

Koops' Nigeria Journal[1]

By way of introduction, Robert Koops and family are close friends to our family, going way back to our days at Michigan State University (MSU).[2] Quite apart from his exquisite never-failing humour, I have included this brief journal report of his because it so reflects our own travel and visiting experiences in Nigeria. It could very well be our own story! This is the way it went and, apparently, still goes! One cannot help but love Nigeria with its amazing life energy!

After two weeks of living with a couple of quiet geckos (they do squeak, incidentally) and a very noisy rat that seems to enjoy chewing on a piece of tin somewhere in a dark corner of the kitchen, I got some new company. Somebody in Jenuwa where I went to church donated a large robust rooster and a sack of yams for my sustenance. I incarcerated the cock in the kitchen overnight. He was as quiet and humble as a gecko until one of his age-mates on the outside decided to welcome the dawn at around 5.30. Mine, of course, responded. A rooster crowing in your kitchen is surprisingly loud. I transferred him to the veranda where he could carry on contrapuntal cacophony with two or three others that were already strutting around outside, "hand in pocket, cap over eye, whistling at pullets passing by."

All the traffic coming into Lupwe goes right past my house (the old Buys family residence), and, dry season being at its peak, I can also see all the traffic on the Bissaula road, which is as busy as Route 66, but riddled with potholes. Most of the way to Takum you're off on the side. Lorries carrying grain, lumber, and farm produce creep along, lurching painfully as equally overloaded motorcycles whizz past them in dizzying swerves. On Saturday a funeral procession was heading east, with an ambulance for a hearse, the siren blaring wee-waan-wee-waan-wee-waan and believe it or not, right here in front of my eyes, they were met by a wedding procession heading west toward town, with a pickup full of young people singing at the top of their lungs to the furious beat of a drummer in their midst. What a racket! All we needed was the vehicle that goes by advertising native medicine, with two gigantic speakers on top of it. Or the equally loud vehicle from some evangelistic outfit. (Incidentally, they came onto campus at 5 AM last week one morning, speakers blaring away, urging me to repent, which of course I had to do after they left). The motorcycle traffic in between the lorries is almost as entertaining. It is rare to see less than two people on one, and often it is three or four, especially if they are penniless students. The driver sits scrunched up on top of the gas tank, and then the passengers scrunch up behind him, often one with a baby on her back, or someone will sit side-saddle across the gas tank. How they avoid accidents is a mystery, especially when you consider that many bikes are

carrying prodigiously wide loads, like doors in their frames, 12-foot long poles, bundles of zinc roofing, long bundles of grass for thatching, et cetera. I saw a guy in town carrying an enormous truck tire. He had it around him and was barely able to reach the handlebars. Now picture this circus weaving in and out of the potholes like that pass-and-break exercise we used to do in basketball practice.

Even the goats stopped butting each other to watch the meeting of the processions, and that's normally an entertaining diversion from our butt-numbing translation work. We've got at least a dozen on campus. Billy goats deserve their reputation. Females in heat get no rest and no sympathy. Everyone should have a flock of goats nearby to help understand the difference between human and animal behavior. It is by no means easy to define. People will tell you that animals have four legs and people have two, but I'm not so sure.

Breakfast this morning began with a bowl of Fulani-fresh warm milk at a cattle camp a mile east of here. They welcomed me warmly and told me to come back Thursday afternoon. I hope I can get some pictures. The clouds are rumbling ominously in the afternoons; we may just get a storm one of these days. Astonishingly, NEPA was on all last night, so I had a fan going to keep me cool. NEPA's off now, but the translation office is loaning me their one working generator for evening work. I'm grateful. Fxaefa lent me her modem and I put time on it but just got a message that my N400 is used up, so I am quite irked not to be able to get on line tonight.

Weds. Just back from a "Bible study" in Lumbu, about 40 minutes' drive away. One of the translators invited me to lead it. After 40 minutes of introductory singing the church was packed. I read the story of the wise and foolish girls from Matthew 25 in Kuteb and we actually had some discussion. There was even a new song created for the occasion, and lots of boisterous picture-taking afterwards.

Saturday, 12th. Big conference in Takum at the RCCN secretariat grounds. Looks like well over a thousand, some sleeping in partially finished buildings, some strewn around the campus like they'd fallen out of a plane. Service ok except for the fact that motivational speakers here don't realize microphones actually work, so they shout anyway. My ears are still ringing. The president of our sister denomination CRC-N and his delegation were "danced" in and he gave a strongly positive message of unity.

Sunday, 13th: Rain from 4 A.M. onwards. Late start to big conference in Takum, road muddy and slick in places, making it a challenge to dodge the oncoming traffic. The people at the conference were upbeat despite the rain that turned the whole place into mud.

Announcements took up a good half hour. One was that the bride price for church members can go no higher than N50,000 (around \$200) and six bags of salt. Going beyond that is a SIN. Also that members should go to our own pastors for healing: "Healing is available by our own pastors. Beware of going to QUACKS from other denominations [RK: when we have our own].

FF to Monday, March 14th. I made a farewell presentation to the Kuteb team and Rev Manasseh Musa took me to Mkar (75 mi. West on a really bad road). We left early from there on the 15th, greeted the Igala translators in Ayangba (100 miles to the west), then headed north 50 mi. to greet my friend Paul Imoh in Odenyi (Rubassa language). We crossed the Niger by ferry at Shintaku just a couple miles below the confluence, and encountered a huge go-slow at the bridge that crosses the Niger above the confluence. From there it was mostly well-paved freeway to Abuja. It took us an hour to find the airport (made several wrong turns) because we weren't used to coming in from the south. Flight out at 23.50 took me to Paris, where I loaded up on chocolate, and home via Atlanta. On the flight from Paris I sat in the middle of a small group of Ukrainian athletes on their way to a meet in Portland, OR. The one next to me was a high-jumper. PB 2.4+ meters. Legs like a grasshopper. Plans to be in the Olympics in Rio.

A good time was had by all except the 4 (only!) cockroaches I killed in the guesthouse.

Rob

[1] Robert Koops, *Nigeria Journal*, March 12-13, 2016.

[2] See details about our relationship with the Koopses in *Every Square Inch*, vol. 1, p. 257. Rob was a student of linguistics and went on to become an international consultant in Bible translation. Fran, my wife, and I met Rob in a Hausa language class in MSU's African Study Center.