

Vol 7, no 2, (2016): pp(54 -73)

The History and Challenges of Simen Mountains National Park: the Case of Fauna and Flora (1969—1983)

Girma Tayachew

Lecturer at Gondar University, Department of History and Heritage Management, 2016

Abstract: This paper explores the full history of the foundation of Simen Mountains National Park in the Simen part of Ethiopia following the discovery of Walia (Capra Walie). The study shows the struggle of the government and foreign agencies to protect walia ibe by also shedding light on the response of the local people towards the foundation of the national Park. The study critically examines the challenges and opportunities during the process in the foundation of the park. Even though Simen Mountains National Park is one of the known heritage sites in the world, what has been truly missing to date is the study of its amazing history. The existence of more than 30,000 people in the premise of the park is another core problem. The study draws on hitherto untapped files from the archives of North Gondar Zone Administration Office as well as on interviews with historical actors. In addition, attempts have been made to gather qualitative data that are both published and unpublished documents. In 1963 a UNESCO-funded mission discovered walia ibex as one of the endemic animals in Ethiopia. It provided the corner stone for the emergence of the Park. The Simen Mountain National Park was officially established in 1969 on the recommendation of a UNESCO mission in 1963 to save the endemic animals. In 1978 it was registered as a world heritage site. The main challenge remains to maintain and sustain the park as a great heritage site by assessing from the foundation of the first park by critically examining the peoples' and government's response to the park

Keywords: hunting and poaching, walia ibex, national park, deforestation

Current Address:

Researcher: Girma Tayachew, Lecturer at Gondar University, Department of History and Heritage Management, :Email:bealugirma50@yahoo.com

Introduction

Begemider and Simen Awraja was divided into Provinces, Districts, Meslenes and Mikitil Meslenes after the withdrawal of the Italian five years of occupation. In 1941, Begemider and Simen Awraja was divided into three Woredas; sixteen main Meslenes; one hundreds and fifty Mikitil Meselenes. In 1945 a new administrative structure was introduced. Accordingly, Begemider and Simen Awraja was upgraded to governorate general. Thus, Begemider and Simen governorate general was divided into seven awrajas, twenty seven woredas, and one hundred twenty one sub woredas. (The ministry of Interior Bulletin. 1961,p.1)

Begemider and Simen Awraja was upgraded to governorate general in 1945 by replacing the Mislene and Mikitil Mislene by woreda and sub-woreda respectively. The Derg introduced a new administrative system in 1974 by renaming the Begemider and Simen governorate generals the Gondar Kiflehager and the TPLF's ethnic federal in 1991 divided the Gondar Kiflehager into North Gondar and South Gondar.

The Simen Mountains are made up of varieties of plateaus which include the peaks Ras Dejen up to 4620 meters. The area up to recently (second half of twentieth century) was mainly populated by the Falasha people (Bete Israel), next to Christian Amhara and a few of Tigreans for a long time. According to oral tradition Queen Gudit is sometimes explained as a "Falasha" Queen from Simen who is said to have dismissed the town of Aksum in the time of Dilnaod. One of the Christian rulers, Amde Tseon, in 1332, sent soldiers to be subordinate of the Ayhud people in Simen. The Falasha in Simen remained independent. The evangelization activity was strong led by the Monk Takla Hawariyat especially during the reign of Zera Yacob. This effort ignited the revolt of Falasha in Simen, Tälämt, and Dembya. The majority people of the study area exercise mixed agriculture i.e animal herding and agriculture which is subsistence agriculture and some of them engage with transporting the goods of tourists. The area is highly affected by degradation and deforestation since the early settled and thus the people led the life of hand to mouth. The main crops produce in the study includes wheat, pea barley, corn and sorghum Teff is not produced in the study area, the dominant crop production still is barley. To justify the presence of excess production of barley, the local people made poem which reads as:

አገር ጥሩ መልካም ስሜን አምባ ራስ

ዋሊያ ያሳድጋል እያበላ ገብሰ፡፡(Informant: Amha Nadew)

The best place, Simen Amba ras

It brings up Walia by feeding barley.

This shows that barley was the staple food of the surrounding people.

At present due to the rapid population growth, no pieces of arable land could be available in the study area. Peasants are forced to cultivate marginal lands like mountains, slopes and arid plots that affect the Simen Mountains National Park.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SIMEN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

When we think about the Simen Mountains National Park, the first thing that comes to our mind is Ras Dejen. There are minor variations in the name of the highest mountains in Ethiopia, Ras Dejen. Although is commonly known Ras Dejen in Amharic, foreign writers usually call it Ras Dajan, Ras Dashan, or Ras Dedchan. (Messerli ,B. &Aerni, K.,1978, p.25) This means the names are written and pronounced according to the way of pronouncing and writing style of an individual.

The Simen Mountains with its scenic splendor holds a prominent place among the mountains of the world. In addition to the magnificent scenery, the Simen Mountains are noted for the prolific wild animals and birds. The recorded species of mammals number twenty one and the bird species sixty three. The most famous of this wild life is the *walia ibex*. The Simen Mountains National Park was therefore established to conserve these wild life species and their habitat, which would

include all the scenically splendorous areas.



Fig 1. The picture of Walia. Photo by the researcher

UNESCO in general and World Heritage Committee in particular played a great role to conduct a general survey on the Simen Mountains National Park. At the beginning, Leslie Brown studied the Simen Mountains in 1963. Based on the evidence or discovery of walia the protection of walia (Capra Ibex Walie) was recognized as important and arranged. The imperial government also assigned guards to conserve the walia in 1964. The World Heritage Committee also assigned Leworens Richard Guez as a head of guards on the Simen Mountains in 1967.(File No. ፡/41; 22/04/1959 E.C)

When Richard Gauze returned to Europe after one year service, C.W Nicol replaced him. Nicol came to Ethiopia from Canada assigned as the Game warden of the Simen Mountains in 1968.(File No. 4/1; 13/02/1960 E.C)

Clive Nicol made a maximum effort to the establishment of Simen Mountain National Park. He and Nievergelt worked very hard and studied about the species of wild life, mammals, birds, and plants. He discovered Ethiopia is the only country with four animals which are not found anywhere else in the world. Three of these animals are found in Simen, namely the walia, the Gelada Baboon, and the Simen Fox. Apart from these animals, there are many birds, and countless plants that are found here. Therefore the chief duty of Nicol and his colleagues was to establish a national park in the Simen area for the following reasons.

1. The overriding objective was to be protecting the unique flora and fauna of these majestic mountains. These animals, birds and plants deserve to live in peace, as they lived before man began to disturb and kill them.

2. The forests themselves are valuable to the country. They give wood for fuel and construction. The protection of these natural forests could maintain the eco system; In this case, keeping the forest is another reason for the establishment of the Park.

The destruction of forests would definitely lead to the extinction of wild animals and birds. They have no place to shelter, and will disappear from the hills. Much of their food grows only in the cool shelter of the trees. When the trees are gone, the food and the shelter are destroyed and the animals and birds are also destroyed.

4. When the forests are destroyed the soil would lose its fertility and would be washed away, leaving bare rock. The roots of the trees hold the soil like giant hands, and the shelter of the trees allows many plants to grow beneath them, and these plants also hold the soil. Once the forests are gone, it is not too long before winds and rains take away the soil.

5. When forests and soil are gone, then the water will also disappear. The area would turn dry as the rest of Ethiopia. Like most highland areas, the dry season lasts for nine months. When the rain comes, a barren land could not hold water. In the absence of forests, much of the water would dry off the land by wind and sun.(File No. 4/1; 17/02/1960 E.C)

Nicol passed the following advice:

The number of people in this country is growing rapidly. More food is needed as hillsides are destroyed, the move on to other hills, cutting and burning and destroying the forests. This destruction has reached alarming proportions. There is absolutely no doubt of the final results of this destruction. This country will become a desert land, and its people will either starve or leave the land. The cutting and burning of forests must stop now, before it is too late. Farmers must plant a tree whenever they have been forced to cut one. Already the destruction has been vast, and has reached a point in many areas where the change of the country to desert has begun to accelerate.) The choice lies in the hands of the people.

Do they want arid desert or green fertile country with rolling hills, fine farms, green forests and meadows, wild animals and birds? The destruction of the forests, in the end, will cause more evil to the country than a hundred wars. Conservation, therefore, is not only of walia. It is the preservation of animals, birds, plants, forests, soil, and water. It is the preservation of the country itself. And it is unquestionably the duty of every person to conserve his country. Please, for the sake of your country and the future, try to understand, and stop this destruction before it is too late.(File No. m/41; Ginbot 1960 E.C)

Nievergelt also forwarded the following suggestions to Major Gizaw Gedlegiorgis, general manager of the Wild Life Conservation Department on October 29, 1968. (File No. m/41; 19/02/1961 E.C). Dr. Nievergelt not only, considered as a clear evidence for reckless deforestation and he alerted the government about a possible extinction of Walai Ibex.

In 1966 the Ethiopian government replaced Balambaras Negash Woreta by his brother, Agafari Nadew as the head of local guards. Nicol and Nadew worked peacefully. But after a while conflict broke out between Nadew and Nicol, particularly after 1967 onwards. As a result Neivergelt and Nicol charged Agafari Nadew so many times. Neivergelt for the first time indicated a complete change in Nadew's character and responsibility. He turned against the development of the National Park. He was a farmer living at Amba-ras and he never protected tree cutting. He became the primary obstacle to the development of the National Park. (File No. m/41; 17/02/1960 E.C)

Nicol also listed 13 charges against Nadew including bribes and theft and suggested that Nadew should either be fired or transferred out of Simen. (File No. m/41; 18/02/1961 E.C). After four days, Nicol also reported other problems created by Nadew. Since Nicol was a game Warden, Nadew's relatives requested him to employ them in the proposed National Park. He also listed other related problems. File No. m/41; 22/02/1961 E.C.

As a result of Nicol's complaints and charges against Nadew Woreta and other related issues, the governor general summoned a meeting on June 24, 1969. The main participants were *Dejazmach* Araya G/Medhin, governor of Simen Awraja, Brigadier General Seyum Gessesse, head of the regional police force, Captain Asefa Tesfaye, commander of Simen Awraja Police Force, Mr. C.W. Nicol, Chief game Warden of Walia, Zerfu Wudu, Secretariat of Simen Awraja administration and Lieutenant Hailu Alemayehu.

The meeting was chaired by B. General Seyum Gessesse. Participants of the meeting identified three main problems. These were:-

- a. The absence of demarcation of the habitat of walia.
- b. The conflict between Nicol and the local people, and
- c. The stealing of Nicol's rifles

Final decisions were made after the end of the rainy season. With regard to the demarcation of the park, it was decided to be implemented November, 1969. It was hoped that demarcation would solve the conflict between the local people, game warden and the guards. Concerning the theft of fire arms, the application of *Ato* Kassa Abuhay to Colonel Tamirat Yigezu about stolen rifle was so late that it was difficult to detect the thief. Thus, Captain Asefa Tesfaye, Commander of Simen *Awraja* Police Force and his vice, *Ato* Tafäte Ayälä agreed to investigate the crime.. But the meeting simply ignored the conflict between C.W. Nicol and *agafari* Nadew Woreta as a personal problem. (File No. α /41; 14/10/1961 E.C). As a result, C.W. Nicol was highly disappointed by the meeting resolution and thus he became hopeless. Then, he decided to quit his job. In fact he was the one who proposed the Simen Mountains to be a National Park and did a lot of contribution to implement it.

At last, he expressed his disappointment in the process of the establishment of the Simen Mountains National Park to Major General Gizaw Wolde Giyorgis. In his letter sent to *Ato* Abebe Reta, Minister of Agriculture, on July 7, 1969 he expressed his bitter regret for abandoning his rewarding job "Marine Mammal Research Technician" for the Arctic Biological Station of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada. His former job was full of field visits, laboratory and office work. At the time of his arrival in Ethiopia, he was initially fascinated by the prospect of the

creation of new national parks in Ethiopia because of the magnificent Mountains, unique both in its scenic beauty and its wild life and flora. For him, it was a wonderful experience to be part of a process that may lead to the establishment of one of African's finest national parks.

He began to frustrate as officials broken many promises with regard to the road, funds, and the prevention of the destruction of Simen. To make matters worse, there was much misunderstanding among the people. Rumor was circulating among the local people, for instance saying that the park project was not government sponsored rather it was sold to foreigners. The general situation distressed him very much and drove him to write a strong worded letter to high officials including Colonel Tamrat Yigezu, Governor General of Begemider. In that letter, he stated that he was no longer interested in seeing a park developed. In addition to his furious statement, his colleagues also submitted their reports on the deplorable situation in Simen. His colleagues included Dr. Nievergelt, the Swiss Biologist who worked there for a year, Dr. Vollamar, Secretary General of the World Wild Life Fund, and Mr. Blower, the senior game Warden. All of them reported to the Wild Life Conservation Department and Colonel Tamirat. Even, Mr. Blower's report was conveyed personally to Emperor Hayle Selassie. But all reports were apparently ignored. Finally, he decided to depart not only from the Simen Mountains but from Ethiopia on October 16, 1969. His resignation was submitted on July 13, 1969. However, he was forced to stay in the Simen Mountains three months until another person took over the responsibility. (File No. m/41; 29/10/1961 E.C)

The Demarcation of the Boundary and the Creation of the National Park

A careful study of walia ibex was conducted and the result of the study was compiled in the RED DATA BOOK. Despite opposition from the local people measures were taken by the Ethiopian government in collaboration with the World Wild life Fund to prevent hunting of the walia ibex and destruction of its habitat. So, in 1969, a strip of land along the escarpment in Simen was proclaimed the first Ethiopian national park. The demarcation of walia habitat officially began on February 7, 1969. Colonel Tamrat Yigezu wrote a letter to *Dejazmach* Kflie Ergetu, Minister of Interior informing him about the demarcation of the National Park. (File No. ϕ /1; 30/05/1961 E.C). But the sketch map of walia habitat was not properly done. Sometime later, however, the

Ethiopian Mapping Agency prepared an accurate map of the new national park. (File No. $\Phi/1$; 03/11/1961 E.C)

Before demarcation, an exhaustive survey of walia habitat was required. To accomplish this study Balambaras Negash Woreta was assigned to identify all the areas inhabited by walia ibex. *Balambaras* Negash who was commander of Netch Lebash in Simen Awraja identified the habitat of walia after ten days of walking on foot. According to him, the walia habitat included the following areas:

1. In Telemt Woreda:- Saint Yared Mountain, Selqi, and Walia Qend areas
2. In Beyeda Woreda:- Ras Dashen Mountains, Semsemet, Tefahu Lezer, Segenet
In Janamora Woreda:- From Buahit to Bahir Amba, Eras Amedu, Se'ayaw, Emet GoGo, Gutaw, Tiliq Amba, and Kosso
3. In Dib Bahir Woreda:- Azemach Ya'ecob, Kebya, Qey Gedel, Turefa, Tiya, Seha, Atola Belay, Abo Belay, Agdamia, Menta Gedel, Semtash, Geheru, Sanqaber, Adaremah Belay and Chilqunit Belay
4. In Debark Woreda:- Michibi Betach, and Sanduk Amba. (File No. $\alpha/41$; 04/02/1962 E.C)

Together the area of Simen Mountain National Park became a vast area which included a lot of Woredas in the region. After internal and external pressures under the will of Emperor Haile Selasie, the Simen Mountain National Park was officially established on October 31, 1969. It was announced by the then, Negaret Gazeta, 29th year, No.4, order No.59 of 1969.

. Even though, the establishment of the National Park was announced by Negarat Gazeta on October 31, 1969, Begemider and Simen governorate general did not fix the boundary based on the new mapping information. The Wild Life Conservation Department wrote a letter to Lt Colonel Tamirat Yigezu concerning the matters of boundaries demarcation in order to create favorable situation for administration. The Wild Life Conservation Department received budget support from American National Geographic Society Television. In order to conduct an aerial survey, the government rented one Ethiopian helicopter from Ethiopian Air Force. It became demarcated based on the map information delivered by professional assigned by the Ethiopian mapping and Geographic office. Demarcation of the park was completed on Monday, April 9, 1970. (File No. $\alpha/41$; 19/03/1962 E.C). In April 9, 1970 the demarcation was done in the presence of *Balambaras*

Zerfu Wudu, the secretary of Semen Awraja, *shaleqa* Zergaw with three members from Simen Awraja Police Force, *Balambaras* Negash Woreta and others representing the local people and also foreigners. *Ato* Mesfin Abebe, head of the park received the new National Park on that day. On Tuesday, April 10, 1962 E.C Brigadier General Mebratu Fiseha, head of Wild Life Conservation Department with American National Geographic Society TV crew arrived at Simen National Park where a colorful ceremony was held. (File No. $\phi/1$; 17/07/1962E.C)

But between 1969 and the beginning of 1974, no major conservation activities were carried out. Following the establishment of the national park, the Imperial government failed to carry out other activities essential for the protection of the park. There were no government officials to follow up and supervise the overall situation of the new park, and no foreigners were employed. Thus, the local people continued to cut down trees, kill wild animals, and encroach on the park. Although park guards reported several illegal activities, no preventive actions were taken by the government. Concerned officials simply ignored the issues which affected the Park. (File No. $m/41$; 02/08/1962 E.C)



Fig 3. The satellite image of the study area

THE USE OF PARK & THE COMING OF VISITORS

The Simen Mountains National Park has been very much beneficial for the local people and to the international society at large. The local people used 53% or 10,000 hectares of the park land for agriculture and grazing till 1970 E.C. Out of that vast land, 18% or 3,400 hectares of the park was used for agriculture, 35% or 6,600 hectares of the park was grass land. At the time 2,500 people were living in the seven villages of Truwata, Tiya, Dirni, Antola, Amba Ber, Agdamia and Muchila. After the establishment of the park, some members of the local community were employed to do various activities in the park. This opportunity for employment proved important in reducing the pressure and encroachment of agriculture. (Ministry of Agriculture, 1986, p.56 and Informants: Metaferia and Simegn). That is why Melaku Tefera, the then party secretary of Gondar province, reported that 10% of the local people generated their income from the park as wage laborers and park staff. (Melaku Tefera, 2011, p.110)

In 1978, the park administration had 17 local employees as a staff in 6 camps. Out of them 15 were wild life guards. The guards were living at Sankaber camp with their families but they did not have cattle in the camp, and did not exercise agriculture. There were other 50 auxiliary people in the camps of Gich, Chennek, Dirni, Muchila, and Adarmaz (Ministry of Agriculture, 1986, Pp.56-57). And the number of park staffs reached 61 in the year of 1983.

Before the establishment of the National Park, the Simen Mountains became a center of tourist attraction, particularly after the discovery of Walia ibex. As stated earlier, in the year of 1963 Mr. Brown investigated the Simen Mountains and the presence of unique animals called Walia Ibex, Gelada Baboon, Simen Fox, and endemic birds and plants. Following the introduction of Walia and others the “*Karneji Museum*” from America sent experts to Simen Mountains for the purpose of scientific research in 1964. (Ministry of Interior (MoI). File No. 71/1; 05/13/1956 E.C). Then, Mr. Leworens Richard Guez came to the area to protect this new species in 1967. After he left, C.W. Nicol replaced him and stayed nearly three years (between 1967 and 1969. (File No. 7/2; 19/06/1957 E.C) C.W. Nicol, an employee of World Life Conservation Department came to Ethiopia in 1967 to establish a national Park in the Simen area. As indicated above, he played a great role in the establishment of the Park. In this regard, he had this to say:

Many people will want to visit Se[i]men; doctors, scientists, artists, photographers and tourists. They will come from the big cities of Ethiopia and from foreign lands. These people will bring much wealth in to the country, in much wealth. But the first consideration is not the wealth of the tourist. The first consideration must be to save the national beauty and richness of Ethiopia. A good national park in the Semen or indeed, in any of the other wonderful and beautiful areas of Ethiopia, will proclaim, clearer than any words This is one face of the beauty of Ethiopia. We love it, we are proud of it, we recognize it and will guard it so that others may see, share and know its beauty.(File No. m/41; Ginbot 1960 E.C)

In the year of 1968 a couple from Switzerland (i.e., Mr. Bernhard Neivergelt and his wife) arrived in Ethiopia. They were assigned by the World life Conservation Department and the Swiss National Orappin Study Organization to conduct further study of Walia ibex. The government of Ethiopia then gave special attention to them because their study would disseminate the news of the park to the international community.(File No. 4/1; 29/05/1960 E.C)

In 1969, a group of Journalists came from Europe to take pictures of Walia and other endemic wild animals in the Simen Mountains. They were taking pictures for a renowned world magazine called “*Life Magazine*”. The group was led by Carlo Bavagnoli who took pictures of walia Ibex and Gelada Baboon. (File No. m/41; 05/03/1961 E.C). The expedition played its own role in advertising the existence of such endemic animals of the Simen Mountains to the international community. .

In 1970, another team of experts from the *Life Magazine* came to Simen Mountains for the second time. Their main objective was simply to study the walia habitat, report the beauty and display to the international community through documentary films and other alternative methods. The team included Mr. Mikel Mock and Mr. William Rey. They discovered the general characteristics of walia, and general features of the area. Mebratu Fiseha, Manager of Wild Life Conservation Department wrote a letter to commander of the regional police force ordering him to give full support for the delegation. After a one week stay in the Simen Mountains, the team returned to Europe.(File No. m/41; 04/02/1962 E.C)

These visitors advertise the Simen Mountains as a fascinating tourist destination and tourists from all over the world began to flock to the Simen Mountains. In the mean-time, such visits contributed to the establishment of Simen Mountains National Park. Many local and foreign visitors came and visited the Simen Mountains. For instance, in addition to ambassadors, His highness Bernard,

leader of the Netherlands and Princess Anne of England visited the Simen Mountains National Park in 1972.(File No. m/41; 15/09/1966 E.C) . Local and foreign visitors came throughout the year especially foreigners stayed more than a week in the Mountains of Ras Dejen.(Informant: Tiruneh and Mesfin)



Fig 4.The physical area of Simen Mountains. Photo by the researcher

In 1974, the foundation of “Pro Simen” was created. To give technical assistance for the development of the park and improve barley production of the local people, ‘Pro Simen’ sent B. Messerli & K. Aerni to conduct geographical research.(B. Messerli & K. Aerni, 1978, pp.13-14).

The coming of international visitors to Simen Mountains continued until 1983. But from 1984 to 1991 the region was barred to visitors because of the civil war. Before the outbreak of the civil war, about 100-200 international visitors were coming to the Simen Mountains per year. After the

downfall of the military government, the numbers of visitors increased i.e 655 in the year 1999 and 1000 in 2000. In 2007 it reached 7000.(Aysheshi Tiruneh; 2010, P.1)

The Challenges: Truly speaking Simen is unique in many ways in Africa as well as in the world. The endemic mammals, birds, plants, and its amazing cliffs make the Simen Mountains wonderful and breathtaking. The conservation of the Simen was a sacred responsibility of the Ethiopian people and government. Of course, before the establishment of the Simen Mountains National Park and the discovery of Walia ibex, the Imperial government had formed the responsible body called *Wild Life Conservation Department*. The main duty of the Imperial Ethiopian government, Wild Life Conservation Department (latter changed and upgraded to Forestry and Wild Life Conservation Department Authority) was to protect the health of wild animals and birds throughout the country. In order to achieve its goal, the authority carried out many activities. One of its activities was to set aside an area in which these birds and animals may live in peace. That led to the establishment of the National Park called Simen Mountains National Park. The establishment of the Simen National Park and the protection of wild animals was not an easy task for that organization or the government.

Deforestation is closely related to population growth. As population pressure increased, the availability of cultivable land in the surrounding areas greatly diminished. (Informant: Setargew, Tiruneh and Shimelis). Deforestation has been one of the earlier threats since seventieth century. (Pankhrust, 1990, p.390)

Following the discovery of walia as an endemic animal, the Imperial government sent a directive to the governorate general to protect this endemic wild animal. The government was not, however, equally concerned about deforestation. This implies that the deforestation in the study area was high.(File No. m/41; 07/05/1956 E.C).

Despite repeated reports and warning, the culture of shooting of walia and other animals continued unabated. The problem was so critical that the situation was brought to the attention of the emperor. Finally, Emperor Haile Selasie himself wrote a letter to Lt. Colonel Tamirat Yigezu on October 10, 1968. The letter partly reads as follows:

በስሜን ተራራ የሚገኘው ዋሊያና ሌላውም አውሬ ዝንጃሮውም ሳይቀር የሚታሰብለት መሆኑን በውጭ አገር ቱሪስቶችና በሌላውም ተመልካች ሁሉ አድናቆትን ያተረፈ ያገር ቅርስ ሲሆን በጥበቃውም በኩል የተሟላ ነገር

አልተደረገለትም ስለሚባል እስካሁን የተደረገውን ወደፊትም ሊደረግ የሚያስፈልገውን ሁኔታ በዝርዝር ጻፋል፡፡(File No. ጠ/41; 30/01/1961 E.C)

The walia and other wild animals including baboons found in Simen Mountains that have gained admiration from foreign tourists and local visitors, are considered as the country's wealth. But no proper care has been taken with regard to protection. So write to us in detail regarding what has been done so far and what is being planned in the future.

As understood from the above letter, the emperor seems to have been well informed about not only walia ibex but also other endemic wild animals in particular and the national park in general.

The presence of the people was another problem. Before the establishment of the park, the Imperial government tried to relocate the people who had been living in the park because in the beginning of 1969, the government had already decided to establish the park. Thus, in January 1969, *Dejazmach* Girmachew Tekle Hawariat, Minister of Agriculture wrote to Colonel Tamirat Yigezu ordering him to relocate the people in the park to another area. Solomon Abrham, Vice Minister of Agriculture also sent a similar letter to Colonel Tamirat. The letter partly reads: “...ዋሊያውን በሚገባ እንዲጠበቅና ያለስጋት እንዲኖር ፓርኩ ቢታቀድው መልኩ እንዲከበር ለማድረግ እንዲቻል በክልሉ ውስጥ የሚገኙት ነዋሪዎች በሙሉ ተነስተው ወደ ሌላ ቀበሌ እንዲዛወሩ እናሳውቃለን፡፡(File No. ጠ/41; 24/06/1961 E.C.)” “If the walia ibex are to live without danger and if the park is to be protected the people living inside the park should be relocated to another locality.”

The response of the governorate general officials was not satisfactory. They rather preferred to magnify the problem they faced. According to them, the main problems were the shortage of agricultural land, the poverty of the people, and the presence of *rist* system. For instance, they stated:

ይህ አገር ፓርኩ የአማራ የእርስት አገር ነው፡፡ ተወልዶ አድጎበት በማሳ እየተከፋፈለ በችግር ተጣቦ የሚኖር ህዝብ ያለበት ነው፡፡ ከትውልድ እርስቱ አስነስቶ በሌሎች እርስተኞች ላይ ለመምራት መቻሉን አይቻልም፡፡ ለማዛወር ቢሞክር እንኳ የመንግስት መሬት በቀበሌው የለም፡፡(File No. ቀ/1; 27/06/1961 E.C)

The land of the park is the *rist* land of Amhara people, who are born and grew up on the land. The local people are dividing the land among each other and are living in difficult situation. It is impossible to relocate people from their *rist* land to the land of others. Even if relocation is attempted, there is no government land in that locality.

The regional officials like Shaleqa Gizaw Gedlegiorgis held a lengthy discussion over this problem. Then, they put forward the following recommendations before the establishment of the park. Firstly, following the establishment of the park, some members of the local community would be employed as guards and scouts. Secondly, the government should make peaceful negotiation with the local people and try to persuade them to move to another *rist* in another Qebele. Thirdly, the poor and the elderly should be allowed to live near the park and fulfill their needs. (File No. $\Phi/1$; 27/06/1961 E.C)

The recommendations were somehow good since it was good there was an extra land in the neighboring districts. It can be mobile. All the people living in the park could be relocated to vast uninhabited areas in Quara, Metemma and Hummera. But the area became a fighting area between the Derg government and EPDRF since 1983 to 1991 which affected the Park.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the centuries, human beings have been fundamentally changing the natural environment. Ethiopian peasants have been dependent on plow agriculture for thousands of years. As population increased, the land for arable land led to the clearing of forest land. The cumulative effect of this process was severing deforestation that is observed in many parts of Ethiopia. One of the areas is Simen Mountains National Park. More specifically, in the twentieth century, deforestation has been getting worse in the study area as a result of uncontrolled human activity including the expansion of arable land, and hunting. Following the discovery of walia as an endemic animal in 1963 the Imperial government embarked on conservation mechanisms. Subsequently a game preservation and shortly after wards the Ethiopian Wild Life Conservation Organization was founded. The alarming UNESCO report on the situation in the Simen Mountains area caused Emperor Haile Selassie himself to order the preservation of wild life from human menace. A lot of programs were made. Finally, the Simen Mountains National Park was established in the year of 1969 under the will of the local people, the recommendation of UNESCO has become one of the leading sites for tourist attraction. The government employed guards to protect walia and natural forests. In addition to government, the community especially the community of Ambaras and the UNO under UNESCO were involved in the protection program.

Immediately after, the down fall of Imperial government, the Derg also continued the protection program with better objectives under the philosophy of “*Ethiopia Tikdem.*”

The Ethiopian governments (the Imperial & the Derg) had received support from International Donors like WWF, UNESCO in the name of Simen Mountains National park. Truly speaking the two governments at a time failed to remove the many constraints in the development of the area including the resettlement of the encroaching peasants in the area in particular. Even today the current government (EPDRF) did little though now it is trying to take measures on the resettlement of the people.

Acknowledgments: I would also like to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to Professor Mammo Muchie from Tshwane University, South Africa for his invaluable help in preparing this study, correcting and arranging for final publication. I want to thank also Dr Fantahun Ayälä from Bahir Dar University for his constructive and critical comments given throughout the different stages of development of this paper. I wish long life for them so they can continue to contributing for their country’s progress.

References

I . Published and unpublished books

- Aysheshi Tiruneh. (2010). Mass Tourism & Human Settlements in protected areas (a case study in Simen Mountains National park) Ethiopia, unpublished
- B. Misserlie, & K, Aerni. (1978). *Carthography & its application for Geographical & Ecological Problems*. Geographisches Institut der Universitat Bern
- Ministry of Agriculture. (1986). Natural Resources, Conservation and Deveolpment. Management Plan Simen Mountain national Park and Surrounding Area. Ministry of Agriculture,Ethiopia
- Ministry of Interior. (1961). The ministry of Interior Bulletin. No.1, year 1, Addis Ababa

Richard Pankhurst. (1990). *A Social history of Ethiopia: The northern and central highlands from Early Medieval Times to the Rise of Emperor Tewodros II*. Institute of Ethiopian studies; Addis Ababa university

II Gondar & Ministry of Interior Archives

w.w.w. unesco.org

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. 4946/51/56/63, Belete GebreTsadik, Vice Minister of Agriculture to Dear Lieft. general Nega Haile Selasie, governor of Begemider & Simen governorate general, 07/05/1956 E.C

Ministry of Interior (MoI). File No. 71/1; Ref. No. 6069/792/1/56, *Tsehafe Taezaze* Tefera Worq, Minister of Gibi to *ato* Akaleworq Habtewold, Minister of Agriculture, 05/13/1956 E.C

File No. ሸ/2; Ref. No. 6391/49/4999, Lieft General Nega Haile Selasie, governor of governorate general to governorate general Netch Lebash Office, 19/06/1957 E.C.

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. 633/4/59, *shaleqa* Gizaw Gedlegiorgis, Chief Manager of Wild Life Conservation Department to *dejazmach* Arya Gebre Medhin, governor of Simen Awraja, 22/04/1959 E.C

File No. ቀ/1; Ref. No. 383/4/60, *shaleqa* Gizaw Gedlegiorgis, Chief Manager of Wild Life Conservation Department to Simen Awraja governorate office, 13/02/1960 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. Dr, B. Nievergelt to Major Gizaw Gedlegiorgis, General Manager of Wild Life Conservation Department, 17/02/1960 E.C

File No. ቀ/1; Ref. No. 2915/49/4999, *fitawrari* Bekele Zelelew, Vice Enderasie of governorate to *dejazmach* Arya Gebre Medhin, governor of Simen Awraja, 29/05/1960 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. C.W. Nicol, Game Warden of Simen monthly report's to the people of Begemider, Ginbot, 1960 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. Emperor Haile Selasie to Lieft. Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 30/01/1961 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. C.W. Nicol, Game Warden of Simen to Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 18/02/1961 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. C.W. dr. Nievergelt's report to Major Gizaw Gedlegiorgis; General Manajor of Wild Life Conservation Department, 19/02/1961 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. C.W. Nicol, Game Warden of Simen to Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 22/02/1961 E.C.

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. 433/4/61, *shaleqa* Gizaw Gedlegiorgis, Major Manager of Wild Life Conservation Department to Lieft Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 05/03/1961 E.C

File No. ቀ/1; Ref.No. 1/ዋ59/5/49, Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general to *dejazmach* Kiflie Ergetu, Minister of Interior, 30/05/1961 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. 77/8348, Solomon Abrham, Vice Minister of Agriculture to Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 24/06/1961 E.C.

File No. ቀ/1; Ref.No. 4/ዋ59/5/49, Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general to Mengistu Tiruneh, governorate Enderasie, 27/06/1961 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. The Report to governorate general, 14/10/1961 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; No Ref. No. C.W. Nicol, Manager of Game Warden of Simen to Abebe Reta, Minister of Agriculture, 29/10/1961 E.C

File No. ቀ/1; Ref.No. 2712/17/61, Brigadier General Mebratu Fisha, major manager of wild life conservation department to Colonnell Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 03/11/1961E.C

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. 0162, Balambaras Negash Woreta to Dejazmach Arya Gebre medhin, governor of Simen Awraja, 04/02/1962 E.C

Negarit Gazeta, Amharic Monthly: 29th year, No.4; order No.59, 21/02/1962 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. 735/41/62, Mebratu Fisha to *dejasmach* Arya Gebre Medhin, 19/03/1962 E.C

File No. ቀ/1; Ref.No. ሰ69/62, Brigadier General Mebratu Fisha, Major Wanager of wild Life Conservation Department to Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general, 17/07/1962E.C

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. ሰ6/62, Litenal Colonel Tamirat Yigezu, governor of governorate general to *fitawrari* Bekele Zelelew, Vice Enderasie, 02/08/1962 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. ነጽጦ4/5/9/66, Birhanu Asfaw, Game Warden of Simen to Wild Life Conservation Organization, 15/09/1966 E.C

File No. ጠ/41; Ref. No. ፓ3/18/18, Teshome Ashine, Major Manager of the provisional military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Forestry and Wild Life Conservation Deveolpemnt Authority, wild life Conservation organization to Comrade Melaku Tefera, Chief Secretary of Ethiopian Workers party Arrangement party, 10/06/1975 E.C

III. Informants

No	Name of informant	Age	Date of interview	Remarks
1	Amha Nadew	46	29/06/2014	He is the son of <i>grazmach</i> Nadew Woreta who born at Ambaras Qebele & now he teaches at Ediget feleg secondary school in Gondar
2	Metaferia Belay	67	29/06/2014	He is the living at Debark and remember the process of park establishment.
3	Tiruneh Alebachew	49	27/08/2013	He is the employer of Woreda Agriculture and now works in Gondar Town who remembers his family how to conduct deforestation.

4	Mesfin Kebede	77	05/09/2015	He was born in Tach Armachiho and lives in Gondar and he remembered every activities of the past
5	Simegn Tafere	61	25/04/2015	she was born and grew in Simen Mountains and now teaches at Gondar elementary School
6	<i>Shanbel</i> Setargew Mekonen	71	20/05/2015	He is a farmer in Ambaras and one of the participant in the foundation of Simen National Park
7	Shimelis Limenih	65	22/12/2015	He was a soldier of Derg and vividly remember the past history