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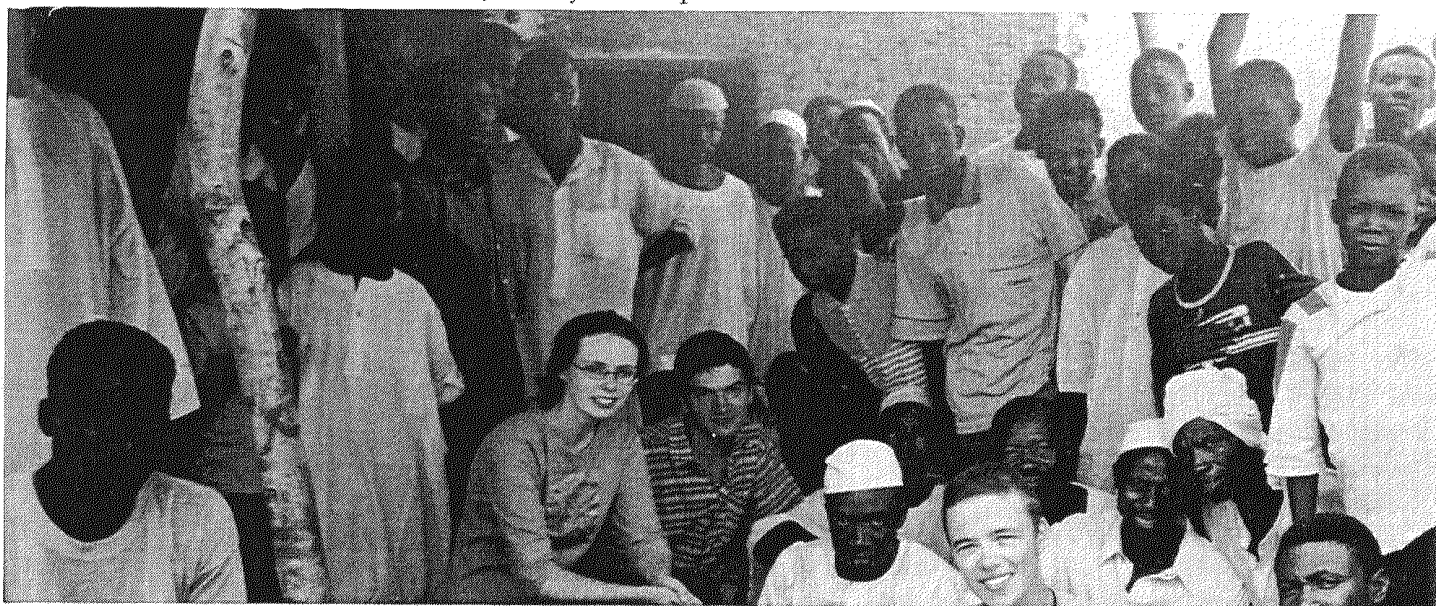
Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

December 2001

Sudan Volunteer Programme started 2001 with a group leaving London in early January continuing our policy of sending more volunteers with longer term commitments. Re-organisation of university terms in Sudan has also made this year's Summer Programme a much smaller.

As in former years SVP has continued to learn from its experience in many ways which will be relevant to future plans. We rely on the great demand and welcome for our volunteers at all levels of education, and our many friends in Sudan eager to help our expansion and improvement in service and expertise. With the the university year now organised in two semesters we are looking for volunteers for programmes of three or more months with starts in January and September.



Maria Byars, Ben Cook & Dominic O'Neill with friends at Rumitab, near Khartoum

A note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the fifth issue of SVP News. It contains some stories received from our volunteers in this year's programmes. We hope that these will encourage others to join us in our really urgently needed work of teaching English. SVP now has volunteers working throughout the Sudan academic year.

SVP thanks all the volunteers of the 2000-2001 season: Ken Darmanin, Emily Chamblin, Michael Metcalf, Eleanor Weaver, Oje Ighoroje, Rebecca Edmunds, Brian Jervis, Richard Lee, Lyndon Ocansey, Laura Donkin, Kirsten West, Scott Burns, Amy Dean, Nadine Powell, Fatimah Ya-Fanah Kelleher, John McAfee, Lee Howard, Simon Carroll, Sue Haigh, Adam Forbes, Sara Almer, Aynah Merchant, Nabila Hameed, David Tighe, Luke Anderson, Lal Howell, Sarah Gough, Amanda Bass, Rowena Sinker, Dominic O'Neill, Nikolai Hutchinson, Ben Cook, Catherine Mahony, Robert Fuller, Robert Hunter, Barnaby Young, Mehrnoosh Aref-Adib, Catherine Bell, Maria Byars, Patricia Kenworthy, Denise Tandy, Dylanne Skillin, Charlie Platts, Julian Steer, Ian Macaulay, Jai Hart, Matt Sanders, Mark Penn, Michael Bartlett, Des Vine, Kirsty Rowan, Imogen Martineau, Till Brückner, Tom Kelly, Alun Macdonald, Simone Crocker, Gareth Carter

SVP could not exist without members and supporters. Please continue your help and keep in touch: if not one already - please become a member.

Ahmed Bedri

Amy Dean writes: I am an SVP volunteer who arrived in Sudan in January this year. I was first placed in Shendi, then in Khartoum, and then I found my way, rather by accident, to Karima and Merowe in the north. Before arriving I thought that I wanted to be in Khartoum, as Esther's briefing notes made it sound very enticing. Within a week I realised that I couldn't be happy there. Some people fit right in, but others, particularly those who don't live in cities back home, find it rather stressful. Many volunteers never discover how completely different the experience of living elsewhere can be.

My experience in Merowe has been absolutely amazing. I think what I value the most, is that it is like living in one big family; the faculty is so isolated we all have to live around each other all of the time. In the village too, everybody got to know me, and look out for me. In my first few days there, I went to get cold drinks from one particular café, when I didn't return for another day or two the owner came all the way to the faculty (a couple of miles) to ask if I was O.K.!

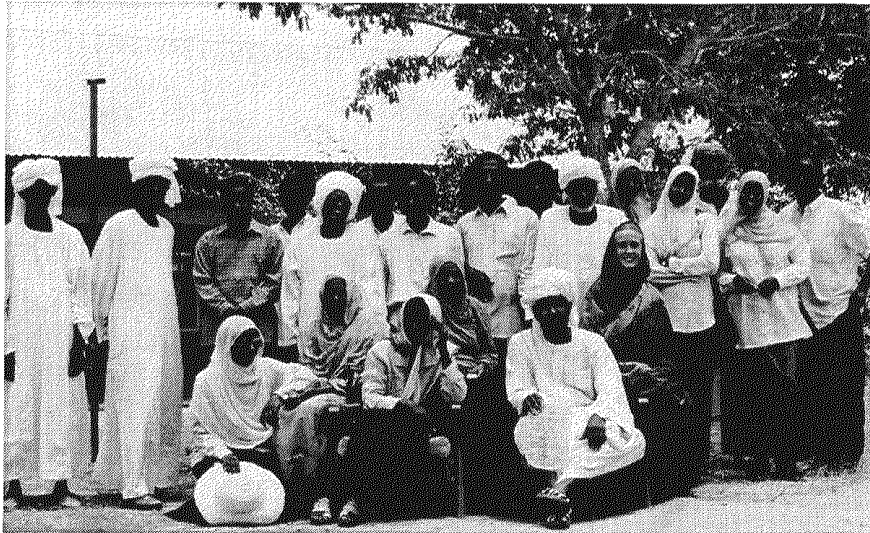
Most visitors to Sudan comment on how friendly and generous the Sudanese are. You will experience this in Khartoum, it is but a watered-down version of what you get in the north! I ended up in

several huge arguments with my friends because they would never let me pay for anything or do anything for myself! Even complete strangers would buy my food and drink in cafes! In one month in Merowe, I only cooked ONE meal myself!

The Faculty of Arts at Karima across the Nile, nearby to Merowe, is the only other faculty of the University of Dongola. Many of our teachers live there. Karima with its surrounding villages is one of most beautiful places in the world. The banks of the Nile are unspoilt, and the villages are scattered amongst the date palms which flank the river. This strip of greenery is narrow; beyond it the desert begins immediately. At the start of the desert, a peculiarly shaped Jebel (smallish mountain) juts out, with a cliff face over-looking the Nile. Jebel ElBarkal dominates the sky-line, and it is easy to see why this was chosen as the first capital of the ancient Kushite kingdom. Surrounding the Jebel are pyramids, tombs, and the ruins of an ancient temple. These can be seen from both faculties, and I never fail to be astounded that I can look out of my lecture-room window and see pyramids, the Nile, and (if I'm lucky), camels. For those who love camels as

much as I do, this is one of the best areas to see them, as they are everywhere, and there's a huge camel market in a neighbouring village. The students are not the standard of those in Khartoum, but they are very enthusiastic, and friendly, and they really value the chance to learn from a native English speaker. The classes are very small (between 8 and 15), which makes life a lot easier. All of the English teachers in Merowe and Karima are fantastic people too; really friendly and mostly quite young.

As there is little to do in the evenings, staff and students congregate in the faculty and just sit around chatting. This may sound boring, and indeed sometimes it is, but they always want to include you, and teach you Arabic, and to learn English. Most of my conversations in Merowe contain is much less serious. I can safely say I've



Amy with friends at the Faculty of Education, Merowe

never laughed so much in any one month than during my time there! They are obsessed with jokes and gossip, and playing tricks, and making fun of me.

If you're keen on learning Arabic, then you are much better off going outside of Khartoum, because you are forced to learn, as so few apart from some of the teachers, speak

English. There are many, many more good things about life in Merowe and Karima, but it's nice to find some of these out yourself. Not all is good about life up in the north, and I feel I should warn anyone who's keen to work there. The main difficulty I had to overcome was the living conditions. It is really not for the faint-hearted! I'm used to roughing it wherever I travel, but the accommodation here is VERY basic. I share a two-roomed building with 5 other women. We sleep in the yard outside because it is too hot, and only in the evenings do we have running water and electricity (no fans)..

This is one of the hottest regions of Sudan, and when I first arrived it was 50 degrees with no running water for 3 days! The good news is that outside of the summer months, it is very cool - getting decidedly cold at night. I would say that from late September until March, it is often cool during the day, and you will need a sleeping bag at night.

Other more minor problems are really psychological. It is sometimes frustrating being the only English person

around, as the intensity of some customs can sometimes get you down. But the vast majority of my time, I would have chosen the company of my Merowe friends above any of the other volunteers! You do, however, have to be of a sociable nature, as visiting families for two or three days at a time is necessary so as not to offend people.

The dress-code is generally stricter outside Khartoum, and although you can draw a line between respecting their culture and losing your own identity, you'll feel much more comfortable if you bear in mind the following basic rules: Men: long sleeves, long trousers. Women: Long skirts or very baggy trousers (it's often very windy so flowy skirts can be impractical and embarrassing - believe me!), long-sleeved tops (should cover your collar bone, and cover your bum!). What most girls wear is long, fairly fitted

blouses, and straight skirts. Above all make sure they're not too fitted, both for modesty reasons, and comfort in the heat. Head-scarves are often useful, to wear around your neck if a top isn't very high, and to cover your head if you get out into the heat, so you don't get sunstroke!

For both sexes: Bring a jumper or two for the evenings if you're there in the winter, and socks! Short-sleeves are generally O.K. for both men and women outside of teaching hours.

Something that can't be stressed enough, which many volunteers have commented upon, is that Sudanese place a lot of emphasis on appearance. They take great care to be smart and clean outside the house, and expect others to do the same. In the words of another volunteer who was here for 2 years: "if your clothes are crumpled and dirty, your students will be laughing at you, even if you don't realise it". Just think what would be respectable to wear to teach in England - it's no different.

I hope I haven't scared anyone away. It really does take a lot of effort to work in Merowe, and needs somebody who is mentally and physically tough, but the rewards are, in my opinion, well worth it. They are in desperate need of English teachers (and books, so please bring plenty), and will be more than happy to use your help, whatever your speciality!

Dominic O'Neill writes: Arriving in Khartoum - I think the experience one gets when entering Khartoum for the first time is unparalleled. I remember the call for prayer at

4.30am and temperatures rising into the forties before I even got out of bed. This and waking up on a balcony made me feel about as far away from home as could be possible. Momen's family were incredibly hospitable, and most of the first few days were happily spent relaxing in the shade and being waited on at every meal in a beautiful old area of Omdurman. On the third day a still bewildered group of westerners were shown around Omdurman suq: a fascinating, bustling area reminiscent of medieval times. Every possible item is available in some part of the market, but most areas concentrate on a particular product: cooking utensils, for example, all in steel and of every shape and size. Another big area is for clothes: mainly colourful material for *tobe*, the traditional Sudanese women's dress.



Date palms and Jebal ElBarkal

University of Khartoum The work here started well with Ben already having taught two weeks of a six week English course open to all. Maria and I were told that our course would start shortly and that television advertisements had recently been broadcast. In the meantime we

helped with Ben's classes, which was great fun and good teaching practice. The students were really friendly and enthusiastic. We played a lot of games; had discussions and helped the students with a simplified version of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Unfortunately, after about a week, it became obvious that our course was not to be organised. Dr Hamuda told us that before the term started we would be teaching staff members. A few people (about five) arrived at about 9.30am, clearly members of staff recruited from around the immediate vicinity of Dr Hamuda's office. The level varied from absolute beginner to intermediate. We split the class into two; Maria took the beginner and I the intermediate. We managed to have some quite productive, enjoyable lessons despite a huge range in ability. I did various role-plays: airport departures, arrivals, hotels etc. I also enjoyed talking about topics such as marriage, food and festivals (one of the pupils was shortly to depart for America). Normally I would talk a bit about British norms before getting them to explain Sudanese customs. This was to go on until the term started: apparently on 24th July. We were told that we could all have a week off before then and that when we came back Mohammed would have a timetable ready for

us. When we came back this was repeatedly delayed. After talking to other U of K professors, apparently there was some trouble with the terms start dates. mornings.

Sudanese Open Learning Organisation (SOLO): Centre in Madrassat AbuAnja, Omdurman. SOLO is an adult learning organisation with links to the Cambridge Distance Learning College. It has various centres in Khartoum and Gedaref (originally for Ethiopian refugees). It prints its own course books which teachers are supposed to stick to quite rigidly, although there is scope for discussions and games after the formal part has been understood. I heard about SOLO from some notes left by an ex-volunteer. A Sudanese friend gave me the directions to its office and I started work a couple of weeks before our holiday. SOLO works on Friday, Tuesday and Sunday afternoons; I was teaching an advanced English course (the students were there just for the English course) and a GCE O-Level course (for students who were also doing courses in Physics, Biology, Chemistry and Maths). The latter were much more advanced, but both were enthusiastic and attentive. The course materials were interesting and effective, and demanded little preparation. The number of books was often limited, but this could be overcome through sharing. We also had discussions from time to time - often about quite abstract ideas.

The students and teachers here were a real mix. It would be quite normal to find Mubarak (a pupil) who is a rich Saudi expat about to study in King's College, London, talking empathetically to Mr Yen (teacher), who is a Seventh Day Adventist Nuer tribesman and Lebanon University graduate with the most bizarre accent: a cross between Birmingham and deep south American preacher. Going any way near this school necessitates patronising the stall at the bottom of the road. with delicious *agasha* (spicy meat in bread crumbs etc)

St Philips Basic School, Soba Aradi, Khartoum South
I would recommend everyone to see if they are interested in working with displaced people (everyone I have spoken to says this is a very worthwhile thing to do - Sudan has the world's highest proportion of displaced people). Soba Aradi is a displaced area (mostly southerners) outside Khartoum. The camp has been there ten years, so is quite permanent now, although there is still no running water (water is sold from barrels transported by donkeys). It is basically a town of mud, and wonderful after Khartoum. I could literally hear the calm. The school is part of a compound consisting of an Anglican Church, a medical clinic (partly financed by CARE) and a UNICEF water pump (all made of mud and without electricity). My teaching there was delayed by the rains that made Soba inaccessible by bus, so I started after my holiday. I taught the two highest ability levels twice a week. The classes held about twenty children ranging from 12 to 17 years

old. I never thought I would be able to teach children, but I really enjoyed it. They were from all over the south, and most had moved to Khartoum when still very young. Discipline was not a difficulty, although in a classroom without a door I often had a large audience of kids staring in. Concentration often had to be renewed. Games were always received with wild enthusiasm. I also did some comprehension exercises and conversation (school life in Britain and Sudan was a particularly successful subject). I tried to keep away from the grammar books and *SPINE* (the Sudanese curriculum text book). The disciplinary methods could be quite distressing at times, but you had to keep your mouth shut. We had presents and speeches on my last day and I was introduced to Congo music (fantastic: try listening without feeling happy!)

Social Development Unit, Diwan El Zakat This office deals with Islamic zakat tax. I taught as private paid work three hours twice a week from the *Reward* (intermediate) course books. The pupils (about ten) were all intelligent adults and they learnt fast. The books are well put together and often interesting. Using course books needs some adaptation to give it a more personal touch: they should be a guide. Some of the lessons needed changing for cultural or religious reasons. I found it useful teaching practice and could use some of the ideas from the books in my other lessons. People were great as usual - they were trying to convert me to Islam!

Khartoum Monitor - The newspaper is run by southerners and is the only proper English daily in Sudan. I had a great time there and gained valuable experience. I was employed as a sub-editor, although I helped in other areas of the newspaper as well. I worked five times a week (afternoon/evening) and conducted interviews with Oxfam and Save the Children's country representatives. It was a fascinating place to work and I made some really interesting friends, especially the Managing Editor, Nhial Bol, who taught me a lot.

I had a great experience in Sudan. The trick is not to expect anything. What you plan probably won't happen, but you'll probably end up doing something as good or better!

You can find more about SVP on our website with stories and pictures by volunteers as well as our annual reports and accounts. www.svp-uk.com

Please support us by becoming a member, £25.00 per year or £10.00 concessionary rate entitling you to take part in our meetings and receive our reports.

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