

'The Abyssinian Difficulty'

Retracing a Victorian Expedition

In 1868 the British government mounted an extraordinary bid to rescue a clutch of European hostages in the Ethiopian highlands. They built a Red Sea port, then a railway across the coastal plain, and finally imported 44 Indian elephants and commissioned 26,000 local people to serve the soldiers and carry their heavy artillery into the heart of Africa.



A hundred and fifty years later, John will follow in their footsteps and look at the changes that have swept through Eritrea and Ethiopia in the intervening years. He says, "I'm very excited about going back to Africa. This will be a chance to think about how Europe's relations with Eritrea and Ethiopia have moved forward, but most of all about how far we still have to go.

"Only the Victorians would

have set off on such a mad mission. The captives were being held in a supposedly impregnable hilltop fortress near Lalibela, 300 miles inland. Despite arduous conditions, the invaders reached it, freed them, and vanquished the emperor who for four years had been their persecutor. They then looted his rich collection of art treasures – which they saw as booty – but to its credit Whitehall resisted the temptation to turn the success into a full-scale colonisation bid. Had it done so, the Horn of Africa's history might have turned out rather differently. Instead, they simply made their way back to the coast, dismantled the infrastructure and took their elephants home.

"As well as meeting today's Eritreans and Ethiopians, of course I'll capture the drama of the route with lots of photographs, and will

put the best of them into a new presentation which will be ready **in October 2018**. The slide/sound show '**The Abyssinian Difficulty**': **Retracing a Victorian Expedition** will generally last an hour, but I can easily adjust this to your needs. I'll provide all the equipment, including a choice of big screens."



My fee for this talk is £420 plus travelling expenses. If you'd like to make a booking please get in touch. My contact details are:

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