

## In Kenya with AGRO/CED 497C

My professors, classmates, and I arrived in Nairobi after long flights and took a matatu (taxi-van often customized with stickers, etc.), customized with blue fluorescent lights, to the Terminal Hotel. The Terminal's meager accommodations were welcomed by our group of weary travelers.

In Nairobi, we visited the Kenya Forest Research Institute's Forest Product Research Center and the Kenya Agriculture and Research Institute where we toured the facilities, learned from the staff, and collected useful information. We also visited various places of interest including the Nairobi National Museum where we saw an impressive collection of hominid bones and skulls, an animal orphanage where we scratched young cheetahs, and a giraffe center where some members of the group had their faces kissed by the long, black tongue of a giraffe.

I enjoyed the matatu rides through Nairobi and taking in the scenery and activity. Although I am sure Nairobi could have offered innumerable adventures, I was ready to trade the cement and smog for the trees and clean air of the country after a few days.

The drive to Nyeri was incredible; the countryside was much more lush and beautiful than I'd anticipated. The bumpy roads carried us past tropical countryside, fruit stands, and colorful markets. On our way to Nyeri, the matatu driver stopped for bananas, and we were swarmed by a group of banana and avocado salespeople. It was an overwhelming fruit

purchasing event. After the sea of fruit salespeople parted, we enjoyed some bananas and continued down the road.

Between Nairobi and Nyeri, we made a planned visit to the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). A group of staff and students took time out of their weekend to meet with us that Saturday. We discussed university life at JKUAT and Penn State as well as East African agriculture. We were also taken on a wonderful tour of the facilities and were shown indigenous crops, solar dryers, etc. I and one of my trip-mates Elayna were taken on a walk led by Professor Njue to see some interesting soils (Vertisol and Plinthisol) and termitaria.



Later that day, we arrived at the Children and Youth Empowerment Center (CYEC) in Nyeri. Erica, one of my trip-mates who had been to the CYEC the previous summer, almost exploded with excitement as we drove through the entrance gate. She was thrilled to see some of the children whom she had become very attached to. Led by a group of children, I toured the CYEC, walked through the shamba (garden), and began to understand Erica's enthusiasm.

#### **Peter and Francis in the shamba**

I can't remember the last time I'd spent a substantial amount of time around children; it had probably been since I was a child. The CYEC is an amazing family of one-hundred –and – some brothers and sisters and a small but devoted group of staff and volunteers. I really

enjoyed spending time with the kids: holding, swinging, helping with homework, being beaten at football (by small children), taking walks, and talking. The level of disarray one might expect from one-hundred-and-some former street-dwelling children and youth was not present. This is not to say that all kids maintained a constant level of angelic behavior. However, they were often observed sharing and were very affectionate despite the various hardships each had endured.

Several groups of people including groups of students from Penn State and elsewhere were working on different projects and spending time at the CYEC throughout our stay. Our



primary goal was to conduct research and perform tasks promoting the development of an eco-village in Lamuria. Although less than an hour's drive north of Nyeri, Lamuria receives much less rain and is classified as semi-

#### **View from Nyeri**

arid. The eco-village is to be self-sustaining and reproducible. It will provide youth a means of supporting themselves through agriculture and other activities after completing their stay at the CYEC. During our stay, we travelled back and forth to Lamuria to assess the site of the future eco-village, take soil and water samples, and talk with members of the community.

During our second visit to the site, Professor Sjoerd Duiker and I were about to collect soil samples when we were greeted by what we thought to be an angry bull due to its loud cow-screaming and brisk rooting around in the soil with its head and feet. I took some comfort in the fact that Dr. Duiker and not I was carrying the bright orange, soil sampling bucket but was still about to jump over a nearby fence when we met a man in a bee suit. The man's name was Paul, and he told us that the bull was just happy because the weather was beautiful, and he had



a belly full of grass. It was a beautiful day and the green grasses of the rain-kissed earth must have tasted nice after the previous several years of drought and sparse, brown vegetation which plagued Lamuria.

### **Paul the beekeeper in Lamuria**

Paul not only saved us from running away from a happy bull but also gave us a great tour of Lamuria and provided us with tons of information on beekeeping. Our group had been very interested in learning more about beekeeping in Lamuria because our research into the agro-ecological and socio-economic conditions of Lamuria as well as the suitability of several crops and products to be grown or produced within the eco-village led us to believe beekeeping could be promising venture for the eco-village. Current and former students of the CYEC are

currently involved in beekeeping with Paul and developing a business plan for marketing wax and honey.

During our stay, we were fortunate to meet and learn from many innovative individuals from local businesses, farms, and elsewhere who greatly contributed to our understanding of agriculture, business, and life in Kenya. Through collaboration, we developed plans for the initial stages of the eco-village. Beekeeping, hay, food crops, and aloe are some of the products that hold potential for contributing to the future success of the eco-village. Through the continued work of our professors Dr. Janelle Larson and Dr. Sjoerd Duiker as well as others and the support of some wonderful people, many exciting developments which will contribute to the future success of the eco-village and ultimately the opportunities given to the youth at the CYEC are continuing to unfold. I appreciate my professors and trip-mates for their good company and devotion to this project and thank Mr. Jack Indekeu, Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State's Education Abroad, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for their generous financial support.

*Visit the CYEC webpage at:*

[www.cyec.net](http://www.cyec.net)



**Sitting with some of the guys at the CYEC**