

S·V·P News 16

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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English language skills are needed more than ever by Sudanese graduates looking for work either in Sudan or abroad. SVP continues its policy of placing our volunteers where possible outside Khartoum, to support the teaching of English as a second language in towns and cities across the country. In collaboration with the Sudan Ministry of Education we are developing a programme for volunteers to teach in secondary schools.



Pyramids
at
Begarawiyya
photo by
Vanessa
Volland

a note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the sixteenth annual issue of SVP News. It contains a selection of extracts of stories from our volunteers in last year's programme. We hope these will encourage others to join us. 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:

Gemeela Sherif Rhea Schmitt Paul Major Helen Lamb Jessica Pratt Andrew Lawrie Mary Atkinson Billie Tomlinson Christine Murphy Brent Siegel Paul Fean Nabeel Hassan André Figaro Rebecca Glade Martha Quinn Isatu Haddi Joanne Lewis Alexander Skinner Tanya Williams Susanna Miller Rajiv Rampersad Martin & Jennifer Beels Rebecca Mallinson Christin Weigt & Tim Young Tom Wharton Kristianna Smith Hugh Cotton Sara Ali Jonathan Larkin Vanessa Volland Jonathan Hargreaves Patrick Halling Robert Dvorak Kate McIntosh Polly Steele Mark Ozanne Marthe Broadhurst Krista Wise Eva Khair

Dear SVP members - please stay with us: we urgently need your support.

Ahmed Bedri

Hugh Cotton writes: The weekend before I left Sudan I managed to escape Khartoum for a 4 day trip. The plan was to go with Tanya - also leaving Sudan after a year teaching in Khartoum. Once a trip is mooted in Sudan inevitably others will join in and 2 young Sudanese friends both called Omer offered to drive us on our first leg to Ed Damer about 350 kilometers north of Khartoum. Later we would go on to Karima by bus before returning to Khartoum - a round trip of 1000 km. 7.30 a.m. saw us starting the long drive through the desert; though it was still officially winter temperatures were up to 35c. We were going to Ed Damer to see Kate and Rebecca, volunteers who were teaching there and to stay with Fadia. From the main road we crossed a large dusty open area and then followed a sandy lane down towards the green of the Nile farms to find their house at the end of the lane. As usual the compound is surrounded by a high wall and you can't see anything from outside but once through the gate a lovely vista of a beautiful green opened up and a long low house. We were enthusiastically received by Fadia, her husband Abdul Rahim and son Ali aged 11. Soon we were sitting on the porch drinking lovely cool juice and plied with copious tea and food.

With Kate and Rebecca we set off for a walk to the banks of the Nile, crossing about half a mile of cultivated land - a variety of crops and fruit trees and a network of irrigation channels. Farmers were at work as the heat of the day had passed. Power is provided by water buffalo and other than the pumps there is very little mechanization - a landscape that has not changed for thousands of years.

On Saturday morning we were going to go quite early to visit the weekly camel market. The camel market was a very interesting but potentially dangerous place! Hundreds of camels on display, racing backwards and forwards to show their speed and prowess. I was offered a ride. I noticed that the camels were very lively. I could see these were much friskier than the one I had ridden the previous year at Meroe and I politely declined.

Mark Ozanne writes: Two weeks ago I was lucky enough to be invited to stay for the weekend with a Sudanese friend at his home in Sennar a quiet agricultural town on the Blue Nile about 200km south of Khartoum. Three to four hundred years ago it was the capital of the Funj Kingdom and one of the most powerful cities in Africa but today there are no visible remains of this once great city. We arrived late on Thursday evening to be served a huge meal which we ate sitting out in the garden - there is always more food than you can possibly

eat but you have to try especially as the best bits of the food are usually being pushed in front of you! The highlight of my trip was a visit to the Maulid celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. For about ten days leading up to the day itself, there are festivals during the evening in many towns. In Sennar about six different Sufi orders (Tarigahs in Arabic) had



Maulid in Sennar -Mark Ozanne

their own enclosure in a big field. In their respective enclosures they each demonstrate their own style of music, 'dancing', and recitation. All the orders are also distinguished by their own brand of clothing such as orange caps for one order and white for another. The most entertaining was the Mukashafiyah who wore bright red and green cloaks and were led round in a circle by an energetic man wearing a big red and green jester's hat and holding a huge wand. The dancing was very energetic with the leader going down to the floor at one point and others behind him doing somersaults. The music and dancing reached a crescendo of 'La Illah Ila Allah' - 'There is no God but one God' - a striking expression of the African music and dance within the ritual of Islam, and in some ways this sums up Sudanese culture where an Islamic culture has not forgotten its African roots.

Rebecca Mallinson writes: Teaching in Sudanese secondary schools has been a very interesting and rewarding experience. I have found myself in a variety of schools ranging from a technical school to the top model school in the whole of River Nile State.

When I arrived in Khartoum I was prepared by the English Language Institute in Khartoum to 'teach the teachers' rather than the students, to set up English Clubs and to concentrate on ways to improve speaking and listening skills. This seemed a scary prospect as a newly qualified TEFL teacher, but it hasn't been the disaster it might have been.

The school year runs from June to March, although teaching ends in February. There is a three tier secondary school system, based on exam results at the end of basic school at 14 years old. At the bottom are technical schools, where boy students are trained to be builders, electricians and carpenters. I am not sure what the equivalents are for girls. Next up are the secondary schools. At the top are the model schools. Funding is based on results, so the model schools get the best deal but even then there's not enough. At the technical school they struggle even to buy textbooks and the training areas for vocational skills are bare.

With preconceptions about Islamic societies, I have been surprised how girls are generally far more motivated than the boys and more confident communicators, also far more ambitious for the future, with their eyes set on university.

Methods that work: My TEFL training, even though completely theoretical until I got here, has been a great help. I have made use of the internet for inspiration. Lack of materials makes creative thinking essential. There are usually a few students at the front

of each classroom who are able to answer questions, while the rest (always at the back) sometimes literally go to sleep. The teachers concentrate all their attention on those who put up their hands. To counteract this I find that using a ball and throwing it around the class when I want students to speak is a huge success. It keeps students alert and ensures that everyone tries because they don't know who will be asked. The boys are particularly enthusiastic even if they really struggle to answer! I use pair work to let the students practice on each other before speaking in front of the class because they go into panic mode otherwise and become completely speechless.

I have found that putting the class in competitive teams is an effective method whenever possible. This is a completely revolutionary thing to do here and the students respond with great excitement and try really hard. I have often been asked to take revision lessons (for monthly exams). I've turned vocabulary revision into a competitive game and with literature revision by asking teams to devise hard questions for each other's teams and then holding a quiz - to give a literature lesson a solid speaking and listening component.

Coming here has been immensely rewarding for me personally. Schools in Sudan need a lot of help to improve standards. I have been told numerous times that it is very encouraging to have a 'native speaker', both for the teachers and for students. Even with the slow progress, I think this is a very strong reason to continue.

Susanna Miller writes "An Evening in Khartoum, In Which I Learn to mind out for Water Bottles" One day in September, only two weeks after I arrived, Tanya and I went to two debates in English at the University of Khartoum, at the medical school campus. It was on our second time that we were greeted at the university by very friendly 2nd-batch students. [Don't ask me why they distinguish years as if they are trays of cookies.] Unfortunately, the power cut out, so the debates were delayed a few hours. While we waited, we were brought dinner and chatted with three students. When Tanya mentioned wanting to get her eyebrows done, they decided we had time before the debates and drove us right across the city to a beauty salon! On the way, we got our second rain of the year, lasting a mere 6 minutes. In typical Sudanese fashion, the girls insisted on paying for Tanya's eyebrow shaping and also bought us juice while we waited. Men are not allowed in salons, so I finally got to see what women's hair looks like here. I had only seen it in public peeking out behind a scarf. When we got back to the college, we were escorted to the hall and placed on a stage behind an enormous judges' table. I was to judge vocabulary (use, richness, and pronunciation), much easier than judging grammar. The debaters' grammar is just about perfect, but their vocabulary and pronunciation could use improvement, so it was easier to score. I found my 7th grade math came in very handy while averaging lots of figures quickly to determine scores under the pressure of a loud crowd.

When the winner of the first debate was announced, the audience loudly voiced their disapproval. Out of the blue, a water bottle came flying through the air, inches away from my head. I thought it was a bat at first, but it was really shocking. They said it was the first and only (?) time something like this had ever happened, and our hosts couldn't apologize enough.

After the second debate, Tanya had an awful headache—credit



Washing the Donkeys - Vanessa Volland

dehydration, loud crowd, and her upset at the bottle incident. Our hosts were very concerned and rushed to find painkillers that gradually eased her headache. Then one student took us home, though we were stuck for ages in heavy traffic, at 10 pm! Where I grew up (Malawi), the streets would be dead at 7 pm. It's a different world here.

Tanya Williams writes: Just over a year ago I embarked on a journey which changed my life. A journey that was only meant to last 5 months and a bit, turned in to a journey that lasted a year, and has left me with half a heart. The other half of my heart, is floating in the Nile, or running around somewhere on Shariah Jamhuriyah looking for me. I left England with very little expectations of Sudan. If

you were to read the newspapers and believed everything that was said in the media, you may think I was mad to make such a journey as did my parents. Being from the Caribbean, they thought I was crazy for wanting to go to a war torn, 3rd world country, "where women are disrespected", when they, my parents, worked hard and did all they could to come to a land, that would ensure their children would always have opportunities. That land being England, of course. But being a part of several minority communities, I decided that the media don't really know as much as they claim anyway. And seeing that I had a friend who had been living in Sudan for 3 years, I decided it was safe. Enjoy the ride I did, the ups and the downs. But Sudan is one of the most wonderful places you can dream to visit. So what is it? I think it is the warmth, heart and dignity of the people. I challenge you to find anyone who can host better than the average Sudanese citizen. Subhan Allah! They care, I mean they really care. Their hospitality is second to none. I was really taken in by families like a daughter. It had nothing to do with, being black, Muslim or from England. In fact in some situations these things can actually act as a barrier. It's because there is something in their very nature that tells them to host and to be good. They are so trusting and willing to spark up a conversation with you, whether it is on a bus or sipping tea at tea lady's. For most Sudanese people that I came into contact with, as far I was a guest in their country and so they had to treat me with respect and love.

What is unique and amazing about SVP as a charity, is how grassroots and organic it is. SVP in no way competes with any of the larger charities, the living allowance is humble, the accommodations are also somewhat humble, but as a result the volunteers eat, sleep, drink and laugh with the normal people in Sudan. We use the same buses and shop on the same souks as normal people in Sudan. SVP has a network of hardworking people who are there to help you, and want to be friends with you. Yes there were times when I complained and I could not help but wander into ex-pat land, where I ordered chicken wings, beans and chips, and read a British Newspaper whilst being air conditioned. But SVP being the sort of charity that it is, attracting the sort of beautiful volunteers that it does, having

the type of connection with normal salt of the earth people that it does, means that when you go to Sudan, you are already someone's daughter, someone's sister, someone's cousin and friend, and all you got to do is be open to it, have no hidden motives and accept the good and the bad.

As a result of that that 5 months and a bit trip, which turned into a year, many great things have happened to me.

Tom Wharton writes Goodbye Khartoum! The bus journey itself is worth a column alone. No journey in Sudan would be complete without the obligatory seven hours of WWE wrestling re-runs.

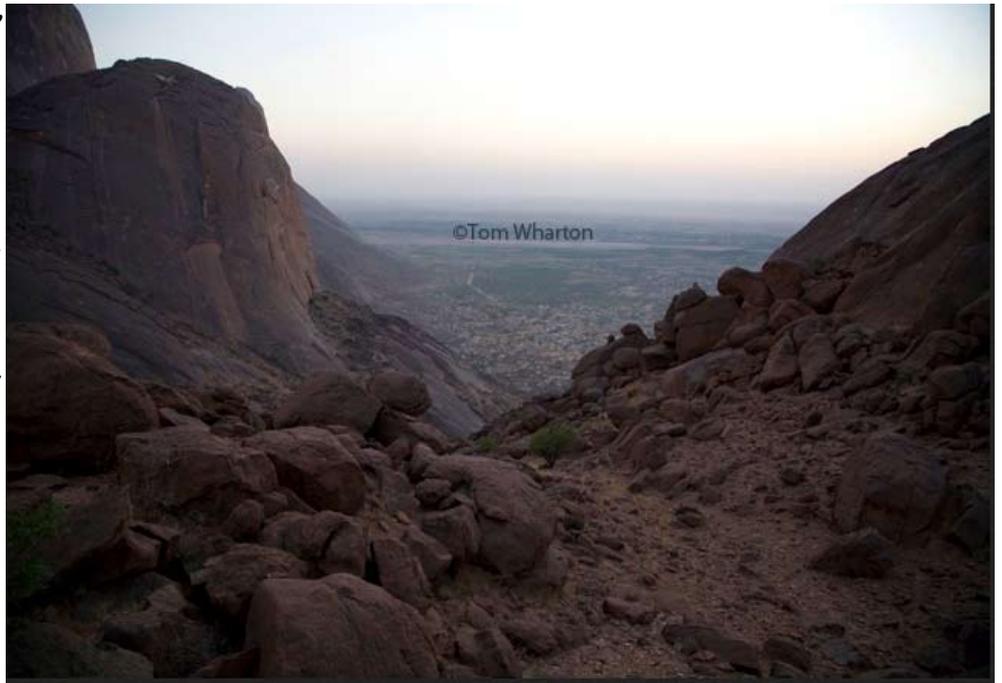
I grew up with wrestling, abandoning it at the age of 8, so those seven hours were actually more of an exercise in nostalgia. I looked around and realised all other grown men on the bus were doing exactly the same thing, cheering, booing and tutting in unison as Rey Mysterio was denied a shot at the championship belt much to the chagrin of the entire bus.

East Sudan as seen from a bus window is incredibly flat, indescribable just how far the horizons stretch in all directions, let alone how vast this country is (I still can't quite believe nine hours of journeying on fairly adequate roads represents only a few inches on my map.) The most obvious facet of Kassala life are the mountains. These dramatic 'Jebels' that spring from the flat plains of the east as confusing as they are beautiful, as if some invisible hand has taken the most dramatic peaks of grander mountains

and placed them haphazardly in the desert, stretching all the way from here to Eritrea and apparently crawling with roving brigades of baboons and the occasional hyena. Kassala really does feel like Africa closer to the ends of the world than it does Khartoum. Men proudly stroll the streets with large swords hanging from their belts, the tea ladies which frequent the streets of Khartoum in large numbers are almost nowhere to be seen here, in their place are men selling coffee men stronger and spicier than my European palette is accustomed to. In fairness most foods here seem to have an emphasised taste, even salads taste better.

Vanessa Volland writes: Before leaving for Sudan, I tried to fight my ignorance, but the media portrait of Sudan is not exactly favourable and makes one believe conflict is ubiquitous and poverty is so bad that everyone lives in little mud huts without running water or electricity. In order to deal as efficiently as possible with the unexpected, I tried to think of all possible scenarios, so when I prepared my departure and packed my things, I packed an entire pharmacy but did not give too much thought to clothes and shoes. This ended in a rather frustrating and unsuccessful day spent in Suk Omdurman and Suk Al Arabi. It did not help that a couple of weeks prior to my departure, the UK and German embassies were attacked. Fortunately, SVP & some ex-volunteers were very encouraging and portrayed Sudan in a very different way. Generosity and incredible hospitality were very high on the list but also dust, heat and dust. I went with the expectation of the unexpected, of conflict and hospitality, of poverty and generosity, and of dust and heat. The first confirmed expectation was the

heat. I arrived in the middle of the night and it felt like Europe in a summer heat wave. As I found out the next day when I had the idea of wandering around Suk Al Arabi at midday, it can get a lot hotter. On my walk, I also realised that it was indeed rather dusty. As to generosity and hospitality, it's definitely something which other nations can learn from the Sudanese. As a European, it is sometimes hard to accept everything without a chance of reciprocating. It all starts with a cup of tea here and there and continues to be a meal here or there, and ends up being an invitation to everything. As the invitations accumulate, there is a slight feeling of guilt slowly but surely surfacing. Sometimes, I have just given up on trying to give something back, so I accept gratefully with a big smile feeling a bit stupid. However, sometimes I see my tiny chances. For example, the other day on the bus I wanted to pay for the young lady sitting next to me as she was very nice and helpful. I handed over the money for two passengers and sat there smugly congratulating myself on my success. It did not last long. The money was returned despite my wild gesticulations and efforts to refuse the money. In any case, I experienced the peak of generosity and hospitality (thus far) when travelling around the country for roughly three weeks. Apart from seeing pyramids and other amazing archaeological sites, climbing the mountains, riding horses and camels, snorkelling and much more, the people helping and hosting us were incredible. We were welcomed warmly and fed and spoilt.



the view from Jebel Totil *Tom Wharton*

SVP needs your membership to support our efforts. No wages or rent are paid in the UK.

Please support SVP with your donations or membership at £3.00 per month or £36.00 per year or £10.00 concessions:

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Sudan Volunteer Programme

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