

Guess who's back... back again...Coxy's back... tell your friends... Yes ladies and gentlemen friends and famiglia. Coxy's back tryna get familiar. What's up all you homies. In this newsletter Numbah three I'll be talking about my visit to a gold mine, the public transit system, food, update on the science fair, and fashion. Etzgetit!



Section 1 Gold Mine:

I visited my fellow Peace Corps Volunteer Mugi in Siaya county a few weeks ago. One of the Mamas, who lives near by, works at a local goldmine and invited us to visit it. We accepted the mission and began walking to the mine, which was “just nearby” - we arrived one hour later. The mine we visited was a small scale operation, having about 50-100 workers and it produced a few grams daily. It had multiple shafts that pockmarked the land. They shot 30 feet straight down into the orange earth. We walked around the sprawling complex. In some older sections of the complex there's abandon mine shafts some of the shafts are marked with sticks across it to prevent one from falling in - others are not.



The typical miner shimmies down this shaft with arms and legs outstretched. The shaft's walls are dirt and seem to crumble as the miner makes his way up and down the shaft. They descend down the shaft in groups of three. One man remains at the bottom of the shaft while the other two dig horizontally. This man is a precaution incase there's a cave in (which happens often). This seems to be the only safety measure taken. No hard hats, gloves, or ropes are present. Well ropes are present but they are only used to attach buckets to the wench pictured above. This wench hosts up buckets of rock gathered by the two diggers. Rocks that they hope will contain gold.

Next, these rocks are taken to large tumblers run by simple two-stroke motors. As seen here on the right. These tumblers remove dirt from the rocks and break them down into more manageable chunks. After the tumblers the rocks are further broken down by hand using rock on rock violence. Once this process is complete the small rocks are run through a ramshackle mercury and water sieve as seen below, which is made from old clothe scraps. The gold is attracted to the mercury and then collected in these clothe scraps while the water flows off into the pit also seen below.

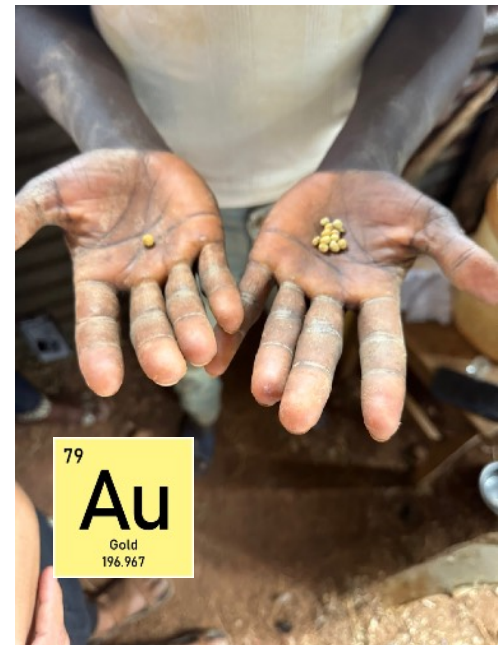




This is the end product: beautiful little balls of raw gold. (See right.) This gold Au will be Gold that will be used in jewelry, consumer electronics, stored as bullion in a vault somewhere - (probably the West).

The typical miner worker usually gets paid sh100-sh300 (\$0.75-\$2.25) a day. (sh100/100ksh stands for 100 Kenya Shillings by the way) This is whether or not they find any gold when they do find gold they'll get a bonus of sh500-sh1000 (\$3.81-\$7.61). However, due to Kenya's communal ethos this bonus is typically redistributed to anyone who might have had a hand in procuring this gold - the digger, the stone-crusher, the sifter, etc. From here the mine owner or manager sells the gold to a middleman at sh4000/gram ~\$30/gram. This middleman will sell it to another middleman or a refinery, which will sell it to a distributor (more middlemen) until we finally arrive at the market price of gold: sh8,356/gram or \$63.59/gram at the time of writing.

Who does this job? The mining workforce consists of male diggers and stone-crushers who did not graduate from secondary school, were too poor to afford



secondary school, or did not score high enough on the senior year exit exams to move on to college. These men are on the young side usually in their 20s or 30s The female workers at the mine are in charge of sieving. They tend to be older Mamas, who are widowed or who don't have the ability to grow and sell their own crops - the typical job of Mamas. These women tend to be in their 50s, 60s or even older.

The risks? Of course there's risk the mine we visited was most likely an illegal operation but legal or illegal anything resembling workplace safety does not exist. If it was legal some inspector could easily be payed off to avoid any citation given. When shimmying down the mines no safety rope is worn, but according to the workers falls rarely occur. Also, they have no issue with handling mercury with their raw hands nor were they aware of the potential for poison that comes when mercury is handled that way. By far the biggest risk to a laborer, in this field, is mine collapse. Nobody was sure how often collapses occurred at this mine, but it was often enough where everyone knew multiple people that have perished. When collapses do occur that spotter that I mentioned before shouts to the workers above - the stone-crushers. People will then flood down the shaft and dig tirelessly until they reach the site of victim. The survival rate of such collapses is unknown but people do survive, which is remarkable considering how rudimentary these mines are. Sometimes the collapse just cuts off the digger from the shaft, sometimes it only breaks and traps a leg or arm, other times it kills you. Either way other workers will dig until they reach you. If you're dead your body needs to be recovered. It would be taboo to leave a body in a collapsed mine. It brings about bad energy.

The work is brutal and extremely dangerous but gold is relatively plentiful at the mine we visited many grams of gold are found nearly everyday. They did not want to tell us the exact number of course. Fearing that the Americans would force the land to be sold.

Section 2 Public Transportation:

(photos in this section are not mine)

Now the public transport system here is nothing like I've experience before. It is a chaotic whirlwind of trucks, tractors, vans, cars, bicycles, and motorcycles. This is the most amount of motorcycles that I have ever seen in my life. The four options for public transit are: matatus, tuktuks, pikipikis, and bicycles. Matatus are vans that constantly run on main roads. Hailing them is as easy as hailing taxi in New York City - maybe easier. They have between 15 and 20 seats but can squeeze many more people than seats. They look like this



The matatu is a two man operation: one conductor and one driver. The conductor is busy riding on the running board shouting at potential customers. During rush hour it only takes 5 minutes for a matatus to fill up, and when I say fill up I mean packed to the brim. Some matatus I've been on are packed as tightly as a Tokyo subway car. I have had to crouch above people, sit on people's laps, or be basically sat on during rush hours.

My typical matatu journey is from my site Lubao/Kakamega town to Peace Corps headquarters in Kisumu. This journey usually takes 1 hour, and costs 250ksh ~\$1.90 There's only a few things that slow down the journey: traffic police looking for "a little something" (a 100ksh bribe), the dropping off and picking up of new

passengers, and the dozens of speed bumps, humps, rumble-strips, and dips. All of these obstacles cause the average speed to be 60km/hr ~35mph. Sometimes drivers ignore those speed bumps. The matatu will violently hit them, and because matatus rarely have seatbelts this strike will cause my head to smack into the ceiling. Ouch!.

Next, we have tuktuks, which are these engine equipped rickshaws (aka auto rickshaws) that are found throughout Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. They have the capacity for 1 driver and 5 passengers, but I've ridden one that was carrying 12 people: 4 in the front 6 in the middle 2 in the trunk. They look like this:



The tuktuk is a one man operation. I usually take tuktuks to get around Kisumu or to travel from my site in Lubao to my county's capital town: Kakamega. This journey takes about 20 minutes and costs 50ksh ~\$0.40.

Last we have pikipikis, which is Swahili for motorcycle. These are ridden by bodaboda drivers, which is Swahili for motorcycle taxi driver? (There's no direct translation.) They look like this:



There also exists bicycle bodaboda taxis that look like this:



I have no idea what the prices for pikipikis or bicycle taxis are. It is against Peace Corps policy for me to ride on pikipikis, but I can use the bicycle taxi as long as I wear helmet. Every Kenyan has ridden on a pikipiki at some point in their lives. I have seen babies, 80 year old grandmas, and 60 year old tourists riding those things. Personally, I would not feel safe riding one of those things considering how chaotic Kenyan traffic is. Since arriving here 8 months ago I have yet to see a single traffic light or stop sign. All intersections are handled by the roundabout (thanks a lot British!) There are no discernible traffic rules. There are no speed limit signs, yield signs, or crosswalks. There are, however, a shit ton of speed bumps! Also, my counterpart, Anunda, has been in two pikipiki accidents, and a teacher at a nearby school perished in a pikipiki accident just last month! So I guess the Peace Corps ban makes sense.

If any of you ever visit me I'll definitely take you on a tuktuk and a matatu ride. Like I said I can't use pikipikis, but you'd be able to! Taking a matatu is a right of passage for any tourist in Kenya - so much so that the image on the right is sold emblazoned on shirts:

I survived a MATATU ride



On holiday in KENYA

Section 3 FOOD:

Food in western Kenya is generally plain. You don't eat food for pleasure here you eat it for fuel. This is epitomized by western Kenya's staple food ugali. The best way I can describe ugali is as thick hand-held grits. To make it you add maize flour to boiling water and stir until thick. The end product is this white blob that has a play-doo like consistency. Once made you serve it hot. The hotter the better! Kenyans like to eat ugali when it is scalding hot. They take it in their hands form it into ball with a divot, then use this edible spoon to scoop up sukuma wiki (collard greens) or nyama (meat). Meat, greens, and ugali is the standard meal in my region of Kenya. Everyone eats ugali at least once a day, but usually twice a day. It is very hard for the teachers and students at my school to fathom a day without this staple. Here's a photo:



There are two types of ugali white ugali and brown ugali. As mentioned above white ugali is made from maize flour. While brown ugali is made from millet flour. Corn was native to the new world and wasn't introduced to Africa until Columbus. Corn was introduced to east Africa sometime in the late 1500s by the Portuguese. Thanks Wikipedia! Before this brown ugali was the staple food. Basically it's the difference between white and wheat bread. Brown ugali is healthy and earthier tasting while white ugali is unhealthy and sweeter. However, both are extremely heavy, and they sit in my stomach for hours. I eat ugali everyday for lunch at school. After every ugali session I am immensely tired. Luckily, it makes everyone tired. All schools in Kenya know this so the school day is designed by the inevitable ugali comatose. There's only 3 lessons after ugali and 7 lessons before ugali. Thank god!

I often get the question: "What is the staple food in America?" I find this question difficult to answer. What is our staple food? Do we have one? Is it fast-food? Fries? Pizza? Bread? Corn-syrup? If you, the reader, have any idea what our staple food is please sound off in the comments/replies! If I have energy I respond to this question by telling Kenyans that America is a multi-ethnic state, and we don't have any single staple food. This is what I miss most about the US. In one day I can eat Jewish

bagels with lox for breakfast, Mexican tacos for lunch, and Japanese sushi for dinner. If I don't have energy I curtly reply mkate (bread.) This answer befuddles them. They say "bread is for babies and it doesn't fill you up." I've gone on a field trip with my students where each child will get half a loaf of bread for lunch and still feel hungry. The Kenyans I know are insatiable. The amount of food they eat is unfathomable. They always tell me I am not eating enough even though I have gained over ten pounds since arriving here! I'm jealous of the other volunteers who have gotten dysentery and slimmed down to a heroin chic look! Kidding! But seriously, Kenyans consume double the calories that I do. Kenyans say this is because they burn more energy in the African heat? I think it's because they walk way more here. Walking two hours a day is normal for students, and most people here don't own cars so they walk.

Another aspect of Kenyan food is it is extremely plain. It has little seasoning and very little salt. I have cooked Asian stir-fries and Italian pastas for my Kenyan friends, and they rarely finish their plate because "I added too much spice." One day I went to KFC with a Maasai friend and he had a bite of my chicken sandwich. He began to cry because "it was too spicy." The only spices my pallet could detect were: salt, black pepper, and maybe paprika. Another time I went to a restaurant and ordered a vegetarian sandwich They asked if I wanted it spicy I said yes. When I took my first bite I was overwhelmed by black pepper and began to sneeze incessantly. The only "spice" in my sandwich was black pepper not chili pepper. Yikes! After this experience I learned that you had to differentiate between pillipilli kali (spicy pepper like cayenne) and pillipilli nyeusi (black pepper). Saying just "pilipili" implies black pepper. However, the amount of pepper that the cook added to my sandwich at that restaurant amounts to cruel and unusual punishment, and I will not be patronizing that establishment any longer! Yelp review over.

Fortunately, Kenya has a large Indian immigrant community. In most large supermarkets I can buy every American spice I can think of and some Indian spices I have never heard of like Garam Masala, Tea Masala, Black Cardamom, Green Cardamom, Fenugreek, Tej Patta, etc. Also, with such a large Indian community, I have been able to eat at many Indian restaurants. Kenya has some of the best Indian food I have ever eaten - probably because we are just a stones throw away from the mythical sub-continent. I assume such a large Indian community exists thanks to their shared history of British colonial rule. I imagine there's a larger Indian population than say Tanzania - a former Germany colony - or Somalia - a former Italian colony. Many Indians come to Kenya for opportunity. They are adept at starting and managing businesses. Almost every supermarket or large store you enter has an Indian managing it or owning it. There are Indian enclaves in every major town whether it be Nairobi, Kisumu, or Kakamega. Every one of these enclaves has at least one Hindu temple but

often times many as well as many Indian specific grocery stores and restaurants. The existence of Indian food is a saving grace for my pallet. All of those spices break up western Kenya's monotonous cuisine.

Bland food rant over. I'll touch on food again in a future newsletter: how it varies from region to region, how to cook with a food, and how the British legacy persists in Kenya's cuisine. Sweet beans for breakfast? What the hell!

Section 4 Science Fair Results:

As you might recall from my last newsletter I escorted ten students to the county level science fair. This was a three day event that started at 7am and ended at 6pm. Oy vey! It was exhausting and the hours passed slowly. I spent most of my day chilling (or should I say sweating?) on the school bus reading *Absolute Monarchs* a book about the history of the papacy - fascinating I know.

How were the kids scored? A group of three judges per sector tediously evaluated each project. They took an excruciating amount of time. It took the panel three days to evaluate 60 projects per section. Why? I have no idea. We competed in three sectors: Computer Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Science. Unfortunately, we did not do too hot. All of our entrants performed in the lower quarter and one group got dead last, but I won't say who (it was Form 4 Cow Dung project.) Only the top 3 projects advance to the next level, which is regionals. After regionals it's nationals in Nairobi, and lastly internationals in America. So needless to say none of our students made it to the next level. The students and teachers from our school blame corruption for their poor results. That's a nice scapegoat, but our projects stank. They were haphazardly thrown together and barely rehearsed. Yikes! But now I know what it takes to move onto the next level so we will try again next year, and we will make it all the way to the international level! Anyway, here are some photos from the county level science fair. See next page.



Section 5 a Note on Fashion:

Now time for something fun. “THE FASHION!” As many of you know I am a fashionista. (I’ve seen every season of Project Runway, watched *House of Gucci* once, and famously bought a Gucci sweater in Copenhagen no big deal) I love seeing all the random baseball hats, football jerseys, misprinted designer brands, and Lakers jerseys with Jordan’s name. I am still looking for the rumored championship loser merchandise, but have yet to find any. I would love to get my hands on some Superbowl LVII Eagles Championship gear, Philadelphia Phillies 2022 World Series Champions hats, or Boston Celtics 2022 NBA Champions shirts. The hunt continues. Some of the outfits Kenyans wear are hysterical because they are devoid of our American cultural context. So far my favorite two Kenyan fits was a mze (old person) rocking a confederate flag hat, and a young pregnant lady in a Washington Redskins jersey. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to snap a photo of these two legends. I was, however, able to get a photo of the following fits. Clockwise from top left we’ve got the Supemer sweater, the Skinheads Mosco pullover, the IDF Tee, and lastly the adidas x Louis Vuitton collab.



Finalê:

Thanks for reading! That's enough for now. I have a lot of sections in the works so expect Newsletter No.4 in a couple weeks. Also, big news RED ALERT! IDK HOW TO ADD EMOJIS HERE. A couple weeks ago I received a physical letter from my friends Alex and Charlotte Lopitz. So that address I posted in my last newsletter works! You can send me letters, postcards, gifts, money, booze, cigarettes, but no drugs! If you want that address read Newsletter no.2. You can find it in that special folder on your computer's desktop labeled "TrevorsCoolNewslettersFromKenya." See you in a few weeks. PEACE!

