

## **Project Update: August 2003**

We have completed the first of three expeditions supporting our project. We arrived in Nigeria on October 22nd, 2002 to begin a botanical expedition to survey the montane forests of Gashaka-Gumti National Parks and surrounding highlands in order to determine how these forest remnants have changed over the past 30 years.

It took the five of us travelling from New Zealand six days, four airplanes, a station wagon and a series of leaky boats and Landover's just to reach the park! The isolation of Gashaka Gumti makes research here challenging, but it is also the key to the very existence of the unique and significant forest remnants that we are surveying. At Gashaka headquarters we were joined by Kamaia Pepe, a Masters' student, and Marcus Markson (from the Nigerian Conservation Foundation), and our guides Francis Kamjoh and Saidu Isa from the Nigerian National Parks Service. I had known both Francis and Saidu from trekking in the area with my father, over twenty years ago!

The nine of us, with ten porters, set out for our first ten day trek to resurvey the forests of Chappal Hendu and on October 24th. Chappal Hendu (a plateau of rolling grassland with scattered forest at about 1600m) is an enclave within Gashaka Gumti National Park. Many ethnic groups live in the enclaves, but most settlers are Fulani pastoralists, who first arrived in the 18th century and settled here during the 1960's. The enclaves have been part of the national Park since its inception in 1991.

Every day we spend trekking between forests, mapping the forests extent, and collecting botanical specimens of forest shrubs and trees for identification purposes, and for the new herbarium at Gashaka, of which Marcus was to become the curator. We also note, with the help of our National Park Guides, all evidence of wildlife. On Chappal Hendu warthog and baboon are common, but we have also seen African buffalo, colobus monkeys, red river hog and a jackal, and heard chimpanzees.

On Chappal Hendu we found most of the forests still intact, and at least superficially similar to the 1970's. Only one fragment of many had been cleared for farming.

Our second trek begins on November 6th. This is to be a 22 day trek round most of the montane forests in Gashaka Gumti, including Chappal Waddi and Gangirwal, which at 2420m. The trek takes us along the Cameroon border, and includes the enclaves of Chappal Delam and Filinga, and some of the remotest areas of the Park.

I'd like to acknowledge the wonderful logistical support given to us by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation in Lagos and Aaron Nicholas of WWF-UK, who is based in Gashaka. Without their help, and that of Nigerian National Parks, our task would have been much more difficult.