

Footprints in the Sand

I thought, “What would the Ancients think about us trekking across their sacred ground trampling over their footprints with ours?” How would they describe the casual way in which we walked, gawked, and stalked *over* and *at* their Egyptian places of rest? Were the spirits who entered those curious catacombs thousands of years ago peering at us as we added our shadows to their holy landscape?

In November 2007, we had the awesome opportunity to visit Cairo, Luxor, and Aswan. Cairo has no stoplights, few stop signs, and it is a pedestrian nightmare for most foreigners. The highways and byways are filled with roundabouts, and vehicles drive on the left side of the street. Michael and I wanted to see the great historical city of Cairo by foot, but after running across our first major thoroughfare, we decided that it would be safer to invest in Cairo’s taxi system. Our guide advised us to be careful of stepping on clumps of dirt, which, to the naked eye, appeared to be soft and easily crumbled yet were stones covered with dirt. We later found his advice to be wise.

Moving south on our journey toward the cities of Luxor and Aswan, our footprints and those around us became more visible and memorable. Traveling to Luxor by train, we were amazed at the lush green and crimson red soil of the terrain. On the roadside, we saw young boys riding on the backs of donkeys carrying bundled carrots the length of broomsticks on their backside, and cabbages the size of basketballs held in reed baskets balanced on the heads of the young lads. My mind inquired why the determined footprints of the donkeys were not deeper and more pronounced on top of that lavishly fertile ground. I imagined our ancestors Eve, Adam, the prophets, Jesus, the disciples, and others making their way back and forth from Jerusalem to Egypt on donkeys and foot, leaving tired forgotten footprints behind. After a few days in the countryside, we ended our stay in Luxor with a beautiful and filling dinner.

Last stop: The Nubian village of Aswan. We took a fishing boat from the southeastern shore of the Nile that bordered Luxor and Aswan. From a distance, we saw herds of camels—some wild, and others making huge footprints on the hot Egyptian sand

as they supported tourists who sat on saddles atop brightly colored wool blankets. As we descended from the small vessel, I let my right down into the flow of Mother Nile, catching a spirit of sorrow that was later explained by the tour guide. The stone houses were small, no windows, dirt floors, and shared community bathhouses. The black African people had been exiled to their Nubian village and “rewarded” with housing in exchange for denouncing Christianity and accepting Islam. World history tells us that many countries and nations have the same narrative—different religions. The footprints of the Egyptian people will forever reside in my heart.