

CHANGING PLANET



The tribes of Ethiopia's Lower Omo Valley in Photographs

In [Changing Planet](#) April 26, 2016 [0 Comments](#)



[Joanna Eede](#)

The Omo River rises on the mountainous plateau of Ethiopia's Shewan Highlands, then flows for hundreds of kilometres through lush grasslands, acacia plains and riverine forests, until it reaches Kenya's Lake Turkana.

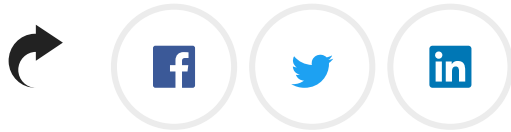
The river's lower valley, in the southwest corner of the country, is a wild, beautiful, remote region. In the mud and volcanic rock of the Omo's banks, paleontologists have found the fossilized remnants of early hominids, discoveries that have contributed to man's understanding of human evolution.

The Lower Omo Valley is a region where migrating peoples with a broad genetic and linguistic diversity converged. Today herdsman, agro-pastoralists and fishermen still live along the lower reaches of the river. Many depend on the flood cycles of the Omo for their survival. Every year the Omo swells, overflows, and deposits silt on the riverbanks as it retreats. It is on this rich, fertile silt that the valley's tribes have long planted crops such as sorghum, corn, maize and beans.

Matilda Temperley's new book, 'Omo - Change in the Valley' is a collection of sensitive and strikingly composed images that are not only testament to the beauty and diversity of the Omo peoples, but a reminder that there are many different ways of being human. Matilda's photographs, captions and text also show the grim reality of what is happening to their ancestral lands. As she describes, the construction of hydroelectric dam 'Gibe 111' will limit the flow of water to the south-western area of the Omo River, so threatening the region's ecology, wildlife and the tribe's flood recession techniques.

"Since my first visit to the Omo Valley ... I have witnessed a change in both the landscape and its inhabitants," Matilda writes. "While modernisation is inevitable, in the Omo it appears to be at the expense of the inhabitants rather than at their hands. The scars are visible in the hundreds of thousands of acres of

bare earth waiting to be planted by multinational corporations. The current pace of change driven by the industrial farming practices is impossible for the people of the valley to assimilate.”



MEET THE AUTHOR

Joanna Eede was an editorial consultant to Survival International with a particular interest in the relationship between man and nature and tribal peoples. She has created and edited three environmental books, including *Portrait of England* (Think Publishing, 2006) and *We are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples* (Quadrille, 2009). Joanna writes for newspapers and magazines on subjects such as the repatriation of wild Przewalski horses to Mongolia, the whales of the Alboran sea, the chimpanzees of the Mahale rainforest, uncontacted tribes of the Amazon rainforest and the Hadza hunter gatherer people of Tanzania. Future ideas include a book about Tibet's nomads.



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