

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

January 2001

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Message from the President

Greetings to all of you, members and others, who have found your way to the Friends of Niger web site. On behalf of myself and the FON Board of Directors, I want to extend best wishes for the upcoming year and to thank you for your continued support.

Most especially, I want to thank all those who contributed so generously to our recent campaign in support of Niger's National Immunization Days drive to eradicate polio. In our next full edition of The Camel Express, sometime next month, we will try to have a report from Niger as regards the campaign as well as regards future plans related to this important national effort.

Also, by the time of the February issue of The Camel, we should be in a position to pass along more detail on both the upcoming Celebration of Niger - scheduled to be held in Washington, DC during the first weekend of August 2001- as well as on the planned return trip to Niger in 2002. Questionnaires will soon be sent to all those who have already expressed interest in the trip but we continue to welcome input and ideas from anyone.

In this mini-edition of the newsletter you'll find a reminder of the availability of the new FON T-Shirt - selling like hotcakes, but plenty left; an update on the FOB/BU chewable vitamin campaign; Jim Bullington's latest column from Inside Peace Corps Niger; as well as a number of other items which should be of interest.

Elsewhere on the site, along the left-hand column under the Other Great Links heading, you'll find a new link named Photos from Niger. This new link currently features photos recently sent to me by Jim Bullington. In the future, other photos will be added and we'll keep you informed as new material arrives and gets posted.

Concurrent with the arrival of the year 2001 is the debut of FON's 2001 membership year. I want to welcome and thank our new members; express our gratitude to those of you who have already renewed; and, encourage those of you who are thinking of joining and those of you who have yet to renew your membership - to print

the form that can be found under the Join FON link in the upper left and take action today.

Finally, for those of you who have been asking for information concerning Noma disease in Niger, we've included a news item from the January 7 issue of Kakaki: News of Niger - <http://users.idworld.net/jmayer/kakaki/>. Additional information can be found at the World Health Organization site - <http://www.who.int/ncd/noma/index.htm> - and the Winds of Hope site - <http://www.windsofhope.org/e/home.htm>.

Enjoy the update and please stay in contact.

Jim Schneider
President

Inside Peace Corps Niger

Dear Friends of Niger:

We are all enjoying Niger's glorious and all-too-brief cool season, marred only by occasional bouts with harmattan dust storms. On recent field trips, when I slept under the stars in Volunteer transit houses in Matameye and Gaya, a heavy blanket was necessary. And even in the middle of the day, it requires rather vigorous exercise to work up a sweat.

This issue, in addition to my letter I'm also sending along a few electronic photos - these new digital cameras are really great for a place like Niger!

Articles on Peace Corps/Niger

Before coming into Peace Corps, I frequently wrote articles on foreign policy and global economic topics. Several of them were published in *American Diplomacy*, an on-line quarterly journal based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The publisher asked if I would document some of my Peace Corps experiences in Niger with a series of letters for his readers.

Some of you may be interested in my article in the current issue of *American Diplomacy*, "Peace Corps Adventures in the Sahara." It describes my 10-day visit to the Agadez region a few weeks after my arrival in Niger. (We've had two Volunteers in Iferouane for the past year, and we're tentatively planning to put additional Volunteers in the region next year.) The article can be found on the *American Diplomacy* home page at <http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/>.

I hope to have further articles related to Peace Corps and Niger in future issues of *American Diplomacy*, as one of my contributions to Peace Corps' Third Goal.

Islamist Violence

In November, there was a brief outburst of Islamist violence in Niamey and Maradi. This was reported on BBC and Radio France International, so some of you may be aware of it.

The Islamist demonstrations were initially aimed at an annual fashion show to be held in Niamey, which some Islamists judged to be a promotion of public nudity. The targets were quickly broadened, however, to include the national lottery and bars and restaurants serving alcohol. In Maradi, the targets also included a church and the offices of some American missionaries (SIM). There was significant destruction of property, and several people were injured. The Government reacted promptly, quickly restoring order and security and

arresting several of the Islamist leaders.

Neither Peace Corps as an organization nor any of our Volunteers was a target or in any way involved. Moreover, the vast majority of Nigeriens are not religious fanatics and did not approve of the extremists' actions. The Government remains avowedly secular, and non-Muslims have long enjoyed toleration in Niger.

The importance of this development, however, is that it was the first-ever outbreak of Islamist violence in this country. In view of Islamist-inspired attacks on Americans elsewhere, we cannot afford to be complacent. Volunteer safety and security is our highest priority, and we will remain vigilant and work closely with the Government of Niger and the US Embassy to minimize any danger.

Bukoki Transit House

Peace Corps has maintained a transit house (hostel) in the Bukoki neighborhood of Niamey for about 15 years. It has generally served Volunteer needs quite well.

In recent months, however, concerns about security at the transit house have been mounting. Though Volunteers have not yet been victims, the incidence of petty crime in the neighborhood has become worrisome. Moreover, a new, two-story Coranic school is under construction next door to the transit house, bringing the courtyard and verandah into full view of people who might be offended by what they could see therein (e.g., alcohol consumption, "immodest" dress, etc.). And finally, the Bukoki mosque has become a center of the Islamist movement in Niamey (see above).

Therefore, prudence and Volunteer safety dictated that we relocate the transit house.

We have just leased a new house, which is in a much safer location, only a five-minute walk from the Peace Corps office. An added bonus is that it's considerably nicer in terms of aesthetics and cleanliness.

The move to the new facilities should be completed by January.

New Trainees

We are preparing for the arrival of 56 new trainees and the beginning of our now once-per-year Pre-Service Training on January 11. This will be my first PST as Director, so I'm looking forward to it as they must be, with a mixture of excitement and trepidation.

Full Staff

With the hiring of Hassane Abdourahamane, a well-qualified and hard-working Nigerien, as our new Training Manager, and the return from maternity leave of our outstanding APCD for Natural Resources Management, Jen Burt Davis (along with baby Zachary), PC/Niger is now fully staffed for the first time in more than a year. This gives us the opportunity to further improve Volunteer support as well as to begin looking at some new programming possibilities and other initiatives.

Jim Bullington
Country Director/ Niger

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 shirts in plenty of time to meet holiday gift giving needs. 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 Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes and sell for \$18 each, shipping included. Use the **FON 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.**

You're Gonna Love This T-Shirt		
Available in 3 Sizes		Makes a Great Gift!!
- M, L, XL		It'll Look Good on You as Well!!

Children's Chewable Multivitamins - a Campaign Update -

Friends of Niger continues to receive donations for the purchase of children's chewable multivitamins. As before, these donations are used for the periodic bulk purchase of vitamins as part of the FON/Boston University project which began last year. The vitamins are then carried to Niger and passed along to BU's Resident Director in Niamey - Sue Rosenfeld. Sue, in turn, makes sure that the vitamins are forwarded to the National Hospital in Niamey and to the SIM Hospital at Galmi, near Madaoua.

The next shipment is tentatively scheduled for late winter/ early spring of this year.

Financial contributions should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to:

**Vitamins c/o Friends of Niger
P.O. Box 33164
Washington, D.C.
20033-0164**

FON will continue to liaise between people going to Niger and anyone or any group wanting to make a contribution to the campaign. In this regard, anyone travelling to Niger and finding themselves with room in a suitcase or, better yet, a spare suitcase is encouraged to get in touch with **Jim Schneider** via e-mail at **lorenz3@magi.com** or by telephone at 819-827-4870. *Remember - it all counts.*

New Group of PC Trainees Arrives in Niger



On January 11 of this year, 56 new PC Niger trainees arrived in Niamey. The picture below - courtesy of Jim Bullington - shows all but two of the group just after their arrival at Hamdallaye, the Niger PC training center.

*The following item has been reproduced from the January 7 edition of **Kakaki: News of Niger** with the permission of Joel Mayer (Kakaki editor and Niger RPCV).*

NGO's Join to Fight Noma

Officials of two non-governmental organizations, "Vents de l'Espoir" and "Aviation Sans Frontières," will visit Niger from January 8-14 within the framework of the fight against noma, also known as cancrum oris and "grazer disease."

Vents de l'Espoir (Winds of Hope) was created in 1999 by Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones following their balloon trip around the world. Each year, they make a contribution in defense of "neglected causes," notably diseases that affect children. Last year, they contributed \$100,000 to the fight against noma in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

The recorded incidence of noma in Niger is 7 to 14 cases per 10,000 children aged 0-6, although the real incidence is probably much higher since many victims have no access to health facilities. In 1999, Niger recorded 117 cases.

Noma is often called the "face of poverty," since it flourishes in the absence of hygienic conditions. The name "noma" is Greek for "devour." Indeed, the illness devours the flesh of its victims and is said to be fatal in over 80% of its cases worldwide, and the survivors remain disfigured for life.

In Niger, the mortality rate from noma often reaches 90%. The most vulnerable segment of the population are children aged 2-6, because they often suffer from malnutrition after being weaned. It also attacks people already suffering from infectious diseases such as typhoid and measles, and those with poor oral hygiene. Victims of HIV are also severely vulnerable to noma due to their impaired immune system, and the rise of HIV and AIDS among children in Niger has almost certainly contributed to the increased incidence of noma in the country, according to information we have received from a Nigerien medical source.

Sources: PANA, citing the World Health Organization, Kakaki of 8/19/00

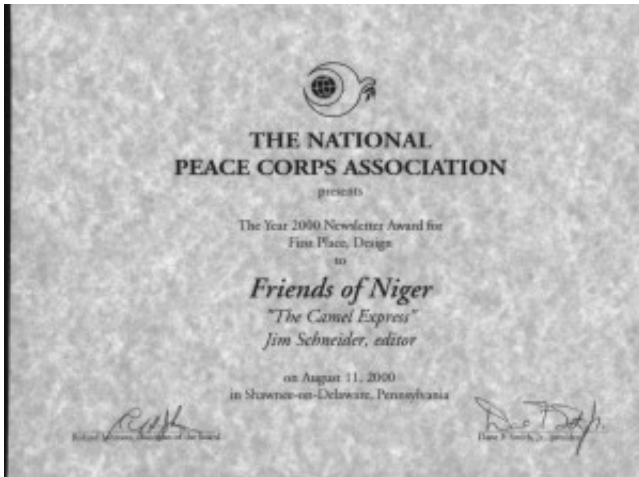
Peace Corps Fellows Program at Illinois State University

The Peace Corps Fellows Program at Illinois State University is now in its 7th year, training and placing RPCVs in community and economic development internships around the nation. Students who successfully complete the program receive graduate degrees in economics, political science or sociology.

According to Michael Kelleher, director of the program and a Sierra Leone RPCV, the program is now considering Fall 2001 (August) and Spring 2002 (January) admissions.

Additional information is available through the program web site - <http://lilt.ilstu.edu/uced>. The program can also be contacted by e-mail at UCEDInfo@ilstu.edu or by phone at 309-438-8685.

The Camel Express Takes First and Second at NPCA



Newsletter Awards Ceremony

When Friends of Niger President Jim Schneider attended the Awards Dinner at the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) Annual General Meeting in August he was looking forward to a pleasant evening and received a pleasant surprise as well.

The Camel Express, newsletter of the Friends of Niger and edited by Schneider, was recognized by NPCA with the first place award for Newsletter Design. FON also tied the Friends of Burkina Faso (FBF) for the second place award for Editorial Content. FBF President Bob Osborne and FBF

newsletter editor Denny Fitzpatrick were also in attendance at the meetings which took place at Shawnee-on-the-Delaware, Pennsylvania.

FON Reunion 2001: A Celebration of Niger

Target Dates Tentatively Set for Niger's Independence Day Weekend in August

The **Friends of Niger Reunion 2001** has now been given a thematic designation and is being called *A Celebration of Niger*. This name is intended to reinforce the hope of FON's Board of Directors that next year's event involve Niger's Embassy as well as the Nigerien community in Washington, D. C. - the site of the reunion.

On a recent trip to D. C., FON President Jim Schneider met with Mr. Joseph Diatta, Niger's Ambassador to the United States. Mr. Diatta expressed support for the reunion and has agreed to work closely with FON on the organization of the event.

FON's Board has tentatively scheduled *A Celebration of Niger* for the weekend of August 3-5, 2001. August 3 is Niger's Independence Day and a national holiday in Niger itself.

Tentative plans call for social gatherings on the nights of August 4 and August 5; exhibits and displays which highlight Niger, its culture, and the activities of FON - archives, multi-media shows, etc.; films from Niger; Peace Corps and NPCA material; readings by authors of books on Niger and by RPCV Niger authors; as well as events related to the nation's capitol - such as a memorial service at the John F. Kennedy grave site. Additional information regarding alternative accommodation and other details will be released via the FON web site - <http://www.friendsofniger.org> - and the next issue of *The Camel Express*.

The theme of the reunion, according to Schneider is "a celebration of Niger and its people as well as of our time in Niger and our experiences while we were there. We are hoping that people who care about Niger - and who fondly remember each other and the time that they spent in Niger - will bring their families, their photos, their scrapbooks and help make the weekend a very special occasion."

2002 Trip to Niger Sparks Interest & Ideas

- 40 Years of Peace Corps in Niger -

The last issue of *The Camel Express* carried a brief announcement of FON's plan to sponsor a trip back to Niger in the year 2002 - for many reasons, including the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Peace Corps presence in Niger.

That brief announcement has stimulated considerable response from people interested in participating in such a trip - in some cases along with members of their family: spouses, parents, children. The amount of interest expressed at such an early date, means that the trip is now a likelihood.

When the trip first went onto the FON drawingboard, it was assumed that most everyone interested in the trip would be primarily attracted to the idea of returning to the community in which they served. While this is, indeed, true for many - others have expressed interest in two other kinds of activity or itinerary.

Some - especially those who served in the earlier years and who lived in the larger urban areas like Niamey - have expressed an interest in visiting locations that they were never able to get to before, like Agadez - for example. Others have expressed an interest in being involved in some manner of 'work project.'

Because of these and other inputs the Board will now be 'exploring' a wider range of potential activities. Both the timing of the trip, the content of the trip itinerary, and trip options are still open to input from anyone who might be interested. The current plan is to take the process to a second phase - involving research on more specific details regarding timing, content and cost - this coming winter.

Meanwhile, early and very tentative discussions have begun with Peace Corps Niger.

Please continue to send input, comments or questions to **Jim Schneider**. Jim is most easily reached at either his e-mail address - lorenz3@magi.com - or by telephone - **819-827-4870**. He can also be reached by surface mail at the FON address (see page 2).

FRIENDS OF NIGER

2001 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Phone (h) _____

Zip _____ Phone (w) _____

E- Mail Address _____

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____

Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____

Program or Involvement in Niger _____

Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities, including The Camel Express

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

- Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON
 - \$45 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA
 - Enclosed is \$35 for a Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)
 - \$67.50 to cover Family Membership in both FON & NPCA
 - I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership
 - Please send me a Copy of FON's Bylaws (Members Only)
 - In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed a Contribution of _____
 - Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed a Contribution of _____
 - Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts at \$18 each (Shipping Included) _____
- T-Shirt Sizes: M _____ L _____ XL _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Make Check or Money Order Payable to **Friends of Niger** and mail to:

P. O. Box 33164, Washington, D. C. 20033-0164

(Please Enclose Membership Form)

FON Participation Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on the **Friends of Niger 2001 Membership & Order Form** (see above).

- × ___ Will help set up local FON group
- × ___ Would participate in local FON group
- × ___ Reunion 2001 in Washington, D.C.
- × ___ Trip back to Niger in 2002
- × ___ Will be local FON contact person
- × ___ Will help with BU/FON Vitamin Campaign

Other _____

Credits and Other Information

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed via hardcopy, e-mail and website posting with the contributions Sue Bracken, Irma Poots Sarata, Judd Lyon, Jim Bullington, Jane Bonin, Sue Rosenfeld, Jai Evans, Don Bracken, Julia Burke, Carrie Regan, Penni St. Hilaire, Tori Paide, Meghan Maguire, Andrew Younger, Chris Fabian, Gabriella Maertens, John Soloninka, Larry Koff and our friends from Friends of Burkina Faso and from RPCVs of Madison, Wisconsin Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses below.

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 e-mail at lorenz3@magi.com; and you will find FON on the web at the following Internet address

www.friendsofniger.org.

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