Fieldwork Challenges (and opportunities):
Claire Bowern, Rice University
http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~bowern/

Preliminaries:
Most of what I will say is not only applicable to women.
Every field site is different.
Most of this is applicable to socio-type research as well as the ethnographic "go to a tropical island"-type fieldwork.

Rationale: anatomizing what might go wrong, and what to do about it.

1. Before you leave
a. Getting funded
The first grant is the hardest.
Most grants fail because they aren't specific enough, or they promise too much.
b. Preparation time
Planning can take arbitrarily large amounts of time.
Three most crucial plans (anything else is a bonus!):

> The first few sessions
> Equipment
> Overall what you want to achieve
> (Data structures, database, metadata, etc)

c. Human subjects approval and other administration
Start early, be clear about your methods, and treat it seriously.
HAVE A BACKUP PLAN.

2. In the field
a. 'Unwanted attention' and not being taken seriously
e.g. drunks => find out what the locals do (avoidance, running away, humor)
lack of freedom (e.g. women in patriarchal societies) => turn this to your advantage; lack of power -> harmless -> left alone to do your research.
Be pragmatic about self-expression (you might make things harder for your consultants and for yourself); fieldwork is usually not the place to push boundaries, since you're already way off the charts just by being there.
b. Culture shock
Talk to others who've been to the area
Go for a short preliminary trip
Expect differences
c. Imposter syndrome
"Work the problem" - "I suck at language learning" isn't a helpful statement, but "I don't know how this morpheme *-da* works" is a pathway to a solution.
Keep a diary of what you do.
Remember that if you already knew how to analyze X, etc, there'd be little point in being in the field. You're there because these problems aren't solved.
Potentially high stakes (working with last speakers is a responsibility)

d. **Stress that comes with you**
Dissertations don't disappear while you're in the field
Relationships, etc
e. **Exhausted communities**
Desire to help, to "fix" the problems
Depression
Feelings of powerlessness
Recognize what you can and can't do as an outsider (and temporary visitor) to the community. Problems like this seldom have easy solutions.
f. **Physical danger**
Road accidents, snakes, medical emergencies, etc => have good health insurance and a way to leave the site quickly if you have to (or be well prepared if you can't leave quickly)
g. **Consultant challenges**
not turning up
wanting to control sessions
not wanting to speak field language
remember:
    be patient, and realistic
    being a consultant is hard work
    listen to what you're told

3. **Coming home**
   a. **Reverse culture shock**
   b. **Data processing, unanswered questions**
   There will always be questions you can't answer from your notes.
   As you work on your data and get more experience, you'll see places where you might have been misled, or where you didn't get the data you thought you got. *This is good!* It means you're learning.

OPPORTUNITIES
Some of the things that are scariest about fieldwork are also the best opportunities.
- As role model
- As ambassador
- To make a contribution to your field community
- To make a contribution to linguistics
- To test yourself