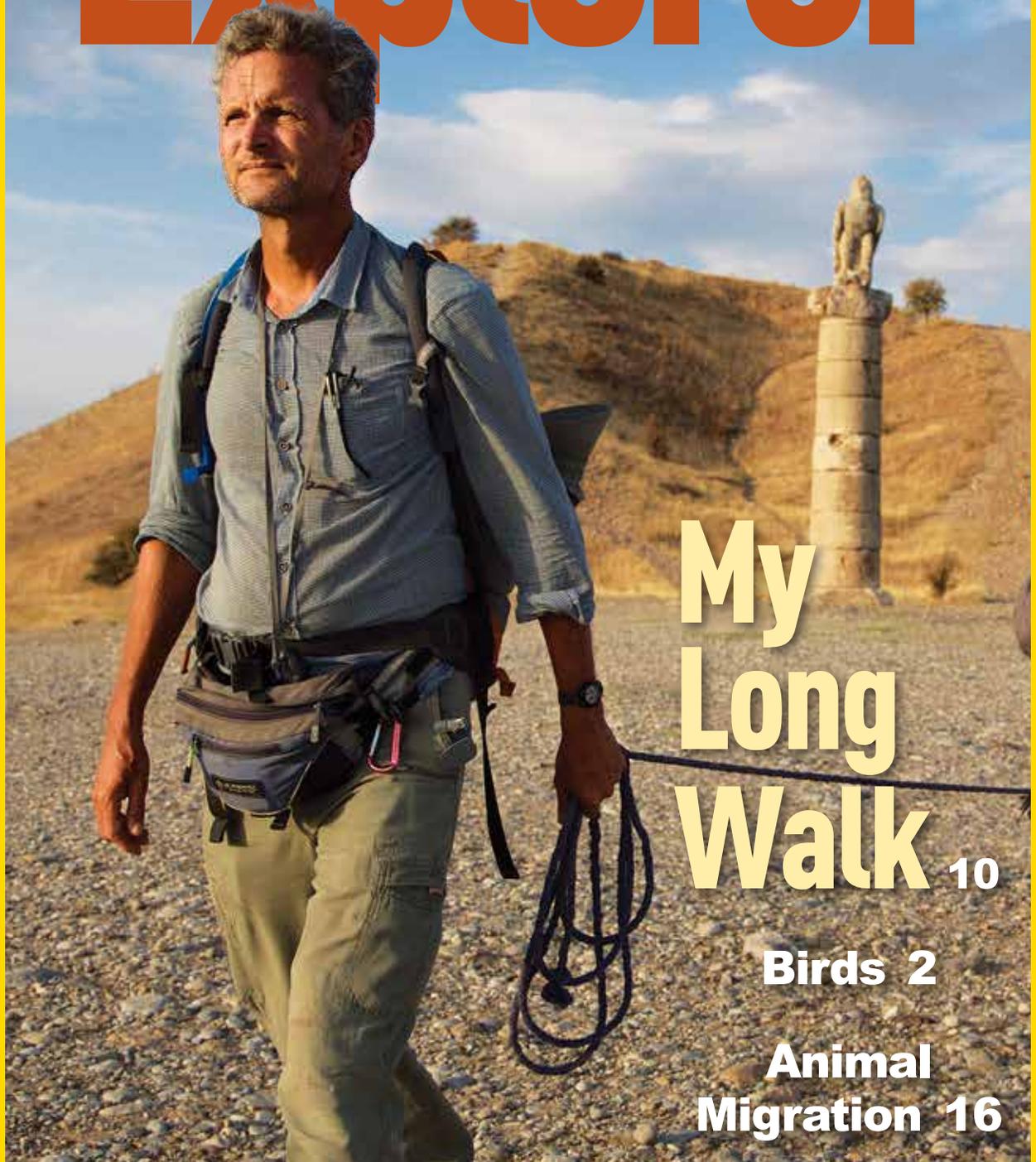


 NATIONAL
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Explorer



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OUT OF ED



EN

Human Journey

GEOGRAPHY

As you read, think about what you learn about the people Salopek meets on his journey.

Journalist Paul Salopek is taking a long walk. A *really* long walk. He is following the footsteps of the first humans who migrated out of Africa. Read about his adventure in his own words.



Sole Brothers

Rift Valley, Ethiopia
January 31, 2013

Salopek's trip will require millions of steps, so his footwear is pretty important. In Ethiopia, there are few options.

How do you measure a man? Look at his shoes. Shoes announce their wearer's class, style, even job. It is disorienting, then, to be walking through a place where human beings—millions upon millions of women, men, and children—slip on identical-style footwear every morning. They are the cheap, versatile, plastic sandal of Ethiopia. Many people are poor, so they buy and wear what they can afford. Poverty drives demand. The only brand is necessity.

A couple of my camel handlers for this portion of my journey each wore matching lime-green plastic sandals. The surface of the Rift Valley is covered in footprints stamped in the dust by millions of these plastic shoes. Yet if Ethiopia's popular sandals are mass-produced, their wearers are not. They drag their left heel. They ruin the right shoe's molding by stepping on an ember.

Our guide knelt down the other day on the trail, examining the shoes' endless impressions. He pointed to a single sandal track and said, "La'ad Howeni will be waiting for us in Dalifagi." And so he was.

Millions of Ethiopians wear the same style of shoe, made from molded plastic.



Around 60,000 years ago, humans migrated out of Africa to the rest of the world, making it to the tip of South America about 10,000 years ago. Traveling on foot, Salopek is following their path.



Awad's Refrigerator

Umlajj, Saudi Arabia

October 30, 2013

Salopek and his guides must carry everything they need as they trek for days and weeks at a time. Carrying water across the desert is essential. But who said anything about it being cold?

When the first modern **Homo sapiens**, or modern people, walked out of Africa and into the Arabian Peninsula, the region's seas were lower and its hills greener. The details of what these wanderers experienced, we do not know. What is undeniable was their need to carry water.

The weight of water is a sensory experience. Water is heavy. It weighs four kilograms (nine pounds) per 3.8 liters (one gallon). To carry enough of this vital substance for great distances requires strength and ingenuity. What did the first human rambler use as containers? Nobody knows. Canteens or buckets made of natural materials? Perhaps they carried water in a gurba—a goatskin water bladder. Awad Omran, my Sudanese camel handler, has a solution to conquering today's thirst.



Awad's cold-water canteen: burlap rice sack, cardboard, plastic twine, knife, needle, plastic water bottle

Omran spends 20 minutes building a water-cooling thermos. It's made entirely from found materials—piles of junk discarded around a farm. He wraps a large water bottle with cardboard. He wraps the cardboard bundle in piece of burlap that once held rice. He makes a long handle from twine.

Awad's water refrigerator operates on the simple principle of **evaporation**. Wetted and hung on a camel saddle, its dampened cardboard insulation cools our drinking water by several degrees. We refill it constantly.

Mule-ology

Near Siverek, Turkey

December 11, 2014

Salopek rarely travels alone. He's usually joined by a local guide and a pack animal or two to help carry supplies. Here, he writes about his mule while traveling through Turkey.

First things first: A mule is not a donkey. In my opinion, a donkey is a member of the horse family burdened by low self-esteem. It's a small, modest, long-eared creature from which mules are bred when mated with a horse. A mule is something else entirely. To call a mule a donkey is fighting words.

There are jack mules (male) and jenny or molly mules (female). There are blue mules, cotton mules, sugar mules, and mining mules.

But the one thing I've learned is that it doesn't matter what you call a mule. Mules do not tolerate names.

Our white jenny, for example, has been baptized differently by each of my walking partners across Turkey. One guide called her Barbara, for reasons only he can explain. Another dubbed her Sunshine. Still another called her Sweetie. John Stanmeyer, my photographer, refers to her as Snowflake.

My preference is Kirkatir, a Turkish name meaning "grey mule." The truth is that, like all mules, she answers to no label handed out by humans. Kirkatir does not come when called or when whistled to. She comes when she feels like it. This is not very often.

Kirkatir does what she pleases and when she pleases. She plods along at her own pace, shouldering the burden of our supplies. And for that, we are grateful.



Paul Salopek's mule in Turkey may not come when called, but she shoulders much of the burden on the walk.



A farmer carries nearly 45 kilograms (one hundred pounds) of hay to his house about 3.2 kilometers (two miles) away.

Walking Grass

Near Khurramabad, Pakistan

January 02, 2018

Along his travels, Salopek encounters many people going about their daily lives. Here, in Pakistan, he comes across some farmers harvesting and carrying hay.

The mountain range that cuts northern Afghanistan from Pakistan is a cold desert. There is little precipitation. For all their thick glaciers and snowpack, the towering mountains are parched. In the late summers, glacial melt streams down, washing away villages, roads, and topsoil.

The people who call this stark landscape home—many of them farmers—ready themselves for fall. Every autumn, as their pastures dry to the color of gold and copper, villagers harvest wild hay.

You can see them walking fast to shorten the agony under their heavy loads. They look like human ants toting huge bundles.

Rehman Ali and Bibi Pari are older now. Their sons have grown and moved to larger cities. But they remain and harvest their sloped and rocky fields by themselves. Pari, the wife, stands no higher than my bicep. Her name means “fairy.” I can hardly budge her cargo, but she rocks it swiftly to her shoulders. “Thank you, brothers,” she says to us, for the ridiculous act of watching her work.

WORDWISE

evaporation: the process of turning from liquid into gas

Homo sapiens: the species to which modern humans belong

migrate: to move from one place to another



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Cover: a red-winged parrot
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