

Week ending 16.1.10

A full teaching week, so the content maybe reduced.

My first rugby training session went well, 16 players turned up including some big guys. The only problem with the big fellahs (including an ex boxer Bob!) is they are not confident to run with the ball and have 'basketball' passes. Simple passing drills were effective with my direction, followed by a translation interlude by Bayo, but the lads are not ready to synthesise more than one skill at a time. However, a 2 hour session flew past before I ran home through the centre of Serrekunda; Denise was convinced I was in mortal peril on arrival– the dust and sweat had not done my slim line features any favours.

On Wednesday my *Field of Dreams* came under threat. My arrival at Gambia College at the start of the academic year was accompanied by the University of Gambia – well the chancery department and some new science labs so far, but more of their departments are moving from Kanifeng with time. We were warned off by the grounds man that the Vice Chancellor had eyes on the field and sought clarification from the deputy Registrar; he admitted they had plans for a 'concertarium,' or 'Chancerium' the word meant nothing to me (and the computer now suggests I should be using the word cinerarium or chan cerium so I maybe misquoting the guy, but you'll have better research access than me if you want to check it out) so without sounding too stupid, I hope, I asked for clarification and apparently, it would appear, it's a place to congregate for academics for such things as awards. My co-worker highlighted our plans that were afoot, I suggested such a place needed to be more central within the college, and we were told an email suggesting an alternative site for this hall would be found. But I came away aghast at the thought of what the University wants to be – obviously a shop window for pompous academics to bore themselves with self aggrandising ceremonies; the very antithesis of what I was hoping to achieve. The college produces Primary School Teachers who are supposed to have a grounding in teaching PE, but with no facilities or resources to practice they are just taught theory, and maybe a few playtime games! So if these are supposed to be the best brains in the country that cannot see an imperative need for even half decent Physical Education in their schools then I fear there is no hope.

I had already been depressed through discussions with the PE head (Carnegie trained) when we had discussed athletics in the Gambia, any Olympic team will really only consist of runners, the only field events considered are long jump and shot putt(they have safety concerns for other events!). How can a nation whose international claim to fame is a Mandinka warrior (Kunta Kinteh in *Roots*) is unable to produce javelin throwers? A recent review of the PE syllabus apparently had one proponent insisting that the sack, lime & spoon, and three legged race be given equal footing with football or basketball within the curriculum! I was so tempted at the time to send a hoax email, to a fellow volunteer involved in curriculum development, professing to be a sack maker of 'Olympic standard' or official lime/ spoon supplier. Sport is outside my VSO remit, in once sense 'thank goodness', if the aspirations are so wanting –it would be more demanding than my Maths role I fear. I have had dealings with a student who is related to the newly appointed Minister of Sport; the student has suggested engineering a meeting with me when his cousin has settled into role: "how will I be diplomatic?"

The remainder of the week passed without incident, I did brave outings in the car despite my documents being out of date. Remy spluttered and stalled more frequently in protest and sprung a further leak from her radiator. I completed the editing of the Volunteer's Handbook for the incoming volunteers; I resisted temptation of using restaurant reviews as a free dine

out Egon Ronay style; the promise of 38 volunteers requesting a discounted meal is not as attractive as *Lonely Planet* or *The Rough Guide*.

Apart from the threat to my sporting objectives there are reasons to be cheerful; the weather now is delightful. I know it sounds British to discuss it but 2-3 months ago when we were sweltering with humidity people said “its going to get nicer” I would normally say “really” while thinking ‘its nice and warm as it is, this will do’ it has become more pleasant. The *harmattan* wind that flows from the Sahara provides a refreshing breeze, and the need for showering twice a day has definitely gone, cuts and grazes are healing without infection. The sea has also acquired a ‘nip’ and I can understand why it has been so cold in the UK if we are now feeling the effects of the Atlantic water streams. However, for winter sun I could recommend the Gambia; the proviso against it would be the hustle from Gambians after a fast buck but I can report that through the last week I have been able to walk to and fro through the taxi park at the end of our street without being called “taxi Senegambia”. I had told the ‘manager’ my proper name in September; word must have finally got through! I am conscious of the winter visitors that have migrated here; before dawn the Sandpipers and Curlews call – their shrieks take my thoughts to the moorlands above Great Ayton and the Yorkshire Dales: homesick? Not yet.