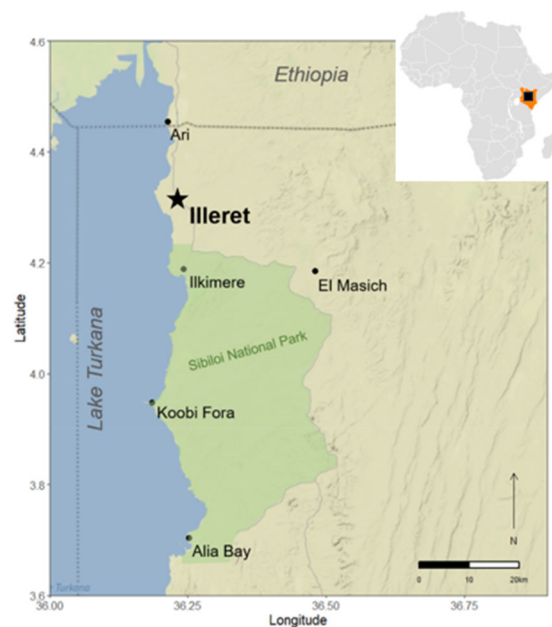


Tufts Koobi Fora 2024 Frequently Asked Questions

Koobi Fora is the name used to refer to an area on the eastern side of Lake Turkana, in the vicinity of the village of Illeret. Koobi Fora is home to the Inkoria territorial section of the Daasanach people, who occupy northeastern shore of Lake Turkana and further north along the Omo River, with an estimated population of around 77,000 in Ethiopia and 19,000 in Kenya. While Ethiopian Daasanach combine pastoral food production with horticulture, Kenyan Daasanach live in more arid rangeland conditions and are almost entirely dependent on herding livestock for meat, milk, and blood, supplemented with fishing, foraging, and trading. Mobile pastoralism has been practiced in some form in this part of the world for the last 5,000 years.



Koobi Fora is also a location where tectonic and geomorphic processes have combined to expose Miocene and Pleistocene-aged deposits bearing fossils and artifacts associated with early human ancestors. These include well-known fossils of *Homo erectus*, *Paranthropous boiseii*, and *Kenyanthropus platyops*, which have been critical for our present understanding of human evolution. This rich record of human prehistory has attracted research in paleoanthropology and archaeology for many decades, and was the impetus for the establishment of a student training program, the Koobi Fora Field School.

The research we will be undertaking will be in support of a National Science Foundation study that investigates long term perspectives on water security, food security, habitat loss, cultural change, and land management among pastoralists experiencing change in a rangeland ecosystem. We are a multidisciplinary team that includes researchers from National Museums of Kenya (NMK), University of Nebraska, Penn State University, Duke University, and others. We conduct this research in tandem with the Koobi Fora Field School, operated by the Center for Advanced Study of Human Paleobiology at George Washington University in collaboration with NMK.

This document is based on a Frequently Asked Questions document used for the Koobi Fora Field School, but modified to be specific to this program, offered for the first time this year at Tufts.

What will I need to enter Kenya?

Visa requirements have changed notably over the past few years, so it is a good idea to check with the US State Department for the most up to date advice. At present you still need a visa to enter Kenya. It is no longer possible for travelers to purchase a visa at the Kenyan border, so travelers must use the Kenyan eVisa process. When you apply, please make sure that the information you provide on the form matches your passport. Immigration officials are within their right to require you to purchase a new visa if any of the information on your eVisa does not match your passport. For this you will need:

- a passport photo to upload (if you have this done professionally, specify that it is needed for a Kenyan visa as US Passport photos use different dimensions),
- a photo of the bio data page of your passport,
- a PDF of your flight itinerary for the eVisa application.
- a letter of invitation from NMK (to be provided)

The eVisa application will ask about where you will be staying and phone number contact. Enter the following Information:

Henessiss Hotel, Limuru Road, Next to Stima Plaza; PO Box 6859-00100, Nairobi

Tell them you will be staying at the Hennessis hotel. For a phone number please use the number +254-722806545 (this is the phone number of Purity Kiura, one of our colleagues in Kenya). For email address please use endiema@gmail.com.

As of present there are no regulations for entry regarding COVID vaccinations, but your CDC “Yellow Fever” card will be required, and some airlines may require this before boarding.

Be aware that Kenya has implemented a very strict policy on the use of plastic bags. Importing plastic bags is not allowed, and if you are found with bags in your luggage you may be fined. If you have questions about what is or is not allowed, please ask.

How will we get from Nairobi Airport to our accommodation?

Nairobi Airport is usually a very busy place, especially just outside the International Terminal, with many vendors and drivers offering services. A local driver will meet us at the airport, and we will travel together from the airport to our accommodation.

What are accommodations in Nairobi like?

In the past, students and staff have stayed at two locations not far from the National Museum of Kenya: Hennessiss Hotel and KenGen Gardens Apartments, both in the Westlands neighborhood. Hennessiss is more like a hotel room you’d be familiar with in the US, usually with two twin beds, ensuite toilet and shower. There is a restaurant on site. KenGen is more like a self-catering apartment rental, with multiple bedrooms in a single apartment as well as kitchen, dining, and living area. Both of these are gated facilities with a guard posted at the gate. Generally, students are discouraged from traveling alone outside of the accommodations. During our stay in Nairobi there will likely be opportunities to participate in a shopping trip or museum visit.

How will we get to/from Ileret?

The most likely scenario is that we will travel to and from Ileret on a charter flight from Wilson Airport in Nairobi. The charter is operated by Air Turkana, which is owned by the Turkana Basin Institute (TBI). The flight is about 2 hours, and usually travels north along the rift valley and crosses Lake Turkana. Depending on who is traveling, the plane may touch down at other locations en route.



Charter flight at Wilson Airport

It is possible that we may caravan over land with the Koobi Fora Field School on the way back. Road conditions mean that travel is slow, and we may be driving for upwards of 8-10 hours a day. There are places we will need to stop en route that are part of the Field School experience, including the Koobi Fora Base Camp in Sibiloi National Park, a campground in Loyangalani or South Horr, another campground outside Nanyuki, a smaller city not far from Mount Kenya, and stay there for a couple of days, and then on to Nairobi.

These plans may change depending on the needs of the project and the availability of transport options.

What are accommodations at TBI Ileret like?

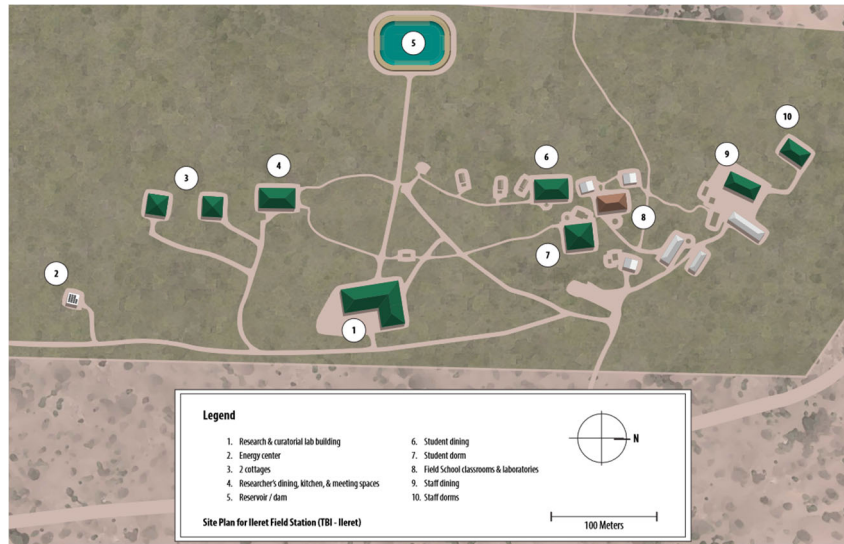


Local dog at TBI Ileret

The TBI Ileret campus is located immediately opposite the airstrip in Ileret, and just south of the main village. This will serve as the primary camp for the research team, and at any given time there may be 50 or more students, staff, researchers, and community members present. There is a gated fence along the perimeter and guards, primarily to deter wildlife at night.

The grounds have multiple bunkhouses, lab/classroom facilities, as well as central dining/meeting areas. Flush toilets, running water, and showers are available for use in the bunkhouses. This water is obtained from a borehole and should not be consumed; filtered drinking water is available at the central dining/meeting areas.

Power is available, though it can be intermittent and camp/field gear is prioritized for electricity use. If you have devices that you want to have available on a regular basis, it's recommended that you bring a solar charger. Mobile phone and wireless data service is available in and around TBI Ileret, but again this can be intermittent, and will be mostly unavailable during daily research outings.



How will we get around at Koobi Fora?

If we're going out to collect data, we will travel using program vehicles, usually in a LandRover or 4WD truck operated by an experienced driver. Most fieldwork sites are within 45 minutes drive of camp, though some are within walking distance of TBI Ileret and a few might be as far as 90 minutes.



Field vehicle en route to Koobi Fora

Roads are dirt or gravel, often cross laggas (dry river beds) and may be in various states of repair. This can lead to highly variable travel times, vehicles stuck in sand, and cause damage to vehicles. It is not uncommon for several vehicles to break down during a field season. We have a mechanic on staff who can conduct repairs, but this means you may end up stuck away from camp for an extended period until alternative transport or repairs can be arranged. Vehicles carry enough water and supplies to ensure safety during breakdowns.

It is also fairly common for community members or staff members to hitch a ride with a research vehicle going between Ileret and field sites. Occasionally this may involve transporting livestock as well. This is part of the experience of working in this part of Kenya but also means that vehicles can get crowded; if you are uncomfortable/claustrophobic, please let me know and I will do my best to accommodate you.

What will conditions be like in the field?

Field conditions will vary depending on the part of the project we are collecting data that day. Most days we will be working at abandoned cattle enclosures (bomas) that are situated around the study area. During these excursions, we will be working. These locations are usually on a relatively-flat, open space dotted with shrubs and acacia trees. Activities will include mapping the site using a roving GNSS receiver and tablet; conducting vegetation transects with meter tape, flag pin, and data sheet; taking soil and vegetation samples; taking drone imagery; and taking lots of pictures. Most days we are unlikely to see any other people while conducting these activities, though occasionally we may encounter a group of herders and if so may stop to talk them and possibly conduct an impromptu interview. Daytime temperatures are usually in excess of 100°F, so we will normally work for several hours in the morning, take an extended lunch in a shady spot around midday, return to work for a few hours in the afternoon and then return to camp in the late afternoon.



Mapping an abandoned boma at Area 129

Some days we may travel to an occupied boma or settlement to meet with community members and conduct focus groups and interviews. These places will normally be full of activity, with people and livestock in numbers. Community members are often curious about what we are doing, especially children, so don't be surprised if a group gathers around while you work. Activities during these outings will usually involve meeting with a small group; gaining informed consent to participate; asking questions through an interpreter; and undertaking ranking exercises using vegetation exemplars. We may also collect and redistribute GPS collars used to collect movement data from livestock, and depending on the location, we may conduct vegetation surveys as well. Please note that conflict with wildlife and other pastoralist groups is rare but is part of life here, and it is common for herders to carry firearms. During these visits we will be representatives of the research team and should always act in way that is always respectful of the community. The work schedule will be similar to that above.



Occupied Boma at Kokoi

Depending on your own research project, we will also collect data that is associated with your project during field outings. We will establish these protocols before we depart and make sure you have the necessary equipment. If there is a method or technical skill you are interested in learning, please ask as the research team is more than happy to help you.

Occasionally, we may be asked to assist with another group's research if they need additional personnel or if it give us an opportunity to collect a unique data point for our project. In the past, these outings have included helping to create a map of a settlement, or assisting with collecting data about water quality and health metrics. If you choose to participate, you'll be given instructions on your role.



Focus group with herders at Guoro

When away from TBI Ileret, the research vehicle will carry communications equipment, a first aid kit, and additional drinking water for the day. Bathroom facilities are typically not available at any field sites, and you are advised to bring toilet paper with you in the event it is needed. Water for handwashing will be available in the research vehicle.

What about food?



In Nairobi, food will be provided either at the hotel/apartment or, if we are out shopping, from restaurants in town. Options will be more or less comparable to those in the US.

In Ileret, you will have breakfast and dinner at TBI Ileret. Breakfast usually consists of toast, cereal, Dinner options minimally include meat such as goat curry, or grilled fish, a cooked vegetable, and a starch like rice or ugali. The meals are sustaining but can get repetitive; some team members bring their own condiments (hot sauce, etc) to spice things up. Lunches at TBI Ileret may include a vegetarian stew, but in the field will usually consist of sandwiches (peanut butter, tuna) and canned fruit; if we are away at lunch time it will be carried in a cooler in the research vehicle. Tea and coffee are provided in the morning and afternoon.

If you are usually hungry between meals, or may find yourself wanting a treat from home, you may want to bring some food. Energy bars are a good option for this. There may be opportunities to purchase some food in Nairobi, but be aware you may not find brands or options that are familiar. Most fresh foods should be avoided as these will spoil; if you're going to bring something that might attract insects, it helps to pack a Tupperware or similar to keep food in.

What about vaccinations, medicines, and medical care?

Consulting with a physician or travel clinic well before you depart is a good idea. Kenya is a tropical nation and suffers from disease outbreaks that are not common in the US, but there are some out-of-schedule vaccines that provide protection. Yellow Fever vaccine is required for entry. Consult with your doctor about carrying and/or take a malaria prophylaxis during the course of the fieldwork. You may also want to request a course of antibiotics (e.g., Cipro, Zithromax, etc) to combat common travel illnesses.

If you regularly take medication, or have medication for an allergy or condition, you should carry it with you as well as a prescription from a doctor. This includes epipens or medical devices used to treat diabetes. If you require corrective lenses, it is recommended that you bring glasses rather than contact lenses as the sandy conditions can make putting in and taking out contact lenses difficult. A second pair of glasses is helpful in the event your primary pair are lost or broken.

All vehicles carry a first-aid kit, and your instructor does as well at all times. The project has a nurse on staff who will be at camp with a well-stocked medical kit. If you need more serious care, there is a medical clinic in Ileret with more facilities and trained staff. We can also access telemedicine through George Washington University if additional expertise is needed. In the event of a medical emergency, the program subscribes to the AmRef flying doctor program, and you can be transported to a hospital in Nairobi for treatment.

It is critically important that you be aware of your health, set reasonable limits on your activities if you are unwell, and inform the nurse or a staff member if you think you may need care. Common illnesses such as traveler's diarrhea can lead to severe dehydration or exhaustion under the conditions in which we are working. It is much better to take a day off than to be medically evacuated.

What should I bring?

Below are some recommendations for items to bring with you. It is essential that you carry what you need to be comfortable on the trip, as there will not be opportunities to do shopping once we leave Nairobi.

Bag

During our days on the road we will be unloading all of the bags and reloading them back onto the lorry every night. You want to bring a bag that you can pack and unpack pretty easily. Many of us bring duffel bags with wheels that are easily transported through airports and can also be carried easily within camp. Hard sided bags tend to do poorly in these conditions. This should be big enough to bring everything you will need during the course of a single day in the field. You should bring a smaller bag for fieldwork purposes.

Tent

Parts of the trip may involve staying in a tent. Bring a tent that you are going to be comfortable in. Most faculty and students bring anywhere between a 4 and 6 person tent, but since we are unlikely to stay in a tent for an extended period, a two-person tent should be fine. The Coleman Sundome is a practical and affordable tent many past students have used.



Water bottles

Drinking water during the day is incredibly important. It is recommended you carry two 1-liter bottles with you. You will have access to filtered water at TBI Ileret; some participants also bring a water filtering bottle out of an abundance of caution.

Field clothes

In the field the most important thing is that you are comfortable since it will be very hot, and that you are protected from the sun. Lightweight, synthetic fabrics are ideal, especially those rated for sun protection. Long sleeves are advisable for sun protection, as well as a wide-brimmed hat, neck gaiter, and sunglasses. You will want to have a rugged pair of hiking shoes or boots. The ground is often littered with acacia branches with stout needles in excess of 1 inch, so thick-soled footwear is preferable. There are opportunities to go swimming in Lake Turkana; bring a bathing suit if you think you would be like to do this.

At camp, warm weather street clothes are perfectly suitable. You may want to bring a pair of comfortable camp shoes; some participants wear sandals like Tevas or similar, but be aware that snakes and scorpions are not uncommon and these provide little protection from bites, so be aware of where you are stepping.

In Nairobi and elsewhere in Kenya, there is an expectation of modesty in dress. Despite being in the tropics, Nairobi is at high elevation and we will be there in wintertime, so a warm layer is advisable especially for evenings.

Sleeping bags, bedding, etc.

When camping, a sleeping bag is advisable, particularly for areas away from Turkana. You will have access to a foam mattress from the project, but if you sleep comfortably on a personal groundpad you

may want to bring this. A lightweight sheet is also advisable for nights when temperatures are higher, and you may want to bring a travel pillow. Bring your own towel for use during the project.

Camp chairs

There are chairs available at TBI Ileret in common areas, and we carry camping stools for use while camping. Some participants will bring their own personal chairs and you are welcome to do so, just make sure that this fits in your bag.

Toiletries and medicines

In addition to the medicines listed above (e.g., malaria pills, antibiotics), you may want to bring a small supply of pain relievers, antibiotic ointment, etc. Sunscreen and insect repellants are recommended to have. Band-aids are also recommended.

For toiletries (e.g., soap, shampoo, toothpaste, tampons, hair brushes, nail trimmers, etc.), bring what you think you will need for the duration of the trip, as these will not be readily available in the village and are not provided by the project.

Electronics, entertainment, etc.

Mobile phones typically need to be unlocked to be used internationally. You can purchase an eSIM in advance of the trip; however, be sure the provider has coverage in the Ileret area. You can also purchase a local SIM card at the Nairobi Airport when you arrive. Historically, Safaricom has the most reliable coverage in the areas where we will be.

Personal laptops may be difficult to keep charged and are not advised, but discuss with the instructor if you feel this would be important for your project. An e-reader is a good idea for downtime, as are easily transported card games. There will be lots of photo opportunities, so something you can use to take pictures would also be recommended. Bringing a paperback or two is also recommended, especially in the event of an extended power outage.

Some charging facilities will have the option of using US-style outlets, but you should carry a Type G adapter as well. Charging cables and USB wall plugs have a habit of wandering off from charging facilities, so having a backup or two is recommended. A solar charger can be helpful as well, just make sure that it is rated for the devices you intended to use.

Other equipment

Mechanical pencils, notebooks, and a permanent marker are good to have on hand. A pocketknife or multitool is often helpful as well.



Cash

Carrying a lot of cash is not recommended, and most situations we will be in won't require it. Most students in the past have found that \$200 is more than sufficient for purchasing sodas and tourist items. An ATM card is good to have, and you can take out cash from an ATM at the airport when you arrive. It is recommended that you contact your bank before departure and notify them of your trip to ensure that a hold won't be put on your card.

