

Into Africa

Whilst contemplating what to do in my retirement, I set off in January to a few places on the African continent courtesy of a variety of funders and surgical and medical gastroenterology past trainees and acquaintances over the years.

First stop Khartoum, Sudan the place of the Longest Kiss, the union of the White and the Blue Nile. Another adventure on the good ship Gastro Foundation with the project being to take the best of UEGW 2017 video presentations as a postgraduate programme to their annual congress.

Eduard Jonas, building on an HCC in Africa initiative held Cape Town 2017, was my travelling companion on Kenyan Airlines, the “preferred cheapest provider”. Like all cheapest providers you get what you pay for. A late arrival in Nairobi our staging post, a spot on the back of the plane from which I was the last to embark and a very long security queue all conspired at 10pm on Tuesday to make us miss our connection to Khartoum. The only and particularly unhelpful Kenyan Airline representative then told us that the next available flight was on Friday, the last day of the congress. Ed and I then retreated to the coffee shop in a desolate transit area and logged on to the free WiFi to see what we could find available to get us to our destination. We booked on Ethiopian airlines leaving at 5am but could not pay for the flight online as it was too near our departure time. A helpful Ethiopian representative took us backward through immigration to pay with my credit card.

Ed successfully embarked on the flight but I was not so lucky. My entry visa for Sudan was checked, had my old passport number and boarding was denied. I was



Eduard Jonas, Chris Kassianides, Sandie Thomson

exhausted, had run out of free WiFi and was a wee bit distraught. I decided to exit the airport terminus and change the passport number on my visa electronically, reprint it, pay another R200 to change to the next flight at 2 pm and try again. Success, a short hop to Addis Ababa then onto Khartoum where I was whisked off to the VIP lounge to have my documentation processed.

One of my side plots was to meet our recently returned Cape Town Fellow Mahmoud Kheiralla now in practice in Sudan to see how he was progressing. Mahmoud turned up at the VIP lounge and took me to my hotel without my luggage. It caught up with me 48 hours later. He was a most attentive host. Faculty stayed at a Gadhafi's Hotel on the Nile (picture) Our host and organizer was Abdelmoumen Abdo and he and his team were most hospitable. The congress was held at a recently built state of the art venue. There were around 150 enthusiastic delegates, medics, surgeons and nurses. I was introduced at my session by Fedail

Suliman the father of gastroenterology in Sudan and good friend of Issy Segal. The session and the subsequent ones chaired by Ed Jonas and Chris Kassianides were well received. There were several other activities around the meeting, an ultrasound course a nurses parallel programme and a colonoscopy training course, a UK JAG type course similar to what Dion Levin and Adam Boutall are promulgating in South Africa. The latter course came about through a Sudanese gastroenterologist practicing in Barnsley, UK and has



Elly Ogutu, Edna Kamau, Stephen Onyango, Alemanji Ajua, Sandie Thomson

been an annual event around their congress for the past three years. I had the pleasure of accompanying their team of three doctors and two nurses on a trip of some 300 kilometers north to the Sudan pyramids. They made the whole bone shaking kombi journey entertaining including the visit to the pyramids where we were frazzled at 42 degrees Celsius. Accompanying us on the trip was a pathologist from UK tagging on pathology outreach activities for the Sudanese pathology fraternity as well as participating in the main congress programme. This was followed the next morning with a boat trip to the Longest Kiss and attendance that evening at the groom's party of the brother of a surgeon who is about to set up a living related liver transplant centre in Khartoum.

My other reason to go to Sudan was wearing my WGO hat to visit their Training Centre which is part of their GI Bleeding Centre, a separate structure funded by the Cofftea magnate Mohamed Salih Idris which is linked to their Japanese built Ibn Sina Hospital. I have been tasked to set up as a pilot database project based on a system we have at UCT to get real time entry of clinico-pathological data on their endoscopy service. They have replaced their 2002 computers and when I visit again on the 23rd of this month for the WGO TTT in Khartoum I will set the database in motion.

The next leg of my trip took me back to Nairobi to visit the WGO centre in Kenyatta Hospital to fact find for the

database pilot project, to give some small group lectures to the GI fraternity and to run a two day hands on ERCP training workshop. This went well despite being in unfamiliar surroundings and I met up with three South African trained Kenyans who were facilitating and participating in the course (Stephen Onyango, Edna Kamau, and Allan Rajula). They gave me a very warm welcome and it was great to see them and hear how they were establishing their GI practice in Kenya. The only drawback was the travel time to the hospitals I visited which though less than 20 kilometers from my gracious hosts abode were more than an hour away by car or taxi. I will be returning again for their gastroenterology meeting in August by

which time we should have six months of data from the project.

These trips are full of incident and more than the odd hiccup but the wave of enthusiasm which emanates from the many budding and the few established gastroenterologists is hard to resist and make it all worthwhile. They are committed to develop the really fledgling specialty of gastroenterology in Sub-Saharan Africa and I am grateful that I can make a small contribution. As you can see I have been bitten by the bug and will be doing more of these ventures and asking SAGES members who have a similar disposition to join me for my version of "Into Africa"

**Emeritus Professor
Sandie Thomson**



Corinthia Hotel Khartoum



The Meroe Pyramids at Nubia north of Khartoum with the colonoscopy training team