

Week ending 12.6.10

The car was returned on Sunday evening after 9. The cylinder head has been replaced; part of the reason for the delay was that the mechanic had travelled to Senegal to source parts, mine included. The bill for the work was less than £100 but these things keep mounting up. Talking to other car owners it is par for the course out here; the parts are always second hand so wear out in the conditions, so running repairs are frequent. Running costs have also risen with a 15% hike in fuel prices, whilst the UK economy requires higher taxation, have you had to face a 12.5p per litre increase like we have?

The journey to work on Monday alerted a stir. With my arm out of the window of the geleh I felt it get wet; I assumed it was some trader spraying their apples to make them look more appealing, but no, I looked up to see the windscreen wipers in use – there had been a 10 second rain shower. I was more than excited to share the news when I arrived at work. More followed through the night when it rained for about an hour around 3am, we even had to close the windows to stop it coming in! So rain isn't news in your world, but when you haven't seen any of the stuff since October it takes some beating as a highlight. It wasn't a full on tropical storm with thunder and lightning but just a good down pour. It hasn't rained since, but has got hotter – sitting still makes you sweat. The rain also threw my common sense systems; I have continued with more practical rugby coaching to the students, and whereas on Monday I had used sun protection I didn't bother on Tuesday as it had been raining! Reasonable assumption in the UK, but not here. 6 hours on the field later, I suffered from the lack of protection; my nose and, receding, hairline have peeled and my lips are still burnt.

The week at college concluded without significant dramas; I completed delivering the syllabus to my maths students; exams commence in two weeks so a chapter draws to a close. I had to submit exam papers to the Head of School, 6 weeks overdue in theory but, still in line with a reminder memo giving a day's notice(I had asked my boss 6 weeks ago about the deadline then, but his inefficient answer had meant disengagement on my part).

On Friday I witnessed an 'only in Africa' incident. A young boy (11ish) cycling across a road in a built up area had caused a speeding car to slow down. The car driver blasted his horn then drove at the cyclist forcing him off the road; once he had stopped, with the lad's bike under his nearside wheel he got out and ran around to slap the boy twice around his head. I, and another witness, stepped in at that stage to remonstrate. The dialogue continued in the local language, the driver's 'defence' joined the dispute – a young woman got out of the front passenger seat, but from the rear, a woman with babe in arms with an exposed breast showing a feed had obviously been interrupted; so much for the kindness of motherhood! As I felt useless in the proceedings I helped the lad to straighten the handlebars of his bike so he could get away. The driver had failed to apply his handbrake when stopping, such was his intent on administering his justice, so I had to laugh when the car rolled into the concrete drainage cover – I only wish more damage had been done to his car. If the incident had happened in the UK how many offences would have been committed by the driver and which would have incurred the greatest punishment?

On Saturday morning I met with the 'Margaret Medland' scout troop to discuss their wish to develop contact Rugby from their current 'Tag' playing status. The good news is that they wish to form a team called the 'Martin Johnsons'(they have some promotional balls of his); I'm sure he would be honoured, so if anyone has a contact email address for him they could maybe seek some patronage from the big man himself. In the afternoon, after a bit of 'gardening'[attacking a strangling vine(previously strangling a young baobab and palm) and pruning with my machete (a practice I will have to maintain when I return to my UK garden)],I went to join a crowd of

Gambians watching a large street TV screen to watch Argentina v Nigeria. It was the first bit of the World cup I had been able to watch. I thought the atmosphere would have been better than it was, a fellow West African team could have been better supported, but then I suppose the Gambia is the butt of many Nigerian jokes; I hope future games will have greater ambience.

After that we headed to the British High Commission to watch the England match. The American ambassador and Peace Corps were present to raise the 'anti'. We got to drink bottled British beer for once; we could enjoy Yanks cringing for 40 minutes; too many turned up and the barbeque failed to feed us all and they did run out of local beer. I got out of the pool 10 minutes before kick off but had another swim at half time to keep the kids happy; I think I will remember the game in future for that experience. The evening allowed me to make a further rugby contact; a British educated Gambian who had tried to raise rugby profile here with less success than myself so far – hopefully we can create something better for its continuation. He was very impressed when I guessed his school; he'd mentioned North Yorkshire so I'd named Ampleforth. The rivalry with Middlesbrough colts was sufficient explanation.

I suspect the coming weeks will fly by as the football will be an ever present commentary and I'd like to say that the thought of imminent rain should be a cooling one but it isn't; we're into hot and humid(still blue skies) and have months ahead! As the kids face end of year exams next week we have calculated they have 14 more school days then 73 days holiday; that is the timescale for this season.