

FRIENDS OF KAIRA KONKO NEWSLETTER

Patron: Mrs Mary Fagan JP, Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire



Number 3 : September 2008

Trip by Committee Members – December 2007

A factfinding trip was undertaken by several members of the committee. We set about rectifying areas in which there was room for improvement. We talked about housekeeping and the gardens and what standards are expected by visitors. We know that with constant reminders standards can improve, although we appreciate that the environment they live in is not always conducive, (i.e. sand) and does make life difficult. There were fruit trees and recently planted banana plants in the garden and whilst we were there oversaw general garden maintenance and the digging of nursery beds to grow vegetables. The well in the garden is used by up to 200 people a day when the standpipes are not working. We have therefore set aside an area for the women to do their washing which does not impinge on the garden. The gardens have to be watered twice a day by the children. Recent visitors from the UK have reported that the garden looks wonderful and is well cared for. The Scouts have



started to propagate trees which can be planted at local schools by the next group to visit from the UK. We were pleased to see that the wells were working well. New chains were fitted to the wells at Soma school and Jiroff school during our visit.

We met the new High Commissioner, Mr Phil Sinkinson OBE who has offered us his ongoing support for our projects, but no money! The HC used to have what was known as a "Small Projects Fund" which he could allocate at his discretion but this has now been withdrawn by the British Government.

Refurbishment of KK

Whilst we were there the hall area of KK was being reroofed. The walls of the hall had been raised by two blocks so that the floor could be raised to help prevent damage in the rainy season. New metal roof trusses replaced the old wooden ones. Sori and his assistant



had to be bought new sunglasses to protect their eyes whilst fixing on the new corrugated sheets, a difficult job in temperatures of 35°C. New windows and doors have been installed and the raised floor has been tiled. This has been financed mainly through Gift Aid repayments. That leaves the bedroom area of the old building to refurbish and we will have to raise about £10,000. We are currently investigating grants from various sources. Once this work has been completed KK will be in good shape for many years to come.

Since our visit the floor of the bantaba has been tiled incorporating the Scout logo in the centre!



George Devine

George who was the medical officer on the original Gambia trip in 1989 was very impressed with our project. It was a community project, encouraging other organisations within Hampshire to be involved but always ensuring that the projects link in with each other to maximise the benefits to the local people. George also acted in an advisory capacity to the Gambia National Scout Executive Committee as they have been going through a difficult time. A new Secretary of State for Youth and Sports has been appointed in The Gambia and is now working closely with the Exec to promote Scouting. Lamin Kinteh is a highly respected member of the National Exec. KK has become a hub for meetings and trainings because of its position in the middle of The Gambia.

Future trips

George is planning to go back to Jiroff in December 2009 with a group to convert the original classroom block built in 1989 into teacher accommodation. Jackie Heath and Paul Stubbington are planning another Explorer expedition over the New Year 2008/09. They will also celebrate the tenth anniversary of Kaira Konko.

Soma

We met the new Alkalo (Village Chief), brother of the Alkalo who died last year and hoped to have a long and rewarding relationship with him too. We knew he was in poor health when we met him but did not expect to hear the sad news only a few weeks after our return that he had passed away. The culture requires that we send a donation to his family as well as our condolences. Kinteh acted as our representative in this matter.

Pa Kolley

Huge thanks to everyone who responded to our Emergency Newsletter 7th February 2008. We received over £1000 from you our sponsors and friends. This was matched by the Jason Chant Good Deeds Fund. Jason's fund also paid for beds for all the family. We will hopefully have an article in the next issue about Jason. Pa and his family moved in the middle of September. The house has four bedrooms and a parlour and the rooms open onto the veranda. It has been painted inside and out and lino has been laid on the floor. To us it is very basic but Kinteh described it as 'Extreme Makeover African Style'. Pa wouldn't move in until 'the time was right' according to tribal traditions, then it was lots of sprinkling of water, special dances and many prayers. Wouldn't we all have loved to be a fly on the wall? Pa and his family send their heartfelt thanks to everyone. Kinteh says it is impossible to describe the old man's feelings. He is so happy. Thank you all for your positive, rapid response to the appeal. You really have made a difference to Pa and his family. The Scouts and Pa's kids are delighted too.



The news has spread around Soma that we are helping the old man and everyone is pleased, according to Kinteh.

Clinic

A visit was once again undertaken to the Soma Fire Station where it was pleasing to see that standards and enthusiasm are still being maintained. Since our previous visit there is a new addition in the form of a clinic which was initially created for the fire station personnel and their families. Although somewhat limited in its equipment and medical supplies, it is already being heavily used by the people from Soma and the surrounding areas as well as the fire station personnel. The clinic is a 24 hour facility crewed by a firefighter paramedic and 3 firefighter 'nurses', all of whom have been trained to a high standard. The firefighter nurses work in conjunction with Soma hospital and spend time working in and around the local community, promoting healthcare. The clinic has little or no medicines and their medical equipment is extremely basic - any support that can be given would be more than welcome.



School Sponsorship

Many of our Scouts are sponsored through school by our friends in the UK. Sponsorship varies for each child depending on the level of need; it could be all or part of school fees or it could be money for books, uniforms or

flip flops. As the childrens' needs vary it is more effective to have the money in a general fund to the benefit of all the children rather than individual sponsorship. The exception being students wishing to go into higher education. We then have to find individual sponsors to cover college fees etc. The fund is administered by Kinteh, our Project Manager. Kinteh is very careful to make sure that the sponsorship money is effectively used to support those students who can make the most of education opportunities. Not all students have the ability to achieve such good results. Two students who have recently completed at Pakalinding will no longer be sponsored as they would struggle to achieve satisfactory grades at Tahir.

At present we sponsor 2 children at the Catholic Mission school, 19 children at Soma Lower Basic school (approximately age 6 to 12), 7 children at Pakalinding Upper Basic (14-16 years) and 13 at Tahir Senior School (age 16-19).

Four students have recently completed their studies at Tahir:

Demba Kujabi – Good grades, looking for a job

Almameh Kinteh – Good grades, looking for a job

Modou Sonko – Fair grades, hoping to participate in carpentry workshop

Marianna Cham – Good grades, in Combo hoping to take up a place at Banjul University to study an access course in English and Maths prior to taking a degree. Marianna needs sponsorship to take up this place. Can you help?

We are very pleased to congratulate Malang Touray who is a Grade B pupil at Tahir and this year came 1st in his class of 37; a great achievement.

We are also very pleased that Lamin K Kinteh has come 2nd in his Grade 9 class at Tahir and Bakery Sannah has come 2nd in his class at Pakalinding. Alagi Federa has completed his four year City and Guilds motor mechanic course with excellent grades; a real success.

Three of our older Scouts have passed the exam to join the Gambian Police Force and are now in training. Musa Barro, Lamin Ceesay (know as Lamin A) and Abdoulie Kolley (son of Pa Kolley). These guys were the first to receive sponsorship for their schooling over 10 years ago and for them to go on and get jobs is wonderful. They are ahead of everyone else in training because of their Scouting skills, teamwork and ability to march! Kinteh is very proud of them and I think we should be proud too. These boys would not have had the chance of schooling if we hadn't come along. The days of them doing their homework by candlelight at KK have certainly paid off.

Contact us:

If you would like to sponsor a Scout or require any information on the project please contact Marion Christmas at Alice Cottage, Bucks Horn Oak, Farnham, Surrey GU10 4LW. Again, thanks for your support and a reminder that every penny raised in the UK goes to the project. The committee covers any expenses incurred themselves.



Explorer Scouts Expedition 2008/9

The next expedition of the Explorer Scouts from the New Forest promises to be the best ever as they will be helping to celebrate 10 years of Kaira Konko. New Forest North Explorer Scouts have a long-standing relationship with Kaira Konko and their expedition at the end of the year will be their fourth in six years.

They recently held a launch evening to which explorer scouts from across their District were invited. Places on the expedition were snapped up fast and they currently have twenty young people and six leaders signed up. Each scout has agreed to pay £660 plus an additional fundraising target of £440. The scouts are likely to be doing various fundraising events such as sky diving, sponsored cycle ride, bag packing at supermarkets and car washing. It's going to be a busy few months for the scouts as they have also signed up to two training weekends and a working party day.



The training weekends are firstly intended to break the ice and get them all working as a team and give them a chance to get to know the leaders. Secondly they get to learn about the Gambia and how to cope with living in Africa.



The aims of the expedition are numerous but in the main they are aiming to give the scouts the opportunity of experiencing life in Africa, while giving as much as they can to the local community in the relatively short time that they have there. While in the Gambia the scouts will be undertaking community projects such as renovating classrooms at the local schools, building walls, planting trees and fixing water pumps. They will also be taking much-needed clothes and books to deliver to the schools, hospitals and the Gambian Scouts.



Extracts from an article in Gambia's Daily Observer which you may find interesting!

Youth in development is our business - Meet the youth philanthropist - Mr Lamin Kinteh

Tuesday, September 16, 2008

Market Beat was privileged to meet one of Gambia's rarest breeds of development-oriented, philanthropist-oriented and most significantly, rural-inclined class of youths in the person of Mr Lamin Kinteh.

This interview is made possible from the just concluded Market Beat tour of rural Gambia, unearthing the best of The Gambia, development project, lapses in the system, meeting villagers and assessing the progress of the farming season among a whole host of bits and bytes as per our national developmental goals and aspirations as a nation and a people.

I was deeply moved and inspired by the youthful prowess of Lamin Kinteh and the dedication he puts into Kairo Konko Lodge and its programmes and activities including communal and community works and charity. The breed that Mr. Kinteh belongs to are rare in The Gambia as there are very few people, rurally based, who are involved in charity work and helping local communities cope with the hustle and bustle of everyday life and more profoundly doing it on an individual basis.

I have interviewed a lot of people on this column but none of Kinteh's calibre, who are charity-based, rurally inclined and most important are non-profit oriented. This is just marvellous and in Kinteh a whole generation of Gambian youths have a role model to look up to and emulate for a better Gambia and a progressive Gambia. Mr. Kinteh's works cut across scouting activities, charity, community work, sponsoring students and correspondence with some UK based Philanthropists led by Marion Christmas. He is a seasoned traveller and has been to lots of countries to spread the word and faith in helping local communities such as Jarra Soma, Jiroff to cope with simple development initiatives such as clean drinking water and school fees for the students.

According to this ambitious young man there is nothing like home and as youths, the development of this country lies in our hands and we must not desert Mother Gambia to go abroad for good.

Our interview goes as follow:

What is your name? Lamin Kinteh

Name of business or area of interest? Charity and we operate under the auspices of Kaira Konko Project with the Kaira Konko Lodge, Kaira Konko Sponsorship Initiative to name but a few of our interventions within the Kaira Konko Project.

What are your other engagements? Scout and scouting activities, tree planting, gardening as in Jiroff, tap maintenance, housing and building houses for neighbours, painting especially nursery and lower basic schools, supporting local organizations such as donating a fire engine to the Soma Fire and Rescue Services, weeding and clearing shrubs and small bushes within the neighbourhood, etc.

Where is your business domicile? Jarra Soma in Lower River Region (LRR)

If you have something to change in the Gambian youth, what will it be? Banish the lazy attitude among our youth folk and stop the dreaming and building of castles in the air.

Best region in the Gambia? Lower River Region (LRR)

Why? It is where I live and I love it here and please come and join us.

Best diet? Domoda with subo.

Public school or private for your children? Public school for a start so that my children can understand diversity and plant the seed of appreciating and loving other children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Why are African people so poor when Africa is the richest continent? It is down to our own ways of treating one another. Look at Africans exploiting themselves because of self interest. A typical example is African leaders signing contracts in oil mining at the detriment of their masses; getting as little as 5% and western companies walking away with 95%. That is slavery and that is why we are where we are. Africa could have even been better without the oil and natural resources as the West is using it to re-colonise us and spreading guns and weapons on our shores to kill each other and if that happens they walk in and plant their own stooges.

One word to describe the West? They are workaholics.

What is the best quality you look for in a woman? Traditional.

What is the best quality you look for in a neighbour? Peaceful.

What is the best quality you look for in a friend? Loyal.

What is your best colour? Green.

What is your best moment? When I am helping people to better themselves.

One word to describe Gambian Music? Struggling with identity.

One word to describe Gambian football? Improving.

Best African country apart from your own? Sierra Leone because we share a lot in common.

What is the way forward for Gambian Youths? Get off your backside and try do something for today and for your tomorrow. Wake up from your mad slumber and move on.

What is the solution to youth unemployment? Help the youth to learn a skill.

What is the solution to youth poverty? Support the youth to get some skills, sensitise them as to what it take to travel and why and when to travel and the advantages and disadvantages of traveling and finally encourage them to learn and stay in school. The youths are the future and if they are doomed, then we are doomed too, so we must confront the youths and force them to take up their responsibilities.

Your last words? I will first and foremost thank Marion Christmas for setting the ball rolling for me and for the people and residents of LRR especially Jarra Soma and Jiroff.

The authorities are also worthy of our praise and commendation for the peace and tranquility in the country as peace and decorum are the foundation for our very existence.

I will also say a big thank you to the people of LRR especially Jarra Soma for their cooperation.