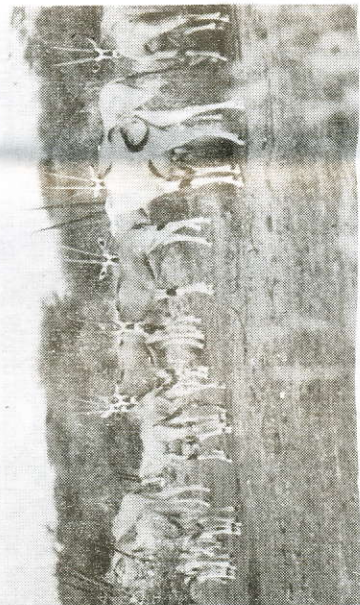
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Outside the park: There are many colourful markets in the area and a visit on market day is an enjoyable one to meet people and see the sorts of foods, utilities and ornaments that people barter. Thursdays and Saturdays are the Jinka market days when crowds of Ari with sometimes some Mursi and Benna people gather. The main Benna markets are at Kako (Mondays) and Key Afer (Thursdays). The big Hamar markets are at Dimeka (Saturdays) and Turmi (Mondays).

Jinka is not far from the park and there are other places of interest. Although the roads are rough and the travel is slow. Most visitors to the area prefer to camp in the park and tour from their camps. Popular tours are from a base in either the park or Jinka to Mursi Hana. These are big Mursi villages from where people leave the villages for the Omo during much of the dry season. To see the Karo and Muguji it is best to camp on the Omo near Dus (Karo), or Murle. A night in Turmi is recommended to see the Hamar and the Geleb or Dassenetch people by driving down to Omo Rate near the Kenya border.



ORYX

