

# S·V·P News 6

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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Sudan Volunteer Programme started 2002 with a group leaving London in early January continuing our policy of sending more volunteers with longer term commitments.

As in former years, SVP continues to learn from its experience in ways 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 who are eager to help our expansion and improvement in service and expertise. With the the university year now organised in two semesters, we are now looking for volunteers for placements of at least six months with starts in January and September.



*Daniel Clarke and friends on Tuti Island*

## **A note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme**

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

*SVP thanks all the volunteers of the 2001-2002 season: Ken Darmanin, Michael Metcalf, Alun Macdonald, Tom Kelly, Gareth Carter, Till Brückner, Helena Wright, James Baldwin, Daniel Clarke, Lucy Blakemore, Kay Nicholson, David Innes, Joy Alderson, David Doran, Jonathan Sharp, Tom Rhodes, Sally Seex, Ian Macaulay, Robert Vokes, James Hardy, Stuart Bracewell, Gilbert Ramsay, Alistair Dawber, Moira Thompson, Daniel Leech, Salma Bhuta, Anne Cornish, Claire Wilson, Pat Callaghan, Michael Whitehouse, Tom Connell, Nava Velupillai, Tessa Morrod.*

*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*

*Ian Macaulay writes to a colleague about working with teachers:*

As a volunteer with Sudan Volunteer Programme, taking a 2 year career break from being a headteacher with Fife Council, the experience of working here has been a privilege. Sudanese teachers are brilliant to work with. The standard of participation and commitment by participants during the 6 week course was very good - as good as anything I've seen in 16 years of headship in Scotland.

I'm more convinced than ever that the training goes much deeper than just ELT, and that it addresses generic learning and teaching issues and capacity building in primary schools. The team of trainers we've brought together became stronger and more confident by being on the course, and I believe we could have a national approach to recovery in education in embryo.

I do hope you will be able to join us in taking this forward.

*from Kay Nicholson:*

Afhad: High profile, all women and English speaking as it is, Lucy and I never felt as if we were in a university atmosphere. Many of our students were only interested in receiving a tick in the attendance register and behaved more like school girls than students learning study skills.

In my case, at first I had classes of 60-70 with a huge ability range, which dented my confidence badly as I had done TEFL before and had ideas of how it should be done. The standard of English, we know has deteriorated alarmingly and only a few members of the teaching staff we talked to for long seemed really fluent themselves.

There were many advantages to living on the campus: no travelling to work, the proximity of take away stalls within yards of our flat, the leisure 'club' and the Dean's garden. These two gave us easy access to various concerts by the university orchestra, Lucy's choir performing in a full 'Womens Week' programme, Nubian dancers in full regalia and a big 3 day wedding, complete with private view of the bride's dance.

Being a grandmother as well as having a Sudanese past (albeit 45 year ago and more) both seemed to be of great interest to many people. The respect shown to older people is markedly different from our culture, and explaining our Homes for the Elderly was difficult and shaming. So: whether it was mounting a camel (when elderly men shook my hand saying 'shedeed!' or walking mules into the desert, I seemed to be the object of comment.

David Henderson, the son of K D Henderson - who was an author and contemporary with my father - was staying at the Akropole Hotel, and took me round our childhood sites where the government had taken over all the old British

buildings, but much of the layout is just the same. Gone are the felukas on the Nile, replaced by lorries, and the sagias, and the shadoufs for irrigation are now pumps. There are now five bridges instead of the two in our time; but Tuti remains as green and productive as ever.

Living in Omdurman meant that we didn't visit the British Council often. Besides my talk, I attended part of their conference on English teaching organised in the Grand Hotel - which used to be the only hotel on Nile Avenue in the 1950s. Significantly the topic was the deterioration of English at all institutions and what could be done about it.



*Ian Macaulay with friends in Wad Medani*

Daniel and David teaching in the Computer Department as well as the English Department at Ahlia Omdurman University made great friends with their colleagues which Lucy and I benefited from in many delightful ways. Their boss in the computer department whose home is in Shendi, invited six of us to visit his home during Eid in order to take us to the pyramids at Begerawiya.

It was a fascinating trip and a big adventure, all sleeping in his yard under the moon. When we were in pyjamas and borrowed gallabiyas, our host emerged from his wife's quarters with the standard vast tray of food for our supper - outside on the beds in the dark!

Farid also in his department at Ahlia, came too. It was his first night away from his wife after a year of marriage. The frequent, uncanny rendering of 'Waltzing Matilda' from his mobile phone as she kept in touch, made a weird experience even more so.

Another day Farid and friends took us to a wonderfully moving display of Sufi dancing where we sat by the holy man on his mat and were given refreshments, then joined in the hypnotic singing at sunset. The same kind friends also took us to the camel market and negotiated our 'rides' and taking of photos.

Daniel and David's popularity and Farid's kindness are to be thanked for these as well as many meals, parties etc. Another of their colleagues, Nazar, an English teacher I bumped into again at Afhad - yes and talked to -- asked if we'd like to walk in the desert. Once again six of us were escorted on a gruelling but fascinating 8-10 km walk, rested under very small acacia trees for 2 hours then walked back to a huge meal at his parents' house in the evening.

And on the last Friday Saif took us to the 6th cataract at Sabaluga where 6 boatmen took 10 of us out in the traditional wooden rowing boat and we watched more bird life than we had seen elsewhere, including yellow weaver birds with their spherical nests hanging over the river bank.

We arranged some trips ourselves: twice to Tuti island and on a bus to Jebel Aulia dam, where it was as I remember it, though very low water meant the fish ladders were dry. Some of our students took us out one Friday when we witnessed the strange repetitive chanting by a large crowd of worshippers at a mosque. And we went to yet more weddings, notably I was taken to a simple one - out of town with no commercial element at all - No twinkling lights, no outside caterers, no cameras, no music except one daluka drum - and not even Pepsi. I chatted to the modestly dressed bride with some pupils from the school she had been teaching in.

The Abdel Karim Centre provided the most enjoyable and truly TEFL work that I did. Articulate, 'advanced' students, men and women - some graduates, some in jobs, but all eager to improve their conversational skills and learn from a native speaker. Not only did the classes go well but I was taken by some members to their various places of work: the impressive Chinese Friendship Hospital, where a doctor works in the orthopaedic department, a day clinic where babies were receiving inoculations, the Sudanese Environment Conservation Society where I met a painter in his studio, and a day's outing to the pottery owned by one student's father.

My last subject is Medani. A friend of Namia's asked her to find a teacher to go there for 4 nights to coach some doctors for the British Council IELTS test. As my father was District Commissioner there (at the time of my birth!) and Ian Macaulay had said how nice it was, I jumped at the offer, though Ian was on holiday in the UK and I would be the only British person in the town.

From a shambolic arrangement I then had the best teaching experience I've had. With such intelligent and charming young men who were very kind to me and understood my predicament - ie coming without preparation. They told me what would help them the most, to increase their fluency and confidence. To be able too use idioms and jokes made it all very enjoyable - as with my Abdel Karim class in Omdurman

#### *Tom Kelly finds his 'Sudani Moments':*

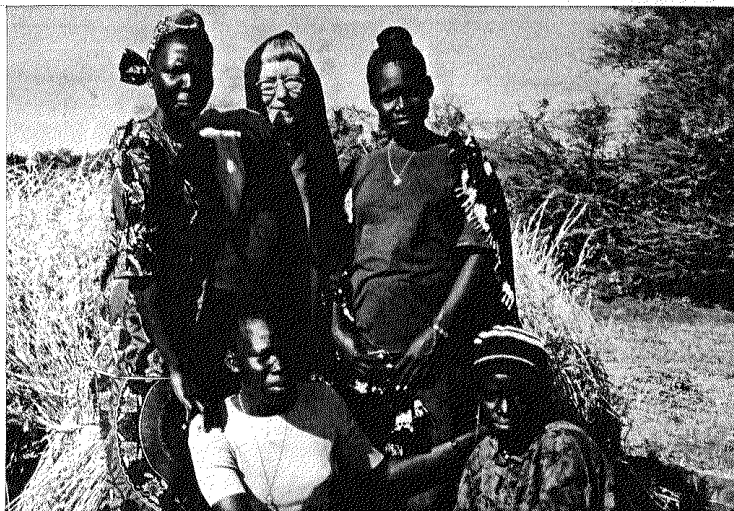
Every day is an adventure and has its lows and its highs and it's 'Sudani Moments'

Muna my Arabic teacher lent me a walkman to listen to pronunciation. I 'lost' it. When I offered to pay for it she refused to accept anything, her reason - 'the servant would have stolen it anyway'.

Trying to get a bus to Omdurman, a small, quite full minibus arrives, an old man in an immaculate white jalabi-

ah gets out, motions me in. I assume because he wants an outside seat to get off at the next stop. The bus drives off without him, I shout to the driver to stop, then someone explains that he gave up his place so that I could get on. The driver said 'he is saying welcome to Sudan'.

At 8am on Christmas morning I am thinking of home and about to open my present, suddenly there is a shout from outside the window, it's Momen 'Tom, come and see my farm, now', 'what right now?' 'yes right now!' - a great idea once you get used to it (I am not going out to lunch until one), I refocus and think what I need. Five minutes later



*Kay Nicholson with friends*

just as I am about to leave the door bursts open, it is my long lost German roommate, Till, with an Arab friend he met on his travels. They are covered in dust and obviously very hungry from the way they are eating my bananas. Till says 'Can I borrow ten thousand and sleep in your bed then my friend can sleep in my bed?' I say yes of course, wish them a happy Christmas and leave for my mystery farm visit, which turns out to be a lovely two hours by the

Blue Nile.

#### *from Daniel Clarke's notes*

I met the Dean of the Faculty of Arts on my first day at the university. I had arrived the previous morning to watch the sun rise over a quiet early-morning Khartoum. A few street traders dressed in their long, white Jalabiyas unpacking, ready for a day's business. It was 7am and already 29 degrees.

He was an extremely dignified and thoughtful man. Through him I recognised a serious commitment to SVP and the volunteer programme with his talk of an 'SVP Shed'. A building that was nearing completion that was to be for the sole use of the SVP teachers. 'In two weeks', he assured me, 'your shed will be finished'.

Two months later I was still teaching under a tree. A new floor was being fitted in the shed. Slowly some wooden benches arrived and were fitted. Then came a board and some fans.

Four months later I gave my first lesson in what was by then termed the 'SVP Oven'. There was not yet electricity for the fans. I went back under my tree.

A fortnight ago, just under ten months since I arrived in Khartoum, I attended the Grand Opening of the 'SVP Palace'. The building was finished and, during his speech, the Dean confirmed Omdurman Ahlia University's commitment to SVP. People tend to tell you that things may happen quite slowly in Sudan, this is understated, massively.

With the help of one of the technicians I worked hard over

the course of the following few weeks. We made many improvements in the labs and introduced a network in one which will be connected to the internet soon, I am assured.

In order to study Computer Science a student needs a certain level of English which many unfortunately lack. The Sudanese teachers wrote notes in English and explained them in Arabic. My level of Arabic did not afford me that privilege, however, and it was often very demoralising to see how hard students were concentrating and just how keen they were to learn with the language barrier to apparent.

Confusion over relatively simple concepts was often born of a lack of understanding of a few key words.

One word that took up a substantial part of a lecture was 'queue'. After unsuccessfully trying to explain it in terms of computing I drew a picture of a bank and a line of stick men on the board. Regrettably, the concept of queuing is rather alien to many of the Sudanese - something that anyone who has tried to get on a bus will have witnessed.

Sudanese are immensely proud of their country and their people. You will get invited to peoples' houses and be treated like royalty. They say that it is a great honour for them that they have been able to make your breakfast or dinner or a cup of tea, and they really, really mean it.

A Sudanese person who has practically nothing will share all that they do have with you and feel honour in being allowed to do so.

*Anne Cornish writes:*

My decision at 50, after a long teaching career, to take a gap year and go and work in Sudan as a volunteer, was a surprise to family, friends and colleagues. We hear so little that's positive about Sudan from the western media - a place that harbours terrorists, sharia law, a poor country with a punishing climate...

Even though I'd read my briefing notes, nothing could have prepared me for the overwhelming warmth and hospitality of Sudanese people. Khartoum bursts with street life - manic rickshaw and van drivers, donkeys, goats, vendors of all kinds, a fusion of African and Arabic music from stalls and buses. It also rightly deserves its reputation as the safest capital in Africa.

At a local community centre I teach beginners. Every week my class grows. Despite the policy of arabization, the desire to learn english is very strong. On the bus, in the market, in the photocopy shop, everyone is keen to chat, to ask about lessons, to offer an invitation to their home.

As a visitor in the month of Ramadam I have enjoyed many evening 'breakfasts' - often eaten in a courtyard, sitting on a carpet with communal food from bowls on a silver tray. As I write the fairy lights are up for Eid, the markets are bursting with shoppers, and homes are ready with biscuits and sweets for visitors.

With another volunteer I have made visits to one of the many shanty areas of Khartoum for displaced people - often

christian southerners or people from the Nuba Mountains. Conditions are sobering - large families sharing one room mud brick huts with no facilities, children with rickets and eye infections. Sudanese Muslim friends who accompanied me, work hard as volunteers in a small community centre, with an outreach programme, providing a little healthcare and education. We hope the report on our visits will generate some funds from a charity in Britain. The suffering of displaced people in Sudan is again highlighted on the world news in a human rights feature this week.

I have been a member of a small group of Western volunteers and our ages range from 22 to 64. We've supported each other, sharing experiences and lesson ideas. We've also had opportunities to travel. At Meroe we walked among the pyramids and sand dunes, marvelling at engravings on a par with ancient Egypt. Sudan has wonderful archaeological sites, remote and with few visitors.

As a volunteer in Sudan life can certainly be challenging. Temperatures of 40 degrees plus for many months of the year take some getting used to. Electricity and water cuts are common, accommodation is basic. I will go back feeling that I have contributed in a small way to English language here, but overwhelmingly that I have learned a huge amount about another culture, a dignified and warm people.

*Tom Connell teaching at the Ministry of Science & Technology:*

The class consists of Librarians, Lab Assistants, Technicians, Assistant Researchers, Researchers, Engineers and Scientists. They range in age from 25 to 50 and have all learnt English at some point to varying levels, but lack speaking practise. Their written grammar and grammar knowledge is usually quite good. Some classes are just spoken English and the others are Scientific English, which includes scientific report writing. Also there are various people who require training in writing an abstract from scientific reports on Sudan for the archive in NCR. Lessons basically consist (at the time of writing and everything is subject to change at the my or the students' whim) of at least half the lesson doing grammar theory and practice through exercises and role-plays and the latter half (or less) on a discussion on either a current affairs subject or a scientific topic.

You can find more about SVP from our website with stories and pictures by volunteers as well as our annual reports and accounts.

[www.svp-uk.com](http://www.svp-uk.com)

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

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