

Madagascar for Real



Highway crossing over rapids on the Betsiboka River near Mahajanga. (David Parks photo)

When the rains come to the central highlands, the land is transported away in amazing torrents in which even the froth is red. The photo above illustrates the severe erosion that is common in Madagascar. Sediments estimated to be 130 feet deep were deposited in the estuary of the Betsiboka River between 1900 and 1950. Such extreme erosion is decreasing the ability of the land to support both human needs and natural ecosystems.



Clearing previously uncut rainforest along the Ambanizana River at the west edge of the Masoala Peninsula. (David Parks photo)

On the Masoala Peninsula (left), as in most of the rest of Madagascar, the poorest people are the leading edge of rainforest clearance. Such people are often among the last to receive any benefits from development programs or regional economic growth.

Cutting and burning have claimed half of the rainforest on the opposite hillside in only a few years. This rate of clearing quickly results in total loss of forest cover. The Masoala Peninsula area has the largest remaining concentration of undisturbed rainforest in Madagascar. A new national park was established there in 1997.