

RETURN TO CHOLE MJINI

by Sarah and Cliff Dixon

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Following their first visit to Chole in 2010 Sarah and Cliff Dixon became regular, generous donors to the Trust. Earlier in 2015 they made another trip to Chole, in the process becoming, in Jean de Villiers' words, '*repeat offenders*'!

Before leaving, they contacted the Trust to ask what they could do to help. Many donors remain very generous towards the Chole community for long after they have visited, with little first-hand chance of seeing for themselves the results of their generosity. We therefore suggested that Sarah and Cliff should find out from the Community itself how the support of the Trust is regarded. We suggested focusing especially on the Learning Centre, which is perhaps the most unconventional facility that we support.



This is what they found.

We would like to thank Sarah and Cliff so much for taking time out from their holiday to prepare this report. Although we do try to keep donors and supporters up-to-date, we know that nothing is as valuable as a truly independent assessment.

We first visited Chole Mjini in 2010 and fell in love with its unique spirit, from the moment we waded ashore. We vowed to return and were happy to maintain contact by becoming regular donors. After the privilege of enjoying several wonderful safari holidays, we felt we had found a direct and personal way to be connected to Africa through this special place and its local community. Five years on, we finally returned! We agreed to the Chairman's invitation to write this newsletter, because it gave us the opportunity to understand how the Trust and the Village work together and what they have achieved. Anne de Villiers suggested the Learning Centre as a specific topic and organised a meeting for 13 past users so that we could hear of its value first hand, which we followed up with a visit to the Centre itself. Our return stay was every bit as special as the first and we left inspired by the young people we met and with a determination to continue our support and be effective ambassadors for the Trust.

Our second Tanzanian trip started with a week in Ruaha with Kichaka Expeditions; a very special private bush experience, which we would highly recommend. We flew in to Mafia with excitement and some trepidation; would it be as we remembered? Mafia airport has been rebuilt; the island now has a tarmac road right across it; and our transport had a door that stayed shut this time, so a rather more comfortable, if less rustic journey across the island! Our arrival on Chole was at high tide, so we stepped rather than waded ashore. The scent of frangipani and the warm and relaxed welcome from Jay (Food and Beverage Manager) at the Red Herring soon got us back into the Chole vibe. It was lovely to see Anne again and to get to know Jean, who had been away on our first visit. We were the only guests for the four nights of our stay. For us, it was wonderful to have the Lodge to ourselves and feel like we were guests rather than visitors, but clearly it was dispiriting for Anne and Jean, who are just as committed to the Lodge and the wider community as ever, after having spent a couple of years away. Visitor numbers in Tanzania have been hit by general fear of Ebola and the bad news stories from Kenya. The consequent low prices in the volume areas of Zanzibar and the Kenyan coast have impacted the Mafia area in particular, so this is a great time to plan your return visit and to encourage like minded friends to visit too.



Before 1993, when Anne and Jean arrived on Chole, only one child from the village had ever got beyond primary school, which, bearing in mind that the nearest school was on the neighbouring island of Juani, only accessible at low tide, is perhaps not surprising.. The Chole Primary School, initiated by Anne and Jean, is now run by the Tanzanian authorities and the direct support of the Trust focuses on the Kindergarten, the Learning Centre and bursaries to pupils studying away from Chole, which in 2014 supported 46 secondary pupils, 5 students on certificate courses and 10 at university! With such progress, one of the key questions we had was: why was the Learning Centre needed and what did it do? Anne explained that the Learning Centre focuses on English and IT skills, with three teachers on hand. One key insight is that whilst primary education is in Swahili, secondary education is in English, so a good standard of English is key for continuing education. English is also important for job opportunities; mostly in the tourist industry locally and of course IT literacy is a further advantage. Despite many more pupils attending secondary school, the pass rate at graduation is still low and the Learning Centre is a safety net and second chance for those motivated to achieve their goals. We then had an opportunity to understand first-hand the impact that the Learning Centre has had on individuals at the meeting Anne organised.



The meeting Anne had arranged was scheduled for 5.00 at the Red Herring. At 4.30 Jay called up to our tree house; everyone was ready and waiting! Fortunately we were changed from our beachwear and were also ready. We assumed Anne had built in some "Africa" time to ensure everyone was on time but actually they were very punctual!!! In the cool interior of the bar, we rearranged chairs into a big circle round the table, and soda and fried doughnuts were served. There was a feeling of nervous anticipation as we all looked at each other. There were only two women present, which Anne suggested was not representative, but because generally they are more reluctant to participate in a public group. Everyone was dressed in smart shirts for the occasion, including a prized Everton shirt. Anne asked everyone to introduce themselves: name, educational history, experience of the Learning Centre, their first teacher and current job; ideally in English.



Outside a dhow sailed past in a timeless scene, as we listened to their stories. Each stood up in turn and, with some understandable nervousness, spoke in good English with no lapses into Swahili. Each had taken an individual path but there were some common themes. Several had attended secondary school but not passed or had not gone at all, but had used the Learning Centre to continue their studies. In some cases this led to a



certificate course. Many spoke of working as a tour guide, as an important step to practice their English and develop their confidence. This had led to jobs as waiters and, for Jay, ultimately to Food and Beverage manager. They all spoke of their first teacher with evident affection and recognised the opportunities they have had. In the group were four University students, all happy to be back on Chole for the holiday and to give their time back to the Learning Centre to mentor the next generation. They were studying Education; Business and Finance and one was in the Clinical Office at the medical school. All of



the group were clear that without English and IT their choice of job would be farmer or fisherman. There was now a variety of jobs open to them with the security of a salary; unthinkable to the previous generation. Their motivation and resilience shone through and they expressed thanks for the support of the Trust. It was inspirational for us, and for Anne a chance to realise how far they had all come; a moment of justifiable pride and great emotion. The formalities completed; there was a series of group photographs by Cliff and a flurry of mobile phone cameras!

Mohammedi, one of the three teachers at the Learning centre, escorted our visit to the Centre. He also explained about his role as secretary of the Harambee Committee; twelve people, who meet fortnightly to focus activities and control the budget. The Learning Centre is a modest concrete building with bookshelves along one wall - more secondary level novels and poetry books are requested. There is a Solar Nexus power system, originally installed by SolarAid, and a small 4 workstation IT network off one modem. Maintaining the IT equipment is a challenge and at



the time of writing one keyboard and one computer weren't working. There are plans for the Trust to provide laptops and develop the power and capacity further with wifi a goal. As well as students using the Learning Centre, adults also drop in when they can fit it in around their work. The teachers offer this *ad hoc* support as well as classes to accommodate these needs. This flexibility helps adults, as it is often daunting to visit. As well as the teachers, students home for the holidays were also in attendance demonstrating their commitment.



Our return trip was every bit as magical as our first and further enriched by the contact with the community and the inspiring stories of the alumnae of the Learning Centre. Whether you believe in education for its own sake or as a means for economic development, you can be assured that it has improved the lives of the individuals that we met and they are very appreciative of the opportunity and support of donors. We encourage all supporters to return and see for themselves!

With thanks to Anne and Jean de Villiers and the attendees at the Red Herring meeting: Alafa Shehari, Abdalla Hassani, Othumani Ahamadi, Hassani Ahamadi, Bweshehe Yussufu, Zainabu Shomari, Mohammed Hassani, Sami Mzee, Mohammed Ally Kingi, Jumanne (Jay) Ally, Shaibu



Mbaraka, Mahadhi Shehari Omari and Mfaume Ally.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

In the article above Sarah and Cliff Dixon note the great importance of English language tuition, because secondary schooling in Tanzania is taught in English. Since this article was written a new library in the Primary School on Chole has opened. The library has computer-based English language tuition facilities, running on two high specification laptops generously donated by **Computers 4 Africa**, powered by a solar power system funded in part through the efforts of pupils from the International School, Geneva. Genki English Language tuition software, probably the leading English language computer-based system in the world, is used, thanks to the generosity of Richard Graham, founder and chief executive of Genki.