

2006 SENEGAL

Wednesday, January 25. Last night I went to an ATM to get money for my trip and the machine ate my card! Horrors. I really need an ATM card to go to Senegal. They don't use credit cards very much. At 9:00 AM this morning I was at the bank to get my card back. Alas, it had expired. It never occurred to me that ATM cards have dates to expire. I thought they were good indefinitely. It will take several days to get a replacement! I don't have time. At any rate the customer service person retrieved my card and tried to "reactivate" it. I don't know if she succeeded or not for the ATM machine was out of order. So I cashed a big check and will just have to hope for the best.

<http://inventors.about.com/library/inventors/blatm.htm>

Fortunately I had scheduled a massage this morning. After an hour on Laura Strickland's table, I felt much less tense.

<http://www.amtamassage.org/>

My next problem was that I had awakened with a cold. All day long I pushed Sudafed at it. However when Martha called to wish me goodbye I started to cough. Not an auspicious beginning for a trip!

<http://www.sudafed.com/>

At four the limo came and took me to the airport.

The man who pushed the wheelchair was the same man I had two weeks ago when I went to Florida. He was no good then and hasn't improved, but he did get me to the lounge on Concourse E. The flight to Paris was smooth and I slept most of the way.

Thursday, January 26. Landed in Paris about a half hour late. My cold is almost gone!

<http://www.paris-cdg.com/>

Delta had handed out cards inviting me to the "Arrivals Lounge" in Terminal C, which promised showers, breakfast and other amenities. Sounded great. When the wheelchair bus eventually arrived I told the man I wanted to go there instead of the lounge in my departure terminal (E). Such consternation. My high school French got a real workout. Finally I got to someone who spoke English. She told me the lounge in E had amenities as well, but I didn't believe her. I said I would walk on my own to The Arrivals Lounge if they wouldn't take me. Then she told me that to get to the Arrivals Lounge I must clear immigration. I gave up and told them to take me to the Business Class Lounge in Terminal E.

She was right. The lounge in E not only offered showers but a free 10-minute massage. I am almost getting to like Charles de Gaulle airport.

http://www.airlinequality.com/Product/lounge_cdg_af.htm

Of course they forgot to send a wheelchair to take me to the gate! When I heard the final boarding call for Dakar I went to the desk to inquire about it. They got one in hurry and the girl ran me to the gate where I was the last person to board!

Air France Business class is almost as good as Deltas, although the middle row was three seats across. The chairs recline almost as much but lack some of the bells and whistles I am used to. Nonetheless they were comfortable enough for me to sleep most of the five and a half-hour flight to Dakar.

Dinner was much better than Delta. Pate de Fois Gras followed by guinea hen with leeks and potatoes. I had not had guinea hen in years. My grandmother used to raise them on her farm. They acted as watchdogs putting up a great racket when disturbed. Desert was a delicious chocolate mousse. All of this was washed down with the perfect French wine for each course! I can't imagine the one person in First Class had a better meal.

<http://www.airfrance.com/>

Arrival in Dakar was easy. I was helped down the stairs to the pavement but rode the Premiere Classe bus to the building. Since we were the first there, the passport line was short and I was soon through customs.

<http://www.africanet.com/africanet/country/senegal/getthere.html>

Abou Ba from Saga Tours met me. He had expected both my granddaughter and me but of course Constance is already here. She had told me she would come to the airport, but since it was ten o'clock at night I thought she had changed her mind. However I did look through the arrivals area to make sure.

<http://www.sagatours.com/>

2006 SENEGAL

We drove into Dakar to the Sofitel Teranga Hotel. Teranga is a Wolof word meaning hospitality. The lobby is decorated with large wooden carvings from cultures all over Africa. There is still no sign of Constance.

My room on the second floor looks out onto the South Atlantic Ocean. I got ready for bed and finally received a phone call from my granddaughter. Constance had been told the plane arrived at 11:40 and had gone to the airport to meet me. She caught a cab to the hotel to welcome me to Senegal.

http://www.accorhotels.com/accorhotels/fichehotel/gb/sof/0563/fiche_hotel.shtml

<http://us-africa.tripod.com/senegal.html>

Friday, January 26. This trip is very special. My granddaughter, Constance Harrell, is in Senegal on a Fulbright Fellowship. She spent a semester of her college career in Senegal and did her senior paper on political implications of changes in Muslim education in Senegal. Now she is continuing her research on the relationship between politics and religious education here.

<http://exchanges.state.gov/education/fulbright/>

From her e-mails, I know she is having a unique adventure. Now I will have a chance to share this with her. When my grandchildren were younger I used to take them on trips. Then they got involved with college and careers. So this is the first time in some years I have had an opportunity to see a grandchild without parents around. It will be such fun.

I had a delightful buffet breakfast on the covered terrace of the hotel with sparrows flying about and had a quiet morning getting acclimated. The weather is lovely, in the 70s.

http://www.au-senegal.com/decouvrir_en/cart_dk.htm

Constance arrived about 1:00 and we walked out across the Independence Square next to the hotel. My eyes were everywhere looking at the people. They are so colorful with the men in their long robes called boubous. The women wear a dress that is also called a boubou but it comes in many different styles. Both men and women often wrap scarves around their heads, particularly in this "colder" time of year. The women have perfect posture from years of carrying things on their heads. The fabrics of their clothing are beautiful. Constance tells me the Senegalese are very proud of their Indigo dyes so the colors tend to be blue but there are reds and greens and yellows as well. The indigo comes from the Guinea and southern Senegal in particular.

<http://www.wi-countries.com/cy/2389-262-79>

http://www.senegal-tourism.com/where_togo.htm

http://travel-island.com/interesting_places/senegal.html

French is the official language here due to two centuries of French colonization, though only about 30% of the population speaks it. Approximately 70% of the people speak the Wolof language, even though only about 43% of the population belongs to that particular ethnic group. The second largest ethnic group, called the Fulani or Peulh, speaks Puular. The country is about 90 to 95% Muslim.

Everyone is so polite. Whenever you meet someone they say how are you and you reply how are you. Then they ask how you slept. It goes on and on before you get to what you want to say.

<http://www.wolofonline.com/>

<http://talkislam.com/muslim-religion.htm>

<http://www.islamworld.net/>

We met a colorful acquaintance of Constance named Yabsa. He wore a patchwork costume, which symbolizes that his branch of Islam is "Baay fall". It requires the members to be impoverished. The Baay Fall is a sub-group of the Mourides, Senegal's most powerful Sufi brotherhood. He posed for a picture with me.

<http://www.bcconline.org/wolof/Mouridism.htm>

Mention should be made of the Talibes or beggar boys of Senegal. They are everywhere begging for money. Apparently the mosque sends them out to beg. Constance thinks it is wrong to make them beg for money and gives them candy instead.

<http://www.iviews.com/articles/Articles.asp?ref=IV9909-630>

The ATM machine had a long line so we went on to a local restaurant for lunch. Then we tried the ATM machine again and my card was rejected. No surprise. So Constance used her ATM card and I will pay her back.

2006 SENEGAL

Next we went to an electronic store to get Constance's mobile phone repaired. While negotiating for a taxi last night it fell onto the ground and the taxi ran over it! They had to replace everything inside the case, which somehow survived. \$80 dollars would have bought a new phone but the repair cost only \$40.

<http://www.cellular-news.com/coverage/senegal.php>

While we were waiting for the repair, men started pouring into the shop to look at the television. There is a soccer match going on for the African Cup in Cairo and Senegal is playing Ghana. Because of the importance of the match, the public schools are closed and many of the businesses. I learned later that Senegal lost.

<http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/soccer>

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200602061175.html>

Constance dickered for a cab and we went out to her apartment. Three people share what is a three-story house with a courtyard. From the outside it is a bit forbidding with heavy metal doors and locks. There is also a night watchman who sleeps in the house at night. However it seems quite secure. Like most furnished apartments, the furniture is not the greatest, but she has a fair sized living-dining-kitchen room-in-one on the first floor. Beyond her bedroom is the bath, which also has a door that opens into the back alley. Her roommates live on the floor above, which also has a kitchen. The top floor is the roof where the girls are not raising chickens although roofs are often used for this purpose.

Her roommates, Lauren and Arwyn appeared and we talked for some time. Lauren Browne is another Fulbright studying the substance abuse rehabilitation in Senegal. She calls New York home and hopes to enter medical school next fall. Arwyn Moonrise (actually her middle name) is a massage therapist and yoga instructor, who has lived all over the United States but she presently calls Marin, CA home. She is here to meet her boyfriend's parents. Her boyfriend, Moustafa, has spent 5 years in the US.

I also became acquainted with Muus, whose name means cat and smart in Wolof. A smart cat is "muus bu muus". This is a feisty black kitten that delights in attacking with teeth and claws. Apparently the Senegalese do not like cats, consider them almost like having a rat in the house. He has been kicked and abused. Constance has a water spray bottle but his training has a long way to go. He clawed me. I think his problem is that he has no one to wrestle and fight with since he is the sole cat in residence. She plans to bring him back to the United States when she comes in May. Constance's roommates will care for Muus when we leave but they are not enthusiastic about it.

We walked to nearby store to buy some cat food. She lives in a pleasant neighborhood and seems to know many of her neighbors.

She dickered for another cab and we returned to the hotel. I am impressed with her skill in bargaining for taxis and for other purchases we made. Almost everything has a negotiated price. Since she speaks French and Wolof she gets her own way most of the time.

I was tired so we ate in the hotel. Pleasant but expensive hotel food and we went to bed early.

Saturday, January 28. When Abou Ba picked me up at the airport I thought he had said he would pick us up at nine. However he meant Sunday. After getting to the lobby by 9:00 we soon realized we were wrong. No city tour was on the itinerary. Constance and I set off on our own. We negotiated for a cab to go to the dock and caught the boat to Goree Island. This is a very interesting spot.

<http://webworld.unesco.org/goree/>

<http://www.congo-pages.org/senegal/Goree.htm>

The Portuguese established a slave trading post in the 15th century, which the French subsequently continued. Thus the trading went on for over 300 years.

The first building we toured was the Women's Building, where there are exhibits of women's role in the society. Naturally they did most of the work. Women on Goree historically played an unusual role. Those women born to black mothers but with white, slave-trading fathers frequently became involved in the island's slave trade. These light-skinned women were known as "signares," a word demonstrating their Portuguese (and later French) heritage.

2006 SENEGAL

I scraped my arm on a door hinge so after this we made a detour to the pharmacy where a doctor dressed and bandaged my wound. We looked into a shop but soon went back to the main Slave Trading Post.

Slaves were brought here from all over Africa. The traders had rooms on the second floor while the slaves were crowded sometimes 50-100 to each small room on the floor below. They were sorted according to type: women, women with children, children, men etc. Men were appraised according to weight. There were exhibits of the ball and chains, which shackled them. Children were valued according to the number of teeth they had. Women who became pregnant by the slave traders were allowed to stay on the island but the others were herded like cattle into slave ships to be sent to Brazil, the Caribbean, United States and Britain. You can imagine this gave a tragic incentive to women to submit to sexual predation.

One of the most poignant sights was the "door of no return" where they were loaded onto ships. If a slave became sick on the voyage he was thrown into the sea so the other slaves would not become infected. It was gruesome in the same way that the infamous Nazi concentration camps turned my stomach. It is incomprehensible to me that there is still slavery in some parts of the world, particularly in nearby Mauritania.

http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
<http://dir.yahoo.com/Regional/countries/mauritania/>

Josephine Bonaparte advocated giving up slavery. She freed her own slaves and France gave up slavery long before the United States.

<http://www.napoleonguide.com/josephine.htm>

We wandered around enjoying the small shops. Constance had brought a necklace that belonged to a friend hoping to find other pieces to match. One of the ladies obligingly made another necklace and earrings while we waited.

Nearby we watched a girl having her hair braided. Fake hair is added to the natural hair and the braiding takes most of a day. It only has to be done every six weeks. Some of the braiding is elaborate with other colors woven in.

<http://www.naturalhair.org/vc.htm>

We then walked almost up to the top of the island where we had cokes. Everyone wants to sell us something but they are not obnoxious. Back at the dock we ate a quick shrimp salad lunch, and caught the boat back to Dakar. Near the dock I bought an interesting painting made of butterflies from a street vendor.

Constance negotiated another cab to go to the handicraft market, which is next to the soumbédioune fish market. Here there is a bazaar of small shops with everything from leather goods to woodcarvings. I bought a pair of colorful earrings since the pair I arrived with will no longer clamp shut. I also bought some necklaces and a leather wallet.

http://www.au-senegal.com/art_en/marche.htm

We then returned to Constance's apartment to check in with Muus. Constance has found a young couple that has just arrived in Dakar. They can house and cat sit while they look for their own lodging. Constance's roommates will be happy to be relieved of caring for Muus.

Back at the hotel we showered and changed, then caught a cab out to La Pointe des Almadies Restaurant. This was a delightful open-air restaurant, the only one I have ever seen that has a swimming pool just for its patrons. The restaurant is near the westernmost point of Africa.

<http://www.lhdigest.com/database/uniqueighthouse.cfm?value=3905>

I had invited Lauren and Arwyn to join us, plus another friend, Andrea Yocum. She is a high-school French teacher from Indianapolis. She has been teaching French in the United States and is now in Senegal teaching English. It was so interesting listening to them talk about their experiences. I had a delicious fish with béarnaise sauce followed by two scoops of pistachio ice cream.

<http://www.recipesource.com/desserts/ice-cream/00/rec0091.html>

Sunday, January 29. Abou picked us up at nine and we headed north. About 45 minutes later we arrived in a small town where our guide Fallou Mboup awaited us. He apologized for not meeting us in Dakar but his car had broken down. He has been to the United States 14 times and speaks English almost like a native. Since Abou is a competent guide himself, we have two guides, one

2006 SENEGAL

speaking French and the other English. While Fallou talks the most, Abou is the boss who drives and handles the money.

We continued on to Le Lac Rose, also known as the Pink Lake or Retba. It lies about 30 kilometers north of Dakar. This is a salt-water lake near the shore known for the pink color it turns when there is plankton in the water. It was not overly pink today but we could see how it might be. The water that feeds the lake comes from the sea where it is filtered through the dunes of seashells. By the time the water enters the lake it is almost pure. However the lake itself has a high salinity because it is below sea level. Unfortunately, due to over-mining of the salt as well as excessive storming in recent years, the lake has become decreasingly pink. While we were suffering hurricane Katrina, a huge storm on this side of the Atlantic flooded many areas and some public schools in coastal areas are still closed.

http://www.au-senegal.com/decouvrir_en/geo_retba.htm

We were driven around the lake in a four-wheel drive vehicle looking at the enormous salt manufactory. The men go out in boats in the shallow water and break up salt from the bottom. Once ashore it is pounded with sticks in order to break it up to the consistency of sand. Iodine is added. Then it is packed into 60-kilogram bags, which we are told sell for about \$2. They produce 15,000 tons of salt each year.

<http://www.saltinstitute.org/37.html>

Continuing around the lake we came to a Fulani village called Keur Youssou. The chief, in a colorful blue robe, explained that they were a nomad tribe that has now settled down. Each man is allowed three wives and they are “problems” since they want things and must be treated equally. We think he would have more “problems” without them for there is a lot of work done to keep his clothing clean and his food prepared! We were shown a typical hut with two cots, one for the parents, one for the children. They eat out of a communal bowl with their hands

Some of the men have become prosperous from the salt and can afford cement-block houses and real wooden furniture. I imagine eventually they will all live in cement-block houses and the traditional huts will be abandoned.

http://www.gateway-africa.com/tribe/fulani_tribe.html

We returned to the entrance of La Lac Rose Park via the nearby beach. Abou turned on the 4-wheel drive and we drove just above the water line. Crashing surf produced spray and two horseback riders galloped by providing entertainment. There were spindrifts off the waves, which put the whole scene in a sort of mist.

Back at the entrance we waited a long time before they provided lunch. Constance found a small tortoise-shell kitten that would have been company for Muus but it disappeared, probably going on to another restaurant.

My meal was a leg of chicken with rice and onion gravy. This is a traditional dish here known as “yassa.” Then we waited even longer. Why I don’t know. We must have been there for three hours. Constance and I did Sudoku puzzles to kill time. We also watched the tourists going out in dune buggies.

<http://www.websudoku.com/>

It was a long and somewhat monotonous ride north to Saint Louis, the colonial French capital of Senegal. The landscape became drier and drier dotted occasionally with the curious baobab trees. Baobabs have bulbous trunks and short branches making them look as if they were planted upside down. Senegal is reforesting large areas to hold back the desert encroachment. We did stop once for refreshment but otherwise it was three long boring hours.

Saint Louis reminds people of a somewhat run-down New Orleans with wrought iron balconies and shuttered houses. It sits on an island in the middle of the Senegal River.

http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=956

We crossed an iron bridge, which had been delivered to Senegal by mistake, its intended destination being the Danube River in Europe. The Senegalese and colonists enterprisingly put it to use with a small modification. On the shore was a lively fishing scene with the fishermen going out in their gaily-painted heavy wood boats and the people who had come to buy the fish. Fishing is Senegal’s most important business, the second being tourism. The fishing village is named Nguet-Ndar. Adjoining the village was the crowded fisherman’s cemetery, some of the graves are decorated with fishnets or shells.

<http://www.congo-pages.org/senegal/saint.htm>

2006 SENEGAL

Then we drove down the peninsula almost to the end to the Hotel Cap Saint Louis. This is a resort hotel complete with swimming pool. The rooms are housed in circular thatched huts that resemble the local village homes. However they are far more comfortable. We had dinner in the open-air dining room.

Monday, January 30. A knock on the door at 7:00 was followed by a continental breakfast before we left for the Parc National des Oiseaux Djoudj. Our way became swamplier and there were fields of raffia sticking up beside the road.

<http://www.unep-wcmc.org/index.html?http://sea.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/djoudj.html~main>

This bird preserve is home to many migrating birds at this time of the year. From the sturdy wooden boats we were taken to see the pelican rookery. Thousands of birds crowded the site. The young black pelicans turn white when they mature. Pelicans here are much larger than our brown ones. They stick their beaks down into the river in unison to catch the fish. We also saw fish eagles and cormorants. The anhinga are called snake-birds because of their long twisting necks. Too far away for me to identify, we saw great flocks of birds swarming like mosquitoes over the Djoudj branch of the Senegal River. One large and two small crocodiles were pointed out. The trip took one and a half hours and I was stiff and sore sitting so long without a back.

http://www.savenues.com/wildlife/birds_great_white_pelican.htm

<http://www.birdguides.com/html/vidlib/species/Anhinga%5Fanhinga.htm>

Returning to our SUV, we headed back into town but not before a pit stop where a small pet Patas monkey on a chain took a shine to Constance. Unfortunately it seemed to want to bite, just like Muus.

<http://www.sierrasafarizoo.com/animals/patasmonkey.htm>

We had lunch in Saint Louis at the Galaxie restaurant. I had a spicy fish dish and rice. Desert was the most delicious pistachio ice cream!

Then we were taken on a carriage ride through the streets of Saint Louis. I thought the big mosque was a church because of its clock and bell tower. The French governor complained about the traditional call to prayer so this solution was found to announce the times of prayer.

The northern end of the island has government buildings housing fire and police stations as well as the imposing French Embassy. Few people were in the streets. Perhaps they were home watching the soccer matches.

The Portuguese had settled the southern end of the island and the houses lacked the fancy balconies of the French quarter. However, here people crowded the streets for there were small shops.

Our carriage crossed over to the peninsula where we found Abou waiting for us in the fishing village. We returned to the hotel. I pulled out my computer to catch up on my journal. Constance headed off with the men to an Internet cafe to check her mail.

Tuesday, January 31. We had a wake-up call at 6:00 AM for the long drive ahead. You can hear the muezzins call. Each has a separate schedule so the call to prayer seems almost continuous for about an hour.

<http://i-cias.com/e.o/muezzin.htm>

I slept for a while only waking to use God's open-air bathroom an hour before we got to Touba.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Touba,_Senegal

Amadou Bamba (1853-1927) was a poet and spiritual leader. He preached the work ethic and non-violent protest. People came from all over to hear him teach and to learn the Qur'an. Amadou Bamba built a mosque and a Sufi brotherhood sprang up who called themselves the Mouride. They are very wealthy and are found all over the world. They are very charitable and give a lot of money to the poor. Once a call went out for two million dollars to build a hospital and it was subscribed within two days.

<http://www.alovelyworld.com/webseneg/htmgb/sen24.htm>

After Bamba died his sons succeeded him as caliph. Bamba and four of his sons lie facing east under the domes of the mosque. Another son did not live long enough to build such a fancy tomb. The last son, Saliou Mbacke, is now Caliph and it is uncertain which of Amadou Bamba's grandsons will be the next Caliph. There is even a contender who is not a family member.

2006 SENEGAL

Constance had coffee with the present Caliph and was with him for 32 minutes, a longer audience than was given the President of Senegal.

http://www.htcom.sn/spip/article.php3?id_article=542http://www.htcom.sn/spip/article.php3?id_article=542

Touba enjoys a special status in Senegal and is exempt from many taxes. Because of this, it also does not appear on the official maps of Senegal. No smoking or drinking is allowed in the city.

To enter the grounds of the Mosque we had to cover our heads and wrap a sort of skirt over our pants to show respect. We were not allowed to enter the sanctuary but did see the large pavilions where over ten thousand of the faithful come to pray every Friday.

The floors are Travertine marble, which never get hot. The third caliph covered the mosque in beautiful pink marble from Portugal. The ceilings are plaster with geometric patterns carved into them and painted.

It is the most beautiful mosque I have ever seen.

I was moved enough to buy some prayer beads made of teak. There are 100 beads, divided in thirds and there is a sort of abacus arrangement so you can keep count when you go over 100. As in many religions people come to circle the tombs of their Caliphs praising Allah with their prayer beads.

After leaving the Mosque we went to a Qur'anic School called Hizbut Tarquiyah. One of the Caliphs abolished the public schools so only the Muslim ones remain along with some private Catholic schools.

<http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr140.html>

We had not arranged our visit ahead of time and they apologized that we could not have a tour. Constance said this was just as well since her last tour here took six hours and included four meals. However we went to the library where Bamba's works are held as well as other important books. At this school the children learn much more than just the Qur'an. A higher education is offered including languages and so forth. Abou stayed behind to use the Internet connection, while we went to see the guesthouse where dignitaries are housed.

As we left Touba we stopped to buy picnic supplies for it is a very long drive to Tambacounda. The cashews were not a good choice since Fallou and I got sick eating them.

The drive took us over endless savannah, broken only by small villages of thatched huts. There were few cars. Most people use donkey and horse carts. Even the public transportation is sometimes a horse cart. The horses seem smaller than the ones we have in the States but they are very strong. Donkeys are everywhere and often used in pairs to pull their burden. We often saw loose donkeys along the road and I wonder if some have gone wild. There were herds of cattle as well as goats and sheep.

Six hours of this seemed interminable although Abou drove at about 70 miles an hour along the straight, and well paved road. I was so sore and exhausted by the time we reached the Relais de Tamba that I collapsed on the bed until time for dinner.

The Relais is like a motel, built around a swimming pool with bougainvillea cascading from the roof of the lanai. The doors are carved with animal motifs. We had an elephant on our door, as well as on the block of wood attached to the key.

After dinner, I fell asleep so fast that I forgot to brush my teeth or take my malaria medicine. I was up at 4:00 AM taking care of this. I suspect that the fact I did not have a full stomach when I took the medicine is one of the reasons I was nauseated the next morning.

Wednesday, February 1. We started the day with a tour of Tamba. The city is a fair size city and a major rail junction. Near the station is the market and we walked through it dodging carts and even taxis. An amazing amount of stuff is for sale in the small booths. I saw the usual food and fabric, and also gold jewelry and medicines. There were pots and pans homemade from aluminum, second-hand clothing, bicycles and people making furniture.

<http://www.rootsyrecords.com/Html%20Files/Djembetamba.htm>

<http://www.moxon.net/senegal/tambacounda.html>

Back in the car we headed toward the southeast corner of Senegal. At the Niokolo River we got out of the car and walked across the bridge. Below we could see a crocodile in the stagnant water and a troupe of monkeys arrived to gather the candy the men threw toward them.

2006 SENEGAL

The scenery changed as we headed south. Not only did it get hotter but also there are slight suggestions of hills and finally a view of the mountains. Hardly impressive but they are the only mountains in Senegal. I believe the highest is about 2000 feet. The vegetation became more lush with fields of grass and real trees instead of the scrub we have been seeing.

We arrived at the Bedik Hotel in time for lunch on the lovely porch. Below us was a busy laundry on the Gambia River bank. Constance went down to see if she could spot our own laundry but no luck. We had been running out of clean clothes.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gambia_River

We rested after lunch and then walked into town to view the market. Since we are close to the border with Guinea there were supposed to be different ethnic groups and clothing. My eye was not practiced enough to tell the difference but Constance is able to do so, much as we can tell Spanish from Italian and other French from German.

We ended up at the Cyber cafe so I was able to check some of my mail. I have a hard time with a French keyboard since "Q" and "A" are switched. The period is uppercase and the ampersand is a special command.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/gv.html>

I did not sleep well. My restless foot was kicking all over the place and my muscles hurt every time I moved. We have been going pretty hard and now I must pay for it.

Thursday, February 2. No matter how I wish otherwise the years roll on and on. I woke feeling every one of my 78 years. As on all "Groundhog Days" I make a weather prediction and this one says there will be six more weeks of winter for I saw my shadow. The following was sent me from two sources: "This year, both Groundhog Day and the State of the Union address occur in the same week. As Air America Radio pointed out, "It is an ironic juxtaposition of events: one involves a meaningless ritual in which we look to a creature of little intelligence for prognostication, while the other involves a groundhog."

<http://www.gojp.com/groundhog/>

The plan was to climb a small mountain where there is an interesting ethnic village and a waterfall. However, my body was yelling in protest so we went to plan B. I lay in a hammock while Constance went for her morning run. Evans called to wish me happy birthday and it was so good to hear his voice.

Then we went into town to the tailor. Constance gave me a lovely boubou for my birthday but apparently Senegalese ladies aren't as buxom as I am and the top needed altering. While this was going on we went to the Cyber Cafe and checked in with the Internet.

Lunch at the hotel was delicious. Fish kebabs and rice followed a salade Nicoise. I washed it down with a rum punch drink and lots of water. We drink a lot of water in this dry climate.

Took it easy all afternoon and then dressed in my new outfit for dinner. Standing with your legs about shoulder-width apart, you tie the wraparound skirt, known here as a "paañ," up above the waist and then put on the blouse. Constance helped tie my bandana. Then we walked slowly into the dining room because the skirt more or less hobbles you.

Both the maitre d' and Fallou rushed to embrace me and tell me how wonderful I looked. I have watched Scotti "go native" on many occasions but this is the first time I have tried it myself. It really seems to go over big.

To surprise me they had arranged for a local semi-professional band to come and entertain me. The band members were ethnically Firdo, related to the Fulani or Pulaar group. Their handmade instruments were interesting. One man had made a sort of violin with a calabash and horsehair strings. This was called a riti-riti. Three men played rhythm with pairs of shakers made by stringing together disks of wood. These are called tchëkërë. One string came loose during the performance but the man was able to fix it on the spot. One man played a long decorated flute called a mbipp. One member of the troupe was an acrobat who did some incredible stunts. The music was an unusual rhythm and Abou and Fallou even got into the act singing and dancing the local songs. They even got me up dancing. I have never had a private serenade like this before so it was very special. Almost made it worthwhile having a birthday. There was a birthday cake as well but it was not the greatest. They don't have the kind of ovens in which to bake a cake.

2006 SENEGAL

Friday February 3. We had sent out a huge pile of laundry and to our surprise there was no charge. Of course this meant the poor woman who carried it on her head down to the river to pound it on the rocks was not paid. Constance left a big tip in the room for the maid to help compensate for this.

We drove back toward Dakar spotting wildlife along the road. There was an eagle, some monkeys and a black bird with white under its wings, which the men called a milano. There were hornbills and a pretty green bird with a red chest and long tail called an Abyssinian Roller. We also spotted a warthog.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abyssinian_Roller

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/creature_feature/0106/warthogs2.html

At last we got to the Parc Nationale Niokolo Koba, a huge preserve that is Senegal's game park. I had been warned that it doesn't begin to compare to the parks I have seen in East and South Africa. We rented binoculars (\$6) and picked up a local guide named Azou who crowded into the back seat of our SUV with Constance and Fallou.

The park covers about 24000 acres. Three rivers are in the park. There are 50 species of animals, 350 kinds of birds and 1500 plants. There are plans to airlift in 40 elephants from South Africa.

http://www.au-senegal.com/decouvrir_en/parc_nioko.htm

We are early, for the best time to see the animals is from April through July. During the rainy season the park is inaccessible. Now, in February, there are still remote water holes that we cannot reach by road. When these dry up the animals will be forced to come to the river and be more visible.

My first impression of the park is that of thick bush which in itself would make it harder to spot the animals. After the rainy season they burned large areas of the park. Since the trees are still moist they are apparently undamaged. After burning the brush, pretty yellow flowers spring up. There are many umbrella palms and hardwood trees.

In 1976, the people who lived within the park were evacuated. We passed one deserted village and there were two poignant chairs sitting in it. Apparently the people return out of sentiment or perhaps to visit the graves of their ancestors. Jobs in the park were offered to the displaced people.

We started spotting animals. First we saw some baboons. Then there was a female guibernachee, a sort of antelope. There was cob (also in the antelope family). We saw 6 or 7 cob have lovely spiraled horns to set off their handsome faces. Then there was a huge warthog.

<http://www.nature.ca/notebooks/English/baboon.htm>

<http://www.amadou.net/ci/anim.htm>

<http://experts.about.com/q/Wild-Animals-705/Ugandan-Wildlife.htm>

We stopped at a rocky dam in hopes of seeing hippo. The rock was volcanic and Fallou explained that there was much volcanic activity in prehistoric Senegal. There are two hills, called les Mamelles (English translation: the breasts), in Dakar that are the remains of these ancient craters.

<http://experts.about.com/q/Wild-Animals-705/Ugandan-Wildlife.htm>

There was a swinging bridge that was built in 1966 for a French movie called the Southern Star (L'Etoile de Sud). Constance decided to cross it and the men teased her by making it bounce. She was a match for them and bounced it right back.

At last we came to the Simenti Hotel. This is a rustic lodge built high on the riverbank with a lovely view overlooking the Gambia River. It boasts a somewhat murky swimming pool, a terrace for viewing and an open air dining hall and bar. Our cabin was a circular thatched hut complete with a noisy air conditioner but no door on the bathroom. There was also no electricity until 7:00PM.

A lot of people were gathered around the TV set to see Senegal play Guinea. Senegal was the underdog but there was much cheering when they won the match and move on to the semifinals.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/football/africa/default.stm>

Constance found a walking path and was planning to run on it tomorrow, but she was told it was not safe.

At 4:30 we were taken for a lovely boat ride on the river. After spotting a crocodile we had pointed out many birds. Most prevalent were the Abyssinian Rollers, but there were hornbills, fish eagles and gray herons and kingfishers. The kingfishers are smaller than ours. Occasionally we

2006 SENEGAL

spied antelope along the riverbank. There was a white ibis sitting on the thorny jube jube plants. The reflections on the water were also lovely to see. The guepera are interesting birds. They have green backs and a red throat and long tail.

<http://clare.overt.org/gallery/park0405>

<http://www.world66.com/africa/senegal/books/thegambiaandsenegal>

<http://www.kenyabirds.org.uk/king-mal.htm>

After dinner we found we had electricity to go to bed but the air conditioner was so noisy we turned it off. During the night it became so hot we opened the door.

Saturday, February 4. We were rudely awakened at 6 AM when the lights and air conditioning came on. Then I realized we had no hot water. Up until then I had been enjoying our ecological bush hotel. Now I realized I need more creature comfort. Perhaps I am ready to go home!

Since it was early morning we saw much more life leaving the park. We found some warthogs rooting in the ground and, wonder of wonders, we got a picture of them looking at us! Most warthogs that I have seen run off with their funny tails up high. There was some cob of course. We also saw some wild dogs with a prominent white stripe on their sides. Quail scurried across the road in front of the van. We also got a good look at a black beak hornbill.

Abou apologized for seeing so little wildlife but I saw more than I expected.

http://www.kidsplanet.org/factsheets/african_wild_dog.html

Near the entrance to the park was a local school in session this Saturday morning. We were allowed to visit a room where the children were having their Qur'an lessons. The verses were neatly printed on the blackboard in Arabic and the children learn from chanting. They sang a song for us about their teacher teaching them the Qur'an. **Muslim education starts early with the children learning to chant the Qur'an or Koran as we sometimes see it spelled. Only after the Qur'an is learned do they progress to other studies such as reading and writing**

We passed a colorful group of Fulani girls on their way to have a baby baptized. They were all dressed up with beads braided in their hair, jewelry on their arms and neck, and had even painted designs on their feet. They seemed to enjoy having their pictures taken and Abou got their address so he could send them some prints.

The men stopped to buy some of the charcoal sold along the road. It is cheaper here than in Dakar.

We stopped at Douba to see some ancient stone circles. The 14 or 15 stones stood about four feet high. At one side of the circle there was a taller stone. Fallout told us that inscriptions had been found on some of the stones. Archaeologists have found relics that show these were burial places for tribal kings and that they date from about 750 BC give or take a hundred years. More of these circles have been found nearby and in The Gambia.

<http://home3.inet.tele.dk/mcamara/stones.html>

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ga.html>

We stopped in Kaolack for lunch at the Hotel de Paris. The restaurant was smoky so we chose to eat in the bar. This pleased the men for they could watch the soccer game. I had a salad and cheese omelet for lunch. The chocolate mousse dessert was the best part.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/world/A0827041.html>

At last we came to Saly. Abou stopped at a bank so Constance could cash some money and then we checked in to the Savana Resort Hotel. We said goodbye to Fallou but Abou will return tomorrow to take us to Dakar and me to the airport.

<http://www.savana.sn/index-ang.html>

I spent an hour at the business center on the Internet. Somehow I had told everyone I was coming home on Sunday. I had forgotten I left Dakar at 11:40 PM, which meant of course I would get home Monday. I sent out an e-mail hoping my friends would change the limo and so forth.

The hotel is such a cultural shock. There is constantly watered grass planted under the palm trees. Our room is small but has a modern bathroom with shower and an air-conditioner that doesn't groan at us.

Constance went for a run along the beach but reported that men would approach her and offer their sexual services. Apparently there are a number of male prostitutes. I found the idea repugnant and so did she.

2006 SENEGAL

We had a lovely buffet dinner with music near the large pool. The music sounded Caribbean but Constance pointed out that the Caribbean music had its origins in Africa. There was going to be an evening entertainment but we did not wait for it. Both of us are worn out from the trip.

Sunday, February 5. After a last Internet session in which I managed to crash the hotel computer, Abou picked us up and took us to Maxim's Restaurant. His cousin runs this beach restaurant. The menu started with delicious skewered fish. Equally delicious grilled shrimp followed this. The piece de resistance was the langouste. They made a trip out to a special trap and showed them to us live before cooking them. They were smaller than other langouste that I have had but very very good. Two young men were there with their drums. We told them they could play one song but they made it last a half hour. It was a lovely farewell meal.

<http://www.savana.sn/index-ang.html>

Back at Constance's I gave my hair a much-needed shampoo and then rested in preparation for my late night departure.

Abou appeared about 9:00 to take us to the airport. Constance insisted on coming to say goodbye but they wouldn't let her into the building since she has no ticket. I had packed my e-ticket itinerary and had to unpack and find it before they would let me in! All went well at check-in and I was waiting at the gate with almost two hours to spare.

The trip to Paris was a short night but I managed to sleep about four hours.

Monday, February 6. I waited on the plane for the wheelchair bus. Finally the stewardess came and told me that I would have to take the regular bus into the terminal and the wheelchair bus would be there. I did but it wasn't. I went up the escalator to where the agents were and finally after a long wait one of them produced a wheelchair. She pushed me about 20 feet and then said we had to wait for the wheelchair bus. After a half hour it finally arrived. We were driven to the plane, which was not at the terminal but parked out on the field. At one point we had to back up to let a big vehicle around a curb. Our driver couldn't see behind him and he plowed into a car that was following us. At least we were driveable. I don't think the other vehicle was.

So eventually I got to the plane. It was an Air France code share flight. The seats were the first class seats I saw on the flight to Dakar. They had all the bells and whistles but I never figured it all out. I slept most of the way across the puddle.

We were late arriving in Atlanta. It was cold and pouring rain. What a shock after the tropical warmth in Senegal.

Postscript. Senegal lost to Egypt in the semi-finals.