

## Week ending 5.6.10

After the demoralising experience of the previous week, a break at the beach resort of Sanyang was ideal. The car was still at the mechanics where it had been for the previous 10 days awaiting a part, to patch it up for the next few months, so we had to arrange a taxi to ferry us to and fro. The aim of the weekend was to say farewell to Cathy and James Gee, Cathy is a volunteer teacher from Hull and her husband was my walking buddy. Cathy had ended her placement early on realising as much as she could achieve in her year and the two opted to spend their summer travelling homeward overland across Gibraltar and along the Mediterranean coast. Time on the beach with fellow volunteers allowed me to unwind from the experience I'd had and formulate an objective plan for a report. We sat with a bonfire into the early hours, took a swim in the sea at 1am (it wasn't cold enough to invigorate!) and made the most of an empty beach resort. I was also advised that one of my Gambian colleagues from the mentoring workshop had been to the head of the school of Education, Isatou Ndow, to complain about my role at the workshop

I delivered my report on Monday to Madame Ndow with the words that she had my immense respect but also sympathy in equal measure in consideration of the management issues her staff created. My main issue was about the futility of VSO supporting my boss, as history has shown he is not worthy of the effort; she suggested an alternative chain of command.

My stock at the college rose through the doubling of my timetable workload by delivering PE to the Primary Teachers. Some 300 trainee teachers have now been introduced to the ways and means of teaching Tag Rugby to their children. The buzz has been great, and even caused some jealousy as my Arabic students have asked to be included. I have promised them that I will find an opportunity for them in the next academic year – they aren't expected to teach PE in the Madrassa schools but are still keen to learn. I hope to roll out the same programme I have currently planned to next year's cohort of student teachers, and also to the current trainees on practice, through their summer school( titled 'face to face') at the college in August. With luck some 900 educators will have been introduced to Rugby by Christmas. It won't be easy; to introduce the concept of chase, evasion and boundary awareness I started with games of 'tig' - it would appear they have never played such games in their own development.

I am struggling to hold the same enthusiasm for the rugby team I have been training in Serrekunda. The promise of a game, by the committee, in April in Senegal has obviously passed and the motivation appears to have dwindled also. With only two attendees at training on Tuesday (1 was Bayo, the coach) we could do little but strategize a plan of action to avoid the ineffectual committee. I do have hopes to develop another team from a scout troop – they are named after the woman that has given them a base, and who loaned me the rugby equipment used at the college – Margaret Medland. I have a meeting with them next Saturday afternoon to check on commitment levels, but they claim they have been playing Tag rugby for a year or so already.

On Wednesday we celebrated Denise's birthday combined with a leaving meal for Cathy, James and Felix( a student on placement in the Gambia as part of his tourism studies degree). But it really has been a hectic week that has flown by with my increased timetable. I did return to help the head teacher of the kid's school, with her wish to create a Science SAT paper on Friday afternoon. I was very privileged to sit down to a lunch with fine crockery and cutlery for the first time since UK days; I ate smoked salmon and drank expensive red wine (£10 local price!) so was more than flattered. When we settled down to work the time was fruitless as the necessary software appeared unavailable; I left an hour later with the usual 'oh well, it is the Gambia' attitude (despite the finery). When I got home I received a call to say that the access to the software was available; just a husband/wife communication, while I was there, about what was

in the mail had been misunderstood – we could have achieved something more purposeful. Well, there's something else for next week's agenda.

We awoke early on Saturday to fulfil a long term promise to Abigail to visit the game reserve at Abuko. I had visited the reserve, with Mum and Mike, in March to a park very different to the rains sodden area visited last August and so had resolved to see the parts that were impassable before. The kids were impressed with the main education centre facility; and the one bird, a violet Turacco, which we wished to see, was immediately on show. We didn't see many mammals roaming loose, other than the monkeys, and the sight of crocodiles no longer holds the magic it once did here. Dreaded Saturday afternoon shopping was curtailed to half an hour to two tailors in Brikama to alter some of Denise's birthday presents before we 'geleh'ed (the car is still with the mechanic) to a hotel resort with a pool, Jacuzzi and board games to have a relaxing afternoon with the owners of a couple other resorts(Safari Garden and Sandele) and their young student wards. It was a lovely 'backwater' away from the hustle, that other volunteers have recently found and recommended – God knows how! the Guide book maps are hopeless – it will probably be a place to use for lazy afternoons in the future, when the car works.