

21 • Tips from the bush: an A-Z of suggestions for successful fieldwork

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to provide a light-hearted, yet serious, list of suggestions for improving your comfort and safety in isolated tropical locations where the facilities may be relatively basic. We hope that it will also be useful for research and travel under less arduous conditions. It has been written as both a checklist and a set of instructions, gleaned from conversations with a wide variety of fieldworkers over a number of years and through personal experience. We end with a few wise sayings relating to the environment – to keep you going in times of adversity.

A

Adaptors. Check what sort of electrical sockets to expect at your destination and take the right adaptors.

Ant-proof socks. Have you ever had the problem of army ants invading your trousers so that you have to get undressed to pull them out of your skin? Just in case you do, tuck in your trouser bottoms and use Gortex® over-socks. Ants are unable to negotiate the smooth material and never make it to your nether regions. These socks also keep your feet dry, since water can only pass out. Not very glamorous, but at least you can feel smug while your companions disrobe in a hurry or suffer from rotting feet.

B

Bags. Hip bags of various kinds are invaluable, and cloth bags/shoe bags of different sizes and colours can help to store things and enable you to find them quickly at the bottom of a rucksack. Large polythene bags

will keep things dry and double as laundry bags (see also Zip-lock or self-seal bags).

Batteries. In addition to rechargeable batteries, take as many long-life batteries with you as you can (not rechargeable). Local batteries may look the same but do not always last. Remember to remove all batteries from your devices before getting on a plane as they can leak and destroy expensive equipment. Batteries that appear to have 'had it' can be 'recharged' a bit by laying them in the sun - sufficient to power your radio once they are no longer useful in a torch. Use rechargeable batteries round the camp and standard batteries for work.

Beeper. A watch that beeps at set intervals (60 seconds, 120 seconds, etc.) is invaluable for collecting behavioural data.

Binoculars. You cannot spend too much on binoculars. Spend time choosing, buy the best you can afford or place this item at the top of your list of presents required. If you take good care of your binoculars they will last you a lifetime. Use lens covers, or blow across the lens before use, to avoid getting debris in your eyes.

Books. A paperback book may be just the thing when sitting under your poncho stranded in the rain or on long trips to town. You can always swap with fellow travellers.

Boots. A good stout pair of boots is of paramount importance (ankle-supporting and waterproof if appropriate). Never scrimp on boots as they get hammered. Many rain forest researchers use cheap rubber boots fitted with high quality arch supporting insoles for working in muddy or flooded areas. Plastic, locally made sandals are popular in humid forests and stout trainers in dryer regions.

Boxes. Plastic storage boxes, particularly those of the size normally used to store shoes, are ideal to take to the field and are gratefully accepted as gifts when you leave. They protect small and sensitive equipment from the elements and insects, and are perfect for storing food. Like shoe bags, they also provide order in a top-loading rucksack.

C

Cameras. You will miss that once-in-a-lifetime shot if you do not carry a compact zoom, idiot-proof, flash camera on your belt, and practice your quick-draw technique. A good flash is invaluable in dense forest as well as fast film. Learn simple maintenance of your camera before you go and remember to buy a spare battery. Automatic camera traps can show you things that you may never normally see (Chapter 16). However, there are also plenty of other ways to record your trip, so don't just take a camera (see Tape-recorder, Video, Chapters 15 and 16).

Clothing. Essential field clothes include: three shirts (one on, one drying and one in the wash), three pairs of socks, two pairs of light-weight field trousers (not the heavy cotton type - quick-drying ones are invaluable

and rip-proof ones are available). Undergarments can be kept to a minimum if you get into the habit of washing the pair you have worn each day. Piles of used underwear can attract mice and ants that will demolish them! Take some smarter clothes too, as you will sometimes need to look smart to avoid giving offence when meeting village elders and permit givers, or for social events and special occasions (Chapter 1). Being a fieldworker does not give you the right to be scruffy.

Compass. (See Orientation).

Confidence tricksters. When you arrive in a city where visitors are common you are vulnerable to a group of people who gain a living from tourists by relieving them of their belongings. It pays to be wary of those who seem friendly and charming in their desire to 'help' you. A polite but firm response can, for example, halve your taxi fare. Always check exact prices *before* you travel, and negotiate a fair price. You need not avoid going out, but it is wise to do so with the minimum of possessions so that you do not make an attractive target.

Contraceptives. Remember that these may not be available, or may not be of sufficient quality, in your destination country. The same applies to tampons.

D

Data. Perhaps your most treasured possession – always carry your data with you in your hand luggage when travelling (see Xerox copies).

Data sheets are useful for all sorts of work. It's amazing how easy it is to forget to note down the obvious if you don't have a prompt (see also Lists).

Dehydration. Few visitors realise how much water they need in a hot climate when exercising more than usual. Dehydration can happen quickly in the sweaty tropics. Drinking as much as you can *in advance* is the answer. By the time you get headaches it is too late but it is wise to carry re-hydration salts. Paradoxically, dehydration makes you feel less thirsty, and can kill. Carry enough water, even if it is heavy. Think twice about consuming ice (not just in drinks, but often used to keep food cold, etc.) and salad, because of the risk of stomach problems.

Dictaphone. Very useful for recording data in bad weather, or when you can't write it all down. But don't get carried away – you'll have to transcribe it all later!

Driver's licence. If you intend to drive (or even if it's just a remote possibility), take your driver's licence with you, and get an International Driving Licence before you go. You may also need to apply for a local licence if staying for any length of time.

Drying your equipment in the tropics often means using silica gel (reusable by drying in an oven) and airtight containers. Waterproof bags of all kinds are available from camping shops – or use those boxes.

Air-conditioned rooms can result in condensation inside your cameras and binoculars when you take them outside. Keep them in sealed containers until they have warmed up.

Duct tape is tough canvas tape that is good for temporary repairs to almost anything.

E

Electricity. Be prepared for power cuts and erratic power surges. Make sure you have a long-life battery and a spare if using a computer, and it may pay to invest in a surge protector since many computers have been ruined without one (see also Adaptors).

Email. An excellent idea for your sponsors, friends and family is to send reports whenever you can get to the Internet. Such instant feedback on the joys and woes of fieldwork is an exciting way to keep in touch and to involve all those who have helped you. Email facilities are now available in many cities. You may want to scan important documents and send them to your own email account, as well as to a few trustworthy friends. In this way, you have back-ups in case they are lost.

Embassy. Your country's representative in your study country can help in difficult times and provide useful advice. Make sure you have the address and telephone number of the local Embassy, High Commission or Consulate. It may be useful to report to them on arrival, so that they know who you are and where you are.

Excess baggage is sometimes unavoidable. It's always a good idea to let the airline know in advance, rather than just turning up with it.

Eye-drops. Sounds ridiculous, but if your animals live in trees, and you are spending a lot of time looking upwards, you may need them. They can also be useful if you are anaesthetising your study animals, to protect their corneas from desiccation (Chapter 8).

F

Field guides. When searching for elusive species, local people may point to the nearest likeness without you asking leading questions. For example, the Congolese 'dinosaur', Mokele Mbembe, has recently been identified as a rhino.

Film. Always take more film than you need. Visual aids are invaluable in enabling others to share in your experiences, but remember to ask permission and avoid sensitive subjects. Many remote places that you visit may change drastically in years to come and you may be the only person to have recorded what it was like in the past. Set aside time to take key photographs that will be useful and entertaining when you get home, perhaps years into the future, especially people and close-ups of your animals and their habitats (Chapter 16).

First aid. What you take will depend on your particular needs, but a basic medical kit might include paracetemol, itch-relief cream, anti-histamines, starters and stoppers, rehydration salts, antibiotics for skin infections and gut problems (medical advice required), fungicides, betadine solution for wounds (treat all wounds, even small ones). Travel stores will provide you with useful information, and some will sell you all sorts of exciting emergency medical kits but these are useless unless you have received training in how to use them. Don't worry too much about those frightening health stories – unless they are very recent! Books like Schroeder (2000) and Werner *et al.* (2002) are extremely useful in remote places (see also Health).

Flip-flops. Going barefoot is not a good idea, owing to the risk of parasitic infection and other potential injuries.

Food fads. Local foods may be safer than 'exotic' ones when you are eating out, especially if you eat with your hands. Packet soups are very handy and it is good to take favourite reminders of home. Packets or tins of drinking chocolate can give you instant energy. Spices and herbs are useful and dried fruit bars or packets of figs, raisins and bananas provide treats without being too heavy. Prevention is better than cure, so take multivitamins to supplement your diet and eat as well as you can.

Foot rot. Ugh! Remember those Gortex socks and foot powder!

Fridge. Portable fridges and freezers are available and are good for cold beer/soda. More seriously, these can be very useful for sample storage (see Chapters 1, 8, and 19).

Fungicide. In case you forget the Gortex socks and to get rid of ringworm.

G

Gadgets. We all have our favourite items under this heading. How about trying one new gadget each trip to see whether it handles a rigorous field test. If not, discard it. For example, how about a folding monopod for your camera or microphone, or one of those light-sticks that you break to provide lighting around camp, a simple toast maker or an edible candle?

Gifts. Before you leave home try to think of easy-to-carry items that will be appreciated far away. Things that are typical of your country or that are of practical use, such as watches or kitchen gadgets, are ideal (see Chapter 1). If you are joining people who are already in the field, take magazines, sweets, etc. with you – you will immediately make yourself very popular!

Gloves. In the event that you need to handle animals, consider bringing along a pair of gardening gloves. These are often unavailable locally and will protect you from nasty bites. Furthermore, a pair of warm gloves may seem unlikely in the tropics, but can be essential for watching nocturnal animals on chilly nights. Finally, sterile latex gloves are

invaluable if you are collecting tissue for genetic analysis and do not wish to contaminate them, and to keep you safe when handling biological samples (see Chapters 1, 8, 19 and 20).

Gossip. As a foreigner, you will be the centre of attention. You may also be the only person from your country that people have ever met. You are an ambassador and a celebrity, so you may have to get used to the idea and be cool about it.

GPS. Global Positioning Systems are a valuable modern tool (Chapter 4), but they may not work under canopy and the batteries may run down. Remember that gadgets can (and often do) fail and it is difficult to get them repaired in remote places. Your old-fashioned compass remains an invaluable aid (see Orientation).

H

Handkerchiefs. The multi-purpose functionality of a handkerchief is unsurpassed. Not only is it useful when you have a cold, and do not wish to pollute the environment with tissues, but it can also serve to wipe the sweat and dust from your brow during hikes or long bus journeys. It can be used to wipe your fingers when no cutlery or water are available, to dust off unsavoury bus or roadside seats and benches, or to bind a small wound. Folded into a square it provides a cushion behind the lens of your headlamp, or for other purposes where padding is needed.

Health. Find out about the major health hazards (e.g. chloroquine-resistant malaria) in your field area, get the best medical advice you can on how to deal with them, and bring the right medicines. Get the recommended vaccinations (see Jabs), and also a general health and dental check several weeks before you leave. Get a tropical health screening when you return home too – some diseases (e.g. schistosomiasis) may be symptomless, yet very destructive in the long term. Take a sterile kit with you, with an assortment of needles and syringes, to avoid the potential of infection at small, poorly funded hospitals. Take a dental kit if you have dodgy teeth. See a health professional in your study country to find out information that may be unfamiliar in your home country. For example, a local health professional will be better placed to advise you on malaria prophylaxis than your own doctor at home. Always check the expiry date when buying medicines.

Hip chains are invaluable for hands-free distance measurement, or simply to make sure that you don't get lost in new territory. Just tie the line to a tree or other fixed object, set the counter to zero and start walking. Go for photodegradable line, which breaks down with sun-exposure.

Hippos, crocodiles, elephants and other large animals. Find out what the best reaction to potentially dangerous animals is (preferably by asking people, rather than experimenting). Apparently, if you are in a close

encounter with a hippo you should stick your fingers in its nostrils. It is forced to come up for air and therefore lets you go. To be honest, if you are this close it may advantageous to pray a little as well!

I

Insects bite, and can carry all sorts of diseases (malaria, dengue fever, Japanese B encephalitis, filaria, to name just a few). It may be hot, but light coloured (biting insects are attracted to dark colours), tropical-wear cotton shirts with long sleeves and long trousers will help to prevent insect bites. These are especially necessary in the evenings and at night. For the exposed bits all you need is to carry a propelling stick of Avon Skin-so-Soft and you will always be safe – and smooth. If you don't believe this just try it at home on a summer evening before you go. If it doesn't suit you, and you require something with a bit more kick, take a repellent containing DEET (diethyl-toluamide). This is rarely available in tropical countries. DEET sweats off, but impregnated wristbands might work. It also melts plastic. You can 'bug-proof' clothes with permethrin. Head-nets may be needed in extreme conditions and tubes of anaesthetic cream work well to soothe bites. Apparently taking vitamin B makes you less tasty to mosquitoes.

Insurance that covers medical expenses and repatriation is vital. You may already be insured through your institution or university department, so check before buying a policy. Always carry a card with your name, insurance details, medication taken (e.g. malaria prophylaxis), blood group, allergies and details of emergency contacts and procedures.

J

Jabs. Prevention is better than cure. Find out what vaccinations are recommended. Remember to tell your doctor or travel clinic that you will be working with animals, and ask people who have visited your study area for advice.

Journal. Keeping a journal can keep you sane, and will provide you with a wonderful reminder of events and experiences you will otherwise forget.

K

Kettle. Place a portable kettle in a small bag with a pocket stove (one that uses solid fuel and folds flat), a disposable lighter, plastic containers of tea and coffee, etc. and your cup and water bottle – for a refreshing (and calming) break while on the move.

L

Language training. This is now much easier thanks to the Internet and many ‘learn in your car’ CDs and tapes are also available, often in more obscure languages. Take a phrase book (if available). Knowing even a handful of words in the local language is invaluable. The fact that you are trying to embrace what is in many ways the essence of a local culture will make people more accepting of you. Better yet, try learning a song in the local language. In many places, if you can sing a song, your hosts will be very pleased, and your fieldwork will progress even more smoothly.

Laptop and palmtop computers are being used more and more in the field for direct data entry, but keep a hard copy for back-up (see Email).

Leeches. If your field site has leeches, socks up to your knees allow you to detect them before they get into your shoes. Other ways to deter these bloodsuckers include spraying your boots with roach killing spray or mashing up tobacco and mixing it with water and rubbing it on your boots; the leeches will fall right off. You might also decide that it is better to wear sandals or flip-flops and pick the leeches off as they come; try rubbing your feet with citronella oil, or better yet with soap, to deter them from attaching their mouth parts to you. If none of these works, salt or burning with a lighter will do the trick. Make sure the leech has released its grip before you pull it off or blood will flow!

Lighters. Take lots. It’s amazing how they disappear! Keep a bunch in a self-seal bag or tin and also put one in each bag and pocket for convenience. They also make welcome gifts.

Lists. Keep lists of everything that needs to be done. This is especially important when visiting new places, when there is so much to remember. Such lists will prove invaluable when planning your next trip. For example, you will not be able to remember your cravings for particular foods unless you write them down at the time you are starving!

M

Malaria kills. If you’re working in a malarial area, start taking prophylaxis before you leave, so that if side effects occur, they occur at home, and you can switch to an alternative medication. Continue taking your prophylaxis. Know the symptoms to look out for. Self-medication for malaria gains you time to get to a doctor, and is not an alternative to medical help (see Health). Self-test kits (using monoclonal antibodies) are commercially available for falciparum malaria (and are under development for other species) and may be helpful in remote places.

Marking and measuring tapes. Orange ‘surveyor’s tape’ can be used to mark out trails and temporarily label trees (Chapter 11). You can write

on the tape with permanent marker pens. Tape measures may be needed for mapping trails or measuring animals (Chapter 9). If you lose your measuring tape, simply use string and calibrate it later.

Money. Transfer funds from your bank to the field. Take travellers' cheques in case problems arise. Find out which currency is the most useful to take with you. Keep receipts for claiming. Credit cards may be a useful back-up in cities but do not assume that they will be accepted, or that cash machines will be available.

Mosquito net. It is best to have your own. Treat your net regularly with permethrin.

N

Notebooks. Of course, for all occasions! Write-in-the-rain notebooks are the answer to wet climates and, to save losing all your hard won data, it is a good idea to write your notes (and letters) in duplicate books (you can buy carbonless ones). Do not forget to store the copies *separately* or send them home! If write-in-the-rain books surpass your budget, store your notebook in a plastic bag, and write in pencil, which never runs, and writes on damp surfaces!

O

Orientation. Try to obtain maps and guides to your study area well before you leave and *always take a compass*. Look out for additional material on arrival and ask as many opinions as you can. The more you understand in advance, the easier it will be to settle down and get things done, or to arrive at a decision on whether it is even safe to go at all. Maps of your study area may be available in the capital city, and guidebooks may list where. What to do if you get lost will depend on your study area. Don't panic, just follow your compass in a straight line until you hit a trail, or walk downhill until you reach a stream, then follow it to the river, etc.

Other people. Many field sites have more than one researcher, plus other staff. You must be able to live and work co-operatively in crowded, difficult conditions, with different characters. This can be one of the best parts of the whole experience but, equally, it can also be the worst! Remember too that other researchers may come after you, and how you act will affect their success as well as your own.

P

Pens. Bring lots and make sure they will write well on damp paper. Forestry Suppliers sell a pen used by astronauts, which is sturdy and has a clip

so it can be attached to your notebooks with a string. Pens used and sold locally are likely to be cheap and functional. Indelible markers are necessary for labelling sample tubes and bags and flagging tape, and are less likely to be easily available.

Permits and regulations. Allow plenty of time to organise research permits, permits to export and import biological samples, etc., and respect regulations for the sake of your own research, and that of future researchers.

Pictures of your study animals, home and family are invaluable aids to communication when language is a barrier. People will be interested to see pictures of where *you* are from, and to hear about your culture, just as much as you want to learn about theirs. A few passport photos are always useful for permits.

Pockets. You cannot have too many pockets. Some people swear by those organiser waistcoats worn in the tropics in colonial times and sold today as photographer's jackets, or buy army-style field trousers.

Political situation. Always check before you go (e.g. UK Foreign Office website, US State Department) and ask repeatedly when you get to a new country to learn what to do and what not to do.

Poncho. For those sudden storms (beware of falling trees and branches in hill forest), and sometimes the only thing that will keep insects off.

Postcards. Why not buy postcards when you first arrive in a city and bring adhesive address labels for your friends and loved ones. By posting your cards immediately, they may actually arrive before you get home.

Procrastination. Fieldworker's Procrastination Syndrome is a psychological affliction that can render you useless for weeks, particular if you have fallen for the romance of fieldwork rather than the reality. Symptoms include a compulsive desire to get everything just right before you start work. Preparation becomes the end rather than the means. Others conspire to support your delays by tempting you to do more enjoyable things or pointing out all the dangers and pitfalls. You end up doing little or nothing. You will have to be single-minded and at least a bit 'driven' to succeed.

Q

Quick-cook meals. A few dehydrated camping meals take up little room, and provide an excellent source of familiarity and comfort. Select some of your favourite meals and save them to celebrate special occasions or in cases of emergency. If meals are too large an option, bringing several of your favourite herbs stored in film canisters is a fantastic way to make local food taste more like something from home.

Quick-wipe cleaning tissues or travel wipes can be purchased in a flip-top dispenser and provide an excellent way to keep clean at a field site or

when on the move. They are also very effective for cleaning stains from clothing. Just dab onto the dirt spot, rub hard when damp and wipe away with a dry face tissue. Magic!

R

Radio. This may help to keep you sane if you are in the middle of the forest and isolated for a while. Short-wave broadcasts from home help to adjust your perspective when you are feeling run down and lonely! Rest. (See Y).

Rucksack. If you cannot get your stuff into one manageable rucksack and your overnight bag, *leave it at home*. A single 65 litre rucksack has been used successfully for a one-year trip (see Clothing).

S

Sarongs are often available locally, and have all sorts of uses.

Secateurs. These are quieter than a machete/panga and are useful for botanical sampling too. Slip them into a belt bag or custom-made holster.

Sewing kit. Should be obvious really.

Sleeping bag and sheet sleeping bag. It's so much easier to wash a sleeping bag liner than a sleeping bag. Having your own sheets can also be useful in cheap hotels/rest houses.

Snakes. Love them or hate them, you will feel safer if you carry a crepe bandage large enough to bind a limb (as if for a sprain). This slows the effects of snakebite for long enough to travel for help, saving you from panic, and is much safer than other do-it-yourself remedies.

Soap. Camping stores sell liquid soap that will wash you and your clothes in fresh or salt water, and is biodegradable. They also sell antibacterial gel, which cleans hands without the need for water, and may be useful under some circumstances.

Solar panels can be bought cheaply and hooked up to a car battery to provide a source of power, or to charge your rechargeable batteries, thereby being a bit more environmentally friendly.

Specimen tubes. Take lots, of varying sizes.

Spectacles. Daily disposable contact lenses circumvent steamy glasses. If you wear spectacles, wear a sports elastic to keep them firmly attached to you, and carry a spare pair with you in the field (imagine losing your only pair in a swamp 5 km from camp...).

String, spare straps and bungee cords take up little room but always prove useful as washing lines, guy ropes, etc.

Sun cream and sun hat. High factor sun protection is vital for the fair skinned, particularly if you are near water, sand or snow, or taking doxycycline as a malaria prophylaxis.

Swiss army knife or multi-tool (with scissors, saw and most importantly tweezers). Don't carry this with you on the 'plane – pack it in your hold luggage. A simple dissecting kit in a cloth wallet provides a convenient way to carry most of the other tools that you may require – including a small screwdriver for when your glasses fall apart, or to pick thorns out of your boots!

T

Tape-recorder. A small tape-recorder and good directional microphone will enable you to 'capture' animals that you cannot see. These should be considered as essential as a camera for the study of cryptic (nocturnal and forest-dwelling) mammals and birds, but it may help to you collect valuable data on most species. Calls can often be used for identification and to provide additional information about social interactions and predator detection. Once recorded, they are available for further analysis – perhaps years later (Chapter 15).

Tent. A small tent with a sewn-in groundsheet and mosquito netting is often essential.

Thermometer. This provides a good way to monitor your state of health when things get serious.

Ticks. Don't forget the all-essential tick check on returning from the field each day. These tiny creatures can find their way into the most uncomfortable places, and it is best to remove them with your fingernails or a pair of tweezers as soon as possible. Wear protective clothing and don't wander around with your shirt hanging out. Pepper ticks must be squeezed between your thumbnails until they click! Use Vaseline or burn off the larger varieties to avoid leaving their mouthparts in you. Get someone to groom those places you cannot reach.

Toilet paper. Doubles as tissues and should go everywhere with you.

Torches/flashlights. Head torches are now available in an amazing range of sizes and types with additional red filters and halogen bulbs. Not only will you be able to see animals from their eye-shine, and find your way around more easily than with a hand-held torch, but they are invaluable when removing contact lenses and doing chores around camp. Always carry a torch when away from camp. Invest in LED (light emitting diode) torches that last for ages without new batteries for emergency use; you never know when you may get caught with the light fading.

U

Understanding other cultures. Perhaps the most vital key to success is to be aware of the knowledge and customs of local people (see Language). You will make slow progress if you fail to observe rituals of etiquette

and politeness that are normal in an area, so listen, learn, and behave accordingly. It can be an offence, or at least insensitive, to show certain parts of your body in some cultures (e.g. belly, thighs, legs, hair (for women)). It is advisable to spend a few days visiting village elders and important officials at the start, to enable them to understand why you are there, and to listen to their advice. If one line of action fails, try another – do not simply give up! You will eventually find someone who can help. There will often be someone who shares your interests and enthusiasm, who will want to meet you, even if they are difficult to find. When trying to influence people when you are away from home, it is helpful to think of how you would react if the situation were reversed, and they were visiting you (Chapter 1).

Remember to adjust your pace of life and try to be at least as calm and patient as the people you meet. Shopping for supplies can take all day, because you should not ask a stranger a question, pass a friend in the road, or buy something at a stall without following local etiquette and stopping to chat. Local assistants/informers/translators/friends are invaluable for cultural information, and you will learn a huge amount about other people just by sitting down to talk – one of the best things about fieldwork.

V

Video technology is now so good that you may decide to take a small camcorder that also functions as a still camera and tape-recorder. For nocturnal observations, the night shot on a video camera can double as a night vision scope (Chapter 16).

Visas and visa extensions. Check on visa requirements as early as possible, since these may take time to organise. Consult with people who have experience in the country that you are visiting, as well as the appropriate Consulates or Embassies, and ensure that you have all the letters of recommendation and other official documents that you need (see Xerox copies).

W

Water containers are *vital*, especially a personal water bottle to keep with you. Folding containers (polythene or canvas) are convenient and even a condom can serve as a lightweight water carrier! Always take plenty of sterilising tablets (either iodine or chlorine) for emergencies when a water filter is not available. Don't forget to bring flavoured drink powder to cover up that nasty tablet taste.

Water filters. Take one with you or make a siphon water filter using a bucket hung on a branch of a tree, a jerry can and Mill-bank bags for

filtering (but in this case remember you will still need to sterilise the filtered water).

X

Xerox copies. Photocopy all your important documents, such as passport, insurance details, permits, airline tickets and driver's licence. Leave a copy at home with your family or friends, and take another copy with you. This will make your life easier when they get lost or stolen. It may be safer when out in the city to carry these copies and leave the originals in a more secure place, along with your other valuables. You may need to get the photocopies officially authorised (normally at the police station).

Y

Why? An often-asked question, especially when you are tired, hungry and have just lost your study animals in the middle of nowhere. You have given up your normal life to struggle around on the side of a mountain in the pouring rain and be eaten alive by all sorts of tiny creatures. It is hard to keep a sense of proportion, so it is very important to take breaks. Do not work so hard that you collapse. Rather, put your health as the number one priority. You will be less efficient or useless if you become run down or sick. To maintain a sustainable workload, plan your working week as if you were at home, with time off for relaxation, socialising and sleep.

Z

Zip-lock or self-seal bags. Your mum may swear by them in the freezer but it is also a good idea to take tons if you are collecting data in humid areas or during the rainy season. They can also be used to store specimens.

SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

- Wastefulness has become a product of civilisation – but it is not a sign of a civilised person.
- We don't inherit the earth from our forefathers; we borrow it from our children.
- Life is like a tin of sardines – we are all looking for the key.
- Failure is the path of least persistence.
- If you don't enjoy what you have, how could you be happier with more?
- After all is said and done – there is more said than done.

- Enthusiasm breakfasts on obstacles, lunches on objections and dines on competition.
- Many a false step is made by standing still.
- People may doubt what you say but they will always believe what you do.
- Telling others what to do in their own country is like them telling you what to do in yours.

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