

S·V·P News 2

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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IN July 1998 twenty SVP volunteers assembled at Heathrow and set off for Khartoum. This was SVP's second summer of operation. Ahmed Karrar had accepted the arduous task of being coordinator in Khartoum, responsible for meeting the plane, getting everybody to the hostel accommodation, answering all sorts of questions and seeing that the schools and colleges were ready to receive them. It turned out to be a demanding job for Ahmed and also for his wife Dr Amani Osman and the other members of SVP Khartoum. Our thanks go to all who helped and gave so much hospitality to our volunteers.

Again there is much to be learnt from the experience of this programme which will be relevant to future plans for SVP. But as before we can be sure that there is a great demand for our volunteers at all levels of education, and that SVP has many friends in Sudan eager to help and support our expansion and improvement in service and expertise.

Emily Pegg
with a
group of
happy pupils



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A note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the second issue of SVP News. It contains extracts from a few of the many reports received from our volunteers in this year's summer programme. We hope that these may encourage others to join us in this really worthwhile work, not only by their accounts of their teaching but also stories of their experience of meeting and travelling with Sudanese. SVP thanks all the volunteers who took part: Morwenna Banham, Christine Chappell, Sarah Cohen, Avery Davis-Roberts, Caroline Driver, Alexandra Marsland, Gopali Mulji, Emily Pegg, Amy Scott, Wendy Young, Paul Bartlett, Adam Dawlatly, Matthew Green, Craig Hart, Stewart How, Hugh Riddell, Ashish Shah, Richard Sherrington, Simon Whittaker, Edmund Wyatt.

SVP could not exist without its members and supporters. If you would like to help or keep in touch please become a member and come to our meetings and receptions. There is more about SVP on the back page.

Ahmed Bedri

A Trip North by Hugh Riddell

At a quarter to six on a Thursday morning I found myself in Khartoum North bus station. Small as it is, the pressures in Sudan's capital city can bring one to the edge, so my plan to hit the road North to visit some obscure pyramids had become a matter of some excitement. For me anyway. My Sudanese friends could think of nothing worse than bouncing for four hours on a converted cattle transporter to find a pile of stones surrounded by sand and when put like that it does sound a little perverse. Nevertheless here I am at a quarter to six drinking tea with a soldier who says he comes from somewhere near there and who is swearing on his life these pyramids long predate all that pharaoh nonsense. He insists on settling the bill and I am led to the 'right' bus and then to a different bus where I am introduced. Now that all my fellow passengers are discussing my itinerary amongst themselves the bus becomes a hive of information. Any plans I had made are collectively scrapped while theories as to the whereabouts of the pyramids fly thick and fast. The back row advises a change at Kabushiya, the driver assures me of the back row's stupidity and my neighbour smiles and mutters the Sudanese answer to everything: "Mafi mushkilla".

Five miles into the desert a sandstorm falls out of the sky. Although a normal Khartoum fixture I was not ready for the desert 'haboob'. A violent crosswind leaps through the empty windowframes and deposits its cargo of dust on everything. My

neighbours draw their headscarves over impassive faces and offer sympathetic shrugs while I splutter like a newborn rubbing my eyes with the back of caked fists. My alarm grows as I register that our driver is completely unfazed by the now near zero visibility. I sit up alert to every jolt or lurch exasperated by the serenity of my neighbours who have brilliantly become their galabias. Can't we stop and wait for it to blow over? Why won't he settle for second place behind the donkey cart? And what am I doing here anyway? Occasionally I catch a glimpse of the desert stretching far away and I remember how Osman had laughed at my plan to look for something beautiful in the desert. The Sudanese have no illusions about their country.

Four hours later and the bus has stopped. I assume we have broken down for this is evidently not a bus stop. I sit patiently with the others until I realise the others are waiting for me to get off. I point into the sandstorm: "pyramid?" The Sudanese are confused: can this khawaja still intend to get off a perfectly decent bus to muddle about in the sand all day? As if it was the most normal thing in the world, I sling my rucksack and climb down giving my fellow travellers my stiffest upper lip and heartiest wave. Of course this is what I intended!

The road is receding seemingly without my moving. Sand is creeping across the tops of my sandals and whipping my eyes. I stand motionless, facing the way the driver pointed as he drove off. Yes, I'm sure it was that way.. I feel like a clown with my bread and my water filter cup: as if they can save me now, I sigh, and am considering a melodramatic posture of hopelessness in the sand. Suddenly I confront a man digging the sand outside his square house. For a moment both think the other mad: why does this man walk in the desert like a camel? But why does that man dig in the sand? Having no time to clear up such problems I set to waving all arms and describing pyramids in the air endlessly repeating the name of a 'nearby town' in such a way as to assure him of my insanity. Overjoyed I see recognition light his face and before long he has set me on a distinguishable path.

The minaret of Beggarawiya was a heavenly sight. It beckons me towards a town of long low brown walls beyond which rise the palms of the Nile. Nothing stirs. A wandering goat turns its floppy ears to me then joins a tethered donkey in some shade. But then I hear the unmistakable screams of break time. There are two

schools in this town: one for boys and one for girls. I have stumbled straight into the latter. The courtyard evacuates in terror, skipping ropes and arguments are dropped, the school scuttles for shelter and peers back at a bemused white man. However, initial confusion soon gives way to ordered hospitality. Guides are mustered, food and water presented and a bed is



The pyramids near Beggarawiya

offered. Children reappear, gather and smile and I am loaded onto a donkey cart bound for my precious pyramids, thanking God for Sudanese generosity.

After half an hour of wishing I didn't have such a bony bum my two young guides clasp my arm and point at some shadowy forms in the distance. Gradually as many as ten stone structures distinguish themselves from the dust, looming from a proud desert ledge. Small and very alone, discovered and forgotten many times over, the pyramids impress by their strangeness. Together we climb one as a sign that our mission is complete and successful.

My day careers on, taking me almost by accident to Shendi; where a man presents me with the keys of his house and then returns to work; where, buying a coke, I am swept up by a passing mob of students and taken home for a huge meal prepared by invisible mothers and aunts who reveal themselves only as I depart; and where at sunset I am shown the favourite cadaver of a medical student before a final tea at the onion market on the river's bank. I slink 'home' to find my host already snoring in the courtyard. Soon I am snoring with him wondering who on earth he is.

Ashish Shah writes:- 'In terms of teaching I thoroughly enjoyed both the work in the University of Khartoum and at Amal. My classes at the University were small and the students were absolutely fantastic and enthusiastic. The great thing was that while teaching English we simultaneously discussed ideas for development and new methods of making Africa better which was motivating and enjoyable at the same time.

... 'You said the Sudanese were friendly people . .that's not true. The Sudanese are the most friendly people I've ever met. . not just friendly . . people are so warm and welcoming despite the hard conditions. Never in my life have I got onto a bus, paid the fare to the conductor and then had the conductor return my fare to me because a stranger has paid for me! Never in my life have I walked along streets and got people I have never met calling to me in Arabic 'itfadel' and asking me to join them for a meal . . or waiting for a lift have people going in the opposite direction stopping and giving me a ride completely out of the way . . or giving food to a street child and have him cut the burger in half and offer it to me to eat with him . . .What am I taking from Sudan? Some of the best two months I've ever spent coupled with unforgettable memories of a great place and fabulous people . . ."

Wendy Young writes:- If anyone had told me before I left for Sudan that I would be teaching English to 23 year old university students in classes of over 100 at a time, I would never have volunteered! However once there, standing in front of the class, there is no way out and the only answer is to gather together one's strength of character and teach! And once you have managed to cope with the first two hour lesson and in fact come out of it feeling that you have done a respectable job, your confidence blossoms and you are able to relax and improve your performance at each lesson . .

Amy Scott writes:- Never had I been to a country about which I knew so little and yet turns out to be the largest country in Africa! . . So the learning experience for me was immense . . to be suddenly struck by such friendly, enthusiastic people, an almost complete lack of westerners, small children clinging to my clothes . . .teaching in a completely new environment . .it left me feeling privileged to had access to a country which has so much to offer me which beforehand had been so unknown . .just being in Sudan felt like something worthwhile.

to Jebel Marra- extracts from Sarah Cohen's diary At 2.45am Faisal knocked on our door at the Guest House to wake us up and by 3am we were in Mubarak's truck on our way to the airport and we had a good flight to Nyala. . .It became apparent that we were to go straight up the mountain - no possible catch up on lost sleep . . we stopped at BulBul a small village for some food - zabadi which is yoghurt and meat which is absolutely tough. Everything was so amazing; I had always wanted to go to a rainforest and suddenly here I was with birds with unbelievable colours - blue with a velvet look, with purple shimmers - and red eyes - also bright light blue with brown in the middle and others with bright light green - all the colours in the rainbow - trees of every variety. Caroline and I met some people and we went to where one of them lived and they invited us to eat with them; it was bread, tomatoes and something made from beans. The surroundings were literally like something out of a film set and everything was so 3D. We went to meet the others who were at this wonderful waterfall - 2 boys climbed up a rock oblivious of the danger and entertained us for a while by jumping - wheee- splash into the middle. Later we climbed the mountain in the dark. Next day we walked along a little brook with the water trickling down, so fresh and clean while all about flew an amazing variety of dragon flies, no two the same. . .we stopped at Video a village where everything was huge; oranges the size of footballs, sheep the size of ponies and even the visitors' book needed at least 2 people to hold it. . . I had a great time playing with the kids and chasing them all over. Eight hours later we got near the top of the mountain, no more people, bleaker and bleaker, the stars were unbelievable, so prolific it was like being on the moon. It was freezing and 3 or 4am before I got to sleep. In the morning we set off at a good pace, lovely walking with no one around but some camels and little paths beside huge crevasses and monkeys running by, then in the distance we saw the lake, it looked a green colour.

More about SVP

Until about 15 years ago the medium of instruction in Sudan in most secondary education as well as in higher was English (as it still is in some subjects). However, as in many Middle Eastern countries there has been a policy of Arabisation of the medium of instruction. Combined with the reduction in the number of English language classes, these factors have left the younger generation of teachers and pupils with little colloquial experience of English. The need for English language teaching is now recognised by many to be of critical importance and the initiative by **Sudan Volunteer Programme** to send volunteer English language teachers has been welcomed on all sides.

Virtually since independence in 1956 there has been conflict between the south and the central government based in Khartoum. Fighting and famine has led to great suffering and displacement but the northern part where **SVP** is working has remained peaceful. The government which came to power in 1989 has been boycotted by some countries and some NGOs have withdrawn or reduced their operations in the last few years. **SVP** is looking for volunteers whose work will seek to re-establish the traditions of cordiality and friendliness in personal relations which have for so long been important to both. Sudanese people, as they always have been, are very hospitable and welcoming, particularly to strangers. Their charm and courtesy has to be experienced as anyone who has been there will tell you. Their desire to work with **SVP** is genuine and whole-hearted. **SVP** plans to extend its work to towns outside Khartoum and Omdurman. **SVP** volunteers have found that travel within the country is particularly sociable and friendly.

SVP volunteers

SVP is working with native English speaking undergraduates and graduates who are prepared to give their time to this urgent cause. Some have experience of working in other parts of Africa and the Middle East and some have experience of teaching English. Each has had to raise money for the cost of their own airfare to Sudan, which is about £420 and to cover their travel and living expenses in the UK for selection interviews, orientation, briefing and de-briefing.

The host colleges will provide free accommodation and medical cover. **SVP** pays for travel insurance costs for each volunteer and arranges a modest living allowance while in Sudan, sometimes paid by the host institution. Volunteers look after themselves on the college premises. Teaching is informal in style with contact time not more than 4 or 5 hours a day. Volunteers have the chance to plan their own scheme. They can arrange games and competitions and devise

tests towards the assessment of the skills gained by students and progress made in the period. They are close enough to the other colleges with **SVP** volunteers to allow them to get together regularly and profit by each other's experience.

If you would like to apply to work for **SVP**, please contact us at the address below.

SVP's friends

SVP is working with an experienced and capable group of colleagues in Khartoum, Momen Osman Salih, Dr Ahmed Abdullah, formerly English Language Officer at the British Council, Saif Hag ElSafi, Nasreldin Shulgami, Ustaz AbdElAziz Moheddin, Muna Muhalab Ali Taha, Abdullah Bedri and Rasheed ElAmin Hamid who see to the welfare of the volunteers and who advise on placements and academic policy. **SVP Sudan** is being registered as a Sudanese charitable association.

SVP is a registered charity based in London, formed as a company limited by guarantee. The trustees who comprise **SVP's** committee of management are: Ahmed Bedri (*chairman*), Samya Muddathir AbdelRahim (*vice-chair*), Sadig Muhalab Ali Taha, Nadir El Gadi (*treasurer*), David Wolton (*secretary*), Mohamed Hireika, FathiElRahman Kabbashi Agil, Mamoon Ibrahim El Tayeb, AbdelMoniem Ali, Babikir Yahia, Ahmed Zakaria ElHashim.

We hope you will join **SVP** by applying as a member and by persuading your friends to do likewise. Membership entitles you to take part and to vote in **SVP's** general meetings, to receive our news, reports and accounts. The membership fee is £25.00 per year which you can choose to renew annually; there are no legal obligations or liabilities.

Whilst **SVP's** administration is done wholly by volunteers without paid staff, it still has to find money for its own administrative expenses and to give the volunteers a living allowance while in Sudan and to provide their insurance cover. All this costs money and we need your help to make it possible.

Please join us by filling in the membership application form and, if you can, allow us to mention your name in our literature as being '*among our members.*' There is much to be done; your help is needed and your comments and suggestions are welcome.

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