

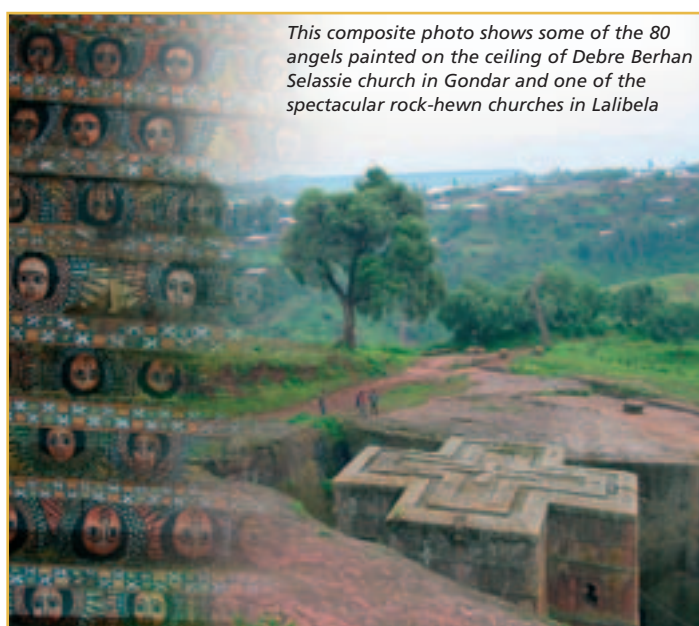
# Education in Ethiopia

In the second in a series of articles, **Dr Jenny Search** reports on her continuing two-year voluntary service overseas placement at Debu University in Ethiopia

**A**S I WRITE, it is the summer break and the faculty is preparing for the start of the new semester in October. An escape from Awassa for a few weeks to visit the historical sites in the North of Ethiopia was amazing. They are little known in the western world, where the prevailing image of Ethiopia is of drought and famine. Although this is the case for isolated patches in rural areas the majority of the country receives plenty of rain and is very green and lush, especially around the rift valley which runs through the country. We visited some 800-year old churches in Lalibela and the surrounding region which are carved out of the bedrock. Before Christianity was introduced, the same skills were used to erect stellae (standing stones) in Axum. Some stand over 20 metres high and are carved from single pieces of rock. It was really good to see some other parts of the country, however, now it is back to work..

## Teaching

The Freshman students could not start classes until their accommodation was built and as a result started a semester behind the rest of the university. The second semester was taught during the summer break. I also taught a summer extension programme course in microbiology. These students



*This composite photo shows some of the 80 angels painted on the ceiling of Debre Berhan Selassie church in Gondar and one of the spectacular rock-hewn churches in Lalibela*

study part-time either in the evenings or during the summer for about five years (depending on their previous qualifications) to complete a BSc in either plant- or animal-science. Some of these students are unemployed and are funded by the government whilst others are given leave from jobs over the summer.

I have been in the lab trying out some practical experiments for a third year Cell Biology course. I successfully extracted DNA from onion cells and from *E. coli* using washing-up liquid and alcohol. Now my colleagues want me to prove it is DNA but we don't have any appropriate dyes. I'm thinking of trying to make some electrophoresis tanks – I found instructions on the Internet! – but I've no idea

where I will find platinum wire to make the electrodes. All departments in the university suffer from bureaucratic problems in procurement. To alleviate this, some cash has been made available for the Faculty to go to Addis Ababa on a buying trip to purchase chemicals and equipment. Hopefully this will enable some good experiments to be designed for the practical classes next term.

## Research

The good news is that we have been awarded some funding by Debu University for a small research proposal entitled "Bacteriological Analysis of the Quality of Drinking Water in Awassa". Working on this project with two colleagues, we plan to sample standpipes and in-

house water containers from a number of households in Awassa and evaluate their microbial quality. We have submitted a list of chemicals and equipment required to the purchasing office and now have to sit tight to wait for them to be ordered and delivered. This could take a couple of months! Of course, there is still plenty of preparation to do. How do we randomly select households when there are no detailed maps of this town and no addresses as such? How do we design questionnaires to collect some socio-economic and demographic data? Amharic is only one of seventy languages spoken in this region and there is also a high rate of illiteracy. Trying to think up ways of solving these problems is what makes my job so interesting and I'm learning to take things in my stride. The time seems to be flying which must be a good sign!

**Jenny Search**  
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## Further Information

■ This is the second in a series of reports from Jenny. You can find out more about her activities and see some more photos at [www.neal-jenny.info](http://www.neal-jenny.info)

■ For more information about VSO, see [www.vso.org.uk](http://www.vso.org.uk).

■ The Faculty of Natural Sciences at Debu University also has a website at <http://home.no/dufn>