

w/e 24.10.09

Another week to review that has seemed to pass too quickly, and at ten weeks down, out of a proposed 104, it suggests I should be 10% through my placement; it is frightening to think how the time will fly. The heat continues, but a couple of damp mornings have bought the snails back to the compound.

Sunday was a busy day, made difficult by the closest thing to a hangover I have had in months after the Diwali celebration, free bar included. We made an 8am visit to the wifi internet café to skype and catch up on email correspondence. At 10 o'clock I had a meeting with Maurice Mitchell, the building force of the Sandele eco retreat, to discuss the possibility of using his compressed earth bricks for a sporting proposal at Gambia College. The Sandele site has been built without concrete, instead it has used local compressed soil; thus avoiding environmental damage from concrete production methods and transportation of the materials. In this climate earth bricks are ideal; some are used in the South of France, so I feel the message should be spread to the young teachers at the college as well as my proposed fundraisers. (We also learnt that the eco resort won the *Guardian* award for ethical tourism).

During the early part of the afternoon I met with the Secretary of the Gambian Rugby Association to discuss how I could help promote the sport. Some junior coaches from Kent had visited Gambia in February to introduce Tag Rugby, so I hope to help its continuation through my role at Gambia College. The senior game has yet to develop despite a few keen members (discussions with previously approached coaches/aficionados has suggested apathy rules when it comes to attending serious coaching sessions) who I hope to meet in about a month's time when the Secretary has returned from Nigeria. He's away on 'business' as Chairman of the under 17s National Football team supporters; the President has arranged a planeload of barmy army supporters! The early evening was the bi-weekly touch rugby on the beach. Denise decided to attend with the kids. Bradley ended up frolicking fully dressed in the surf with a local playmate; his pockets filled with wet sand- in total contrast to the boy we took to Tenerife at Easter who still cried at the seas edge. As we walked home Abigail spotted bats, which we at first dismissed as too big, but then accepted her claim when I realised they were fruit bats- another creature I had not expected to see here, especially not in the urban areas.

Transport to work is becoming more 'routine' from the earlier days, as one's tolerance increases. While sat in the front seat of a minibus my attention was roused when the side door fell off the gelleh-gelleh in front of us into the middle of the dual carriageway; I think it had happened before as there was no glass in the windows to shatter and no one seemed to panic about re-fitting it. I also got to travel in the newest/smarest van so far but it turned out to be the slowest; I arrived late for work as a consequence.

The challenges of work have been class sizes, Allah and chairs; the extra class I covered this week has 82 members – the average is just over 70. A number of my lectures occur during prayer times so a dozen students may leave mid way to complete their 5pm prayers. The college has insufficient chairs for its classrooms; as a consequence if you are not careful and don't have all of your students sitting down at all times (difficult if you are trying to promote interactive learning) chairs might be removed while the class is busy working; I have found myself having to stand in the doorway bouncer-like to protect the room from student chair raiders.

The other buzz at work has been the publication of the teaching practice observation schedule (mentioned in week 6). As the new recruit I have been spared a trek this term

but am being dispatched to the furthest region at the end of March; it will be HOT. I hope I will have acclimatised, late on Friday I went for a run when the forehead thermometer suggested the temperature was 100° in the shade (OK it was in Fahrenheit!) so I am working on matters. Denise found a pair of bathroom scales and believes she has lost just under a stone so far; I cannot be too far behind her through my extra exercise.

On my return home on Thursday, a long day with first lecture at 9 and a 6.30pm finish, I was pleased to find Denise had attended the VSO Office and the latest Post Office run had returned with a package for the kids and the first copy of the *Guardian Weekly*. Oh the joy of text (British text that is); I couldn't resist the sport section to read immediately but I will savour the remaining pages over the week while making the journey to work. Listening to the BBC World Service every evening does rather repeat itself and is light weight on content at times for UK news.

When I drive my car to college I have been giving a lift to a young student, who had the initiative (rare here) to overhear a conversation and then approach me with his request for a lift, called Langley. On Friday he recalled me telling him that my eldest son, Dale, had a birthday on that day and recited an Islamic blessing for him; I admired the sentiments.

On Saturday morning we took the kids to Bijilo Forest Park, known as 'monkey park' by the locals. We arrived around 9.30-before the entrance desk had been opened but went in anyway. It was still unspoilt by the tourist season and we saw all the monkeys we could hope to see. Despite the 'don't feed the animals' rule the common *callithrix* monkeys expect to be fed; Bradley was chased by one expecting food within the park. When we exited we were refreshing ourselves with a drink and some apples but were harassed further such that we retreated into the car. One grasped at my quarter eaten apple and I had to back hand it away; the locals laughed but I hope there are no 'PC' RSPCA friendly readers out there prepared to shop me for the assault! They didn't strip the car of wiper blades or anything less tasty.