

Alaska Health Project South Sudan

PO Box 230183
Anchorage, AK 99523



A message from Jack Hickel
Board President and co-founder
Alaska Health Project South Sudan

ON THE NILE RIVER. The 75hp Yamaha outboard is jetting us along the White Nile in route to the village called Diel. I'm sitting next to our AHPSS boat driver, Peter GatKouth, cruising atop the olive-green water that will flow north through Sudan, Egypt, and eventually emptying into the Mediterranean Sea.

Diel is one of two villages in an area called Canal-Pigi where the Alaska Health Project South Sudan has recently drilled water wells. The two wells in Diel are the only sources of clean water for six thousand residents. Sadly, most people in this region still drink, and are sickened by, the polluted water from the Nile or the swamps.

Our route started in Old Fangak traveling on the Zaref River which feeds into the Nile. We've been on the water for almost two hours. Just 20 minutes to go. I am excited to visit Diel. A year ago, when visiting South Sudan, I first heard of the great need there. Could "Alaska" come to help.

Alaska. Everyone knows "Alaska." The people who bring clean water and provide seeds. On this day, jumping ashore at Diel I am reminded of my very first visit to South Sudan 16 years ago. Diel has a population today like what Old Fangak had in 2007. The homesteads are spread out with plenty of room for the goats and cattle, and areas for children to play. It's also dry. The flooding, plaguing most of Fangak County, is not as severe here in Canal/Pigi. Yet, they

suffer from a lack of clean water, no medical infrastructure and malnutrition due to a lack of food.

At the well we call "Diel 1" I am met by the school headmaster. He told me about the student testing this week and gave "Alaska" thanks for the clean water his pupils now enjoy. It's remarkable. Our tiny non-profit, based more than 7 thousand miles away, is providing clean water for children attending primary school in Diel, South Sudan. Wow. Had you been with me today, I know you'd have a smile as big as mine.

On our return that evening to Old Fangak, we slow each time we pass many small dugout canoes. Mostly fishermen checking their nets.

We also slowed when approaching a large raft, made of river reeds and grasses. On top about a half dozen teenage kids—floating home after finishing their school exams. They departed from Old Fangak and will float a total of 24 hours, carried by the river current, until reaching their hometown of New Fangak. Remarkable. The journey might seem "Tom Sawyer" like. But in reality, it is fraught with potential danger and certainly a full night of unbearable insects.



A chance meeting with the school headmaster at the village of Diel .



Diel #1 water well. One of 67 wells completed so far by AHPSS.



Seed distribution Old Fangak (above) and consulting with Dr. Jill Seaman (below).

This trip to South Sudan has already had so many highlights. In Juba, along with our team, I met with several potential NGO partners including Action Against Hunger, World Relief, and the United Nations agency in charge of the humanitarian response involving clean water. They all know “Alaska” and the good work we’ve done so far. 67 completed wells (as I write this) with plans for 30 more by next June including two more in Diel.

On this trip I was again able to work side by side with Dr. Jill Seaman. Dr. Jill continues to amaze me. This may very well be the hardest place in the world to deliver medical care. There are often killer infectious diseases. Severely malnourished children. Long lines of patients waiting for care well into the evening. It is always a struggle to provide the best care without proper medications, equipment, and supplies. Yet her resolve is steadfast, and her loving care saves lives every day.

We employ 20 Southern Sudanese who carry our program on their shoulders. When I visited our AHPSS work compound in Old Fangak, one of the housekeepers, Nyalam, began to dance. Hopping from one foot to another with a joyful countenance. She later said that each time one of our team returns here from afar she is “filled with joy and gratitude.” Another employee, who helps with our

agriculture program, gave thanks for what AHPSS is doing for his community and for himself. “I can now send my children to school because of my job with Alaska,” he said.

Perhaps the most poignant comment about our work in South Sudan came from Stephen, the Southern Sudanese man who has been with AHPSS from the start. “It started as a dream,” he said. “Today it is real.” You might call it a Christmas miracle—repeated for 16 years.

At this Christmas time I am so thankful for the kindness and love you’ve expressed through your generous support of our work. Thank you. Together we are impacting thousands of lives with our water and agriculture programs. The dollars you donate are truly gifts from heaven. The people here consider you to be their brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. They understand that kind, caring people from very far away are giving to make their lives better. They know “Alaska” will go where few others are willing to go and do what others cannot do.

Again, I say thank you. May God bless you and your loved ones this holiday season. Merry Christmas!

Jack Hickel



With Stephen at the Paguir airstrip.

Alaska Health Project South Sudan
PO Box 230183
Anchorage, AK 99523
907-244-7762
www.ahpss.org

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