

## Mission Report – Buuhoodle and Taleex

15 – 19 May 2017



### The road to Buuhoodle

Buuhoodle can be reached by air (charter service) and a bewildering array of roads, leaving from Burco, Laas Caanood and several places in between. Contrary to what is suggested on Google Earth and other maps, there seem to be no clearly demarcated roads, only many tracks, intersecting in many places, and one really needs a local driver to navigate them – also to ease passage through the few checkpoints along the way.

The choice for one approach or another will depend mostly on whether and where clan conflict is taking place. In May 2017, when our team travelled to Buuhoodle, the safest road was considered to be that from Guumays, on the tarmac road, through Yeyle and Horufadhi.

Guumays is 45 km E of Caynabo and 76 km W of Laas Caanood. The border between Isaaq and Dhulbahante territories runs between Oog (an important Somaliland army base) and Guumays. Coming from Oog, the road to Buuhoodle starts just before the entry checkpoint to Guumays. It is the usual place to change to local cars and drivers. It is advisable to also use a trip organizer who has good relations with all the parties in Buuhoodle. In our case it was Abshir Abdullahi Aided, who runs a garbage collection business in Buuhoodle and knows the town well.

From the tarmac road to Buuhoodle takes four hours. The road is unpaved, and sometimes can be flooded or muddy. The most treacherous spot for getting stuck in the rainy season is the area close to the beginning, near the tarmac road. It seems flat and desert-like but the ground, when we passed, was wet mud under a thin crust of seemingly dry hard surface. In the rainy season a 4wd is necessary; in the dry season it is recommended.

Shortly after leaving the tarmac road, we met our escort, consisting of two Dhulbahante Somaliland soldiers, who escorted us to Yeyle, and two 'freelance' soldiers dressed in Somaliland uniforms but who had also fought

for Puntland and Khatumo; they seemed to be on good terms with all parties. These two stayed with us until our return to Guumays a day later.

The landscape along the road consists of shrubbery, acacia tree forests and dry scrubland, being the greenest around Ceegaag, about halfway to Buuhoodle. The landscape is generally flat, between short ranges of low hills.



*The road to Buuhoodle: section near the beginning, and past half-way.*

Guumays and its area is inhabited by the Dhulbahante/Jama-Siyaad sub-clan. Other Dhulbahante sub-clans met along the way are the Yaxye (Gol Jano), Hayaag (Ceegaag), Wacays-Adan, Barkad and Jama-Siyaad (Horufadhi) while the dominant sub-clan in and around Buuhoodle is the Ahmed-Garaad, that counts many important sub-sub-clans such as the Ali Geri and the Reer-Hagar.

In Yeyle (28 km from tarmac road, 50 min drive) is a Somaliland army base, with a checkpoint that checks the identity of those traveling (but without asking for papers – this is not done anywhere: a white face, NGO look and/or the narrative of the guide is generally sufficient).

16 km (45 min) after Yeyle lies the village of Gol Jano, the headquarters of the Yahye sub-clan. When we visited it, there were many IDPs: Yahye pastoralists and clansmen from other drought-stricken areas. The community



had been struck by an outbreak of AWD, which local volunteers were trying to fight with private donations in a repurposed school building (closed because of the emergency). It was maybe because of this emergency that an angry villager (described as a madman by his peers) had shot at a passing aid distribution convoy, startling an Emirati donor on 01 May 2017. The Dhulbahante are considered, also by other Somalis, to be fiery people, and many men carry weapons, so one must always remain alert when traveling through their areas.

When we visited, no NGO (local or international) was providing support to the village, although the improvised field hospital had received drugs from the Somaliland Red Crescent and

hospitals in Caynabo and Buuhoodle. The head-nurse (the doctor was not present, he had reportedly gone to get medicine in Laas Canood) told us 15 people had died from diarrhoea over the past weeks.

7 km after Gol Jano, where we had to change a shock-breaker, we arrived in Ceegaag (20 min drive). It seems we made a detour, deviating from the road we had planned to take for mechanical reasons.

The 16 km from Ceegaag to Horufadhi took 45 minutes. Horufadhi and Yeyle are the biggest villages along the way, with shops and teahouses. The last 41 km to Buuhoodle took an hour and 35 minutes. Not counting stops, it took us 4 hours to drive 102 km, and our drivers evidently knew the road very well and were driving as fast as they could, but the average remained only 25 km/hour.



*IDP camp in the outskirts of Buuhoodle and a drought-afflicted camel*

### **Situation in Buuhoodle** (for contacts and other practical information see Buuhoodle access brief)

Buuhoodle town is quite peaceful, despite the prevalence of conflict in the region and its disputed status. The town has been effectively disarmed by the Garaad (traditional elder) of the Ahmed-Garaad, whose authority stands higher than that of Khatumo, Puntland and Somaliland. Even when high dignitaries from Puntland or Somaliland visit Buuhoodle, they must leave their armed escort at one of the town's entry checkpoints.

There is nonetheless a security vacuum. The only police station in town is controlled (paid) by Puntland, but the officers do not venture much outside the station and only intervene in affairs where both parties are somehow answerable to Puntland. Puntland also funds the court, a prison and other security institutions, but again, they have little power. Khatumo and Somaliland have no effective power at all in Buuhoodle, although the former has a local council through which it pretends to govern the town. Everything must thus be negotiated with the tribal elders, and good relations with all major sub-clans are paramount to ensure one's safety.

Several NGOs have worked in Buuhoodle for years, and have encountered few obstacles to implementing programs. We met an expat working for an INGO who felt quite comfortable walking around town and frequenting its teashops.

A large hospital was built by the current Somaliland Minister of Health, the founder of the Sool, Sanaag and Cayn separatist movement 'Xaglo-Toosiye', whose Buuhoodle-based clan has long been pro-Somaliland. It closed

shortly after opening in 2006, but reopened to deal with the AWD outbreak. The Red Cross of several countries and Save the Children International is involved in operating the hospital, and other INGOs are bringing support to rural areas of the district. There is another hospital in town which hadn't operated for months in May 2017.

The town is developing rapidly, despite its isolation. The Buuhoodle diaspora seems to be well-connected and is funding the construction boom in town. There are many restaurants and a few hotels that seem good enough for (low-maintenance) foreign guests, including one run by a Somali lady from Minnesota. Clan tensions sometimes erupt but with little bloodshed (e.g. pro-Puntland Reer-Hagar vs pro-Khatumo Wacays-Adan – these are sub-sub-clans of the Dhulbahante/Ahmed-Garaad)

The Ethiopian border runs through the southern part of town, slicing off a tip of about 10% of the town; locals can cross from one side to the next without issues, normally, although the Liyuu Police that guards the Ethiopian border sometimes cuts it off. For example, when we were visiting in May 2017 the Liyuu Police was blocking Somalilanders anxious to return to their homes after the first rains, citing security reasons. Non-locals can never cross the border here; there is no customs & immigration office, only security forces.

Sometimes the Liyuu Police pursues wanted men into the SL side of town, causing tensions to rise. The tribal paramilitary outfit set up by the Ethiopian authorities of Zone 5 can be quite brutal. They guard the Ethiopian border effectively, also by fear. The massacre of Ethiopian Somali civilians in Gashamo, last year, occurred not far away. But the Ethiopian presence can also be positive. 16 Ethiopian doctors were sent to Buuhoodle at the height of the AWD crisis to treat patients there for three weeks.



*Puddles inside Buuhoodle and the Daa Uud restaurant, including the Khatumo mayor of Buuhoodle*

Outside the town, the security situation is more volatile. The Habar Jeclo are increasingly present along two vectors, from Horufadhi towards Yeyle and Ceegaag, and from Qorilugud towards Buuhoodle. This leads to clashes with local Dhulbahante sub-clans. The Somaliland Army often sides with the Habar-Jeclo but usually clan conflict resolution systems prevail and these clashes have led to little bloodshed<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes, on the Habar-Jeclo side, the Soolomadaw, Ahmed-Farah, Omar, Biciide, Reer-Younes and other sub-clans. Over the past 18 months clashes have taken place with local Dhulbahante sub-clans in Sool Joogto (vs Araale-Mahad), Meygaagle (vs Cigaal Naaleeye), Qoriligud (vs Reer-Hagar), Horufadhi (vs Wacays-Adan), Ceegaag, Carro Weyn and Widhwidh (vs Dhulbahante/Ali-Geri)

This is very different to the east of Buuhoodle, where the Dhulbahante sub-clans of Qayaad and Baharsame started a recent round of fighting in June 2016, around Dharkeyn Genyo. This conflict has claimed more than 70 lives. Despite many reconciliation attempts the conflict continues festering today, in June 2017<sup>2</sup>.



*Landscapes on the way to Taleex: bridge on tarmac road, starting to cross the Nugaal plain, and green spot along the way*

### **The road to Taleex**

The tarmac road from Laas Caanood to Garowe is quite straightforward. While leaving Laas Caanood there is a control at the exit checkpoint, the most serious one on the trip (we were waved through all others, and only had to present documents here). This is the customs and immigration department for those leaving Somaliland towards Puntland. However, of course not all traffic passing here is heading towards Puntland, so not all vehicles are equally controlled.

Our drivers had a Puntland plate on the front of the car, and a Somaliland plate on the back. They had additional plates in the car, if some authority was going to be difficult about this informal arrangement, but as they were known to the soldiers, they encountered no obstacle and told us they could easily drive back and forth between Garowe and Eastern Somaliland.

The tarmac road is in good condition, and it takes slightly less than an hour to drive the 75 km to Faleeryale, where the dirt track to Taleex leaves. After 15 minutes (19 km) one passes through Gambade, which is the limit of the area controlled by Somaliland forces along this road. After another 15 minutes comes the village of Tuko Raq, which is controlled by Puntland forces. When they heard we were heading to Taleex (which is controlled by Somaliland) we were woven through.

Tuko Raq is the place most often used to change SPUs when internationals are traveling between Laas Caanood and Garowe. Puntland customs and immigration, however, are at Bixin, closer to the real border between the two states, so not of concern when traveling to Taleex.

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<sup>2</sup> Other recent clan conflict among the Dhulbahante includes : *Reer-Hagar vs Ali-Geri* over Qat supply to Buuhoodle in 2016, Jan 2017 *Barkad vs Jama-Siyaad* near Bali Hadhac and *Barkad vs Ali Geri* near Dhoobo Gadud over access to underground water reservoirs during the drought, and *Reer-Hagar vs Wacays-Adan* over politics (pro-SFG vs pro-Khatumo)

After Tuko Raq the road goes on through Geed Qadoob to Faleeryale, where the track leading to Taleex departs. In fact, there is no clearly demarcated road, and one can follow many other tracks to Taleex, but Faleeryale probably offers the quickest connection.

The 88 km from Faleeryale to Taleex take about an hour and a half. The track is fairly good, and crosses the vast Nugaal flood plains or 'Dhoodi' as they are known locally. The Togdheer ('long valley') river running through this area catches all water from the Sheekh mountains, running all the way to Eyl where it reaches the sea. Usually the river is dry, swelling a bit in the rainy season, but only rarely covering the whole plain, when heavy rains fall. Only then does it become impossible to cross. Now, after some rains, stretches of the road were muddy and it was good to have a 4WD.

There are no checkpoints from Faleeryale, until one reaches Taleex town. One sees almost no traffic or people along the way. An occasional pastoralist encampment is the only distraction from a flat, featureless landscape. A village called Dhofar God exists nearby Taleex, well off the road, where Rabiciyya mystics from many different parts of Somalia converge, to live separately from the world. Most of Taleex's rural areas are used as pasture by the Dhulbahante clans, except East Taleex which is also populated by Majerteen and Dashiishe clansmen. Outside the rainy season, water can only be found in wells or water catchments that were filled up during the rains; with the exception of one small river, that has water all year, at Xalin (38 km from Taleex). Along this river some small-scale cultivation of vegetables takes place.

**The situation in Taleex** (for contacts and other practical information see Taleex access brief)

There has been no conflict in Taleex for almost two years, but in the years 2011 to 2015 tensions ran high in Taleex town. The two main sub-clans living there, the Farah Ali and the Samokab Ali, fought bitterly for control of the town; the former, for Khatumo state and the latter for Puntland. This conflict has never been resolved, but it has been frozen over the past two years. A proper reconciliation meeting between the elders of both clans is tentatively planned for after Eid, according to the Somaliland governor.

The town is thus calm but still tense. It is divided into two parts (North and South) between the Samokab Ali and the Farah Ali. If one wishes to speak to both communities, separate meetings must be held. There are also other sub-clans, (see below) who live on either side of the divide.

Dhulbahante sub-clans living in Taleex	% total population (approx.)
Samokab Ali	30
Farah Ali	30
Ahmed Ali	9
Wacays Ali	9
Aden & Yusuf	12
Wacays Abdulle & Omar Wacays	7
Minority Groups (Shirwac Ahmed Mohamed Nuur & Gabooye	3

The town is currently under control of Somaliland, who has made a region out of Taleex district, called Xaysimo, and the 13 villages of Taleex have been distributed into five new districts. Governor Abdirashid Mohamed Ahmed, from the Omar Wacays sub-clan, cannot count on much of an administration. Indeed, government workers, including teachers, do not receive a salary from Somaliland. Somaliland has in fact not done more than build three government buildings in town, including a guesthouse that offers the only option for lodging. One may point out, however, that this is more than what Puntland or Khatumo did for the town.

Puntland and Khatumo have no administrative or security presence in Taleex at all. Until 2015 Taleex was being administered by Garowe, which is only three hours away by dirt track, and there was a rival Khatumo administration. In Jan 2012 the Dhulbahante elders that backed the Khatumo project declared their statehood under a giant tree in the outskirts of Taleex, from then on called the *Barde Khatumo*. The capital of this new state, meant to be a constituent part of federal Somalia, was Taleex. After the bloody clashes that split the town along sub-clan lines, the Khatumo administration moved to Buuhoodle. As to Puntland, its claim to Taleex became less pronounced after the Puntland Vice-President Abdisamad Ali Shire, himself a Samokab Ali from Taleex, was replaced by a Dhulbahante from Buuhoodle when Abdiweli Gaas came to power. In effect, since then Puntland has done little to stop Somaliland from affirming its sovereignty over Taleex.

There is almost no development in Taleex; the town seems stuck in time, with the exception of mobile phones (with weak 3G). There is notably a problem with drinking water (only a borehole 35 km distant from the town provides a guaranteed source), but the electricity supply is also problematic. The diaspora does not invest much in the town. When asked why, local people explained that 'the Taleex diaspora is not organized'. Accordingly, there are also almost no employment opportunities for young people, pushing them, as several elders mentioned, to commit crimes.

Khatumo state did invest in the construction of an airstrip, opened in 2013 and repaired in 2014. However it seems years since a plane has landed there, and UNHAS seemingly doesn't even recognize its existence.

NGO presence in Taleex is minimal. Only the Somaliland Red Crescent (Bisha Cas) has a real presence, especially since they have reopened a hospital to deal with the AWD outbreak (however, when we visited, there was only one patient). Other NGOs that come with the whims of funding include ARC, Save the Children and some local NGOs; none of them had an operational program when we invested.

NGOs and other external players are afraid of coming to Taleex because of clan conflict, the disputed status and lack of government control. This fear seemed to us exaggerated; the situation has been quiet for almost two years, and although clan conflict could again erupt, this need not affect NGOs directly. As to the security vacuum, this is indeed an issue. Local elders (caaqil) are generally not strong, leading to the unfamiliar sight of businessmen leading peace talks. Good relations with all sections of the local community are primordial, and safety arrangements must be individually made, so as to have several fall-back options when in trouble.

We were escorted by 10 soldiers drawn from all the clans by the SL governor: 3-4 from each majority, the Farah Ali and the Samokab Ali, and others from minority clans. The soldiers are paid by Somaliland. We walked freely through town, over the 'green line' separating both communities and into the fortresses, palace and tombs built by Sayyed Mohamed Abdulle Hassan (the 'Mad Mullah' warrior-poet who resisted the British and Italians for 20 years, inspiring Somali nationalism). These may be the most impressive and significant ruins in Somalia, well worth UNESCO's attention. Their restoration could be the centre-piece of a development project for the town.



*The Tree of Peace (Geedka Nabadda) in Taleex, and Gov. Mohamed Ahmed (centre) making a call in the fortress compound*

Route	Distance & Time	Comment
<b>1. Hargeisa-Caynabo</b>	<b>400km, 5h28'</b>	<b>Tarmac road, with potholes in first 80 km after Hargeisa, after that a good road.</b>
<b>2. Caynabo-Buuhoodle</b>	<b>148km, 5h07'</b>	<b>Road to Buuhoodle safe but must remain vigilant and have a local driver with a 4wd car in the rainy season</b>
Caynabo - Oog	23km 30 min	Tarmac road
Oog - Guumays	23km 30 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tarmac road.</li> <li>Oog is the last village that Isaaq/Habar-Jeclo sub-clan inhabits, and east of the village starts Dhulbahante land.</li> </ul>
Guumays - Yeyle	27km 50min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rough road</li> <li>Guumays area is inhabited Dhulbahante/Jama-Siyaad sub-clan.</li> </ul>
Yeyle – Gol Jano	11km, 45min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a Somaliland base near Yeyle village.</li> <li>There are 3 IDP camps in the village.</li> <li>About 400 to 500 people were afflicted by AWD patients, 15 of them died.</li> <li>Gol Jano has no borehole and relies on rain for water.</li> </ul>
Gol Jano - Ceegaag	7km, 20min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This village is inhabited by Dhulbahante/Hayaag sub-clan.</li> </ul>
Ceegaag - Horufadhi	16km, 47min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This small town is inhabited by Dhulbahante sub-clans of Wacays-Aadan, Jaamac-Siyaad and Barkad.</li> </ul>
Horufadhi - Buuhoodle	41km, 95min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Buuhoodle town is majorly inhabited by Dhulbahante/Ahmed-Garaad clan. The clan has many sub-clans such as Reer-Xagar and Reer-Wacays.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Buuhoodle - Laas Caanood</b>	<b>179km, 5h01'</b>	<b>Road from Buuhoodle safe but must remain vigilant and have a local driver with a 4wd car in the rainy season</b>
Buuhoodle-Guumays	100km, 4h04'	Rough road, no stops longer than a few minutes

Route	Distance & Time	Comment
Guumays – Laas Caanood	77km, 57min	Good tarmac road but in places damaged by flood, once washing away a section of the road
<b>4. Laas Caanood - Taleex</b>	<b>170km, 2h25'</b>	<b>Good and safe road, paved until Faleeryaale, with almost no potholes, and track thereafter.</b>
Laas Caanood – Gambade	14km, 12min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gambade is the last Somaliland checkpoint on the tarmac road.</li> </ul>
Gambade - Tukaraq	15km, 12min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a Puntland forces' checkpoint near Tukaraq village.</li> <li>Tukaraq has an unpaved road to Holhol village.</li> </ul>
Tukaraq – God Qaboobe	36km, 26min	
God Qaboobe - Faleeryaale	17km, 12min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We left the tarmac road towards Taleex in Fararyaale village.</li> </ul>
Faleeryaale - Taleex	88km, 83min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is recommended to use 4WD vehicles, particularly in the rainy season when the area near Faleeryaale becomes flooded</li> <li>The area has plains called Nugaal plains, which locals know as Dhoodi (or flooding land).</li> </ul>



*Tomb, allegedly of Sayyed Hassan's grandparents, in Taleex*