FIELD REPORT TO THE MBEMBE FOREST RESERVE

Presented by Jumbam Blaise on Saturday 12th May, 2012.

The Mbembe Forest Reserve (MFR) is located in Ako subdivision within Donga Mantung Division, NWR. It spans from Buku-up through Ndaka to other villages. We embarked on this trip the lasted 3 weeks on the 16th of April, 2012. We left Buea this day at 9:00 pm by Grand Jeannot Express travelling agency. We got to Bamenda the next morning and by 10:00 am, we continued to Nkambe via Kumbo. At a few minutes past 16:00 pm, we boarded the next vehicle for Ako where we arrived at about 18:00 pm. We left for Buku, passing several checkpoints undisturbed just to be stopped at the National Gendamerie for an authorization from the Divisional Officer (DO). Fortunately, the DO met us at this checkpoint on his way back from a tour in the neighbouring Abonshie (a border town to Nigeria). After serious deliberations with the DO, he called our Head of Department (HOD); Ass. Prof. Chuyong George B., who affirmed he was actually aware of the trip.

The DO together with the Brigade Commander permitted us to continue our journey, promising to send a team of soldiers on patrol to the field to ensure our security. He equally asked us to see him on our return journey. We then left and arrived Buku (or Buku-Public) at about 21:00 pm where we were given a warm reception by prince Silas, Samuel and others. We spent the night there and continued the following day to Buku-up by means of motorbikes after having a talk with the Chief of Buku. By 14:00 pm, we were at Buku-up and immediately went to the forest to locate a site for our research plots.

We got the first site 309m above sea level (asl) and 06°53′22.1″N & 10°36′50.9″E from the village where we set up a one hectare (1 ha) plot of woodland forest. The second site for the woodland forest was located at 06°52′42.5″N & 10°37′26.7″E, 297m asl. The third plot was a sub-montane forest located 322m asl at latitudes 06°53′11.8″N & longitude 10°36′35.1″E while the fourth and last plot was a woodland savanna 841m asl and located at 06°50′51.9″N & 10°36′55.5″E. We worked in three teams (1) A tree inventory team that comprised Jumbam Blaise (as recorder), Libalah Moses (measurer and field assistant), Alfred and Ramsey (taggers), Jonathan, Jackson and Suken Succeed (taking the x,y points), (2) A herb inventory team made up of Awani Mireille (recorder) and Ngoh Michael (field assistant), and (3) The ethno-botanical
team that comprised Sainge Moses (Botanist) and two herbalists (Roland and his colleague). These teams were shuffled from time to time as some of the villagers refused going to the field on Sundays and other ordinary days in order to attend to their farms.

We recorded diameter at breast height (dbh) ≥ 1cm and height for all stems, trees and lianas inclusive. Note was also taken of some animal trails. The work took us 3 weeks to complete and we had the following results; Plot 1 (woodland forest) recorded 1098 stems, Plot 2 (woodland forest) recorded 382 stems, 4963 stems were recorded in plot 3 (sub-montane forest) while a total of 236 stems were recorded in plot 4 (woodland savanna). Also, we saw trails of several animal species like the deer, dicard, monkeys etc. Other animals that we saw with the local hunters include the pangolin, stone beef, monkeys, bush babies, and deer, meanwhile they told us that others like the chimpanzees, leopard, buffaloes, and all types of monkeys could be found in the reserve.

We finally left Buku-up on Wednesday May 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2012 at 23:00 pm, spent the night at Buku-public, met with the chief next day in the morning after which we left for Nkambe. We had a brief stop at Ako to see the DO and keep some field material. From Nkambe we got a vehicle to Bamenda, got there at 20:30 pm and immediately Libalah, Ngoh and Awani booked for Buea at Musango Bus Travel Agency while I (Jumbam) and Sainge followed the following day by Grand Jeannot Express.

We encountered the following difficulties in the field:

- Lack of potable water for bathing and drinking as we bathed with and drank water that was carried from a lentic point along a river course that was drying off. The water was golden brown in colour and odouriferous.
- Insufficiency of field material like pencils, binding wire, and tags for some plots that recorded more than the estimated number of stems.
- The irregularity of the local employees as some of them consistently absented from work to attend to their own farms and businesses.
- Very high diurnal temperatures.
- Nuisance from sweat bees that some time entered our eyes, nostrils, mouths and even would not allow us have lunch in the field.
- The lack of a cook was also stressful to us as we struggled to prepare food after returning from the field late in the evening.
- We also had it very difficult with the strong winds in this area that caused us to leave the forest sometimes earlier and chased most of us from our tents.

I wish to recommend the following for future projects:

- Net caps should be provided to avert the nuisance from sweat bees which can cause someone to hurt him/herself. Insect repellents could also be provided.
- Better gloves should also be provided as taggers complained of binding wire tearing off flesh from their palms.
- Boots should also be provided to other workers as they expressed fear of being injured.
- Provision should be made for vegetables and fruits to supplement the food.
- Also more drinking cups should be bought to provide beverages to workers and reduce the amount of food eaten in the morning as it sometimes causes dizziness.

In conclusion, it was a wonderful experience in the field with the rough topography in some localities, the terrible odour and colour of potable water. We also learnt so much on the diversity of tree species found in this area and the culture of the local people especially the traditional dishes they served us. I wish to thank TroPEG for the opportunity given me to be part of the team that did this job and especially their funders (i.e. Rufford Small Grant Foundation) for providing the funds for this work.