

# MALI - a personal journey to Timbuktu ... and back

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U3AC Exploration Forum

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Why did I want to go Mali?



# How did we go from here 2 Timbuktu?

## AFRICAN JOURNEYS - THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED



from here **2** TIMBUKTU

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**Guy Lankester**

Founder and  
director of From  
Here 2 Timbuktu



# Our Mali Trip

- 28 Dec 2011 – Juliet and Mike flew to Bamako to join group
- 29 Dec – Set off by road to Segou
- 31 Dec – Met our boat on the Niger
- 2-3 Jan 2012 – 2 Nights in Djenné
- 4-6 Jan – Dogon escarpment trek
- 7 Jan – Night in Mopti
- 8-10 Jan – Slow boat on the Niger
- 11 Jan – Reach Timbuktu!
- 12-15 Jan – Festival of the Desert
- 16 Jan – Fly back to Bamako
- 18 Jan – Flight back to UK



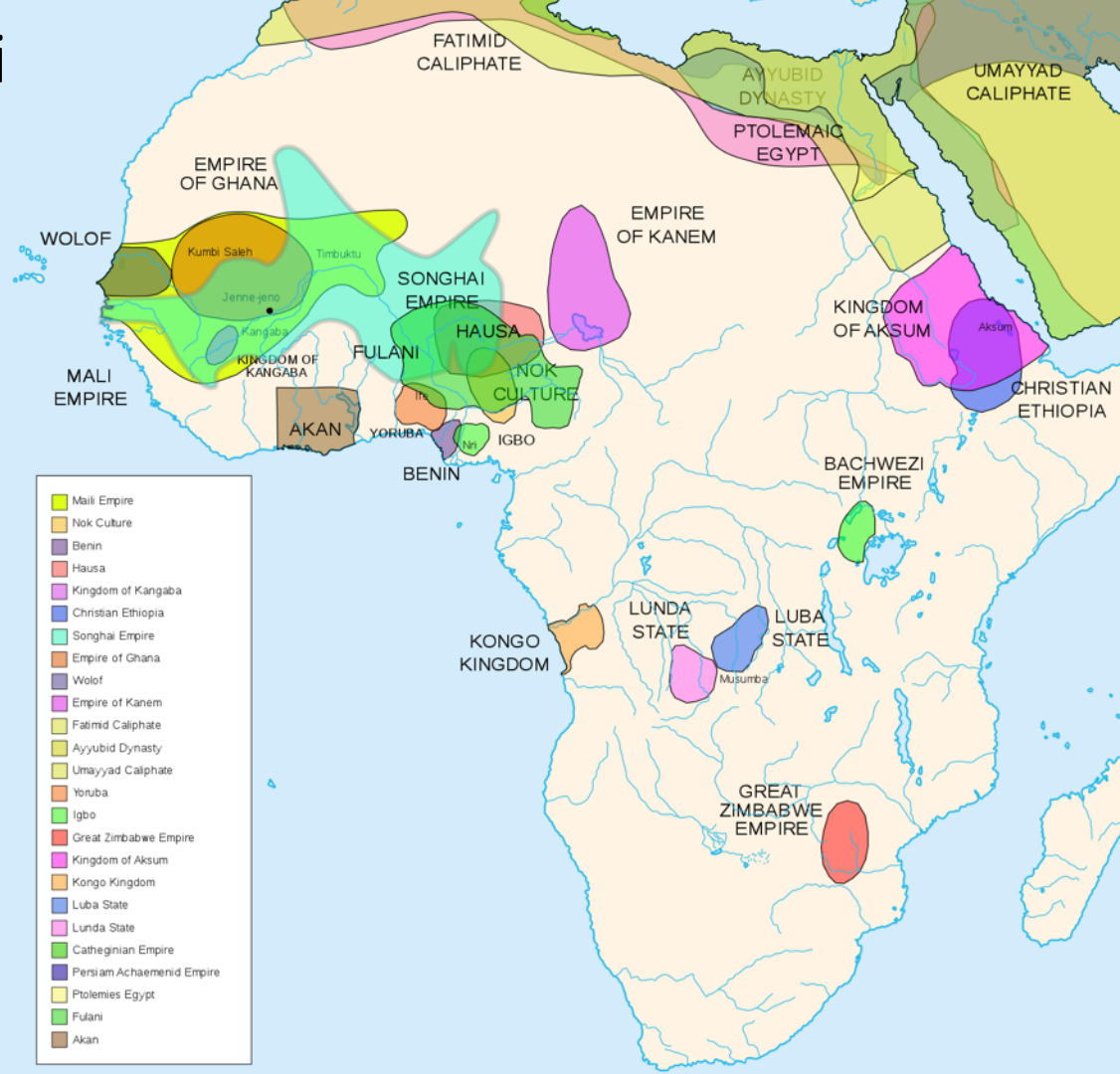
# The recent Mali Civil War

- 16 Jan 2012 – MNLA (Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) fighting for homeland for the Tuareg people
- 22 Mar 2012 – President ATT ousted in a coup d'état
- 5 Apr 2012 – MNLA achieved objectives proclaimed independence of Azawad
- 17 Jul 2012 – MNLA lost control of most cities to Al-Qaeda backed groups
- 11 Jan 2013 – French military began operations against Islamists
- 8 Feb 2013 – Islamist territory re-taken by Malian military with coalition help
- 18 Jun 2013 – Peace deal with Tuaregs
- 26 Sep 2013 – Fighting resumes
- 19 Feb 2015 – Ceasefire sign in Algiers
- 15 Apr 2015 – Signing of Peace Accord in Bamako



# Ancient Kingdoms of Mali

- The Ghana Empire – Wagadou  
c. 700 – 1240
- Gao Empire c. 9<sup>th</sup>C – 1430  
Islamic by the 10<sup>th</sup>C
- The Mali Empire – Manden Kurufaba c.  
1235 – 1400
- 1312 King Abudukari sailed west with  
2-4,000 ships to cross the Atlantic
- Mansa Musa hajj to Mecca in 1325  
with 60,000 men and so much gold  
that it devalued the gold market
- Songhai (Songhay) Empire  
c. 1464 – 1591 (capital Gao)
- Dendi Kingdom c. 1591 – 1901  
(founded by Songhai people)



# Mali Trade Routes



Clay sculpture of a horse and rider from Mali

- Gold
- Salt
- Slaves
- ...

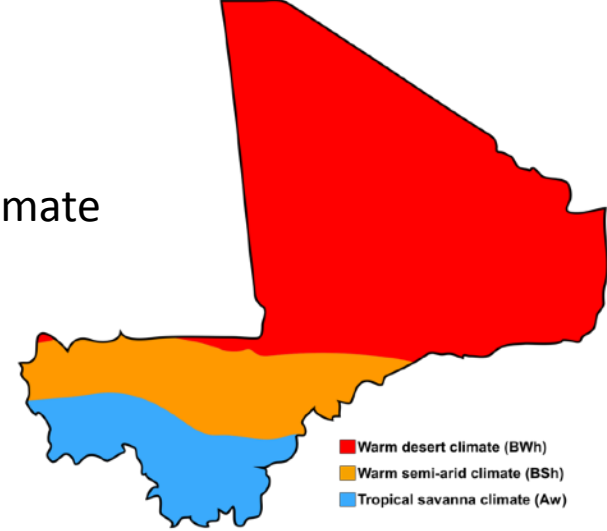


# People and Geography of Mali

Total population about 18 million:

- Mande – 50%, includes **Bambara**, Dialonke, Dyula, Malinké, Mandinka, Mende, Soninké or Sarakolé, and Susu
- **Fulani** or Peul – 17%, semi-nomadic cattle herders
- Voltaic – 12%
- Moor, **Tuareg** (blue men of the desert) – 10%
- **Songhai** – 6%, farmers and fishermen along the Niger
- **Bozo**, Sorogoye - <2%, fishermen along the middle Niger from Djene to Niafunke
- **Dogon** – ~2%, the first occupants of Mali, farmers
- Others – 2%, Bobo, Senoufo, Khassonké, Manianka, Toucouleur
- 48% population under 12y old
- 40 African languages, 12 national languages beside French and Bambara

## Climate



## FCO Travel Advice



Images of Mali Sebastião  
Salgado Mali 1985



# Bamako

- A vibrant mega-city of 2-3,000,000
- Fastest growing city in Africa
- Bambara “crocodile tail”
- C11<sup>th</sup> centre for Islamic scholars with 2 universities
- 1797 Mungo Park became 1<sup>st</sup> European to enter the city (pop. 6,000)
- 1883 French control (pop. 1,000)
- 1908 Capital of French Soudan
- At 1960 independence pop. 160,000
- Socialist until 1991 coup of Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT)
- Rich cultural history or oral tradition, literature, graphic arts and music
- Poverty - Mali ranked 175<sup>th</sup> / 188 in UN Human Development Index



# Seydou Keïta

“He who has not had his photo taken with Seydou Keïta has not had his photo taken”



# Malick Sidibé

Malick Sidibé was lauded “**the eye of Bamako**” for his work in the Mali capital in the heady years after independence from France in 1960.

# Travelling down the Niger River



# Djenné – market, mosque, students



# Djenné – home of the great mud mosque

- Largest adobe building in the world
- Annual festival for plastering the mosque
- 1<sup>st</sup> mosque built in C13th, 3<sup>rd</sup> rebuilt in 1907 under French administration
- Restored recently by the Aga Khan Trust
- Djenné founded after 800 C.E. near the site of Djenné-Djeno which was settled around 200 B.C
- Situated between Niger and Bani rivers, become an island in flood season
- Controversial dams (Tele 2006, Bani 2009) on the Bani river have delayed and reduced the floods



# Dogon - Bandiagara Escarpment





# Dogon Dance



# The Dogon People

- 600,000 living mainly around the 500m Bandiagara Escarpment
- Fled there 1,000 years ago to escape conversion to Islam
- Displaced the now extinct sky burial tribe from the cliffs
- Unique culture, language, religion, art and architecture
- Keep pool of crocodiles around their villages
- Worship the dog star Sirius believing that it has a twin with a 50-year orbit
- Not visible to the naked eye and only proven by 20C astronomers – The Sirius Mystery

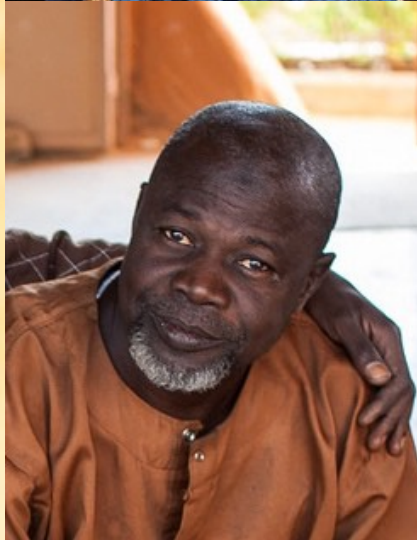


# Mopti to Timbuktu by boat



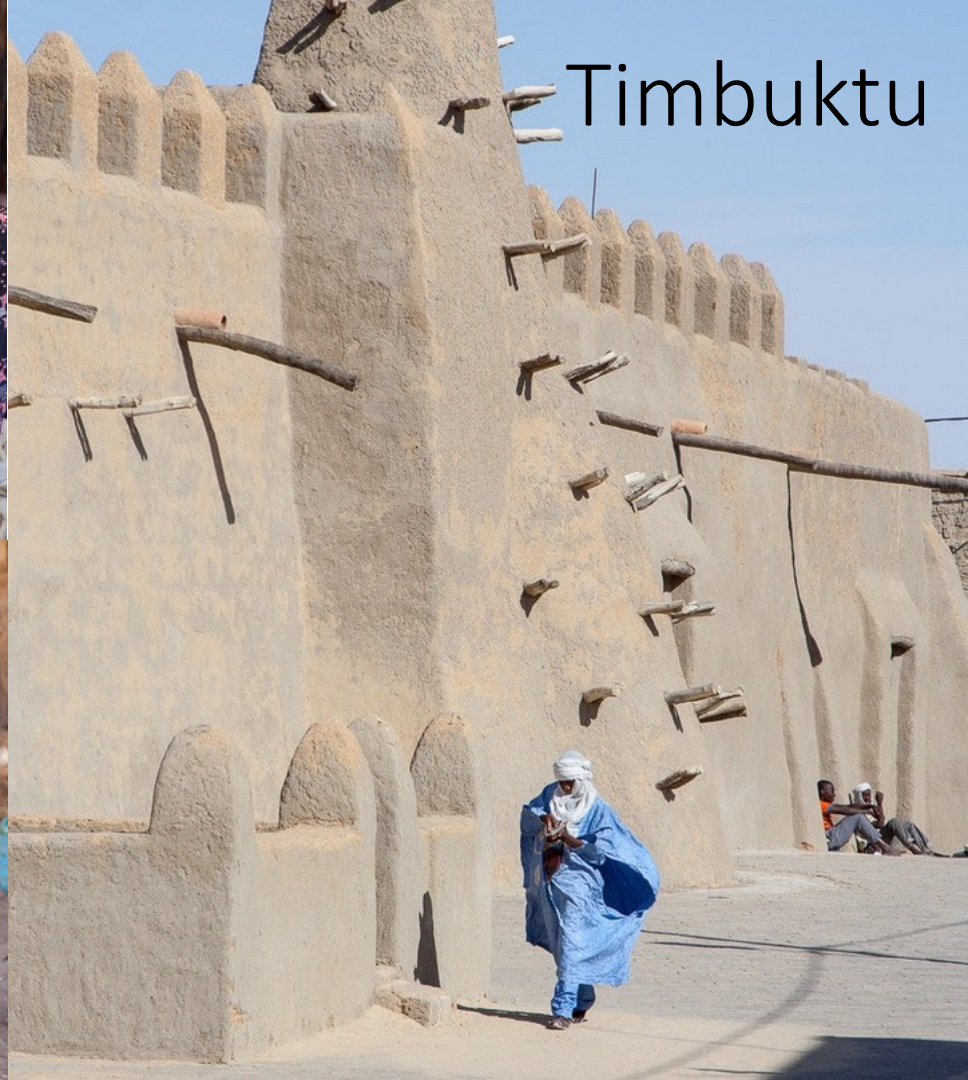
# The annual Fulani cattle transhumance





Our last morning on the Niger River





Timbuktu

# Europeans and the Legend of Timbuktu

- Muslim scholar, Ibn Battuta explored much of the medieval world, including Timbuktu in 1352
- Leo Africanus, expelled from Granada in 1492, grew up in Fez. Travelled widely across Africa visiting Timbuktu on a diplomatic mission. He wrote of its riches.
- West African slave traders brought back tales of the legendary inland city – an African El Dorado
- The “fabled” city of Timbuktu sparked the imaginations of European adventurers, lured by the promise of gold
- 1618 – a London company formed to establish trade with Timbuktu
- Major Daniel Houghton from Ireland, after a 4-year diplomatic post at Goree, off the west coast of Africa, led an expedition in 1791 to seek the source of the Nile and Timbuktu. After several disasters murdered about 200 mile short of Timbuktu
- Successive Sultans decreed “death to infidels”



Alexander Gordon Laing house



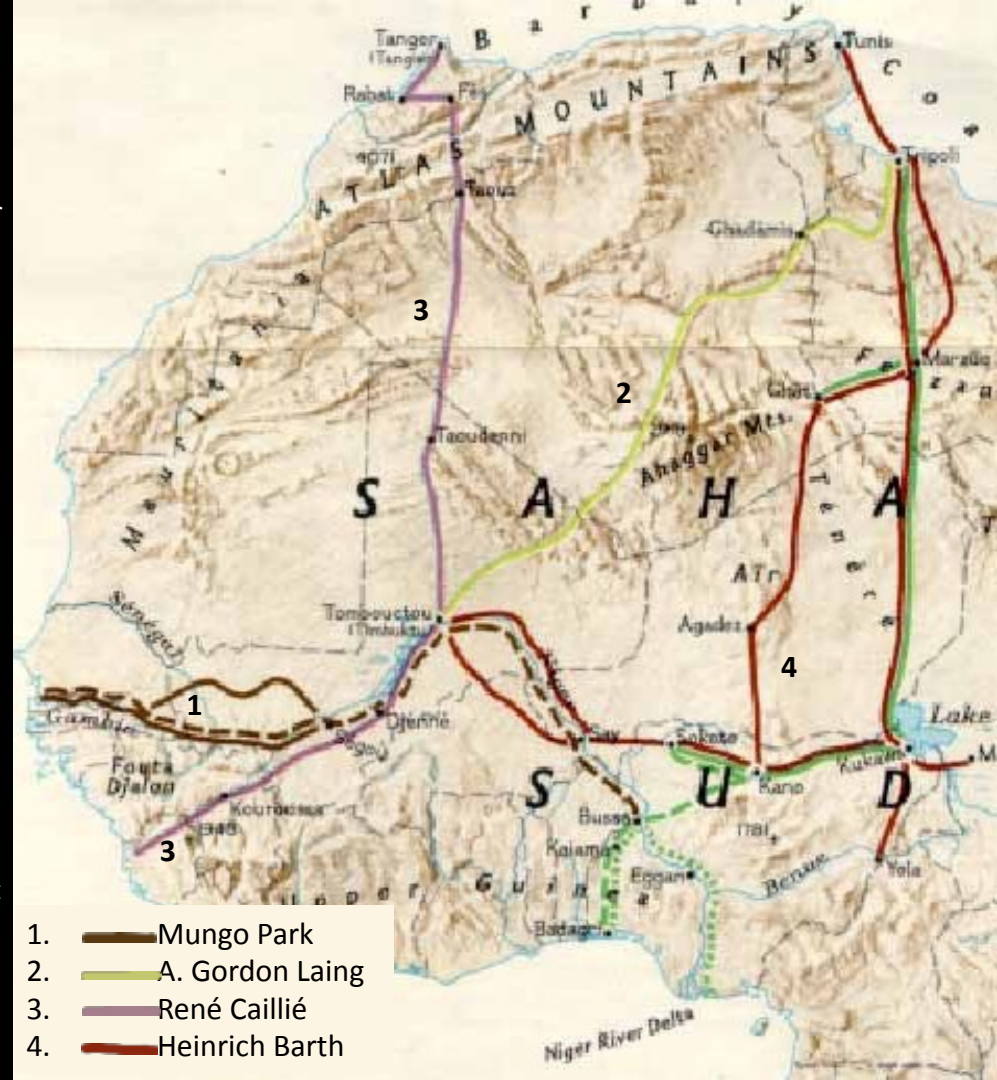
# Europeans to Timbuktu

## Mungo Park sailed past Timbuktu in 1805

- 1st Journey in 1796 imprisoned for 4m, escaped alone, reached Niger River at Segou, back via Bamako, fell ill, back to Scotland
- 1805 lead a UK Government expedition with 47 Europeans.
- Aug 1805 reached Niger River with only 11 Europeans still alive
- Nov. left Segou in makeshift schooner; 4 remaining Europeans
- Their guide reported numerous attacks chased by canoes until boat trapped at Bussa rapids in Nigeria where all drowned.

## Major Alexander Gordon Laing became first European to reach Timbuktu in 1826 ... but strangled.

- Married Consul's daughter in Tripoli and set off 2 days later on camel with a small group and Sheikh Babani as his guide.
- After 5 months Tuareg nomads joined their caravan, and attacked at night, supported by the Babani, leaving him for dead
- Gruesome wounds; struggled on with only remaining companion
- 399 days later reached Timbuktu; expected to take a few weeks
- The "legendary city of gold" was now a dusty grimy place and he found that Sultan Bello made it clear that he was not welcome
- Stayed 35 days in Timbuktu, studying ancient manuscripts and sent letter to Emma's dad saying not safe and time to move on
- Joined a caravan to Morocco but 2 days out betrayed and killed



# Timbuktu ... and back!

- 1828 - René Caillié became first European to make it to Timbuktu and back alive
  - A Frenchman born to a poor family near the Port of Rochefort
  - Planned to travel to Timbuktu alone disguised as a Muslim, spent 8m with nomadic people in Mauritania to learn language and customs
  - Encourage by 10,000 franc prize offered by Société de Géographie
  - Setting off from modern Guinea, he arrived a year later and staying in Timbuktu for 2 weeks, before crossing the Sahara to Tangier
  - Awarded the prize and Legion d'Honneur
- 1852 – Heinrich Barth reached Timbuktu, and saw it was as Caillié had claimed
  - The first true scholar to travel and study in West Africa, fluent in Arabic, Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri, interested in the history and culture of the people, rather than commercial exploitation
  - Travelled from Tripoli to Cameroon and Lake Chad to Timbuktu, where he established close relationships with scholars and rulers
  - Published “Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa” 5 Vol

“The best weapon for the Christian traveller in Africa is decency - impeccable decency - toward the natives.”



René Caillié house

# The Libraries of Timbuktu

- Estimated 700,000 manuscripts on art, medicine, philosophy, science, religion
- Arabic and local languages from 13<sup>th</sup>C onwards
- UNESCO project to preserve and digitize some
- Ansar Dine attempted destruction in 2013
- “The Badass Librarian of Timbuktu” Adbel Haidara salvaged most books
- New dangers still face the manuscripts



# Festival au Desert d'Essakane



Tuareg



# Back to Bamako



# My Memories and Impressions of Mali

- An intensely moving and rewarding journey
- Totally different from my previous Africa experiences
- Great diversity of people, mostly very poor, barely touched by the modern world, open and friendly
- Deeply Islamic (except for the Dogon)
- Festival au Desert brought together many diverse cultures
- Definite army presence beyond the festival fringes
- Juliet found the accommodation rather more basic than as I had sold it to her (wild camping)!

Welcome to Mali!