THE LONG, LONG ROAD TO

TIMBUKTU

AN UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY ACROSS THE SANDS OF MALI, TO A PLACE THAT LOOKS LIKE NOWHERE ELSE ON EARTH

BY TED CONOVER

A pinasse, or motorized wooden boat, carried the author down the Niger River for three days from Mopti to Konna—about 90 miles.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ALDO ROSSI

PAINTINGS AND MAP BY MARC LACAZE

Holding the boarding pass with "Tombouctou" printed on it, looking out the airplane window at the desert sands of northern Mali, I almost felt I was cheating. After all, of the nearly 50 explorers who attempted to reach Timbuktu between the late 16th and late 19th centuries, only three are known to have made it. And only two returned alive. Today, not only is the fabled desert crossroads accurately located on the map, it also has an airport and locals who, instead of murdering you, will show you the sanctums of Islam.

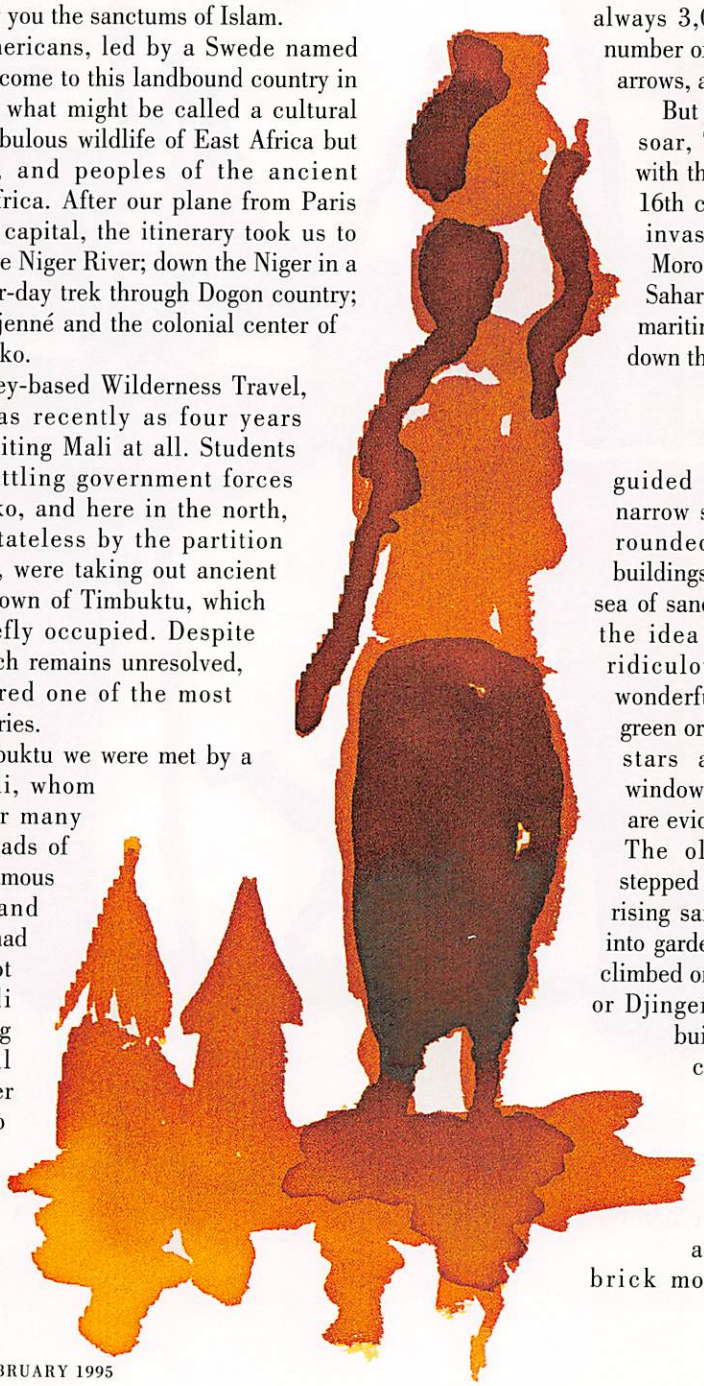
Our group of 12 Americans, led by a Swede named Magnus Andersson, had come to this landbound country in the southern Sahara on what might be called a cultural safari—to see not the fabulous wildlife of East Africa but the art, architecture, and peoples of the ancient civilizations of West Africa. After our plane from Paris landed in Bamako, the capital, the itinerary took us to Timbuktu; to Mopti on the Niger River; down the Niger in a pinasse boat; on to a four-day trek through Dogon country; to the ancient town of Djenné and the colonial center of Ségou; and back to Bamako.

Our outfitter, Berkeley-based Wilderness Travel, had not told us that as recently as four years ago tourists weren't visiting Mali at all. Students and unionists were battling government forces in the streets of Bamako, and here in the north, Tuareg nomads, left stateless by the partition of West Africa in 1960, were taking out ancient grievances against the town of Timbuktu, which they attacked and briefly occupied. Despite the Tuareg conflict, which remains unresolved, Mali today is considered one of the most democratic African countries.

At the airport in Timbuktu we were met by a Tuareg, Mohammed Ali, whom Magnus had known for many years. The Tuareg, nomads of Caucasian descent, are famous for their aloofness and insularity, but this man had studied English in Egypt and Arabic in Saudi Arabia before returning home to start a small travel agency. A stranger pair would be hard to imagine: stocky Magnus with his khaki shorts, white clogs, pink skin, and ready smile, and Mohammed Ali, tall, dark, and wrapped in robes. All we could see of his skin were his feet in fine-tooled sandals, his long-fingered hands covered with rings, and the part of his face not obscured by his robe or big sunglasses. He was everything you would hope for in a guide to Timbuktu: knowledgeable, mysterious, and a bit scary.

In the 16th century, then more a city than a town, Timbuktu gained prominence as a center of Islamic learning and a meeting place for middlemen. It was on the shore of the Niger River, where caravans from North Africa and nearer places, like the Taoudenni salt mines, traded goods with boats. A well-traveled Spanish Moor, Leo Africanus, visited in 1494 and wrote, "The rich king of Timbuktu has many plates and scepters of gold, some whereof weigh 1,300 pounds, and he keeps a magnificent and well-furnished court. . . . He hath always 3,000 horsemen, and a great number of footmen that shoot poisoned arrows, attending him."

But just as its reputation began to soar, Timbuktu declined. It fell with the Songhai Empire in the late 16th century, brought down by the invasion of Berber armies from Morocco and the circumvention of Saharan trade routes by European maritime nations, which sent ships down the coast of West Africa.



Mohammed Ali guided us through Timbuktu, all narrow streets, mud buildings, and rounded corners. Between the buildings, on the wider streets, flows a sea of sand. Its changing shapes make the idea of paving anything here ridiculous. Some houses have wonderful hardwood doors, painted green or blue and studded with silver stars and half-moons. Arched windows and other Moorish details are evidence of northern occupation. The oldest houses have to be stepped down into from the street, as rising sand has converted first floors into garden levels. A dune had nearly climbed one side of the Grand Mosque, or Djingereyber, Timbuktu's largest building. (Unlike in many other countries, in Mali non-Muslims are allowed to enter mosques.) Though it has a 50-foot-high minaret, which offers a good view of Timbuktu and the desert, the mud-brick mosque is earthen and low,

impressive but frankly overshadowed by the town itself.

As the wind picked up, we watched swirling dust through narrowed eyes, and tied handkerchiefs around our cameras. The dust is part of the harmattan, the wind's seasonal kicking-up of sand that dirties white shirts and casts everything in a suffused yellow light, smudging the views. It is part of the reason Timbuktu doesn't look like any other place.

The exception to this was our hotel, a run-down member of the Sofitel chain that could have been a Bauhaus box transplanted from Europe. Though the rooms seemed to have been unused for days, they were probably slept in the night before and cleaned that morning: throughout Mali we were to find that dust settles constantly on every surface. Even a dresser wiped clean an hour before may fail the white glove test.

Magnus professed an allergy to anything that exists for tourists. In Bamako he had steered us clear of the lightly visited main market so that he could show us the Marché Medine, a market that specializes in products made from recycled materials such as painted steamer trunks. But he knew that in Timbuktu you must have a camel ride. The local concession in this business was, alas, a group of Tuaregs. Men and boys came to the hotel, made the camels kneel while we got on them, and walked us off to their camp in the desert. Sitting there in a half-circle, refusing to meet our eyes, were the Tuareg women. With their traditional indigo robes pulled over their heads like hoods, they began to wail and drum for us, looking more than a little like grim reapers. After a while the men drew their swords and, whirling them in the air, danced to the ululations. Nearby, vendors lay clothes on the sand and set out Tuareg-made rings, bracelets, knives, and sabers.

The decline in living conditions since France left West Africa in 1960 prompted the Tuareg attack three years ago on Timbuktu, which Mohammed Ali joined. I had felt sorry for the Tuareg when I read in the *New York Times* a month before leaving the United States that these nomads are "a dying species . . . at the edge of cultural extinction." Hostile military regimes have made it difficult for them to move their herds from one watering hole to the next. Foreign aid is not being passed on to them by the ruling party. Moreover, Mohammed Ali declared, the government has deprived them of their "property"—meaning their slaves. Victimhood is always more complicated than you think.

The legacy of Tuareg slave ownership is a tragic group of black Africans known as the Tuareg Bella. On a vacant lot in the old part of Timbuktu, we came across a settlement of their shelters—domes of wood sticks covered with mats and fabric—and approached the women tending them. Originally these people came from many tribes, but their mother tongue and culture are now Tuareg. Without jobs or houses, they camp on the edge of things, wherever people let them. The women were red with dust, and many had dyed the skin on their hands and face with patterns in henna, as is common all around the western Sahara.

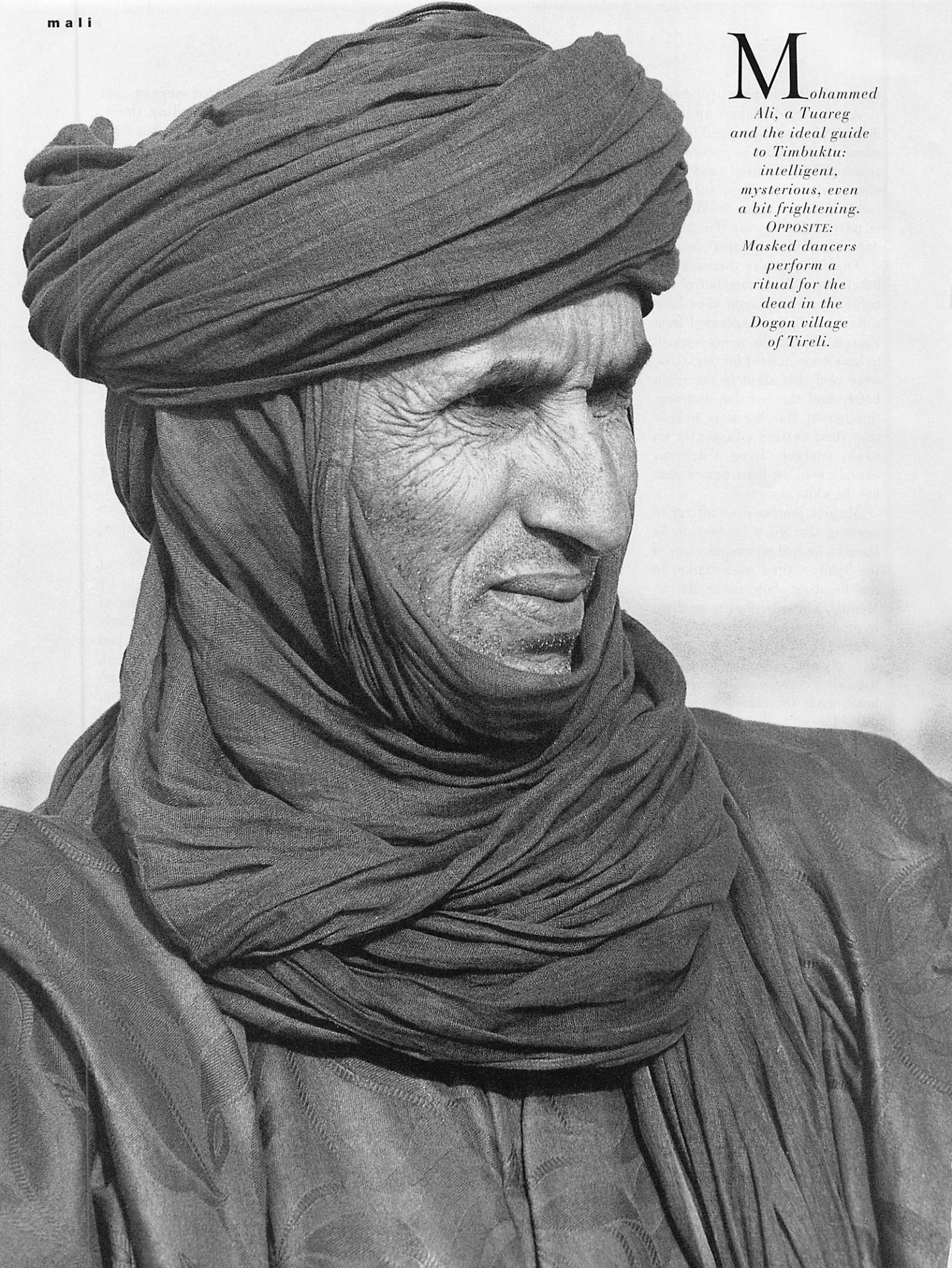
BETWEEN TIMBUKTU'S MUD BUILDINGS FLOWS A SEA OF SAND WHOSE CHANGING SHAPES MAKE THE IDEA OF PAVING ANYTHING HERE RIDICULOUS

We also visited the Grand Marché, the main market, where among the items for sale were gallons of officially packaged vegetable oil "furnished by the people of the United States of America" and tinned beef loaf from Denmark—items sent to this country, one of the five poorest nations in the world, as free food aid. But something went wrong in the distribution. "They don't have any Norwegian sardines right now," said Magnus, "but they usually do."

The generator at our hotel ensured that there was light by which to eat our evening meal of fried captain fish, or Nile perch, and local bread. Eagerly we tucked in—and crunched to a halt. For just as it had found its way into our shoes, socks, scalps, and underwear, the sand in Timbuktu was part of the whole wheat bread. Our guidebooks discussed the wisdom of everything you could eat *but* sand, so we turned to Magnus. He smiled and tore off a big bite. Crunch, crunch, gulp, gulp, a swig of water and down it went.

As elsewhere in Africa, the variety of Mali makes it feel like several countries rolled into one. A short flight to Mopti, a bustling port on the Niger River, and we felt far removed from the mysteries of the Middle Ages and more in the commercial present. The Niger, wide and brown and languid, flows 2,600 miles through West Africa on its way to Nigeria and the ocean. From rainy season to dry season, the water level varies wildly; a postcard showed a blue bay near a mosque where we saw only sand, and two German ferryboats lay tilted on one bank of the Niger, awaiting rescue by the rains, which begin in May and June and peak in July and August. A pinasse, a long narrow motorized wooden vessel, would be our home for the next three days as we cruised 90 miles down the Niger, the highway of Mali, to the town of Konna.

It was a slow-moving, leisurely voyage that gave us time to meet the people who live on and along the river, mostly fishermen of the Bozo tribe and Fulani cattle herders. Several times a day we would stop, wait for our boatmen to



Mohammed Ali, a Tuareg and the ideal guide to Timbuktu: intelligent, mysterious, even a bit frightening.
OPPOSITE: Masked dancers perform a ritual for the dead in the Dogon village of Tireli.

place a long plank over the mud between the gunwales and the shore and step out into a friendly village. The residents would stare at us and we would stare at them. Often children would break the ice by holding our hands as we explored the paths between earthen dwellings. Islam is expanding, and most communities had a mud-brick mosque. Many also had a place where the village elders were resting, and Magnus always made a point of seeking them out to greet them.

Occasionally kids asked for a cadeau—a gift of candy, a Bic pen, or some African francs. But Magnus, sounding like a ranger at Yellowstone, discouraged this. The adults, when they had the courage, would most often ask for medicine because the need was acute. Marc, our trip doctor from Hawaii, took a look at various of the villagers' rashes, cuts, and fevers, and several of us shared antibiotic ointment or capsules.

A group of mothers in one village surrounded Lindsey, a lawyer from the Bay Area who had purchased a distinctive stone necklace in Timbuktu. Though beautiful just to look at, the necklace also denoted motherhood, and the women demanded to see the evidence. Magnus went to some lengths to explain that Lindsey was not actually a mother—she just liked the necklace—but they wouldn't believe it. As we returned to the boat, we found two of them already there, searching for the children she had undoubtedly left behind.

At night we camped on bluffs overlooking the river, where our Dogon cook, Ména, and the Songhai boatmen served us feasts at long tables by lantern light. The members of the group got to know each other a bit better, including Magnus and Amadou Traoré, who had joined us in Mopti. A member of the Bambara tribe, Mali's largest, Traoré had studied at the national university in Bamako to be a teacher, but then discovered, with some dismay, that there were better opportunities in tourism. He was an amiable guy, a good translator, and not so steeped in Western customs that he wouldn't spontaneously take your hand if you were walking alongside him.

The birders among us were rewarded the next day by West African river eagles, hooded vultures, flycatchers, and kingfishers. I finally acquired a real-life referent to the crossword puzzle favorite, "wadi," a seasonally dry stream. One day, a lone hippo interrupted her nap to hop off a small island and swim away from our boat. On a small tributary, we saw how Bozo fishermen assure a good catch by placing nets across the entire river. Our crew negotiated for fresh fish with Bozos in pirogues, or dugout canoes, who constituted much of the river traffic, and they served us the bright red hibiscus tea called karkaday as we took in the world from our cool wooden benches.

The trip entered its third major phase, and certainly its most memorable, when jeeps transported us from the river to Dogon country. A cross between Mesa Verde and the land of Hobbits, Dogon territory extends 90 miles along the base of a continuous sheer cliff known as the Bandiagara Escarpment, about 45 miles southeast of the Niger. The 250,000 members of the Dogon tribe are the source of some of Africa's most famous art, mainly carvings, as well as a fascinating cosmology and odd, but wonderful, architecture.

DOGON COUNTRY, EXTENDING FOR 90 MILES ALONG THE SHEER BANDIAGARA ESCARPMENT, IS A CROSS BETWEEN MESA VERDE AND THE LAND OF HOBBITS

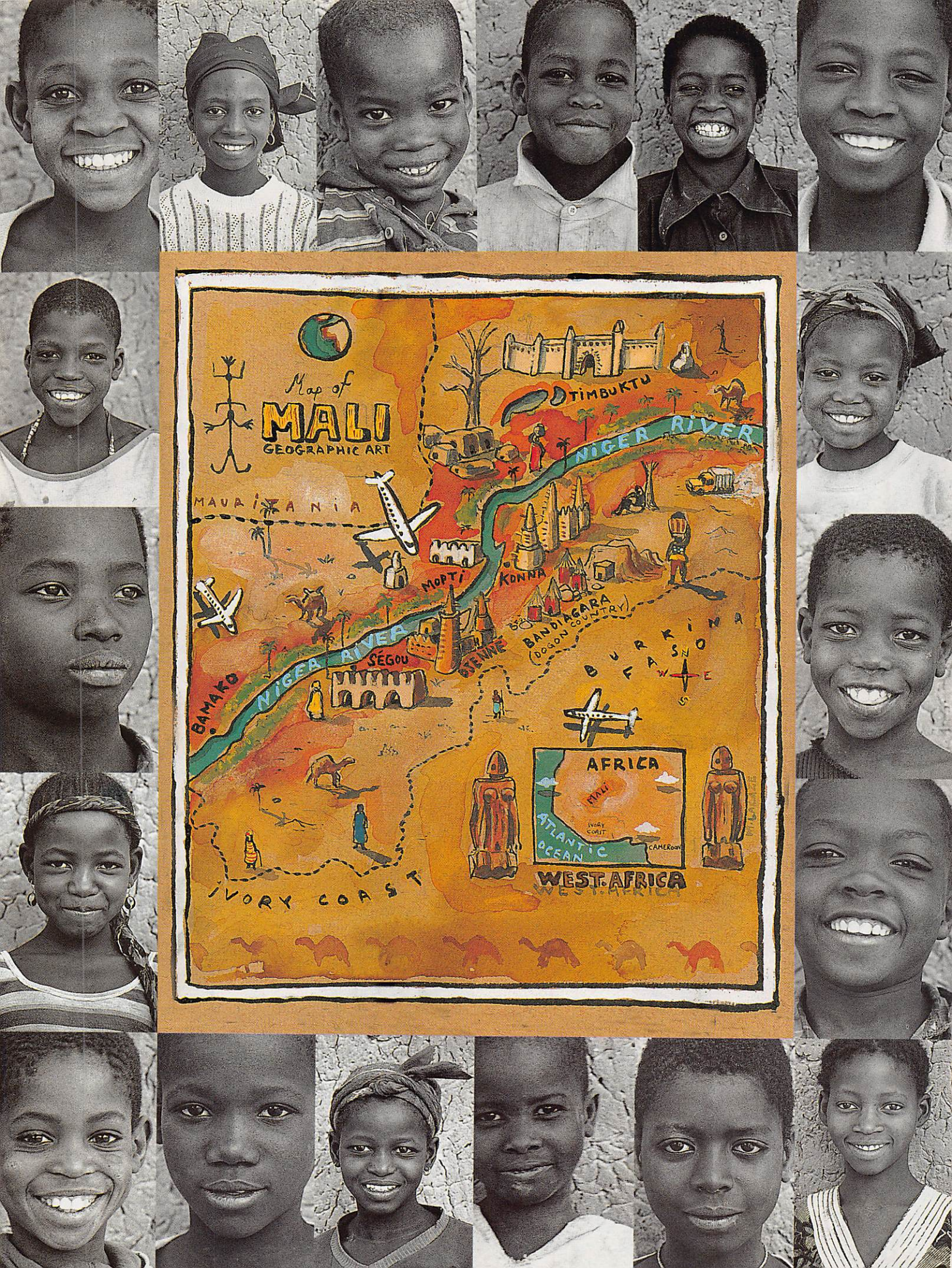
We approached Dogon country on a half-day walk of moderate difficulty from the town of Sangha. The main challenge was descending the escarpment, which we did through a notch with a well-worn trail over rocks. Before us lay a panorama with the cliffs on the right, villages perched on the inclines below, and flat, lightly wooded savanna extending endless miles to the left.

Magnus and our Dogon guide, Ama Dolo, explained that 1,000 years ago the climate was different, and vines that grew up the sides of the cliff allowed the Tellem, a previous culture, to climb the rocks and live in its caves. Now, however, the cliffs are inhabited mainly by the spirits of Dogon ancestors, whose bodies at death are still lifted by rope up to crypts in the escarpment.

Other sacred objects are also stored in the rock face. Dogon men are known for their weaving, and as we approached the first village we saw in a low cave hundreds of wooden shuttles, each of which had belonged to a weaver. The generations of family history represented by this cache were hard to fathom, as was the fact that they were there within the grasp of any unscrupulous trekker.

Magnus, who had been visiting the Dogon for 20 years, had been painstaking in his explanation of what constituted good and bad behavior here, and we were careful to be respectful. When one of the trip members raised his camera to photograph the shuttles, however, an old man appeared and started yelling at the top of his voice. Our guide had words with him, and so did other villagers who came out to chide him, *(continued on page 148; see page 151 for The Facts)*

The Dogon village of Ireli, LEFT, *where villagers use caves as crypts; sunset on the Bani River, a tributary of the Niger.*


Map of
MALI
GEOGRAPHIC ART
TIMBUKTU
NIGER RIVER
MAURITANIA
MOPTI
KONNA
BANDIAGARA
(DOGON COUNTRY)
BURKINA FASO
BAMAKO
NIGER RIVER
SÉGOU
SENNE
IVORY COAST
AFRICA
MALI
IVORY COAST
ATLANTIC OCEAN
CAMEROON
WEST AFRICA

Tuareg women ululate to the beat of a drum at a desert encampment near Timbuktu.
OPPOSITE: Portraits of Dogon schoolchildren from the village of Tireli.

Tuaregs control the camel-riding business in Timbuktu, a major tourist activity.
OPPOSITE: The mosque in Djenné, the world's largest mud structure; its walls are reinforced with more mud each year after the rains.

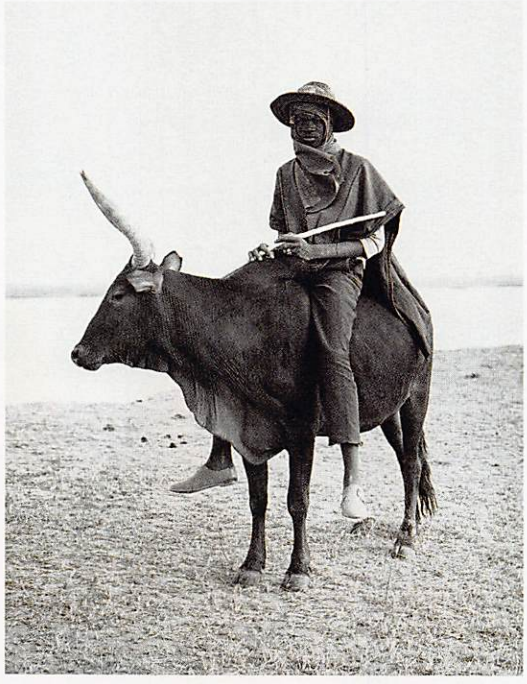
(continued from page 142) as though he were the village crackpot. But I wondered if he didn't have a point: how much exposure to the outside world, including photographers, can sanctity withstand?

WE WERE HEADED FOR A VILLAGE called Tireli. Normally, the walk takes you through the settlement of Yaye, but on this day they were having a once-a-year ceremony in Yaye. It involved the sacrifice of a fish in a village pond, where the water level was nearing a seasonal low. If a foreigner arrived during the ceremony, Ama Dolo explained, fish would be thrown at him. "And if the fish hits you, you will die within a year." We kind of laughed about this, but Ama Dolo was quite serious, and Amadou believed it, too.

So we went around Yaye. Already, though, we could see what makes the villages unique. The most striking feature, besides the setting, is the earthen granaries, slightly bigger than phone booths, with their characteristic straw "hats," cones of thatch gathered at the top to deflect erosion-causing rain. Each of the 19 or so Dogon communities along the escarpment is dotted with them, and every household has at least one. Surrounding both granary and dwelling is an earthen wall; paths wend through the villages between these walls. Some of the paths have special meanings; for example, menstruating women are restricted to certain ones. Goats and chickens abound, as well as children who followed us and endlessly called out the only French they seemed to know, "Ça va? Ça va?"

Each village also had a men's house, or toguna. These open-air structures were mainly roof—eight layers of millet stalk stacked a yard high, one for each of eight apical ancestors—supported by stone columns so short that standing up inside was impossible. Men within the cool space had to squat or lie down. "This way, they cannot fight with each other," said Ama Dolo.

Near the toguna there was generally a pile of stones—the village's navel, according to Ama Dolo, since every village is laid out in roughly the form of a human body. Up at the top, where it was too steep to build, the hogon, or village spiritual head, lived, sometimes in the only two-story house in town. Amadou was surprised when a group of us, given free reign by Magnus, decided to pay a visit to the hogon of Komokane village. A heavily wrinkled old man in a white tunic, he was sitting on a wooden chair in the sun where he received us happily and shook all our hands. Just a bit higher in the cliffs dwelt the souls of the ancestors. Amadou stayed back with an air of reverence. "You know, he does not have to bathe at night," he told us. "The snakes lick him clean."



A *herdsman on the Niger riverbank.*

Magnus knew Tireli well and was clearly delighted to be back. We set up camp on the edge of town, and Dugulu Saye, the village headman, arrived to welcome us. The formal Dogon greeting sounds like a song and takes about 20 seconds to recite; Magnus, an aficionado of this culture, was excellent at it. He had even been given a name by the elders of Tireli: Monodem, "he who brings people together." The friendship between our leader and the villagers transformed our status, too; we were less a group of tourists than, as Magnus liked to put it, "a delegation of visitors."

A MAJOR SPECTACLE OF DOGON COUNTRY is the masked dance, and Tireli is renowned for its version. From a rocky perch above a circle of sand near the village navel, we watched a procession of masked young men dance a ritual appeal to animist deities while village elders drummed passionately. But these were not ordinary masks; most were extravagantly painted and two were 20 feet high. They represented sacred buildings. Others that came by in a lengthy sequence represented water buffaloes, gazelles, hunters (with huge foreheads, signifying the need for brains in a successful hunt), and, on dancers with 12-foot stilts, herons. Our cameras hardly stopped clicking, yet it struck me as a bit contrived, the meaning changed or distorted by its being done for us and not for them. Magnus countered that the outside world was inevitably going to impinge on these cultures and that, if we could demonstrate admiration and not disdain for their rituals, they stood a better chance of being preserved.

More moving to me was the spontaneous dance we were invited to the next night, about a quarter mile from our campsite at the village edge. It also took place outside, with drums the only music and lanterns the only light, but this time the women danced, too, and little kids. The objective here seemed to be pure fun. By the end, all of us were in there, kicking up dust to the hypnotic rhythms, Africa seeping into our veins.

A final wonderment of Dogon country was saved for our last day:

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fortune-telling by foxes. We went a short distance from Tireli to a place between two hummocks where a fence of thorns had been built around a rectangle of sand about 10 feet wide by 30 feet long. Women were not allowed inside. A village priest had drawn square compartments within the space and, using an arcane system of charcoal bits, short sticks, and lines in the sand, had posed villagers' questions there. The questions would be answered by foxes, which came at night and left their responses in the language of their footprints. The priest also had placed peanuts in the sand to thank them in advance. The villagers paid the priest for finding the answers to questions like "Why am I sick?" and "Has anyone in [X family] put a curse on me?" or "Do I have any chance of sleeping with that woman?" ("It will be very difficult," was the priest's answer. "You should probably give up.")

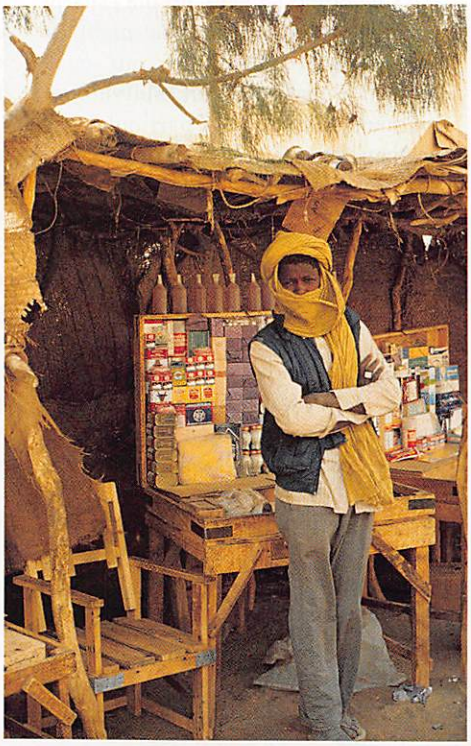
We left Dogon country after four days by climbing back up the escarpment at the other end. That night, as we camped at the top, our cook roasted a goat on a spit. Marvels remained for us yet, in particular the earthen mosque at Djenné, the largest mud structure in the world. It was like some huge sandcastle dream come true, and when you got up close, you could see the handprints of the faithful who every year, as with all earthen buildings in this climate, have to reinforce the walls with mud after the rains. As Djenné riveted us with its endurance, nearby Djenné-Djeno impressed us by its collapse: now only a vast field of soft earth suffused with pottery shards, Djenné-Djeno, dating from 250 B.C., is the site of the oldest-known city in West Africa.

On a brief stop back in Mopti, we took advantage of the incredibly low prices for handwoven blankets and other works of art in the market there. En route to Bamako, we spent a night in the colonial city of Ségou; a short drive east of the capital, it has an intriguing district of decaying mansions.

While walking with Amadou in Ségou two days before our departure, I was feeling glum about leaving when we noticed monkeys crossing the road in front of us. It was a good sign, he explained: "Our elders say if you are beginning a trip and you see a monkey going to the left, it's bad luck. If it's going to the right, it's good." These monkeys were headed to the right, which was probably why he brought it up. But another trip member pointed out that we were finishing a trip, not beginning one. "No," said Amadou, "I believe you are beginning a new trip, the day after tomorrow." Which, given all that we had seen and done, was exactly right. *(see following page for The Facts)*

THE FACTS

MALI



A Tuareg vendor awaits buyers.

November to February is the best time to visit Mali and avoid the rainy season; the weather is warm and dry, with daytime temperatures in the 80s, nights in the 50s.

Outfitters

Throughout most of Mali, travelers on a budget can explore without a guide or employ local ones, but they should use extra caution in the north, including Timbuktu, where there is still occasional unrest. Comfort, efficiency, and safety are all increased if you go with an experienced tour company such as those listed here. Prices include round-trip airfare from New York, hotel accommodations in a shared room, local transportation, and some meals. Prospective travelers should always inquire about minimum and maximum group size and which transatlantic airline is used.

Wilderness Travel *801 Allston Way, Berkeley, CA 94710; 800/368-2794 or 510/548-0420.* This good-size company, which I used, has the advantages of relatively frequent departures and the excellent guide services of Africa expert Magnus Andersson. This year's trips are Feb. 1–17, Feb. 15–Mar. 3, Nov. 1–17, and Nov. 22–Dec. 6. The cost is $4,960.

Turtle Tours *Box 1147, Carefree, AZ 85377; 602/488-3688, fax 602/488-3406.* Irma Turtle's roster of trips has expanded beyond its beginnings in the Sahara, but it remains her specialty. Group size is small, usually five to nine people, and Turtle herself leads the Mali trips. The 1995 departures are Nov. 19 and Dec. 17; the cost is $4,890 for 15 days.

Museum for African Art *593 Broadway, New York, NY 10012; 212/966-1313.* The museum's series of trips to West Africa, led by Jerry Vogel, the first Fulbright professor to teach in francophone Africa, emphasizes local art and architecture. The next Mali trip leaves January 19, 1996. The cost is $4,900 for 14 days, $600 of which is a tax-deductible contribution to the museum.

Born Free Safaris *12504 Riverside Dr., North Hollywood, CA 91607; 800/372-3274 or 818/981-7185.* Born Free will design itineraries for independent travelers with local guides and stops in Mopti, Dogon country, Timbuktu, and Djenné. Prices depend on itinerary and trip length; a seven-day journey will run $4,250.

Good buys: ***colorful blankets, silver, toys, and masks ("très ancien" and not so)***

Gear

T-shirts, shorts, and lightweight cotton pants serve well in the daytime; long-sleeved shirts, a lightweight sweater, and a waterproof windbreaker will round out the evening wardrobe. Pack a pair of sturdy walking shoes, along with sandals or rubber thongs. A brimmed hat, sunglasses, bandannas, Chap Stick, and sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 make up a good arsenal against the sun.

Extra items for the toilet kit should include insect repellent, Pepto Bismol, a topical antibiotic like Neosporin, and toilet paper. Take one large thin (and, therefore, quick-drying) towel and some liquid laundry soap. A flashlight is very useful.

Many travelers bound for Africa pack their gear in large duffel bags with small padlocks to fasten shut the zipper. A good idea is to place a smaller, empty duffel bag inside the big one, which will come in handy for carrying home your acquired treasures. Use a daypack for your carry-on luggage, as well as for hikes and shopping excursions to markets.

Health

Drink only boiled or bottled water, or bottled carbonated beverages, all without ice; avoid raw vegetables or fruit that can't be peeled. There are few mosquitoes during the dry season, but you should still take antimalarials and the recommended vaccinations: typhoid, yellow fever, polio, tetanus-diphtheria, and a gamma-globulin shot. For more information, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's International Traveler's Hotline, 404/332-4559.

Shopping

The market in Mopti is famous for colorful handwoven blankets, particularly Bambara and Fulani wedding blankets, which make striking wall hangings. Look for silver in Bamako and other jewelry there and throughout the country. Masks and other wood carvings, usually copies sold as "très ancien," are good buys, especially in Dogon country. Keep an eye out for folk crafts: toy trucks made from old tin cans and calabashes repaired so often they look like quilted bowls.

In Dogon villages and the Mopti market, old chains, bronze figurines, and other antiquities will be shown to

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you; those that are genuine are sought by collectors in the West and have most likely been stolen from archaeological sites. Consider carefully before buying.

Vendors can be persistent. Patience and a sense of humor help immeasurably in the mandatory bargaining process. In the cities, beware of individuals who offer to negotiate the best prices with vendors but demand a large tip for their services.

Cassette tapes of Malian music tend to be of poor quality. Unless you're looking for obscure recordings, it's best to buy from large music stores back home where works by such stars as Oumou Sangaré and Salif Keita are often available. However, if you do buy cassettes in a market, follow the African lead: have your selection played to avoid purchasing a blank tape.

With the CFA, the West African currency, devalued by 50 percent in 1994, prices are lower than ever. Take traveler's checks in French franc denominations. —Ted Conover

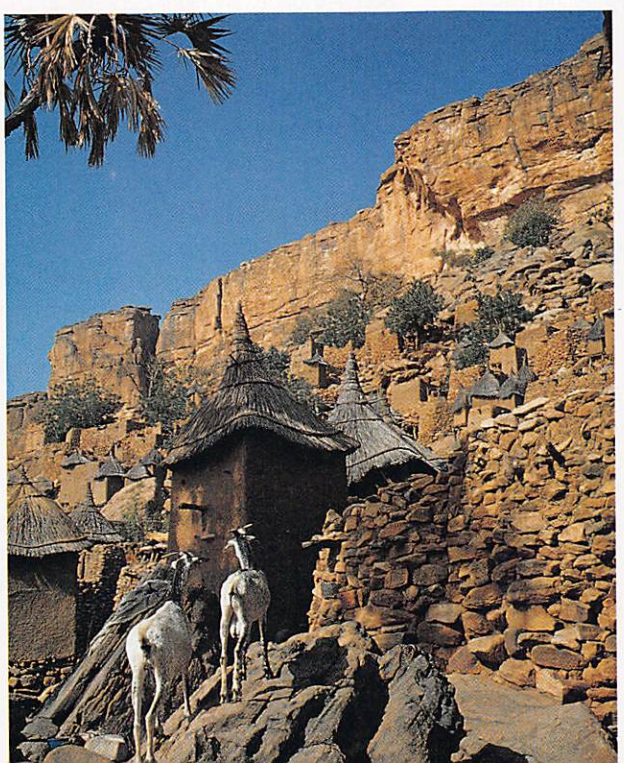
Best Books

Travel Survival Kit: West Africa (*Lonely Planet Publications*)—Packed with hard-to-find practical information and good maps, this is an indispensable guide for the independent traveler.

The Lost Cities of Africa by Basil Davidson *(Little, Brown)*—A fascinating study of Timbuktu, Cush, Benin, Songhai, and all the other cultural powers that flourished south of the Sahara in the 1,500 years before the first Europeans arrived.

Travels in West Africa by Mary Kingsley *(Charles E. Tuttle)*—The incredible adventures of a 30-year-old woman who ventured alone into the deserts and jungles of West Africa in the 1890s.

Impossible Journey: Two Against the Sahara by Michael Asher *(Penguin Books)*—Vividly detailed, this account of a west-to-east crossing of the Sahara by a young man and his bride will leave you breathless. —Martin Rapp



The Dogon village of Komokane.