About the country...

Population: 750,000
Land Area: 4,361 square miles, about four-fifths the size of Connecticut
Cities: Banjul (pop. 40,000), the capital
Languages: English (official), Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, other indigenous languages
Religions: Muslim 95%, remainder Christian and traditional beliefs
Terrain: Savanna
Climate: Sub-tropical

The Gambia is often described as a finger protruding from the Atlantic Ocean into West Africa. The country runs from the sea for 300 miles along both banks of the Gambia River. Its borders generally extend from 10 to 15 miles from the river's banks. And, as one would surmise, the country draws its life from the river. The Gambia is bordered on three sides by Senegal with whom it maintains a very special relationship.

The Gambia was first written about in 470 B.C. by Hanno, a Carthaginian. Since that time several African empires have claimed the river basin. As a result many groups arrived as conquerors and stayed. Later, Britain, France and other European powers struggled for dominance over the river country. Britain finally emerged as the pre-eminent nation and the country became a British Colony in 1843. The Gambia received its own executive legislative councils in 1901 and gradually progressed toward self-governance.

During World War II, Gambian troops fought with the Allies and Banjul served as a stop for the U.S. Army Air Corps and port of call for Allied naval convoys. President Franklin Roosevelt stayed overnight in Banjul en route to and from the Casablanca Conference, marking the first visit to the African Continent by a sitting American President.

The Gambia achieved independence in 1965 as a constitutional monarchy within the British Commonwealth. In 1970, by referendum, the Gambia became a republic on April 24.

Most Americans were unfamiliar with The Gambia until some ten years ago. That was when the author, Alex Haley, traced his origins and ancestor, Kunta Kinte, to its shores. His search became the book, and later the TV mini-series, "Roots." Through Haley's work, many Americans got their first glimpse of life in The Gambia. The few that were knowledgeable about the West African nation were more than likely
The Gambia
former Peace Corps Volunteers. Peace Corps has served the people of The Gambia for the past twenty years. Peace Corps was invited to The Gambia in 1967. Seventeen Volunteers were in-country that year. They were mechanics, co-op organizers, carpenters, construction specialists and one was an electrical engineer. In late 1969, the first group of education Volunteers arrived. Since that time education Volunteers have been the mainstay of Peace Corps’ program there. Currently, Peace Corps/The Gambia fields about fifty Volunteers. Twenty PCVs are involved in Education. In addition to classroom teaching of math and science, Education Volunteers have branched out into functional literacy programs and are developing new educational materials.

Eight Volunteers work as Nurse-Tutors. In this program, PCVs teach basic nursing skills to students in the State Nursing School in Banjul and the Community Health Nursing School in Mansakanko. They also direct classes in health education, primary health care and environmental health. As secondary projects, many trek to villages and supervise clinics, make home visits and do nutritional surveys.

As in many Peace Corps countries, Peace Corps/The Gambia has an active Forestry Extension Program. Eight PCVs are currently working in nursery management and extension, promoting conservation activities village organizations. Most forestry Volunteers work in beekeeping and in improved wood stove production as related projects.

In the area of Soil Conservation, eight Volunteers are assigned to the AID/Gambia Agriculture Research and Diversification Program. Here they work with both crop and animal extension to increase crop production, to utilize crop residue as feed and assist the livestock owners’ association with animal health programs.

One PCV works as a Business Advisor/Trainer with The Gambian Indigenous Business Advisory Services (IBAS) advisors with on-the-job training in business management, loan proposals and business skills.

In 1980, a National Women’s Council was established by the government and administered by the Women’s Bureau. A PCV was requested to help the bureau establish a reference center concerning status and needs of rural women and to assist in training field workers. A Volunteer helps coordinate WID activities into all phases of Peace Corps programs.

During 1988, a new program, Winrock International/Seed Production, is expected to begin. Four PCVs will be involved. The goals of this project will be to improve the on-farm seed production techniques and support seed multiplication.

Peace Corps Times

LynnKay Brown, a nurse-tutor, teaches basic nursing and pediatrics to community health nurses. At a vaccination clinic at the Mansa Konko Health Center, she discusses methods with Ibrima Ceesay. An experienced nurse, Brown, of Salt Lake City, also holds both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in art history from the University of Utah.
Focus—The Gambia

Former Dean of the School of Nursing at the University of Wisconsin, Val Frock settles into her new career as a teacher in Mansakonko. She is pictured here in her new home.

Ken Foon Lee teaches a Form 2 math class at the Gunjur Secondary Technical school. About 50 students are enrolled in his classes. Kan is from Brooklyn and graduated from the University of Wisconsin.

About the cover—Chris Haynes, whose site is Kontaur Fula Kunda, is a forester and field extension worker. Here he helps Wasseu Tree Nursery attendants prepare 2,600 “poly” pots for planting with mango, cashew, guava and other fruit tree seeds. Prior to Peace Corps service, Haynes worked for the U.S. Forest Service. He is from Lowell, Mass., and received his degree in forestry from the University of Maine.

Prock photo on this page by Deedie Runkel. All others by Carolyn Watson.

RPCV Group Formed

Partly as a result of their wonderful reunion during Peace Corps' 25th Anniversary Conference and to fill a long-time need, RPCVs have formed a new organization, Friends of The Gambia and Senegal. Marty Pipp is serving as the first chairperson. Members of the steering Committee are: Graeme Frelick (TG), John Hand (S) and George Scharffenberger, (RPCV-S and staff-TG).

They welcome inquiries and articles from current Volunteers for their newsletter, GAMBEGAL. For more information, write to: Friends of The Gambia and Senegal, 4620-48th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20016.

Lesa Langan, a graphic artist working as an information assistant for the Soil and Management Unit, reviews posters with Ibrima Sonko and Bintou Marang. Prior to Peace Corps, Lesa, a fine arts grad from Western Kentucky University, worked as a commercial artist for the Environmental Education Programs.

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