

# The Camel Express



## Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

February 2003

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## Message from the President

**Dear Friends of Niger -**

These continue to be difficult times. And not just for Niger, of course. For the world. For all of us. Recently, a group of RPCVs from the Seattle area formed an organization called Returned Peace Corps Volunteers for a Better World. Among other things, they've organized the placement of ads in the New York Times - signed by RPCVs who served in many countries - expressing opposition to unilateral military action in Iraq. The first ad appeared in the February 21 edition and the next is due to appear any day. More than fifty of you have signed one or other of the ads. Additional information can be found here - <http://epic-usa.org/peacecorpsad/>. Others of you were involved in the recent Virtual March and/or in other efforts of the Win Without War movement - <http://www.moveon.org/>. Stories related to these efforts continue to be carried by Peace Corps Online - <http://peacecorpsonline.org/messages/>.

All of us, I know, are struggling on a daily basis with the complex issues and considerations surrounding Iraq and the United Nations and the potential for preemptive military action by the United States. It is almost certain that our views vary. Some of us believe with A. J. Muste that "there is no way to peace. Peace is the way." Others are less certain; or, at least, less unequivocal. But the upper case "P" in Peace Corps does signify a value that we all share. A recently released statement from the National Peace Corps Association ends by saying this - "However, we will not be dissuaded from our basic belief that true and lasting peace can only be achieved by eliminating the underlying causes that breed violence. Therefore, in accordance with our basic beliefs and understandings, we implore our fellow Americans and the people of all the nations of the world to follow our lead and join us in our work to bring about world peace through peaceful endeavor." I am confident that all of you, each in your own way, will continue to work for peace.

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No edition of The Camel Express would be complete without a sentence or two regarding our continued need for your financial support, in the form of membership dues and in the form of donations to our project activities in the areas of microcredit, children's

vitamins, and appropriate technology. We hope that you'll use the [FON 2003 Membership and Order Form](#) to renew your membership, to join for the first time, and/or to contribute to our various activities in one or more of the ways listed on the form.

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Enjoy the newsletter, thanks for your continued support, please stay in contact and please work for peace.

**Jim Schneider**  
**President**

**In his June 10, 1963 speech at American University, President Kennedy said: "What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children -- not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women -- not merely peace in our time but peace for all time."**

## **FON Will Help Finance Development of Appropriate Technology in and for Niger**

### **Niger RPCV Steve Hoyt Spearheads First Initiative**

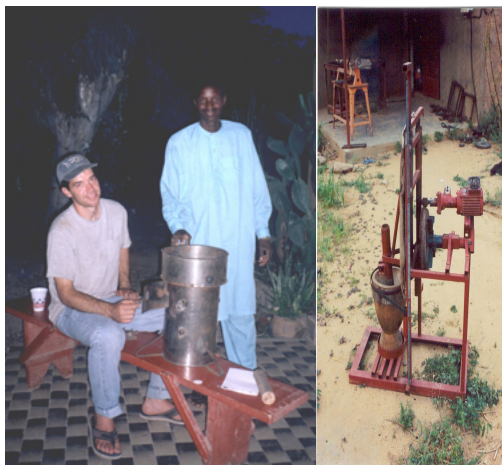
When Steve Hoyt returned to Niger in October, six years after completing his service as a PCV in Maradi, Dogondoutchi and Tessaoua he had objectives beyond visiting old friends and reliving his years as a volunteer. Steve wanted to do some work with one of his old colleagues - Boubacar Akali. Steve and Boubacar share several things in common - an engineering background, a passion for problem solving and a love for Niger. They've stayed in contact over the years, ever since collaborating on the development of the Alternative Fuels Cookstove. Steve developed the idea from a cookstove used in Thailand and made a steel version when he was a PCV. The original version burned things like millet chaff and peanut shells instead of wood. When Steve left Niger he turned the project over to Boubacar who produced a more sophisticated version (see photo below). Upon Steve's return to Niger, he and Boubacar picked up where they had left off - locally producing cheap versions of the stove and giving demonstrations for villagers and for PCVs.

Boubacar and Steve are now collaborating on the development on several other 'inventions' and that is where **Friends of Niger** has entered the picture. One of these is a mechanical and motor driven version of the millet pounder invented by Boubacar - an early version of which can be seen below. The millet pounder is designed to produce millet flour without the necessity of the intensive labor required of women using the traditional mortar and pestle technique while also avoiding the disadvantages of the alternative screw type steel milling machine - which tends to heat the grain during milling and distort the taste and which sometimes leaves steel fillings in the flour.

The other priority effort of Boubacar and Steve is the design and development of a of a solar steam pump which would pump water from a well using a simple steam piston powered by a solar concentrating mirror. The simple design of the system, as that of the millet pounder, will make it easy to operate and repair in Niger. The steam system has the added potential of providing steam for cooking or other uses. The pump also has the potential of further reducing or even removing yet another of the many labor intensive responsibilities of women in Niger and, in the process, of having a positive impact on sanitation.

**Friends of Niger** has established an **Appropriate Technology Fund**, the purpose of which is to encourage the development and promotion of small-scale, low cost appropriate technology in Niger and for Nigeriens. **FON's** first initiative in this regard is financial support for work by Boubacar and Steve on the further development of the mechanical millet pounder and the solar steam pump. Steve, a member of Friends of Niger and President of the RPCV's of Northern New York, has also raised funds from other sources. He can be reached by e-mail at - [steveh@albany.net](mailto:steveh@albany.net).

Future **Friends of Niger** initiatives in this area will largely depend, as do all of **FON's** project activities, on the response from people like yourself. You can help by sending a check or money order made payable to **Friends of Niger**. Use the [FON 2003 Membership and Order Form](#) or send your donation to: **Tech, c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 200-33-0164.**



Steve Hoyt and friend demonstrated the Alternative Fuels Cookstove at the Peace Corps transit house in Maradi during the recent Friends of Niger trip. On the right can be seen an early version of the mechanical millet pounder.

## Profiles in Service: Meeting the Shriver Challenge

"Serve, serve, serve. That's the challenge. For in the end it will be the servants who save us all." Sargent Shriver said it. The people who participated in the recent **Friends of Niger** trip to Niger lived it: RPCVs, friends and family of PCVs and RPCVs alike. Some - but not all - of the many contributions to Niger that were made before and during the trip are reported on here and below.. Together they tell a tale of continuing service and they remind us that service is neither confined to the years as a Peace Corps volunteer nor even limited to having been a volunteer.

The huge stack of vitamins and other children's medicine (seen below left behind **FON** President Jim Schneider pictured talking with Sister Marie Noël and two of the children from the Notre Dame orphanage in Niamey) represents only a quarter of the 500 plus pounds of vitamins and medicine gathered and transported to Niger by the trip participants in response to Schneider's appeal



The **Wysopal's, Maureen and Jim** (seen above right with PCV daughter Jessica) live in Augusta, West Virginia and work at schools for the deaf, the blind, and the handicapped. Jessica is a PCV in Galbi, east of Zinder. Having decided to join the **FON** trip to Niger, wanting to make a contribution to Niger during their visit and knowing that **FON** was hoping to bring along a large supply of vitamins, the Wysopal's passed the word that they were accepting donations for these purposes.

The appeal enjoyed an enormous response. Money and supplies poured in from adults and children alike - from the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, From Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, via an e-mail list of family and friends, from 4-H clubs, from the Boy Scouts, etc., etc., etc.

The proceeds were used to purchase vitamins and infant formula. T-shirts were donated by the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind to the School for the Deaf and the School for the Handicapped in Zinder . They were able to buy laminated world and US maps for three schools in Zinder . Jim & Maureen prepared a photo journal about the work of the West Virginia School for the Deaf. Jess gave the presentation in Hausa at the School for the Handicapped (see photo bottom left) and Maureen gave the presentation at the School for the Deaf in sign language (see photo bottom right) with occasional Hausa assistance from Jess.

While in Zinder the Wysopal's purchased reading books, slates, and chalk for the School for the Deaf. And when the teacher requested hearing aids to show the children how they work, they went back home and organized a donation of five such aids that Jess' brothers, Joseph and Jack, took with them when they visited Jess in December.

Jessica - who has extended her Peace Corps service for a third year - is still implementing projects with the money that the Wysopal's left in Niger. She bought a Hausa bed and mattress for the School for the Handicapped in Zinder and is in the process of getting bids on a hangar. Made of mud brick and scheduled for completion by January, the hangar will be used by the School for the Handicapped as an infirmary for sick children during the school day. And additional funds will be passed along to Peace Corps Niger for use towards the scholarship fund which supports girls who pass the test and want to go to the second level of schooling away from their village.

Before they left Zinder, the Wysopal's found that they had sufficient funds to leave a donation with the priest in Zinder for the support of another two activities - the leprosarium and a project that provides a bed and a meal for street children in Zinder. And then, before they left Jessica's village of Galbi, they purchased notebooks and pens for students at the new school being built in her village

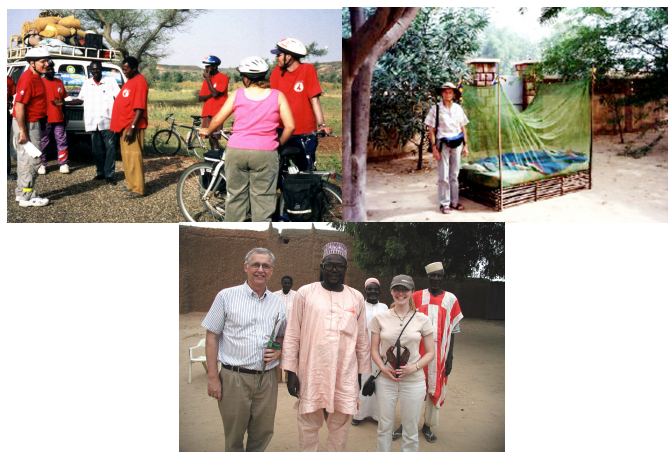


### Bikin' and Beddin' and Other Things: More Profiles in Service ...

**Larry Koff**, FON Treasurer and pictured on the far left of the photo on the left below, was one of the riders in Niger's AIDS Bikeathon which took place between October 28 and November 2 along the road between Filingué and Baleyara. Larry joined the many Niger PCVs who participated in the event, designed to raise awareness to HIV/AIDS. Larry and spouse **Barbara Davis Smith**, along with **Sue Bracken**, **Steve Bushell** and **Penni St. Hilaire**, also gathered and transported supplies for the ride which was promoted on the **FON** website.

When **Liz Griffin**, pictured below right, found out that the PC hostel in Zinder no longer had functional outdoor sleeping accommodation, she and four others - **Linda Hager Bailey**, **Kyle Hording**, **Jane Huser Maxwell** and **Charleen Pratt** - went out and purchased five Hausa beds which they then donated to the hostel.

**John Baird** (below bottom along with Chadakori canton chief Mahamane Djika and John's daughter **Mary Ellen Price**) made a number of visits during his recent trip to Niger. One of those was to Chadakori where John had been a PCV in the 60's. Before leaving he made a major donation for the purchase of medical supplies for the village dispensary.



### ... And Yet a Few More

No more photos, but a little more mention of only some of the contributions made by members of the group that traveled together to



Niger last fall.

**Joshua Bills** went to Niger to visit his friend, PCV Courtney Stonestreet. Joshua sent ahead and brought along the components necessary for the installation of a solar system at the Peace Corps Training Center at Hamdallaye. Then he and Courtney did the installation.

Everyone contributed to the children's chewable vitamin campaign with extraordinary efforts coming from **Simone Fung, Mary Upshaw, Liz Griffin, Charleen Pratt, Kyle Hording, Jim & Maureen Wysopal, Pamela, Britton White, Steve Hoyt, Vera Mae Walsh, Franceen Fallett, and Kris White.**

**Mary Upshaw** raised sufficient money to make a major contribution to the vitamin campaign with enough left to finance several MicroNiger projects. **Ricki Hall** provided MicroNiger funding for the women of her community of service. **Tom Shafer** makes monthly donations to FON project activities in Niger. Etc.,etc.,etc.

## FON Trip to Niger: A Postscript



In the previous website edition of The Camel Express and in the articles above you have read stories that touch upon the recent **FON** trip to Niger, things we did while we were there and contributions made by some of the participants. It is difficult to adequately convey the truly generous contributions made by virtually every participant. For this I apologize, because there was not a person on the trip that did not make sacrifices before, during and since the trip - to Niger, to their communities of service and to **Friends of Niger.**

The photo above captures trip participant **Simone Fung** at the orphanage in Niamey and is but one of many remarkable images captured by trip participant **Steve Bushell.** A great selection of these photos can be found at - <http://www.sjb.org>. - Jim

## New Government Announced by President Mamadou Tandja

President Mamadou Tandja named a new government on November 8, 2002. The twenty-eight member cabinet is the third government of the fifth Republic. Hama Amadou remains Niger's Prime Minister and Aïchatou Mindaoudou continues in the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation. A complete listing of the members of the new government can be found online at [http://www.nigerembassyusa.org/news.html#\\_Toc26132109](http://www.nigerembassyusa.org/news.html#_Toc26132109).

## Second Bridge for Niamey

The Government of Niger recently announced plans for the construction of a second bridge across the River Niger at Niamey. It is anticipated that the bridge will be completed before the start of the Fifth Francophonie Games, scheduled for 2005 in Niger. According to government sources, the Kennedy Bridge, constructed by the United States in 1970, is no longer sufficient for the volume of traffic in the capital. Niamey now has a population of more than a million people.

## Micro Niger - How You Can Help -

Contributions to our ongoing support for microcredit in Niger should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **Micro Niger** c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164 or sent along with the [Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form](#)

## FON's Founding President Establishes

# Grassroots Advocacy Firm

Back in the 80's Meredith McGehee led the initiative to establish **Friends of Niger**. She became the first president of the young organization and remained in that position for the best part of a decade. Over those years, she was also emerging as one of Washington's leading grassroots public policy advocates.

Meredith became Senior Vice President/ Chief Lobbyist for Common Cause, the national citizens' lobby and one of its principal spokespersons. An expert on campaign finance reform and ethics and an international speaker on citizen engagement, McGehee directed the coalition effort to pass the historic Bipartisan Campaign Finance Act of 2002 and was recently named one of the top nonprofit/grassroots lobbyists in DC.

Even more recently, Meredith has set up her own company - Meredith Strategies - which specializes in helping organizations develop and deliver programs related to public education and to direct lobbying for legislative change.

Two years ago, at the **FON** sponsored Celebration of Niger 2001, Meredith received a Special Achievement Award for her many contributions to **Friends of Niger** and to the people of Niger. The Board of Directors of **Friends of Niger** congratulates Meredith McGehee on her latest achievement and looks forward to working with her in the years ahead

## New US Ambassador Assumes Post in Niamey

Sworn in some months ago, the new US Ambassador to Niger - Gail Denise Mathieu - has now assumed her post in Niamey. A career foreign service officer, before her appointment, Ambassador Mathieu was the Deputy Chief of Mission at Accra and, before that, Deputy Office Director of West African Affairs with the State Department in DC. Prior to her arrival, DCM W. Stuart Symington served as Chargé d'Affaires.

## Vitamin Campaign - How You Can Help -

Donations to FON's ongoing vitamin campaign should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to **Vitamins, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the [Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form](#)

## Video Production that Features FON Available for Purchase



The 42 minute documentary on Niger, originally produced for Canadian TV and shot in Niger in January 2002, is now available for purchase from **Friends of Niger**.

From the blurb of the video's jacket - "In a '*Brother from Niger*', award winning journalist Andrew Younger brings a story of courage, hope, and struggle from one of the world's poorest countries. '*Brother from Niger*' follows **Friends of Niger** president Jim Schneider as he returns to a country he once called home, a country that's still as poor as when he left it.

The video was shot on location in Niamey, Maradi, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Kantche and Zinder and includes interviews with Haoua Diatta of the Oxcart Project as well as with Schneider, representatives of **FON**'s Nigerien partner organizations and others.

Copies of the videotape may be purchased for \$20 each (2 for \$35). Use the [FON 2003 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check or money order, made payable to **Friends of Niger**, to **Video, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164.**

**“Serve, serve, serve. That's the challenge. For in the end it will be the servants that save us all.” - Sargent Shriver .**

Friends of  
Niger

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Love This T-Shirt**

**Available in 4  
Sizes  
- S, M, L, XL**



**Makes a  
Great  
Gift!!**

**It'll Look  
Good on  
You as  
Well!!**

***Introducing - Friends of Niger T-Shirts...***  
***You're gonna love this T-Shirt!!***

Based on a design originally created by our neighbors at Friends of Burkina Faso, **FON** had produced its first and very own T-shirt. The short-sleeved shirts are 100% cotton, pre-shrunk beefy-T, natural muslin-colored fabric. The design (above) is four color: brown, black and the orange and green of the flag of Niger. You'll notice a nifty proximity map of Niger within the map of Africa which appears in the branches of the baobab tree. The shirts are available in Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes and sell for \$18 each, shipping included. Use the [FON 2003 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check made out to **Friends of Niger** (indicating the number of shirts by size), along with your name and address to: **Shirts. c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**

**INSIDE PEACE CORPS NIGER**



## **Dear Friends of Niger:**

After a vacation and Peace Corps Country Directors conference in sweltering Washington, it is good to be back in the relatively pleasant weather of the rainy season in Niger.

Some of you may have read reports in the international media in early August about military mutinies and coup threats in Niger. Here is what happened

### **Mutinies and Coups**

On August 5, Peace Corps staff and others were awakened at 3 a.m. by a call from the Embassy reporting the outbreak of gunfire at the Army barracks on the eastern edge of the city. The gunfire, which continued for more than two hours, was noisy and intense, but it was mostly wild shooting in the air and did little damage. There were no reported casualties.

We soon learned what was happening via a report on Radio France International. Their Niamey correspondent was at the scene, and the Prime Minister called them to give out the government's account of events. Some troops from the Niamey garrison had mutinied and attempted to seize the main armory. Loyal troops quickly quelled the mutiny, however, and by 8 a.m. traffic had returned to its usual flow, markets were open, and most people resumed their normal routines. We kept those Volunteers who were in town and other Americans off the streets until mid-afternoon, however, just to be sure all the shooting was over.

The Niamey mutiny was apparently related to a similar but temporarily more successful mutiny that had taken place a few days earlier in Diffa, Nguigmi and Ngourti. There, the mutineers captured and held hostage the prefect and other officials. Their demands were mostly related to pay (currently about \$35 a month for privates), but they also called for the dismissal of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff. By August 9, loyal forces sent from Niamey had freed the hostages, arrested 235 mutineers, and restored order. Two soldiers were killed in the fighting.

According to the Prime Minister, the mutiny represented an organized attempt to destabilize and overthrow the government, with the mutiny in the Diffa region intended to draw enough troops away from the capital to permit a successful coup. Four officers associated with a previous military government were arrested on suspicion of involvement.

These events demonstrate that political stability in Niger remains fragile. There were two successful military coups during the 1990s, and there are no guarantees that this history won't be repeated.

However, I've been encouraged by the government's response. First, it put down the mutinies quickly and with little bloodshed, demonstrating both the weakness of the rebels and the loyalty of the bulk of the armed forces. Moreover, it adopted a reasonably open communications policy and sent Cabinet Ministers to all parts of the country to explain to people what had happened. And with help from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, it quickly organized a seminar for military officers on civic responsibility and the role of the military in a democracy. Finally, it promised to do what it can to improve pay and living conditions in the barracks.

Moreover, all Nigeriens are vividly aware that the 1990s coups brought on a decade of disaster and further impoverishment for this already desperately poor country. They know that the violent overthrow of the current democratically elected government would lead to the suspension of most foreign aid, without which a successor government could not long survive; and this message has been quietly reinforced by the donor community.

I recognize that stupid, illogical things can happen, particularly in politically fragile countries, but my expectation is that there won't be any more coups any time soon, at least not successful ones, and that order will be maintained.

Our PCVs and staff were never in any danger from these events. We do not have any Volunteers in the Diffa region. Peace Corps operations continue normally.

### **Peace Corps Growth**

Peace Corps/Niger's growth plans for FY-03, which begins October 1, have now been approved and funded. We will change from one PST per year with trainee input of 56, to two PSTs, in December and July, with a combined trainee input of 84. The December PST will be for agriculture and natural resource management trainees, and the July PST will be for trainees in the health sector and the new



Community and Youth Education project.

Over the next two years, we project growth to an average of about 135 Volunteers, from about 95 currently.

**Jim Bullington**  
**Country Director Niger**

## **Credits and Other Information**

**The Camel Express** is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**.

**FON** can be contacted via the post at **P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164**;  
by email at **lorenz3@magi.com**; and you will find **FON** on the web at the following Internet address - **[www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org)**.

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed by Sue & Don Bracken, Irma Poots Sarata, Judd Lyon, Meredith McGehee, Steve Bushell, Steve Hoyt, Jim Bullington, Gabriella Maertens, John Soloninka, Larry Koff, Penni St. Hilaire, Niger trip participants, John Baird, Liz Griffin, Jessica, Maureen & Jim Wysopal. Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses above.

## **FRIENDS OF NIGER** **2003 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM**