

FRIENDS OF KAIRA KONKO NEWSLETTER

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

Number 2 : September 2007



The Centenary of Scouting

August 1st saw the Sunrise Ceremony to celebrate 100 years of Scouting. Over 40,000 Scouts from all over the world attended the Jamboree at Hylands Park in Essex. Unfortunately none of the Scouts from Kaira Konko were chosen to come by the Gambian Scout Executive but they had their own celebration at KK. The Sunrise Ceremony saw Scouts around the world renew their promise. The Scouts at KK then marched around the town in celebration.



Water

Most people in Soma use the standpipes in the roads for their water which means that it is a long walk for some members of the community but the water supply has been very good, i.e. constant, until 2/3 years ago when the supply became rationed and only available at certain times of the day. (We won't go into the politics of the situation.) This saw many people going to KK to use our well that had only recently been dug by hand and was not covered, so the task of drawing water was quite laborious. Through generous donations the well has now been capped and a pump installed which makes life very much easier for those using it, mainly women and children. The Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire arranged for the Christopher Fagan Memorial Trust to sponsor the installation of five water taps at Soma School that worked very well until the water restrictions. The staff were very concerned that the children who often walk many miles from home had no water to drink. Seeing this need, when the Southampton University Officer Training Unit were out in January, Captain Hill raised the money for a well to be dug at Soma School. This is now completed and ready for use when the new term starts. Thanks go to Jersey Rotary Club and Gambia Experience for their sponsorship of this project.

A well serving part of Soma had broken down and an urgent request was made to Kinteh for his help. The well served about 100 compounds, with approx 20 people in each. The local community were so grateful and constantly say prayers for the group. 'The Friends' visited Jiroff School on their way to KK to find that the pump there needed a part and the children could not attend the village school, as there was no water available to them. Funds were provided so that the pump could be repaired.

Is it any wonder that our money never stretches far enough! These are such positive ways of helping this very poor community. I am pleased to say that a sponsor has given a lump sum specifically for well repairs in Soma.

The wells are dug by hand with no safety equipment apart from a rope being tied around a guy wearing swimming trunks and a pair of goggles. Concrete rings are put in as the well is deepened. The pumps come from Germany and seem quite reliable. Water is a precious commodity and the children always ask for our empty water bottles so that they can use them as containers for water to take to school.

It is quite a social occasion round the well as women bring their washing. Most compounds have small 'gardens' where they grow food to eat so the water is also necessary for cultivation. KK garden has fruit trees, cassava and seasonal vegetables. The rainy season from July to November has not been good so far this year making the wells even more important



"Sori" leading prayers of thanks for the support of the scouts for the repair of the well.

Refurbishment of Kaira Konko

Kinteh and his team have markedly improved their building skills since KK was built in 1998 so it is now time for a refurbishment of the main building. Through Gift Aid we have the funds to deal with the hall, ie. half of the building, and we are looking to the British High Commission and DIFD to match this funding for the bedroom area. The upgrade will ensure the building is fit for the future while keeping its character and ethos. The aim is to provide clean accommodation to suit all pockets. Accommodation at the moment ranges from a bunk bed in a dormitory, five bedrooms with shared bathroom facilities through to the two new ensuite rooms that are proving very popular with European backpackers. Kinteh uses his discretion at all times and will allow use of the rooms by Gambians if stuck in the area without transport etc for any reason. It is because of the condition of the road the families may get stranded without anywhere to go so we will always give them a bed. KK is becoming ever more popular for Gambian ministers, European travellers, VSO personnel and business people. This growth has all come by word of mouth recommendation, although we do now have a mention in The Rough Guide to Gambia – 2nd edition published November 2006. Visitors like the inter-action with the children, the fact that it is run by Scouts and that it is a non-profit making concern.

British High Commission

We have a new High Commissioner in Banjul. He is Mr P A Sinkinson OBE, known to us as 'Phil'. Kinteh has met him on more than one occasion and he is very keen to support KK and associated projects. He is hoping to visit KK in December when some members of the Fellowship committee will be going out. It is always good to have the backing of the High Commission as it endorses the credibility of the project. We are intending to apply to the Small Development Projects Fund for help with the refurbishment of KK.

Fund Raising

A concert by **Cantique** in aid of the Rice Fund and other projects. Cantique, formed in 1997, is a group of friends drawn by a common love of music and singing, with a choral repertoire varied from light to serious, from comic to tragic, from the very ancient to the very modern. A chamber choir numbering around 20, members are very experienced musicians and most also sing with other choral societies and with Church choirs. Cantique sings a challenging and varying range of music spanning across many ages and eras appealing to audiences and performers alike. The group's main objective is to use its musical talents to raise money for charities.

Date: Saturday 6th October 2007

Time: 7.30 p.m.

Venue: Thornden Hall, Chandlers Ford, SO53 2DW

Tickets: £10 available from Anthea Bailey on 01420 82657 and leave your details.

Bar available

www.cantique.org

The amazing Chant family have done it again! Look at <http://www.justgiving.com/highlandergeorge> to see another way you can help the children of Soma.

A big 'THANK YOU' to those who have taken up sponsorship following the first newsletter. We would be interested in your feedback, if you have any questions or if you are interested in coming out to The Gambia with us.

Please tell your friends about us and bring them along to the Concert!

Marion Christmas

Alice Cottage, Bucks Horn Oak, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LW, 01420 23231,

e-mail: m.xmas@btinternet.com

We plan to send out the next Newsletter in early 2008.

The Gambia 2007- part 2

Last time, we left the story of the Explorer Scout expedition to The Gambia having arrived, started the projects and been on several visits to Soma itself. The night of the January 3rd, was the first 'proper' football match of the trip. In addition to the pitch we were building for them on the land next to Kaira Konko, the Scouts had put up goals on the riverbed, which aside from the odd tree stump was a good flat surface. Inevitably, it was England (and two Gambian Scouts) v Gambia. Without turning this into Match of the Day, Gambia dominated the first half to go 2-0 up. After the break, we fought back to 2-1, but couldn't find the equaliser. Despite this, everyone had a great time, and the Gambians were well deserving of their victory.

The next two days consisted of more project work. The new pitch still had to be cleared, and the foundations were laid for the new wall. There were also still classrooms at Kanikunda to paint, as well as making blocks for the wall. Everyone went about the tasks with great enthusiasm, and because of this we were making significant progress every session.

Something rather different followed, as for those who wanted to, there was a morning visit with a difference. On the outskirts of Soma were goats to buy, and after some careful deliberation we chose two of our own. We tastefully named them Salt and Pepper, and without going into detail, we watched them get killed and skinned. Lo and behold, it was goat stew and rice for dinner! Then it was campfire time, Gambian style. These are much rowdier than English ones, where everyone sits on a log for a few hours, toasting marshmallows. In The Gambia, it's all about shouting, singing, dancing and generally making a fool of yourself. Which, considering at least 150 other people are as well, is tremendous fun.

Normal service was resumed the next day with the projects continuing apace. However, that evening was The Rematch. I'm talking, of course, about England v Gambia. Again, I'll try to be brief. An early

goal for each side and the game was all set for a classic. It was fast and furious, although always in the best of spirits. A not-at-all-miss-hit wonder goal from Rob Line, then a penalty put us 3-1 up. To cut a long story short, we were 6-3 ahead with the light fading. In true Southampton fashion, we conceded two goals late on, but unlike Saints hung on for a fantastic 6-5 victory. The crowd, which as well as the non-playing Explorers was most of the children from Soma, went berserk and we returned to Kaira Konko absolutely shattered.

Now, it's common knowledge that Scouts are not to be trusted on their own, but we were given a whole day to do whatever we liked, within reason. Most of us went to the nearby town of Farafenni. This involved our first trip over the River Gambia and to our surprise, the ferry was new and in good condition. Transport on the other side, however, was more in keeping with what we'd seen in Gambia previously. 20 people and a 15-seater gheli - you get the general idea. Farafenni itself was basically a larger version of Soma, with a market selling anything and everything. Perhaps the most memorable part, along with a donkey-cart race down the main street, was the ferry journey back. Despite having seemed fine when we were on it, the main ferry had broken down. The replacement was about 15 foot long, 6 feet wide and powered by a man with a pole. We were then told that most of our accompanying Gambian Scouts were not too fond of water, and the River Gambia is about a mile wide. It was, by all accounts, an interesting journey back.

More projects sprung up in the next few days. At Soma school, we were going to put a new floor in one of the new classrooms. What was left of the old one had to be 'dismantled' first, using pickaxes and brute force. There was also a surprise in one of the rooms. It was piled ceiling-high with bits of broken desks and chairs, and ankle deep in termite-chewed books. It was quite the clean-up operation. There were also a few repair and improvement jobs at the lodge to be done, so a band of 'merry men' was set to work. Unfortunately, work was slowing down on the wall, due to a lack of bricklaying tools. This meant that only one person at a time could actually lay the newly made blocks. On the pitch itself, we had fashioned and put up wooden goalposts, which were then painted. On one set was a Gambian flag, and the other (which, by some coincidence was smaller... how did that happen?) was a Union Flag.

By the evening of the 10th, all the project work that was to be done had been done, and everyone was gearing up for the end-of-expedition campfire. First, though, was a sporting issue to be sorted out. 1-1 in the series simply wouldn't do. But, as it turned out, it would have to. Just before kick off, Kinteh drove up in his jeep to make a sad announcement. The Akalo, who we had visited just ten days earlier, had died suddenly. We were all very saddened by this news, especially as he had supported us so well in all our expeditions. The village was to go into mourning until his funeral the next day, so both the match and the

campfire were off. Although entirely understandable, this was a disappointment, as the night would now consist of packing, and thoughts of leaving.

Leaving The Gambia, and Kaira Konko, is a long and tearful process, as far as we can tell. After morning flag break, Kinteh and several other leading Gambian Scouts thanked us for all we had done. As if leaving wasn't bad enough, there was then a song that seemed to serve the sole purpose of making people cry. It was an incredibly emotional moment, having to leave behind such a friendly set of people, but eventually we had to. Another 6-hour journey lay before us, made longer by at least eight vehicle breakdowns.

It was a different hotel for our last night in Banjul. It was much bigger, more modern and populated by European beach tourists. There was such a huge contrast between this and Kaira Konko, as everything reminded you of England, from the power showers to the English breakfasts. The pool was a welcome relief after the journey though, and we quickly drove any other swimmers out of the pool with an intense hour of water polo!

The final morning was spent, predictably, saying goodbye. Some of the Scouts had come with us back to Banjul, and there were many more tears at the airport. It was finally time to go through the so-called 'security', and back to England. We arrived at the Scout Hut at about 1 in the morning, spending the final night there. The next morning, just as we thought the work was done, we had a presentation to prepare. It wasn't the slickest of operations, but it was entertaining. And at 2 o'clock on Saturday 13th January, the expedition finished as the presentation did.

Just before I end this rather long article, I'd like to say a massive thankyou to anyone and everyone who helped to get us to The Gambia, be it with fundraising money or gifts for those out there. The support was fantastic. Also, all seven of the leaders who not only organised the whole trip, but managed to cope with 25 Explorers for two whole weeks!

Roll on Gambia 2009! Phil Smith (*Explorer Scout*)



This pump was repaired by the expedition to KK from Copythorne in January this year.