

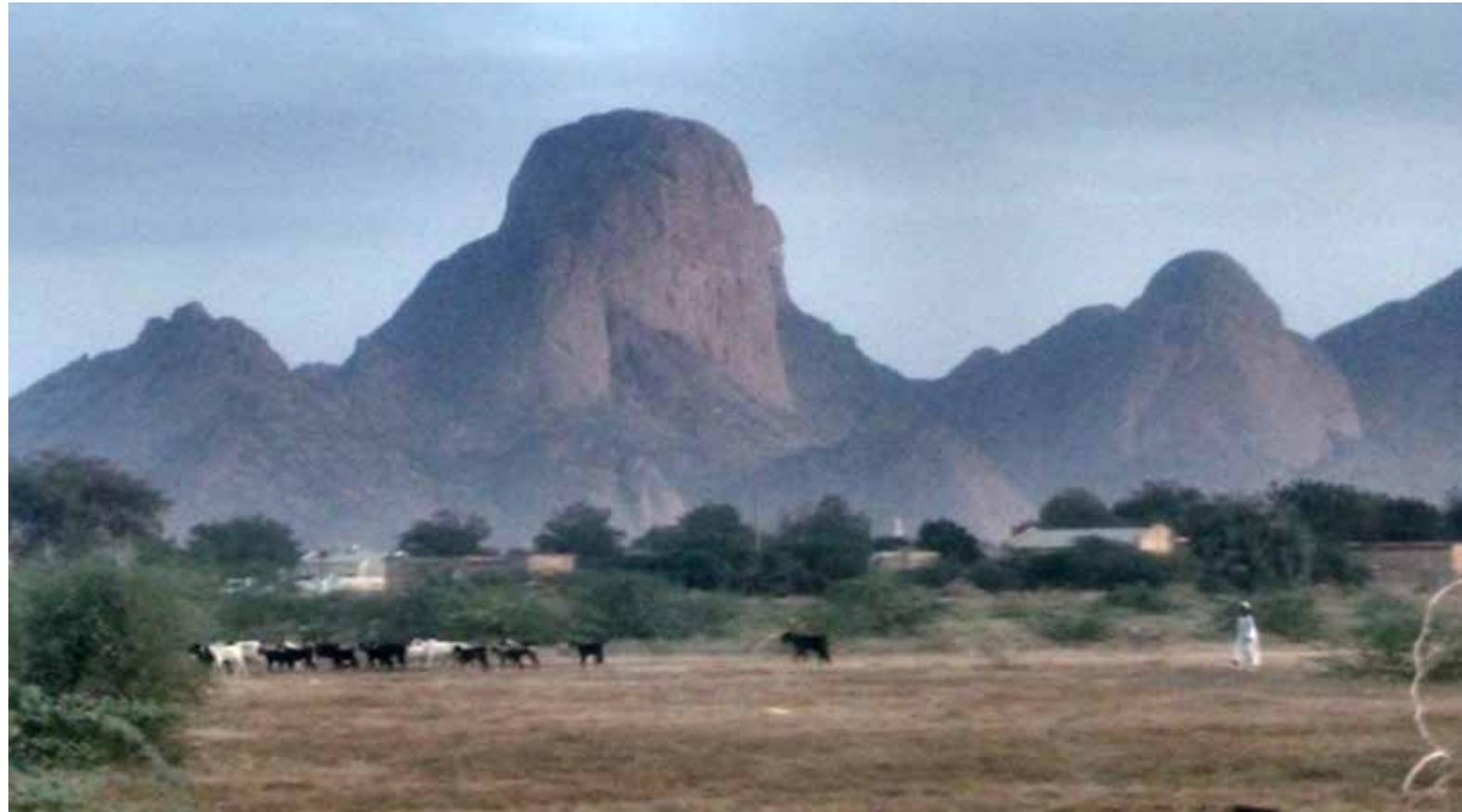
S·V·P News 20

Sudan Volunteer Programme

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English language skills are needed more than ever by Sudanese graduates looking for work either in Sudan or abroad. SVP volunteers are teaching conversational English in universities both in and outside the capital.



Jebel Totil, Kassala *photo by Will Buckner*

a note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the twentieth annual issue of SVP News. It contains a selection 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 gives special thanks to all our volunteers - who give so much of themselves:

Tim McVicar Damian Kruz Jacquelyn Kunz William Scott James Riley Mats Liekens Angus Girling
Angelica Razack Emilie Heath Jordan Greene Kamal Gray Rhea Pendleton Kamran Sehgal Chris
Clatterbuck Nokomi Achkar David Sargent Abdullah Hamid Zainab Lalwal Cate Pollock Amal
AbdelGadir Andrea Collados George Garrett Jorge Ibarra Laura Attwell Rachel Alford Bill Buckner
Isra'a Nour

Dear SVP members - please stay with us: we urgently need your support! Ahmed Bedri

Cate Pollock: *The Famous Goat of Suakin*: During my holiday in Port Sudan, I took a day trip to Suakin. I didn't know what to expect, but I had heard there were cool ruins. It took half an hour to find the right bus stop from Port Sudan—different people kept giving me contradictory directions, and the out-of-date guidebook I had borrowed was full of lies. The main thing to see in Suakin is apparently the island, which I found by walking toward the sea on what appeared to be the only road in town. A camel walked past in the opposite direction, as if it had somewhere to be. Goats and donkeys outnumbered people.

I crossed a bridge onto the island and walked past a guard. At first he looked like he was going to leave me alone, but then he changed his mind and started shouting at me, demanding ten pounds. I gestured in the direction of all the other people walking onto the island for free. Then he wanted to see my passport, which after three months was still in 'processing' in Khartoum.

Finally, he gave me a ticket and let me walk around the ruins, the most ruined ruins I had ever seen; most of the island is covered in stones that look like they might possibly have formed a building once. The only real structures were the Ottoman customs office that the Turks had restored, and the skeleton of the first ever bank in Sudan. Not that I could tell it was a bank; an old man in a jalabiyya told me. He also said that Suakin used to be full of genies, but that they had all left a few years ago.

On my way out I got hungry and was directed to a fish restaurant close to the shore. I asked the owner what he had. "Fish," he replied, as if that was the dumbest question he had ever been asked. "Ooookay," I replied, "I'll have some fish. And a Coca-Cola." As I sat down, two men left their table and went to pay. A goat snuck towards the table and jumped on it to start eating the fish. I, being an idiot tourist, decided to get up and take a picture before the goat was chased away by one of the workers, who shouted and threw a glass bottle at it.

My food and drink arrived. The fish was delicious, and I was really enjoying my cold drink. When I had almost finished, the restaurant owner came to my table. He was a grumpy old man, and he angrily asked me why I had taken a picture of his goat. I joked that it was because we didn't have goats in America. He was unamused.

At this point he started ranting about something, speaking too quickly for me to understand. I picked out were 'picture,' 'five pounds,' and 'Coca-Cola.' It sounded like he was saying that the goat liked Coca-Cola, and he seemed to want some money from me. I'm also pretty sure that he claimed his goat was famous all over the world. I just thought he was a crazy old man, so I told him I wasn't paying him anything. He looked at the half-finished Coke on the table and said 'Ok, this is enough.' He then whistled for his goat, which came running over. The goat jumped up on its back legs and supported itself against the man's chest. Then, he took my bottle of Coke and put it in the goat's mouth. The goat tilted its head back and swallowed the whole thing.

The entire time I had just stared open-mouthed at this strange spectacle, and when the goat started drinking my soda I collapsed into uncontrollable laughter. But the man was offended—why hadn't I taken a picture? He refused to speak to me again, except to tell me the price of the fish. A few times I heard him muttering to himself; "Famous goat! No picture!" Clearly, I had made a huge mistake.

This was one of the highlights of my travels, so the next week I told my students about it while scrolling through my photos. They all started smiling and laughing excitedly, until one said "Teacher, you met the famous goat! I heard about this goat before." Most of my students knew about it, and a few got out their phones to show me the videos of it on Youtube, with a surprisingly high numbers of views. Turns out, the man wasn't crazy, his goat really was famous, and now I must return to Suakin and apologize for not taking a picture of it.

Damian Kruz: After Ramadan the Eid holiday lay on the horizon, the feast the sacrifice, a week long break and an invitation to get out of Khartoum and visit Ar-Rabad in Kordofan, extended by a colleague in my English Department to visit her family home and also the occasion involved the wedding of her eldest brother.

Travel permit was issued without complication and bus ticket purchased on my behalf, for which I was never allowed to pay, we eventually set-off by bus on the first morning of the Eid holiday. I was part of an extended family return that

numbered many children. We finally reached our destination around dusk. A family reunion just off the bus, joyous embraces that took long moments to re-familiarise the feel of parted kin, generations together again. The Eid celebration holiday is a time for family reunions and is often the only chance in the year for people from the big cities to get back to their origins. And the family I was with had the extra joy of the wedding, the subject of which was or worked its way into the tapestry of many conversations.

Israa Nour: Before arriving to Khartoum from Washington, DC, I thought I understood how Sudanese people thought, their values, and principles. A Sudanese woman myself, born in Sudan to two parents also born and raised in Sudan, I thought I had a complete understanding of the culture I would be immersing myself in. It was not until my first discussion with my English Club, that I realized how much I had to learn.



Club discussion group Isra'a Nour

I had expected a very black and white existence living in Khartoum, with conversations limited and many subjects taboo. I thought people would be easily offended, their lives revolving round Islam and little else. I imagined people being overly disciplined and an overall oppressive atmosphere.

I had no idea how liberal, bright, driven, generous and compassionate the Sudanese people are. The English club is open to the public, not just the University of Khartoum students that I teach everyday, but a general sample of the Sudanese from every walk of life that have opinions they would like to share with others on a variety of topics such as; love, racism, civil rights, immigration, divorce, and drugs.

On every topic, my expectations were disproved. Sudanese it turned out, want what anyone from around the world would want: security, to be loved and valued, to provide for their families, and the opportunity to reach their personal goals. When topics where I expected radical islamic ideas or conservatives to silence everyone were discussed, everyone was extremely respectful but majority of my groups had very humanitarian ideas and a strong moral compass with no mention of religion. I heard secular ideas I would hardly expect from Europeans, nor Americans for that matter, the majority speaking liberally about social issues. As in the US, the government is not the same as the people. People spoke openly and honestly about their love lives (which before arriving, I thought was a privilege reserved only for married couples). I listened as they spoke about achievements, heartaches of friends and families. I heard optimistic predictions for the country and sentiments of patriotism. People shared their stances on everything imaginable with little reserve. Although censorship is a part of everyday life, my English Club is an exception. Everyone expressing themselves freely.

Some of the words shared at the English Club will stay with me forever, the entire discussion through my head over and over for the rest of the day, their ideas and aspirations warming my heart. Their gratitude makes me more grateful. Their hope makes me more hopeful. I am convinced some of the greatest minds are hidden in this country. It is a shame students are not provided the same opportunities as those in the West because they seem more hungry to learn and committed to their education. The English Club at

University of Khartoum taught me: as Socrates would say “The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing.” I continue to discover how little I know during my English Club.

Laura Attwell: Archaeology and adventures in the north. Maria, my friend from Poland, came to visit for a couple of weeks. While she was here we decided to travel around the north, where many of Sudan’s archaeological sites are. I didn’t have a definite route but I knew that I wanted to go sort-of in the direction of Kerma but not as far as Wadi Halfa (last stop in Sudan before Egypt).

The first place we visited was Karima, which we went to visit the Jebel Barkal site. They are visible from the road, in between the towns of Karima and Meroe (about ten minutes from either). As soon as the bus stopped near the pyramids a gust of wind blew in and specks of sand whipped us in the face. There was a sandstorm! The pyramids looked beautiful. Jebel Barkal means ‘Holy Mountain’ in Arabic and is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Besides the pyramids - which represent a royal cemetery from the second Kingdom of Kush - the remains of the Temple of Amun (Egyptian State God) lie at the base of the mountain. There is also a rock pinnacle which sticks out of the mountain which is said to look like a serpent rearing its head. These pyramids are different to all the others we visited because they’re in an urban environment, nevertheless they’re relatively well preserved.

We stayed in Karima for a second night (it was very cold but the kindly hotel owner gave us some thin sofa-cover type blankets. The north is colder than Khartoum so bring a sleeping bag if you have one) then headed to Nuri and Dongola the next day. We had planned to walk to Nuri but we bumped into a couple of German archeologists in a shop in Karima (they are working at the Ghazali site, they came into town to buy a chocolate bar each) who said it would take about 3 hours so we decided to hitchhike. We took two rides and each time got picked up within a few minutes - our second ride took us right to the foot of the pyramids. The pyramids were stunning, they are crumbling but much larger than the ones at Jebel Barkal and Bejirawiya.

On the way back we found a bus that was going to Meroe (we didn’t know that they existed) and then Dongola. The bus to Dongola was packed full - the guy next to me sat on a crate which had been cut in half and wedged between some other seats. The guide book says that in Dongola there is “a large number of high quality accommodation options” so after the hotel in Karima I had high hopes. I remember saying to Maria that there would almost definitely be blankets there and perhaps even hot water. We arrived in Dongola and walked to the hotel. I saw a large building from the back which looked hotel-ish, it looked newly painted and had lots of air conditioning units coming out of the back. I could almost feel the hot shower. Anyway by the time we got to the front it turned out that it wasn’t a hotel but the oncology ward for a hospital. We asked around for the hotel and some people pointed us towards a souk-like area, which had three rough looking hotels in a row. Hotel Haiifa (the one we wanted) was full, S hotel didn’t accept females (dormitories only) and Lord Hotel had a room for us, but it turned out that the room was actually the receptionist’s personal bedroom. There was a kitchen at the front with lots of pots and clothes and old suitcases and plastic flowers, and a dark bedroom at the back. There were no lights but he said he’s fix that for us. We decided to try our last hotel option, a place called Hotel Ola which was on a different street. It was massive and they did have a room for us, and it was warm. They even gave me an extra blanket. I think it was the best night’s sleep I’ve ever had.

The next day we wanted to go to Kerma and then Atbarra. Kerma was my favourite site of all the ones I’ve seen. It consists of a large mud structure called the deffufa and some remains of graves. You can climb to the top of the deffufa, which was built during the Kerma civilisation, about 5500 years ago. There are lots of little birds flying around and the natural surroundings are beautiful, a combination of date palms and desert.

The next day we left Atbarra at 6 am for our bus ride to Bejirawiya. We got dropped off at a petrol station which was about 3 km from the pyramids so that we could get some food then walked through the desert towards the pyramids. It was completely deserted except for halfway there, when two weird men, one was chubby and the other was skinny with a broken arm, came up to us shouting “Mmooooo...nn”. They were putting some crops (there was a small patch of green) onto the back of a truck. The skinny one

was especially excited, he was practically jumping towards us. I thought they were saying “morning” so I was like “hello! Good morning!” then it turned out that they were saying “money! money” repeatedly. They had a beaten up white pick-up truck which they wanted to take us to the pyramids in for...500 SDG! I said no and carried on walking, the skinny one ran after us shouting “200! 150!”. After about a minute they left us alone. This is the first experience I’ve had like this in Sudan. 98% of the Sudanese people I’ve met have been extremely polite, welcoming and hospitable. As a general rule Sudanese people do not treat foreigners like this - these people were an exception.

Our plan to get back to Khartoum from Bejirawiya was to catch a bus from the road (there’s no bus stop) to Shendi or Khartoum. We were only there for a few minutes before a little white car came zooming along. It stopped and immediately the driver popped the boot open. I asked how much it would be to go to Shendi and with a big grin he said “free!”. It turned out that he - Ali



The pyramids near Jebel Barkal Cate Pollock

- was going to Khartoum and he gave us a lift all the way home. Ali is from the Nuba mountains and he told us loads about his culture and hometown, he also introduced us to some great Sudanese music and taught us some dance moves (while driving, although he was actually a careful driver). I was so pleased to get back to the relative luxury of Khartoum after the trip, but I had an amazing adventure and would not choose to spend those days in any other way. I hope other people get to do the same.

Rachel Alford: In the months before I arrived in Sudan, I remember telling myself over and over that of course the first few months in Sudan would be difficult while I adjusted to my new life, and that it would take a while for me to be comfortable, but that it would get easier. In reality, I was shocked at how quickly and easily I was able to embrace Sudanese life, and to feel very settled here. Despite having only been here for just over two months, I have had overwhelmingly positive experiences. However, that doesn’t mean that there haven’t been challenges.

For me, teaching English is hard work, made worse by my average class sizes consisting of 100+ students, overcrowded class rooms, and an inability to express myself clearly. Behaviour is often an issue too, meaning that occasionally I’ll spend an entire lesson trying to get the class to pay attention, or complete the work that I set. However, despite the challenges inside the classroom, what happens outside the classroom makes it all worthwhile.

From my colleagues who are always willing to share fuul with me in the staff room or listen to me whine about my classes, to my students who, despite not always being the most well behaved, cook me local food so I can try it, invite me to their houses, take selfies with me, and show a genuine interest in my life. But this kindness and hospitality goes beyond my university.

On a trip to Tuti Island, two local people insisted on not only spending their day showing us around, but paying for everything as well, stating that ‘when we come to Australia, you can pay them’. Strangers regularly pay for my meals/tea/buses after nothing more than a short conversation or greeting. My Sudanese friends invite me along to cultural events where we can discuss anything from their post-graduate applications to bad British rappers. While waiting for the bus, strangers have stopped their cars to offer me a free lift to work. Other volunteers and I often share tea or coffee with our security

guard and his family despite not speaking the same language, communicating with smiles and laughter instead. Sudanese hospitality is something that I heard a lot about before I arrived here, however actually experiencing it is something indescribable.

Will Buckner: When I got to Kassala a little over four months ago, I knew I was in for an adventure. From Khartoum to Kassala is like travelling back in time. In Kassala, there are none of the traffic jams or skyscrapers of Khartoum - most roads are unpaved, and almost no buildings taller than a few floors. The roads have as many carts pulled by donkeys and horses as cars, and the only time the carts and cars have to wait is when goat herders bring their flocks across the road.

In Kassala khawadjas (foreigners) are rare and people were excited to meet me. During my first few weeks, everywhere I was swarmed by people of all ages shouting out welcome to me, with invitations to join them for tea, a meal, or to visit them at their home. Agreeing to these requests as often as I could, I soon had many good friends.

They are of all ages, all eager to teach me more about their country and traditions. Kassala is home to many, many different tribes, such as the Bija, Beni-Amer, Howsa, Reshaida, Haddendua, Shukria, and Baarta tribes (to name just a few). Some are easy to recognize, as they purposely scar their faces in certain locations, or by dress in certain clothes, or by carrying swords. My new Sudanese friends come from a variety of tribes, and they enjoy explaining the customs and practices of their particular tribes. I am often invited to attend various tribal functions, which helps me to understand what



Tomb carving Jebel Barkal Andrea Collados

life is like for each tribe.

One event that a friend took me to was camel racing - hosted by the Reshaida, famous for their camels. Their races attract people from as far away as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, who come all the way to Kassala to buy, some for over 2,000,000 Sudanese pounds, more than the average Sudanese will make in a lifetime.

The morning of the race, my friend I and arrived at the Reshaida compound, where we were greeted by the leader. Sudanese are famous for their hospitality, and the Reshaida more than lived up to that. To ensure that my friends and I enjoyed our visit, the leader said that we would watch the races with him. The race takes place over a 5-kilometer course, so spectators drive in cars alongside the course to get the best views. A race started right after we arrived, and so we quickly headed to the Reshaida leader's car.

On the drive to the starting line, the process was explained to me. Little machines are placed on the camels before the races, and these whip the camels into running at maximum speed. On either side of the track, cars were filled with prospective camel buyers eager to watch. There were also trucks with people recording the races, so that they could send the tapes of the camel races to prospective buyers.

As soon as we pulled up to the starting line, the races started. In an instant, the calm desert around us was transformed. The camels charged forward, and the cars raced forward to keep pace with the surging animals. Meanwhile, the people in my car talked excitedly about the camels. Some were owned by people in my car, or by friends. It was a mesmerizing

experience, with the speed and the grace of the creatures. When the race ended, there was no time for celebration - we rushed back to the starting line to see the next race. We watched many races that day, and each as entertaining as the first. Meanwhile my hosts were happy to teach me about the finer points of camel racing.

After the races, I was invited to join the leader of the Reshaida in his tent for a feast - and what a feast it turned out to be! They brought in one of the largest trays I had ever seen, which was overflowing with meat, rice, and other delicious foods. The main course was a Sudanese dish called Mundi, which is goat meat. Goat meat turned out to be far more delicious than I expected, and I happily ate what was in front of me. As the people in the tent ate, we told jokes, bonding over the events of the day, and they shared some of the history of the Reshaida. It was a great day, and it was one of many wonderful experiences I have had so far in Kassala!

Living in Sudan has not always been easy, but days like that remind me how lucky I am to live in Sudan. Every day presents new opportunities to see a different aspect of Sudan, and to better know these people who have made me feel so welcome.

Zainab & Abdullah Lalwal: An early morning arrival into Khartoum airport, and a warm welcome by Tim and Jacqui made for a pleasant start to our Sudan adventure. A warm yet cool temperature filled the atmosphere in Khartoum. A peaceful traffic free journey through the night to the SVP volunteers' house showed us a deceptive calm and quiet city.

5 days into our stay in Khartoum just as we were becoming slightly familiar with our new setting we were whisked away to Merowe, where we would be living for the next academic year.

The day after we arrived we were teaching our first class, an introductory session but nonetheless it still needed preparation. Not expecting to be teaching so soon we entered the classroom feeling underprepared and nervous. The students looked excited to meet their foreign English teachers. With our east African looks and Zainab's Islamic dressing the students were also under the impression we spoke Arabic and/or were Sudanese. When we spoke English we could see confusion and intrigue growing on their faces. The sheer number of students was daunting: we somehow made it through the first class. Living in Merowe and working in Karima means we get to see well known landmarks on a regular basis. The first time we made the journey we watched everything with pure curiosity and amazement. As we crossed the Nile we had a beautiful view of Jebel Barkel which lay in the distance. Further into our journey date trees fill the distance, the green scenery formed such a striking contrast to the dry desert which encompasses the area. We finally reach the Jebel Barkel and see the famous pyramids. Having been to Egypt we somewhat expected them to be bigger! It's amazing to live a stone's throw away from so much history and beautiful nature.

Life in the northern state life is quieter, more community orientated and is great for those looking for the full Arabic and cultural experience. Patience is needed with the university's administration department as at times communication can be frustrating. Foreign foods and resources are minimal in these parts, restaurants are few and transportation doesn't run late.

We've enjoyed the full experience outside a big city and we have met some amazing people on our trip. We quickly grew to learn that Sudanese people treat guests with great hospitality in all matters. Sugar, fowl (beans), bread and chai (tea) are staples of our daily lives, with the only times that are set are those of prayer.

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