

Week ending 13.3.10

Having done the Northern coastal region on the Saturday I wanted to take Mum and Mike south on Sunday. Best laid plans were abandoned as the car wouldn't start, again. I was so disappointed as we decided to opt for the local beach instead; I left the keys in the visor confident it wouldn't get nicked (if only such insurance was possible here!). As I walked to beach the mechanic phoned saying he wanted to make adjustments, I expressed my frustration but directed him to the keys. The first juice bar hustler also felt my frustration; the southern beaches have none of this plague and the hustle added insult to injury and it continued from other vendors – we've never had it so bad but it is obviously what happens when you use hotel beach sun beds (those of Mum's hotel). I asked the 'boy' responsible for the area to keep the hustlers away but he was clueless (probably recruited from their ranks). Fortunately, within half an hour the mechanic called to say Remy was fixed; despite the anticipated late lazy lunch it was preferably to the persistent hawking of the tourist zone. We headed south to the border village of Kartong to have lunch in a beachside resort called the Boiboi lodge, I wanted to visit the resort to check out the accommodation – tree houses with views of the ocean! Lunch was good (mid afternoon) and after checking the border point we visited the eco-lodge at *Sandele* as Mike has an interest in the underlying green principles. The site has developed since our introduction in October and there was still more to absorb as Maurice shared his vision and knowledge. On our return I spent the evening attempting to, unsuccessfully, skype Dale; we did have something of an SMS conversation but that became curtailed. I should be grateful for some communication; our previous contact in January was interrupted by his mother's petulance - over his proposed wish to visit us later in the year.

The car started again on Monday morning which meant I was able to take Mum & Mike to the Abuko game reserve- a walkabout park that we had visited at the end of our second week. It was emptier this time as we were the only three in the place; other than a keen official guide who willingly shared his twitching knowledge for free whilst pond side (an area unreachable in the rainy season). We didn't see any of the large monitors but did get some full frontal views of red Colobus monkeys leaping from tree to tree; and I saw my first wild live snake disappear through the undergrowth, black and shiny, I'm 90% sure it was public enemy no.2 here, a Black mamba so I'm happy with that. I continued to college but then had problems with the car on my return; having run out of fuel ½ km from the first petrol station on the journey, as a result the carburettor got blocked and subsequently left the 6 of us stranded in the middle of the turning traffic at our local landmark of 'traffic light'. A policeman helped to push us off to the nearby garage forecourt. We were going out for a meal in recognition of Mum & Mike's impending departure; the consequential delays detracted from the evening as the children tired. Needless to say the mechanic met me at the abandoned car at 10.15 in his bright white chemise and trousers: to remove a screw, which he suck and spat from twice then placed his lips around the top of the carburettor and blew, petrol spurted from the side. After reassembly she started! Mola told me to deliver her to his garage the following afternoon to fit a fuel filter.

My planned farewell stroll for Mum and Mike had to be abandoned on Tuesday morning as I had to take Bradley to the medical clinic for his impaired breathing. We left with 4 bottles of medicine as the medic saw mosquito bites, so decided to provide an anti malarial treatment in addition to the treatment for the bronchial complaint. It was difficult saying goodbye to Mum again, but a teaching session in the afternoon refocused my thoughts to my positive role here (however, some lecturers seem to have given up on the term already and subsequently unfocussed students are left hoping their time will be occupied).

I managed to lose my wallet, again, in the back of a taxi at the end of my homeward journey. I realised within 5 minutes on this occasion but was still too slow to track the vehicle. I reported

matters to the police station nearby who told me I would have to visit Serrekunda on the following day to get the necessary documentation to permit replacement alien/id card and driving licence. Fortunately, within the hour I was called by a woman stating she had found it and asked me to go and collect it, about a kilometre away. I did need to give Abubacar(gardener/security) a ride to help us find the rendez-vous. The contents of the wallet, including cash were all there; thank goodness there are some honest Gambians around. The incident restored my faith in the 'humanity' line that many hustlers try to use as an inroad to 'softening' up their targets.

The rest of the week flew past with little to record of note; other than the final felling of a parasitic tree that had been difficult to remove, as it had grown from the roots of another tree; without the availability of power tools I had relied on the drying effect of the heat and levers as I dug deeper into the root system.

My usual short Friday session was extended as I had to wait and discuss arrangements for next week's chapter. The upcountry observation trek is upon me. After collecting my expenses at one o'clock I had to wait two hours to meet 'our leader' for the trek, to arrange a pick up on Sunday morning. We're off to Basse, at the eastern end of the country; some 'civilised' facilities exist there but it will be hot, here a coastal breeze keeps us relatively cool but there will be no escape closer to the Sahara. Who knows how I will feel this time next week when I have returned? I know I have a busy week ahead of me and dispatch of this missive may prove tricky as Saturday is sett-settal so facilities will be closed and I leave town at 10.30 on Sunday morning. Life is suddenly looking very complicated, and unGambian, as I must plan for Bradley's birthday party and ensure student assessments are completed before the end of term while working in a world where electricity will be negligible and hand-to-mouth survival paramount. Excuse the brevity but I am otherwise focussed this week, and next week may take a little recovery.