

First stop was the small enclave of Sarejeka where one of our 'volunteers' lived and worked as an educational methodologist. We were able to visit her home and the junior school adjacent to it where she spent a significant amount of her time. Dee was mobbed by a band of small, smiling and dusty children as is so common in the more remote parts of Africa. We also took tea with the school principal, tribal scars and all. Most of the dwellings in this charming village were the traditional wood and clay **Hidmo's**, again a refreshing change and 'far from the madding crowd'.



Volunteers Mansion



Dee and the Kids of Sarejeka

Some twenty kilometers north west of Sarejeka lies the small country settlement of **Adi Tekelezan** where yet another of our intrepid foreign VSO 'volunteers' is 'on placement'. It was here that we were able to take a good look around at a typical, rural **Eritrean** town and also visit the famous **Dendem Secondary Modern School** from which the resident volunteer operated. Between the two locations surveyed we were able to glean a vague inkling of what it must be like to live and work as a lone 'Aid Provider' in the remote wilds of a country such as **Eritrea**.

Heading north once more I was amazed to spot the well preserved, 'olive drab' wreckage of a 'mined' soviet 'tank' lying folorn and squat in an open field a hundred yards from the road and off to our right. Without thinking and unable to resist temptation I stopped our vehicle and galloped across the field to explore the 'casualty' in more detail. In my haste I completely forgot my carefully crafted 'lesson plan' of the previous day about the dangers posed by uncleared mine fields in areas of previous conflict. Dee, the designated 'mission photographer' for the duration realized the danger but gamely followed me through the field toward the tank, knowing that I would want a close up photographic record of our find. Surprisingly our guide joined me at the scene and delivered a fascinating, albeit impromptu, history lesson about the last 'enemy' tanks attempting to flee northwards from **Eritrea** in 1991 (of which this one was a fine example). I walked back to our vehicle retracing my own inbound footsteps VERY carefully. You just can't get the staff these days.



The Think Tank

On our way back to **Asmara** our ever genial hosts made a detour and stopped at a typical rural eating house where we were all treated to huge platefuls of the local **injera**, basically a delicious meat stew served on fermented dough (you had to be there). From what I can remember this rare treat was washed down with copious quantities of a surprisingly good **Eritrean 'house wine'**.

Later that evening we met with several of the foreign volunteers who had been selected to attend our upcoming workshops and consequently recalled to the city. A guided tour of the well organized and very homely VSO head office in downtown **Asmara** was followed by a review of VSO's impressive motorcycle and bicycle fleet.



VSO HQ Asmara with CD

First light the next morning found Dee and I in a well equipped and spacious lecture room on the upper level of the **British Council Offices** in **Asmara**. Our high tech presentation package featured a white board and a rather suspect blue marker pen. It was **DAY FOUR** and time for the first workshop session. Headings duly written we nervously awaited the arrival of our twenty 'students'. A mixed bunch, the volunteers are primarily, though not exclusively, drawn from **Britain** and are mainly school teachers with at least three years 'post grad' experience. The average age is thirty and some seventy per cent of those involved with the **Eritrea** based 'educational' programmes are female. I was amused to discover that one of the more 'mature' male volunteers had, in a previous life, worked as a Bank Manager for a large and powerful institution who happen to be closely allied to my own employers within **Saudi Arabia's Best Bank**.