

2:00 P.M. I chair the selection committee for participants in an upcoming exchange. We always have far more qualified applicants than there are places available, and this program is no exception. As I page through applications from doctors, I'm struck by how few materials and training opportunities are available to them here in Tajikistan. Last winter, many had no power in their hospitals and clinics for months, but they still managed to treat patients and deliver babies. Many professionals have left the country, but those who remain are extremely dedicated to their work despite the immense challenges they face. It feels good to give them a chance to meet colleagues in the United States and learn more about simple preventive health measures that could save lives here.

4:00 P.M. Local English teachers participating in a three-week training we're sponsoring in Dushanbe drop by the office. They show me a newsletter they've published about their experience, and ask if I can visit their class next week to talk about exchange opportunities for teachers. Their English has improved markedly since they started the program, and their enthusiasm is through the roof.

5:15 P.M. Time to get some exercise! An officer in our Defense Attaché Office is also an aerobics instructor, and she teaches classes after work several times a week. Even when I'm feeling lazy, it's hard not to go when the class is 50 feet from my office. While I'm in the class, my husband plays soccer outside with embassy colleagues.

6:30 P.M. Sweaty but happy, we head home and shower and change in time to meet friends for dinner. Expatriates working for nongovernmental organizations comprise our regular group, and we try to have dinner together every Friday night. After dinner we head to the plaza in front of Dushanbe's opera house, which turns into a barbeque and beer garden in the summer. It's a great way to end the day.

Anne Benjaminson, from New York City, joined the Foreign Service as an economic officer in 2004. Her first assignment was a consular position in Budapest, Hungary. From Tajikistan, she moved in 2008 to a job in the Embassy Kabul economic section, followed by a tour in the State Department Economic Bureau, Office of Aviation Negotiations. A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, she speaks Russian, Hungarian, and Spanish, as well as some Tajik/Dari.

A Day in the Life of...

AN ECONOMIC/ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND HEALTH OFFICER

EMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA, HONDURAS

By Jason McInerney

NOVEMBER 2007

4:45 A.M. Okay, I'm up. An embassy car will pick me up in 15 minutes. I shower quickly and do a final check of my backpack. I've traded in my suit for

cargo pants and a collared shirt, sturdy hiking boots, bug spray, and plenty of socks. Water bottles, earplugs, and a change of clothes complete my gear.

5:00 A.M. The doorbell rings and I head out into the fading coolness of early morning. My driver and I are headed to the military side of the international airport. Honduran President Manuel Zelaya has invited all the ambassadors serving in Tegucigalpa to join him on a two-day visit to see his nation's efforts at protecting a remote rain forest. It was a last-minute invitation and our ambassador is unavailable, but Deputy Chief of Mission Jim Williard remembered I'd been trying to arrange a reporting trip to the rain forest. Would I like to go? As an economic officer in charge of environmental issues, I jumped at the chance.

6:00 A.M. We arrive at the airport. A few of the guests are already there, and many more stream in over the next three hours. There are Cabinet-level officials from the government of Honduras, an assortment of foreign ambassadors or their deputies, and media representatives. I chat with the minister of forestry, learning how population growth and the relentless conversion of forest to pasture and then to farmland puts pressure on protected areas.

9:30 A.M. The presidential airplane is an old, white C-130 transport plane. Earplugs in hand, I toss my bag onto the luggage pile and board via the rear ramp. Conversation fades as the engines rev up and we lift off. It is impossible to see out the passenger window, so I jot down some notes from earlier discussions and then catch a little sleep.

10:15 A.M. Bump, bump. It's a good landing, considering the dirt airstrip. We're halfway to our destination. We're on a rarely used military runway, and there are no facilities besides a water truck, a tarp to protect us from the intense sun, and two colorful, ancient buses that will transport us to the other end of the runway. Three helicopters appear over the horizon. Two more helicopters appear later, and all five will make multiple trips, shuttling us to the jungle.

1:30 P.M. We jump onto an ancient Huey helicopter and take off. The "RPM Limit" warning light flashes red for most of the flight. I try to ignore it and focus on the scenery. Flying at low altitude, we can see farmland transition to forest, though the forest contains several permanent-looking, and illegal, logging settlements. We land, hop out, and head to camp.

2:05 P.M. This rain forest is not what I expected. For one thing, we're fairly high up, so it's warm but not hot. There are pine trees here alongside their subtropical cousins, and no triple canopy in sight. I leave my backpack on an old army cot in one of the large green canvas tents and head to the lunch tent. We're



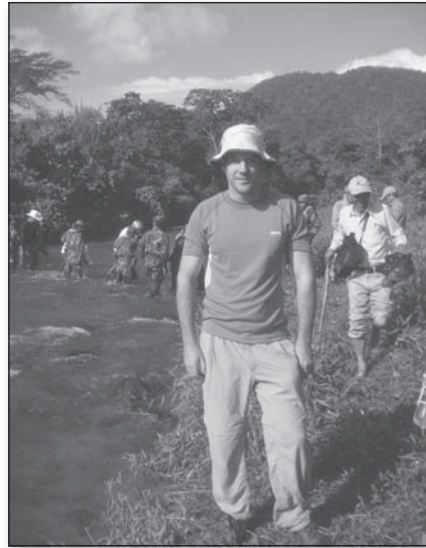
On the way to the Rio Platanó Biosphere Reserve.

all hungry and dig into the meal of rice and chicken. I meet a German from a nongovernmental organization who has spent many months meeting with residents of the illegal logging communities inside the forest, with government officials, and with other NGOs. He's an expert and a great source of information.

3:30 P.M. The guests are getting restless. Finally, President Zelaya arrives via helicopter and greets us in turn. Tomorrow, the military will lead us on a hike through the rain forest. Today, improbably, we are treated to a PowerPoint presentation, set up inside an army tent, showcasing how the Honduran Army patrols the jungle and protects it from illegal loggers. It is a monumental task, especially for a country this poor. Nevertheless, the deforestation rate is comparatively low for Central America, so the military presence is having some effect. During the presentation I jot down notes from the conversations I had during lunch. Back at the embassy, I will write a report on what I've learned.

6:30 P.M. I trade in my notebook for a flashlight and descend a dark, muddy trail. Dinner is being served in a tent near the river. Colorful lights ring the dinner tent, lending a festive atmosphere slightly at odds with the remainder of the excursion. Although the focus of this trip is the rainforest, I am also responsible for covering the Honduran energy sector, and value the opportunity to meet and speak with the newly appointed energy minister after dinner. Later, I meet the Japanese deputy chief of mission and several high-ranking Honduran military officers.

10:45 P.M. A Honduran band sings folk songs inside the dinner tent. President Zelaya and a few members of his Cabinet join them. It is not for show; Zelaya is from Olancho, cowboy country, and he knows the songs by heart. Slowly the guests begin to trickle back to their tents. One logistical casualty of this hastily planned trip was sleeping bags. There are only a few, and they go to the president and his entourage. The night air is cold, so I use my spare clothes and mosquito net as blankets. Other guests, similarly without sleeping bags, grumble about the cold as I drift off to sleep.



Jason McInerney after crossing the Platano River.

After serving in the U.S. Air Force, Jason McInerney joined the Foreign Service in 2003. He has served in Naha, Japan; Tegucigalpa, Honduras; Washington, D.C.; and San Jose, Costa Rica. He and his wife, Miluska, have two children.