

FRIENDS OF KAIRA KONKO NEWSLETTER

Patron: Mrs Mary Fagan JP, Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire



Kaira Konko
Scout Fellowship

Number 1 : July 2007

Welcome to the first of what we hope will be regular updates on the happenings in Soma and particularly at Kaira Konko.

Kaira Konko Scout Lodge

When the Lodge opened in 1998 we had a hall, five bedrooms, one toilet/shower and an outside covered area for cooking. Since then we have added an outside toilet and shower, a bantaba (large covered eating/meeting area) with a kitchen and an office, an additional accommodation block with two ensuite bedrooms built to a high standard, a large store cum workshop, a well and garden with fruit trees where seasonal crops are grown by the Scouts. Solar power panels which provide lighting have been installed as there has been no electricity in Soma for over 2½ years. Through a generous donation we have been able to purchase a large piece of land adjoining KK for future development.



The Community at Kaira Konko

Lamin Kinteh, our project manager, does a wonderful job in over-seeing KK and the children who require sponsorship to enable them to go to school. It may be a pair of flip-flops, school uniform or school fees and books for those at High School.

Alaji, one of our senior Scouts, is in his last year at Gambia Technical College studying motor mechanics, sponsored by KK Scout Fellowship.

Students from Treloar College (based in Alton) sponsor three disabled children through school and have donated a vehicle for KKSF for the transport of the children and for use at KK at other times.

Lamin Kinteh also distributes rice to Scout families most in need. This was never part of our original agenda for KK but as things have worsened in The

Gambia we have found that many of our families were going hungry. We are currently spending £150 per month on rice alone which is raised through monthly sponsorship. This is more than we are getting in so the need for more sponsors is urgent. Can you help us with this? A bag of rice costs in the region of £10 and will feed a family of 10/12 people for two weeks. This time of the year is known as 'the hungry season' as it is the time when last year's rice is finished but the rains have not yet come to enable this year's crops to grow.

We employ one of our older Scouts, Mbake, as assistant manager at KK. Kumba is employed as housekeeper and Jola is in charge of the laundry and assists Kumba. Abdoula assists Mbake with taking care of the guests and general maintenance. They are all paid from the income generated at KK and they all contribute into the Government Pension Plan from their wages(!) Local people are employed on our building projects ensuring that money we spend goes back into the community. Our Scouts also work alongside them to gain new skills. Every day there are children at KK. They seem to appear as soon as they can walk. The young ones play and fight and the older ones hang out with friends. It is their place.

Kaira Konko Scout Troop

There are currently about 100 Scouts, girls and boys. There are Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers, with the older boys staying on to become Leaders. Not all have uniforms because they cannot afford them, but we are trying to provide uniforms, which are made by the local tailor and cost in the region of £5.

We have provided some instruments for a band and our Scouts are regularly called upon to lead parades, such as Independence Day parade, or when any officials come to Soma.

Our Scouts are highly respected within the local community. They take great pride in their marching and their uniforms. Troop night is Friday night for all sections and KK senior leaders have provided training for other Troops. The young people go camping to nearby villages and generally have a good time.

Kaira Konko Sewing Shop

Through a generous donation from Alton TWG we purchased six treadle sewing machines to enable our older girls to learning sewing/dressmaking so that they can become self-supporting. It costs £40 a month to rent a shop in the market and pay a tailor to train the girls. It has been a very successful venture so far. We probably have the best dressed girls in Soma and now that they can sew they are learning the techniques of pattern making and cutting out.

Kaira Konko Scout Fellowship

Kaira Konko Scout Fellowship was formed to safeguard the future of KK. The committee are all members of the Scout Association and we belong to the Hampshire County Scout Council. We have all visited KK; some many times!

There is so much to tell you that we will include more next time on associated projects through KK - Soma School, Jason Chant Memorial Fund, Hampshire Fire and Rescue as well as the current situation in the Gambia.

The latest expeditions were in December 06, January and February 07 and there is the start of a report from Magellan Explorer Scouts from Cadnam, New Forest. With the next edition we will send you part 2.

You, our sponsors, are the lifeblood of the project. Your support has enabled us to oversee so many children through school, feed them and their families when necessary, provide medical treatment, teach the children skills through Scouting and allow them to have fun. We thank all those who give on a regular basis, those who have been part of an expedition to KK, those who have given donations of money and/or items when requested and those who have supported our fund raising.

Our next big fundraiser will be a concert by **Cantique Chamber Choir** on **Saturday 6th October 2007**. Tickets £10. Venue and more details to follow but please note the date now. If you would like to book tickets, please phone 01420 82657 and leave your details.

The Kaira Konko Scout Fellowship committee is:

Marion Christmas MBE JP	Founder
Mike Chance	Chairman
Lamin Jarjue	Treasurer
Anthea Bailey	Secretary
Gill Casey	
Paul Christmas	
Tim Hayes	
Jackie Heath	
Ingrid Leonard	
Jerry Leonard	
Paul Stubbington	

The Chant family have sponsored KKSF on the Justgiving website which enables anyone to make a donation direct to KK. Gift Aid is collected by Justgiving and the funds are paid directly into the bank. It's great for anyone who wants to run a sponsored event or make a single donation. Why not try the link, which is www.justgiving.com/kksf.

As always, you can contact Marion Christmas at Alice Cottage, Bucks Horn Oak, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LW if you require further information on anything you have read in this Newsletter.



The Gambia 2007- part 1

2am, Friday 29th December, Copythorne Scout Hut. 25 Explorer Scouts with 7 leaders, and all of us ready for the expedition of a lifetime (even if some had been before). It was also, purely by coincidence, Ollie's 18th birthday! Not a conventional celebration, admittedly, although there were fireworks to mark the occasion. Then two hours on a coach to Gatwick, breakfast at the airport, six hours on a plane, and we were in The Gambia.

We were met at the airport by Lamin Kinteh- the Scout Leader at Kaira Konko, and a fleet of jeeps and ghelis (Gambian minibuses), which were to be our transport for the next two weeks. The hotel we stayed in for the first two nights, on the outskirts of Banjul, was at best passable. Suffice to say that the swimming pool was green. Anyway, it helped to adapt with the Gambian climate, and before we knew it, it was time for our second six-hour journey.

This time it was by jeep and gheli along the dusty gravel track that is The Gambia's main road. It is flatter by the side. Everyone and everything was soon covered in a fine orange dust coating, but after a few stops, the town of Soma came in to view.

Along with about a hundred people who had come to meet us. This is all the more fantastic, as it was the Muslim festival Tobaski on the day we travelled and many people were spending time with their family. The music and singing continued for what seemed like hours, before there was a taste of things to come with the expedition's first football match. Then, just as you thought there might have been time for a rest, it was time for the combined Tobaski - New Year's Eve celebrations. A party, more fireworks and more getting to know the locals ensued, before we all retired for a well-earned rest. That is, after we'd constructed our mosquito nets - much harder than it looks!

In true Scout fashion, we were all up bright and early for breakfast the following morning, followed by Gambian-style flag break. This is much more formal than we were used to in the UK, and we were caught out on numerous occasions about what we were supposed to be doing.

It was then time for a visit to Soma itself to see the Akalo- the village chief. We were escorted by at least a hundred Gambian children, all desperate to hold your hand, practise their limited English or be carried. This takes some getting used to, but all the kids are so happy to see you that you can't help but smile. The Akalo was, as always, very pleased to see us, and through Kinteh thanked us for our visit. He also spoke of how he didn't have long left - he was incredibly frail.

That afternoon, we finally got stuck into some project work. To begin with, there was a piece of land owned by Kaira Konko, which needed to have a use found for it, and a wall built to separate it from the road and identify it as owned by Kaira Konko. There was also

some painting at Kani Kunda School, so everyone signed up for a project and work began in earnest. We decided that the best use for the land was something the Gambians would really appreciate; a football pitch. There were two rather large obstacles in the shape of a pile of sand and a pile of gravel. Although combining mountain climbing with football is a novelty, it gets rather irritating after a while. They would have to go.

The next few days followed a similar vein, with project work in the morning, followed by a break in the hottest part of the day and more work in the afternoon. The foundations for the wall were laid using homemade concrete, which is all the more difficult without a concrete mixer! We also had to contend with the presence of Gambian children who were trying to help us. This was normally much appreciated, but when the mixture of the concrete is crucial, it can become a hindrance. One mix began to resemble soup when left unattended for a minute. Still, it is very hard to complain at such friendly people.

The afternoon on the third day in Soma brought the first of several visits in the area. This was to the so-called hospital, which from the outside could hardly look less like one. It is a real eye-opener, as it is much dirtier than what we're used to. It was pretty quiet when we were there, but in the wet season malaria fills the wards and the corridors. Pointedly, because of the holiday there was only one nurse in the whole hospital at the time of our visit. It makes you think how lucky we are with our own health service.

This account is clearly going to take some time, so it's in two parts. Part Two will appear in the next Newsletter with more tales of hard work, great fun and every leader's nightmare - Scouts allowed a day on their own!

Phil Smith (*Explorer Scout*)

