

S·V·P News 11

Sudan Volunteer Programme

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The investment boom continues and English language skills have become even more necessary for those wanting jobs. Pressure on transport and accommodation in Khartoum has increased making outlying towns better for our placements. SVP needs volunteers who can stay in Sudan for six months or more.



fishermen on the Nile - photo by Brad Zerivitz

a note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the eleventh annual issue of SVP News. It contains a selection of extracts of stories from our volunteers in last year's programme. We hope others will be encouraged to join us in this worthwhile and necessary work. We thank all the friends, supporters and members of SVP-Sudan and SVP-UK whose donations and goodwill, ideas and skills, time and enthusiasm make our work possible.

SVP specially thanks all our volunteers - and their families - who give so much of themselves:
Serena Fassò Kasia Kedzia Don Sloan Kit Kidner Nicholas Kitchin Joanna Zaliki Knowles
Einas Mansour Liam Morgan Rosa Raco Neetha Tangirala Rachel Walton Peter Wiggins Brad
Zerivitz Emily Carpeaux Anna Aylward Matt Baker John Hayhurst Mungo Woodifield Monica
Fletcher Tim Davies James Dawkins Serge Rousset & Pat Rousset Christian Sandjord

Dear SVP members - we depend on your continuing support.

Ahmed Bedri

Anna Aylward writes: *Memories of Khartoum 2007* Even now, almost a year since leaving Khartoum I think about that extraordinary time. Yes, it was always difficult to live in Sudan but there, freed from the pleasant routine of home, I had the unique opportunity to enjoy something completely new - a climate of welcome.

From the start there was a curious mix of chaos and Sudanese kindness. When I landed at 5.00am there was no one to meet me. I had no contact address (not that it would have helped as addresses don't really function), no money and no Arabic. It was the policeman who, without a second thought used his mobile to sort things out for me.

In the succeeding months my faith in humankind blossomed as I met more and more kindness and generosity. There was the hotel receptionist who spent hours trying to teach me Arabic; the taxi driver who bought me water and even an amjad driver who gave me a free lift. This climate of generosity and friendship rubbed off on us all. Perhaps it is the realisation that life is difficult which makes volunteers and Sudanese alike eager to welcome another person.

One of the kindest English speaking people you can meet anywhere must be Griselda. She entertains all volunteers regally and gives up a lot of her time to help them feel at home. She took us, my flatmate and me, to see her farm house by the Nile. It was a lovely day out and cool! Through contacts we all had a range of experiences - from sailing on the Nile to drinks at the British and Greek embassies.

Einas Mansour writes: Its 7am, the children are up late, mayhem and tears as sandwiches are stuffed into clear plastic bags then stuffed again into a Mickey Mouse back pack. The mother runs around in a panic as odd socks are matched, shoes are righted and jackets are worn; left arm into right sleeve, right arm into left. The bus hoots its horn and mayhem is subdued; for another day at least. Sounds like any other morning, any other school day in any country in the world. But this is Sudan, Fitihab Shigla to be exact. Where hovers are exchanged for mukshasha's, shoes for sandals and at the end of the day instead of wiping at the rain on your coat shoulder, you look for the nearest damp cloth to wipe off the dust from any place on your person.

Unlike other SVP volunteers living in accommodation, I am living with my family in Omdurman. Our house in Khartoum comprises all that is typical of a Mansour family dwelling. Of the three main houses (Others being in El Obeid and Al Mighaya), Omdurman house is a base for all those that live, work and study in Khartoum. Hence the mix of my aunt and uncle and their 3 children, my newlywed uncle and his wife and three cousins at university; recent additions to the house have been both grandmothers and baby Mustafa born in February. So this is the basis for my very domestic situation.

James Dawkins writes: *University of Khartoum 2007* Volunteering at the university was extreme fun. I worked at the University of Khartoum and was responsible for teaching five classes. I taught in the department for English and the principal of the department allowed me to implement my own method of teaching. This gave me the freedom to formulate and execute my own personal methods of teaching. I conducted a lot of group activities within the classroom which included speaking exercises, games such as hangman, role play exercises and

debates. All these activities were strategically designed to increase the speaking confidence of Sudanese students as well as their vocabulary. I always asked for feedback at the end of the lesson which allowed the students to comment on the aspects of the lesson they enjoyed and those which they did not enjoy.

I went to a wedding in Khartoum and it was very lively, there was lots of music, food, dancing and singing. Everyone was dressed smartly and the sound of Sudanese music along with the food and Arabic singing gave an ambience of real joy, happiness, and unity. This is one of my most memorable moments. I had an wonderful time in Sudan and I would DEFINITELY advise anyone who is thinking of volunteering abroad to consider Sudan, as it's an extremely safe, friendly, relaxed and accepting country.



Graduates celebrate in Kassala - photo by Joanna Zaliki Knowles

Joanna Zaliki Knowles writes: *Graduation in Kassala* The day begins early with members of the Student Council decorating the outdoor stage at Kassala University. Colourful banners, lights, audio equipment and other such items are installed and ribbons are draped all around the tree-lined avenues of the Faculty of Education Campus. The fifth year students are graduating today!

Parents, grandparents, siblings, neighbours and friends start arriving for the big occasion at about 3pm and sit at tables and chairs, clustered in the fashion of a café or restaurant, in front of the stage, as well as on both sides. It is a huge crowd of excited, happy people and they have brought large quantities of home made food.

Kasia Kedzia writes: As an SVP volunteer I had the opportunity to experience some unique things. The University at which I worked was Afhad. While there I prepared a young group of girls for a play in English to be performed at the festivities celebrating International Women's Week (week of 8th March). I was also able to coach the National Debate team, which incidentally won first place landing us a picture in one of the local papers. I was also able to travel to El Gezira Abba with SAFE - Student Advocacy for Education. The group was actually founded by another SVP volunteer some years ago, Paul Fean. While in El Gezira I with three other Sudanese trainers ran a workshop for the local educators on how to improve their teaching techniques, including lesson preparation, use of games and songs as teaching aids and so on. It was a wonderful trip and a phenomenal experience. Historically the

region is quite significant as well as quite beautiful. All the teachers were very grateful we had come and were most hospitable.

Matt Baker writes: *A Sudanese New Year.* Taking advantage of the break in the university schedules a few friends and I decided that we would spend Christmas at the Pyramids and travel up to Atbara for the New Year, which corresponds with the Islamic festival of Eid Al-Adha, commemorating the Abraham's almost sacrifice of his son. The journey to the pyramids was only 4 hours. The importance of travelling with the correct documentation was reinforced as we had to make a brief stop in Shendi for a quick chat and registration with the police. As usual the police were only too willing to chat, practicing their English and offering tea. By the time we arrived at the pyramids it was



Long shadows in Dongola - photo by Christian Sandjord

early afternoon. There two sites, bisected by the main roadway heading north from Khartoum to Atbara, are all well preserved; presumably by the dusty, hot environment that has encroached on the monuments over the centuries.

Serena Fassò writes: I am teaching English as a volunteer in the Islamic university outside Khartoum, in the lively town of Omdurman, bursting with commerce and young students coming in and out of their respective boys and girls campus. I am teaching all four years from the age of 19 up to 22 – although it is not uncommon, while still remaining the exception, to find more 'mature' students of 40 years old or so who are finally being given the chance to pursue higher studies. Most of the classes have an emphasis on speaking and communications; their understanding tends to be quite good but they obviously have not had many opportunities to practice their English in their everyday life and often troubled backgrounds. This particular university is an incredible mixture of ethnicities and backgrounds. Many of the students come from Gezira State just south of Khartoum but there are also many girls coming from Nyala in the western Darfur region of Sudan.

Monica Fletcher writes: The pace of life is slow in Port Sudan. I am teaching two hours a day, in the Faculty of Education, for trainee primary school teachers. I organise a few extra evening classes: twice a week for university staff; once a week for a small group of students. Later I also teach a few odd classes at a private language school some

of my students attend.

The education students struggle with English. I have four groups, including two massive first and second year classes. These should be about 90 in all, and I try to do basic English: "I like [swimming]"; "I have [a red book]"; "Turn left[for the station]."; "Where am I? [Under the desk]." They struggle to understand me: it's all too difficult. I wrestle to help them understand. They are nervous about being heard; I try to show them it's OK to make mistakes. I learn that the local community don't like to talk about their womenfolk - so don't ask about a typical mother's day; and don't like too many personal questions: it's a bit like interrogation; so we back off on some of the question-asking exercises.

There's a small hard core who turn up, who make the effort, who arrive with amazing lists of vocabulary questions ("what's environment mean?"); and who will send me missed calls at night before their exams, so they can ask me: "Teacher, what's the difference between a clause and a phrase?".

Peter Wiggins writes: I have just returned from holiday with a friend of mine called John, a fellow teacher (who actually lives right near Brighton when he is in the UK), and his brother and sister who came to visit. We went to the small town of Dallanj in the Kordofan region where we stayed with a welcoming Sudanese family. Sudan is such a vast place that travelling to a different region feels a little like going to another country.

From Dallanj we ventured into the Nuba Mountains to a small place called Jewled, where I stayed on an NGO compound with an organisation called the Fellowship For Af-

frican Relief. I went to forests, climbed mountains and read my book. The weather was cool, the air was fresh and it was green and beautiful in contrast to noisy Omdurman. It was all very, very nice.

The Dust Storm I was off to a party with my friend with Mungo. He has air conditioning and also a spare bed. I have pretty much moved into his house (although I have two other rooms). I put on some nice clothes, not something I do very often. It would have been a good day to dress as casually as I normally do. We got on the bus and we were chatting away. I spotted a giant dark cloud in the distance coming towards us. Mungo and I looked at each other aghast. I think our anxiety must have been pretty apparent because the Sudanese started laughing at us. The impending haboub - dust storm - was more familiar to them than it was to us but it was striking by any standards. If you were in Khartoum or Omdurman the haboub would hit you sooner or later. *Sudanese Punctuality* The Sudanese aren't much good on punctuality. Initially some of my students were happy to turn up an hour late to an hour and a half class. There is just a totally different attitude to time. They're happy to continue a class for an hour after it has finished. Unfortunately for them, I'm not. I have been trying to discipline them and I have got most of them arriving on time. I have started to get students to explain to me why they are late. It is amusing, if a little cruel.

Christian Sandjord writes: People in Sudan are ever so friendly and generous... If you are with someone, they will insist on paying everything for you and will go out of their way to help you and make you feel comfortable. When I arrived in Dongola (a 6 hour bus ride

to the north of Khartoum) on 1 November, a Thursday, I couldn't have received a warmer welcome...I was taken around town in a car, given food and drink, and shown around my new accommodation. They had even filled up the fridge with fruits, water and something to eat! And my room was equipped with air-condition, which is one of my few comforts here. They had also bought a knife/fork set for the kitchen (although I insist on using my right hand here when I eat). I live in a house, actually, which I am at present sharing with another Sudanese doctor/TA, so there is enough space. My room is quite nice, but the problem in Sudan is that it is impossible to keep things clean, because of the ever-present dust and sand...so I am forced to keep most of my books and stuff locked up in the closet...The staff at the university are very helpful and kind...The uni itself is a 3 minute walk from my house, it is a small campus, with lots of palm trees around...and they have AC and fans in every lecture room, even a multimedia projector! I have an office in a beautiful, new research building in the centre of the city, which keeps a very modern standard. I feel a bit spoilt to be honest, and a bit guilty that I only will be here for 6 months, taken into consideration all the trouble people have gone to...Hope I can give something back!

Brad Zerivitz writes: Before coming here, I had very little expectations. Nevertheless, many things have surprised me about Sudan. Here's a short list:
 -Everyone (except the very poor) take great care in their personal appearance. The men wear either western style button down shirts with slacks or the traditional Jelabia. Their clothes are always exceptionally clean and ironed.

-The woman do not feel oppressed at all. They wear the head scarves by choice and feel like they are free to do as they please.

-They LOVE sugar. People here drink sugary drinks like soda and fresh fruit juice all day long. It is necessary to consume sugar to keep your energy up during this heat.

-The food is incredibly fresh and tasty. I can never get this quality of fruits and vegetables in the States.

-They love watching English football (soccer), American Professional Wrestling, Oprah, Dr Phil, Bollywood films, and bad American films.

I went to a big football (soccer) match between Hillel (a local team) and a team from Nigeria. Most games cost 500 Dinars, so I only brought 1000 Dinars, but this game cost 2000 Dinars, because it was a big match. I walked up a ramp leading to the expensive seats (the ramp is taller than the stadium wall) and watched the beginning of the game from there. The view was not very good, though, so I went across the street where many people were watching from a rooftop. The view was a little better, but you could only see one goal. At half time I was given Hawaja Privilege (taking advantage of the fact that white people are rare and well respected) and got in for free. Inside the stadium, I met some Sudanese fans who spoke decent English and watched the game with them.

The place was absolutely packed. It was the deciding game for entrance into the African League Semi-Finals. Sudan had lost 3-0 in Nigeria, so they needed to win by more than 4 points. No one thought it could be done. Hillel scored one goal after another. Each time, the fans lit newspapers on fire, shot off Roman Candles (fireworks) and danced around hugging each other. It came down to an exciting sudden-death shootout and Hillel won! I and the whole city of Omdurman (and probably the rest of the country) celebrated for hours.



Displaced Mother & Child- photo by Brad Zerivitz

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