

## Bekoji Blog



*Shane Benzie training in Bekoji*

"I'm running at a pace that I know my body will soon refuse to keep up. Two sounds enter my head momentarily blocking out the voice that is screaming at me to stop and just sit down. The first sound is my breathing, we are at altitude, 9200 ft and just when I need it most the air seems unfairly thin. The second sound is the rhythmic footfall of the eight athletes surrounding me; their steps are quick, light and in perfect harmony. Apart from that they are completely silent, not a sound, I can't hear them breathe and some are actually smiling. Then with no words spoken or a warning of any kind they move up a gear and I am left behind to watch a blur of colour glide smoothly away".

I am in Bekoji, known as the town of runners training with some of Ethiopia's best young prospects and the learning curve is as steep as the hills they train on.

Runners from the tiny Ethiopian town of Bekoji have won 8 Olympic gold medals, broken 10 World records and won 32 World championships

I was extremely privileged to accompany Malcolm Anderson co-founder of Running Across Borders and Kayla Nolan the Executive Director of Girls Gotta Run to Bekoji. It gave me an amazing opportunity to see first hand how these two organisations work with and support young athletes. Not only do they help to produce potential world-class athletes, they also help young people to develop as individuals and find careers in industry related jobs such as coaching and sports massage.

The reason for my visit was to train at the camp and work with their coaches to understand how this small town manages to produce world-class athletes that would, in just about any other country, be pride of the entire nation.

At the heart of the coaching is a man with a smile the size of the Rift Valley and a personality to match. His name is Sentayehu Eshetu, affectionately known as

'Coach' by the athletes and the residents of the town. On my first meeting with him he explained that the continued success of the young athletes from Bekoji was down to a combination of thin air, lean diet and training on varied terrain. Could it really be so simple?

The training sessions consist of long warm-ups that introduce rhythm into the running and, depending on the terrain, the practice of speed, endurance and technique. The training alternates between forest, track, the road to fields and long cross-country sessions. It ends with a discussion on the athletes' progression and subjects such as nutrition, hydration and how to rest between training sessions. In all the time I was there I didn't hear Coach raise his voice once and, enviably, enjoyed the complete and utter attention of his students at all times; testament to his coaching and their focus and eagerness to learn.



*Shane with Coach Zagaye*

Training with the athletes and working with the coaches was fascinating, not least because as a Running Reborn technique coach, the principles I teach are in many ways very similar. This was confirmed by using gait analysis to break down the athletes running form. Techniques are introduced to the athletes in a very simple and natural way, something I will certainly incorporate more of to my coaching method here in the UK. The reason I love to run and to teach others to run, is that it is so natural to our bodies; in Bekoji Coach Sentayehu takes that concept to a whole new level.

I spent a lot of my time working with Coach Zagaye. This is a young man who has recently moved from competing to coaching. He exudes the endless energy that all Ethiopian athletes seem to have and has a focus and determination that confirms his pride and sense of achievement at being offered a coaching role in an environment that has proved again and again to be so successful.

I was so impressed with him and learnt so much from him that I discussed with Malcolm Anderson from Running Across Borders and Coach Sentayehu, the possibility of Running Reborn sponsoring him through his coaching career. I am happy to say that everyone, not least Coach Zagaye, was in favour of this, which is

fantastic. Not only will the sponsorship ensure that a very talented coach will be able to recognise his potential, it also means that Running Reborn will be able to continue our study in understanding just what it takes to make the Ethiopians such great runners and include these methods in the way we teach.

One of the many things I took from this trip was that we could all learn a tremendous amount from the Bekoji Runners, in mind and in body.

Running Reborn will continue to work with Coaches Sentayehu and Zagaye and will keep you up to date with events from Bekoji, as well as what we're up to in the UK.