

EXTRA, EXTRA

Special feature on Sudan
July 2007

SUDAN: *Life in the field*

Stories and pictures from Kurmuk, Sudan

By Tobru and Claire Inoue

Take the Sudan Quiz!



Tohru, outside his house in Sudan

Housing

Sudan is the largest African nation and 10th largest country in the world at over 967,000 square miles (over 4.5 times the area of France but only two thirds its population). Approximately 60% of the population live in rural settings which is also where we resided during our stay. Houses in the rural areas—called tukuls—are generally built with local materials which include wood poles of different types of acacia, bamboo, mud, and grass. Items are collected in the 'bush', cut down and carried in. It often takes several trips to get enough materials to start building.

Once the materials are gathered, holes are dug in the ground for the corresponding poles. The roofing is made of a combination of poles and bamboo. The joints are held to-

gether with strips of rubber torn from old tires or dried bark. Once the walls are woven with either bamboos or thin sticks, they are mudded using a combination of red mud and

well in windy situations. The doors are very short and the common tukul usually does not have any windows. In the rainy season, the temperature dips quite a bit and so the houses are able to maintain heat.

Our tukuls were built in a square shape as seen in the picture which enabled it to easily accommodate a bed. Dimensions were approximately 4m x 5m with a small veranda.



One of our Sudanese houses called a 'tukul'

grass. The roofing will then complete the structure. The latter is made of grass, bundled together and tied with rubber strips. Most people choose to build a round house which does

Accommodations were simple but comfortable. Once the tukuls were set up and decorated a bit, they quickly became 'home'! It was a small home but a nice one indeed!

This Issue

- Housing
- Transportation
- Weather
- Women and culture
- Diet
- Critters
- Building materials



Transportation: Local

Sudan can be a challenging place to travel, especially when working in remote rural areas. The rains swell the rivers and turn hard clay soil into the stickiest mud which makes travel an ordeal if not a hazard.

For local transportation we used Toyota Landcruisers and ATVs of different makes. These have proved reliable throughout the many rainy and dry seasons. Where there are no

roads, it is sometimes preferable to use a dug out canoe like the one pictured here. When the terrain is unsafe or inaccessible for vehicles of any kind, walking is the still the most reliable form of transportation.

The picture on the right illustrates a 50 km trip up north which took a total of 5 hours. The thick mud repeatedly forced us to dig a road of our own. There have been other organizations who have had to



Rainy season: Stuck in the mud

spend over a day on the different roads. The official record for this particular trip was set by another organization at 20 hours! That's an average of 2.5 km/h!



Dug out canoes used to cross rivers



Rainy season



Grass huts in the dry season

Weather: the seasons

Sudan is a land of many extremes. It can be nearly 50 degrees Celsius during the dry season (the sun lulls everyone into a siesta in the middle of the day) to a chilly 15 degrees at night during a thunderstorm in the rainy season. Sudan is located just north of the equator in the continent of Africa. The weather here varies according to the different geographical features. The climates can be classified as hot and arid, hot and semiarid, and tropical wet and dry. The North is desert-like and has powerful dust storms which blow in periodically; the central and southern

sections have high temperatures and its share of rains.

The two seasons in our area of Sudan were the rainy season and the dry season. Rainy season would last from May to October and dry season from November to April. During these two seasons there is an astounding change in the colours.

Arriving in April, it is hard to believe that anything could grow here. The ground is dry and cracked; along the roads there are only a few areas of shade if you are walking; the rivers are dry exposing the sandy bed; and the sun beats down from

morning to evening and the heat that is stored in the mountains radiates during the night to leave you sweating throughout.

During the rainy season the roads turn into mud; the rivers rise and swell; the grass grows long and tall covering the land. The rains come and wash away buildings and roads and bring a season of malaria. But this is also a season of blessing and relief from the hot weather and God's gift to the many subsistence farmers as well as pastoralists.

Women and culture

Women occupy an important role in society. It can be said that African life rests with the women. They are the ones who get water for cooking and drink-

ing; who wash the clothes; prepare the meals' and who raise the children.

Cooking requires much more time to accomplish in Sudan than in North America. Here are the steps: 1) Go to the market very early to get ingredients (oil, salt, sugar, flour, vegetables etc.); 2) Collect water for cleaning, hand washing and cooking; 3) Collecting firewood; 4) Soaking ingredients (beans); 5) Boiling water; 6) Mixing in ingredients; 7) Serving the

meal; 8) Serving tea; 9) Cleaning; 10) Eating after everyone else has eaten.

Women in rural areas often grind their grains by hand using stones. A larger one on the bottom is carved hollow through time and a smaller one to do the grinding.

In the culture, when women conceive and give birth, they stay inside the house and are attended to by other family members for 40 days. This is the time when friends and family come and visit bearing gifts.



Women grinding sorghum with stones



Claire visiting a newborn

Transportation: in and out



Tohru boarding the DC/3

Due to the war in Sudan the main offices for operations were in Nairobi, Kenya. We would fly out of Sudan roughly every two months for a short break. The flight into Sudan would be on a DC/3 here shown. The first leg of the flight would take off from Nairobi at 7am and land in northern Kenya for the night. The next morning flights would take off

just after sunrise into Sudan. On occasion we would fly in on a smaller single engine prop plane where there are no on-board washrooms for 3 to 4 hours.

While the airstrips in Kenya were tarmac, those in Sudan

were dirt strips which got muddy in the rainy season. Sometimes we would have to dig them out as though any other vehicle.

Once, a plane was stranded and it took 3 days to dig and pull it out using trucks and tractors.



Samaritan's Purse DC/3

Diet: local foods

Sudan has a rich diversity of nutritious foods. The staple in the country is sorghum, a grain which they grind and boil into a thick porridge. This is accompanied by a stew of vegetables and occasionally, meat. The main ingredients in the stew are onions, tomatoes, okra and salt.

In the markets we can find locally grown and imported fruits and vegetables such as limes, mangoes, tomatoes, onions, maize (corn), eggplants, okra, potatoes, and hot peppers.

In addition to the staples, Suda-

nese also go into the 'bush' to find different foods which grow wildly. Here are some neat drinks you can make: 'Gungulez', hibiscus (Karkade), and Tamarind.

When there is little to consume or the harvest has not been good, people will scavenge the forests for different foods which

include a variety of wild fruits, nuts and roots.

Most foods are consumed by hand - referred sometimes as our God given fork! People usually eat everything and drink water after the meal is finished. There are no formal deserts but Sudanese love a cup of hot tea or coffee. The latter is often served with copious amounts of sugar!



Coffee is a favourite



Local food is consumed by hand

Critters and other animals

Sudan is filled with an amazing variety of different wildlife including many different kinds of insects.

Mammals in our area include: hyenas, small antelopes, squirrels, rats, bats, cats and dogs, donkeys, monkeys, goats, sheep, cows and camels.



Predatory bird circling

Birds include: migratory species, hawks and an amazing array of colourful birds and

guinea fowl, chicken, and grouse.

Reptiles include: monitor lizards, crocodiles, snakes, and turtles.

Insects and arachnids include such a wide array of different species. There are interesting ones such as giant millipedes, locusts, praying mantises, white ants (termites), dragon flies, dung beetles and little red insects which come out of the ground during the onset of rains.

Caution is taken around centipedes—which may easily grow to half a foot—to different



One of the many lizards

kinds of spiders, biting horse flies, sand flies, and scorpions of varying colours. Perhaps the most notorious of the lot is the mosquito which is the cause of malaria—

still one of the greatest threats in rural Africa today.

We sleep under mosquito nets to avoid all these during our sleep. Wearing replants and long sleeves also deters them from getting too close!

Building materials

Building is another heavy task in Sudan which is typically given to men. Materials are used mostly in the construction of tukuls, fences, granaries and goat pens.



Locally burnt red bricks

Most people in rural areas live in tukuls made of poles, bamboo,

mud and grass. Others who can afford better housing have constructed structures with locally produced red bricks: a combination of mud and straw.

These are produced as needed by baking moulded bricks in large open air ovens.



Fences built with grass

Cement is brought from Ethiopia and northern Sudan.

Most houses or collection of houses, called compounds, are surrounded by a grass fence for privacy. They are simple structures made, as seen in the picture, predominantly by poles, bamboo and grass. While it is of simple construction, rural areas are quite safe and do not require greater measures than these for safety.

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Check out more stories and pictures at:
www.claireandtohru.blogspot.com



Tohru and Claire in Nairobi, 2006

Claire and Tohru met while living and working in Kurmuk, Southern Blue Nile, Sudan in April, 2005. Prior to working in Sudan they had worked in different parts of East Africa. Tohru graduated out of McGill University in Montreal where he grew up and joined Samaritan's Purse to work in Uganda as a water filter technician in 2003. Later, in April of 2004, he started work in Sudan where he served for three years. Claire has been in the mission field since 1995 serving with SIM as an ESL teacher in the Sudanese refugee camps of Ethiopia for 5 1/2 years. She graduated out of Providence College just south of Winnipeg and joined work in Kurmuk, Sudan where she served as the Kurmuk Community Centre Program facilitator for 2 years. They were married on October 21, 2006 in Watamu, Kenya.

Sudan Quiz: Test your knowledge

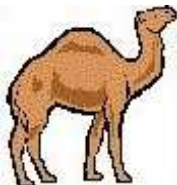
Test your knowledge of Sudan!

1. In Sudan, most people can speak:

- A. Tagalog and English.
- B. Arabic and English.
- C. Swahili and English.
- D. Afrikaans.

2. Dry season is so tough because:

- A. Food from the past rainy season and harvest run out.
- B. Finding water may require digging it from a dry river bed.
- C. Fires threaten households.
- D. All of the above



3. Which tree is said to cure up to 40 different diseases?

- A. The red acacia.
- B. The eucalyptus tree.
- C. The neem tree.
- D. The baobab tree.

4. 'Gungulez' is the local term for:

- A. Village chief.
- B. Tree bark.
- C. Baobab tree pods.
- D. Digestion problems.

5. What is the first thing you do when you visit someone's home?

- A. Shake everyone's hands.
- B. Take your shoes off.
- C. Wash your hands and feet.
- D. Share a meal.

6. Sudan shares borders with which following countries?

- A. Eritrea and Ethiopia.
- B. Kenya and Uganda.
- C. Chad and Libya.
- D. Central African Republic and Congo.
- E. A and B.
- F. B and C.
- G. All of the above.

How did you do?

6/6



3/6



1/6



Answers:

1. B, 2. D, 3. C, 4. C, 5. A, 6. G

