

# The Explorers Club Northern California Chapter

November 2003

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Issa Mohamed  
in Mali

## San Francisco November 7, 2003 Issa Mohamed

The Ancient Libraries  
of Timbukto  
Must Be Saved

Issa Mohamed has an ancient tale to tell. In fact he has 700,000 of them: ancient manuscripts at the University of Timbuktu and in private homes throughout this old caravan stop in the Sahara. It was a well at an old woman's camp that first attracted travelers to this place, at a time lost in history. Almost a thousand years ago, the loca-

tion became a site for scholars, and much of their library remains in tact! Unlike the destruction of the written history of the Incas or the sacking of Alexandria's Library, these documents exit, now, still.

Timbuktu is a difficult place

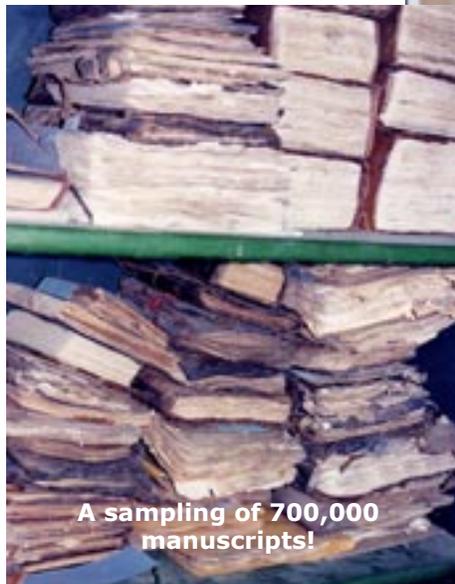


A scientific text on  
phases of the moon.

**NEW LOCATION**  
**Date** Friday, 7 November 2003  
**Place:** Sinbad's Pier 2 Restaurant  
Embarcadero, San Francisco  
**Time:** 6:30 pm, no-host cocktails  
7:15 pm, dinner  
**Cost:** \$40 (by November 3)  
\$50 (if posted afterwards)

Reach Steve at  
[nauticos@oceaneearth.org](mailto:nauticos@oceaneearth.org)  
 or 925 934-1051.

Reservation Form on page 5  
 Please reserve promptly!  
**NO MEAL WITHOUT RESERVATION**



A sampling of 700,000  
manuscripts!

to visit; one has to want to go there and make the effort. Issa was born there, felt lucky to leave and succeed in his adopted America, and now wants to give back to his Mali heritage. He feels that it will benefit both societies. The Timbuktu Heritage Institute was founded to accomplish this, and he spends full time at the task.

The books that he has identified are in various stages of decay; they need to be saved. They also need to be studied. It makes sense that books written so

Continued on page 2

long ago were for a purpose: they deal with mathematics, astronomy, medicine, philosophy, the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed— the spectrum of a cultural center of learning. Because Timbuktu is where it is, the books have laid fallow for these years, protected by low humidity. You have to know they exist, to read old Arabic and to have access. On a pilgrimage home in 1999, Issa met a professor at the University. Out of their conversation rose his non-profit foundation.

He wants to find the money to establish a study center in Timbuktu that is dedicated to the protection of and study from this wealth of old knowledge and teachings. He envisages visits by scholars from around the world to teach and research. Local professors and information technologists would work to document and preserve the library. The results would be made available to the world via the web. While daunting, this is not an overwhelming goal. Local expenses are low and the local talent can be developed. It is a matter of who will help and at what pace. Issa's plans are long range; his immediate search is to find help to start. He has met at the United Nations and the National Geographic Society, been interviewed on National Public Radio and presented this vision to several academic meetings. In a slow economy, it is tough to start something



A University of Tmbuktu campus, the ancient mosque Sankore, where the students have studied for centuries.

new— even with something very old.

Come hear his compelling ideas. He opens access to an understanding of thinkers from ancient times. How often do we try to piece together marks on stone to make a whole; the Timbuktu Heritage Institute shows the way to an abundance of words we can read! What has been translated tells of times of tolerance and welcome, based upon the teachings of early Islam. There is insight into the mind of the Islamic philosophers and ethicists, as they resolve conflicts of a thousand years ago. Times have changed little; can we learn from this past?

Issa Mohamed has an extensive presentation of his mission with the Timbuktu Heritage Foundation on a website you may wish to visit:

<http://www.timbuktuheritage.org>

The well of Buktu, an oasis that was the origin of this Sahara caravan site. Water was transported in goatskins (below) to cross the sands.



**January 9, 2004  
Maritime Museum Reception**

**January 10 & 11  
Cowell Theater  
Fort Mason Center  
San Francisco**

Krist Jake (MN'79) reminds you to mark your calendars; the films are committed and details will be provided next month. The festival is shaping up as a premier opportunity to see striking examples of marine documentaries.

# Flying Across Russia Thierry Thys San Francisco



Thierry Thys told our group, peppered with pilots, about his 65 hours flying across Russia in 2000 in a Soviet MI-2 decommissioned military helicopter he purchased a year earlier. He spoke more about all of the time spent between flights. Most of this time was waiting for decisions from a hide-bound bureaucracy still in place after the dismantling of the USSR. A trip originally thought to take a bit longer than a fortnight was successful only after almost five months; a summer plan slipped into one fighting the elements of a Siberian winter.

Thierry set a goal to circumnavigate the world under conditions not to break any records, rather to do so *'a su costa'* (as the early Spanish Conquistadores often stated, "at his own expense".) He was to own the aircraft, pay all costs and fly it. How long this took was not a condition. Earlier in his business career he had flown from the Bay Area to Europe; the challenge remained to finish the globe-circling experience.

He showed a video he created about his unsuccessful first attempt to fly in Russia, in 1995. Too many official barriers; too many conditions; too little time. But he learned. He



returned in 1996, and managed to buy a fixed-wing small plane which he was able to fly, crossing Lake Baikal (at night because it was not on his flight plan), to Magadan, on the Pacific coast. No fuel was available, within the range of the plane, to allow him to continue and, after ten days, he and a friend gave up waiting. The YAK-18T's wings were removed; it was crated and shipped to the USA.

On his next attempt he found a helicopter in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He met members of the National Aero Club; a deal was struck! The 9-passenger twin-turbine 100-mph-or-so chopper was mechanically brought to flight-worthy standards, two Russia pilots would act as domestic registrars, and a flight plan was approved. They were to depart in mid-July to cover the 5000 miles in two weeks. The stories and pictures this evening were of life in this previous Soviet satellite, crossing the border into Russia and skipping, in 24 stops, across a vast land with no roads (only the west-east rails), to exit, across the Bering Straights in December! It was a tale of life in Siberia which continues much as it always has: little changed from the days of the Czar or the dominating rule from revolutionary Moscow. The people generous; formal regulations making decisions almost impossible; patience prevailed.

Once in Alaska, they whisked through customs at Nome, in minutes. Five days later they were in Oakland,



the MI-3, before retrofit - sunny Kazakhstan - Gulag Grief at Maska Scourve - installing warmed batteries in Siberia's winter - sea ice enroute to America



2700 miles away, having crossed Canada with generous support from their legendary flight-control stations. Mission complete.

## ECAD - NEW YORK March 20, 2004

This event will celebrate the 100th anniversary of The Explorers Club. The Annual dinner, always a treat, promises to be even more grand this year. Make your plans early.

The Club Board has announced that reservations for the ECAD will be announced, and accepted, at the same time that the annual dues request is mailed— in November 2003. Seating will be on a first-come, first seated basis.

Payments and reservations will be allowed on line, at the Explorers Club web site too.



### Present at SFYC

John and Elsa Roscoe attended our October 3rd meeting, to the delight of all. He reigns as one of the Chapter's elder explorers: FN'54. He joined the Explorers Club while very involved with Admiral Byrd in the expansion of exploration in the Antarctic. His expertise: the interpretation of aerial photography. John is a Ph.D. geographer and United States Marine, now retired. Elsa, an archaeologist, worked for years with Kodak: the connection between photography and film has to figure strongly in their meeting!

John also contributed greatly to our chapter: he is the sponsor of webmaster Mike Diggles. Elsa was a 'groomsperson' in the wedding(see left)!

### Bike and Fly and Cruise

Treasurer Tom Hall returned from the summer with his wife, Liz McLoughlin; they were on board *Onward* cruising the Inland Passage of western BC and Alaska. For a real treat, check out their web site:

[www.bikenfly.org](http://www.bikenfly.org)

Before our next meeting they will have completed a bike trip from San Francisco to the Mexican border.

Mike Diggles and Deanna Buhl were married on September 27th; perhaps it was too much to expect them to be at an Explorers Club event on their honeymoon!

Deanna's daughter, Maurie Hamilton, was in the wedding ceremony. She has joined us at several meetings.

A hearty congratulations to our webmaster and his family!

### Absent at SFYC



### Roster Project(s)

It has been nearly a decade since a national roster was published by The Explorers Club; it has been five years since we have had a local one. National was close but water damaged an attempt a couple of years ago, and a new publication is not yet ready.

Meanwhile we have a local roster in process, based upon our newsletter mail list and a cross check with current membership records in New York. Sue Estey has taken on this endeavor. One would think it would be a simple process of using the data base and checking everyone off. Alas, it is not. Try

as one might the details we have and the details New York has did not jibe. So, Sue has decided to call each and every one identified to be sure of their address, email, phones and status.

Would someone like to volunteer and help her? Please email her at [sestey@earthlink.net](mailto:sestey@earthlink.net) or call her at (510) 526-2216 (home), (510) 923-2856 (work). Almost there! Help will help.

With a bit of help and success in tracking down busy explorers, we hope to have the document ready by year's end. Then there is the cost. We estimate printed versions can be provided

for \$5.00. We can send PDF versions to all who have provided email addresses at no added cost.

Matthew Stubbs, Manager, Membership Services Office, and Michael Doyle, Membership Coordinator, for the Club are happy to report that their ongoing efforts of database construction and data cleaning are also almost finished. They have completed the double checking and editing of over 3000 records to insure the greatest level of accuracy possible and hope to go to the presses in late October early November.

## The Chapter Chair

Dear Northern California Explorers:

As many of you are aware, for some time now your officers have been seeking ways in which we might reduce our meeting costs to encourage increased attendance. An additional incentive arose last month when new usage rules led to our reconsideration of gathering at the St. Francis Yacht Club, a traditional site of long standing.

As a result, this month's meeting will incorporate a somewhat different approach. We will be meeting at Sinbad's Restaurant on the Embarcadero in San Francisco, a bayside spot right on San Francisco's waterfront. It is situated near the Fremont exit from the Bay Bridge; it is also accessible using BART and CalTrains (using the Muni extension.) One of the attractive features of Sinbad's is the availability of the restaurant's bar! Previously your club was required to pay for such service before and during dinner. Instead, at this meeting we will call on you to be explorers and find the bar if you so wish. Additionally, since wine is available, the club will not be hosting wine at the tables. This has been a source of additional cost, for many went unused (based on the number of unfinished bottles at the end of the night). The foregoing allows us to reduce costs for the upcoming meeting; \$40 is not so bad for a Friday night in the City! I will be looking forward to your feedback on Sinbad's as an ongoing meeting place. Don't be shy.

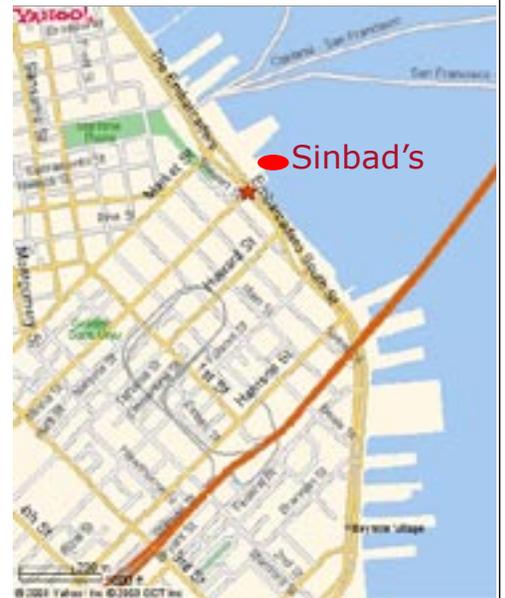
As we depart from the SFYC, I extend the Club's thanks to Don Bekins, our SFYC member -host. Don has put up with a considerable amount of accounting and correspondence to avail us of this venue. We certainly appreciate his time and assistance.

On another note, we have heard from some of you regarding your interest in the Explorers Club Annual Dinner in March 2004. Keep those

notes coming so we can try to arrange tables for our clan. As noted elsewhere, remember that the reservations request for ECAD will be a part of the dues renewal process this year. Look for this information when you receive your annual renewal letter in November.

Lastly, thanks to speaker Thierry Thys for a great presentation at last month's meeting, and a big congratulations to our member and Webmaster Mike Diggles for his new status. I'll look forward to seeing all of you on November 7th, at another intriguing meeting..

—Stephen E. Smith, FN'96



## Evolution

### @ The Explorers Club

We should continue to reflect on how we grow as an organization. The idea of building membership is a real benefit. To help, The Explorers Club's Board has decided to grant a significant price reduction for dues for all members under 45! Now is an even better time to find new members.

Taking the step to become a member isn't automatic; it takes effort. Effort to do something that competes with all of the other activities we have. You have to have a sponsor; you have to write a positive self-endorsement; you have to want to join fellow members. Indeed, it can be a bit daunting; however, do not make it so. It is, in reality, a serious reflection upon your role in exploration. The first level: you are interested in the adventures of exploration and would like to learn about them from those who have something to say and to report. The second level: you have been involved; you have been part of expeditions; you have more than traveled widely, you have travelled with a purpose and been part of field par-

Sinbad's Pier 2 Restaurant is easy to find: JUST south of San Francisco's Ferry Building! Parking is available. BART access.

Great views  
Bring a friend!

ties. The third level: you have reported on your findings from the field; you have published and spoken and made films and documented what you found or tried. These are the levels of The Explorers Club membership: associates, members, fellows. All are welcome. Students are welcome too.

The result of making the effort to join is that you will meet and enjoy people who have worked in the hinterlands of the world. Some you will know about; most you will not (but you will want to.) You can speak about and discuss each other's ideas and dreams and findings. You can reminisce and talk of times gone by and adventures in the wild. You can plan and participate on new ventures. It is a nifty group. Be a friend; find a friend and encourage this friend to join!

—Lee Langan, FN'99

Please make your checks out to The Explorers Club, Northern California Chapter, and mail with this form to:

Please reserve \_\_\_\_\_ spaces for November 7, 2003, at the Sinbad's Restaurant. Cost: \$40 each by Nov 3; \$50 if postmarked thereafter (contact Steve at [nauticos@oceanearth.org](mailto:nauticos@oceanearth.org) or 925 934-1051 to assure a reservation).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address (if changed): \_\_\_\_\_

Guests: \_\_\_\_\_

**Δ I am interesting in attending ECAD, in March 2004, with Chapter members.**

Dr. Stephen E. Smith  
402 Via Royal  
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

meal choice (please circle):

meat

fish

vegetarian

## **Northern California 2003-2004 Event Calendar**

(Mark the dates! Venues will be identified at time of event.)

October 3, 2003	Thierry Thys St. Francis Yacht Club, San Francisco	"Private Piloting Across Russia"
<b>November 7, 2003</b>	<b>Issa Mohamed</b> <b>Sinbad's Restaurant, The Embarcadero, San Francisco</b>	<b>"Ancient Manuscripts of Timbuktu"</b>
December 5, 2003	Alan & Shan Nichols	"A 2300-mile Father/Son Odyssey Through Central Asia"
January 16, 2004	Dana Isherwood	"Helping Out in Western China"
February 28, 2004	Sheldon Breiner	"Remote Sensing in Archaeology"
March 28, 2004	ECAD, New York	100 Years of The Explorers Club
April 30, 2004	Rupert Isaacson	"The Bushmen of the Kalahari"
June 4, 2004	Open	Final details not complete.
June 19, 2004	Chapter Picnic	Contact Anders Jepsen

Please note venues and dates with care.

The November 7 meeting is at  
Sinbad's Restaurant, San Francisco.

**In full and lively color!**

To experience this newsletter in color,  
see the 'pdf' version at our web site.

(When copying the URL addresses be sure to keep them all on one line; most are also available as links on our Chapter web site.)

### *November 2003*

Dr. Stephen E. Smith  
The Explorers Club  
Northern California Chapter  
402 Via Royal  
Walnut Creek, CA 94596

