

Geography Report by Jane Harrison

Following the interest generated by Gerald's talk on pre-Colonial Africa in April, the Geography Group held a further meeting on the theme of Africa in July. "Back to Africa" was based on member contributions and proved very popular.

Phil Johnson began by looking at the continent's geological history and explained how that influenced its geography. Annie Clouston described teaching in northern Nigeria, in the 1970s, when she was on VSO. Some of the pupils she taught were as old as she was! Being white and female (and riding a motorcycle) also had its challenges in the garrison town of Mubi. She observed great extremes of wealth and poverty there. Life is still very precarious and unpredictable for the subsistence farmers today and now the ever-present threat of Boko Haram adds to the insecurity of this remote border region.



Photo: Young woman in Soweto. Pete Redgrave.

Pete Redgrave was also aware of the inequalities on his visit to South Africa in 2018. He showed us photographs that he had taken, somewhat hesitantly, in Soweto and later at the World Heritage Site in the Drakensberg Mountains. He was struck by the friendliness of the people he met, as was Bill Bartle, who talked about a volunteering visit he made to a school in Accra, Ghana. Watching a teacher teach two separate groups fractions and percentages simultaneously he did wonder what he could offer by way of advice!

Pete Harding showed photos of his holiday expedition from the Cape to the Victoria Falls, a journey of 5,800 kilometres, which was mostly on dirt roads. The landscape of Namibia was spectacular with the Fish River Canyon, the Sossusvlei sand dunes and the Etosha salt pans. Not to mention the wildlife. He described a somewhat terrifying excursion when one of the unstable flat-bottomed boats capsized in a river full of hippos and crocodiles. Fortunately, their boat stayed upright!

Hazel Yeadon rounded off the meeting by talking about her memories and impressions of Africa on visits to different parts of the continent. We also had the opportunity to look at three beautiful Tanzanian paintings belonging to Joyce Jackson.

There were so many excellent contributions the meeting overran. We didn't get to discover what link Les Knight had found between Africa and Northumberland in 1681. Perhaps we will find out another time!

Next meeting: Thursday 21st September. 9.40am for 10am start. Barnard Castle Cricket Club. Joint meeting with Probus. Gerald Blake "The History and Geography of Durham Regatta".