

# Report for Alanouwoly on Visit to Boke, Guinea in January 2009 by Sally Peake

We arrived safely in Conakry in the early hours of Sunday 18th January and were whisked away from the airport to stay at Keita's house. Keita's wife, Fouta, is a very old friend of Souleymane Compo and heads a very welcoming household on the city outskirts. We had stayed there previously and were pleased to see them all again.

Our trip to Boke was planned for Monday afternoon and the minibus duly arrived. The bikes we brought from England were loaded onto the roof along with drums while the rest of the luggage along with our party (Souleymane, Sarah and Ali Compo, Penny, Steve and I) plus our drum teachers Soda and Lamin was packed inside. The trip itself was relatively uneventful - a military checkpoint to check passports and yellow fever certificates and then we were on our way. Initially the French built road is good but, beyond Boffa, it deteriorates badly and the journey as far as Koliboui is pot-holed and slow. As darkness fell we became aware of the realities of rural Guinea - no electricity so families collect around household cooking fires and these pinpoints of light are scattered along the roadside amongst the trees. For those of us accustomed to constant light it is a mesmerising sight.

It was the next day before we were able to see Salifou's house. The workmanship is excellent and we were delighted to see that unused concrete blocks were still on site along with some sand, mud-baked bricks and water in the purpose-built storage tank.

On Wednesday 21st January we met Seny (Salifou's old friend who is managing the construction); we were pleased to find that he continues to be enthusiastic about the project, fully understanding the need to reduce the scale of the building and adapt the original plans. He was also very keen to build (and live in) a small house as a caretaker; this is a common practice in Guinea providing both security and maintenance for properties as well as a small income and accommodation for the incumbent.

Over the next couple of days Seny and his builder, Abdullah Karim, provided Steve with costs of materials while Steve calculated quantities. We were pleased to find that all the tools and equipment had been stored in a neighbour's house - we agreed a payment to cover accommodation for both materials and the labour force for the next month while work progresses. One of the things we needed to understand is that wages, whilst very low by UK standards are not the only cost of labour. All meals plus the cost of their preparation are also our responsibility so it is important to have a contingency figure. Similarly the cost of materials usually excludes their transport to site. One thing that Africans do not seem good at is planning in advance how much will be needed and, also, the need to stick to plans. However, we agreed a figure that will complete the small house and hopefully allow for the existing materials to be incorporated into the big house and boundary wall corners.

During our trips to various builders' merchants we were able to pay our respects at both Salifou's grave and at the spot where he died on the road near Boke. We were comforted by the respect and honour paid to his memory; Seny and his workforce are obviously proud to be involved in a project in his memory.

Steve drew up a schedule showing how the small house would proceed and, generally, the building progressed as planned. On the day we left Boke the walls were nearly at eaves level (see the photos), most of the materials needed to finish were on site and Seny had sufficient funds to complete the project. As I sit here now I understand that Seny is living in the house although the tiled floor is not yet laid.

Steve is drawing up a schedule of materials and labour required to complete the main building using 2009 prices. We are also keen to research the use and cost of solar-powered pumps for water, small scale solar PV systems for lighting, mobile phone charging and a TV. These are becoming practical and cost-effective for rural Africa and would be another way of making the project building a centre of excellence in Boke.

During our stay I was able to meet the mayor of Boke to regularise the paperwork giving Alanouwoly a right to develop and use the property. He was very supportive of our aims and offered any help that he might be able to give. He is an educated and influential man and will be a useful ally as the project proceeds - he also speaks good English!!

In summary, Steve and I feel that we achieved more than we had initially expected. We are very optimistic for the future of the project and are excited at the prospect of pursuing a programme to finance these ideas.

Sally Peake  
Chairperson Alanouwoly

Footnote: Our travel and accommodation in Guinea was organised by Souleymane and Sarah Compo. Our thanks and appreciation goes to them.