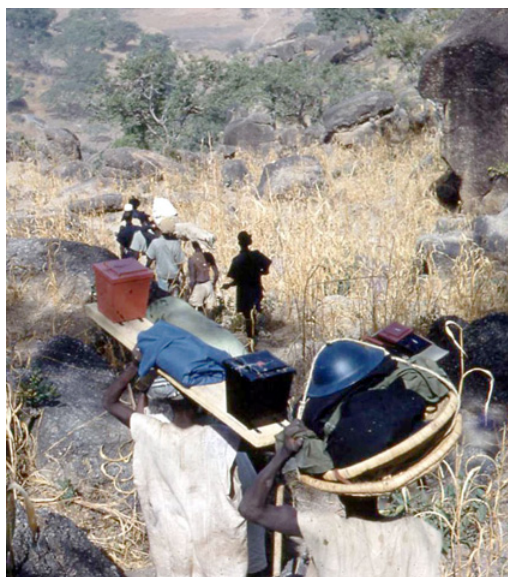


Malcolm Cooper

The Northern Cameroons Plebiscite

1960/61



A Memoir with Photo Archive

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Foreword

This memoir is a personal account of my experience of the Northern Cameroons Plebiscite 1960/61 on which I worked as a Plebiscite Supervisor. It is an edited version of a chapter I first wrote in 2000 for a larger memoir. The story is told through my letters home, and the notes and diary records I made (intermittently) at the time. Linkage and explanations are provided where necessary by text in blue. I have left the language of the original text just as I wrote it when I was 25 years old. The spelling of place names follows conventions of the time, like ‘Micika’ (now Michika), ‘Humsiki’ (now Roumsiki), ‘Marua’ (now Maroua), or ‘Cubunawa’ (now Chubunawa). The same applies to names of ethnic groups, like ‘Fulani’ (now Fulbe, language Fulfulde), ‘Matakam’ (now Mafa), or ‘Wogga’ (now Waga).

The memoir is accompanied by photographs I took during the work, especially when touring on foot through the Madagali and Chubunawa Districts of the then Northern Cameroons. The original photographs were taken with a Zeiss Ikon camera using Kodachrome. The resulting slides moved around the world with me, and were finally digitised in 2007. A selection of about one hundred of them have been prepared for this online publication with the help of appropriate software and can be viewed in the attached photo archive. There are two maps attached at the end. One (figure 1) with an overview of the wider region, while the other (figure 2) is a digitised version of the original map as supplied by the Plebiscite administration.

Soon after arriving in the Northern Cameroons, I met an American anthropologist James Vaughan and his family, and they were very helpful to me. When preparing this memoir, it was a great pleasure to renew contact with James (or Jim) after almost fifty years, and I am very grateful to him for reading the memoir and offering comments and advice. I am also most grateful to Anthony Kirk-Greene (who was District Officer in Mubi before I went there) who also read the memoir.¹ I have also enjoyed making the acquaintance of Gerhard Müller-Kosack who has advised on questions of ethnicity concerning some of the people I photographed. I am also grateful for Nicholas David’s, Jim Wade’s and Marta Galantha’s ethnographic input with regard to the selection of photographs published with this memoir.

This is – I need hardly say it – a memoir not a research paper. There are things I cannot be sure of – locations where the map couldn’t help; ethnicity as suggested by dress; interpretations of words and behaviour and the like. But my experience, thoughts and reactions as recorded here, I can entirely vouch for. As for any errors, they are very much my own!

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¹ Anthony Kirk-Greene kindly recommended the Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, where I was able to deposit a CD of all the photographs and an earlier version of this memoir.

Memoir

Editorial note:

Letters are indented while diary entries are not

Comments and explanations are in blue

Introduction

One day in 1960, there appeared on the notice board of St Peter's Hall¹, Oxford, where I was in my final year, and also in the Sunday broadsheets, an intriguing advertisement, placed by the Commonwealth and Colonial Office. It invited applications from suitable persons for a limited number of short contract posts as Plebiscite Supervisors, to join a team to organise and implement a Plebiscite in the Northern Cameroons, in which the people would decide whether they wished to join the newly independent Federation of Nigeria, or the République du Cameroun. The contract offered £1000 tax free for a six-month term beginning in September 1960. Experience overseas and a commission in Her Majesty's Forces would be an advantage, as well as an adventuring spirit and the ability to live and work in isolation. Now, wasn't this just what I needed? An exciting paid breathing space in Africa to decide what I really wanted to do? And didn't I measure up pretty well against the requirements? (I had spent a year of my National Service (1956/57) on secondment to the then Queen's Own Nigeria Regiment). I applied and was invited to an interview. I walked across an expanse of deep red carpet and sat myself before a table behind which was gathered a panel of five or six people. One Stuart Johnson, who was to be the Deputy Plebiscite Administrator, took the lead, and I early on struck a common chord with him. He was a thespian; he had been at Oxford a few years before with Kenneth Tynan; and it was pretty evident that he was pleased to find someone who shared his enthusiasms. Moreover, the fact that I could say I had some (very limited) experience of writing sketches probably made him dream of cabaret in the African bush. I emerged from that interview feeling buoyant, and I was not disappointed. A few days later a letter welcomed me to the team, to be led by Sir Percy Wyn-Harris, a former Colonial Governor, who had attempted to climb Everest in the thirties, and now sailed the oceans because he thought mountain climbing had become too soft! The letter, which I have slightly abridged, was from Stuart Johnston.

Deputy Plebiscite Administrator
Northern Cameroons Plebiscite Administration
c/o The Premier's Office
Kaduna, Northern Region, Nigeria

July 1960

Dear Cooper.

I am very glad to be able to write this letter and to tell you that you have been chosen to help me with the Plebiscite in the Northern Cameroons.

I was sitting on the board which interviewed you, and my job is Deputy Plebiscite Administrator for the Northern Cameroons. Under Sir Percy Wyn Harris, who you will remember from your interview, it will be our job to see that the plebiscite goes well.

¹ Now St Peter's College.

The real object of this letter is to fill some possible gaps in your knowledge, give you an idea of the staff running the Plebiscite and the work they will do, and also to let you know about such important matters as kit and living conditions.

The letter here detailed the management of the Plebiscite, with the Deputy as executive director managing three Assistants on secondment from the Government of the Northern Region, who would supervise nine Field Officers, of whom I was one. Each of us was responsible for a Plebiscite District. There would also be a Supply Officer.

So much for the staff. Now to tell you something about the country. You will have gathered from the map that the Northern Cameroons is in fact divided into two separate territories North and South of Yola, the chief administrative town of the Adamawa province of the Northern Region. The northern portion runs from Lake Chad southward for about 250 miles towards Yola. The northern half is extremely flat and towards the end of the rainy season is subject to considerable flooding from Lake Chad. In the dry season it is a country of sand, hard mud and at this time of the year is easy to travel over by landrover, but during the rains, as you will imagine, hard foot slogging often above your knees in water will be the order for whichever of you is posted there. The people here are largely Kanuri, the famous founders of the great Bornu Empire of the 16th and 17th centuries, Shuwa Arabs who have come into the country from Central Sudan, a few Hausa, and a few Fulani who are cattle-owning nomads.

The southern districts of this northern area are hilly and largely populated by pagan peoples. They make many of their villages up on the tops of these harsh rocky hills, they are backward in learning, the rate of literacy is very low, and they are suspicious of strangers. This does not mean that they are dangerous, but it does mean that it will not be easy for the Officer stationed in this area to make his points to the local people. [This was the area to which I was posted.](#)

South of Yola the country is flattish savannah land leading to low foothills and finally rising to the great grass-covered open spaces of the Mambilla Plateau some four or five thousand feet above sea level. The people here are pagan and Fulani, - indeed the Mambilla Plateau is one of the more famous cattle-grazing grounds in Nigeria.

You will see that there is a considerable variety of peoples and types of country in each area, and although you will be given charge of one particular district ... I hope it will be possible to move you around a little so that you can get a good idea of the whole area.

To get on to the job itself, you will know that the Plebiscite is being held under the supervision of the United Nations ... and we shall have ten UNO observers constantly in the field to see fair play ... The purpose of the Plebiscite is to determine whether the people of the Cameroons wish to achieve their independence by joining a free Northern Nigeria or a free

Republic of the Cameroons (the new name for the old mandated territory of the French Cameroons.)

Our job will be to run the Plebiscite. That, and no more. It is not our job to take sides at all in this question; ... we must restrict our remarks to matters concerning the mechanics of the Plebiscite, - how to vote, where to vote, when to vote and the choices before them, without commenting in any way on those choices. It is not going to be an easy job; in fact it is going to be a very difficult job and one which will need all your wits. The majority of these people are backward and illiterate but amongst them there are some extremely astute political minds and it will be one of our most difficult tasks to keep these people happy and satisfied that the Plebiscite is entirely free and that we are in no way biased as to the result.

To come to your conditions of living. Each of you will be given a house, permanent or semi-permanent (in fact we are building a number of houses in the more remote areas for this purpose). The house will be fully equipped. A cook-steward will be provided for you (you will have to pay him of course. £8 to £10 per month will be a fair salary). You will find attached to this letter a list of the equipment which we have bought for each of you.

Your food you will buy yourself ... your Assistant Plebiscite Administrator will give you every help in drawing up your lists of food and showing you where to buy stuff that you need.

The loneliness of this job was stressed to you during the interview but I would not like you to get the wrong idea here. Your house will be somewhere where there is another European, - at least one, in some cases there will be several. You will only be by yourself when you go on tour for a week or ten days at a time round your district, but we are providing an interpreter to go with you who will speak English, and we are trying to find people who can help you get around what is to you a strange country. The Administrator, the Resident, myself and your A.P.A. will be visiting you not infrequently so that you will not be all that lonely I hope. I would however bring out some books, musical instruments, a gramophone, anything you like to while away the evenings when you are by yourself.

Your movement about the country will very often be on your flat feet but each of you will have a couple of landrovers to take you as far as motorised transport will go and run you into headquarters as needs arise. With the exception of the most southerly station at Gembu on the Mambilla Plateau, all the Headquarters, and all your houses, are on motor roads. It is possible that during the rains you may be cut off for a day or two but during the dry season, which starts in October, we should experience no difficulty with our communications.

A wireless network is being set up ... and there are one or two air strips which will, of course, greatly facilitate the senior members of the organisation visiting you, - and in the event of anybody being ill, it will help us to evacuate them from some places.

Talking about things medical, before you come out you will be examined by the Physician to the Colonial Office ... There are two Government Doctors in the area and several Mission Doctors. There are hospitals at both Dikwa and Mubi...

I have asked the Crown agents to arrange passages for you all on the same plane round about the 25th or 26th August, and I very much look forward to being at Kano to welcome you off the plane in the early morning when you arrive.

Yours sincerely

S. Sill Johnston

I can still feel the thrill I had when I first read this letter. It offered a real adventure in a varied and beautiful landscape among interestingly diverse people, and the opportunity to do a useful job. Attractive too was the fact that Stuart Johnston had gone out of his way to write a long, informative and encouraging letter, which made me feel very much part of a team, and a valued one at that.

Getting there; meeting old friends

I left home for Heathrow on the 25th August, where I met the other eight members of the team going to Kano. (Simultaneously there was a Plebiscite in the Southern Cameroons, and a separate team had been recruited for that operation, which would fly to Lagos.²)

c/o Plebiscite Administration Office
Mubi, Northern Cameroons
Northern Region
Nigeria³

28 August 1960

We arrived safely at Kano on Friday morning to be met by Johnston (a charming boss) and whisked off to breakfast. You can hardly imagine my elation however (tempered only by the fatigue of an uncomfortable journey) when I learnt we were moving to Govt HQ KADUNA.

I had spent the last 4 months of my National Service there in 1957 with the 5th Battalion of the Queen's Own Nigeria Regiment, and was excited at the prospect of meeting old colleagues.

² For an account of the Plebiscite operation in part of the Southern Cameroons, see 'The 1961 Cameroon Plebiscite: Choice or Betrayal', John Percival, Langaa RPGIG, 2008.

³ I have included the location and date in my letters, but omitted greetings and endings. Letters are occasionally abridged to exclude irrelevant matter.

The nine of us plus baggage journeyed down in four long wheel base landrovers over unimproved roads; we suffered three punctures! We are putting up at the Rest House until Sept 1st and in the meantime we are learning about the job, selecting cook/stewards and sorting out a heap of bumpf. On Friday night I slept the first solid dreamless night for days and this was as well because Saturday was full. We were briefed and lectured (informally and very pleasantly) during the morning. In the afternoon we lunched late and went straight to tea with the Assistant Plebiscite Administrator, Francis Davies, who is the immediate superior of the two of us working in the central area of the N. Cameroons. My area does not appear to be more than 40-odd square miles and is heavily populated. It also rises to hill country in the east, peopled apparently entirely by pagans⁴ - and the odd leopard.

As I write I feel hugely thrilled about the prospect of adventure in country more varied and interesting perhaps than anywhere else in West Africa. These peoples are at present very little touched by western culture. We shall be touring among them often and for the hill country we will be trekking with camp kit.

Our first job is to make a new register of voters and women are voting for the first time. Then after Christmas we prepare for the Plebiscite on Feb 14th 1961.

After tea yesterday we had drinks with Johnston, then I led a hungry group to the Kaduna Club for a belated dinner. I met a 5th Battalion subaltern and tried not to be too old-stagerish, while learning a few things about people's movements. This morning I decided to find out for myself and visited the Battalion lines. My preview yesterday was in meeting the guard at Government House. The welcome, and the feeling of returning to great friends, was overwhelming. Today was more so. Even though B Company to which I had belonged is in Kano I met the group of people who really mattered: Linus, my Boy [or batman](#), the Quarter Master Sergeant, now CSM, and my Recruit Sergeant. I drank in the Sergeants' Mess then moved with them to the Palace, an African dive in the town. They were ecstatic and so was I! The CSM insisted on paying for everything, including my taxi back.

The other Plebiscite boys are an interesting bunch; among them Major Edmunds, ex-Somaliland Scouts, and John Kevan - ex-Rhodesian farmer and an artist ... I have chosen a Boy [cook/steward](#) - an older chap called Audu Gara, with considerable experience ...

Bauchi

3 September 1960

We are 81 miles east of Jos and are fast leaving civilisation westward. This I believe is the last Catering Rest House - lit by Tilley lamps. We have been

⁴ This is how they were referred to then, meaning people following traditional belief systems and as yet largely untouched by Islam or Christianity.

awakened at 6.30am as usual after a night punctuated by the rhythmic bangings of the unsilenced water pump.

After the usual predictable delays, we managed to leave Kaduna in convoy for Jos. On arriving there we learnt that a 3-tonner with much of our bumpf aboard had crashed - just another small hiccup...

Francis Davies, our Assistant Plebiscite Administrator (APA), is a most amiable chap. He and Colin White - my counterpart in the central area, are stationed at Mubi, the Plebiscite headquarters (where mail is sent), and I will be some 50 miles up the road, on my own in a new 'Uniport' tin house, which radiates, I hear, a most gorgeous heat.

Yesterday in Jos I spent a vast sum on stores and on a camera - I am not buying a ciné. The camera seems to have a mechanical fault unnoticed at the time so I will have to return it to Jos if possible.

Yesterday's journey down from the Jos Plateau took us through beautiful country - green stubbly hills and dales and rocky tumbling rivers. We came across two interesting sights. One was a Fulani beating ceremony to celebrate the coming of age of a boy. There was a group of most attractively made-up girls in bright colours, beads and wrapper head-dress surrounding about six men drumming furiously as they moved slowly round anti-clockwise. All the men carried long lethal sticks and presumably at the actual beating they belabour the boy with these. If the fellow shrinks or runs away he will not marry.

Today we move on another 97 miles to Gombi bush Rest House and then to Yola where we spend two days. Trekking starts in about a week.

My driver, a Muslim, has a wife with him whom he found on the last Plebiscite. He is allowed four wives but says that one will be enough. He is earning with us about £9 a month (a very small amount isn't it), while my clerk (not very expert) gets £23 a month.

In order to be equipped for the solitary life when not working or spending time with colleagues, I bought about 40 novels and works of literature in English. I intended to start filling the yawning gap in my knowledge of English literature which had widened all the time I was concentrating on French literature. I bought mainly 20th Century works and although I have no record of them now, they certainly included Forster, Waugh, Lawrence, Huxley, Greene, and Wodehouse. I know I read them all, and more, but there's only mention of one of them in my letters and notes. That should not be taken as a measure of their significance!

The Plebiscite: people, places, and programme

Throughout this narrative I shall be mentioning a number of people and it may help for clarity if I give a *dramatis personae*.

Plebiscite Administrator - Sir Percy Wyn Harris
Deputy Plebiscite Administrator - Stuart Johnston
Assistant Plebiscite Administrator, Mubi - Francis Davies (his wife is Enid Davies)
Plebiscite Supervisor, Mubi - Colin White
Plebiscite Supervisor, Chubunawa/Madagali - Malcolm Cooper
Plebiscite Supervisor, Gwoza - John Kevan
Plebiscite Supervisor, Karamti - Bruce Cantlie
My Publicity Assistant - Sabo Mohammed
My Interpreter - Kwatire Kwazale
My Clerk – Mr Egbu
My Cook/Steward - Audu Gara

The whole of the Cameroons had been a German Colony (Kamerun) up to 1918 after which the French assumed control. In 1920 it was formally divided between France and Britain into two Trusteeship Territories, first under the mandate of the League of Nations and then under the United Nations. The boundary was established officially in 1922.⁵ The British-administered portion was divided topographically by the Mambilla Plateau and each part was administered separately and known as the Southern and the Northern Cameroons. I was working in the Northern Cameroons. To further complicate matters, this region was split in two, as noted above, with a slice in the north and a slice in the south. I worked in the northern part of the Northern Cameroons.

In March 1959, the General Assembly decided to hold a Plebiscite in the Northern Cameroons (under United Kingdom administration) with the alternatives of joining Nigeria or postponing a decision and remaining a Trust Territory under the United Nations. A motion to substitute union with the Cameroun Republic (the former French Cameroun) as the second alternative was defeated. When the Plebiscite was held in November 1959, the decision was to remain under United Nations Trusteeship, at least for the time being. Women did not vote.⁶

After this Plebiscite, the Northern Region Government of Nigeria undertook and announced in June 1960 a major reorganisation, a key element of which was as follows:

"The Northern Region Government declares that with effect from 1st of July, 1960, the area of the Northern Trust Territory shall be constituted as a separate Province which will be known as the Trusteeship Province and which will be of equal status with the other 12 Provinces of the Northern Region until 1st October after which date the area will be temporarily administered directly by the United Kingdom."⁷

When the United Nations decided on a second Plebiscite, to be held in February 1961, there were significant changes. There was now to be a choice between joining the

⁵ The Diary of Hamman Yaji, James H. Vaughan and Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene (eds), Indiana University Press, 1995. See Chapter 1, The Context, by James H. Vaughan.

⁶ Culture, History, and Grass-roots Politics in a Northern Cameroons Kingdom, James H. Vaughan, Jr, American Anthropologist, Vol. 66 No. 5, October 1964, pp.1078-1095.

⁷ Ibid, p1092.

Federation of Nigeria, which had become independent on 1 October 1960, and the Republic of Cameroun. Women were to vote for the first time.

Each Plebiscite administrative area had a United Nations Observer appointed to it to see fair play.

My Plebiscite area contained two Districts, Chubunawa and Madagali. Each had a principal group with their own language - the Higi and the Margi groups. My interpreter Kwatire, a Higi, spoke both these languages.

The Plebiscite Operation divided itself naturally into a number of phases.

- Phase 1.** Recruitment of my team - Publicity Assistant, Interpreter, Administrative Assistant/Clerk.
First tour of District informing the people of the Plebiscite and its organisation.
- Phase 2.** Selection and Training of Registration Officers from 1 October 1960.
Registration of all adult men and women eligible to vote begins 17 October 1960 and lasts 3 weeks.
- Phase 3.** Review of Registration lists from 16 December for 2 weeks.
- Phase 4.** Selection and Training of Polling Officers.
Building of Polling Booths.
- Phase 5.** The Plebiscite on 14 and 15 February 1961.

Getting to know Chubunawa/Madagali Districts

When I arrived in my District, my Uniport house at Michika in Chubunawa District, was not yet ready, so I stayed for two weeks in a Mission Guest House of mud and thatch in Gulak, in Madagali District.

Church of the Brethren Mission Guest House
Gulak

11 September 1960

It was bliss to get my very first mail yesterday at Mubi. It took roughly 7 days. This is not at all bad, because mail only leaves Mubi for Yola by road twice a week, and then twice a week by air from Yola to Kano. Of course in my base at Micika, 35 miles N of Mubi, and here at Gulak, 55 mile North, there is no PO. I am in fact delightfully cut off from the world. But this means that my trips to Mubi take on the charm of a pilgrimage to Mecca...

I am perfectly well, particularly after the first really good night on my safari bed. We have a long day, starting at 6.30am or earlier, and during our journeys have often missed lunch and waited for a huge orgy in the evening. Audu, my

Boy, is extremely good and seems to sense the occasion so well. Not only is his cooking good, but the preparation and serving of it is done with all the pomp of a Lord Mayor's Banquet.

I am now in my District - Madagali-Cubunawa District, which is some 20 miles wide and 50 miles long. The North/South road, a laterite one, is in good condition in the dry season. Just now it is treacherous after rain because the top six inches become slithery mud and you find the landrover suddenly facing the opposite direction. This is the only road, so all the many villages east of the road and in the hills will be visited on bike or on foot.

I have spent some time already talking to some local literate people trying to fill out the hopelessly inadequate map we have been given. I have located many more villages than those marked in my sketch map.

My house is still being constructed at Micika. I had a look at it last night. It is a portable tin affair, on a concrete base. This is complete. The plumber was there fitting up a pipe line to a 44 gallon drum of water which is being kept filled by a local man. My drinking water has of course to be boiled and filtered. A septic tank has already been constructed in spite of the heavy rains. The constructor advises thatch on the roof to keep the place cool. I think this might be included in the budget. The house costs in all £2700!! I hope to goodness it can serve a useful purpose later - other than as a human broiler house. I have to pay a £12-10s rent a month for this place. As I get 10 shillings a day for touring, I shall attempt to be out in the bush as much as possible! For the next three weeks anyway I have to be.

On October 17th the registration of adult men and women takes place. Until October 1st I have to tour as much of the area as possible with an interpreter, calling on the Village or District Head, getting him to summon the people together and then telling them about the Plebiscite and Registration. On October 1st I return to Micika to give a course to the Assistant Registration Officers - recruited from any local centres of literacy. Then they go to their areas preceded by my Publicity Assistant, who sees that the people are ready and informed. The registration period lasts 3 weeks. After the registration there is happily a long lull while lists are compiled, checked, slandered or defalsified. Publicity for the Plebiscite then begins.

Now putting over the Plebiscite choice to pagan illiterates is a tricky business anyway. The job is further complicated by our necessary impartiality. If we state the case quite barely - and we must - then the people will be quite mystified. Few of them have much conception of an 'independent Republic of the Cameroons', or an 'independent Federation of Nigeria'. We noticed this even among school-educated people who came to be interviewed for jobs.

In the last Plebiscite (when only men voted) the majority elected to postpone the decision of whether or not to join up with Nigeria. They knew that the Northern feudal Emirs had oppressed them and so a 'wait and see' decision was inevitable. Then the Cameroons were given their own Provincial local government (soft soap!). The people's concern now is that to vote for Nigeria

might lead them back into servility under the North. We are not allowed to tell them this is not so (and anyway we can't guarantee it!). I met a local politician Umaru Micika on the road last week and he is off to New York to lobby in the United Nations for a third choice - independence with no ties. This idea is quite wild; only if the region is federated in some way can it have economic stability.

My immediate neighbour at Gulak [where my temporary abode was](#) is an American anthropologist Jim Vaughan and his wife Ann and children. Jim has given me several details about village locations and routes. At Micika there is [so I was told](#) a mission school and certainly one white man – again an American. [In fact I never discovered him and am sure the informer was thinking of Jim Vaughan at Gulak.](#)

Yesterday Francis Davies, Colin White and I sat around the village square testing a host of people who were after the jobs of interviewers and assistants. We simply gave them a long sentence to repeat in substance to the next interviewer. Some of the results were reminiscent of the whispering game we play. The best six were selected, all of whom speak three or four languages.

The day before yesterday the District Head⁸ - a grand old man with a most noble profile - called upon us with a gift of chicken and eggs. Chicken have become staple diet - they cost two or three shillings in the market. Later that morning we called upon him, his Council of Village Heads and other leaders he had called together, to put over our mission. We sat in regal splendour in a large thatched Council room with sanded floor, and some 70 people gathered around us on the floor and in the entrance. Davies spoke and his words were translated into Hausa and Margi, the language of this northern Madagali District. We gathered that the people had already been propagandered by the Cameroon Republic side and were prepared to vote that way. By the time Davies had finished, the meeting favoured Nigeria! He had not succeeded in explaining the choice without partiality. In fact he received a polite ovation! [Or perhaps they were simply saying what they thought Davies wanted them to say.](#)

I have said this area is primitive.⁹ People [the women](#) come in from villages and hill hamlets in nothing but leaves or ornaments to sell and buy in the market. The Eastern Region of Nigeria has banned nudity, which is sad because it forces people to spend scarce money on clothes rather than more essential items.

The drivers are a crafty bunch. They're watching all the time for loop-holes and opportunities to flog Government petrol. As their pay is 6 shillings a day and a gallon of petrol costs 4 shillings, you can see the attraction. If they are given a truck to take them into town they again take liberties. One driver chalked up 200 miles of 'local running'; he said he'd been free-wheeling. A

⁸James Vaughan reminds me (2007) that his name was Malam Risku Madziga, who 'was then not really so old, 58. He was baptized in 1927, one of the first converts to Christianity.'

⁹ A word current at the time, denoting peoples which had not developed or adopted more 'advanced' cultural norms, eg literacy.

mitigating factor is their resourcefulness. On one vehicle the petrol pump sediment collector broke. It was quite successfully replaced by a liqueur glass. Another time, on the way to Mubi my truck pulled on to the grass verge, which looked perfectly stable, and the left side wheels promptly sank 18 inches into sodden mud. We devastated the area around as we sought branches to create a firm base. With extra labour recruited from a passing lorry, the truck heaved itself free in four-wheel drive.

Broadcasting the Plebiscite

Gulak

13 September 1960

Tomorrow I start a 6-day tour in real style. This morning I went 6 miles down the road to address some 80 people at Shuwa and then walked and cycled 4 miles east into the bush to talk to a crowd of 100 people at Mayo Wandu. On the way I discovered my landrover hopelessly bogged down in a foot of water and mud. The driver had no right to be there. After talking about the Plebiscite I asked the people of Mayo Wandu for help. And by Allah I marched off singing a song with the whole village following. It was midday too, and all of them no doubt longing for some food and a siesta. It was about one and a half miles back to the landrover and mass manpower soon shifted the truck. The secret of this generous display of course was the immediate and effective authority of the Village Head. He had only to nod his head and the village was ready to go.

It was bliss to return to my house at Gulak this afternoon, strip down and relax. I then had a session with my interpreter, publicity agent and driver, telling them the plan for the next six days. These treks of about 8 miles between villages will take me right up into the hills, and if successful, will represent the first of two difficult areas covered.

My very first outing yesterday took me on a brief 2 mile walk to Duhu¹⁰ south of Gulak at 6.45am. At one point a hyena bounded across my path about thirty yards ahead. It was a mottled grey beast the size of a small leopard with large hind-quarters and an ugly head.

At the village the Chief was hospitable but actually rather embarrassed by my arrival, because the village had not yet assembled. Still, eventually about 60 men turned up and I sat down on a robed chair for my initiation into this aspect of the job. The result was the gift of a young - and therefore not meaty - chicken from the chief. On the way back we passed a woman shouting and gesticulating in delight that she was going to vote for the first time; only men had been at the meeting, so something had got through and been passed on.

¹⁰ The spellings I employed come from various sources: the maps I used, the spellings given by my local colleagues, and from books and papers I looked at, eg C.K. Meek's Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria. Many have naturally changed since then.

This letter was continued later on 2 October (see below).

My diary record of the Tour of Madagali District, 14 to 19 September 1960

I started this tour at Shambula just north of Gulak to which one could drive. There we unloaded all our portable goods and continued on foot. The tour went east to Mildu Bapura and thence further east to the hill village of Sukur near the border. We then turned north-east to Wula Mango and then north-west via Bebel to Madagali where we were back on the road and met the landrover. From Madagali we could drive to Waga (Wogga) Kasa a short distance further north-east and near the road. The first tour was now complete and we returned to Gulak, my temporary home.

14 Sept. Shambula. Not so successful. When the chief arrived I thought he looked rather tired and depressed. Sabo later told me that he and his people disagreed. Hence the meeting was smaller than usual (40). We then recruited 8 carriers, loaded up from the landrover, and walked to Mildu Bapura (7 miles). The welcome was overwhelming. First I was shown a finely groomed bush house with fresh sand on the floor. Onto it had been built from matting a sort of shaded foyer, and behind it was a covered toilet - an eighteen inch hole in the ground. I then spoke to a large group. My words were well received and I chanced my luck and asked them to dance for me later. They agreed. As I write the drummers are warming up. After the talk, the slight movement at the back of the crowd I had noticed earlier materialised in the gift of two sheep, three chicken and some eggs. Amazing generosity. In response, I tip the carriers some two shillings and sixpence each. One sheep was slaughtered and shared that evening.

Note: The matter of food on tour was not such an easy one to resolve. In a hot climate, and with a group of a dozen or so local people in the party, one is unlikely to carry all the food a party of that size needs. There is a tradition in Africa of giving hospitality to the stranger, and as we are now seeing, I was given gifts in the form of animals and flour, which the whole touring group could share. While I gave recompense in the form of cash to the bearers of the gifts, I couldn't be sure that my 'dash' was equivalent to the market price of the goods. I must have consulted my African colleagues on how to respond to the gifts, and assume they advised the action I took, on the basis that it would not give offence to the chief, and yet would offer some payment to the provider. Later in Mubi I sought and achieved greater clarity from my British Nigerian Civil Service colleagues, and was advised not to accept gifts, and to pay the going rate for whatever we needed to get in the way of food. They noted that the 'gifts' had probably been extracted from a member (or members) of the clan whose turn it was to contribute. Thus, by the time we went to Boka in Chubunawa District, we only sought food in return for payment.

About 3.30pm they started a dancing-singing session which went on till 7pm. Gradually more girls arrived including the chief's seven daughters. They were colourfully attired, though scantily. A coloured scarf covered the head, and they wore a strip of cloth with wide indigo and white horizontal bands and a beaded belt round their loins. Another group arrived with many necklaces and bracelets. Some heads were completely shaved and painted blue. Some of the girls were fantastically marked over their bodies, particularly the abdomen. Some older women had a holed lower lip

with a cylindrical object like a cigarette protruding. Babies carried on the back were sometimes completely covered by a form of basket. Babies carried on the back while the mother dances have rhythm stamped upon them. The best dances were those where the girls linked arms and moved slowly round in a circle in perfect rhythmic unison with identical foot and hip movements. The effect of a *perpetuum mobile* was absolutely mesmerising. I just wanted it to go on and on.

Audu's bush-stove worked wonders and I dined on soup, sheep's kidney and liver. I feel tired but extremely well. I have no worries; I just hope the cash lasts!

The people of Mildu Selmi are without a chief. They asked me to appoint a new one. I reluctantly declined the opportunity to be a kingmaker.

15 Sept. After a fairly good night I ate a grapefruit and poached egg, and drank a cup of coffee. Audu packed, I thanked the Head, the Serikin Baraki, and we left for Sukur. After two miles or so the track moved upwards over one of the few 'paved' paths in Nigeria. It was a long climb, and soon the valley stretched out green and peaceful below us. After climbing for about one and a half miles the path levelled out and, following a contour, took us another half a mile to the fortifications outside Sukur, evidence of the strife of many decades between the notorious Hamman Yaji of Madagali and the chief of Sukur. The path was built and supported by rocks the whole way to prevent erosion, and much of the climb took us through terraced slopes sown with guinea corn [sorghum](#). Half a mile from Sukur, I was amazed to see a horse being led towards me. I had been figuring how difficult it would be to take a horse up this rocky slope. The chief had sent it for me to ride! I climbed aboard and the animal was obviously experienced. It hardly put a hoof wrong over damp pebbles, sharp rocks and steep inclines. Sabo Mohammed and the messenger had again done good work. Apart from the luxury of riding into Sukur, feeling like a warrior returning from battle - the chief, robed in white, greeted me with about 70 of his people. My house - a two-room dumb-bell affair - was swept clean and bright. The men were in their everyday clothes, uniformly brown and dirty, and most had little home-spun caps (like night-caps) on their heads. I offered the chief some tea - or shahi as they know it - and soon sat down in my chair to talk to them. At the end, they posed the problem of taxes - not my province! Most of them apparently go away for a spell of work to pay taxes.

We are now at some 4000 feet and I can see 30 or 40 miles over into the Cameroon Republic. Looking back, the country is not undulating but flat, with outbreaks of hilly areas such as this. This is a pretty large outbreak! Looking east from most high points in the range, one can see an extraordinary phallic rock at Humsiki [Roumsiki](#) rising some 600 feet from its base. It is a greatly venerated feature.

In the afternoon I lay down for a snooze, but instead read Forster's *Room with a View*. At 5pm Audu came in to say that people were gathered outside and they had 'dash' for me. The ceremony was slightly embarrassing because after the animals were called for and brought, nobody made a move. Eventually I sent my interpreter Kwatiri to ask 'naively', whether the gifts were for me. Of course they were, and I went forward to receive them. There were two goats, two chicken, eggs and guinea corn. I enthused over a small white goat, told the chief it would be my mascot, promised, as I had done in Mildu Bapura, that I would bring a gift next time, and 'dashed' the carriers. The large goat was taken away for slaughter. I must confess my horror of

slaughter scenes. I have always avoided scenes of death, and yet still cast glances in their direction, half out of morbid curiosity, half to see how squeamish I really am. Today I kept well away but the terrified and terrifying squeals of the beast I could not avoid. It is now being cut up before a crowd of people who will all receive a portion. Audu will take the heart, liver and kidneys for me.

The sun has set (6.10pm) but it still lights up the sky in pink, yellow and orange stripes and swirls. The foreground as I look out over the landscape is a dusky green and the hills and plain beyond shrouded in a blue veil. Despite the bubble and chatter in the meat market behind me, and the chirruping and sustained screech of insects in grass and trees, the infinity of this unique landscape casts a spell over me - a spell of silent contemplation and wonder.

16 Sept. After we had thanked the chief for a comfortable stay, he escorted us to a point where we could see the track running away down before us. We had a three hour trek up and down rocky slopes, and alongside valleys and ravines, cultivated wherever possible with guinea-corn, rice and groundnuts. The bearers had a small dispute en route over heavy loads, let off some steam, and we continued, sweating under the hot sun. How lucky we have been not to have rain while trekking. We arrived at Wula Mango at 12.15pm, after a final jaunt through high rocks surmounted by tiny black figures. It reminded me of a scene from a Western film. The chief was less obvious and imposing than usual, though he was distinguished from his goatskin-clad flock by a woollen toga. We waited some time for people to gather, but in the end the meeting was pretty big. And it was successful. They seemed to grasp the message - smilingly delivered through Sabo and the excellent messenger - and did not question it. Not so long after, they formed up with gifts - 2 chicken, 3 goats, and three bowls of guinea corn. I had again the embarrassing sensation of wanting to match such generosity from poor folk, yet did not have the proper resources.

I thoroughly enjoyed my afternoon - finished *Room with a View*. I do not seem to want to sleep long in the afternoon, and soon feel refreshed after lunch and a wash. Fresh enough that is not to go gallivanting, but to read and write. Audu has been an enormous help to me on questions of form. The last thing one wants to do is offend, and he prevents me from doing this. Kwatiri, my interpreter, who speaks both Higi, his mother tongue, and Margi, is a pleasant boy, naïve, but enjoying the work. With improved English he will be very good. Sabo, my PA, has a charming, shy, self-effacing, unassuming manner; and he hates to enthuse! He is extremely conscientious. I'm so glad I chose him.

17 Sept. Audu made a supreme effort and we set off for Madagali via Bebel at 8am. The chief accompanied us for some five miles along the desolate strip where the Northern Cameroons meet the Republic. After this fairly comfortable walk in cool blustery weather with always the threat of rain, we tackled the range of hills leading down to the Madagali plain. This was quite hard work and I was amazed at the speed of the bearers, particularly down tricky inclines. We went through a lot of water, including flooded guinea-corn fields, to reach Bebel by 1.30pm. There, a large crowd of Fulanis and other groups awaited me. We had a good meeting. The carriers chose to stage a revolt at this stage, saying that to go on to Madagali was too much. I offered them a small 'dash' extra - the sun was scorching hot - and they proved later that their revolt was not in real earnest. They covered the next four miles in fact at a great pace.

After getting my forehead, neck and nose burned I borrowed an umbrella. The Madagali folk gave us a most respectful welcome, bending their heads and raising one or both fists as a sign of greeting to Baturi - or white man. I was installed in a tin roofed hut. After chatting a little I noticed the sound of drums beating not far off. It was a wedding ceremony. I went along. Two drums were being beaten rhythmically while a piper with cheeks inflated like tennis balls blew a tune on a reed-like instrument. The bridegroom was slowly and meticulously having his head shaved whilst people offered money tokens - to help him get married. A master of ceremonies would interrupt the music to announce each gift and its donor. My shilling was ecstatically received! A magician did his party-piece for me - sharpening his razor shaped like a spear-head on his lips - rotating it in his mouth - rubbing broken glass over his face and head - and eating razor blades - quite impressive! The bridegroom was naturally immobile throughout, fanned by three prettily attired girls with fans woven in many colours from wool and thread. The women of the family provided the colourful noisy chorus, emitting high-pitched ululations at each gift. What followed this stage in the Fulani ceremony, nobody could tell me. I shall try to find out. I wish I'd had my camera!

[My new camera, bought in Jos, had been returned because the shutter mechanism was faulty, so I was sadly without a camera during this first tour.](#)

18 Sept. I lazed in bed longer than usual before being escorted down to the school to address a vast crowd - 300 or more people. There were many questions and some showed much more knowledge than I have encountered over the last few days. One problem posed all along the line is how are the Muslim women to vote. We must arrange a special session for them. In the late afternoon I looked round the compound vacated by the tyrant Hamman Yaji about thirty three years ago - a compound with a huge surrounding wall erected by his slaves. His kingdom stretched from Gwoza far south, and he was only ousted by the British who apparently regretted doing so later because the successor was far less effective.

19 Sept. Addressed a crowd of 80 or so at Wogga Kasa on the main road and then went back to Gulak and Mubi. Both Colin and Francis were there. I had letters from home, from friends, and some information about my camera. Colin had not yet done a big tour but had had fun catching bandits bringing in masses of cigarettes from the Cameroon Republic. Both Francis and Jim Bain (Supply Officer) accompanied me back to Gulak.

Madagali,
Northern extremity of my district.

17 September 1960

[While I was in Madagali, I wrote a letter home which tries to give the flavour of this first tour, and how it was run.](#)

It is evening and I have just watched one of those breath-taking sunsets of clouds tinted pink, green and yellow over the hills. I have washed and sit half naked with my kerosene lamp purring at my side.

I have completed tonight the final trekking stage of my northern tour. Today, with my army of 8 bearers, one armed policeman, interpreter and steward, I have walked some 18 miles. This brings the total up to about 40 miles in four days. All but about 10 of these miles will always be impossible by landrover or bike, even in the dry season. An experienced horse can cope with the tricky mountain track, rock-strewn and steep, and the chief of Sukur actually sent his noble steed the last half mile to meet me.

I have crossed the mountain range between Gulak and Madagali on this tour. They rose to nearly 5000 feet, and evenings were pleasantly cool. Today's journey reminded me very much of Scotland. We started at 8am and moved up the border of the old French Cameroons in blustery weather with clouds racing just above our heads and making wreaths about the mountain tops. The country was barren and unpopulated, covered only by elephant grass and scrub, never much more than 3 feet high. Occasionally we would pass thatched compounds nestling against the hillsides, surrounded by cultivated patches of guinea corn, rice and groundnuts. Wild life seemed non-existent. When we came down from the hills onto the Madagali plain, the sun broke through and quickly burned my face and neck.

The scheme I have adopted is to send my publicity assistant one day in advance of my arrival. He travels with a reliable guide recruited from the Gulak Native Authority. Sabo, my PA, warns the chief that I am coming by midday the next day so that he can assemble his people in time. Sabo also sees that a bush house or room is prepared for me to sleep in. When I arrive, I usually offer the chief tea from my flask, sit down in a camp chair surrounded by up to 100 people and tell them the good news. I then have a question time and am posed few problems. I simply have to find the most tactful way of skirting the politically slanted questions. I find that I can quickly establish a sympathetic bond with a crowd and my methods are quite basic - a ready smile, flattery when due, or a simple joke.

After talking I have a late lunch, wash and lie down on my safari bed to read, think and only occasionally sleep. I am finding this work quite exhilarating, and I will try to say why. First, things appear to be going well; second, I love the people; and third, at the back of my mind is the thought that when I return to base there will be news from home, and possibly from a certain girlfriend! I am not finding my own company oppressive or dull. I often enthuse to myself or to my Boy, who perhaps cannot understand my motives. He is a godsend of course and without him this tour would be extremely hard - even impossible. If for instance on arrival I had to start boiling and filtering water, cooking every edible morsel - all on a bush fire - as well as erect safari bed and equipment, I would quickly starve or get sick. Audu does all this and really dislikes me lending a hand. He has already corrected me for attempting things 'below my station'. His outlook is perfectly feudal - I am master and he is proud to be servant.

I shall be covering this ground at least twice more and shall look forward to meeting again these friendly pagans in goatskins who eke out a slender but fairly happy existence among the rocks.

The diary continues.

20th Sept. Jim Vaughan the anthropologist called. He says the women with perforated lips are Tur people. Saw the District Head before finally moving to Micika. Afternoon rent by storms and blustery gales. The Uniport house has been thatched, which softens the noise of the rains. The water creeps in under the door. Oh for the dry season - with some cooling breezes of course!

21 Sept. Spoke at Wuro Ngundi and Kirsinga. The latter was a 4 or 5 mile walk in hot sun, and at the end we discovered only a handful of people. More gathered, principally Fulani, - the rest had gone to market. On the way to Gulak we ran out of petrol and Jim Vaughan helped out. Saw a Fulani girl wearing a Maria Theresa dollar necklace. [These were a very popular fashion accessory, most of them new minted - there can't have been that many originals in existence!](#)

22 Sept. An incredible day started at 7.45am. Walked 6 miles or so to Futu Les at four and a quarter miles per hour! The chief there looked pretty sick, and Sabo Mohammed didn't look much happier. He had not met with an enthusiastic people. I intended returning there in the evening to speak and then sleep. On I went to Futu Dou. The climb was long and very steep - as steep as anything I climbed in Scotland five years ago. The air on the lower slopes was stifling and motionless. I was dripping in perspiration. Later, though still hot, the air was more mobile and a gentle breeze dried some of the sweat. We first addressed a small crowd in lower Futu Dou - Himike, then moved on and slightly upwards to real Futu Dou. The trip from Futu Les to Futu Dou was about 5 miles, perhaps less, because distance when climbing is so deceptive. The mountain compounds contain little houses like beehives huddled together inside cactus-like hedges. They are quite appealing to the eye. The chief was apparently chosen by the women of the village! About 40 Higi villagers listened carefully to our talk and were not inquisitive. Futu Les and Dou have only been opened up to Europeans since 1958. Before then anyone going went at his own risk, and the Government actually prevented people from going. They were a pretty respectful folk, and the existence they lead is meagre - they have about one cooked meal a day. Their occupations are chiefly farming and spinning. While listening to me, three men were spinning cotton on a 'top', keeping it revolving in its dish by an occasional twitch with the spare hand, which usually kneaded the cotton to prepare it for the spindle. The cotton was of a startling whiteness. Perhaps they have heard of OMO [a well-known washing powder at the time](#). On the way back - tumbling, scrambling, sliding and running, I was shown some Higi graves - each a roundel built up of small rocks, with rock-sand in the middle. On top might be a dish or bowl in which a libation could be poured. The Higi bury their dead in a sitting position. A chief, old man, or rich man is still occasionally skinned before burial. Jim Vaughan has seen this happen. In Futu Les I noticed the women wore replica Navy buttons as a decoration on their belts. The actual loin cover consisted of a fringe of cotton or leather strands behind, and an embellished object in front in the form of a square-ended triangular ornament consisting of three smooth sticks about 9 inches long, each covered in leather and brass, bound together and embossed. On either side hangs a fringe of

chains, such as you might have on a key ring. Their ears are perforated with large holes and a coloured stick decoration pushed through. Many mothers cover themselves, the babe and its goatskin protective cover with red ochre.

We didn't stay long at Futu Les - too damp and the bed would not fit the tiny room allotted! With the possibility of storms and a hard day tomorrow, we decided to go back to Micika. By 7.30pm we arrived after covering - 3 of us - some 23 miles. For the last hour we walked in the twilight and in darkness, our way illuminated at times by fireflies. I wonder if I am the first European - or one of many - to walk to Futu Dou and back in one day. Certainly, the people at Himike had not seen a European this year.

Between 22 and 28 Sept. went on day tours to Humushi, Garta, Sina Komude, and Kamale, all due east of Micika, and Mukava Citta, and Fili close by. Spoke to large crowds in Micika and Bazza markets. On 28th recruited Registration Officers and was amazed at the poor standard I was forced to accept.

Second tour, Chubunawa District, 29 September to 2 October 1960

My second major tour of four days took me to mountain villages which were not on the map at all. And not being a cartographer, I don't know where exactly to place them. They were in a southerly direction. The route was to Boka, a remarkably beautiful mountain with terraces all up its side, then to Za and Sufuku, with a halt at Tiliyo on the way back home.

29 Sept. Walked from Micika to Boka, a large domed hill some 10 to 12 miles away. Drinking was going on in Boka so the crowd was pretty volatile. One man was determined to make things difficult, bringing up several grouses. Later my 'smile' remedy won the day and a smile broke through his savagely moody face. I took the plunge to force his capitulation and shook his hand. The chief was not prepared to help much with food for bearers, and I had to persist. **By this stage we were not accepting gifts but sought food in return for payment.** Fortunately there is always one young sympathetic individual to do some chasing. **This was a junior clan head or Wakili.** I heard I had been billed as a white NPC politician (NPC- the main Northern Nigerian Party - and not popular in these parts!). I slept in a little round house, neat and smooth, barely big enough to take a safari bed.

30 Sept. Left early for Za and had a pretty long mountain and valley journey. Za is scattered. Part of it was visible from a rise in the hills - little compounds glistening coppery against the distant slopes. I watched some dancing at Za. There were the traditional slow revolving dances to an insistent and rhythmic drum beat, with the seasonal song accompaniment; and in a crowning celebration dance, a mad rush of men, women and children round and round. Slept in a mud hut.

1 Oct. To Sufuku. A new 'basha' - or straw matting shelter had been constructed; not water proof - no rain as yet. One of the bearers, feeling tired, called a local to pep him up. The remedy was a series of vertical incisions with a razor above the knee, so that blood poured down his leg and stained the ground. He wiped his leg with a bunch of leaves and said he felt better. I've heard of blood-letting but this seemed a bit drastic.

Perhaps a doctor could explain how this treatment works. So far I have been appalled by the contrast in attitude to a stranger in Higi and Margi lands. The Margi were embarrassingly generous. Among the Higi we have to struggle to obtain every morsel. Among the bearers, there is constant 'habinchi palava', ie grousing about food. In the end the chief brought a goat –which I accepted and paid for.

I had obviously been spoilt by the reception in Madagali district, and did not consider other reasons why the Higi might be less forthcoming.

This is Nigerian Independence Day, and I sat on a rock watching the sun go down over the British Protectorate of Nigeria. This momentous event is only mildly felt in the hills. The headman said the people had been influenced by the politician Umaru Micika (a fellow Higi, who was now campaigning to join the Cameroon Republic.) The girls and boys danced for me.

2 Oct. Walk back via Tilijo. I knew the old chief - a man of vital, mischievous character. Passed the mountain which all people fear. It has a hole in the top from which evil spirits rise and into which they go - attracted from a wide area. The people will not leave the hills. "If they do, who will occupy our grandfather's house?"

Michika market and a fascinating discovery!

Michika, where I lived for five months, was a large village and the administrative centre for Chubunawa District. My house was about two hundred yards north of the village and about fifty yards east off the main road, set amidst cultivated land. Between me and the village, on market days the women, who are the brewers in the community, set up their bar, selling guinea-corn beer from large calabashes, or gourds. If I couldn't find my driver on a market day, I knew where to look.

Michika had a market day on a Wednesday and a Sunday. It was an amazing spectacle. Men and women would come in from the furthest Higi villages and they would put on their finer clothes for the occasion. The women would wear the traditional Higi loin covering, which I have described elsewhere. The men would wear homespun robes and caps. The woman of course would carry the goods they wanted to sell in baskets and gourds on their heads.

The market teemed with humanity selling all manner of goods. There were foodstuffs, grain, ochra, peppers, tomatoes, groundnuts, eggs, live chicken and ducks. There were farming tools, there were sets of traditional female dress and their fashion accessories, there were all kinds of materials for charms and medicines. I noticed what looked like a belt with a fringe of chains hanging from it. The chain link was evidently made by the local blacksmith in the village, and each chain was about 18 inches long. I'd never seen it worn and did not do so until we arrived one day in the hill village Boka and found that a funeral ceremony was in progress. The body of an elderly man was there, dressed in robe and turban, which was tied under his jaw; he was seated on the ground against a rock, watching, as it seemed, his own funeral. In the dance, the women and girls rotated inside a circle of men moving slowly in the opposite direction. The men carried sheaths of arrows and bows, to ward off evil spirits. The women wore a long

chain fringe round their waists. I do not know why; I can only say that a chain fringe is apparently what the women wear in a funeral dance.

The registration of voters

Micika

11 October 1960

It seems a little while since I wrote because, I suppose, time has been so incredibly full. I have been working a 48 hour day - teaching one class the work of a Registration Officer, supervising two others, calculating the requirements for forms (thousands of them) for each registration area, and working in the dark here because no-one knows how the women will treat the business. The powers calculate a 50% registration of women, while my registration officers think in terms of 400% (each man having about four wives.) There's some flawed logic here. However careful I am over these calculations, I'm sure there will be a stream of SOS calls for 'more female forms,' - so like a good boy scout I'm preparing a system of communications with my HQ at 'The Inferno' - my name for my house - where a clerk will be on duty day and night egad! - to deal instantly with demands. I will be touring furiously to check progress for myself, trying at the same time to get back to Micika as often as possible to see reports. I have appointed ten Assistant Supervisors, and they are responsible for getting the vital info back to me about the efficiency of the Registration Officers, the state of the forms, the speed of registration etc. I will tour every station at least once; they will get to their stations every two or three days.

Had great fun yesterday when I actually saw what I had feared - the skill of our recruits at counting over 100. Several of them got as far as 109 and went straight to 200! This is FATAL! It is good to eliminate errors like this now, hoping that on the job it doesn't happen *too* often!

Tomorrow I have to fly [but in a landrover](#) to Mubi to get £440 to pay my people before they leave for the bush on Friday and Saturday (15th Oct). I keep well away from Mubi now because the Administrative Body with its enormous TAIL is there in force. Being the HUB, there is a CRISIS, per minute, flap per second, and CHAOS the whole time. Why should I load myself with all their problems when merely looking in for a chat and a cuppa? I keep to Micika and my 88 trainees for whom I appear a fount of knowledge and experience! One chap asked today if there was an office established for him in the bush. A caustic reply, loaded with sarcasm, flew back at him and the rest of the course howled with laughter...

I ate fish today, bought by Audu in Bazza market - freshly caught. I sent a loud-speaker van down there to broadcast the registration, and it was a great success. It is going to Micika and Gulak markets tomorrow.

I reckon my publicity has been almost as good as it could be considering the problems of local inhibitions and fears, and the lack of communications. The

UN are peeved that we started publicity before they came. If the registration is a success it will be because of the personal contacts I and others have made with the villages...

To give a flavour of the registration period I will cite here a brief diary record I kept in the last week of October 1960. (My diary keeping was not a continuous affair!) By the time I made my second round of tours, I had a new camera, a Zeiss Ikon, and was very pleased with it.

22 Oct. Back to Boka with the District Head. Found that 269 men and 116 women had registered. Latest device to attract women was an old record player.

Looked over Boka. It is a fascinating village, largely because of the mountain - smooth green and black, with a jagged rocky summit. From the distance one sees neat compounds dotted round its slopes; closer in one sees the careful way that terraces have been constructed to make cultivation possible. The mountain is called Humnde and the summit is a place for sacrificial rites to propitiate the spirits.

23 Oct. Comfortable walk with District Head to Za. Only 16 women had registered in six days. By the end of that day 137 had registered! The crowds were volatile and drink-sodden. They listened quietly to me but plied the District Head with questions. Two men drew knives over the tax/registration dispute. They reckoned that to register would put a tax noose round their necks. Saw women with a nail in the lower lip.

24 Oct. By the time I left, 326 men and 153 women had registered. On to Tuku Dou which is a perfect hill village, symmetrically centred on a tree. Thence to Tuku Mise where 178 men and 121 women had registered. In Sufuku-Kali enjoyed a wonderful sunset in tranquil silence in the company of the District Head.

25 Oct. Back to Micika.

31 Oct. To Mildu Selmi. Happy to be back. Registration going well. Enjoyed comparative civilisation because Umaru Jarengal (a supervisor) lent me his radio. BBC overseas news came through crystal-clear at 6 am.

1 Nov. Sukur Dou. No problems with registration. The entrance to the village is marked by two tall pillars of rock which nature can't have put there. Learnt that they were brought there from Kamale by two giants called Duvu and Fula. Also learned about two wine bowls located there which if not kept filled will spell bad luck for the kingdom. Though giants, Duvu and Fula were apparently men of Sukur; in fact they were sons of a Chief. [The local title is Llidi. The Fulbe \(Fulani\) term for chief is Arnado.](#) Hence the present Arnado is descended from giants. But he is not a monster himself!

Saw the compound of a 'rich man'. A cow was being fattened in one house. After six months in solitary confinement it is slaughtered on a certain day with feasting and dancing. There is a kudos value in having people dance before your house. As well as guinea corn and groundnuts, he grows tomatoes, peppers, tobacco, and garlic.

Writing and receiving letters was of course on-going. Often I would not see mail until I went to Mubi or someone was coming to or passing Michika. But once I received a letter way out in the hills at Wula Mango!

Micika

6 November 1960

My last tour round the north from which I returned two days ago, was a very happy one. I met the same degree of hospitality and relished again living in the little mud rest houses. I took several photos - this time at the correct film speed, and stayed long enough at Wula Mango to snap some Wula women who have their own variations of dress, tribal markings and language.

Everywhere is feverish activity among the people. They are harvesting now and spend the whole day from day-break in the fields. It is a familiar sight to see a glistening black back bent over a short-handled hoe, rooting up groundnuts. The women (who do most of the work) are registering extremely well.

I met Sir Percy Wyn Harris last night in Mubi. Francis lured me down with the temptation of good food, wine and music. Enid, his wife, got me an invitation to a little toasting party for the first born of the Mubi doctor and his wife. Sir Percy is a great chap - squat, humorous, unassuming and quite un-pompous. He has a pretty distinguished record: two attempts on Everest in the Thirties, climbed Kilimanjaro, Governor of The Gambia. He's pretty pleased with the way the registration is going.

I had a number of wonderful evenings with Francis and Enid when, after a meal, we would simply listen to a major classical work. Francis had a record player which was intermediate between the old 78 rpm wind-up and the contemporary Long Play machine. He had to wind it up, but only every 20 minutes.

Did I tell you that I shall be moving a long way south for three weeks starting on 18th December? My job there will be to revise the published lists of voters, hearing objections etc. After that, back to Micika for the final blast.

Micika

11 December 1960

Sunday evening, getting dark, rather clammy, must move outside - it's cooler. A quicky this, before I tackle some work. Much to tie up in my district before moving south via Mubi and Yola on Thursday and Friday.

Life has been very good - particularly the last fortnight. Nothing much has happened (except my visit to Marua across the border - see below) but I've been in a good frame of mind...

Christmas but fourteen days away. Don't know where it will be spent or who with. Yours will be grand! I shall think of you and wish that I were home for the important two or three days.

I've received my second set of photos back. I am delighted with some of them. Close-ups are the most difficult because the bright light throws dark shadows or flattens out features, thus obliterating the tribal markings I try to capture.

Bit tired just now. Have had glorious three days. Went to Mubi to discuss polling - managed to get some decisions my way. Lunch with Francis and two bottles of wine! Drinks in evening with Stuart Johnson and dinner with Francis. Home very late. Hard work Friday morning then off to glorious Gwoza to stay with John Kevan. Dinner with the American UN Observer there. Yesterday motored 100 miles to Marua across the border. Bought a demi-john (10 litres) of wine for under £2 and ate a marvellous lunch - 5 courses or so with 4 varieties of meat at a simple French-run restaurant. Marua is quite large - about 80 to 100 French people who still fill the specialist and technical posts. A good local arts and crafts centre where one can buy at a fixed price the wood and leather goods which appear in the traders' bags in Nigeria. I will go again to buy some things - this time I was more interested in tickling my palate. Fabulous drive there through the Matakam¹¹ hills, with compounds clinging to the sides. Thatched roofs shaped like Gothic steeples. We were in an 'open' landrover - open because it had lost its superstructure recently in an accidental roll - so I got covered with dust. A big stretch of the journey was over the dry flood plain of Lake Chad. There was no road - we simply followed a compass bearing over the hard flat mud. John is a splendid chap. I find myself immediately in sympathy with him and he with me - even though he is thirty eight - *how young that seems to me now in 2009!* - and holds several different views from mine. I shall always remember the sunsets and sunrises while relaxing on the wide verandah of his thatched house wonderfully perched on a little hillock of its own overlooking a great vista of Africa.

Time is flying. Two months to the Plebiscite. Busy organising my staff of 120 'educated' polling officers, erecting model polling booths in Gulak and Micika, and persuading all the chiefs to buy their straw matting and poles now. They will face my wrath if they have nothing to show when I go to supervise the building! I've given them each £1 to start with. That will go on beer straight away of course, and they will rely upon what feudal power they have left to get the material.

It's some time since the *Creation* now. *My father conducted and my mother sang in a church choir which performed major works.* Do hope it was a success. Longing to sing chorally again. The acoustics of my Uniport are rather good (its only useful characteristic). I'm teaching Audu *Sixteen Ton and What do you Get* and moving on soon to *Why do the Nations?* Why do they?

¹¹ According to Müller-Kosack the derogatory ethnonym 'Matakam' was still in use in writings by French ethnographers until the late 1960s, when it was replaced by the politically correct ethnonym Mafa.

A pause to review the registration lists

Karamti-Gashaka-Toungo District

Started 19 December 1960

I had now moved south, to the lower part of the Northern Cameroons, for the registration review period of two weeks. This letter was typed, using carbons to make copies, because it was intended as a round robin newsletter.

I have just motored some 400 miles south from Micika to this large but sparsely populated district to do what is officially called the revising of the published registration lists. I do not anticipate any objections here, and in any case the lists have not arrived yet. This is in fact the lull, or holiday, that none of us expected to get. My UNO Observer last night declared his intention to spend Christmas in Yola, and the New Year in Jos, in fact, miles away from any lists. He is a pro-British Egyptian gourmet. He lives 18 miles away in a little house like mine. The house is one of the delights of my temporary life here. It is just like a little English cottage in the hills, looking out on a green forest and grey-green mountains. It is made of mud and concrete, corrugated iron and thatch. Both the sitting room and the bedroom give out onto a small veranda with a thatched roof. There is no sophistication - except for a tennis court! The house was built by the Public Works Department when they were pushing the laterite road through to Serti. The levelling of the court was therefore a simple matter. Bruce Cantlie, my counterpart here, has made the court playable. All he has needed, as I do now, is someone to play with. I think I shall suggest to Bruce that we form the Karamti Tennis Club and affiliate it to Wimbledon. If we were both here at the same time we could have a championship.

This is perfect isolation. I am 200 miles away from any hospital or store, and a short drive takes me to the escarpment of the magical lost world of Mambilla Plateau. (Of course it's not lost to the many Fulani up there). A climb of 7000 feet leads you to the rolling hilly grassy land, grazed by a quarter of a million Fulani cattle. It is the equivalent of the Kenya White Highlands - immensely fertile, but unlike the White Highlands, undeveloped. I met Thornley Edmunds yesterday as he emerged from his trek and descent of the escarpment, which had taken him three days. He has been up there for three months doing the plebiscite supervisory job, and returns for the final fling in a fortnight. We had a glorious Livingstone-Stanley reunion, because he hadn't expected me to go to meet him. He had about twenty bearers - a mere handful because he went up with sixty. The plateau verges on the Southern Cameroons, and can be approached by road from the south. Thornley is hoping to return in a landrover by the southern circuit. Although it would be a 900-mile trip, the cost would be very little more than the journey with bearers.

One of the snags of this isolation is the scarcity of food. My staff feel this more than I do of course, and I'm busy flogging my detestable tins of corned beef to them at reduced price. My trouble is getting fresh meat, fruit and vegetables. There is no village here, and hence no market. My landrover went off to Beli 40 miles away to get meat for me and food for the boys. It is only a

tiny market there today, but quite large enough a magnet to hold the boys there until 5pm.

My drive down here was both exciting and beautiful. I came by the dry season road, which is simply a widened footpath. When the rains come, the bush swallows it up, temporary log and laterite bridges are washed away, and the patched surface is gouged and crevassed by raging torrents. This road - from Ganye to Karamti - is 112 miles of good fun. Slopes almost perpendicular led down to the culverts or drifts, while the actual road curled, climbed and twisted through increasingly forested and mountainous country. Where the north is now getting rather brown, here it is still quite green. Not far south one reaches the same latitude as Ibadan - really tropical, palmy and humid. Thornley tells me that on Mambilla there are still intense storms at times. Nights are apparently cold enough for four or five blankets, and there is a very heavy almost frosty dew in the morning. On the trip we came across a big family of baboons. We split up the family on either side of the road and they retreated 30 yards into the bush to watch us as curiously as we watched them. Some were about 5 feet tall. They sat on rocks or perched in trees barking and scratching themselves. Later on we saw a beautiful deer which paused in the road for a few seconds before taking off with a gracefully balanced leap into the bush.

It is six days to Christmas, and if I am lucky I will spend Christmas Day on my own. On the 26th and 28th Stuart Johnston and Keith Kinross (his Assistant for the South) and his wife will be touring down this way. My Christmas Day is likely to be interrupted by the Ministry of Works road engineer who lives 15 miles down the road. He's a very tough London ex-sapper sergeant with a vast appetite for beer. Generous and friendly as he is, I hope my whole day won't be monopolised by him.

I'm trying to clean up the sitting room a bit to make look less than an office and more a festive scene. Someone is going to find a few fronds of greenery for me - palm, banana leaves etc.

This is such a restful district compared with my own. There seems to be no political activity at all. Bruce Cantlie has certainly been quite untroubled for four months. He has had other problems of course, chief of which has been to find the people. Although this district is the size of several counties, its registered adult population was only 13,000. Mine was 41,000 in a much smaller area (1500 square miles).

Just before I left my district there was an incident. The pro-Cameroon Republic leader [Umaru Micika](#) made a speech not far from my house. It was a Sunday market and to attract some people a chap with a bugle marched through the throng blowing Reveilles and things, looking rather like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. I drove off at this point to address the Village Heads at Gulak (15 miles north). When I returned Audu told me the people had seemed pretty excited. "Perhaps Umaru tell them some fine story." It was Sir Percy himself who told me later that after his speech Umaru jumped into his car (wisely as it turned out) and drove back to his house opposite the market followed by a

procession of people with drums, knives and spears. Back in the town there was a skirmish and someone was wounded. The police are now investigating. I have since been told that the pagans in the market set upon the procession. If this is true it is priceless! The pagan people are normally terribly gullible, and will believe every successive tale. This was demonstrated during the registration when I had to chase around scotching all sorts of lies. But in this case it could mean that Umaru Micika is right out of sympathy with the pagans - that no story he tells will they now believe. To win his Federal House seat he promised tax relief. Then he did nothing. It would be very difficult now for him to find an original and equally convincing bait. A promise of 'Regional Status' would mean little to the uneducated English country bumpkin, let alone a Higi hill pagan. Only a miracle now could sway the vote in the Northern Cameroons to the Cameroon Republic. The South is a very different matter. Considerable political and economic pressure (ie bribery and corruption) must have been used to place the vote in such doubt. Actually the Cameroon Republic doesn't seem terribly interested in the North. Their publicity is uncoordinated and often illegal, while the statement by Adhiju the PM offers nothing more tangible than the regional status mentioned.

After this rest it will be fun to get back to my district and start the last lap of building polling booths (47 chez moi) training polling officers and sending them off, hoping that a) polling booths are still standing, b) ballot papers are not lost, and c) voting boxes are not pinched. Then the counting, mopping up and drive back to Kaduna.

I hope to do two more treks of 6 and 4 days, to supervise the building in the remote hill stations, where even finding a space large enough is a tricky matter. This will give me an opportunity to say farewell to these tough and wiry people, and to take some photographs which I could not do before. Landscape photography is less successful now at the end of the rains, because the Harmattan (a northerly wind) has filled the upper atmosphere with particles of Sahara dust. Hills and colours lose their definition and intensity.

I must now start typing some business letters arranging my flight home and a job when I get there.

Karamti

27 December 1960

I have been very touched by the trouble people have taken at this busy time to send me not only a card but a letter. I actually had 16 cards decorating my wall on Christmas day. I've no doubt there are several more waylaid somewhere. The Plebiscite Admin. has been very thoughtful and even though I am 200 miles from a proper town and 112 miles from the Southern HQ where Kinross lives, mail has often come down the line.

I had a very pleasing contrast over Christmas. The 25th I spent on my own and would have been perfect had I not had my first fall on the hill behind the

house. I was on my way up to snap a view over the valley and be silent for a while.

I was negotiating some pretty big rocks, and standing with one foot on one and reaching out to the next rock with the other, when there was the slither of a snake just beside me. It startled me enough for me to lose my balance and fall backwards, catching one foot and twisting it in the crevice between the rocks. It hurt a lot and I really thought I'd done myself a terrible injury.

Nothing was broken but I had to return very slowly to the house, and was able to be quiet on the veranda looking out over forest to the near mountain range. Only in the evening was my peace disturbed (just when I had gone to bed) by the arrival - drunk - of the road engineer. Fortunately, the Touring Doctor, just down from the Mambilla escarpment, came with him and was a great help in removing him later on. Boxing Day was splendid. I decorated during the day and made this charming little whitewashed cottage even more attractive with palm leaves, polish, and a rearranged design. I called the establishment the Karamti Club in writing a piece on the life and work here of Bruce Cantlie, and their repercussions on me - libellous of course. I was also delighted to receive greetings from affiliated Clubs the MCC, Wimbledon, Carlton etc - all sent to me by me.

Johnston, Kinross and his wife arrived late afternoon, and we had a splendid time just chatting, drinking and eating in a relaxed and almost sophisticated fashion. Surprising how much can be done to and in a bush house. They left this morning and I went to have a drink with the Egyptian UNO Observer - pro-British but not pro-British politics. He says this is true of most Egyptians.

I think this fortnight will remain one of my happiest memories, It is truly a holiday, and because I am enjoying it so much, time passes quickly. There have been no complaints and all I've had to do is send lists and letters on to the chap up on Mambilla. I start my return journey on the 3rd January, arriving Micika about the 6th...

New Year's Eve 1960

I can't remember quite how it came about, but just before the New Year I was discovered by a family of American missionaries of the Sudan Interior Mission, and invited to their house for New Year's Eve. It was a happy evening and distinguished, for me, by being entirely teetotal. I believe one has to drink ten gallons (or is it litres?) of water to attain a state approaching inebriation. I certainly drank a vast quantity of orange juice, and before midnight I was feeling quite lightheaded, relaxed and euphoric; almost tipsy in fact. And I suffered no hangover the next morning. I have to admit however that 1960 saw my last teetotal New Year's Eve.

Preparing for polling day

Some notes I kept of my return visits to Boka and Za. I was especially keen to learn as much as I could about the culture of these people and thus add to the fragments I had learned on the previous visit.

11 Jan. 1961. Boka. Set off from Micika with rope to build the first mountain polling station. To my delight I found everything ready on arrival and so set to work immediately. The 3 labourers worked with terrific energy, and the booth was finished before the arrival of Audu and the bearers.

The ridge or terrace farming which surrounds Boka mountain was much more apparent now that the corn is harvested. The villagers are now rather less busy. I found pottery work in progress - some women were firing pots in hot ash. Although most of the cotton spinning is done by men, occasionally the women will do it, as I saw in Boka.

It was clear that the Wakili, the clan head, had paid his labourers in beer and kept our first cash payment in advance for himself. There was some dispute over this and the Wakili insisted on receiving his second £1 privately. As long as the work is done I don't mind. The labourers seemed happy and were most courteous to me. Spent the night in a 'basha' quite comfortably, with a view of the stars.

12th Jan, 1961. Za. After breakfast of fried eggs and tomato got away by 7.45am. Arrived at Za quite late after a stop at Tuku Bulamo to explain why I cannot give them a separate polling booth. Feel sorry about this but Johnston has said No to extra polling stations. Most likely that it is not the distance that worries the people but village rivalry.

Materials again ready at Za. The Wakili an extremely generous young man. He said that the people had refused to help when the messenger came, so as on previous occasions, he and two henchmen did the work of building me a comfortable basha - a screened area surrounding a mud and stone round house - where I write. He came to tell me his child was sick so I have supplied meagre assistance from my medicine chest. He has given my staff a chicken but I have paid for everything I have received.

One man mentioned a promise by Umaru Micika of a tax reduction of 15 shillings. According to the Wakili, Umaru had also said it was because of him that taxes had not been collected; and if the women voted for Nigeria they would each pay a tax of 30 shillings.

Micika

17 January 1961

Since my last letter a lot of sweat has flowed under the bridge. I have covered about 60 miles of mountains - 15 of them today - and have the last real slog tomorrow - dear old Futu Dou, which in plebiscite circles has become legendary because I always seem to be just going to it or just coming from it. It's the highest thing by far for many miles around and I use it as a sort of

escape valve from bureaucracy. After today's jaunt I am still fighting off the feeling of dehydration. I take a litre flask of cold water with me and eke it out during the day's work, then return gasping to the fridge, consume two bottles of squash, water, and then iced beer - Heineken's Dutch beer in tins 'purveyed' - always sounds such a naughty word - to the King of Sweden. I returned by 5pm and found some mail including some books despatched ages ago - then festered in my pit for half an hour before a bath. Now I await my solid meal of the day.

It staggers me to think that the Plebiscite is but 25 days away. 'The sun will rise and set 25 times before you vote' I've been telling the people today. We have been building booths fast and furiously. We have now put up 13, and by the end of the week all the mountain ones will be built. The rest can be looked after by landrover trips over rough but motorable tracks. The two we put up today were really quite smart affairs for 3600 feet. On my trek of 4 days recently the plan had to be modified considerably to accommodate rocks, trees and sheer lack of space...

[I had decided to return to UK via The Hague in order to visit a girlfriend.](#) There are complications. The bloody agent in Kaduna is tending to ignore our appeals for abnormal routes. However, Stuart Johnston is sympathetic so I'm going to write to him to intervene.

I can see daylight in the work now. I still have the course timetable for the polling officers to arrange. Outside the Plebiscite there is much to do. I am trying hard to consolidate material on the Higi (particularly) and Margi tribes from my own investigations and the sketchy portraits of previous anthropologists. The Higi only seem to have been studied briefly by one man - Meek, the Nigerian Govt. anthropologist. Then on my return from trek I found a very urgent letter from Francis asking me to produce (script/write) a revue!! This is an 'end of the affair' show particularly designed to entertain a body of the RAF who are arriving with troop carriers to ferry police to any trouble spots during the Plebiscite. A play was originally intended, but nobody was prepared to commit himself to intensive rehearsal. We contemplate now, rather than a revue, a party with cabaret. I have already produced some material and ideas - topical - and if others rally we can put on a very interesting session. [This letter also asked my parents to send material from my performance file at home.](#) All in all the last 5 weeks will be frantically busy - and I hope very enjoyable.

My trek was the last round of the difficult Higi hill tribes. This time I took several tins of meat so that I wouldn't be dependent on the people producing a chicken. I would not have bothered them with my presence and extra bearers (there were 15 altogether because of the polling booth gear), thus putting a strain on the local economy, had it not been essential to show my face for the last time and give them the true facts of the Plebiscite. Opinion seems to be hardening now, and even the hill people are not taken in by promises of tax reduction.

At Tili today, I learned that even in the hills the price a man pays for a wife is £50! This social demand naturally sends the young man away from his family for several months to places like Maiduguri or Yola to earn £10 here and £5 there during the harvest season.

Thinking about the future, meanwhile

While in the Cameroons I needed of course to do something about a job when I got back home. A friend who had similar ambitions to my own, to work abroad in some interesting field, had applied in 1960 to join the British Council. Although he wasn't accepted then he was offered a British Council Studentship to pursue a Postgraduate Certificate of Education at London University, and be trained to teach English as a second or foreign language. He accepted this offer and wrote to me very positively about the course. I felt this could be just what I wanted, because it could be a springboard for a career overseas. I therefore applied to join the British Council's established service, in the hope that if I didn't get in, I would likewise secure a studentship. I thus had interviews waiting for me when I got home.

Micika

9 February 1961

The agent, without informing me, booked me Kano-London on the 26th Feb. It was only by spotting the letter in a file in the Mubi office that I knew of this. I quickly wrote a letter to Nigerian Airways requesting an open-dated ticket from Rome (assuming the plane goes via Rome). Then I can get the Dutch airline to Amsterdam.

The last week has been incredibly busy. Until the 11th hour I was completely alone *as far as management and training was concerned*. Then I had the help of two Europeans to issue the stores. Mubi has had the permanent guidance of Francis and assistance of his wife Enid, and Grace Harrison, one organising stores, the other the course. I feel rather satisfied therefore that I have managed everything almost single-handed. Given a safe passage over the next four days the job is done. The day after tomorrow, polling begins. After feverish activity, rallies, speeches, processions, film shows by both parties, there is a 7-day moratorium to allow the tempo to simmer down. 34 men were arrested in Micika for trying to release their wives from jail!

I have no idea why the women were in jail. Given the vital role of women in that society, I don't know how they had time to do anything to merit imprisonment!

No other incidents, although the police detachment is standing by and reinforcements are permanently alerted at Mubi. Micika has become the focal point for security. I think the poll however will be quiet.

All my polling booths are up, and the polling staff left yesterday with all their security stuff carefully sealed. They have two days to prepare their stations, then to begin voting on the 11th. I think the poll will be a heavy one here. I and

the two helpers will be charging around half the night gathering in as many boxes as we can so that security risks are cut down to the minimum. Counting takes place in Mubi so I shall no doubt move there for a couple of days...

I've sent my application to the British Council quoting Francis as one referee and Hausa as my fourth language. Heard of any good jobs lately?

This was the last letter home that was kept, though not necessarily the last I wrote, and there are some gaps that need filling.

On the political front, there was less activity until the last stages from the Nigerian side than from the Cameroon Republic. However, I was accused of partiality by both sides, a state of affairs that the UN Observer considered perfectly satisfactory. It was not surprising that the tax bogey raised its head so often. To many people taxation was all they seemed to know about the effects of government, and in the past, the arrival of a Government official, like the District Officer, meant simply that the tax collector had come. This is why my arrival on the scene would have been regarded with distinct suspicion, and why I worked hard to persuade them that I had nothing to do with tax collection.

Other difficulties we experienced in the Higi hills may have been prompted by politicians, notably Umaru Michika, who, it was said, went around persuading the people to be uncooperative. In the end however, we managed to achieve all our goals.

To overcome Muslim worries, the poll took place on two days, with the men voting on the first day and the women on the second. At registration, each person was issued with a numbered card that entitled him or her to vote, provided they brought the card to the polling booth and were duly checked off against the approved list of registered voters. They were then given a voting ticket. They had a simple choice. There were two sealed metal boxes with a slit in the top which were fixed to a plank which itself was secured. One box was black, representing Nigeria, and the other was red, representing the Cameroon Republic.

Polling, an unexpected nocturnal excursion and farewells

When polling day came, everything seemed to be going smoothly until about 10.30 that night. Then a bedraggled, exhausted and wounded man staggered into our HQ. He'd come all the way from Za to report that there had been a riot at the polling booth there that morning and the booth had been closed. We decided that we must take immediate action, and after making preparations I set out with my immediate assistants and two policemen on a nocturnal trek to Za. There was a moon, the night was calm and, perhaps because I knew the mountainous route better now, it was not too difficult. However we had our worries about what we would meet at the other end and how we would deal with it. We arrived in Za at dawn. The first fires had been lit, smoke curled up into the air and cocks were crowing everywhere. People popped their heads in surprise out of the holes in the tops of their beehive grain stores and greeted us. I returned the greeting with teeth somewhat gritted.

The atmosphere had calmed down since the previous day, and after hearing the stories, I decided that it was not my place to adjudicate, simply to ensure that polling could be carried out in a secure manner. Polling had not even started the day before, so I simply rescheduled voting so that the men voted that day and the women the following day. And this is what happened. Leaving the policemen there, I returned to Michika.

The result of the Plebiscite in our region was a victory for Nigeria. In my area only one station voted for the Cameroon Republic and that was - guess where? - at Za! After the fracas there, the turn-out had been very low but it is perfectly possible that even on a complete turn-out the result would have been the same. Perhaps after all, that was the one place where Umaru Michika's manifesto had been believed. In the Southern Cameroons, the people chose to join the Cameroon Republic, making it a country where both French and English were the official second languages. Now, the Cameroon Republic is also a member of the Commonwealth, as well as being a member of its francophone equivalent.

The final party and cabaret was a huge success. Wyn Harris and Stuart Johnston were there. I couldn't help remembering how Stuart and I had found common ground in theatre in the interview, and thinking how he might now feel that at last his vote for me had finally paid off.

After heart-felt farewells we were driven to Maiduguri where we caught a plane to Kano. My international flight took me to Rome, and I joined a KLM flight to Amsterdam.





And so, farewell to the Cameroons. I kept in touch for a while with Colin White and John Kevan, and, for a longer time, with Francis and Enid Davies. My wife Jane whom I met in 1961 and married in 1962 met all these people. Some time after the Plebiscite, I received a thankyou letter and a gift from Sir Percy, - an inscribed silver plate ashtray - a memento of an extraordinary and unrepeatable experience.




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30 July 2010





Photo Archive





Photo Archive of Northern Cameroons Plebiscite 1960/61
(Photographer: Malcolm Cooper)





001		<p>Michika</p> <p>The Plebiscite Team for Chubunawa and Madagali. (Rear: Sabo Mohammed, Publicity Assistant; Mohammed Bello, Driver; Kwatire Kwazale, Interpreter; Mohammed Sule, Driver. Front: Mr Egbu, Clerk; Francis Davies, Assistant Plebiscite Administrator, based in Mubi; his wife, Enid Davies; Malcolm Cooper; Audu Gara, Cook/Steward.)</p>
002		<p>Michika</p> <p>My Uniport house (by tree in foreground) from the air, with cookhouse and cook's quarters behind. Situated a few hundred yards north of Michika township.</p>
003		<p>Michika</p> <p>My Uniport house with zana matting thatch, looking east to the Mandara Mountains.</p>
004		<p>Audu Gara - Cook Steward</p>






005		<p>Michika market</p> <p>I took this picture standing on a landrover equipped with public address system which we used to explain the plebiscite to the market people.</p>
006		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Right of picture: red ochre on body indicating woman had recently given birth. Baby shaded with beehive-shaped basketry cover.</p>
007		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Higi woman with distinctive Higi cache-sexe, and elaborate body markings on chest, shoulders and abdomen.</p>





008		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Higi woman with clear body marking on back, elongated ear-plugs, back piece of cache-sexe.</p>
009		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Higi woman with baby. Three young mothers, with goatskin baby-carriers and baby shades, all heavily smeared with red ochre.</p>
010		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Woman with distinct body marking. Less elaborate cache-sexe. Significant body marking suggests ready to marry if not already married. If married, possibly not yet given birth.</p>


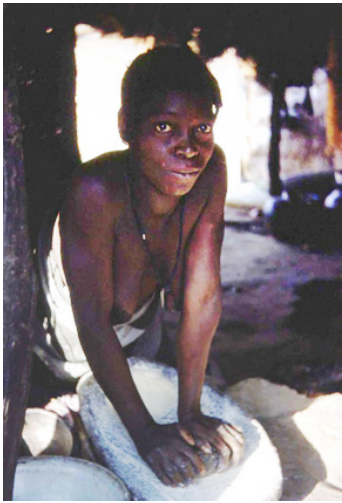


011		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Higi and Fulbe men.</p>
012		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Higi girl displaying eggplants, and possibly tomatoes.</p>
013		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Yams.</p>
014		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Farming tools: 3 sickles, 3 hoes, and several diggers.</p>





015		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Medicinal items, mainly animal-derived.</p>
016		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Central, front, component of Higi female cache-sexe.</p>
017		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Fashioning the back part of Higi cache-sexe on top of a wooden stool.</p>
018		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Knives.</p>





019		<p>Michika market</p> <p>Higi apron made of iron chains, later seen worn by women at funeral dance.</p>
020		<p>Michika</p> <p>Beer market. Sorghum beer made and sold by women. My driver, Mohammed Sule, in yellow shirt in centre with half gourd of beer.</p>
021		<p>Michika</p> <p>Higi girls on way to market, one with several decorative items to sell.</p>
022		<p>Basket maker on way to Bazza market.</p>





023		<p>Bazza market</p> <p>Fulbe girls.</p>
024		<p>Bazza market</p> <p>Higi and Fulbe women. Young Higi mothers with goatskin baby-carriers and basketry shades.</p>
025		<p>Chubunawa tour</p> <p>Starting trek to hill villages from a short distance south of Michika. The landrover has dropped us to continue the journey on foot. The first destination will be Boka, about three and a half hours walking distance.</p>
026		<p>Chubunawa trek</p> <p>Kwatiri, interpreter, leads the way to Boka. Bearer carries Cooper's camp chair and overnight bag.</p>
027		<p>Chubunawa trek - en route to Boka.</p> <p>Cooper looks back the way they've come.</p>

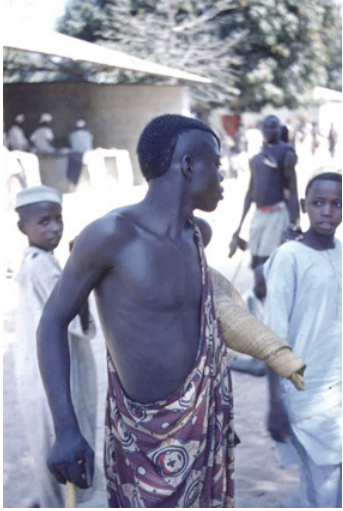


028		<p>Arriving at Boka</p> <p>Note the terracing on hillside and the tightly knit compounds.</p>
029		<p>Boka</p> <p>Woman spinning cotton under the mountain called Humnde. Notice stone walls.</p>
030		<p>Boka</p> <p>Woman spinning cotton.</p>
031		<p>Boka</p> <p>Firing pots of the soup bowl type. Note goatskin baby-carrier.</p>

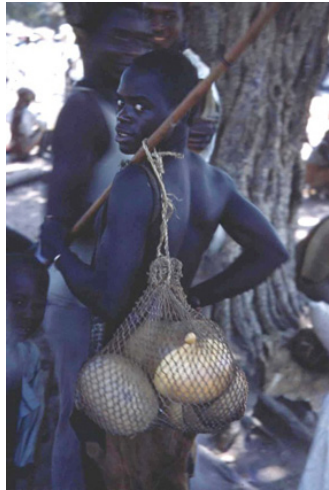



032		<p>Boka</p> <p>Winnowing grain.</p>
033		<p>Boka</p> <p>Young woman grinding flour.</p>
034		<p>Boka</p> <p>Higi funeral ceremony. Note drummer in centre.</p>
035		<p>Boka</p> <p>Men dancing at funeral ceremony. Dressed as warriors, the young men honour the dead as hunter and warrior.</p>




036		<p>Boka</p> <p>Women at funeral dance. Note chain aprons first seen for sale in Michika market.</p>
037		<p>Boka</p> <p>House building.</p>
038		<p>Futu Dou</p> <p>Higi graves.</p>
039		<p>Futu Dou</p> <p>Hilltop compound.</p>





040		<p>Futu Les</p> <p>Compound. Note the closely packed rooms and granaries.</p>
041		<p>Futu Les</p> <p>Drying crops.</p>
042		<p>En route to Za.</p> <p>One policeman with rifle accompanied every trek. Za was about 4 hours walking distance from Boka.</p>
043		<p>Za</p> <p>Wakili and elders.</p>





044		<p>Za</p> <p>Libation pot at house door.</p> <p>When the Wakili's child was ill, he said he went to the medicine man who told him to kill a goat and touch the pot with it and again after cooking it, as a way of making the child better.</p>
045		<p>Sufuku</p> <p>District Head addressing group by my overnight basha. In some places I slept in a basha made especially for me from zana matting; at other times I put up my camp bed in one of their small round rooms, swept and kindly made available for me. It barely fitted!</p>
046		<p>John Kevan, Plebiscite Supervisor, Gwoza.</p>
047		<p>Gwoza market</p> <p>Girl with fine hair style.</p>




048		<p>Gwoza market</p> <p>Youth, also with fine hair styling.</p>
049		<p>Gwoza market</p> <p>Boater boys.</p>
050		<p>Gwoza market</p> <p>Man in boater.</p>




051		<p>Gwoza market</p> <p>Youth with netted calabashes.</p>
052		<p>Gwoza</p> <p>Cooper at Kevan's house.</p>
053		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Camel and driver with bags of salt.</p>
054		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Waga girl, probably.</p>




055		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Waga woman, probably.</p>
056		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Young women, probably Waga, with attractive hair banding.</p>
057		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Girl with anklets of twisted fibre. Probably from Tur. Note calabash hat.</p>




058		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Woman, possibly Tur, with furry animal skin draped on her back.</p>
059		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Tur woman with cowry-decorated animal skin hanging loose on her back. Note significant fibre anklets.</p>
060		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Tur women with huge loads of wood. The calabash headwear also acts as protective helmet.</p>
061		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Tur women carrying infants. Multiple iron bracelets. Cowry-decorated goatskin baby-carriers.</p>





062		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Men with hats of stiffened hide. Probably Tur.</p>
063		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Women, possibly from Wula (Hanko or Mango). Woman at rear wears elongated lip-plug. The woman in front has one, but shorter.</p>
064		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Woman wearing triangular metal cache-sexe. Probably Mafa (Matakam).</p>
065		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Saffron-robed Kanuri women.</p>




066		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Margi girl. Note the characteristic fibre fringe cache-sexe, and skirt of horizontal strips of indigo and white cloth.</p>
067		<p>Margi women dressed for a celebration.</p> <p>Jim Vaughan told me they could be dressed in the style of dancers at a celebration for the public showing of twins (<i>a ful bili</i>).</p>
068		<p>Madagali</p> <p>Fulbe dye-pit.</p>




069		<p>Madagali market</p> <p>Fulbe women selling milk.</p>
070		<p>Mafa (Matakam)</p> <p>En route to Maroua. Mafa compound. Note the typical elongated rooftops.</p>
071		<p>Return from Maroua with John Kevan and Christmas wine.</p>


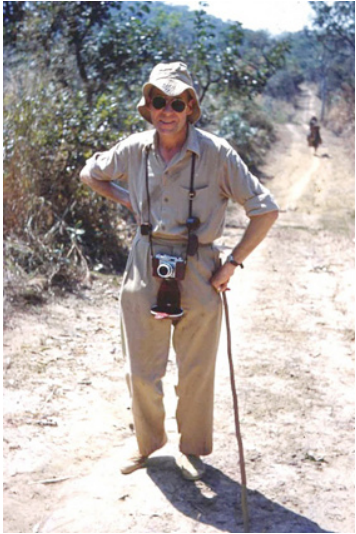


072		<p>Mildu Bapura</p> <p>The Arnado – or Chief.</p>
073		<p>Mildu Selmi</p> <p>Sorghum heads within zana enclosure, prior to winnowing.</p>
074		<p>Mildu Selmi</p> <p>Cooper outside his overnight basha.</p>






075		<p>Sukur</p> <p>Sukur chief between pillars <i>Duvu</i> and <i>Fula</i> at entrance to his compound.</p> <p>According to Nic David, probably the then recently installed Llidi Usaani, standing at the entrance to the <i>Mbuk</i> (council/law court) enclosure attached to his residence.</p> <p>He sent his groom with a horse for Cooper to ride up the paved track (of paving stones) to his village.</p>
076		<p>Sukur</p> <p>Llidi Usaani in passage leading down to the inner compound from the west entrance.</p>
077		<p>Sukur</p> <p>The Chief beside <i>Buge</i>, the megalithic throne on the <i>Patla</i> outside the West entrance to the <i>Llidi</i> house. According to Nic David, most of the daub walling had been replaced with rocks by the 1990s, and the good-sized tree growing out of the structure on the right of the picture had died or been removed.</p>




078		<p>Sukur</p> <p>Women with loads of wood coming up the final part of the northern paved way.</p>
079		<p>Sukur</p> <p>Women and child, a picture probably taken in Dunggom ward close to the Llidi's house.</p>
080		<p>Wula Mango</p> <p>Kwatiri by Rest House where I spent the night. The trek from Sukur to Wula Mango took around 3 hours.</p>
081		<p>Wula Mango elders.</p>

082		Wula woman with straw load.
083		Wula women with loads.
084		<p>Wula Mango</p> <p>Cooper on hilltop looking towards Roumsiki.</p>

085		<p>Audu on tough descent from our visit to Wula Mango, with policeman checking that he's OK.</p>
086		<p>A cooling rest after the descent from Wula Mango.</p> <p>The trek from Wula Mango to Madagali took around six and a half hours, with 4 stops for a rest.</p>
087		<p>Crossing the River Taraba.</p> <p>En route south to Karamti for the Registration review.</p>

088		My house at Karamti.
089		Meeting Major Thornley Edmunds after his descent from the Mambilla Plateau where he was Plebiscite Supervisor.
090		On trek to build polling booths.
091		Building polling booth at Boka.

092		<p>Michika</p> <p>Distribution of polling boxes.</p> <p>At rear, lorry leaves with polling officers and equipment.</p>
093		<p>Trek with polling boxes to polling station.</p>
094		<p>Polling day</p> <p>At a polling booth. Posters explain the choice: black box for Nigeria, red box for Cameroun.</p>
095		<p>Polling day</p> <p>Queuing to vote.</p>
096		<p>Polling day</p> <p>Checking a man's registration card to ensure eligibility to vote.</p>

097		<p>Polling day</p> <p>Queuing to vote. Note registration card held in cleft-stick.</p>
098		<p>Polling day</p> <p>Checking Higi man's registration card to confirm eligibility to vote.</p>
099		<p>Polling day</p> <p>Higi woman emerges from voting booth, the first time she, or any woman in this area, had been allowed to vote.</p>

Maps

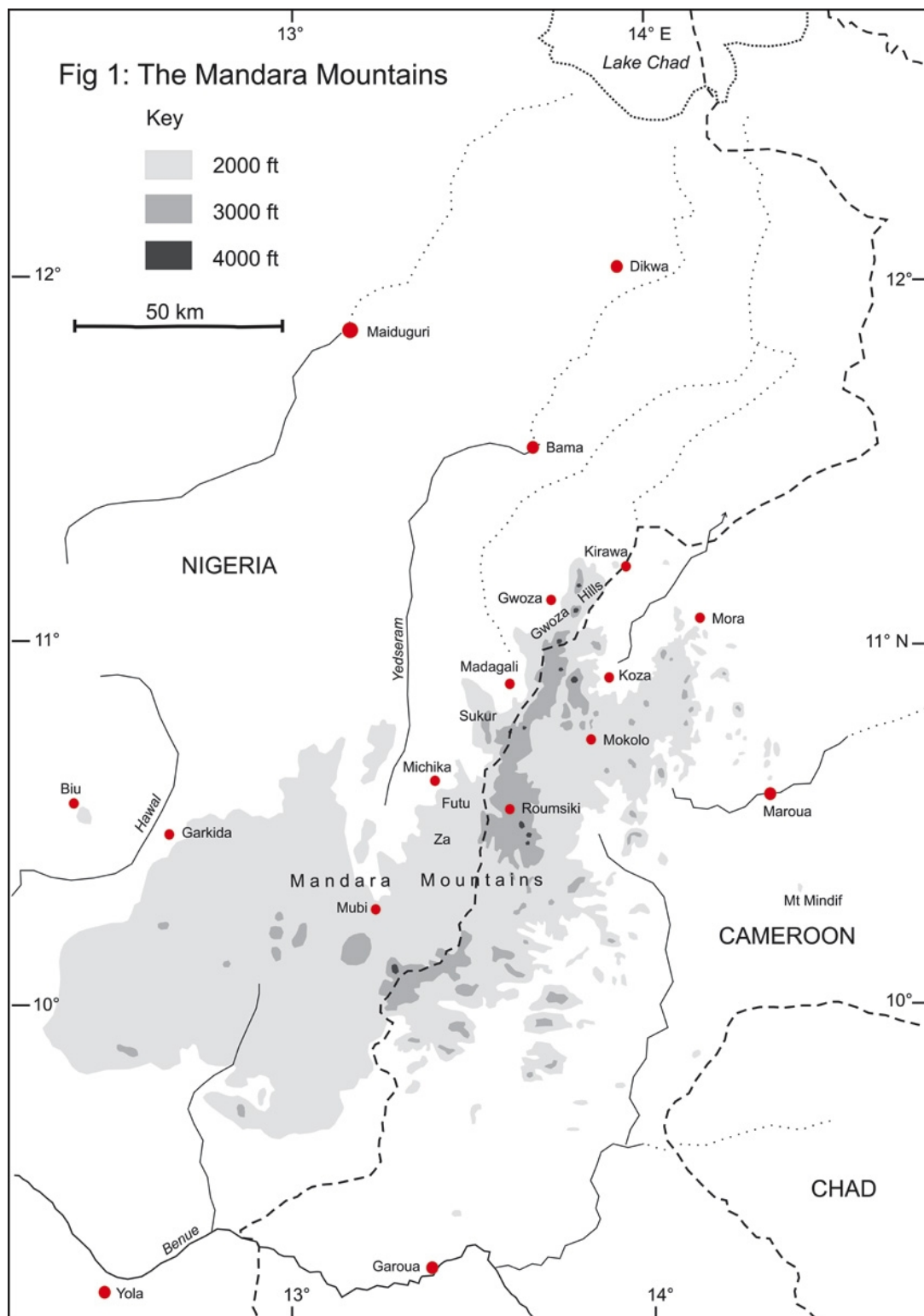


Fig 2: Plebiscite map of north-western Mandara mountains

