

The Adventurers' Club News[®]

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"OTGA -



Erta Ale Volcano Cauldron in Ethiopia

The Adventurers' Club News

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THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE*Rick Flores #1120- President*

Is it spring already? This year is moving fast. It seems like only yesterday that the hills were golden, the

rattlesnakes were hibernating and the butterflies were few and far between. If you go hiking tomorrow you will see many spring flowers (I counted two dozen in the Simi Hills Saturday), the early spring butterflies (Bramble Hairstreaks, Spring Azures, Silvery Blues, Metalmarks etc.), and if you are lucky cranky rattlesnakes waking up from their long slumber (avoid the tall grass areas).

We kick off this month at the Club by visiting Cuba with Ralph Velasco. The following week Sheriff Lee Baca returns to speak about the exploration of space and spirituality. Then it is off to Africa where we will hear about cave diving from Jeff and Evan Bozniac. Finally we end the month on the Pacific Crest Trail with Jace. Sounds like a diverse group of distinguished speakers and another fantastic lineup put together by our first Vice-President Ralph Perez, so make your plans to attend.

I would like to thank all the people who have recommended speakers; your participation has made Ralph's very difficult job much easier. Hopefully everybody has noticed that on our website the people who recommend speakers are being given credit for doing so.

The first catered evening last month was a disappointment in terms of attendance, but the members who did attend gave the meal a positive review, and everybody seemed to appreciate the break from our normal meals. We may plan another catered meal for April, so watch out for e-mails or postings at the Club announcing the event.

We welcomed Chris Dyrek into the Club last month; he was the first new member of the year. Our membership committee informed me that there aren't many more applications in the pipeline, so if you know a qualified adventurous person please bring him to the club. Don't forget, new members are the lifeblood of our Club.

We still need a volunteer to help our stalwart editor Robert Williscroft with the newsletter and don't forget to check out the newsletter online, the photographs there really shine.

Take care everybody – I will see you at the Club!

OTGA – Almost: Our Trek to Hell

James Dorsey (#1081)

Photos James Dorsey

Shane Berry came up with a marvelous concept for a continuing series of articles from fellow Club members about their nearly going OTGA while on an adventure. The articles are to be short, first-person narratives that we can feature each month in the News. All it will take is for each of you to participate in the process and send Shane (or me directly) your "OTGA – Almost" story. Please include the highest resolution photos you have. This month we feature Jim Dorsey's narrative – "Our Trek to Hell."

A team of NASA planetary scientists invited me to join them as a journalist to study *Erta Ale*, a rare volcano in Ethiopia. My wife went because she would not be left behind.



Heading into the Danakil

Our journey took us into the Danakil Depression of Ethiopia, where the temperature hovered steadily at 120 degrees Fahrenheit and the local nomads, all heavily armed, and known as the Afar have a reputation for killing intruders. How could I say no?

The Afar agreed to lead us to the volcano in exchange for a hefty price that included a "policeman" (Their term. I would say, armed thug) to accompany each of us on the torturous trek of several miles over razor sharp volcanic rock that can shred a hikers boots. To stumble or fall is to invite

serious injury. There is no trail per se, only sandy paths between boulders the size of cars, a mere 600 feet above the valley floor that must be negotiated at night due to the intense



Afar gunmen

heat. It is extreme trekking at its best.

Our party was soon spread over several miles, each of us making his or her own way with little assistance from the Afar other than to squat on a boulder and wait for us to catch up. I could not halt the thought of what would happen if this gunman actually had to defend me. Would he fire at a local person? Would I be his victim? We were at their mercy.

Irene had gone ahead, riding a camel because she has only one good eye, and we agreed she could not negotiate this ascent under the best of conditions on foot. Within minutes she was out of my sight and I had to trust I would find her safe at the summit.

I could not understand why I was

so out of breath from such a journey as this was my type of trip and only found out weeks later that I had multiple lung embolisms that should have



Photo Rosaly Lopes

The Erta Ale cauldron

ended my life then and there.

Six hours later I collapsed near a red glow from the summit, lying on the ground, gasping for air and worrying about my wife when a silhouette approached. It was my gunman who had disappeared hours before, returned to see what happened to me. I was so disoriented I did not know if he was going to rob or kill me. What he did was kneel down, roll up in his long robe, and fall instantly to sleep beside me. In seconds he was snoring and it was all I could do to keep from laughing at the absurdity of the situation. It will be one of those bizarre moments that flash back at the moment of my death.

In a few minutes I staggered to my feet, waking him, and together we crested the summit, and I found my wife staring into a bloody red stew of churning molten lava, the heat so intense we could only stay a few seconds before retreating. It seemed to be only minutes later when we were

prodded awake by a rifle barrel and saw the first cracks of dawn breaking. Four hours had passed. The Afar were telling us we needed to begin our descent before the sun rose higher as it was already baking us.

I got Irene on her camel when two shots rang out and the high pitched whine of a bullet sent us scurrying behind a boulder. One more shot rang out just as Irene took a bad fall diving for cover. Thinking she had sprained her ankle and could not stand, we wrapped it tight with duct tape. It seemed that our Afar had betrayed us, when suddenly our personal gunman motioned for us to move downhill, and he stood with his rifle leveled at the summit as though providing us cover. We moved fast, Irene's camel breaking into a downhill trot that had her holding on for dear life, while I ran, praying she would not take a bullet.

Six hours later I collapsed in camp, electrolytes spent, and forced enough Gatorade down to uncramp my body from head to toe.



I fell into the Land Rover *Irene with broken leg* and my final thought was the sound of a rifle chambering a bullet as the Afar were yelling for more money as we sped away.

