

BOOK REVIEWS**LUCKY ME! MEMOIRS OF A FORMER DISTRICT OFFICER IN NIGERIA****Frank Bex****Published privately by the author in softback, pp. 236****£10 plus £2 P&P in U.K. (Or plus £6 for overseas airmail) – Cheques preferred****Copies available from Frank Bex, Little Challoners, Plumpton Green BN7 3DQ**

An enthralling account of the life and day-to-day duties of a colonial District Officer in Nigeria. The author served as an Assistant District Officer (A.D.O.) and District Officer (D.O.) in Eastern Nigeria from 1944 to 1947 when he was transferred to Lagos as A.D.C. to the Governor; Sir. Arthur Richards. The chapter detailing his duties as A.D.C. is headed "Dogsbody".

Subsequently he acted as Assistant Secretary in both Lagos and Enugu until his resignation and departure from Nigeria in 1956, by which time he was married with four children and unable to live on a colonial officer's emoluments; the service paid little attention to families. In 1946 he had been posted to Degema, a port in the now Rivers State, suitable only for a bachelor A.D.O. In 1955 he was again posted to Degema but with a wife and three young children. The posting was declined and was a factor behind his resignation. Evidently this was before the days of career planning.

The author clearly preferred working in the rural districts of Eastern Nigeria where there was more scope for initiative. He and his wife, Margaret, made a number of Nigerian friends whose friendship has lasted over many years. This was witnessed by four further visits to Nigeria between 1985 and 1990 as a guest of the Okafor family, owners of the Bex Memorial Hospitals at Onitsha and Nempi. The author had been instrumental in 1951 in securing a scholarship for Okafor to study medicine at University College Ibadan.

I thoroughly enjoyed sharing the author's experiences. Proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated by the author to the Margaret Bex Trust and used to help poor patients at the Bex Memorial Hospitals at Onitsha and Nempi in Eastern Nigeria.

– Ronald L. Dittrich

LAKE CHAD VERSUS THE SAHARA DESERT

Sylvia K. Sikes

Mirage Newbury, 14 Mallard Court, West Mills, Newbury RG14 5HL, UK. 2003.
ISBN 0-9544079-0-3.

12.50 plus £2.00 per book for postage and packing by surface mail worldwide

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This is a new edition of Dr Sikes' book "Lake Chad" published by Eyre Methuen in 1972, updated by appending chapters for the next 30 years up to 2002, and rewriting Chapter 4 to take account of increased knowledge and later visits to the Lake. The book concerns every aspect of the Lake: hydrology, history, flora, fauna, peoples and industries. Other chapters are substantially those of the original book, and describe her journeys to and researches on Lake Chad between 1955 and 1970. In 1969 she took a 19ft (5.8m) Mirror Class two-berth yacht that had been built for her in the U.K. and transported to Lake Chad, and which she named the "Jolly Hippo" after its "firm snout... and broad beam". She is a formidable lady, and also took a shotgun (to hunt food) and an elephant gun, in order to sample the specially adapted herds of elephant that inhabit the shores of the Lake. In the last chapter of the earlier book she reiterates the ecological and sociological fragility of the Lake and the dangers of the "Development Programmes" to harness the waters and the fishing industry, then being put into operation by the four nations that border the Lake, and ends with a poem which appears as a prologue in the second edition. I quote the last verse:

"Alas! the lake dried up and left a sandy desert in its place
With ancient artifacts of Space-Age Man:
Echo sounders, hovercraft and nylon nets.
A ghostly deadness writhes among the whitened dunes
A whisper on the Harmattan -
'They've changed her name you know
They call this waste the *Chad Depression* now'."

Time is proving her predictions right, although it would have been hard to imagine the changes that were to occur since I visited Lake Chad myself in 1956 (described in a brief account I wrote in the *Nigerian Field* 54:47-58, 1989). The Lake was surrounded by extensive seasonal swamps ("firki"), and at the time only accessible from Maiduguri during the dry season, whence an extensive trade in dried fish was conducted from lakeside villages to other parts of northern Nigeria. Because of its inaccessibility, I was only the third forest officer in Nigeria to visit Lake Chad, despite half a century of forestry conservation. The environs of the Lake comprise the most arid part of Nigeria, which during the dry season bake in oven-like heat; it was paradise to leave the wastes of thorny Acacia bush (then thriving with wildlife) and be punted out on a reed canoe through canals cut in the floating mats of papyrus, other sedges and coarse grass, passing through lagoons coated with blue and white water lilies, where countless diving and wading birds stared through the reeds or flew off in alarm, until one emerged onto the cool of the Lake itself -- which stretched as far as the eye could see to form an unbroken line at the horizon like some huge inland freshwater sea,

except for occasional floating islands of papyrus.

In the 1950s and 1960s the area of Lake Chad had reached a maximum of about 25,000 km². However the diversion of water from inflowing rivers and use of bore holes for irrigated farming have added to the effects of dramatic climate change and severe droughts since 1973; the Lake is now only a tenth of its former size with an area averaging 2,500 km² confined to the southern basin – a change illustrated by means of coloured satellite photographs. The bed of the River Yobe has dried and it no longer flows from Nigeria into the Lake. There have been dramatic fluctuations before, e.g. from a high in about 1900 to a low in 1905-1908 when the ridge between the northern and southern basins became exposed – so that it was possible to trek from Baga on the western shore to Kaya in Tchad in the east. But even this does not compare with the present situation, and the author asks the question whether humans are accelerating the effects of climatic change – and answers herself in the affirmative. She is pessimistic as to our ability to reverse the trend at least so far as the Lake is concerned.

The new edition lacks an index, which would be helpful for such an authoritative work. Photographs are reproduced in colour, instead of the black and white for those in the earlier book. Unfortunately, perhaps to reduce cost, these are many to a page and minuscule in size – whereas in page or half-page size they could have graced a coffee table. Some of the maps would also benefit from enlargement. Conversely the text font is comparatively large, which hinders reading the text quickly or scanning it for information – though there may have been special reasons for this. Nevertheless this is a book to be recommended to anyone interested in conservation, and to serve as a warning to all those who practise economic development, and it is also a readable travelogue full of facts and the clear-sighted observations of the author.

— R.G. Lowe

PRUNUS AFRICANA: monograph. J.B. Hall, E.M. O'Brien and F.L. Sinclair (eds.) 2000. School of Agricultural and Forest Sciences Publication Number 18, University of Wales, Bangor. 104 pp. 15 coloured pictures. A4 size, soft covers.

SCLEROCARYA BIRREA: monograph. J.B. Hall, E.M. O'Brien and F.L. Sinclair (eds.) 2002. School of Agricultural and Forest Sciences Publication Number 19, University of Wales, Bangor. 157 pp. 16 coloured pictures. A4 size, soft covers.

These monographs continue the series produced by Bangor (see Lowe, 1998) and contain a mine of information about their chosen trees. The literature has been intensively surveyed (the two volumes list about 230 and 380 references respectively) and other data gleaned from notes on herbarium specimens. The various chapters are written by the editors themselves, plus several authors who have studied the species in Africa.

PRUNUS AFRICANA is of considerable interest because an extract of its bark is effective

in treating Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH). Enlargement of the prostate gland is a condition which afflicts older men worldwide, causing inconvenience and pain.

The species is found mainly in the highland regions of east, central and southern Africa, plus Madagascar. It also occurs as separate populations on the Nigeria-Cameroon borders, the islands of Bioko and S. Tomé, and in Angola. Hutchinson & Dalziel (1958) listed the species for Cameroon and Fernando Po (now Bioko) as *Pygeum africanum* (family Rosaceae). It was later moved to the genus *Prunus*, the only African species of the genus, and is included by Keay (1989) as a Nigerian tree. *Prunus* is the genus to which cherries, plums and peaches belong, and *Prunus africana* may be called "African cherry". It is a tree, usually 15-20 m high (occasionally 40 m), with hard heavy timber, and the leaves and flowering branches are similar to those of the cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*). The tree is rather sparsely distributed – generally 1-2 per hectare, sometimes up to 5.

The bark and leaves are used in traditional medicine, e.g. for stomach ache and chest infections, but it was not until the 1970s that commercial use was begun by the pharmaceutical industry, with the marketing of bark extract to treat BPH. The amount of bark harvested rose from 200 t (1980) to 3500 t (1997). Chemical compounds identified include phytosterols, pentacyclic triterpenoids, linear alcohols and their esters. However, it has not been ascertained which are the active components, nor have they been synthesised. It is thought that the different components may act synergistically to prevent enlargement of the prostate, and they appear to have no side effects.

The bark is mainly obtained from wild populations of the tree, and exploitation must be done carefully, taking strips of bark to avoid killing the tree. In Cameroon detailed rules have been prescribed to give sustainable harvesting every 5-7 years, but unfortunately, the rules are not adequately enforced. In some countries, e.g. Madagascar, it is legal to fell the trees to obtain the bark. Present levels of demand cannot be met long-term from the wild.

Domestication of the tree is difficult because viable seed is not available in sufficient quantities – the tree only produces good seed every 2 or 3 years, and the seed soon loses viability when stored. Vegetative propagation by cuttings and air-layering have been tried, but grafting is not mentioned. Could it perhaps be grafted successfully on to the rootstock of another *Prunus* species that can be propagated more easily from seed? Plantations and enrichment planting have been initiated, and small-scale farmers in Cameroon are encouraged to plant trees on their land. Young plants may be obtained from wildings, and recently from stock raised in nurseries. The bark may be harvested when the tree is 30 cm diameter (at about 12 years old), but the tree does not flower until it is 15-20 years old.

Because *Prunus africana* may be threatened with extinction unless trade is strictly regulated, it has been placed in CITES Appendix II. This means that trade in the bark extract is limited, and sufferers from BPH may not find it easy to obtain outside its countries of origin. It can be sold in France as a medicine, but in the USA can only be sold as a herbal dietary supplement. In the UK, it cannot be sold for either use.

References

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- Lowe, J. 1998. Shea Butter Tree and African Locust-bean tree. *Niger.Fld.* 63: 62-64.

SCLEROCARYA BIRREA (family Anacardiaceae) is an African tree with potential for domestication and commercialisation. The fruits and seeds provide food and oil, and other parts of the tree are used for various purposes, such as browse, wood carving, fuelwood and medicines. If the tree can be protected and exploited sustainably, the incomes and security of food supply of rural people may be improved.

The tree occurs throughout the drier savanna areas of Africa, (in what used to be called the "Sudan zone" in West Africa) and in Madagascar – where it may have been introduced. It is a characteristic parkland tree, retained when land is cleared for farming. There are two main subspecies: subsp. *birrea* in the northern part of its range from Senegal across to Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, and subsp. *caffra* in the southern part from Congo and Tanzania, to South Africa and Angola. Subspecies *multifoliolata* has a restricted distribution mainly in Tanzania, overlapping with the other two. The three subspecies differ in characters of the leaves and male inflorescences. There are numerous vernacular names throughout its range: in West Africa the Hausa name is "danya", and it is called "marula" in South Africa. It is long-lived, usually 9-12 m high, and with a wide crown in old trees. The pinnate leaves are clustered at the ends of the branches; it is deciduous in the dry season when the flowers are generally produced. There are separate male and female trees, and there is a danger that the male trees (i.e. non-fruiting) may be felled for timber or firewood, although their pollen is needed for fruit formation.

The fruits are yellow drupes (3-4 cm diameter) with a fleshy mesocarp and a hard stone (the endocarp). Within the endocarp, there are usually three compartments with one seed in each. The fruit flesh has a high Vitamin C content, and the kernels are rich in fat and protein. The tree can be extremely prolific, producing as many as 90,000 fruits (weighing 1600 kg) in a season, but such large yields do not occur every year. The fruits are used particularly in South Africa, where there is no alternative indigenous fruit-tree. It is here that most work on domestication and commercialisation has been done: jams and jellies, flavourings, alcoholic beverages (e.g. Amarula cream liqueur). The use of the kernel oil in cosmetics is being explored. The wood is soft and easily carved, but if the tree is over-used for this purpose, its survival may be threatened. More studies are needed to select the best provenances, and to develop methods of growing the tree commercially. It is not easy to raise from seed, and grafting is recommended for obtaining the best fruiting material and early fruit production.

There are some errors in this volume: portions of text are misplaced on pages 17 and 20, and Table 2.5 lacks its legend. Misprints are few, but "principle" and "principal" are sometimes confused. The quality of writing varies, and some passages are not easily disentangled on first reading.

– Joyce Lowe

**A SAHARAN SKETCHBOOK:
A MEMOIR OF A JOURNEY IN AN AFRICA OF YESTERDAY**

Olivia Willes

Published by Wayfarer. Distributed by Gazelle Book Services Ltd, Falcon House, Queen Square, Lancaster, LA1 1RN, UK.

2003. xii + 181 pp. ££14.95. ISBN 0 9543639 0 6.

This book describes more than a Sahara crossing almost 50 years ago, and includes preparations for the journey, a drive through the Cameroons from Douala in the south to Garoua in the north, and then into northern Nigeria through Biu and Jos to Kano. I found it all of interest, especially as we traversed a similar route through Cameroon to Nigeria in the 1970s. By then Nigeria had started constructing modern roads, but in the 1950s (except for a tarred stretch between Bauchi and Jos) the journey would have been on dirt roads, in some places only negotiable in the dry season and little better than cart-tracks. The book is well illustrated with a number of Olivia's paintings (8 of them reproduced in colour) and photographs, relating to the Cameroons as well as to the Sahara. Each chapter begins with an apposite quotation, mostly from Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear.

Olivia had served in the WAAF during the Second World War, and afterwards in Algiers, Palestine and the Suez Canal Zone. In 1954, she became a secretary with the Cameroons Development Corporation (CDC) at Bota, near Victoria. The following year, she decided to travel home across the Sahara, from Kano to Algiers. By chance a suitable companion turned up at the right time: Pete, a Dutchman, who had just made the journey southwards on a Zundapp motor cycle with side-car. At that time, there was no road from Victoria to Douala (and boats were infrequent) but the journey could be made by narrow-gauge railway through the CDC plantations, then by bush paths and canoe -- which took the best part of a day. The Cameroons, a former German colony, had been divided after the first world war into British and French mandated territories, with Victoria in the British part (administered from Nigeria) and Douala in the French part.

Their chosen vehicle was a one-year-old Morris pick-up truck, not exactly ideal and needing constant roadside repairs, for which Pete fortunately had the necessary expertise and ingenuity. The journey, expected to take three months, actually took seven, with enforced

waits for spare parts, and leisurely detours to places of interest such as Poli and Houmsiki in northern Cameroons, and Taza in the Hoggar Mountains. There was not much danger from wild animals – one snake and one scorpion, I think – but Olivia frequently had to fend off predatory Frenchmen. Varied encounters with people they met along the way give the book much of its appeal.

Despite spartan conditions, mostly sleeping under a tarpaulin by the vehicle or under the stars, and a diet mainly of corned beef, onions and spaghetti, they enjoyed good health – until a point about halfway across Algeria when Olivia succumbed to the effects of drinking the local water. They sold the car (in which by this time every mechanical part had been replaced except for the back axle) and continued in a truck to El Golea, a bumpy flight to Algiers, and by boat to Marseilles. Pete returned to Holland, and Olivia went to work at the International Labour Office in Geneva until her retirement. I enjoyed the book and look forward to reading its promised successor.

– Joyce Lowe

'IN BROTHERHOOD WE STAND': A SHORT HISTORY OF THE BRITAIN-NIGERIA ASSOCIATION

Anthony Kirk-Greene

The Britain-Nigeria Association was formed in 1961 under the patronage of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. Forty odd years is perhaps a good time to take stock and the Association has a worthy chronicler in Anthony Kirk-Greene, an historian whose knowledge of Nigeria both past and present is formidable.

Beneath the vicissitudes of government diplomacy lies a network of personal relationships forged often during a lifetime's work. Members of the Nigerian Field Society will not need reminding of this, as our own association is one of many formed and sustained by common interests which have survived Independence and span the political divisions. The BNA aim is "to foster friendship and mutual understanding between Nigeria the UK and other members of the Commonwealth and to provide opportunities whereby Nigerians, Britons and other nationals interested in Nigeria may maintain old friendships and sustain their interests."

After a foreword from the Patron and an introduction from the President, Sir Mervyn Brown, a former High Commissioner in Nigeria, the book traces the development of the Association from the enthusiasm of its early days through the difficulties of the civil war and its aftermath to the present. Whereas personal ties have always flourished, political circumstances have often frozen Government relations, and the chapter headings: "Finding, Making, Losing, Regaining, Rethinking and Doing it Our Way," reflect the problems. The BNA has always

endeavoured to be more than a social gathering and, in operating as a lobby for good relations at a high governmental level, has chosen not to criticise openly policies which have divided the UK and Nigeria. Membership has waxed and waned with these ups and downs but currently stands at 800, of whom two thirds are British; most of the Nigerian members are resident in Britain. New British recruits are largely taken from those with commercial contacts with Nigeria and this will no doubt be reflected in the nature of the relationship in the future.

Social and cultural events, the charitable work of the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa Memorial Trust, as well as relations with other bodies are all described in the final chapter. Useful appendices include a map of Nigeria showing all 36 states to those with good eyesight or a powerful magnifying glass; also a select bibliography of books written about Nigeria since Independence and a list of Nigerian Heads of State. The names of all Nigerian High Commissioners in London are, disappointingly, not matched by a corresponding list of British High Commissioners in Lagos during the same period.

The history of this remarkable organisation provides a useful addition to information about the relationship between Britain and Nigeria since Independence. The book, priced £10.00, of which £1.00 is donated to the charitable ATBMT, can be obtained from The British Nigeria Association, 2 Vincent Street LONDON SW1P 4LD (p & p is included).

– Sheila Everard

SMALL LANGUAGES OF NORTHERN NIGERIA: A BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1800-1990

Nwozo Amankwe

Published by Jamoe Enterprises (Nigeria), Enugu, 2002

viii, 115 p. ISBN 978-35049-9-1

Obtainable from Trigon Educational Suppliers, P.O.Box 3077, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Price including postage: Nigeria ₦740; UK £15; USA \$20

This bibliography of the “small” languages of the former Northern Nigeria spans almost two centuries. Major languages, Fulfulde, Hausa, Kanuri, Nupe, Tiv and Northern Yoruba, with their millions of speakers, are omitted, as they are covered by other bibliographic works. However, two dialects of Kanuri, Lere and Manga are included in the present compilation.

The introduction gives interesting and informative notes on some of the “small” languages. The main part of this work lists references from books and journal articles, beginning with general works, followed by 221 languages and dialects in alphabetical order. Some languages

have only one reference whilst some others have ten or more. A dead language, So, has seven references.

The works cited are in English, French or German. Some emanate from sources in Nigeria and other African countries, e.g. Camerouns, Senegal. Many are published in the UK, Europe and North America, indicating wide interest in these indigenous languages outside Africa. An appendix shows the exact local government divisions where each language or dialect is spoken. For this exercise, the First Schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979 is used to counteract problems arising from recent and possible future changes of names and boundaries.

Some languages and dialects are known by several different names and most names have a variety of spellings. A subject index gives all variations in alphabetical order with references to the name and spelling used in the main list. There is also an index of authors of the books and articles listed.

This is a scholarly work, well researched and professionally organised. It gives insight into the scope and complexity of the study of Nigerian languages, whilst providing access to information which would be otherwise difficult to trace.

– Monica A. Greaves

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