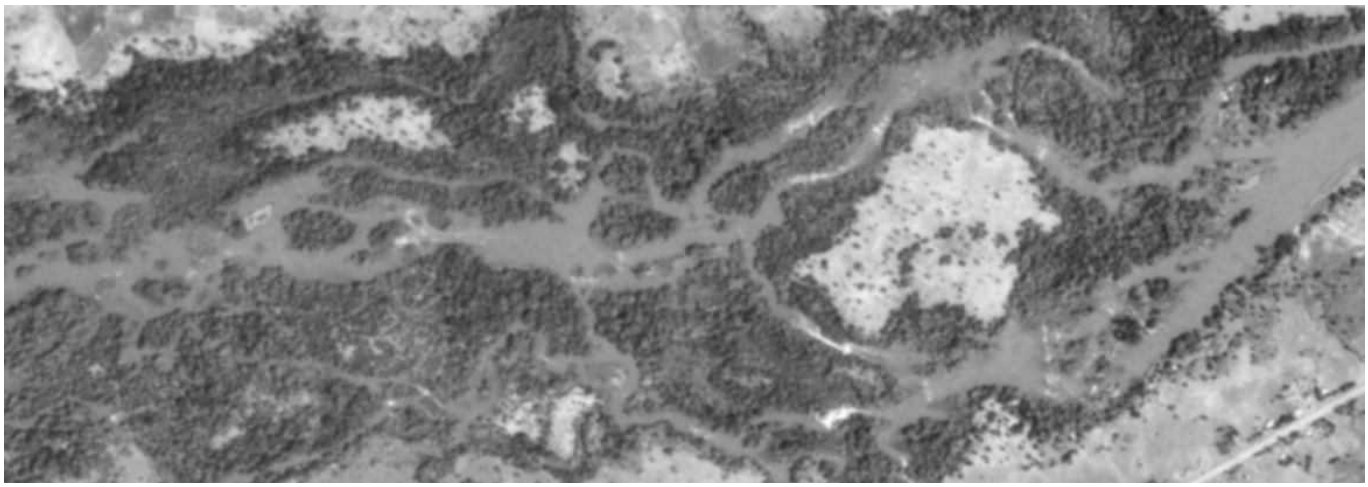
Yemaytsura Abune Gebremenfes Kidus Andinat

The monastery abandoned in the early part of the 20th century has now been reactivated in the 1990s. The majority of the main island is under cultivation but species rich woodland exist at the water edge. The area is also important for wildlife. Expansion of agriculture is the main threat to the remaining woody vegetation.



Name: **Yemaytsura Abune Gebremenfes Kidus Andinat**

Status: monastery
Site Code: GJ02
Floristic Region: GJ
Region: 3 (Est Gojam)
Altitude: 1650 m
Latitude: 11° 30' N
Longitude: 37° 34' E

Woodland/forest:
Status: relict
Size: > 10 ha
Dominant species:
canopy: *Croton macrostachyus*, *Mimusopus kummel*
shrub/ground: *Calpurnia aurea*, *Carissa edulis*
No of woody species: 47
No of species with less than 5 individuals: 3
Threats: deforestation

Photograph: This network of islands and rapids is situated just upstream from the Blue Nile Falls (to right). The monastery is situated on the largest island where the light coloured area highlights the zone under agriculture.

Two km upstream from the Blue Nile Falls there is a large network of islands of varying sizes, interconnecting river channels and rapids. The main islands to the East belong to the Yemaytsura Abune Gebremenfes Kidus Andinat monastery. Access to the main monastic island is via a small boat across of the river's main channel.

They are extensively cultivated and many crops are irrigated using water pumped from the river channel. Along the water's edge there is often a 5-10 m buffer zone composed of native vegetation. Smaller islands are still covered with semi-natural vegetation, but clearly these islands were once logged as indicated by large decaying stumps.

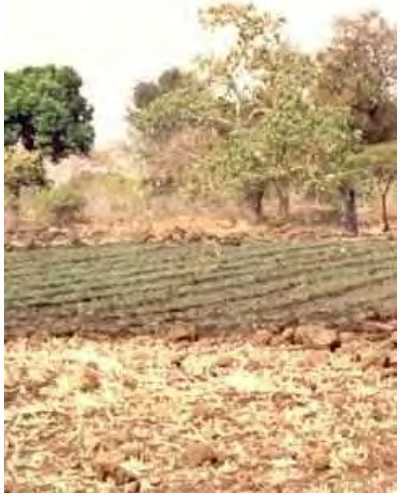
The surrounding countryside is extremely poor in woody vegetation cover. Even the area around the Blue Nile Falls has only some secondary scrubby vegetation. All forest has long gone. There is also a major settlement between the islands and the falls on the southern side of the river.

History

It is unclear when the monastery was first established, but by the early 20th century the impact of malaria on the monastic community became so severe that the site was abandoned. Until the mid 1990s area was used for cattle grazing, then a priest decided to re-establish the monastery single-handedly. Since the community has steadily increased in numbers while the agricultural areas have been put back into production and some areas converted into a coffee plantation.

Conservation status

The monastic islands and others on the Blue Nile are of great biological importance for both plants and animals. On the small island (about 1/3rd ha) where the biodiversity assessment was carried out over 40 species of woody plants were recorded. Fruit bats rust in the trees and many bird species were observable both inside the woodlands and on the various Nile channels.



Much of the main island (white area on image overleaf) is cultivated. This involves a modern irrigation system that enables the monastery community to grow cash corps.

The semi-natural woodland was heavily logged in former times. It is now mostly scrub with no ground vegetation although the island is totally surrounded by water.

Many water channels run through the islands and contain much wildlife.

Threats

Agricultural expansion is currently the only threat to the remaining natural vegetation. The small island, where the biodiversity assessment was carried out, is due to converted into an orange grove. As the monastery population increases, demand for firewood will steadily increase and the riverine trees will become the main source of wood as trees in the agricultural areas will all have been cut down.

Management

The monastery is trying to be self-sustaining and in order to achieve this, it has to produce enough vegetable crops to both support its own needs as well as sell them to the outside world for cash. Instead of converting more of the natural vegetation into food production the monastery should:

a. improve current agricultural practices including irrigation.
b. focus on ecotourism. The monastery is next to the Blue Nile Falls visited by many tourists, which to many is a bit of a disappointment especially as far natural history is concerned whereas the monastery islands have an array of plant and animals. The monastic community could easily charged visitors and make more money that way than by selling vegetables.

In order to promote better agriculture and establish ecotourism, the monastery, however, requires expert advice and support.

Site account produced by Pierre Binggeli and Desalegn Desissa, 2003