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Endawoke on Scientific Mission

Editor's note:
The last page is
"the First Day"
page.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 16, 2013

16 August 2013

Finally, I made it home safely today. I got reunited with my kids! I can say that my scientific mission almost all went out successfully!! I'm confident that I'll have the most productive collaboration with the Guinean and Ivorian scientists who are hosting my AMBER mags. Special thanks to Kathryn who work very hard to make the installation a success! I also thank everyone who participated on the installation process!!!

Posted by [Endawoke Yizengaw](#) at 5:57 PM No comments:



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Last day in Abidjan (15 August 2013)

What a fantastic day. We met Prof Obrou at our hotel lobby just on time. Since it was a holiday, we had nothing to do unless going around until our flight time. Prof Obrou started our tour by driving us to Treichville district where most West Africans (Senegalese and Ghanaian) reside and run small business. We went there just exchange dollar into CFA at the private forex (they call it black market). Then we drove off to Grand Bassam, which is close to where Prof Obrou lives, just to enjoy the Mediterranean ocean breath at the beach. It is very Amazing to hear that, in many African countries still the former colonial power has a visible control of its former colonies. We saw a huge French military base just nearby the countries major international airport. We asked Prof Obrou about it, and his replies were obvious. He said this base has been there even before the 2011 political unrest.

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Enjoying the Mediterranean ocean breath at Grand Bassam beach!!

We went to one of the beautiful beach-side restaurant for lunch. We had no plan to have lunch there actually. We found out that if we came only for the beach we have to pay 2000 CFA (~\$4) per person, but if we have lunch there the beach will be free. However, the restaurant is a bit higher than the nearby restaurants. At the beach we enjoyed the water a little bit, and had a nice lunch. After lunch Prof Obrou invited us to see his small pig farm. on our way to his farm we got an opportunity to see the landscape of the countryside of Ivory Coast. It is so beautiful and so green. We arrived at his farm and saw his pigs. We also had a chance to visit the nearby chickens farm, rubber tree forest (it is my first time I saw rubber trees), and cassava trees. BTW, recently I listen VOA radio that one man is trying his level best to introduce cassava as an alternate and healthy food to the northern part of Ethiopia. Good idea, it is really good food.



Back to Abidjan, Second Day in Abidjan (10 August ...

Sixth Day in Conakry (9 August 2013)

Fifth Day in Conakry (8 August 2013)

Forth Day in Conakry (7 August 2013)

Third Day in Conakry (6 August 2013)

Second Day in Conakry (5 August 2013)

First Day in Conakry (4 August 2013)

First Day in Abidjan (3 August 2013)



Pics with Cassava tree at Prof Obrou's farm!



Prof Obrou's pig farm!



The rubber juice (black vertical strip) is coming out of Rubber tree



The oldest kingdom of the Grand Bassam

Afterwards, we went to gift shops on our way back to the airport, and we bought something. Finally, before even noticed it, our time in Abidjan in particular and in Africa in general is coming to end so fast, and Prof Obrou drove us to the airport just before the Sun denies its brightness for the day. What a wonderful hospitality, Obrou!! Thank you so much and looking forward to continue enjoying our brotherly friendship

forever!!!

Posted by [Endawoke Yizengaw](#) at 12:24 PM No comments:



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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14, 2013

Sixth Day in Abidjan (14 August 2013)

Today's date was a kind of so so. We haven't accomplished that much. It was not just we did not do anything, but we tried our level best to push things to the end. The IP address issue did not move forward that much, and is still in limbo. Since tomorrow is another public holiday and we do not access to the institute, we just gave up testing the IP address functionality while we are here. So, we hope (actually they are working on it right now) the local IT personnel will handle the problem soon. Like Guinea, in Abidjan there is an internet service provider (ISP) to handle the firewall issue. That means once the internal IP address problem get solved, the institute personnel still should contact the ISP people to open the firewall port for us. They already started talking each other. Other than that, the instrument is recording excellent data.



Prof Obrou putting a wire on the GPS for grounding, just to protect from lightning!!

After lunch Kathryn and I had to split, and Kathryn, with Prof Obrou's student another professor from the same university, stayed at the site to see if the IP address get resolved. I went to the university to meet the director of the laboratory which provided help to simplify the custom issue, and in fact the head of our collaborator. Prof Obrou and I arrived at the university in the middle of student seminar presentation. The MSc student were presenting their research work progress in front of the professors, lab director, and fellow students. There were about 30-40 people in that room. Although I did not understand what they were talking about due to language barrier, I was so impressed with the brain storm discussion at the end of each student's presentation. Such student seminar presentation and brain storm discussion with their professors can be taken as role model for other universities across the entire Africa. Because, this provides an outstanding presentation experience as well as help them to understand their research work very well. I'm pro female scientist, especially African, and I was so impressed to see a female full professor in Atmospheric Physics at one of the African university (Cocody University). Hope the young Ivorian female student will follow her foot steps.



An MSc student presenting his work to the audience!!



Some of the professors who are listening student presentation!!!

Finally, Prof Vafi, another professor and a friend of mine, drove me back to the hotel from the university. We picked Kathryn and he took us to the nice restaurant which is located in Riviera suburb. The food was delicious. On the way back to our hotel from dinner, Prof Vafi drove us through the hotel where President Alassane Ouattara was protected by the French army during the 2011 political crises. It is not that big hotel and not far from the US embassy.

As I said tomorrow is a holiday and it will be our final day in Abidjan and in Africa. We'll head back home tomorrow late in the evening.

Posted by Endawoke Yizengaw at 4:15 PM No comments:



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TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2013

Fifth Day in Abidjan (13 August 2013)

Wow! The best day ever. Here is how it started. I wake up early in the morning to meet Prof Obrou's student at 7:00AM at our hotel lobby. In deed he came on time. We hired a taxi and went to the site where we supposed to be for the day. We arrived at the site early, and Prof Obrou came with the instrument a bit late. We got a spot for our electronics and good home for the sensor. The real job started and everything went out successfully. This is my fifth magnetometer I deployed with Kathryn, and it was our first time that we accomplished this far in one day. Here is what we accomplished just today. Sensor securely buried and aligned, internet get connected (though the IP address issue is still pending) so that we can see the UDP on our website, GPS antenna securely mounted on top of the building, what else left? Nothing, except IP address

and firewall issue, and other very little minor pending tasks which do not take that long. Isn't that the best day of our mission?



Our electronics got a safe corner spot!



The sensor deployment process started!



Sensor burial and alignment process completed, smiley face!!



GPS antenna securely mounted

Finally, we concluded our successful day by having nice dinner at the 331 best African restaurant. Tomorrow, we will go and see how the firewall issue will be handled, and finish-up our pending minor tasks.

Posted by [Endawoke Yizengaw](#) at 3:35 PM No comments:



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MONDAY, AUGUST 12, 2013

Fourth Day in Abidjan (12 August 2013)

Holly ShishKabob! *Today's day was an emotional, longest, funniest, luckiest (you name it) day for me. This is the day that I faced yet again the complicated typical African custom clearance procedures. Here is how we started our day. Prof Obrou was supposed to meet us from our hotel. Instead he sent his student to meet us at the hotel lobby. We then hired a driver to take us to the Abidjan airport custom office, where our instrument located. We met Prof Obrou outside and we went to the clearance company that University Cocody hired to do custom clearance for them, such as our instrument. The custom clearance officer told us the delay is due to the new rule that new government introduced regarding how to handle the tax fees waiving for material that will be used for academic purpose. He updated us the procedures that we have to go through to finalize the process and get the instrument release. The procedural steps are; 1) Print a form that's been released by Customs office 2) bring it to sea port and get a signature 3) bring it back to the airport custom office to pick up our instrument. Okay! Well that sounds easy enough. I become suddenly muted, but Kathryn asked where is this form and how it can be accessed? The answer was simple, "wait". Waiting for what? she throw another question. Response? simple again, "we're waiting for the guy to finish filling the form next door". We went to go next door, and we saw a guy filling the form. we were asked to leave the guy alone and let him finish what he is doing. Prof Obrou lead us outside the compound and asked me if he can go and get his car fixed, and he wanted us to seat at the nearby market until he gets back. Then I get un-muted and boldly asked him not to go anywhere until we finalize this process. Thanks to him, he listened to me and stayed with us at the nearby market.*

After about 20 minute we went back to the clearance company office, and we found out that the form has to not only be filled out, but also submitted, but did not go through. Why? The quote number is incorrect. Then we went to the chief officer of the Abidjan airport custom office to get a proper quote. The officer, who seems to be nice and helpful, he would like to cut short the procedures and to do that he requested the custom clearance officer to bring him a letter of petition and he will sign on it and shorten the process. That means we do not have to go to the sea port, and everything will be done right there.

Fantastic!! right? After a few back and forth hassle (due to wrong authentication number usage, I guess), the chief officer signed off the petition and shortened the process. We personally convey our appreciation to the chief officer and gave our business card.



Having lunch at one of the nearby African restaurants

Another problem (may be minor), when we got everything approved for release, those people at the lower level who register and inspect our instrument were out for lunch. Guess how long the lunch break is? Two and half hours! yes! two and half hours (12:00 - 2:30 PM). I never heard such a long lunch break. After lunch, the process was a bit quick; we get it registered, reunited with our instrument for inspection (they open everything and inspect it and even photographed our messy magnetometer box). Then we (Kathryn and I) stayed with our instrument and Prof Obrou went with the inspector officer and finalized the process and finally we got okay to take our instrument. The instrument loaded into Prof Obrou's car. Yes! one more inspection! The guard at main gate has to do a final inspection and sign off paper and he did. Finally, the mag has left the customs. I repeat! The mag has been out of the custom jail. Right outside the custom office I just got a long breath of relief and hug the car that carries my mag.



Reunited with the instrument at the airport custom store!



Got our instrument loaded on Prof Obrou's car but still in the custom compound!



Hugging Prof Obrou's car when I made sure that the instrument really got out of jail!!

Prof Obrou took the mag with him and we took a taxi and got back to our hotel, and started celebrating the great achievement we performed today. One thing I should say is this, it was the right decision that we accompany Prof Obrou to the custom office. It was clear that our presence gave a little pressure and speed up the process.

Tomorrow we will start the real work!

Posted by Endawoke Yizengaw at 11:46 AM No comments:



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SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 2013

Third Day in Abidjan (11 August 2013)

As I said yesterday, there was nothing to do today. I had a chance to do my other business in the morning. In the afternoon, we went for walk around for exploration. The street was absolutely quiet, except a few taxis roaring around. We went to St. Paul's Cathedral in Abidjan. It took 82 years to complete the construction, and can accommodate upto 3500 people at a time. It was designed by an Italian architect Aldo Spirito, and first consecrated by Pope John Paul II during his first pastoral visit to Côte d'Ivoire on 11 May 1980. His (Pope John Paul II) statue is standing outside the church. The crucifixion exemplary towers are fascinating, and if you are strong and would like to climb about 250 stairs, you can go to the top and enjoy the view of the entire Abidjan. We were so fortunate and climbed all the stairs, with an inclination of about 45 degree, all the way to the top of the central tower. O! the view? well! what can you say, except simply marvelous!!!



Partial side view of St. Paul's Cathedral in Abidjan



Enjoying the view of Abidjan city from the top of the tower!!!

Although Saint Paul's Cathedral served as a refuge shelter for approximately 1,800 Ivorian fleeing violence during the height of the 2011 Ivorian political crisis that engulfed Abidjan, but it was escaped from being damaged. The beautifully architected roof of the cathedral has been damaged partially as shown in the picture below. That caused leakage in some part of the church, and water buckets are everywhere in the church to collect the leakage. We were told that it was already estimated that 12M Euro is required to renovate/repair the damage.



Partially damaged roof of the Cathedral



Ivorian has one of the best national soccer team, and wonder how much this stadium contribute to it:)



Another beautiful view of the city from the cathedral tower!

Our free day concluded successfully. After our visit to the cathedral, we decided to go and have dinner outside our hotel. We were recommended, by the receptionist, the French restaurant. The reception guy arranged a taxi for us, and surprisingly the taxi driver speaks fluent English. Unfortunately or fortunately, the French restaurant was closed. We asked the taxi driver what other restaurant that he can recommend. He responded right away and recommended us the best African restaurant. It was in deed the best, and we had excellent evening. What a wonderful day!!.

Now, we are back to our hotel and very much excited and a bit nervous to find out the fate of our instrument tomorrow. We will meet Prof Obrou at 8:00am here at our hotel. Please do not stop from wishing the best of the best for us!!

Posted by Endawoke Yizengaw at 2:58 PM No comments:



SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 2013

Back to Abidjan, Second Day in Abidjan (10 August 2013)

Today, I had to wake up at 5:30am to finalize everything (packing, checking out which was surprisingly easy and fast) before we leave Conakry. Our driver came a few minutes before the scheduled time. He drove us to the airport on a very quiet road which makes our driving to the airport so short. Of course, it was raining hard. We checked in our stuff and were given hand written boarding pass; no seat number so you can grasp any seat you like; but not business class :). One thing which I do not understand is the connection between the

famous Ethiopian airline and Asky airlines. It is my second flight with Asky, and on both flights there was one supervisor from Ethiopian airline (with Ethiopian airline uniform), he just sat at the business class and supervise everything. I decided to talk to him, but at the time of dis-embarkations, he was no where to be found. However, later (in Abidjan) I found the answer. I was told that Ethiopian airline owns more than fifty percent of the entire share of Asky airline. Even the CEO of Asky airline is from Ethiopia.



Asky airline at Conakry airport

We arrived in Abidjan on time and greeted by Prof Obrou, his wife Madam Obrou, and one of his PhD student. Prof Obrou and Madam Obrou drove us to our hotel (Ivotel), we had lunch together at our hotel. After lunch, we went to the potential site of AMBER magnetometer. It is a bit far from our hotel. The site looks great home for AMBER. We identified two possible specific locations for the sensor. The question is when and how we can get the instrument that we sent a month ago out of the custom office? Since we do not have the instrument, there is nothing we can do about today and possibly tomorrow too as every offices are closed on Sunday.



Around the site location where AMBER mag will be housed!

Prof Obrou drove us to his university, Cocody University. Although the university got damaged significantly during the 2011 riot, the current government put a lot of effort and renovate it nicely. Actually, for me, the campus looks very beautiful, though I had no idea what it looks like before 2011 riot. It could be much more attractive than the current condition. We looked around almost the entire campus, thanks to Prof Obrou who drove us around and gave us detail briefing about each departments. We went to the Botany garden where the Japanese MAGDAS team had a magnetometer, which was vandalized during the riot. We also drove around the city before we bounded into our hotel for the rest of the day.



Inside Cocody university compound



Around Abidjan city

Monday (12 August) is a crucial day for the success of our installation, and we (myself and Kathryn) will accompany Prof Obrou to the custom office at the airport to collect the instrument. I was told the crucial paperwork from the custom headquarter is already acquired. Please wish us best of luck, and I hope I'll report good news on Monday!!

Posted by Endawoke Yizengaw at 4:58 PM No comments:



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Sixth Day in Conakry (9 August 2013)

Today is our last day we can visit our instrument. Our driver came way earlier than scheduled time. When we arrived at the institute, we were escorted to Dr Bamba's office. I presented him a vest with ISR of BC logo on it. Then he escorted us to the director general office and had a small business meeting with the directors and director general. We talked about how we make our collaboration more beneficial to both sides. They also told us that the institute has been authorized by the president of Guinea (President Professor Alfa Conde) to offer MSc and PhD in various fields. Thus currently, they have enrolled more than 25 students for both PhD and MSc programs.

Alpf (the IT person) came to the institute at 10:00am with good news. He solved the iBoot connection problem. Of course I had to wake up Matt, which was 6:00am in Boston, to tell me if he can see the iBoot, and sure he did. That was a big success.

I was also asked to give a training (they call it training but actually it is a formal presentation) to the PhD and MSc candidates. I gave about 45minute presentation (remember all my texts are translated to French). Kathryn also gave about 20 minute

presentation. When we left the conference room, we faced another unexpected situation. Remember what the minister requested, i.e., to broadcast my briefing on TV? Well! Here it comes. The minister did not even send the TV crew, instead he brought them with him. Another impressive commitment. He asked me if I can do it again for the TV crew? He also introduced me to the TV crew and formally gave me formal goodbye greeting and left for his primary job. The TV crew made an interview with me, and asked me to go through the briefing that I did to the minister, and of course I did. That was really fun! Of course we had English to French translator to communicate with journalists.



The Guinean national TV interviewing me about my work in Guinea!



I was going through the slides that I used to brief the minister to the TV crew!



Kathryn explains the sensor to the TV crew!



Electronic table cleaned up before we leave!



Very happy face, with everything turns out a success in Conakry! I sincerely thank every single local people who helped us for the successful AMBER installation in Conakry. I also thank our crew at UCLA and Matt of BC for their unwavering support they provided to us.

After all these, Alfa drove us to lunch (because our driver wants to goto mosque for his Friday praying), this time to a different restaurant (Chinese one). After lunch we went back to the institute for a final checkup. Alfa, who became so friendly to us, spent the whole day with us. At the end of our final check up, he took us to the market to buy Guinean roasted coffee to take it with us back home. Guinean coffee is really very good.



Freshly roasted Guinean coffee, full of the pink bag.



On our way to the local market!

However, to go to our hotel it was a big traffic hassle. We were told that since it is holiday, every kid would like to go to the city center. That kept us on the street for more than an hour, and finally we made it to our hotel at about 7:20pm. We had an arrangement with our Canadian friend to take us out for dinner at a different restaurant. We did not get out from our hotel for dinner before. So, Alfa drove us, including our Canadian friend, to the French restaurant which is really good.



If you are on a one way street and has no any turning point, what would you do? Stay in your car and pray for the traffic ahead of you to clear out! that was what we did this afternoon to come to our hotel from the local market.

BTW, just a few things about Guinea. It gets its independence from France in October 1958. I was told Guinea was the first French colonies which get its independence. When Charles de Gaulle withdrew the French from Guinea, he took much of the country's infrastructure and large amounts of capital. Although I know the name President Ahmed Sékou Touré, who was one of the founding father of OAU (organization of African union) along with Haileselassie of Ethiopia and few others, I did not know that he was a president of Guinea. When President Toure fade up with the Westerns, he quickly aligned himself with the Soviet Union, and that opens a gate for many Guineans to go to Russia and did their higher education. Most scientists at the Institute speak Russian and received their graduate degrees from the Soviet Union. I was also told that the institute, where I put my magnetometer, was built by the Russians.

Another important thing I learned was that most business owners in Guinea are Lebanese. The reason, when the Christian Lebanese were being prosecuted by the Turkish, the French, knowing this, invited them to their colonies to be part of the business class in the French African Colonies. Wonder why they did not invite them to France instead of to French African colonies??

There is no check and balance political power in Guinea, which means there is no parliament. This implies everything will be decided by the president. The parliamentary election has been setback quite a few times, and now the parliamentary election is scheduled for September 2013, if it happens, because I did not see any election campaign posters around.

Well! That was our final day in Conakry. We'll be flying back to Abidjan to perform our similar mission there, though the instrument

is still at custom, cross our fingers to have successful installation!



I'm a beer drinker, but there are quite a few variety of choices to enjoy in Conakry!

Posted by [Endawoke Yizengaw](#) at 4:53 PM No comments:



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Fifth Day in Conakry (8 August 2013)

Today is very quite day. Everything is at silent mod, because it a big holiday (Eid) or end of Ramadan. We went to our hotel reception and start doing our stuff, waiting for our driver to show up . Nothing happen nor anyone from the institute came to pick us up until 10:30am. I asked the receptionist (he is very nice person BTW) if he can call Dr Bamba and ask him about today's plan. Then within less than 45 minute, Dr Bamba sent us a car to pick us. The driver told us Alfa will come to the institute at 3:00pm to help us setup the IP address issue. The driver took us to the place where we have lunch everyday, Riviera #2, which is close to the institute. Alfa came exactly at 3:00pm and stayed with us until the end. We managed to make SSH works so that our colleagues at BC and UCLA be able to download the data. One minor problem was our colleague at BC and UCLA couldn't see the iBoot. We tried different options but without success. We decided to left it there and give it a try tomorrow! Lets cross our fingers for tomorrow!!

Posted by [Endawoke Yizengaw](#) at 4:02 PM No comments:

Forth Day in Conakry (7 August 2013)

Since the director General told us he will come and pick us up at 9:00am and take us to the minister, we made ourselves ready (dressed up not as a scientist but as a business man or as a typical politician). BTW, I was also asked to prepare some slides to brief the minister, which I had to translate it to French (thanks to online translation, I did translate all the texts that I had on my slides. Don't ask me whether it is correct translation or not). Then unexpected thing happened at about 9:30am. Instead of the director general our normal driver came and told me that the minister is waiting for me at the institute, because, the driver said, the minister wants to see my instrument setup in person. Holly ShishKabob! It is unusual in Africa that the politician gave such a big attention and pause their political activities and came all the way to see a small space science instrument. I was so impressed with that. He seems a very nice person and easy to talk to. He also speaks very good English. I did all my best to brief him the practical application of the instrument. O! When I showed him comparison of map of instrumentation in Africa five years ago and now, he interrupted my briefing and shakes my hand 'with emotion' and said 'thank you for this'. It is obvious, but I've to mention it here; my role in populating Africa with instruments is way way very limited. Thanks to many other PIs who sent their instrument into Africa and they should get most of the credit. As soon as I finished my briefing, the first question he asked me was this "is that possible to broadcast it on TV for general public?". That sudden and unexpected question for me, but I know I have no other choice other than saying yes, if I want my instrument be healthy! I also had a feeling this won't happen, because I thought he will forget it when he engaged with his routine work. After the briefing I took him a tour to the electronics and then to the sensor location. He seems very happy and very helpful. Before he left the institute, he asked me a very familiar question; he asked if AMBER can help him to get a telescope. I got this question from many other political affiliated Africans, but have no idea why African politicians are fascinated with stars and planets!



Here is me (far right), briefing the minister. From right to left, me, H.E. minister of higher education of Guinea, director general of the institute, and Dr Kitha.



Here is me again, explaining about the sensor to the minister outside, with rain showering onto us. Thanks to his bodyguard, he brought us umbrella.

Right after, the minister left, the director general drove us to the internet service provider (IST) company called Mouna, which does the institute networking and IT configurations..The traffic was really bad and it took us an hour and 45 minute to get there. We met one engineer (Alfa), who can understand us what we were talking about. He speaks fluent English. Alfa has been in US quiet a few times. He promised me to get into our

problem on the same day. We were then driven back to our hotel and stay there on standby mod just in case Alfa calls or email us. Nothing happened on Wednesday after that. Wish us good luck for tomorrow!!



Humm! did Obama campaign here in Guinea for one of his elections? This is one of the office door at Mouna ISP company!

Posted by Endawoke Yizengaw at 2:52 PM No comments:



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Third Day in Conakry (6 August 2013)

We had to wait a little bit for our driver at the reception. Our driver picked us up around 9:00am. The data has a lot interference and we decided to move the sensor to another location, which I did it with the help of the local people. Of course, the massive rain was continue pouring on my body, making me to look like a mouse just getting out of its flooded winter home. However, the new site is by far the worst, and we decided to move it back to the previous location with one big promise from the director general. He agreed to close the pedestrian way and protect that area for various instrument installation purpose. Then we started permanent installation process and aligned the sensor, we put the GPS antenna in place. We accomplished most of the tasks today.



Ok! this will be the home for the sensor, start digging!



Layout the cable and put the sensor in a right position, vertical!!



Due to the language barrier, the sensor alignment was a bit hard. Kathryn and I communicated with cell phone and I was not allowed to have cell phone while I'm aligning the sensor! you can imagine what kind of back and forth shuttling we had to get perfect alignment! any way, finally we made it; smiley face with the sensor!



The GPS antenna got in place!



Bingo! the sensor got aligned, GPS antenna connected. One more thing remain, the IP address for data exchange! (picture shows me and Dr Bamba, our contact point in Conakry)!

Tomorrow will be a big day for us, because we were told that we gonna meet H. E. the minister of higher education and his stuff. Let's wait and see what will happen, goodnight for today!!

Posted by Endawoke Yizengaw at 2:38 PM No comments:



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