

## News from Karagwe, August 2011: Karagwe Kapers I

Dear All

Finally, I have managed to get it together to write to you. No blog ability here as the technology is a challenging in all respects. I am writing this from my office where there is an extremely noisy meeting going on next door – nobody appears to be listening to anyone else - it's just as I remember the NHS!

I have been over here now for nearly 4 weeks and I have had so many experiences I scarcely know where to begin. However you probably don't want a lot of detail, so I will just describe the chain of events thus far. The stories will have to follow later.

I spent one week in Dar Es Salaam doing VSO In Country Training which is where we learn about the culture, how to get work permits, get the low down on corruption, have a scary health talk, and receive essential supplies such as a mosquito net and a rather large aluminium water filter. Not that easy to transport on planes which only allow 15 kg of luggage. There



*Coco Beach, Dar es Salaam*



*The July VSO volunteers*

were 15 of us being induced and we were a very international group: 5 Brits, 2 Canadians, 2 Filipinos, 3 Dutch, 2 Ugandans and we are working on three different programmes: health, education and secure livelihoods. So teachers, business advisors, nurses and doctors are the main professions. It was a fairly chaotic schedule with nothing starting or finishing on time, but at least that got us into the usual way of working here – all part of the acclimatisation. We did manage a nice day on the beach looking out at the Indian Ocean (I have attached as it was so beautiful) and throughout the week we also managed to find some quite good food and



beer. I am relieved that rice is served everywhere as I had been told that ugali (maize paste) was the main carb – it appears to be completely tasteless but requires a lot of masticatory effort to reach that conclusion! You will be pleased to know that the DFID grant is not being frittered away on VSO volunteers as we stayed in a very cheap 'hotel' in Dar which strangely did not allow anyone with 'immoral turpitude' to visit, but I shouldn't think they would want to anyway. There were several long powercuts and apparently the future as regards this looks grim, however the speakers on

the mosque seemed completely unaffected and I woke to the sound of the call to prayer at 05.45. Dar is noisy, hot and dusty and doesn't really have any sights as such - however despite all that it is quite fun.



*The zebras and their lovely bottoms!*

We then went off inland to do our Swahili training in a convent (a place called Morogoro) – we just had 5 days of it which I have discovered is nowhere near enough. I have a collection of nouns and greetings but I feel very inadequate so I am now trying to continue to teach myself as well as practice with helpful colleagues. Previous volunteers had three weeks. We had tasks to perform such as going to market, getting change from the bank and interrogating unsuspecting locals about their personal life. I think they must be very used to it because it was all

quite good humoured. We decided that the best word was 'turnilefti' which is a roundabout. Whilst here I went on a long hike up in the Uluguru mountains – now forever etched in my memory as Blister Walk for obvious reasons – and we also went to a Safari Park where we saw everything you would expect, except lions. It was rather wonderful and I never knew that zebras had such lovely bottoms.

After these two weeks of gelling nicely as a group we then had to split and go our separate ways and this was truly difficult and surprisingly emotional. I had to take two planes over to Bukoba on the western edge of Lake Victoria and then had a bumpy 2 hour ride in a jeep to my new home at Nyakahanga Designated District Hospital in Omurushaka. I am in the hills (about 1,700 metres) and close to the Rwandan and Ugandan borders. The road is only tarmacked for a short part of the 120 km from Bukoba and seems to get washed away in the rainy season. However the Chinese are here and are making a start on widening and tarmacking so hopefully this will speed the journey up and make it a lot safer than it is now.



*The canteen, where I ate before the arrival of the fridge*

I have settled into my house which is in the hospital grounds – I now have a cooker but still no fridge so at the moment I am eating in the 'canteen'. I decided to be vegetarian for my time here, and they don't understand this at all – although this area is extremely poor, there seems to be no lack of meat and they never pass up an opportunity to eat it. They just love it! There is a lot of lip-smacking, marrow-sucking, and bone-chewing – you can probably imagine the sound effects – and I feel terribly English trying to eat my greens with a spoon. They do fortunately have pineapple,

avocado, and lots of bananas so I am getting about 10 a day but I do look forward to cooking myself. A fridge is a huge luxury and quite expensive but if I am to avoid spending all my time shopping and preparing food, I really do need one.

I have found myself frequently shocked as I go round the hospital – I can't believe they actually do some relatively complex surgery in these conditions – but I will tell you all about that and the work I am doing in another email.