

Week ending 11.9.10

Sunday started brightly; I scoffed with Mum while skyping about the warm weather and glorious sunshine while she complained of imminent gloom. It clouded over through the afternoon and went dark early as the heavy rain started just after 6pm and continued till sunrise over 12 hours later. A bucket outside the front door collected at least 7 inches of rain. This is how roads get washed away –some are now impassable; our compound became a pond for a couple of hours.

We headed out on Monday morning to ‘process’ the theft of Denise’s phone. The desk sergeant who had recorded details on Saturday had failed to arrive on time (hour and a half late) but he did open a file for CID to process. Our interview was interrupted by the officer needing to go and spit out of the door (some devout observers of Ramadan consider swallowing your saliva sinful). Alongside this was visiting time for the prisoners arrested overnight in a shared semi-caged area; one was complaining about the threat to his health having to share the floor with six other men in damp conditions.

The CID asked a few more questions then asked us if we had money for their fares. I was a little affronted and challenged them that we were already out of pocket as result of a robbery but we were now expected to be further penalised so they could investigate. I checked out this request with their superior officer and he confirmed it was obligatory; they couldn’t rely on their vehicle so needed public transport fares to get to Banjul to get a transcript of calls made on the SIM card from the phone. If we didn’t contribute we might have to wait a few days for them to go – when it was more worthwhile! Needless to say they haven’t reported any progress since.

After replacing Denise’s phone we took shelter for the rest of the day only venturing out for a short nature walk late in the afternoon; the implication of sodden weather starting to take over.

I showed my face at work on Tuesday. It was more so to collect some resources to keep myself occupied through my break once the kids have returned to school, and receive my pay. Things were quieter than they have been for a long time so I didn’t feel too guilty about staying away until the last week of September.

On Wednesday I planned to catch up with email correspondence before the korite holiday; the main aim being to plan a holiday away from Gambia for the Christmas period. You may wonder why we feel we need to get away from a ‘wintersun’ holiday destination but the ‘hustle’ from locals is persistent, frustrating and draining – we need a more ‘European’ relax/ pampering. Before arriving in the Gambia we intended to use West Africa as a staging post to visit East or South Africa to safari, etc. The reality is that it would be more cost effective to fly back to the UK to then fly to a further destination in Africa than depart from here. Take a look at a world map of air traffic and you’ll find airlines don’t fly west-east in Africa; local airlines can’t make money doing that so most, unsubsidised by their governments, have gone bust; instead major international airlines fly north-south from Europe. So we’re a bit stuck on plan A; plan B is to visit Senegal’s cote d’azur – a well developed tourist expanse between ourselves and Dakar. There is also a nearby game reserve that will impress the kids. So the main task through my college break will be to get that trip organised.

On Wednesday we went to bed anticipating Korite but awoke on Thursday to find it was to be on Friday after all. We decided to take advantage of better weather to visit a bird reserve along the south coast using local transport. The birdlife was nothing new, Denise was convinced we would tread on snakes; the one rare treat was finding a baby sea otter. Our walk back along the beach coincided with the landing of a fishing pirogue so we bought fresh fish off the owner (2kg for £3 seems good value). As I filleted it at home I contemplated adding this self taught skill to my cv so that if I can’t get back into teaching in a year’s time I can work on the fishmonger counter in *Morrisons*.

We continued to support our new neighbour volunteer in her orientation on Friday taking her to the Cape Point beach to look for crocodiles. We succeeded, and managed to make the most of the showery weather before the bad stuff set in through the afternoon. Saturday was awful – probably the worst day weather-wise we have endured here. Sorry to moan on about the weather in British style, one shouldn't really complain as I'm still in vest and shorts because the temperature won't drop below 25°C.

Health & safety horror of the week was a disabled man obviously bored of using his arms to propel his wheel chair 'hitched' a ride by grasping the indicator stalk of a motor bike. He was then dragged along the centre of busiest commercial road in the Gambia doing between 25 - 30 mph.