Walking through the Valleys of Eritrea

By: Berhane Woldu.

At 5:00 AM one Saturday, a friend and I walked to the country side about 20 kilometers out of Asmara to a small village city, population of two hundred household called Daero to observe Toker Dam. The village is out of the main paved road that goes to Keren the capital city of Anseba region. Walking towards Toker Dam one follows the paved dirt road that twists uphill, at-times open and flat. The air was chilly, the leaves were turning and fluttering in the breeze, the morning wind was gashing as the bushes, flowers and cereal crops were dancing to the tune of the wind. Sky gray filed with mist one can barely see the footpath, yet you see Mass attendants’ rushing out; who were reminded by the resonate of the rooster coming out the different bird houses in the village; people are religious and very faithful and loving as they go to church; one can see the unifying and calming effect of religion. Mothers covered with their white Vaile, fathers with their traditional white cloth, priests and deacons with colorful decorations add to the morning rush.

Night had fallen on the small city of Adi-Shemagle (city of the old), Wedi-Quba and Adi-Tesfaselus all along the meadow surrounded by mountains, valleys, river banks and paved road of the Central region. Golden ray of sun light starts flickering to life as the sky cleared you can see movements of people. The rest of the village city carried on with their business. Merchants herd their cattle, goats and sheep and others carrying their goods heading to the market and we watching with amazement ditching the animals, forcing and squeezing our way through the merchants; inching through and forcing pedestrians to squash themselves against the hill to make way for the animals to passes. these were busy cities in harmony. Cities of the same force religious, secular, ancient in tradition yet contemporary in their daily life these timeless cities were quite literally the place to be as the sun rises. As we were on foot we stopped a middle aged lady to ask her about the surrounding villages. Beautiful dark skin with a touch of cream, hazel eyes that penetrated to the core, high Eritrean cheekbone perfect white teeth that revealed an easy, her eyebrows were perpetually arched seductive smile, with an extrovert personality. With a smile she named all the villages and asked us where we were headed. We said headed to see Toker Dam with sigh she asked if we were going to walk all the way crossing five villages and about 9 miles. The walk was beautiful zigzagging paved roads, landscape of amazements: valleys, high mountains, dense forests and riverbanks with greenery everywhere you turn. As we crossed through villages we saw signs stating that loitering was punishable by law. The most startling and astounding thing for me was to see a sign in one of the villages (named Jum-Bulocke) that said “if you need to use the bath room please ask we have public toilet for your use” a service provided to strangers in a village of not more than 150 households.

The villages that we came by to name a few were Daroe, Adi-Ameste, Jum-Bulocke, Adi-Tesfasluse, Adi- Merawe (village of the wedded) one can see Emba Drhoe (mountain of capon) from a vintage point not too far away. All these villages have electricity, water, schools, clinics and no shortage of electricity or water as they are solar powered and to my surprise a residential forester home (orphans home) quiet a mass building for children at Daero village. I was a little jealous to have seen that such a small villages with less than 200 household having electricity and water whenever the residence wanted at their disposal. The villagers were nice answering our inquisitive question; salutations were exchanged as we passed people and at every intersection. Girls following us singing traditional songs after a small token they start praising you (ayeye meareye work seatu opel mezaweretu) big brother with a golden watch and an opel car. After about nine miles we reached the vicinity of Toker Dam.

The surrounding landscape is amazingly gorgeous and breathe taking. The mountains are huge some smaller inter-connected one over the other; mountains locked to each other as a mother caring for her children. Looking at the Dam from top of the mountains one can see that it is built with white marble stone standing majestic like a castle or a citadel in the middle of nowhere. None of us were experts or engineer, were not able to discuss the technicality however; we had our own take to its size, capacity and use. Toker dam is more than a huge shallow man made abyss with a grass, trees and bushes covered dam running about 200 to 300 hundred meters along one end sitting in the far north east corner of Daroe village with a few acres of land on the eastern side of the dam. Prior to the dam river flows from two directions with a mountain in the middle of the two rivers creating a large V shaped water body as it approaches the dam. During the rainy seasons it holds the distinction of being the largest body of water in that region. Seeing the dam overflowing is much fun. As the water overflows it turns the sun cooked valley into streams. The dried up area the ambitious down ward shorelines that had retreated now move much closer together, creating a depthless basin of reddish brown water. These areas are refurbished with the overflow of fresh water turning its reddish brown into brown. Toker Dam is fed from all directions by innumerable streams, creeks, a couple of currents large enough to be called rivers, rain drain off mountains and two large rivers that travel for miles to reach Toker dam. The existence of all theses tributaries unavoidably have given rise to a good number of diminutive lakes nearby.

For me this was an adventure of a life time and comparable to amazing scenic places I have seen. I have run in the great falls area in Virginia USA and the dirt road of C&O cannel that goes all the way to Frederic, Maryland and the thousand islands near the border of Canada they are all breath taking. The Toker Dam area is stunning, exquisite and picturesque as beautiful as Mother Nature.