

## Beyond borders

# Prescott College students working to make life better in Africa

by Denise Calhoun

**D**ecades ago, Africa ensnared the interest of Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, Isak Dinesen, Graham Greene, and Ernest Hemingway. Today, the continent has new conquests: the hearts and minds of Prescott College students and faculty.

Environmental Studies Professor **Walt Anderson**, who has taken six trips to Africa for Prescott College, is among the enamored.

“Anybody who has been to Africa has been changed by the experience,” Anderson said. “The landscape speaks to us in some way we can’t understand.”

Prescott College alumna **Ann Radeloff’s** work with the TOPSY Project in 2003 inflamed her interest in Africa. After participating in that project, she wanted to keep Prescott College students involved.

“Africa opens so many possibilities for us to learn,” Radeloff said in May, just days before returning to Kenya as part of a Prescott College class she helped design. “I’m so excited I can’t even think.”

## Shared love

Cultural and Regional Studies Professor **Mary Poole** developed a love for Africa at an early age as well. She went to Egypt as soon as she graduated from high school because her parents had moved there.

“It was like coming home,” she said. “I’m really hooked.”

Prescott College students and faculty are not alone. In 1985, the percentage of U.S.

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*Photo by Kaitlin Noss*  
Above, at the Community Center in Ambosili, students are undertaking a permaculture assessment. The center will be used for community activities such as HIV/AIDS testing, adult literacy classes, community meetings, and Prescott College classes. The center will also house a library and donated computer equipment. Left, Kaitlin Noss spent the night in the village of Daniel Olof Leturesh and his wife Charity (seen here in the blue top).

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students studying abroad who chose Africa as their destination was a mere 1.1 percent. In 2001, 2.9 percent of U.S. students studying abroad

picked Africa. That number swelled by 4.2 percent in 2002-03, according to the Institute of International Education.

Poole believes the surge can

be attributed to students' interest in AIDS and race.

"They've grown up hearing about AIDS, and AIDS is such a problem in Africa," Poole said. "Students are also interested in race. They are trying to understand race, and Africa looms large in the mythology of race. Also, as students develop knowledge and a social conscience, their minds naturally go to Africa."

## Mutually beneficial

Radeloff, who is a teaching assistant for the class in Africa this summer, certainly agrees. She, Poole, and several students started planning the Kenya Project last year (see page 29). Radeloff wanted the class to be beneficial to both students and the Maasai, a pastoral and hunting people of Kenya and Tanzania. So did Poole.

After a one-month reconnaissance mission, which they paid for themselves, they designed a class to teach Prescott College students about Maasai worldviews and offer their research skills to Maasai community leaders. They hope the research will benefit the Maasai. Radeloff believes the experience has improved her life as well.

"I struggle with being a teacher and communicator," she said. "I don't have confidence in my ability. I hope this helps me overcome that."

One of the project's goals is to educate tourists, to teach them to not only look at the animals, but also to connect with the people who live in Africa.

"You really have to deal with human issues if you deal with animal issues," Anderson said.

Poole agrees.

"You have a much more rewarding experience if you collaborate with people, rather than

*Right, North Moench and Daniel Olo! Leturesh take a break at camp.*

*Photo by Kaitlin Noss*

*Below, Mark Poole, in hat, stands with members of the Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition (MERC). Poole, now deceased, was Prescott College Professor Mary Poole's dad. He had dedicated the last 10 years of his life to MERC, and passed his passion on to his daughter. MERC's mission is to protect the Maasai's culture and ecosystems.*



just making them objects of study," she said.

Anderson, who plans to teach another Prescott College class in Africa next year, hopes it will go one step further.

He believes the Maasai, whose traditional lands have been illegally appropriated over the years and devastated by economic development, irresponsible tourism, and large-scale farming, have been disenfranchised politically.

"We hope to help them find their voice," Anderson said.

## Many links

There are many links between Prescott College, its alumni, and Africa. Among them:

- **Friends of the Honde Valley:** This student project helps children orphaned by AIDS in the Honde Valley (page 32).
- **St. Lucia Nursing Home:** This grass-roots effort, run by Winfrida Mwashala, the wife of **Augustine Mwangotya \*01**, helps victims of HIV/AIDS who have been rejected by their families.
- **The Topsy Project:** This student project supports the Topsy Foundation, a non-profit organization that focuses on children affected by HIV/AIDS (fall 2003 *Transitions*).
- **Documentary: T.A. Loeffler, '88**, recently traveled to Zimbabwe to film a documentary on street children.
- **Regarding Hwange and Other Matters of Perception: Joshua Caine Anchors \*98**, wrote a book based on his experiences as a Peace Corps volunteer in Zimbabwe (fall 2004 *Transitions*).

Radeloff wants these links to become a strong, lengthy chain. She hopes that Pan-African studies will continue to expand the horizons of Prescott College students.

"It can only enhance the curriculum here," she said.

## Beyond borders

# Students team with Maasai on Kenya Project

by Hilary Eller

**W**hile Kenya and Prescott are thousands of miles apart, the two are part of the same global community, a connection students and faculty at Prescott College are fostering through The Kenya Project.

The project's mission is to create a program in East Africa based on a mutually beneficial approach to international study.

A community center and field station in Amboseli, Kenya, will house the programs. The Maasai people, an East African tribe famous as herders and warriors, agreed to allow Prescott College to use a building and land there if College personnel fix it up.

**Mary Poole**, a Prescott College faculty member in cul-  
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The teaching team for the Kenya Project are, from left, Meitamei Olo Dapash, Ann Radeloff, Kaitlin Noss, and Mary Poole.



Prescott College teaching assistant Ann Radeloff, third from left, and Gerry Garvey of the Yavapai County HIV-AIDS task force, second from right, enjoy a moment with Maasai people last July. The two Americans participated in a fact-finding mission to Africa.

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tural and regional studies, has worked for years with Meitamei Olol Dapash, founder and director of the Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition (MERC), an organization meant to preserve the Maasai culture and East African ecosystems. Poole has worked with him to that end.

The Kenya Project shares a similar vision, and extends to literacy, clean water, and AIDS testing and awareness.

The community center and field station in Amboseli sit on the boundary of Amboseli National Park, at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, and will provide a space for Prescott College students to study Africa and complete service projects there. It also will provide a space for the Maasai people to seek resources for education and health.

"Our students will be totally immersed in Maasai culture and activities," Poole said.

While Prescott College students learn from the Maasai, they also will use their knowledge to help the Maasai people learn, she said.

Kenya Project organizers have hosted some fundraisers to make the building usable and are now seeking donations to purchase a vehicle.

**Ann Radeloff '04** went to Africa two years ago to work with the TOPSY Foundation, a home for children orphaned by AIDS. She assisted Poole and Meitamei in teaching a Prescott College class in May at the Amboseli community center.

In future years, it is hoped that students will spend between one and four months in Amboseli, depending upon their curriculum and interests, Poole said. As an example, students may help the Maasai people with research examining the effects of tourism on the Maasai community. She gave the example of a paper, studying the effect of the tourism industry on Kenya's ecosystem.

"We'll turn ourselves loose on a question they design," she said.

Radeloff said that at the same time students study with the Maasai people, they will help set up transportation systems for the Maasai to get to the doctor.

Poole said she has traveled to places where resources do not exist, only to return to the United States, where the resources often are in excess.

"There is such a maldistribution of resources," she said.

Radeloff added, "Once I started traveling, I realized that we're all global citizens. The boundaries of nations are not important or pertinent."



*Photos by Kaitlin Noss*  
Above, Prescott College students visit the office of Keriako Olol Tobiko, newly appointed public prosecutor, also a Maasai lawyer working on Kenya's new Constitution Committee.

Right, Devin Carberry (with camera) rides in the Amboseli National Park with Mary Poole and Rob Nathan.



Hilary Eller is a reporter for the Daily Courier in Prescott.



Prescott College students learned about the political economy of tourism and trade by supporting Maasai community-owned businesses and cooperatives, such as the Women's Beading Cooperative pictured here. Students brought products back to the United States and sold them to raise money that was then used to make improvements to the Community Center in Amboseli.

# A primer on the Kenya Project at Prescott College

**T**he Kenya Project was created to build bridges between Prescott College and Maasai community activists. Many universities have field study programs in East Africa, but this program stands apart because it:

- is jointly created by the college and the Maasai people, and led by the Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition (MERC);
- is designed as a laboratory for learning about how to make social change; and
- models an experiential approach to learning about and across cultural differences.

The Kenya Project was created to give American college students the opportunity to learn from MERC leadership about its collaborative approach to activism.

“Maasai culture has so much of value to teach the world—about sharing food and children, of peaceful co-existence with wildlife—and this program strives to create for American students the opportunity to experience that culture on its own terms,” said **Mary Poole**, coordinator of Prescott College’s Cultural and Regional Studies Program.

The collaboration kicked off in May 2005, with a month-long Prescott College class held in Maasailand co-taught by Poole and **Meitamei Olo Dapash**, MERC executive director.

The course was titled *Maasai: Indigenous People in a Global Context*. Nine students, two teaching assistants, and dozens of MERC colleagues participated. The course met weekly throughout the 2004-05

academic year. Students prepared by studying Kenyan history, landscape, and wildlife, and worked to identify the cultural lenses through which they understood Africa and indigenous peoples.

Once in Kenya, students met with Maasai people in Nairobi and in towns and villages throughout Maasailand. They learned about the issues facing the Maasai people as they encounter the forces of globalization and the ways they are working to maintain their culture and ability to direct their futures.

To strengthen this collaboration, Prescott College has invited Dapash to be a visiting faculty member during the spring of 2006. He will teach, mentor students, and participate in a College seminar on social change.