MY DIARY.... TWENTY YEARS ON

Posted on June 27, 2008 by Eddie

Category: Africa

Over the next few weeks, I'll be posting some excerpts from the diary I kept when we first moved out into Kouya country exactly 20 years ago. I hope you will find it interesting.

The day started rather inauspiciously, good for parasites but not too good for Homo sapiens , I had been bitten badly by mosquitoes overnight, including a good few bites in a part of my anatomy that made the thought of sitting down for a seven hour bus ride rather unpleasant.

I came out to on my own so as to get the house comfortable, Sue and David will follow in a day or two. For the time being we will be staying in our co-workers, Phil and Heather Saunders, house. Sometime in the next few months we will need to start thinking about our long term housing situation.

The coach journey was no problem; I sat next to the window just behind the driver and was comforted to see that despite the impression of high speed the speedo never left the zero mark. I had an open window right next to me which meant that I was sitting in a force ten gale all of the way, sleep did not come easily. I found that the chap next to me was a Kouya: Hudson Taylor would no doubt have struck up a conversation with him, but what with a gale in one ear and loud reggae music on the PA. in the other I somehow never got beyond, "hi, how are you".

As is the case with all journeys here, we were stopped numerous times by police check points as well as having regular halts for food and calls of nature. Every time the coach pulled up a huge crowd would appear, as if by magic trying to sell hard boiled eggs, plastic bags full of cold water and other delicacies to the passengers. At Adjame, in Abidjan one of these ladies became the first African I have seen slip up while carrying a load on her head. With a huge tray of something balanced precariously, she misjudged the height of a roof, which surgically removed the tray from her head without her faltering in her stride.

My taxi driver from Vavoua to DÃ©ma turned out to be a Kouya, being very keen I got him to teach me the evening greeting, which I was subsequently too embarrassed to use. Emile, the Saunders language informant, wasn't expecting me, so I went off to find him, when I finally tracked him down he looked different to my recollection of him, it took me a good five minutes to realise that in fact I was talking to Gilbert, the house help, and not Emile. I wouldn't go so far as to say that all Africans look alike, but to an uncultured European eye, many of them are remarkably similar.

Tea of spiced sardine sandwiches, a bit of conversation and so to bed, for the record, two paraffin lamps throw out enough light to allow you to use a Toshiba 1100+ and almost see what you are typing.