



Figure 1 Location of Kilifi County (3°38'S 39°51'E). (Image from Kenya - Plan International Canada)

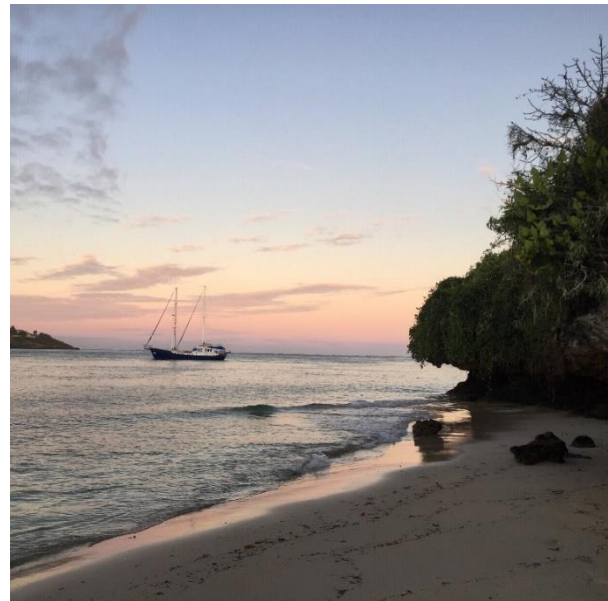


Figure 2 Swimming in Kilifi Creek; Saturday 8th Sept.

Research Trip to Kilifi, Kenya

With the help of the Girton College Travel Award, I was able to travel to Kilifi County, on the western coast of Kenya in September 2018. This trip was a useful reconnaissance trip for me to ascertain the suitability of Kilifi as a field-site for my MPhil and PhD fieldwork. I have just started an MPhil in Epidemiology and following this with PhD in Geography. My research examines how building on locally appropriate knowledge systems in relation to 'wild foods' might inform effective food security interventions. Wild foods are neither cultivated nor purchased but caught or collected by households, and include bush-meat, fish, fruits, leaves, nuts, and seeds (Rowland et al. 2017). Supporting the conservation of wild food use, as well as the underlying knowledge, has attracted attention as an effective and contextually appropriate response to malnutrition, while ensuring prudent use of natural resources (HLPE, 2017). Not only would this trip offer me insight into the sorts of wild food use in the area, but also allow me to make important contacts in conservation and nutritional health that I need and get a good idea of the logistical constraints I might face when I eventually conduct my fieldwork.

I took this trip with my supervisor from the Department of Medicine, Dr Lydia Drumright, who is currently collaborating with researchers at the Kenya Medical Research Institute's (KEMRI) in Kilifi. KEMRI conduct epidemiological, social, laboratory and clinical research. I hope that they will be able to provide me with important secondary data on the baseline health of the local population; getting to know the researchers there will facilitate my immersion into the area. Due to Lydia's time constraints, we were only sadly only able to stay a week – but still managed to pack a lot in!

On **Friday 7th September**, we flew to Nairobi, arriving late at night. We took the new Chinese express train¹ to the coastal county of Kilifi. The train route cuts right through some of Kenya's famous national parks: on our 5hr journey, we were treated to views of elephants, zebras, giraffes, and some beautiful scenery. The Madaraka express was launched in June 2017, and at \$3.8billion is the country's most expensive infrastructure to date. It was built by the Chinese to facilitate transport inland of 22million tons of Chinese imports each year. Tired upon our late arrival in Kilifi, we took a quick swim in Kilifi

¹ The Kenyan 'slow train' is fondly nicknamed the 'Kenyan centipede' since it takes over 10hrs to trundle to the coast!

Creek (which feeds into the Indian Ocean, see Figures 1 and 2) and discussed itinerary for the week ahead.

On **Sunday (9th)**, we met with a man called Ian Gordon in Watamu, about 1hour drive away. Ian has worked in the area for over 30yrs for Birdlife and on a successful community project which farms butterflies, helping people to conserve nature whilst earning valuable income. This was a useful meeting: Ian was able to give us lots of contacts relating to forestry and conservation in the area which we could pursue on our return home. In the afternoon, we took a trip to the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, shown around by our guide, Rafiki. The forest stretches over hundreds of square km (Figure 3) and is home to a few hundred elephants, as well as baboons, deer, and wild pigs. The fencing around the entire perimeter of the forest keeps the elephants from damaging surrounding farmland. Locals must also now obtain a permit to use the forest (for timber collection, butterfly trapping) after state concerns for conservation in the latter 20th century.



Figure 3 The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, and our guide, Rafiki.

The next day, we met Stanley Baya, a man who has championed local children's environmental education in the area. Stanley and his organisational team conduct regular primary school visits teaching children of the importance of nature conservation. The team also work to raise funds to give out scholarships to pay for childrens' secondary education. Stanley was interested in my work and is keen to show me around the communities in my future trips.

Tuesday (11th) was spent at the KEMRI headquarters – a state-of-the-art research unit with adjacent county hospital. I chatted with some of the Kenyan postgraduate students and professors at KEMRI about their own work, and was shown around the paediatric ward in the hospital. Finding out what sorts of studies were being done was insightful, ascertaining where research priorities are currently area as well as answering my questions about more practical issues around conducting fieldwork.

On **Wednesday (12th)**, Lydia and I were taken out on a field visit to a nearby village called Matsangoni with researchers from KEMRI (Figure 4). I had been looking forward to this all week: whilst our meetings and tourist activities so far had been fruitful, visiting and helping local communities is one of my prime motivations for my PhD. Whilst out, we also visited the village



Figure 4 Field visit with KEMRI researchers to Matsangoni clinic; Wednesday 12th September.



Figures 5 and 6: Boat trip up Kilifi Creek with Captain Issa; Thursday 13th September.

clinic, speaking to the doctor on-duty and nutritionist. They were able to describe the nutritional problems they most frequently encounter and how these are treated.

Our last two full days were spent between KEMRI and the Indian Ocean beach. Just spending time in the research community at KEMRI as well as exploring the area allowed me to feel more immersed in the community and get a sense of the lifestyle I might lead if I conduct long-term fieldwork here. Our final night was memorable, taken up Kilifi Creek at sunset in an old wooden boat with the aged Captain Issa (Figures 5 and 6). Overall, the trip was a huge success and I look forward to going back in the near future!

References:

High Level Panel of Experts (2017). Sustainable forestry for food security and nutrition. A report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

Rowland, *et al.* (2017). Forest foods and healthy diets: quantifying the contributions. Environmental Conservation.