

December 2010

Newsletter



Enabling communities
to help themselves

Recent Visit to Nekemte

Rachael Jamieson, Anthea Duquemin and Alexis Taylor made the latest Link visit to Ethiopia just a few weeks ago.

Rachael writes: After an eight hour flight squashed into a small plane we were delighted to arrive at Bole airport in Addis and drink in the thin early morning, fresh mountain air. However, our mood changed quickly into combat mode as customs officials wouldn't believe that the spectacles we had brought were gifts and not for trade. We lost the argument and parted company with some 50 pairs. These can be reclaimed from an office if one has the correct chits, letters of authority and lots of time.

Alemu, our main link person in Nekemte, ensured that we made an early start the next day to drive the 250km to the town where we are engaged in projects. It is a good road until just after Ambo, just under half way. Then good patches are rare and pot holes and road works common. The Chinese road builders have already shifted vast quantities of rock in a massive re-sculpting of the countryside, ready for the road and 140 new bridges. It is due to be completed in two years, meanwhile the pot holes, people, animals and lorries make the six hour journey a long roller-coaster ride!

The new tarmac road in Nekemte came as a great relief and we quickly settled into our

accommodation in the old white bungalow on the church compound. It has been a delight to approach the women squatting on pavements and buy fruit and veg from them to prepare some of our own meals. Nekemte has changed over the last few years into a bustling town with lots of new little cafes, several hotels and buildings going up everywhere. There is the promise of a new airport but more immediately the huge stadium below will open within a year.



We have already met several returnees who having lived abroad now want to make the town their base. Sadly, we just missed, by a week, what was considered a most momentous event when 30,000 people enjoyed a mass 10km run with their renowned hero Gebre Haile Selassie among them.

The great news that greeted our arrival was that the Eye Clinic campus will house an ophthalmic nurses training school and,

thanks to Swiss support within three years, 30 nurses from district health posts will be trained to help people with their sight problems. The clinic itself looks splendid and together with its out reach work (up to 200 miles) screened an amazing 23,000 people and performed 1,500 minor eye operations in the last quarter alone!



People having their eyes tested in the clinic.

More buildings are being constructed, one to provide 18 beds for patients who have walked from afar and the other will be a guest house for visitors.

Links between schools here and their partner schools in Devon have been re-enforced by visits and we have brought donations from schools and exchanged children's writing and artwork. It has been salutary to visit many classrooms made of slated poles and mud, filled with rows of children squashed onto benches on earth floors, looking up at us out of the gloom with bright eager faces. Once out of the town rural schools quickly become very hard to access along the dirt tracks that lace the countryside and virtually all travel is on foot. Our trip out to Diriba School just 8km north of the town was made even more difficult after an unseasonal, extremely heavy rain and hail storm, even the 4x4 slipped and slithered in the struggle to get there.

Calalaqii School in Nekemte is new and linked with Clyst St Mary Primary School – their 90 pupils somewhat dwarfed by the 1500 Calalaqii pupils. Our contact with them was hugely helped by Frits who is a Dutch VSO working to improve teaching methods and is confident in the local language, Oromifa. We were introduced to many classes and in one were surprised to be greeted by 'Hello Teacher, together we will fight Aids.' The community has raised money for several new classrooms as numbers are growing – there are twice as many girls as boys, as boys are generally sent to private school. They have recently made a smart new vegetable plot and we have given money to buy seed to support this fund raising effort.



The new vegetable plots at Calalaqii School.

It is hard for us to appreciate just how vital access to education is. We were introduced to the 14 students who receive sponsorship from some members of the Link and heard how pleased they were to be given the opportunity to study. From very poor backgrounds earning very little as day labourers or wood carriers they now can study for diplomas in nursing, accounting, surveying and more. We feel inspired to encourage others to sponsor a student having seen what a difference it can make to someone's life.

Fire wood continues to be the main source of fuel and the number of tiny women who we see carrying huge loads of firewood into town on their backs continues unabated. A woman can spend up six or more hours a day collecting wood and cooking one pot at a time over an open fire. An efficient closed stove can halve the wood needed and cut down on cooking time. An exploratory meeting with the District Head of Agriculture has raised the possibility of an exciting new project which would encourage the use of fuel efficient stoves and of planting trees.

We are pleased to find that the embryonic women's savings and loan cooperative out at Watcha, on the edge of Nekemte, is going well. Only 3 out of 66 women have defaulted on repaying their initial loan. The next step is for some women to do a short business start up course prior to applying for a larger loan. We have been able to negotiate this with New Generation University and it can start quite soon. The women will take a further loan to pay their 50 Birr registration fee. They work mainly as wood carriers and day labourers, and we will pay them a daily allowance to make up for their lost earnings. We will also contribute towards NGU's costs in providing the 10 day course.

As ever, Alemu Nega's hospitality has been extremely generous and his time and guidance has been invaluable. We would have achieved very little without him. He is rightly proud of how Nekemte and his country are developing and the buzz one feels here.

A tiny symbol of this change is the number of pedestrian crossings which now 'decorate the tarmac' as our Adama driver declared. Through blaring loud speakers the uninitiated are given strict instructions on how to use the crossings

and young men wearing cardboard 'crowns' to denote their authority solemnly shepherd the stragglers and we three wayward 'farangis' (strangers) safely across. A ten day visit that has been enjoyable and very worthwhile.

Our sincere thanks to the Just-Trust for a grant of £1,500 towards our work in western Ethiopia.

The link also received a legacy of £2,000 left by Fran Jenkin who died back in the summer.

Recent Fundraising:

Ø Thanks to everybody who made the Ethiopian Evening in July such a success; to Rita Pankhurst for her talk, to the Cathedral for use of the Lady Chapel, to Hirut for the food, the Plant Café and Ella for organising it and raising £600.

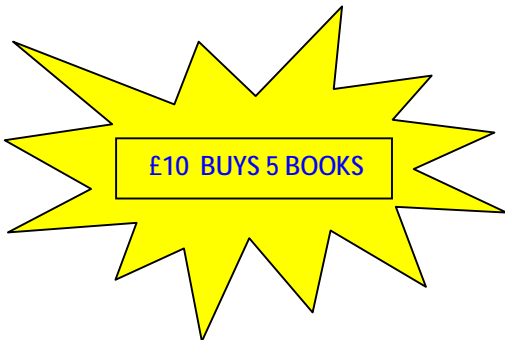


Ø Thanks also to Jeff Sleeman for organizing another Acoustic Café event in Topsham back in October which raised about £300.

Can you help with our website?

The Link is looking for somebody to help with the development of our website. If you are interested and capable please contact our Chair, Mark Howells (contact details on page four).

**WILL YOU SPONSOR BOOKS FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE IN ETHIOPIA?**



The Exeter/Ethiopia Link has worked in the Nekemte area of Western Ethiopia for over 20 years supporting water, health, education and women's projects. Eight Devon schools are currently linked with schools in the Nekemte area. Can you help develop the school and street libraries?

*Please send donations to: Dick Benn, Treasurer,
EE Link, Selgars Mill, Uffculme, EX15 3DA
(cheques payable to Exeter- Ethiopia Link)*

And finally, an end of year message.....

As we approach the end of yet another year, it's time to reflect on events past. This year, due to the general elections in Ethiopia, the link organised only one visit to Nekemte, in November, which you will read about in this newsletter. However, this was substituted by a visit in June from Qes Alemu Nega the development worker in Nekemte. His visit was an opportunity for him to visit linked schools and share views and opinions about the future aims of our link. Apart from the visits, we continue to sponsor students at New Generation University in Nekemte, and the school to school links go from strength to strength. The eye clinic which we established is now supported by another charity, and continues its sight-saving treatment and operations, as well as developing its outreach service. We end the year in a strong financial position and

have many ideas for future projects which we hope to begin in 2011. However, none of what we do would be possible without the contributions of the committee who have dedicated their time and effort during the year to keep the link operational. We also remember Fran Jenkin, a long serving committee member who died in August and whose loss is felt not only by the link but by all who knew her. I would also like to thank all the members of the link who have supported our activities past and present. Finally, I wish you all an enjoyable festive season.

Mark Howells, Chair



Exeter-Ethiopia Link

The Exeter-Ethiopia Link was set up in 1987 to promote a Community Link between Exeter in Devon, England and Hareto in Wollega, Ethiopia. In 1994 the Link included the town of Nekemte. The Link supports: Health, Water, Women's and Educational projects in Hareto and Nekemte and links between schools in Exeter and the communities in Ethiopia.

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