

## Liberia Visit

Liberia is a small country on the southwest corner of West Africa. It was founded in 1824 by Americans of African ancestry. The U.S. dollar is the basis of its currency. The country was ruined by civil wars: 1989-1996 and 1999-2003. We visited at the end of March 1970 when it was still a relatively good and peaceful country.

I was still in graduate school at the State University of NY at Albany, working on a Ph.D. in atmospheric science. My thesis was on the lake-effect snowstorms of the Great Lakes. There was an exchange program with the University of Hokkaido, Sapporo, Japan. They sent scientists to study our snowstorms in 1968-1969. In exchange, I was part of a team sent to Sapporo for January-February 1970 to study their snowstorms coming off of the larger Sea of Japan in colder Siberian air.



My wife, Gail, and I, Ed, were married 21 December 1969 shortly before the trip began. We added our own money and Gail came on that trip, basically a start of a honeymoon while doing the snowstorm research. Having used our own money, Gail and I went home the long way. We visited weather groups and Lutheran mission families around southern Asia as far as Israel, and then visited East Africa, Nigeria, and Liberia. After a trip of 95 days we arrived back in New York State with lots of photos and good memories.

Our hosts in Liberia were the Lemmerman family for six days, 27 March to 1 April 1970. They showed us the various Lutheran facilities in the interior at Phebe, Salayie, and Zorzor, as shown on the map. Of course we entered and departed from Liberia at the airport near the capital city of Monrovia. We drove by the Executive Mansion. We also passed by the radio towers of Voice of America.



Executive Mansion of Liberia, Monrovia



Plantation of rubber trees



Voice of America radio towers

We were shown a plantation of rubber trees (*Hevea brasiliensis*), native of Brazil but now grown in other tropical areas, for latex production which is used to produce rubber. The bark is carefully cut diagonally to intercept the latex vessels that spiral to the right up the trunk. The oozing latex falls into a cup for harvesting later in the day. Latex that coagulates on the bark or falls to the ground is still useful but must be cleansed of contaminants. Sheets of coagulated latex are shipped to industrial factories around the world to create many products.



Latex harvesting



House frame ready for mud throwing



Mrs. Lemmerman and finished homes

Local home construction starts with a wooden frame. Then mud is thrown at the frame to build up the walls. The roof is either sheet metal or thatch (in rear). Decorated homes like these are rare.

The Lemmermans were based in Salayie at a school, LTI (Lutheran Training Institute? - I forgot).



Using a late 2018 satellite image from Google Earth I was able to locate buildings and scenes that I saw in 1970. The arrowheads show the orientations of my photos from the bend in the lines.



Wheels were not on suitcases then, so we attached our suitcases to backpack frames with a “diamond hitch”. One of the residences is in the background, and our host’s home is to the right out of view.



The trees had lots of noisy Village Weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus*) birds that weave these elaborate nests that hang from the trees.





Termites build these tall mounds, gluing the soil particles into strong structures that are hollow inside for natural air regulation. To the left are the Lemmerman children and those from the



background village. To the right is Gail high up on a mound. I tried to kick open a piece of the mound, and it was very difficult to break. The photo shows the hollow structure.

The Lemmermans took us on a hike to a suspension bridge.



Along the trail



Crossing the bridge of natural ropes



Looking up at the bridge



Slash-and-Burn agricultural style



Coffee plants grow in shade



Pineapples

Jungle rule: to pick a pineapple for eating, break off the top and plant the top to grow a new plant for the next person to enjoy.

We stopped at a school where a Peace Corps teacher had worked. But she had been killed in an auto accident in Kenya. She loved the school so much that her grave is now there. The card on the decorations says “In loving memory, Susan Davey Peace Corps Teacher”





Roadside vegetation



Dr. Leidenfrost - translator



Educational materials in 2 languages

When we were there, Lutheran Bible Translators had been working on two local languages. They produced many booklets to provide reading materials so that people could practice reading their language which had recently been produced in a written form. The language characters were phonetic so that anyone could pronounce the language even if they did not understand it. That let the Lemmermans coach their students to read in their own language. By recent years other languages have been put in written form and portions of the Bible and entire Testaments have been produced, with more in production as resources become available.



Missionary children in a youth hostel

On the north side of Phebe is this campus, then named Cuttington College and now Cuttington University. Missionary children lived in a nearby youth hostel and took classes here. Below is a 2020 satellite image from Google Earth with insets of my photos from 1970. The arrowheads show the orientation of the photos usually from the bends in the lines.

Report by Dr. Ed Holroyd, more than fifty years after the visit.

