

The Gabon Letter

April 2018

WHAT'S INSIDE: *Friends of Gabon*

- FOG contact information p. 2
- Update from Gabon p. 3
- Facebook News p. 4
- Peace Corps, Washington news p. 4-5
- 2018 FOG Reunion News p. 5
- Update on Encore de la Paix p. 6-7
- From the archives p. 8
- Recipe of the month p. 8
- Readers Write p. 9-12
- FOG Membership p.13



From the editor's desk: You can go home again.

This newsletter missed the quarterly deadline, but for a good reason. We just returned from a month in Gabon, reacquainting ourselves with the people of Woleu-Ntem, near Mitzic. This time, on my third visit back since Peace Corps days, I was able to make it back to Lastoursville where I had been assigned in the 1970s. Much had changed, but a surprising amount was the same. The pleasant surprise was running into former students, around the town and even in other towns. One man, in Pana, heard me say where I had been posted and then asked what years, and then shouted out my name. I didn't remember him, but should have since I looked in my old grade books when I got home, and he was one of the better students. Who saves old grade books?

Anyway, a fair amount of space in this newsletter is devoted to the trip back and our projects. Next time, asking for help with stories around the theme, "snail mail," as well as any "shout out" news, and new contributions on recipes and old Gabon Gab articles.

John

Friends of Gabon Contact Information

Editor and layout /design

John Dickson

dickson.john2@gmail.com

240-447-8711



Friends of Gabon Officers :

Joan (Mathieu) Tate, Executive Director

j.mathieu@immigrators.com

Mike Crane & Rebecca Pawling Kaplan

Treasurer/Membership

rebeccapawlingkaplan@gmail.com

michael@craneassociates.us

Barbara Benson, Member-at-Large

bebenson@bellsouth.net

(706) 613-8287

Doug Spatz, Member-at-Large

djspatz@sbcglobal.net

(937) 748-4953

The Friends of Gabon is an association of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Peace Corps Staff and others who are interested in the culture and welfare of Gabon. *The Gabon Letter* is published quarterly by the Friends of Gabon.



Update from Gabon - News and views

New U.S. Ambassador Gabon has a new U.S. Ambassador, Joel Danies, who took up his posting this month. His official bio notes he is "a career member of the U.S. Senior Foreign Service, class of Counselor, and a diplomat since 1987." His previous assignments include the Foreign Service Institute, the Office of Haiti Special Coordinator, Afghanistan in the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Office, and in Geneva as a Senior Human Rights Officer, among others.

Danies "was born in Haiti, and he grew up in New York and in Baltimore, Maryland. He received an M.A. from the National War College and a B.A. from the University of Maryland. He speaks French, Haitian Creole, and some Arabic. He and his wife Caren have two college age children, shown below at his swearing in in Washington.



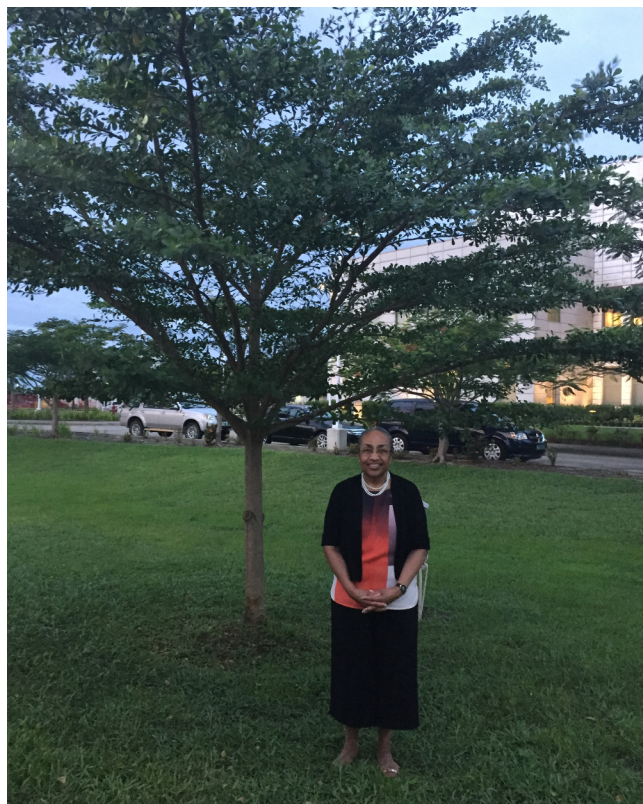
At his confirmation hearing in December, Danies had this to say about Gabon:

"Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe have been relatively peaceful and stable since their independence. U.S. policy priorities are clear for both countries: (1) protecting U.S. lives and interests; (2) strengthening democratic institutions and improving governance; (3) enhancing trade and economic opportunities; and (4) ensuring peace, security, and stability. In Gabon, our priorities remain to encourage the process of democratization, increase good governance, and improve increased transparency. If confirmed, I will engage government leaders, opposition parties, and civil society to strengthen human rights and fundamental freedoms, and urge Gabon to stay on a path to democracy. Gabon's economy has been affected by falling oil prices leading to increased activity in the agriculture, fisheries, and timber sectors. These are areas in which U.S. knowledge and experience can contribute positively. If confirmed, I will tirelessly promote U.S. values and business interests, and I will continue to advocate on behalf of U.S. companies for a level playing field in Gabon. Gabon is a country located on the strategic Gulf of Guinea.

If confirmed, I will work closely with the government as well as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) headquartered in Libreville, to promote regional security cooperation in this vital region by leveraging partnerships with U.S. forces. Gabon is an important partner in the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP), a multilateral public/private initiative for addressing regional concerns, including deforestation and wildlife trafficking.

If confirmed, I will continue to advance our shared work on sustained natural resource stewardship that denies revenues to transnational criminal organizations."

In February 2018, Cynthia Akuettah departed Gabon, closing out her three-plus years as the U.S. Ambassador. One of her final acts was to step outside her office and visit the tree she planted besides a memorial plaque for two Peace Corps volunteers, Karen Phillips and Diana Fillmore. The growth of the tree from its sapling size indicates how time had passed in her three years.



New York Times Reports on Ivory Smuggling in Gabon

Gabon disrupted an ivory smuggling network, according to a January 18, 2018 article in the [New York Times](#). The group of eight Gabonese and one Chadian operated in all of Gabon's provinces, and get this, had links to Boko Haram. The government said it was responsible for the export of six tons of ivory in the past year. "Home to the largest population of forest elephants in the world," the article also noted that the elephant population has declined from 60,000 to 35,000 in the past decade. Not included in the article was my first sighting of a Gabon elephant from the train window as we rolled through Lope Reserve, this past March.



Facebook News

Many readers are members of the Friends of Gabon Facebook group, and if you're not, it's easy to join. But, if you're allergic to Facebook, here are a few highlights from the Friends of Gabon Facebook archives.

What are the chances that the first rider that the new Uber driver, one Jimmy Kimmel, would be from Gabon? The late night comedian helps the young student who is about to return home buy gifts for his family. Check it out here on [YouTube](#), shared by Douglas Keith Himes.



Gabonese Artisan Market Reopens

US Embassy DCM, and 90s RPCV, Randy Meredith posted about the new artisan market in Libreville.

"The Libreville Artisan Market, which has been shut-down since the December 2017 attack on two Danish journalists, has been re-opened. If you are looking for Libreville souvenirs, please visit the Olamba Village on the Bord de Mer in Quartier Glass instead. At Olamba, the products are predominantly made in Gabon by Gabonese artisans. I don't recall ever seeing anything "made in Gabon" at the Libreville Artisan Market... That's Virginia, in the picture, at the shop with woven baskets and bags. The small paniers behind her run 5000 - 7000 FCFA. There are also woven palm fiber sacks, decorative woven bowls, and a variety of plant extract products (oils, creams, etc...)"

Following our month in Sam, we also went to this market instead of the more touristy West African artisan market. We bought Gabon coffee, pagnes and soaps to pass around when we got home. We can attest to Randy's recommendation and

include the photo he posted of Virginie, his wife, at the market.

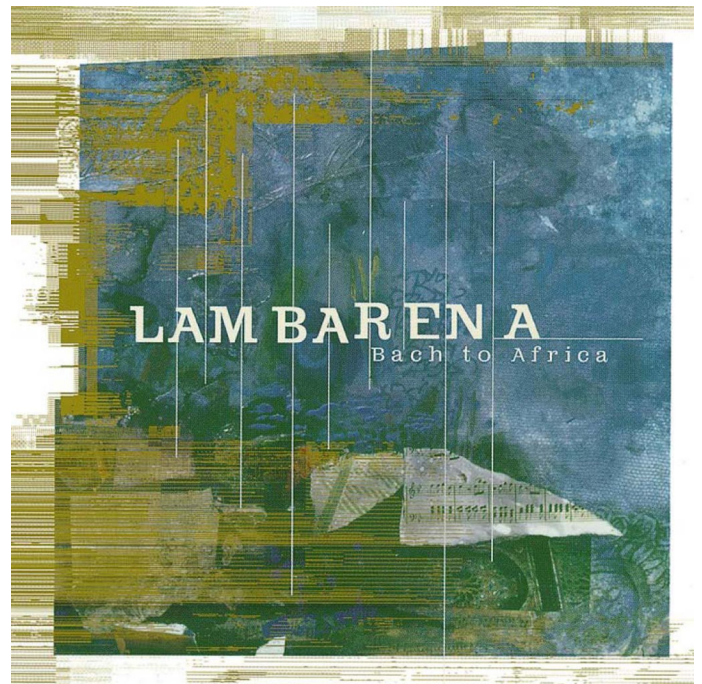


Not on Facebook, but maybe it should be.....

In the background as I am putting this newsletter together, I can hear a music recommendation from Henk Brouwer: "When I got home, I went through my cd collection (I didn't throw everything out!) and found the cd that I remembered: "Lambarena - Bach to Africa", that used to be one of my father's cds."

It's an homage to Albert Schweitzer in Lambarene, and is a mash-up of Bach and traditional Gabonese music. Quite well done. It was released in 1996, put together by Hughes de Courson, French musician and composer, who also did a cd called "Mozart in Egypt."

Perhaps volunteers from the 1990s recall this coming out when they were in Gabon, so it may not be new to you. Available as most things are, on Amazon.



Save the Date: 2018 Gabon RPCV Fete reunion

This year's fete is located in the beach community of Bonnet Shores Narragansett Rhode Island. The fete house is Joan and Mark's family Beach house where all meals, drinks and the parties will be. Sleeping accommodations are several large rented beach houses within walking distance to Joan and Mark's beach house, the Fete house. The Rental houses have separate bedrooms, kitchen, bathrooms, washer dryer, and whatever else a beach house typically has. Plenty of parking.

The fete is within walking distance to the beach. Kayaking, canoeing, scuba diving, tennis plus more is less than 20 minutes drive away. Newport is 15 minutes drive. And the list goes on!!!

FETE HOUSE LOCATION: The Tate's Fete house is located at [14 Parkman Rd. Bonnet Shores, Narragansett, Rhode Island 02882](#).

DATE: Saturday July 21, 2018 4pm to Wednesday brunch July 25th. Fete goers can arrive earlier on Saturday and hang out at Fete house or go to beach.

COST: \$300 Per person. Rental houses are based on occupancy so all persons pay. Mail check before April 1, 2018, payable to Joan Mathieu to [4 Rhode Island Ave, Providence, Rhode Island 02906](#).

Other information

The rental houses are ours from Saturday 21st, 4 pm check in until Saturday 28th at 10am check out. Fete goers can stay at the rental houses after the official fete until Saturday check out. Tates would love to continue to party with you!



Peace Corps News



Peace Corps has a new director. Jody Olsen brings significant Peace Corps experience as a former volunteer (Tunisia 1966-68), former Country Director for Togo (1979) and former Deputy Director (2001-2007). She obviously knows the agency well, and said at her swearing in ceremony that she was committed to leading a Peace Corps that remains the world's preeminent volunteer agency, offering all Americans the opportunity to serve their country. She envisions recruiting skilled and resilient volunteers who stand poised to achieve the greatest impact. In the months ahead, she will focus on ensuring that Peace Corps sends volunteers to countries where they are needed most.

[Update from the Peace Corps Community for Refugees](#)

This past March, when I got off the Gabon railway train in Lastoursville, I saw an SUV with UNHCR license plates. I knew that stood for United Nations High Commission for Refugees, but I couldn't imagine what they might be doing in Lastoursville. I subsequently found out they were doing a survey of refugees who had escaped the conflict in Congo. Imagine the journey that any refugee from eastern Congo, where the conflict is most severe, had to take to get to Lastoursville.

The Peace Corps Community for Refugees is just one year old and is working to find ways it can best draw on the network of Peace Corps affiliates to provide support services for refugees here and overseas. One way they are currently exploring is teaching English to young students who have had interrupted schooling and to offer English classes to refugees as they await resettlement in the U.S.

See the link in the heading above for more information.

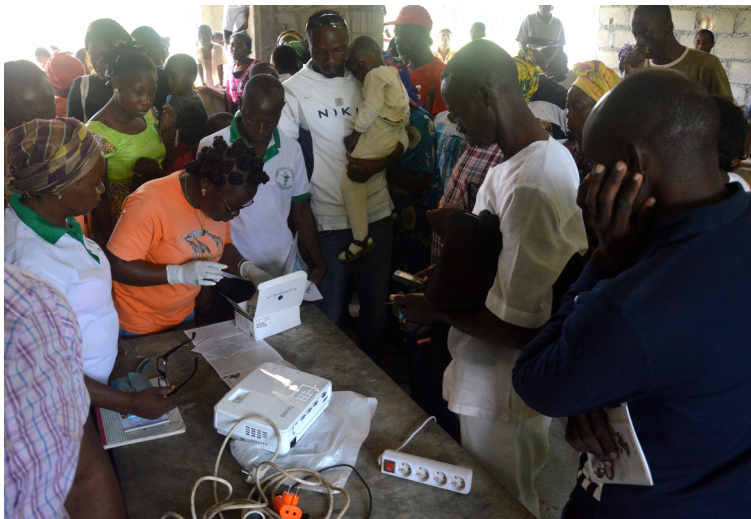


Update on Encore de la Paix

Saving Lives – mosquito nets

Let's start with the most important. Thanks to the Friends of Gabon, for ponying up the funding for the distribution of 540 mosquito nets in the villages around Sam in the Woleu-Ntem. Special thanks to Doug Spatz for corralling all the donations and to Paul Holloway for generously making up our shortfall. Bob Weisflog lent his planning and organizational skills to give the mosquito net distribution a fully professional foundation. Working with the Programme National de la Lutte Contre le Paludisme in the Ministry of Health, and four volunteers who accompanied us to the village, ensured we would reap maximum benefit.

The project started in Libreville with a presentation by the PNLN people to alert us to the biology of mosquitoes, the statistics behind the disease in Gabon and the prevention and treatment procedures. While we all knew mosquitoes breed in standing water, it was only after hearing the presentation that Drew Howard planned on a screen for the tops of the rain barrels we were placing outside the latrines we were going to build. Who knew as well that mosquitoes are drawn to certain colors, like blue and red, but avoid yellow and white? Below is a photo of Marie Pascal from the PNLN team (white gloves), testing residents of Sam.



The PNLN team was ably supported by our own team members, Charlie Morrison, a public health doctor, Virginie Meredith, a Gabonese-American who spoke Fang, and Henk Brouwer, who had excellent French and an artistic eye to document with his camera all aspects of the project. Henk's own story of the trips to the villages is in a later section of the newsletter.

lest you think it is an exaggeration that these nets will save lives, we were saddened to hear that a young girl who had

helped us with our water supply in 2016 had succumbed just a few months earlier to malaria. We learned from the PNLN that the death rate from malaria was much lower than the overall incidence that affects work, family and finances, but this young girl's death really brought home to us the value of what we were doing.

The really good news is that we already have ideas on proceeding with follow-on distribution projects, in Pana and Lastoursville this time.

Latrines Also Save Lives

Building hygienic latrines behind the two schools in the village should also help prevent illness. The state of the latrines available to both students and teachers had been nothing short of deplorable, breeding grounds for all kinds of illness. Through the generosity of Water Charity, we were able to put up two, three-stall latrines in each location. This is a wonderful organization that helps fund small projects to provide clean drinking water and improve sanitation. Water Charity also funded the latrine we built in Doumandzou in 2016, the first projects in Gabon they had supported.

A new design this year prepared by Dick Steeper, Drew Howard and Doug Spatz, served to reduce costs as we relied on local materials, with wood construction, in contrast to the cement block facilities we built two years ago. Drew Howard oversaw the project, working heroically in the heat of the days alongside two Gabonese we had hired, Nico and Pacome, from Mitzi. Eventually all seven of us who volunteered ended up doing work on the latrines, from treating the wood for termites to preparing ties for the rebar and painting.

We were fortunate that both pits had been dug by the time we arrived, although one needed substantial more work, since its walls were collapsing. Drew managed to reconfigure both latrines to take into account the larger pits, and more materials needed. The most time-consuming piece was building the framework for the platform over the pits (new French word – "dale," for slab). The pours for each latrine took a full day of intense work, during which we ran out of water in each site, and had to resort to bucket brigades from students and neighbors to allow the work to proceed. Below are Nico, Pacom and Drew before we



painted the latrine behind the school.

The wood siding went up quickly, and the conclusion was a coat of paint on the interior and exterior. Both latrines have a hand-washing station on the outside, using screen covered rain barrels to prevent mosquitoes. Both latrines have covered vents, so that flies that enter the pit area seek to leave by finding the light, but can't escape and eventually die.

We underscored in our Water Charity application the importance of privacy for girls so that they can stay in school. This issue was reinforced by Pacome who said that he will walk further to use a latrine that has privacy and is clean. Nico's girlfriend came to Sam from Mitzi and helped us paint, remarking after we finished that there aren't latrines as nice as these in her town – "How come they get this in Sam?" she wondered.



Henry Schmalz passed along this photo of George Gamble and Bill Langille from the 1960s group digging their latrine pit. Was it the same one in Sam that we found 50 years later?

World Map Mural May Not Save Lives....

But it sure was fun, for everyone. Building on the experience of the world map mural we did in Doumandzou in 2016, Mary Dickson and Claire Thiebault organized a second map for the Sam school we had renovated that same year. Fortunately, Peace Corps has a thorough, step-by-step manual for these maps, and Mary and Claire followed it, carefully plotting out a grid on the wall of one of the classrooms, and then, with Henk, filling in each of the thousand-plus two-inch squares with the contours of the borders, all under the curious eyes of

school director, teachers and students. You can just imagine them asking themselves, what is happening here? Here again, the Peace Corps manual had some drawing exercises that Mary and Claire gave the students to show how to draw figures using a grid system.

Gradually, the shapes of the continents and countries emerged, especially with the painting of the outlines of each country. That left the fun part, where everyone joined in to fill in the countries, a reward for students who did their homework and helped out at school. Below are Jirelle and Fatima filling in colors on the map.



The opportunities to teach geography occurred daily. Students had an idea of the Gabon map, but not of the world or where Gabon stood in the world. Fortunately, in most maps, Gabon pretty much lies at the center of the world. Questions about being able to drive to America, or where Obama's father was from, or which ocean was the largest were easy to answer with the map.

At right, Henk added his artistic touch to the corners drawing in the corners a north-south directional, a Gabonese flag, and the flower after which the village of Sam is named.

Clear your calendars We even talked about next projects, including a school near Bitam and health projects in Ogooue Lolo. When is still to be determined but we're looking at March or August 2019.

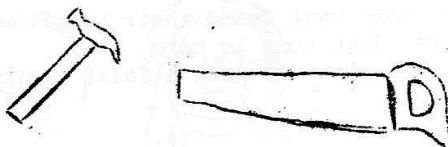


New Features

At the suggestion of one reader, we are trying out a couple of new features, in order to solicit additional input from you all. The first is a dive into the archives of the Gabon Gab. (All you need to do is find an old edition, scan into JPEG form, and send it along.) The second is a section on recipes, from Gabon, West Africa, or even from western Massachusetts.

From the Archives - Spring 1979

CONSTRUCTION CORNER



From the Haut-Ogooue:

The following is a prop card prepared for Gary's next trip to Franceville when he is going to call Libreville -

- 1) Ask Howie about mattresses - stress that we are hosting some 16 or possibly 18 guests and all of the hotels in town are full.
- 2) Is a truck with teacher house material and chevrons on the way?
- 3) Tell Dennis that if he doesn't have tool for another chantier, there are going to be some disgruntled folks out here.
- 4) Is Donna really coming?
- 5) What about Carte de Sejours?
- 6) Is Ombouma coming: yes, no, maybe
- 7) Fuel filters (lots)
- 8) Who pays for the beer?

To be compared with this late request from a TEFL volunteer:

- 1) cheese, not Neslte's
- 2) two bottles of pancake syrup.
- 3) books, books, books - not Tom Robbins, Herman Melville, or Joseph Heller. Something racy - catch my drift?
- 4) a box or three of Tampex.
- 5) aspirin for headaches numbers 238, 629, 717 - Mboulangoye Jean Fierre, Kote Marie Therese, 6e A.

Recipe of the Month - Atangas

Last newsletter, we highlighted everyone's favorite fruit. However, we did not include a recipe, and after all these years, I finally figured out why I could never get them right. Courtesy of Virginie Meredith from our atanga-rich month in Sam: Boil water, turn off flame. Add atangas and wait five minutes. So the next time you see atangas at your local Safeway, you can avoid my mistake of keeping the flame going. Speaking of atangas, I found this about their health benefits.

Skin Care - The fruit is best for skin care. When eaten regularly the fruits lead to healthy skin. The butter from the fruit can be applied on the skin to eliminate acne; **Elimination of Dysentery** - The fruit helps in stopping and eliminating episodes of dysentery. In this case, the fruit should be boiled in salted water then eaten in considerable amounts; **Treatment of Cancer** - This fruit is a good natural remedy for the treatment of cancer. This is made possible by the anti-oxidants present in it that blocks the development and spreading of cancerous cells in the body; **Replacement for Food Substances** - This fruit is a good replacement for food substances. This is because it contains high levels of energy, proteins, minerals, fatty acids and vitamins that are essential in sustaining the body when exposed to starvation; **Enhances Brain Health** - This fruit is a natural remedy that enhances brain health. This is made possible by the presence of magnesium that boosts the functions of the nerves; **Treatment of Hypertension** - The fruit contains potassium which is essential for controlling blood pressure and other cardiovascular related issues.

Readers Write



This time we asked readers to ponder over the theme of Road Trips. While certain that each and every one of us has a road trip story, somehow, the theme didn't catch fire with you all. When I wrote mine, I guessed why - there were simply too many, and they were too involved to write just a few short paragraphs. Indeed, the collage above from Henry Schmal (or Dale Judkins?) says it all.

Next month: snail mail, a look at how we used to communicate with family and friends back in the U.S. and with our fellow volunteers.

Wanderlust

by Suzi Bouveron

Ironically, I ended up working as PC staff (APCD, temporary Desk Officer, and Deputy Country Director), but I wasn't exactly the most compliant PCV. I had wanderlust. Give me any reasonably legit excuse to hop on a bush taxi and head the 50 km into town--either Mouila or

Fougamou, and I was on it. I was a health PCV posted in Guidouma on the main road. One day, I'd *just* climbed into the back of a truck for a boondoggle weekend trip when a Peace Corps Land Cruiser pulled up behind us and flashed its lights. Imagine my surprise! It was my APCD, Kader. He was doing routine, albeit unannounced, site visits in our region. Fortunately, he had a good sense of humor and laughed at me as I climbed down. (He also moved me to LBV soon after and gave me a lot more work.) By the way, a very belated and sincere thanks to the folks, especially Kari and Barb in Mouila, and Conrad and Charlotte in Fougamou, who hosted me so generously so many times.

Road Trips from Sam

by Henk Brouwer

This last month of March, the Encore de la Paix equipe set out to distribute over 500

mosquito nets to the population of Sam and 7 neighbouring villages. The original plan was to visit each village three times: the first to count the number of eligible persons in the various households, then a second visit to check on the acquired numbers and add absentees. The third visit was the most important: the gathering of all/most of the inhabitants, to explain and demonstrate the reason and use of the mosquito nets and the handing out of the nets.

Quickly, it became clear that the second visit could be eliminated by doing the checking and corrections during the first as well as the final visit. This meant less road trips!

During the first week, we were assisted by 4

members of the programme Nationale de la Lutte contre le Paludisme (National Programme of the Fight against Malaria), from the Gabonese Ministry of Health: Luc, Marie-Pascale, Obame and Ghislaine. We, the EdLP team, were Charlie, Virginia and Henk.

And off we went. The first goal was to locate the house of the "Chef de village", or the "Chef de Regroupement", or the "Chef de Canton". Fortunately there was often a flagpole with the Gabonese flag on top in front. While the denominations Village and Canton are part of the hierarchical system of Gabonese society, the Regroupement is the name of the newly formed villages ("regroupements") that were formed during the office of the first Gabonese president, Leon Mba. Hence the sometimes strange or funny names of villages like La Hollande, Belleville or Douala.

The Chef de Village was the one to talk to, to introduce and explain and help us to locate the

different households. Most of the Chefs were very helpful in the process of identifying the eligible persons, notwithstanding the presence of the at times annoying family members or other interested parties.

Driving up and down the roads around Sam was not an easy task, considering the sometimes very bad conditions of these roads. Even though we heard they were graded each year, it seemed that there hadn't been any maintenance for over 15 years, and deep rivulets and gulleys had to be overcome. The fact that the forestry companies with their big lumber trucks ("les grumiers") were also using these roads to transport the lumber to the factories, didn't add anything good.



Nevertheless, Virginia and the driver of the PNL team, Monsieur Ndong, did their best and got us safe to and from the villages of Ndzek, Méléne, Doumandzou, La Hollande, Akonébé and Douala. The rainy season could have often stopped us from going out anyway, but we were sort of lucky with enough sunshine between the rainstorms to let the roads turn dry again. Only once did we turn back from a planned trip to Belleville and Doumandzou because of a very muddy and slippery road. Virginia drove her Toyota Tundra, which may be a big and awesome vehicle (photo above,) but the Sam roads sometimes were just too much for the Toon-dra. Still, it proved indispensable in transporting people, bags with mosquito nets, more people, sand and gravel, bricks, food supplies, bags with pineapple saplings and sometimes game.

We were sad to see the Toon-dra return to Libreville after 2 1/2 weeks, but sadder still to say goodbye to its drive, Virginia.

Road Trips - The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

by John Dickson

Not one road trip in Gabon and beyond leaps out as deserving its own narration. All the road trips seem to converge in a sequence of episodes, kind of a greatest hits from the many road trips.

-- scariest. It's a tie. Trying to maneuver a Toyota pick-up across two logs straddling a stream on the road between KoulaMoutou and Mimongo. Trusting my life to Young Steve, a drugged-up taxi driver in eastern Nigeria, who drove with his head outside the window, at high speeds and dodging potholes in roads left unrepaired from the Biafran War and, yes, a body. Don't believe me? Ask Charlie Morrison who was with me.

-- happiest. Riding in the hills of western Cameroun along the ring road, at a leisurely speed, with plenty of room in the back seat, singing along to Prince Nico Mbarga with the driver and other passengers.

-- longest wait. They were all long. Unless you're driving your own car/truck, waiting just goes with the territory of road trips in Gabon. Seeking an "occasion" meant waiting, since while the term is a great name for cars that just happen to pass by and pick up passengers, the proper term might be "rarely." Hopping on a public transport in a car park also meant waiting for the car or van to fill up with enough passengers to make the trip worthwhile for the driver. Since we didn't have smart phones, we used to amuse ourselves by singing ditties such as "Stuck Inside of KM with the Lozo Blues Again."

-- Tightest squeeze. Here too, they were all tight. However, the ride in northern Cameroun in a van with so many people that there was a guy squeezed in in the row behind us so that his head wedged right next to mine, or rather his mouth right next to my ear, as his loud, non-stop voice still rings in my ears.

-- Happiest ending. Who knew you had to carry IDs with you everywhere you went? The gendarmes who threw me in jail couldn't believe that in America you don't carry around your national ID everywhere you go, and that you don't just hop in an occasion going to Franceville on a Saturday afternoon without ID. Madi Silverman bailed me out late that night, and I was able to enjoy a warm beer and a couch more comfortable than the cement floor.

-- Best line. Again from Nigeria. Charlie and I hopped on the back of a truck filled with bananas heading to Lagos. We were about to pay what the driver had asked when one of the other passengers objected to the cost, with the line "I am not a newcomer to Lagos." Sounded like it was right out of our TFEL textbooks.

-- Sickest. Hands down. Medounou to Libreville, in 2015. Not me, but Mary Boyle Dickson, who got so car sick Bob Weisflog must have stopped the car at least 20 times, for her to well you know. One of the other passengers, a Gabonese friend, capped it all off as we overheard him on the phone explaining why we were late, with the excuse, "I knew I should never drive with a woman."

-- Muddiest. Here again, there are many. Huge mud holes deeper than the roof of a truck on the

route economique from Lastourville to Ndjole meant lines of cars and trucks on each side had to wait for each car to drive in, and get pulled out on the other side by the next truck. However, the slope down the hill from the school construction house in Lastoursville may have been the muddiest. It was the cause of many trucks sliding into the ditch before they could even get to the main laterite road below.

Other superlatives? Probably. I suspect each of you has your own greatest hits list. One more road trip was the last one I did, this past March. The story is too long for here, but check out the journal entry from March 23 about trains, trucks and automobiles from Sam to Pana on encoredelapaix.org.

On the Road Again by Taffy Case

Paula and I were on our way to visit Doug and Mitch's village to help the residents party. I'm not sure if we were celebrating the worst hangover in my life or to view the 60cm gorilla hand in the freezer part of Doug and Mitch's freego. Doug kept saying "hey Taffy. Come see what I've got in my freezer." My answer was that I'd rather have some Tylenol for my head ache. I gave in and opened the door and there was a gorilla hand that filled the freezer compartment. That did not help my stomach settle. I didn't barf but I came close. "Thanks Doug. You dink".

I think some young man in the village was to be circumcised so that meant every man woman and child could consume ridiculous amounts of Palm Wine , manmembooka and Regab for three days.

The night before, we stayed at Jon Cinnamons's Mekouma School. That's where I got the hangover. Before the drinking started, I had a bright idea to drive across the border to The People's Republic of Congo. It looked like it was only a few clicks on the map. There were no signs so we started off on a set of tire tracks headed east.

After a kilometer, we came across a rather small bridge. "Small" being: two meters or so. The bridge was five or six logs side by side. Slowed down and lined the wheels to the logs. Paula said "I don't think the bridge is sturdy enough for our pick-up". My wise-ass response was "I've been driving across dinky little bridges like this." The front wheels of the pickup slid betwixed the logs and the front axle was resting on the "bridge".

Paula wasted no time in pointing out that I should have listened to her. Four wheel drive was not solving our situation so I dug out the hand powered winch. One end of the winch goes on the bumper and the other end gets hooked on some dinky little trees.

The little trees did get unrooted as one might imagine. It was starting to get dark and every PC volunteer knows: you have ten friggin' minutes to get your white Toyota back onto the solid ground before it goes from "dark" to "pitch black".

My next anchor that I wanted to hook the winch onto was more substantial but I had to wade into chest-deep swamp to tie the cable. Down right scared I was. Big Equatorial SNAKE favor this type of environment. The clock was ticking and it was getting darker by the second.

Plan B worked and the Land Cruiser was off the stupid "bridge". I had to wade back out into that swamp that had more critters than I imagined before in close to total darkness and un-hook the winch. I did not get swallowed by a Gabon Viper, and we were on our way back to Jon's. It took a lot of Regabs to soothe my nerves and that is the story that led to my worst hangover in my two years in Africa.

Friends of Gabon Membership Application

Friends of Gabon receives all of our income from individual supporters like you. You can become a member by either joining directly with Friends of Gabon for \$15 or through the National Peace Corps Association by going to their web site at <http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/> **Please** join or renew your membership by completing the form below and kindly attaching a check **made out to "Friends of Gabon."** and send to Friends of Gabon 21 Ivy Lane Burlington, VT 05408 For more information e-mail michael@craneassociates.us

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- ___ Yes! I would like to join/rejoin the Friends of Gabon for \$15.00 for 1 year.
___ Yes! I would like to join/rejoin the Friends of Gabon for \$30.00 for 2 years.
___ Yes! I would like to join/rejoin the Friends of Gabon for \$45.00 for 3 years.

___ Please accept the additional \$_____ as a donation.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Years of Peace Corps service _____

Peace Corps Job Title _____

Shout Out (tell us what you've been up to, where you are, and who you miss):

*Privacy Policy: We will not share your contact information with anyone, no matter who they are or how much they try to bribe us.