

an overcrowded backee showed up and piled us on. Most of the drive was on an elevated dike road

over a huge expanse of swampland. Then we arrived at the Niger River, and boarded a metal ferry to cross. The river is high now, and flanked by greenery. Hard to imagine it nearly empty of water, and surrounded by brown.

Djenne sits about 2 kms up a tributary. Very picturesque, though a monotonous brown, it's a tight cluster of square brown buildings & walls that becomes an island in the wet season. An arched portal, square on top, marks the single entry when the town is waterbound. The enormous mosque is the central point - 3 tiered, boasting intricate carvings, latticework, & minarets. Technically, non-muslims can not enter, but to appease tourists & earn a little, unguided visits are allowed. The view from the top is very beautiful. Houses here all have earthen roofs, many are 2 or 3 stories, and have artistic

touches: sculpted brick, ^{carved wooden} windows,
parapets. It's a calm, lovely
town. Narrow alleys wind
between the buildings.

Djenne is the oldest city
in West Africa, devout muslim,
a mix of several ethnic groups.
Men wear beautiful robes
and embroidered caps, women
dress richly, often with elaborate
tresses, scarves, veils and
jewelry. Most women have
several holes in each ear, incl.
one at the top. Puhl, or Fulani,
women wear enormous earrings
that often distend the earlobes.

Staying at the Campement.

Not bad. 1000 each with ~~speter~~
nets. As soon as our taxi pulled
into town we were attacked by
a group of young boys wanting
to be our guide to Djenne.
Do they realize how obnoxious they
are? All 3 or 4 of them followed
us until one by one, and after
being repeatedly told we didn't
want a guide, they slowly
dropped away. We were left
with Omar, who is fairly
pleasant, for the guide sort.
Having a guide appears to be

more of an advantage than not.
My biggest concern is, do the
townspeople like him? If not,

I feel foolish hanging out with
him. He took us into the mosque.

There are 100 enormous ~~are~~
square mud pillars, perhaps
30-40 feet high, supporting
the roof. Beneath is a series of
isles for praying, and the
floor is deep sand (shoes
must be removed). The imam
is the prayer leader and the
"highest" muslim. He inherits this
from his father. A council of
elders directs the religious doings
of the community.

Sat. Sept. 27

Omar came for us this morning
and gave us the grand "tour de ville"
all one hour of it. The sights of
Djinné seem to be the mosque,
the old quarter, and canoe trips.

This whole guide / tourist business is
very obnoxious, worse here than anywhere
else we've been. So Omar took us
through the old quarter of town,
where there are many lovely old
homes and narrow alleys.

cont'd. Saturday Sept. 27 Djenné

The people here really are gorgeous, the men and women in colorful, flowing embroidered robes in lush fabrics. The women & girls wear layers of colorful jewelry, tressed hair, or scarves. Very few people seem to speak French, so there were lots of smiles and some shy "ga va?"'s. But I wondered what it feels like to have strangers wandering past your home, staring at your daily life. What would the average American suburbanite think if a few Tuaregs in traditional dress came waltzing down the street, staring intently as people washed cars, mowed the lawn, walked the dog?

The architecture here really is lovely. It's hard to believe it's all made of mud: the intricate sculpted balustrades & parapets.

Once women here were cloistered away, much as they still are in north Africa and the middle east. The flat roofs, off limits to men, were their ~~only~~ only unvoiced access to the outside world. Here they could do laundry, chat with women neighbors.

Ornate ~~wooden~~ windows, with lattice works of tiny holes, allowed them to look out without being seen. Of course that has all changed now, and women roam freely, unveiled, though pretty well covered from the neck down. No bare breasts here! Houses here all have ingenious WC's: a tall, hollow pillar of mud copped by a small hut on the roof. The pillar fills up, a hole is dug next to it, and all the sewage is drained into this new hole. So there is no open sludge here, and very little smell. I believe the muslims are fairly finicky about personal hygiene. The town is also blessed with an abundance of clean well water, and all parts are served by neighborhood robinets. The women often gather in these central spots to pound millet together at night.

Saw a woman and her kids skinning a rat they'd caught. The critters don't look all that different with their skin off. The 2 PCV's here in Djenne tell us the meat is quite good, dark like game birds. Seems the houses here were once

made with round balls instead of bricks, as now. This method was supposedly much stronger but much more work.

We've been lucky with the weather; often overcast with a breeze, it's great for walking. It really hasn't been that hot, and so far, no rain. Women here often use a blue stain around their mouths, lips, or gums. It creates what must be considered a seductive, bruised look. There is a lot of money here, and a lot of what is analogous to our "old money". Muslims are notoriously successful commercants, in other words they're good at making money. Many here are animal traders: cows, sheep, goats, etc. It's lucrative no doubt, as most townfolk dress in billowing, embroidered robes worth thousands of francs.

Children here attend Koranic school taught by Marabouts, the muslim equiv. of a rabbi or religious teacher. Children learn to write Arabic on wooden prayer boards.

Crafts for sale here are mostly "batiks", actually designs painted in ochre & red on hand-woven white cloth spun from local cotton. Prices

are ridiculously high for these and for most all else. The cost of living here seems in general higher than Loyo, and also many prices are high for tourists. The campment is the only place to eat, as there really is no street food except a few odds & ends. Food there is good, but overpriced. Two crested cranes live there. Captive since chicks, they now have their wings clipped, and seem content to wander around like graceful siamese twins, moving in unison like each other's shadow.

Moroccan style mint tea is the custom here, a ritual several times a day. As muslims don't drink alcohol, this is the social drink. Didn't get to try it. Had a nice walk partway around the village, and a short pirogue ride across the "moat".

Sun. Sept. 28

Got a ride to the junction with a French couple in their truck. Stopping in to wait a while. Fulani women are selling thick fresh milk, but there is a danger of tuberculosis so we can't drink

it. Settling in for a wait. There are many cars going the other way! Salutations here are a

long string of monotonous, uttered back & forth as if by rote, usually without smiles or eye contact.

After perhaps 45 min a caravan of semi trucks came along. One pulled over for us, so in we piled. There were 6 of us. It was a pleasant, if noisy and bumpy ride. The engine rattled and roared and put out lots of heat. The landscape was lovely. Large flat, lushy expanses, with occasional mesas or clusters of sculpted rock, very much like parts of the American S.W. Stopped for a rest in a village about 50 k's south of Mopti. Marché today and very animated. Fun to wander around and be stared at. People here are quite colorful, and different from Togo!

Lots of donkey riding here. Doesn't look very comfortable. You sit on the haunch itself rather than on the back.

Learned that women are only allowed in mosques after menopause. Women who menstruate are ^{considered} _n unclean, esp.

during their period. Truck dropped us off in Awaré, 13 k's from Mopti, and we caught a market taxi into Mopti. I really like Mopti so far. It's a bustling, colorful port town. Beautiful crafts and people, and very picturesque. Lots and lots of delicious watermelons for sale!

Mon. Sept. 29

Staying at Hotel Oriental in the old part of town. Mopti is composed of 3 linked islands surrounded by 2 rivers, the Bani & the Niger, which come together here. Old town is much like Djenne, with a similar mosque and mud bldgs., but here there are many cars, people, noise, and electric lines.

The commercial part of town is more modern cement, etc. Hotel is funky but cheap. Dormitory style with grass mattresses on the floor, 5 to a room. The ^{crafts} market sells beautiful textiles, beads + jewelry, but prices are high and the vendors are persistent.

Along the port are dozens of canoes lined up waiting to load people

and goods for points up or downstream. Many Tuaregs come here to sell salt. The salt is baked into enormous marble-like slabs, a marbled, dirty white, which are stacked in enormous piles along the water front. They're then broken into chunks & sold by the kilo. The Tuaregs camp here in grass mat lean-tos, grimy & gungy from their travels. They look very different from the black Africans, lighter skinned, with softer, less kinky hair, longer chins, more angular faces, noses more hooked, less broad.

Saw one fellow, large, burly physique, bald, a tooth missing. Looked just like a they out of a James Bond mid-eastern thriller, or a biblical dramatization. Yes, it's very different here, and a feast for the senses.

The hangouts are the restaurant Nuits de Chine, a cozy hideout with a variety of good, if overpriced food, and the Bozo Bar, a covered terrace jutting out into the river, with views of the port & its bustle of activity.

The boat trip... The boat will not arrive until at least Thursday, and possibly later. It's

then a 4-5 day trip to Gao, a 2-day bus ride from Gao to Niamey, and 2-3 days back to Opaong. So time

& money are running a bit short.

We've decided to wait till Thursday, and if the boat doesn't come, then we'll go overland. So we have a good 4 days here in Mopti to just hang out. A feeling of inertia sets in - we've been moving along at a good clip and now all of a sudden we're stopped in our tracks. I feel a bit like a jogger on a stationary running truck, still moving forward but not going anywhere.

Dinner again at Nuits de Chine, and they played some great B&B and then Jackson Browne! Blanket vendors make the rounds here of the captive tourist audience. One of them we call George, because he reminds us so much of Mike's mom's boyfriend George. Same size & features & mannerisms, but black. He's a born salesman, and watching the show he puts on for each new set of tourists. He's a very large, but solid man, with a large, round belly, huge hands a feet, a jolly round face, quick merry Santa Claus eyes.

He's also very tall, and has a

habit of bending down when he talks, to tell you things in confidence. Last night he wore a purple Bassin tunic over a pair of purple baggy pants to match, and a white veil draped loosely over his head & shoulders. He was trying to sell us a small piece of a traditional marriage blanket - intricately woven and multi-colored like a tapestry or a Persian rug. He started at 70,000 CFA and eventually went down to 8,000! But I wasn't willing to spend more than 5,000. There are so many beautiful things made here, it's hard to decide what to buy, since we can only afford a few things.

Women here use henna a lot, to stain their skin. Most women stain the soles of their feet with it. The stain can last up to several weeks.

Tues. Sept. 30

A slept late and had a coffee & brochettes breakfast down at the port.

The port is a pronounced inlet crammed with pirogues of all sizes. On the banks around these are merchants selling straw mats, rice & millet in huge sacks, food & knick-knacks of all

all kinds. Spent the day wandering around, finding lots of interesting things to see. Walked around the old part of town in the evening, watching it grow dark in the narrow, crowded dirt streets. On either side are mud-grey banco dwellings, 2-story & square. Yet there's a pleasantness in the monotone, an earthiness. People live close to each other here, and there's much noise & garbage & bustle. But it's not squalid. ~~the~~ it doesn't smell, and people here are often rich. Many wear the expensive embroidered robes. The weather has been delightful: breezy & often overcast, and we haven't been rained on yet!

Thurs. ~~Sept~~ Oct. 2

Oh my - I've about had it with this boat business. After 4 nonetheless delightful days of waiting here in Mopti, we find out that the boat is full. ~~if we~~ (ie it filled up in Bamako). If we wanted to go on the boat we'd have to pay full price and sleep on deck until a cabin came open. ~~So~~ ~~if~~ we
 against our better judgement

bought 2nd class tickets : 25.000 francs!
The boat arrived after dark, and
all was madness & mayhem.

People pushing & shoving, loading
and unloading. We'd been
told to sleep on the upperdeck,
but arrived to find the army
had taken it over; it was
packed to the gills and we were
rudely turned away. Dismayed
& frustrated, we marched back to
the office to ask for our money back.
But no, it's just a mistake, says the
ticket seller, who was very kind and
patient with us through the whole
interminable affair. So he came
with us and we pushed and shoved
our way up to the top deck, each of us
lugging a bulky pack & several bundles.
To find that the army had taken
over this deck and we couldn't sleep
there. Period. Once again, we just
wanted our money back and to get
the hell off this crazy boat. But no,
you'll sleep on the roof, our friend
declares, and up we went through
a small hatchway, handing up our
packs, onto a curved metal roof.
The stars were out, we were ~~at~~
alone except for one person, and
free of the madding crowd.