

We went to Africa with Salifou ... by Sally Peake

Steve and I went to The Gambia and Guinea with Salifou (and Souleymane Compo) in January 2007 for a month. I had visited Kenya some ten years previously as a 'safari tourist' but it was Steve's first visit to Africa. I kept a diary and below are some of my entries recalled with love and happy memories of Salifou...

Arrival at Banjul airport 'Many willing hands would have helped but Souleymane and Salifou had all under control. Salif was through (*customs*) and vanished...to reappear with Ousman, his brother, and a waiting taxi – a smart Nissan people carrier. Soon we were outside and loaded up and as we drove away from the airport our African Adventure was really beginning. The delight of Souleymane and Salifou at seeing their friends and family was infectious and we were all so happy.'

'And suddenly we were there (*at Salifou's house in Bakoteh*) and the drums started. It seemed the whole world had been primed for our visit and, on our arrival, they burst into music and dance to welcome us. This was Tamala, the music group that Salifou and Souleymane support, made up of their extended family from Guinea. These are the people that they work so hard for in England and the reason we are here – by our visit, these lads who will appear like magic to help it seems, will profit from the dissemination of the wealth we bring. They sang, played and danced till dusk.'



Sunday 4th February 2007, Boke, Guinea. 'Overnight Salifou has been able to confirm his acquisition of some land just to the north of here about 200 metres away. He is understandably pleased and hopes to start building his house while he is here.

This deal has delayed our departure for the coast – the boys did not get to bed until 4am!

However, about 0945 we set off for Bel Air. The plan is to visit Salifou's family at Koliboui. True to form there are numerous stops – for water, smoked fish, food for tonight, rice, a live chicken...plus 11 bodies and a number of drums and the guitar we make quite an entourage. Salifou's family compound is on the main road into Koliboui, a reasonable sized village. We are introduced to numerous members of the extended family with his maternal uncle, his closest male relative living at home, being the one who will organise the sharing of Salifou's contribution to the family finances.

We had a football kit to give and I was delighted to see about 15 young men aged 15 – 25 appear. We were introduced to their 'captain' and when I enquired who were their heroes, various hands shot up to support Beckham, Ronaldhino, Ronaldo and Thierry Henri. They were obviously very happy with the new kit and we all posed for a happy team photo'

