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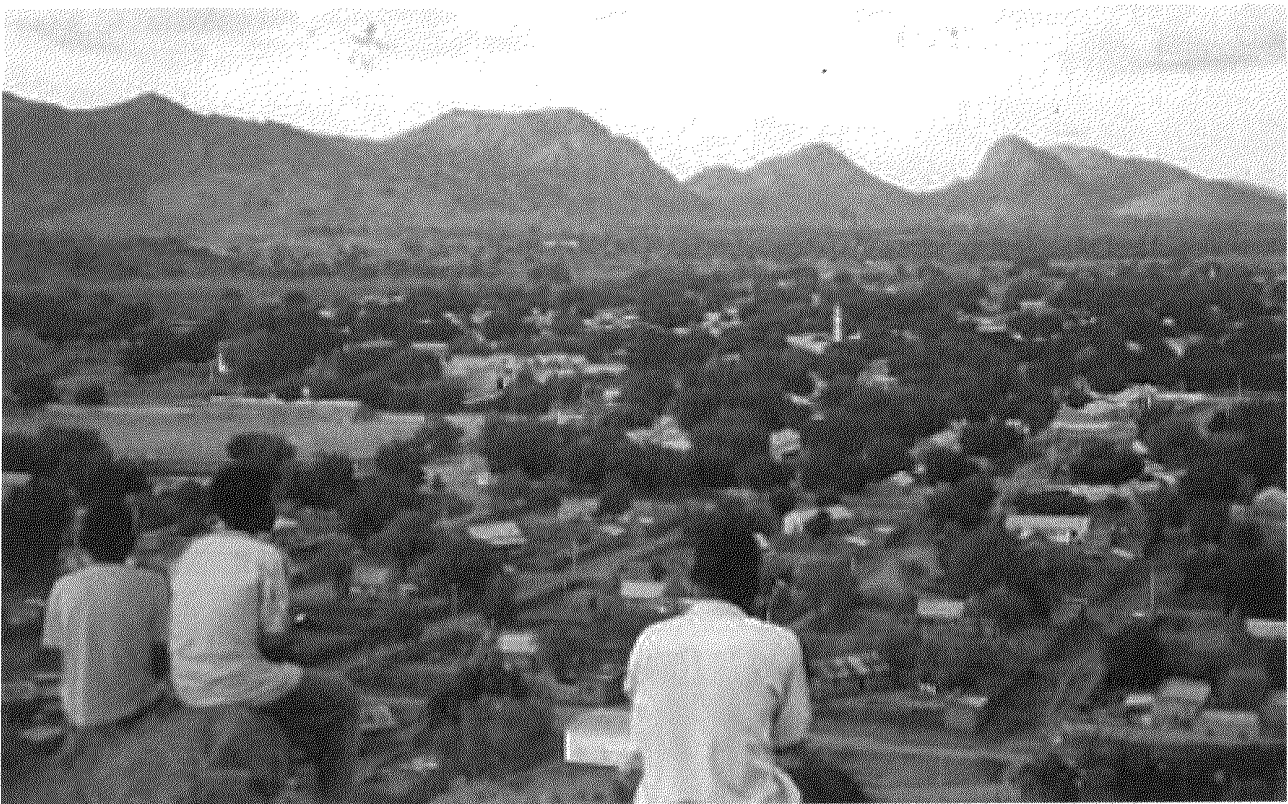
Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

January 2004

Sudan Volunteer Programme started 2003 with a group leaving London in early January continuing our policy of sending volunteers who can offer 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 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.



a view of Kadugli taken by Michael Whitehouse during his visit there with Claire Wilson

a note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the seventh 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 urgently needed work of teaching English. SVP now has volunteers working throughout the Sudan academic year. We thank all our friends and colleagues at SVP Sudan who do so much to organise the placement, accommodation and welfare of the volunteers.

SVP thanks all the volunteers of the 2003 season: Ken Darmanin, Michael Metcalf, Daniel Clarke, Claire Wilson, Michael Whitehouse, Tom Rhodes, Robert Vokes, Tessa Morrod, Victoria Wilkinson, Helen Sloan, Don Sloan, Tony Creaton, James Hardy, Gilbert Ramsay, Vanessa Ansa, Paul Fean, Victoria Brown, Jonathan Pleasance, Max von Dürckheim, Stefan Zoll, Daniel Stephenson, Katy Robinson, Tasawar Amin, Angus Dalrymple-Smith, Dave Clay, Craig Rowson, Hawa Yaseen Omer, Kathy Benavides, Donald Vassell.

SVP could not exist without members and supporters. SVP needs your help.

Ahmed Bedri

Tessa Morrod writes

... Today the teacher in one of my classes, Raja, brought me an Aubergine salad sandwich for my lunch, despite the fact that she is fasting, and told me about her four-year-old daughter, Kamalla. She learns 'Inkle Winkle little Star' and 'One, Two uckle buc lo' at school. I wrote down the real words for Raja, so now they can sing it together, though I got the impression that she was a bit suspicious of the authenticity of my version. It's amazing to think that children on different sides of the world, growing up in very different worlds, are singing the same nursery rhymes.

Wednesday- went for a proper Sudanese breakfast tonight, right out in Haj Yousif, outside Bahri - middle of nowhere almost. Very peaceful, clear stars, house with an outside wall and a courtyard and then buildings. We didn't go inside the actual house at all, but sat on beds in the courtyard. The breakfast was laid out on a mat on the floor where we sat and ate with bread and a few shared spoons.

The flavours and textures of the food are strange - particularly the special Ramadan breakfast dishes. We had aubergine salad, tomato salad, lamb, chips, little corn balls, fowl and the main dish - a weird, huge dumpling type of blanchmange surrounded by gelatinous meat sauce. Didn't like it, can you tell? Good bread dish though, plus gorgeous mango juice and Sudanese coffee, which is spiced, and intensely honey-sweet dessert cakes. Must learn difference between dessert and desert, now that I'm in a position to eat one while in the other.

from Don & Helen Sloan

Teaching English in Khartoum from January to April 2003 was a rewarding and interesting experience for us, although having recently retired we were not the most usual of SVP English teachers. We had the advantage of having worked in Sudan before. Don had previously had some experience with TEFL projects and ELT development overseas, but not as an English teacher. He had only recently trained in TEFL teaching and gained experience teaching in our home town in UK. Helen, an experienced teacher of languages, was also excited about our returning to Sudan, this time as SVP volunteers to teach English at the Ministry of Science and Technology. We divided our time between three research institutes. We also had additional assignments at El Nilein University teaching a TEFL course to 4th year English students and preparing medical specialists for the IELTS test. Sudanese are aware of their lack of proficiency in English and are extremely keen to improve. An opportunity for contact with a native English speaker is really appreciated, so any retired teachers out there who would like to escape the winter, gain an insight into a unique culture through contact with amiable, kind and extremely hospitable Sudanese we would recommend you give it a go. Remember almost any subject matter can be grist to the ELT teacher's mill. Study skills are one of the most important things you can teach, in particular the use of time, punctuality, regular study and revision. Our students at the Ministry, mostly at the pre-intermediate level, were keen to learn English for work-related and social purposes.

On the practical front we required a standard of basic home comforts which our younger colleagues were perhaps happier

to forgo. We rented a flat in Jamhuriya Street in central Khartoum with a fast food restaurant underneath. The flat had a telephone (local and incoming calls from abroad), electricity, fans, an air-conditioner (unnecessary Jan - April), hot and cold water in the bathroom and basic kitchen equipment. The spacious living room had a TV, a large table and bookshelves. Groceries, meat and fruit and vegetables were available just across the road. We were even able to get our favourite cornflakes and marmalade! It was close to SVP, the British Council Library and the Blue Nile Sailing Club where we often relaxed at weekends watching races. We were also close to the main market where we seemed to spend hours photocopying material for our classes. From time to time we met up with fellow SVP volunteers and shared experiences. ... a highlight of our stay included attending the first ever concert, performed by an orchestra from Germany, in the superb setting of the pyramids in the desert at Meroë, some two and a half hour's bus ride from Khartoum. This was a fantastic



experience. Imagine listening to top class musicians with the sun setting opposite the pyramids. There followed a short pageant by the Sudanese about the accession of a new pharaoh. On another occasion we were also able to make a trip with the Sudan Archaeology Society to Naqa and Musawwarat-es-Sufra where we met eminent European archaeologists carrying out excavations. Sudan is an exciting place for Archaeology: we also learned that the British Museum in collaboration with Sudanese Department of Museums and Antiquities is mounting a major exhibition in London in 2004.

Our SVP assignment coincided with the build-up to, and the first three weeks of, the Iraq war. As in London and other capitals in Europe there were plenty of anti-war protests in Khartoum. We found it best to avoid the topic as far as possible though we were involved in one or two frank and uncomfortable exchanges. Indeed the graduation ceremony of our students coincided with an official Government fundraising event to send food and goods to the people of Iraq! We recommend anyone towards the end of their career to at least consider going to Sudan with SVP for a few months. You will probably miss the comforts of home, but this will be more than adequately compensated by the warmth and hospitality of the Sudanese, benefiting from an interesting and stimulating cultural environment. If you live simply as we did you should not be much out of pocket, perhaps making only a modest contribution to your living costs in Sudan. You may well find you save on expenses at home in UK: the cost of living in Sudan is small compared with UK. For us, even though we had previously lived in Khartoum, we found our stay an exciting challenge and adventure, and most important we enjoyed it. We certainly found the back-up provided by Momen Salih and SVP staff in Khartoum extremely helpful, sorting out any teething problems in our first days, enabling us to devote our energies fully to our teaching assignments.

from a Dictionary of Sudanese Experience by James Hardy

AlSafsaf Mercedes aircon coach, over 100 km/h, two films, numerous drinks, one meal and NO stopping. Technologically like a trip on a space shuttle, definitely the way to travel and a useful postal service between all the big towns on the Khartoum to Port Sudan road.

Breakdown When driving any form of transport this is the thing to do (whether it is a punctured tyre, broken axle, rogue detach-

able fuel line, busted bearings, carbon monoxide poisoning, snapped suspension, rolling off the road, out of fuel or the Will of God). Social etiquette requires at least one stop, unless you travel Asafsaf.

Kushtena Playing cards. This seems to be a national pass-time and is taken pretty seriously. Games to mug up on before coming out are hearts, whist (with bidding) and a game called 14 if you can find the rules. In many clubs (see nady) running totals of scores are kept in a vast league table.

English Literature Possibly the real reason for my time in Sudan. Working at the Faculty of Education, University of Gedaref, Gilbert and I were teaching courses from the taught syllabus. We had a very free rein in our choice in order that we select topics, which we were interested in and able to teach. In 'Introduction to Literature' I was able to select material from the university library that I thought was representative of the dissatisfaction that many people feel in British culture. We looked at the disenchanted great literary works of George Orwell and H.G Wells, as well as Wilfred Owen's war poetry (around 3 million have died in the Sudanese conflict) and the classically evil and dark play *Macbeth*. On a serious point I think this was very valuable because it give students an idea about the variety of opinions in the West and the universal values that run through all human lives.

Gedaref The place to be. Home for Gilbert and me. 60 days after arrival I travelled to Gedaref with Gilbert and a motorbike in a lorry that took 22 hours to cover 411 km. We were both accommodated in the male university lecturers' boarding house along with visiting lecturers and the regular employees. The town is practically perfect in almost every way.

Kharoof Portable food that keeps itself fresh and a distant brother of the common British sheep with long floppy ears, cat-like eyes and a big un-chopped bushy tail.

Jebel Tawawa This is the big hill to the north of Gedaref, a bit like Oolaroo in Australia but not so red, but a definite focal point in the cultural landscape. Next door to a vast workshop area called Mantiqa Sinaiya in which it is possible to let all your A-team fantasies come true (an area which gave birth to the four topped shisha pipe).

Khawaja A really useful word to know, of possibly Turkish origin; it means white person or European. In the far country it has been known for pale Sudanese to also be called Khawaja, much to their amusement / distress. The typical Khawaja is straight out of 19th Century English literature and could fall terribly ill if they stood out in the rain or got lost on the moors etc.

Kaddari Meaning to travel by foot. In Gedaref people may think you are ill or don't know what you're talking about if you think about deploying this method of transportation. In fact it often isn't possible to walk long distances in Sudan, not because it is too hot, because people will stop their cars and insists that they give you a lift to where ever you're going.

Lorry A lorry! Sounds like a really cool way to travel. You may change your mind when you're sitting in it over 20 hours later five minutes down the road. Still you can't beat the price. Milih!

Milih Table salt and hitch-hiking. If you tell people you travelled milih it will bring about a long period of laughter and the comment that you've finally become Sudanese.

Nissan A-team style welded bus reconstituted from a lorry and lots of sheet metal and glass. Definitely the way to travel (when you can't afford Asafsaf that is). You may even get a round of applause from your co-passengers after successfully negotiating with officials on the many stops the vehicle is required to make.

Nady The Sudanese men's club (also available for Khawaja women). At the end of a long day at uni there are few things better than a trip down to the local nady. Relax with the members, listen to live music, watch TV, play cards Kushtayna) or smoke a quick shisha (or two).

Oranga Powdered orange, an essential source of vitamins and minerals to help stave off malaria



the Blue Nile at Damazin

People People are the richness of Sudan. The concept of brotherhood is paramount and when travelling in Sudan people will always offer the hand of friendship. Sudanese generosity is often mentioned in people's descriptions of Sudan, but I find it very hard because there is no reference point in my culture. I'm not able to compare it and its abstract bigness does not do it justice. It's not just what they give but also what they have. I've seen people who have nothing go out and get stuff so they can give to people they don't even know.

Fishing for the Eyjil in the Blue Nile by Daniel Clarke

I knew very little of El Damazin when SVP offered me a teaching placement there. They told me the basics. The Faculty of Education of the Blue Nile University was looking for a native English speaker to work with some of Sudan's next generation of teachers. A worthy cause I thought to myself but what was life going to be like in Damazin and how were things going to be different from my last 18 months in Omdurman and Khartoum?

Sudanese people are often opinionated and will speak passionately about their country of which they are incredibly proud. This level of conviction can't always be associated with any weight of evidence supporting their arguments however. I heard of one volunteer being ardently discouraged from taking a train across the desert to Atbara. On closer examination, however, it transpired that her adviser had never taken the train, nor knew anyone who had, nor had taken the bus he was proposing nor in fact had ever left the town where this all took place.

Mindful of this I find it useful to ask around a bit and try to draw from the comments I receive what conclusions I can. I began to enquire about this placement I was told that Damazin was very dangerous. The two main dangers seemed to be from rebel armies and snakes, neither of which I encountered I was told that Damazin was green and beautiful, something I often think of when trawling through knee-deep mud on the way to catch the bus. I was also told that the people are extremely friendly, and that the town has a reputation nationally for a mosquito infestation and black magic. Thankfully I've never experienced the latter but I can certainly confirm the other two to be true.

However, featuring most significantly in the results of my survey were Damazin's close proximity to the Blue Nile, the lake resulting from the construction of the nearby hydro-electric dam in the 50's and the cool, overcast weather of the Sudan-Ethiopia border in the rainy season. My mind turned to fishing and the idea was sold.

Although focused on my teaching commitments I managed to keep an awareness of fishing and never wasted an opportunity to make enquiries. I was very disappointed with the results. Accusations of outright

lunacy replaced the encouragement I had expected to receive. Was the cultural divide really so great? Granted I could afford to eat cooked fish in a restaurant in the market but where was the challenge in that? People weren't going to understand me and my progress was slow because of it. I decided that I needed help and invited Jon, a volunteer who was coming to the end of a placement in Omdurman, to come and join my quest for the legendary 'eyjil' - the cowfish. I knew, as a keen and experienced rodsman, he wouldn't be the kind to resist the challenge of pursuing such a catch. We'd both heard the stories, "1 1/2 tonnes at least" we were assured, "A friend of mine has seen a photo of one in the back of a pick-up that couldn't move because of her weight" another boasted.

We'd done it. We'd been fishing and we'd caught fish. But as I rested my head on that pillow there was something preventing me from feeling satisfied. I didn't speak to Jon about it, I didn't have to. As the fisherman knew he was it was clear that he'd be feeling the same. We'd planned to return to Khartoum after 2 days but how could we with the eyjil still enjoying the deep cool waters of that lake? We decided to delay our departure and have another go. This time we were going to do it right.

We returned to the family that we'd promised the fish to and left the entire catch with them. As we strolled back to the guesthouse we knew we had nothing to show for our days fishing except a sense of satisfaction in our hearts. The 25 balti were something we were proud of and we'd managed to prove something to both our doubters and ourselves. Although the eyjil had continued to evade us both she, and the local population, had seen what we were capable of. She knows that we'll be back someday and I'm sure she won't be looking forward to it.



Jon Pleasance and Ustaza Reem with a class of boys in Khartoum North

street. However men and women eat separately and more often than not the woman are left at home on their own to eat while the men sit together.

You always start the meal by eating a date and then you move onto the rest of the feast. This will include a thick dough like substance made out of sorghum called assida or thick pancakes called gurrassa covered with a local sauce called weka. There will usually be a couple of different types of salad, a gorgeous yoghurt and cucumber soup and lots of other wonderful dishes. For drinks there is something here called abri which is only found in Sudan. It is made from Sorghum and probably the only way to describe it is as a sweet non alcoholic gooiness. We also usually had a selection of fruit juices and a number of other sweet concoctions.

After the meal everyone gets up to pray. These are special prayers only said during Ramadan. There is no need to feel at all awkward at this time. The Sudanese are very devout but are very happy for you to watch and observe their religious practices. I never felt that I was unwelcome any time during the month.

After the meal pretty much everyone heads to the suq which is always packed during this time. Everyone spends the rest of the evening chatting, drinking innumerable cups of coffee and tea and smoking an awful lot of cigarettes to top themselves up for the next day.

It has been fantastic: I have made lots of new friends and having visited so many homes I

have a much better idea as to how people live here.

Ramadan in Gedaref by Angus Dalrymple-Smith

You may be forgiven for dreading the start of the fasting month. I was certainly a little concerned imagining 30 days of furtively gulping down hastily prepared snacks, desperately hoping that you wouldn't be seen and be a judged an ill mannered khawaja.

On the contrary Ramadan is a wonderful time of year, especially in a small place like Gedaref where you will enjoy the very best of Sudanese hospitality and kindness. It is true that it is probably not polite to wander round town stuffing your face with tamia but people are aware that as a non Muslim you are not obliged to fast and more often than not will offer food and drink if you go to their homes or places of work. You will however get serious brownie points if you do fast for a couple of days. David and I fasted every Friday which was pretty easy as there is no work. However the heat deterred me from trying to go without food and especially water during the rest of the week.

As there are only two khawaja here, and given the importance the Sudanese attach to looking after guests we have been invited to breaking fast meals pretty much every day. These usually take place around 6.15 and are announced via the Azzan. Everyone in the neighbourhood brings out large mats, food and drink and breaks fast together in the

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 at £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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