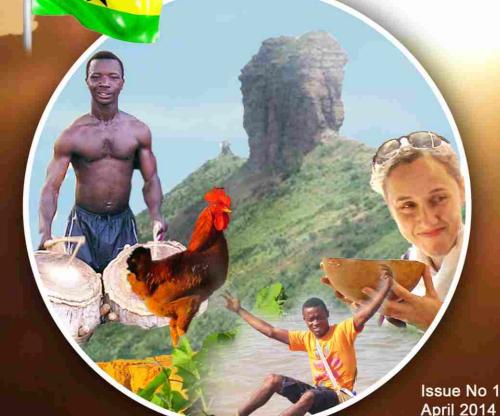
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EDITORS' WELCOME

Hullo and welcome to Kwahu, one of the great unknown delights of Ghana!

This first issue of our Guide Book attempts to introduce you to a beautiful and rewarding experience, to which you will want to return time and time again.

We are aiming to update this brief Guide once a year, and will welcome all comments. We particularly want you to inform us about any errors and omissions – and give us new ideas.

Nana Kwadwo Ameyaw Gyearbour Yiadom I, Nkosuohene of Kwahu Tafo

KWAHU TOURISM INITIATIVE

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Kwaku Asare Bediako Stuart Tattersal on behalf of our KTI colleagues Rev. Stephen Awuah Isaac Adonteng Boamah Christian Ofosu Ansah Akuamoah Boateng Kwasi Dutch and BL Meyer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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KTI was created by Kwahu Tafo Progress Council (Reg. NGO DSW/4993).

Profits from KTI activities go to support the responsible development of tourism in Kwahu

Published April 2014. The photographs in this book have been donated to KTI by Nana Nkosuohene (Development Chief) of Kwahu Tafo and many other generous supporters.



INTRODUCING KWAHU

KWAHU features the highest inhabited spot in Ghana — it's where the Christian Missionaries from Basel found their own new Switzerland — and the rocky green plateau breathes fresh air. Mosquitoes are fewer, and though the sun can still take the day temperature up to 36° the air is not humid, and you may even need a light jacket on occasional evenings.

The name Kwahu applies both to the people and the area, and the most dramatic explanation of its origin is that it was given to a tribe which decided to resist the



expanding domination of the Ashanti Empire and barricade itself on a high ridge overlooking the Afram River (now part of Lake Volta). These peaceful people were nevertheless stout enough to guard their land by threatening to roll rocks down on anyone who came after them, and so outsiders called the area 'Kwahu' – 'Go and die!' We are happy to say that today's

welcome is warmer.



The scenery is equally full of drama, as weather-sculpted rocks tower precariously above ravines and command spectacular views. Waterfalls and huge trees, rivers (trickling in January, racing in July), brilliant flowers and butterflies, wind-swayed crops and above all the great expanse of the man-made Lake Volta, fringed with gaily painted boats, make Kwahu a hidden paradise unlike any other area of Ghana.

Compared with the

better known tourist sites of the Slave Castles at Cape Coast and Elmina, the Canopy Walk at Kakum, the Cultural Centre at Kumasi, the Sacred Crocodiles at Paga and the Game Reserve at Wa, Kwahu is a quiet country area less frequently visited by Ghanaians or foreigners. This makes it all the more special to discover for yourself. Its hills and valleys, rich forests, high cliffs, wildlife and waterfalls all add up to a rural experience



that is quite unexpected in Ghana. Because the area is not over-exploited, the welcome of the people is sincere and delightful.

They are ever ready to include you, whether in town activity or quieter village life, and to share with you the peace that comes from centuries of living in a beautiful place.

INTRODUCING KWAHU

The character of the landscape draws much of its colour from the Traditional (pre-Christian) faith, which holds that all marvels of nature embody the Creator. So this rock is a God, that tree is another, and it is hoped you may be thoughtful enough to toot your horn as you drive across any bridge in case the children of a River Goddess may be playing in the road. Today such instinctive beliefs underlie the very life of Kwahu, emanating a tolerance and understanding which is shared alike by the area's Christians and Muslims.

Those of us who are devoted to the development of tourism in Kwahu do so from a sense of responsibility to nature, and to the ancient culture which has been the

backbone of



this area since the ancestors first came here. Folk memories don't stretch back as far as the makers of the Stone-age arrowheads and knives which have been found here in abundance. but rivers, rocks and caves bear names which testify to the reverence afforded them in 'Gone Days'.

The forest and its grasslands are full of legends about the small, mysterious -- not to say mischievous -- creatures who used to be all around (and to many, still are), and the wisdom of the ages is enshrined in ancient proverbs, which, enigmatic at

first hearing, record the truisms that have provided a testament of wisdom and experience for the Kwahu people. Many of these proverbs (there are a few examples in this book) have been long ago pictogrammed into symbols, known -- from their use on funeral cloths -- as Adinkra (see p.44) which you will see everywhere as you travel in our country.



So you have a lot to find out, and once again, you are welcome to Kwahu.

Set aside your worries and find time for us. In return, we'll find time for you.

A NOTE: Everywhere you may be called 'Oboruni!'. Since this in essence means 'white foreigner', some visitors get upset by its reference to colour. Please, you are in Kwahu: it's just descriptive, and very friendly.

ANOTHER NOTE: The local language is Twi

(say 'Chwee'), and you can find some phrases on p.25. In Kwahu you will encounter varying degrees of ability in Ghana's official language, English.

BRUKU

The towering great God Rock of the Kwahu people can be reached on the road from Kwahu Tafo to Adawso. Magnificent as it is, it was once (if legend is to be believed) even higher, and visible by sailors on the ocean 150 km away. But one



day a peasant farmer was eating some water-yam nearby, and an ant stole a crumb and carried it up on to the mountain, not knowing that the ancient



God Bruku is allergic to water-yam. As a result Bruku's top fell off, leaving the ant feeling rather foolish – but us with a still stunning landmark.

The God Bruku is the sacred guardian watching over Kwahu, and you run the risk of offending local sensibilities if you go walking on the hill without permission (or, worse still, climbing the rock itself): but on request a guided trek can be arranged for you which starts with the ceremony of pouring libation at the shrine of the God, making a strenuous climb as respectful as it is unforgettable.

And if you have any breath left by the time you reach the foot of the

rock, the views, of the surrounding countryside and the gleaming Lake Volta, will take it away.

BUTUASE is a 60 ft waterfall on the outskirts of Kwahu Tafo, on the Kotoso road. In the rainy season it tumbles





down into a series of splashing pools where people love to come and play, relaxing on a quiet afternoon or loudly celebrating a national holiday with jams music and picnics. The stream falls away under a uniquely amazing natural cavern, where even a nongeologist can read the history of millennia in the strata of the rocks.

CYCLING

Cycling routes are not yet developed in the Kwahu area, though you see bikes everywhere, and it's a great way to explore. Ghana Bike and Hike Tours, however, based in Aburi, are eager to expand their field of operation. They managed Friends of Tafo's *Go Ghana!* Cycle Challenge in 2011, when 21 cyclists from UK, Sweden and Malaysia rode from Elmina to Kwau Tafo, raising £30,000 for clean drinking water. Call Kofi on 00233 244 209 587 or email him at kofi@ghanabike2.com to find out what he might be able to arrange for you and friends.



ECHO RAVINE In the forest near

Twenedurase just past Obo there is a natural wall of rock which responds to your voice with a marvellous echo. Stand on a ledge and call out your name: you will never forget the sound of Ghana calling it back to you.

THINGS TO KNOW

DRESS Casual clothes are the order of the day – a T-shirt and decent shorts are fine on all occasions unless you are advised that a slightly tidier outfit is appropriate. Anything too short, skimpy or revealing does offend, and travellers are asked to respect this. Some people like to wear socks and long trousers in the evening, not for formality's sake but to frustrate midges.

WATER Don't drink water from an untreated well, borehole, river, or waterfall, and be wary of domestic tapwater. The supply that comes to standpipes is from Ghana Water Company and is OK. Attendants charge a few pesewas (there are 100 pesewas in a Ghana Cedi) for this.

Some towns also have a community supply of clean drinking water, which is often again charged for in order to pay for maintenance and perhaps other development.

The cheap and easy way of refreshing yourself (whether you drink it or pour it over your head) is 'sachet' water, which is purified and safe. It is only topped by the natural water sold in bottles, which hopefully will come out of an icebox of sorts. In both cases, alas, the container tends to be deliberately thrown on the ground, unless there a interfering Oboruni around to question the practice.



THINGS TO KNOW

CHIEFS

Every Kwahu town and village, however small, has a Chief, or traditional ruler. He (almost always a he) is the life-custodian of the 'Stool' (cf 'throne'), which is to say the town and the land that it owns. Nobody can own freehold in Kwahu society, only lease it from the Stool (though a family may have been doing that for centuries, maybe at a peppercorn rent).

The Chief is the 'Head of State' of the village or the town – the one (supported by his Linguist and Elders) who represents it outside, and locally turns out to cut a ribbon, grace a funeral etc. Though top dog in his own town or village, he will owe loyalty upwards through several levels of higher ranking chiefs all the way up to the Paramount Chief. And what the Paramount Chief says, REALLY goes.

The Paramount Chief heads the Traditional Council of Chiefs (below), which works hand in hand with the elected Government to ensure the orderly carrying out of the District Assembly programme, and upholds the age-old customs and observances of the Kwahu people.





In his own town an individual Chief (all Chiefs are addressed and referred to as 'Nana') acts as Mayor, sits as parochial magistrate, deals with the level of disputes that don't require police attention, and is available night and day for his people's problems and issues. Originally he would have led them into war, but these days the job is a little more peaceable -- if still 24/7.

WHO CAN BE A CHIEF?

As with the old-time English Lord of the Manor, the Chief in each town or village is chosen from a single local family (therefore designated royal).

When a Chief dies and has to be replaced, that family puts forward a short-list of candidates, from whom a panel of Palace 'king-makers' will select the best. Interestingly, the chosen candidate still has to go through a further stage: he has to be approved by the Queen Mother (no relation), who holds the ultimate authority. You can glimpse the Kwahu Senior Queen Mother above, in red just past the Chairman in black.

THINGS TO KNOW

CHIEFS (cont.)

So far so good, but here's a thing: the candidates for succession to a Chief are not his own issue. It's his sister's children, not his, in what is known as matrilineal succession. A son of his, though he will be designated 'Prince', does not succeed him. If you are wondering why, it's because (in a frank admission of human fallibility) a man can't be 100% sure that his presumed son actually carries his blood, whereas the sister's line always will.

WHAT ARE SUB-CHIEFS?

Nana has a 'cabinet' of Elders to help him run things. They are sub-Chiefs but are also called Chiefs and indeed

are also addressed as 'Nana' (as a small child may be too, just to confuse things). Each of these



has a function: to look after Drums, Weapons, the town's Youth etc: and these jobs also run in individual families, who are therefore — you guessed it — royal. So a Kwahu town may have, say, twelve royal families in it. And indeed, if a town wants to co-opt a foreigner as a sub-chief (say of Development), he or she has to first be adopted into a royal family.

If all this sounds very feudal, well yes, it is rule by privileged bloodlines: but it's worth noting that (a) the man elected Chief today may have been a taxidriver yesterday (and, in the case of a sub-Chief,

may still be tomorrow), and

(b) in his 'enstoolment' or Coronation ceremony (after being carried round the community shoulder high and covered in white powder) the new Chief swears an oath of duty and loyalty to not only the Chief and Elders at the Palace, but to the people themselves. And if the people don't like the way he is running his 'job' (for which there is no pay), they can 'destool' him.



The way to do that, incidentally, in case you should need to know one day, is to steal his sandals.

And yes, a woman can be a sub-Chief, even if the main job generally seems to be given to men.

THINGS TO KNOW

TRADITIONAL SANDALS are known as Ohenema — Chief's Children

DRUMMING AND DANCING: FETISH PRIESTS AND PRIESTESSES



If you are lucky while you are in Kwahu you may hear the sound of drums and follow it to a gathering of Fetish (or Traditional) Priests, where the Gods come to possess their human partners and show their mysterious nature in stamping and whirling dances. These occasions happen on



holy days and festivals, and Kwahu Tourism Initiative will be able to help you plan your journey to encounter one, or a special

'Drumming and Dancing' can be organised (at a cost) for a group of visitors. Whichever way, it is not to be missed.

Some of the best gatherings take place in Kwahu Tafo: they are open to all, photography is welcome, and be ready -- you may be invited to join in. Don't be shy. After all, how often do you get to dance with a God?



These gatherings also provide a rare opportunity to hear folk songs, sung by women to accompany the drumming. If you have a recording device and time to spare, an offer of refreshment may well persuade a group of them to sing one song after another as they remember the sounds and words of 'Gone Days'.



FARMS in Kwahu are generally small

subsistence plots where a peasant farmer whose family has long rented a little piece of land from the 'Stool" (ie community.



in the custodianship of the Chief) will grow

some basic produce - yam, peppers, onions, maize, cassava, tomatoes, groundnuts - to feed his family. It's a daily grind,

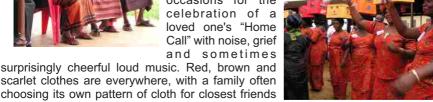


beginning with what could be a 5 mile walk every before dawn, and the returns are poor. If you grow an extra tomato to sell, maybe you will buy a piece of fish to go in your soup – perhaps along with that large snail you found.



FUNERALS

are very important to family life in the Kwahu culture. They are three- or-four day occasions for the



scarlet clothes are everywhere, with a family often choosing its own pattern of cloth for closest friends and relatives to put on. Since it's your duty to return to your hometown for a family funeral, and families are so widely

extended that you could find yourself going to Kwahu every weekend, the custom has grown up of holding Funeral Weekends



every few weeks. When you go home for one of these, you may have several funerals to attend: there will be Friday wakes and lyings-



in-state all over the community. It's a time for mourning, for donating to the bereaved family, and for a lot of socialising too. And the grass in the mouth?

It's to stop a dignitary laughing.

HIKING Nature Walks can be found in so many places, and offer the perfect way to experience



the countryside. One of the very nicest is a long stroll from the Adawso road along the flat rocky land on the left hand side of Bruku (see p.7). Flowers a b o u n d, the



grasses are beautiful, and at every stage you want to take another irresistible snap of the great God Rock towering in the distance. A knowledgeable guide will steer you across the shady stream which is called Bupru, to imitate the sound of the water bubbling over the stones: he'll find ancestral caves, tell you

of legends of dwarves and demons, and lead you back eventually from the drama of a precipitous ravine to the safety of Kwahu Tafo.

LAKE VOLTA is one of the glories of Kwahu. If you fancy a glide on its shimmering expanse (it was the biggest manmade lake in the world at the time of its construction from the Afram and Volta Rivers in the early 60s), go to Adawso, where there'll be a boatman ready to chug you across to Ekyi. Some may have life iackets to offer you, but the traditional wooden canoe boats are comfortingly safe - and outcharm the car-ferry every time. Take a cold beer at one of the spots



on the other side, and your return by sunset (between 4.30 and 6 pm) can be a photographer's dream.

THINGS TO KNOW

SMOKING You won't see many people smoking in Kwahu: it's a matter of lack of funds as much as of habit. If you are a smoker, you would do well to observe the generally accepted 'Western' rules – don't smoke indoors, or anywhere in company unless you ask first. You can buy many brands of cigarette – even as single 'sticks' – but may be pushed to locate an ashtray. Marijuana ('Wee') and other drugs are illegal.

MARKETS



Kwahu markets are colourful, wonderfully scented, and crowded. In Nkawkaw there is a huge



covered area, selling everything from brimming bowls of heaped beans to smoked fish and home-made vegetable-graters. At Kotoso (early Tuesday and Friday) and Nketepa (Saturdays) the main concentration is on fish of every sort pulled flapping from the lake, and in amongst the silver tubs you will find avocadoes, mangos, pineapples, garden eggs, bananas – as well as batik, tie and dye, beads, and every variety of second-hand T shirts and jeans.

MEDICINAL PLANTS AND HERBS

The rainforest is a wonderful home for all sorts of medicinal plant, and since time immemorial the Kwahu people have found remedies for everything from colds and cuts to stomach upsets and 'waist' problems (virility!) – and even cataracts.

In every village you will find someone to tell you about the different herbs and their remarkable properties, and perhaps even give you a sprig of the Moringa tree (right), which cures 300 diseases.



THINGS TO KNOW

WILL YOU BE HASSLED FOR MONEY?

Generally speaking, the people of Kwahu are far too polite to consider asking you for money. It may happen on the odd occasion but it is not something you should be unduly concerned about. If you are approached, the choice is yours, but portraying an overseas visitor as a ready source of unearned income may not be helpful. And a Kwahu will always accept the answer No.



MUSIC in Kwahu is traditionally rather more percussive than melodic, with drums made from a hollow tree and covered with stretched goatskin. These drums, which are of various size and used for various functions, are beaten with the hand or with sticks (inverted V shapes or otherwise), while a cowbell hit with a piece of metal provides a sharp rhythmic sound. Traditionally you will also hear the drone of cowhorns, and the folk songs which accompany the Fetish Priests' drumming; and a

wonderfully plaintive flute may be heard bringing a body home from the mortuary to its lying-in-state. But modernity has also

But modernity has also arrived, and at all public events you will hear live Brass Band from one of the more go-ahead towns (Kwahu Tafo boasts a Royal Music Academy), and Live Band (which is keyboards, with electric guitars and a mplified vocals). Ghanaian pop music is also



played (Hip Life and its successors) by DJs ('spinners') at deafening levels of amplification -- so have your earplugs to hand.

One delightful form of traditional music on public occasions is Kete, graceful dancing to a set of hand-



played drums: and another is Boborbor, which combines drumming, dancing and singing and surprisingly features a muted trumpet.

In both cases, be ready with a small cedi note

to thank a dancer if he or she begs you. [See also TALKING DRUMS p.23]



MYSTIC TOMB Beyond the hidden town of Twenedurase you may be able to find your way with a knowledgeable local guide to a distant view of a cave in the hillside which, with a big slab forming the door to the tomb (sound familiar?), is the resting place of countless un-coffined Chiefs and Ancestors. Tradition has it that you shouldn't make any closer approach – and if you do, you won't return

THINGS TO KNOW

ANCESTORS are not gods, but more like saints, ie the great and good who have gone before, and are held to be still around us every day.

Kwahu people pray for their help in getting messages through to the Lesser Gods (cf. angels) and the Creator, ritually pouring Libation from a green bottle of Schnapps (Dutch Gin).

Why? Because Lesser Gods and Ancestors are thirsty.



ONE MAN ISLAND If you take the long car and boat ride to reach Preda, the Slave Island rising from the waters of Lake Volta (see the entry for Slave Island on *p.22* and Preda on *p.47*), you will also have a chance to visit a small isle t where only one man lives. You may even have the opportunity to ask him the secret of the perfect life, and whether he has found it.



PADLOCK ROCK Near the interesting town of Obo (and ECHO RAVINE see p.8), and in the vicinity of Ghana's first sensational Zip Line (currently under construction), there is a curious formation in the cliff which the locals call Padlock Rock.

As far as we know, no one has yet unlocked it, but maybe, one day, a demon with a key ...

THINGS TO KNOW

YOUR GHANAIAN NAME Kwahu people not only have a welcome waiting for you, but a name too. Every Kwahu baby automatically has a name before it is given any others, and that's the name relating to the day of the week on which it arrives. Ghanaians love to discover *your* birthday, and therefore what they can call you. So, be ready:

Day of the week Boy Monday Kwadwo (KWAD-jwo) Adwoa (AD-jwoa) Kwabena (KWAH-benna) Abena (AH-benna) Tuesday Wednesday Kwaku (KWAH-ku) Akua (AH-kuah) Thursday Yaw (YOW) Yaa (YAAH) Friday Kofi (KOE-fi) Afua (AH-fua) Saturday Kwame (KWAH-meh) Amma (AH-ma) Sunday Kwasi (KWAY-si) Akosua (Ah-KOH-suah)

Mind you, if you are white, you are Kwasi or Akosua anyway, because the first white people were Missionaries, and the Missionaries are associated with "Sunday".

PARAGLIDING

Some years ago a group of intrepid paragliders from USA realised the potential of the sheer mountain that rises above Nkawkaw. Now every Easter pilots come from overseas to strap daredevil locals to them and leap off the edge, sailing onto the wind under a great crescent-shaped parachute.

They land safely, gently (and remarkably) in the football stadium hundreds of feet below. Do you believe you can fly? Come to Kwahu and find out.

PHOSPHORESCENT ROCKS

Near Quarters (aka Mpaam, Mpamu and Amanfrom), a small village on the shore of Lake Volta past Asubone No.1, there are some curious rocks which glow in the dark.

No good for photographs, but could they be a gift from aliens? Now there's another kind of Ancestor...





POTTERY Not all Kwahu boasts good clay, but one place that does is Oframase.

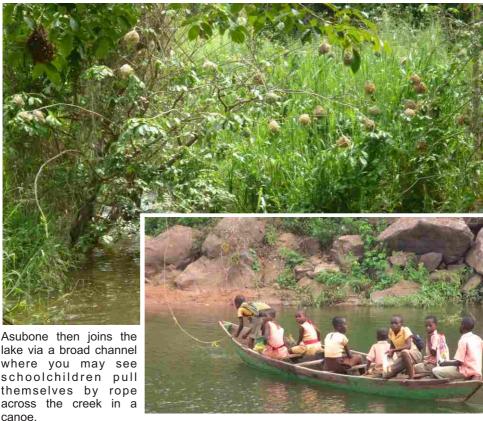
There the roadside is lined with stacks and stacks of pink and black earthenware bowls which are used for grinding garlic, ginger, peppers and other ingredients for local stews. The perfectly circular dishes look as if they have been turned on a wheel, but in fact are made in the traditional way by women walking round and round a pedestal and moulding the shape by eye.

THINGS TO KNOW

BELIEFS Forget broomsticks and magic carpets: witches and wizards in Kwahu fly on banana leaves.

RIVERS abound in Kwahu. The principal River Pra rises near Twenedurase and makes its way eventually to the Atlantic Ocean. Bupru, which runs through Kwahu Tafo and tips over the waterfall Butuase before sparkling through peaceful meadows and farmlands below the Rock Bruku, ends up in the Afram river, now part of Lake Volta. And the generous Asubone (which literally means Bad River) flows under a bridge where weaver birds fill the air with chatter and the trees with their brilliantly woven nests.





THINGS TO KNOW

MEETING PEOPLE

When you encounter any group of people you should approach them with a handshake, always starting from the right, so that your own hand is exposed as carrying no weapon.

If it is a seated gathering, rather than simply people standing in the street, you do the round of greeting and then you will be invited to sit, probably offered some water (because you have been travelling), greeted with a further welcoming handshake by everyone there, and finally asked your 'mission'.

When in due course you feel you should (or want to) leave, you should 'seek permission to

leave'. It is not polite for your host to dismiss you

THE RIGHT HAND

In general try not to use your left hand, which is 'unclean', for anything important like eating, greeting, waving, or passing something. People may even apologise for doing the latter. It's tough growing up left-handed in Ghana. Perversely, some Gods whom you may meet at the Drumming and Dancing gatherings (see p.11) like to be different and use a left hand to greet you. If that happens, do the same!

GREETING A CHIEF

If you are going to be in a town or village for more than a night or two, it is good manners to get someone to take you to the 'Palace' (the Chief's official residence: do not



expect grand), armed with a bottle of Schnapps, to introduce yourself to him. That way he becomes aware that you are in his community, so that he can take care of your general safety and well-being.

If you spot the Chief when you go in, don't head for him first: you still start your greeting from the right. And when the conversation begins. you don't speak directly to a Chief, but address his Linguist (see p.39)

And a final tip: do not cross your legs in the presence of a Chief: it will be taken as an inappropriate sign of self-importance!

ART

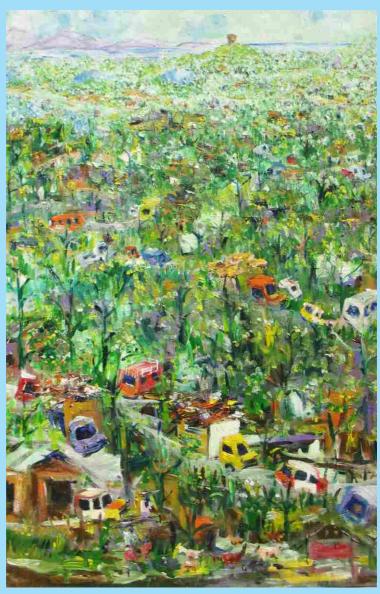
CHRISTOPHER
CHARWAY, the International Awardwinning Ghanaian painter, has been commissioned by Kwahu Tourism Initiative to carry out a superb collection of paintings depicting the glories of Kwahu, and they are for sale through KTI.

Why not brighten your hotel foyer, conference room, or even private hall with one of these great pictures celebrating Kwahu?

Christopher, who is based in La in Accra (027 690 2806), has previously concentrated on urban and seaside themes, and expressed himself thrilled by the scenery and life in Kwahu. "I've never had to use green before!", he told KTI.

His studio in La is packed with many paintings and he welcomes visitors.

This picture is called 'Climbing from Nkawkaw No.2' and measures 40" x 60".



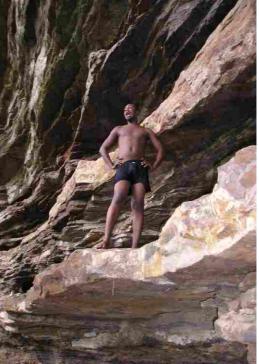
It was exhibited for the first time at the KTI / Ghana Tourism Authority "WAKE UP TO KWAHU! Jewel of Ghana" Exhibition and Conference at WAGS Hotel Obomeng on Good Friday April 18th 2014.

ROCK CLIMBING Subject to respect for local beliefs and traditions which may put certain challenges out of bounds on religious grounds (particularly the very tempting but very sacred Bruku), and the stability of rock faces themselves, there would seem to be many areas in the mountains of Kwahu to interest rock climbers. Kwahu Tourism Initiiative will be happy to guide enthusiasts to survey the area with expert eyes.



ROCK FORMATIONS Apart from the Daddy of them all Bruku, and its Kwahu Tafo companion the great cavern at

Butuase waterfall (above right), there are fascinating rocks to be seen all over the area. Some are weathered outcrops like the precariously hanging rock on the road to Kotoso just where Lake Volta comes stunningly into view: others bear witness as the cave homes of ancestors from many thousands of years BC (right). Many of the most interesting formations (see p.30) are in the area of the citadel 'Stone City' near Amartey and Abuamo, but you may need a 4WD to get there.







ROMAN CATHOLIC SHRINE Kwahu Tafo boasts a striking garden filled with statues representing scenes from the Bible, set under fabulous tall trees.

The area also surrounds an open-air church with an amphitheatre of banked concrete benches which makes a superlative playing space for music or drama, and has hosted performances by the National Theatre of Ghana.

Access to the Shrine is via a gate at one end of a beautiful Palm Plantation.

WHAT TO SEE

SLAVE ISLAND

Unknown to most, this small rocky island in the most northern part of Kwahu marks in silent tribute one of the routes taken by the slave-drivers of the past and their shackled, un-saveable victims.

Before Lake Volta was created, the slaves trod an eastbound path to Preda, where they were thrown into boats to take them down the Volta River to the coast and their journey of no return.

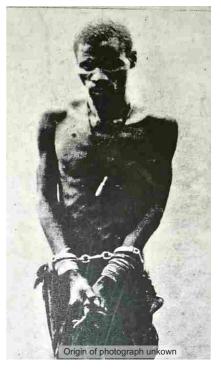
Their footprints now lie below 60 feet of water, and only the lake and sky remember.

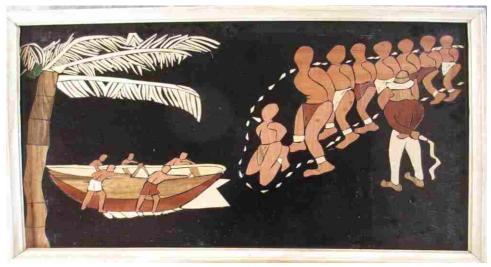
A pilgrimage to visit the site would take you all day by road and then by boat, but it is a chance to share a piece of Ghana's history.

Kwahu Tourism Initiative is seeking funds to set up a memorial on the island with a seat and the legend:

In memory of those who passed this way in chains

BE THANKFUL THAT YOU ARE FREE TO REST





Collage by Kwahu Tafo artist Okai Felix Opoku

TALKING DRUMS

In 'Gone Days' – before mobile phones – the Drum Chief was an important officer in the group of Elders (or sub-Chiefs) at the Palace of every town or village.

He was in fact the village's Minister of Communications if you like, because it was the penetrating beating of the drums which sent messages from one village to another to warn of danger, announce a gathering, or communicate any other piece of public information. By a combination of tone and rhythm, skilfully played 'Abommaa' drums speak messages such as "There are strangers in the area" or "Everybody stand: here comes the Chief"

By arrangement with Kwahu Tourism Initiative, you yourself can pick up a pair of sticks carved from the branches of the Nyenyanfrowa tree and learn how to beat out your own verbal rhythm on a drum. That's what MTV Base's Kat B did in 2007, when he took lessons from the Drum Chief of Kwahu Tafo

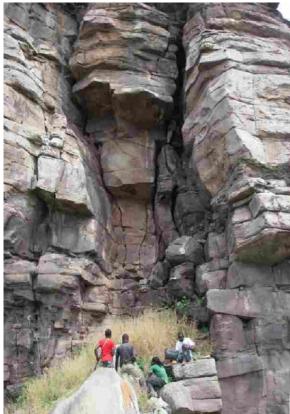


THINGS TO KNOW

SOUNDING THE ALARM In 'Gone Days', the alarm signal was a single note.

TREKKING

It's going to be very hot, rough underfoot, sometimes extremely steep, and more or less everywhere a guide is going to have to go ahead with a machete to beat a path.



But you will go where others don't: you will breathe the air of the ages: you will find ancestral caves: you will even (if you have first paid your respects at the God's shrine in Kwahu Tafo) climb the great hill of Bruku (left).

Take a rucksack with some food and water, and of course your camera. You will never get such shots again. But beware, take no water yam if you clamber up the hill towards Bruku. You need to be reminded why? Please, go back to the first entry in

WHAT TO SEE AND DO



And if you fancy something gentler, see HIKING *page 13*.

WARRIORS CAVE (ENKOFIEHO)

Near Echo Ravine, just beyond Twenedurase, an intrepid guide can clamber with you into the chilly hideout of Kwahu fighters in the days of war with the belligerent Ashanti. Ropes, ladders and torches are provided:

you bring courage.

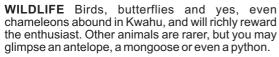


WATERFALLS And finally, what could be nicer than to relax in the refreshing vicinity of a waterfall. Unsurprisingly, Kwahu's craggy hills have many, from the sometimes noisy but always magical



Butuase in Kwahu Tafo to the misty miracle of the two-tiered falls in the forest at Owurubong (see p.45), as well as those at Bukuwura, Asubone No.3, and Kotoso.

Relax, count your blessings, and thank a River Goddess or two.



There are other snakes to be wary of, but generally they will take the lead in avoiding encounters with you.





THINGS TO KNOW

SOME FIRST PHRASES IN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE 'TWI' (SAY 'CHWEE')

- "Maakye" (say 'MAR-chay')
- "Maaha" (say 'MAR-hah'
- "Maadwo" (say 'MAR-jwo')
- "Wo ho te sen?" (say 'wo-HOH-te-seng')
- "Me hoye" (say 'me HOY-yeh')

- = "Good morning!"
- = 'Good afternoon!'
- = 'Good evening!'
- = "How are you?"
- = "I'm fine."

When a man greets you with "Akwaaba!" ('Welcome!'), you reply "Yay ja" (more or less "Yes sir")

When a woman greets you, you reply "Yay eh-na" (more or less "Yes ma'am")

"Medaase" (say Meh-DARS-eh)

"Mepawkyaw" (say 'Me-POW-oo-CHOW-oo')

= "Thank you" = "Please"

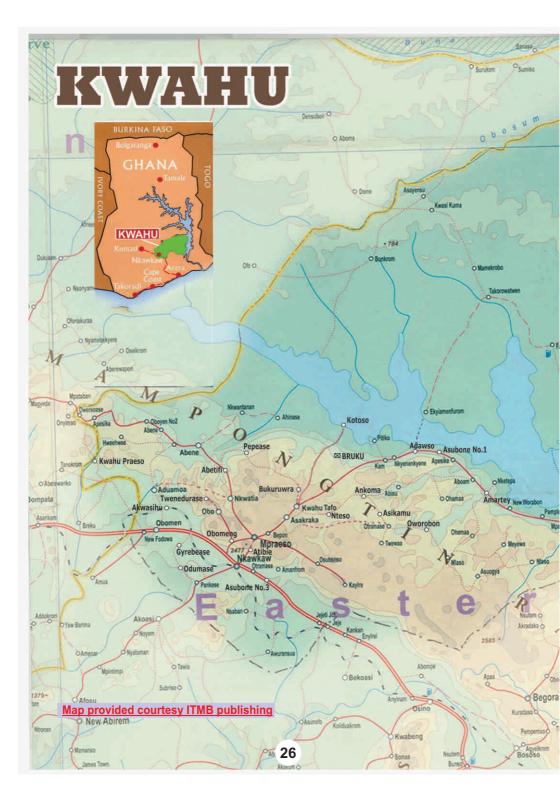
= "Please"

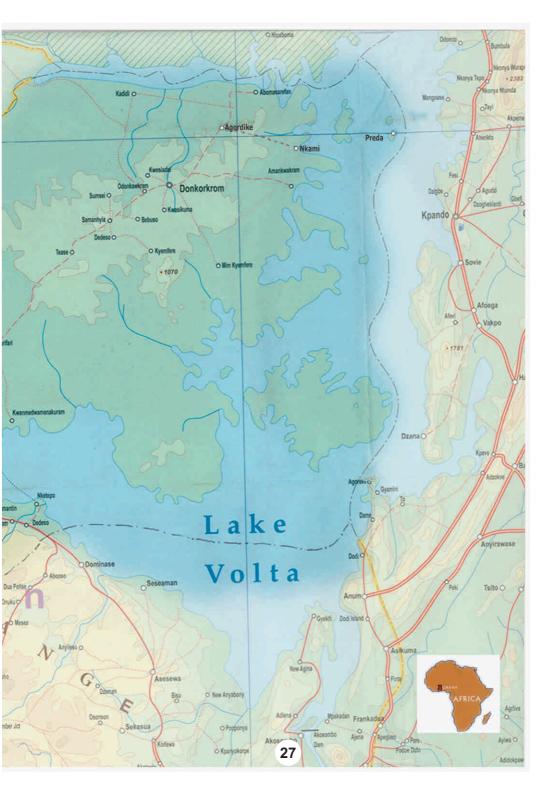
"Okyina" (say 'Otchi-NA')

= "See you tomorrow"

"Bye bye" = "Bye bye" (You see how tough it is?)

If you master these, your hosts will be mightily pleased that you even tried. And never be shy about greeting people: a wave of your (right) hand, and a cheerful "Maakye!/ Maaha!/Maadwo!" will be taken as the friendliest of communications.





AND NOW WE'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU AROUND KWAHU'S TOWNS AND VILLAGES



ABENE is the seat of the Paramount Chief of Kwahu. Every town or village has a Chief, who holds a mayor-like position by virtue of belonging to a particular family, but is under oath to serve his people. It's a life-long job, which is both hardworking and responsible. The Chiefs of the smallest villages owe their allegiance upwards in a multi-level hierarchy which has its apex in the Paramount Chief (see more on pp 9/10).

For such an important place,

Abene is surprisingly remote. You get to it by passing northwest through Abetifi, and descending to find a small settlement cradled in swooping hills ribbed with rock strata, founded originally as a place of safety. There is not a lot to see there, (except, interestingly, the town's ancient prison) but on grand occasions such as festivals or funerals it bursts into life as Chiefs come from all over Kwahu. On such occasions – or any ordinary day -- you may be glad to find relaxation in the Madonna Hot Spot bar.

THINGS TO KNOW

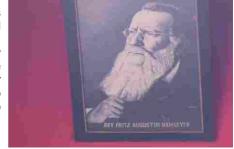
A PASSING PHRASE

In February 2014 the death of the late Paramount Chief of Kwahu, former Chairman of Ghana's Cocoa Marketing Board, was announced on national TV in the customary words: 'He has gone to the village, and we do not know when he will be back'.

ABETIFI At 2,080 ft above sea level, Abetifi Is the highest town in Kwahu, in fact the highest habitable spot in Ghana. In the older part of the town the Presby University College and fine Presby Church pay tribute to the Christian Missionaries led by Dr. Ramseyer who arrived from Switzerland in the late 19th century (having first stopped in Kwahu Tafo, where he left a Bible

still to be seen in the shrine of the Fetish Priest of Bruku). Abetifi is the home of some of Kwahu's ancient caves where archaeologists have found remains from as long ago as 13,000 BC.

If you leave Abetifi on the Pepease road, you may like to pause and take a stroll in the extensive Presbyterian cemetery which you will encounter almost immediately on your right – if only to marvel at the recorded ages of some of those who have more recently been 'called to Glory'.



ADAWSO

This is the southern terminal for the sturdy car ferry which ploughs to and fro across the Afram River, now Lake Volta, several times a day. It carries huge lorries loaded with toppling bags of

charcoal, yams and other produce which are destined for a five hour journey south via Kwahu Tafo and the precarious escarpment winding down to Nkawkaw, to Accra.

But for the visitor, Adawso is where you will clamber into one of the cheerfully painted wooden 'canoes' which take passengers across the water by kind courtesy of an outboard motor. Arrive at the Adawso ferry gates, then branch right following a narrow lane between mud houses until you emerge and find boats waiting. If you charter one, the boatman will take you and your party across the lake to Ekyi (say Etchy)



where you will surely need a cold drink, and he will wait for your return. If you time it right, the views westward into the sunset in late afternoon make the breezy water-lapping trip unforgettable.



ADUAMOAH

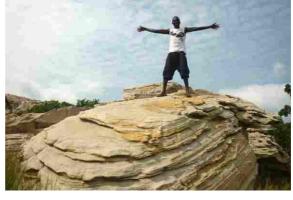
The seat of the Kwahu Benkumhene, that is to say the Chief of the Left (we're speaking battle formation), is located in a 300-year-old Palace which you are invited to visit. Nothing much to look at from the outside, the inner courtyards follow each other in a curious maze as is often the case, as Palaces need to provide different audience chambers for different hearings and meetings. The town is also celebrated for its tiger nuts.

AGORDIKE is the small ferry station on the northernmost edge of Kwahu which receives waterborne traffic from Kpando in the Volta Region. From Agordike you can drive to Donkorkrom, or for more historical interest drive and hire a canoe to Preda Slave Island (see p. 22).

AKWASIHU Off the Kumasi Road after Nkawkaw, this is the nearest town to Echo Ravine (*p.8*) and Padlock Rock (*p.16*). A local entrepreneur has ambitions to build a flight of 1,000 steps here, and Kwahu's first Zip Line.

AMANKWAKROM A farming community on the bank of the Volta River, past Donkorkrom.

AMARTEY This is the area in which to find the huge, curious, scattered rocks that make up the so-called 'Stone City'. Among the beautiful waving grasses lie vast tossed boulders, cow-patted by heat (which must surely have been volcanic) and now cracked by age. Here is a monument, there a citadel, here a great ribbed wall, and there a parcel



tied with string. White and brown, their mystery hides secrets which only the book of time can reveal. It isn't easy to get to, but it's well worth it.

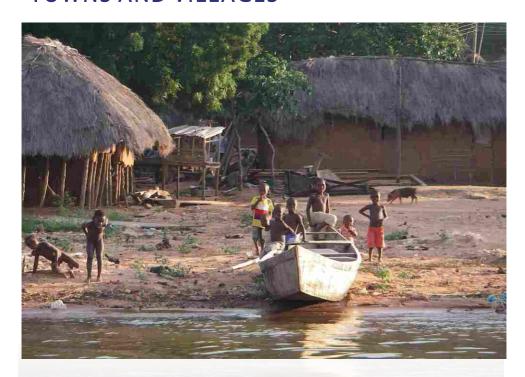




ANKOMA A village between Nteso and Abuamo which marks the beginning of 'Stone City'. Be prepared for very rough roads.

ASAKAKRA A small town which lies between Mpraeso and Kwahu Tafo, Asakraka boasts a spectacular view back towards Nkawkaw, a volunteers' hostel, a fine Senior High School, and one of the very few spots (on the rough track to the school) where you can get 'continental' dishes – basically chicken and chips.

ASIKAMU A farming village on the beautiful road to Owurobon, a drive not to be missed.



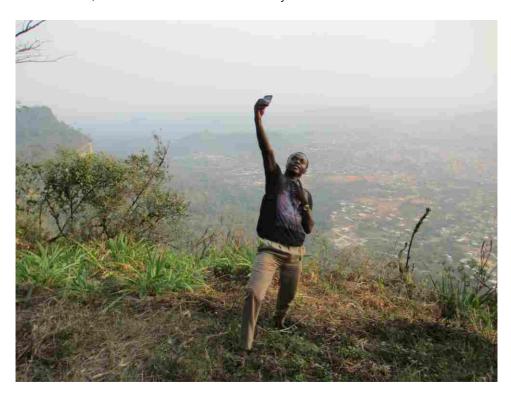
ASUBONE No.1 If you want to experience a simple village with a welcome as wide as a fisherman's grin, head for Asubone on the sandy shore of Lake Volta. You can go by road from Adawso, though sometimes the road is too rough for anything except a 4WD, or by canoe from Adawso, which will take you half an hour of calm motoring down the lake.

The village was once sixty feet below its present level, and when Lake Volta was formed by the creation of the hydro-electric dam at Akosombo in the 60s, the habitation was moved uphill. It's now a friendly fishing village nestling under a wall of massive boulders, and you'll find the beer is as good as the fresh pineapple.

If you venture even further on, towards the dramatic 'Stone City' (see AMARTEY, and ROCK FORMATIONS), you will come to a bridge across a full torrent of the same river, where weaver birds build their ingenious nests in bamboo trees and chatter incessantly to the world (see p 18).

ASUBONE No.3 is a small village off the main Accra-Kumasi highway, in the area which marks your entry to Kwahu before you reach Oframase (the pottery town). Its claim to fame is the River Drobon's waterfall which doesn't dry up and descends into an attractive pool.

ATIBIE After the winding and stimulating trip up the escarpment from Nkawkaw (don't miss the staggering look back from a viewpoint just after you finish the climb: be sure to pull over into a small layby and take a photo – see p.5), you come to Atibie. This busy town has a large district hospital, and soon after it, a road off to the left takes you all the way up to the mountain peak where the Easter Paragliding takes place (see p.17). It's really worth the trip for the scary views from the launch slope itself, and then a few hundred yards further on for the panorama from Odwenanema, where civilisation seems a mile away below.



BEPONG This small sloping town lies between Mpraeso and Asakakra on the road to Kwahu Tafo and Lake Volta. It's built with the Chief's Palace crowning its summit next to a precarious 90-degree turn left which is always jammed with apparently stationary vehicles crammed with bananas and other produce. Bepong has a cheerful market, and is the home of the convenient Moonlight and Spendlove Hotels.

THINGS TO KNOW

BELIEF: Pointing with an index finger is a taboo, and turns bad luck back at you -- through your other three fingers which are pointing to yourself. Try it. So don't point at Bruku! **BELIEF:** If Bruku is shrouded in mist it means he is not there: he has gone to visit his wife. When a God's gotta go, a God's gotta go.

BUKUWURA As you leave Kwahu Tafo for Bukuruwa you pass a Presbyterian cemetery on the left, where you may care to pause at the grave of the late actor Gyearbuor Asante, 'Matthew' in

the UK TV series *Desmond's*, who was buried there in 2000 to the waving of a hundred hankies and a rainbow arching in the sky.

Bukuwura's pride is a big wall of rock with a cheerful waterfall and an especially sweet source of drinking water. It also has a fine Community Centre donated by the Swiss Government, and a stone chair which is said to



belong to a dwarfish creature who wanders around under a huge umbrella. We haven't seen him yet.

DONKORKROM ('krom' means town) An impressive town some way into the farmlands of the Afram Plains, with a major Hospital at its heart. As a visitor your main reason for passing

through is to reach Preda, the Slave Island which links Kwahu to one of history's great tragedies (see p. 22).

THINGS TO KNOW

POURING LIBATION

On many occasions, formal and not so, Kwahu people like to observe the pouring of Libation – a small ceremony invoking the blessing of the ancestors and/or the Gods. A bottle of strong liquor



(most properly these days Schnapps) is presented, opened, and, with prayers being said, distributed in nips in a small glass: if it is passed to you, spill a couple of drops on the ground (the ancestors like a drink, and you can take the opportunity to count your blessings or think a little prayer to yourself), swig almost all of it in one go (which may make your eyes water), and cast a last drop again on the ground before you pass the glass back.

As with so many Kwahu ceremonies, the initial quaintness resolves after an occasion or two into the pleasure of participating in a ritual from 'Gone

Days' which for a moment or two finds stillness in the day, and puts us mortals respectfully in touch with another realm.

EKYI (say 'Etchy') Even Kwahu people shorten Ekviamenfurom to a handier form of name, and the simple cluster of shops, drinking spots and fishing boats doesn't really merit a long one. Ekyi mainly features as the northern port for the car-ferry on its frequent cross-lake journeys from Adawso, and through it traffic continues to the wide-open spaces of the great farming area, the Afram Plains.



FORI FORI

Is largely known for its prison on the road between Ekyi and Donkorkrom. It need not, as they say, detain you.

GYREBIASE A village between Akwasimu and Kwahu Praeso, just beyond Nkawkaw, where the Kwahu people defeated the belligerent Ashanti Empire and established their independence and

lifestyle around and on top of the Kwahu Ridge.

KAM Though this area (on the right as you go from Kwahu Tafo to Adawso) is now chiefly of interest to archaeologists in search of stone-age remains, it also marks with a simple hillside cross the site of a fatal landslide in 1971, which obliterated two villages.

You are bound to give them a passing thought as a local guide brings you here to start a trek into the uplands of Kwahu, heading for the 'Ancestral Grounds'. Spectacular views, tough climbing, and hot sun!





FELIX OKAI OPOKU ART

These striking creations in plywood veneer are by a young artist from Kwahu Tafo by the name of Felix Okai Opoku, who is based in Nsawam. His work may be bought from the artist himself on 02491 53590, or at the Aburi Woodcarving Centre, or by contacting Kwahu Tourism Initiative on 02492 02869.





THINGS TO KNOW

VOLUNTEERING

Kwahu is not yet overwhelmed by volunteers – which means there is room for more! KTI will be delighted to help welcome gifted visitors of all qualification, whether for short stays or longer, who want to share skills with local people, assist with spoken English, or work on projects, in schools, sport, IT (called ICT in Ghana), and creative arts.

We suggest that those interested visit www.wakeuptokwahu.com in the first place, and follow up from there. Few communities have any money to support you, but if Ghana ticks your box you should certainly think about spending time in the coolest place in the country.

THINGS TO KNOW

FRESH FRUIT TREATS

Traditional liquid refreshment is still sold by the roadside in competition with modern fizzy drinks. Coconuts are deftly scalped for you to swig the delicious milk /water inside, after which you hand the big nut back to the vendor for it to be cracked so that you can scrape out the tender flesh. Oranges are peeled with very sharp knives, then displayed for you to buy, whereupon the top will be sliced half off, and you take the delicious fruit away to suck the juice from it. There are few things as good as either of these. Unless it's golden mangos which mass in their dark trees at the right season, and are the messiest things to eat ... oh and the avocados practically falling off their branches, the like of which you have never tasted. And sweet little bananas (buy a tiny packet of ground nuts to go with), or the delicious pineapples, or "pawpaw.

THINGS TO KNOW

POUNDING FUFU One of the great sounds of Kwahu is the thudding of pestle into mortar as a household prepares Ghana's favourite dish, fufu. Fufu is an unseasoned combination of boiled plantain and cassava (and sometimes yam or coco-yam), which the pounding with water turns into a gluey paste which is then plopped into a bowl and heaped with rich peppery soup or stew. The whole dish is now called fufu. The meat in the stew may very well be grasscutter (a bush rabbit with a gamey taste) or goat, sometimes with fish /crabs / snails thrown in, and tendril-like wood mushrooms.



EATING WITH YOUR FINGERS

Ghanaians eat such stews and other dishes with their fingers, whereas many travellers prefer their 'finger food' dry. If you are eating fufu with your fingers, use your right hand, and wash it in the proffered water before and after. You mould the paste with the fingers of your right hand into a spoon shape and then use it to pick up some of the delicious highly-flavoured soup, and scoop it into your mouth. Be prepared to get messy! If you prefer, though, don't be afraid to ask for a spoon. And you may well be sharing a table - or indeed the actual dish – with a local: if you are and there's something in there which you don't fancy, don't hesitate to pass it to your fellow diner: it may well be a delicacy to him.

CARBOHYDRATES The Kwahu diet is based (and ordered) on a carbohydrate foundation – fufu, rice, yam (very nice, potatoey), banku made from corn dough and cassava, or kenkey made from corn dough and wrapped in corn leaves. Both these two ferment a little, which increases their slightly sour

taste. All are served with some spicy sauce. Less strange foods freely available (and delicious) include crispy fried yam, beans, rice dishes, noodles, and some enticing vegetable stews like palaver sauce (spinach) and red-red (beans).

STREET FOOD Find your local food at any street stall, or eating 'chop bar' (chop bars and drinking 'spots' are always identifiable by the striped painted fence or wall round them). The expert cooks will be delighted to pile your plate high, or bring you a massive bowl of something steamy. Street sellers also cook omelettes in the evening, kebabs, and kelewele which is a delicious sweet fry of plantain and a bit of ginger, wrapped in newspaper.

NON-GHANAIAN If local food is not to your taste, try asking for 'continental', which basically starts with chicken and chips.

KOTOSO Pick a Tuesday or Friday and go in the early morning to Kotoso's market on the shore of Lake Volta seven miles from Kwahu Tafo. The tarmac route is easy (a walk if you like), scenically stunning, passing Bruku on the right, and eventually plunging down to the lake past toppling 'hanging' rocks. Tiny scarlet birds flit in and out of the grasses as you descend, and before the road flattens out you might choose to venture off into the bush to your left



and find a third

waterfall belonging to Kwahu Tafo's River Bupru.

The market covers the shoreline, displaying baskets and bowls of gasping fish of all shapes and looks, and every kind of colourful vegetable and grain, along with jeans and T-shirts and household equipment, much of it homemade. Take your time and wander around to find boats being built and fish being smoked. Your morning greeting of 'Maakye' (say 'MARCHay') will go down a treat.

THINGS TO KNOW

WEALTH

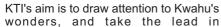
Until not so very long ago, a Kwahuman or woman's wealth was measured in cloths – how many beautiful wax-print, batik or Kente cloths you had accumulated. The 'best' wax-prints came from Holland, and were highly prized. Nowadays your worth may more likely be reckoned in buildings, household goods and mobile phones.

KENTE CLOTH

The traditional bright woven cotton cloth so associated with Ghana mostly comes from one village (not in Kwahu) called Bonwire, which is near Kumasi. A few weavers have set up their looms in Kwahu (one in Kwahu Tafo, for instance), and their produce is highly valued for all grand wear, for men and women alike. The woven strips, when not carrying greetings messages for tourists these days, are made in ancient patterns and stitched together, seventeen at a time for example to make a man's cloth.



KWAHU TAFO Perfectly placed at the centre of Kwahu's finest attractions, principally Bruku and Lake Volta, Tafo (for short, but not to be confused with other Tafos in Ghana), is an unspoiled farming town of charm, energy, computerised schools and clean drinking water. Its Chief has delegated the task of tourism development to a NGO called Kwahu Tafo Progress Council, and KTPC in turn has founded Kwahu Tourism Initiative.



championing the *Jewel of Ghana's* cultural and ecological potential. Many of Kwahu's sites deserve respect for the ancient beliefs with which they are permeated – not least Tafo's own reputation as the 'University' of Fetish Priest training (because of its proximity to the God Bruku – see p.7): many locations need to be preserved from the ravages of time and the occasionally careless impact of unthinking tourism. Your help and interest are important and will be very greatly welcomed.



In Kwahu Tafo you can stay at the Chief's own simple 'Blessed Arrival' Guest House, and share life in the village as dusk falls. Did you know that 'Maadwo' (say MAR-jwo) – the Twi for 'good evening' – means 'good cool time'? Nice.



If you were a fan of the British TV sitcom *Desmond's*, you can find an 'old African saying' outside the Community Library, where Kwahu Tafo's son Gyearbuor Asante, who played the eternal student 'Matthew', is commemorated by his starry UK friends. Next to the Library is Hat Trick Internet Café, which is open to the public.

It was donated to the town by the UK TV company which makes the award-winning "Have I Got News For You" along with other celebrated comedies.

THINGS TO KNOW

TAFO means 'good hunting ground', which is what the original settlers found as they established their homes here. It literally translates as 'my soup ladle is wet'.

THINGS TO KNOW

WHITE 'KENKEY', the starchy food made from corn-dough, is a much-prized Tafo speciality. If you fancy your Twi-speaking enough to order it in the local language, beware: it's name 'Ensihuo' is often confused with 'Ensihunu' (nonsense'). The confusion between the two gives rise to much local hilarity.

KWAHU PRAESO A farming community on the bank of the River Pra which marks the boundary with Ashanti at the western edge of Kwahu. Those living near the river do not eat fish from it, because when the Gods asked the Kwahus to choose between fish and money, they chose money. This seems to be the tale behind the Kwahus' modern reputation as the Traders of Ghana.

MPRAESO Divided from Atibie only by a small river, Mpraeso is the first main hub once you have climbed the escarpment from Nkawkaw -- a bustling crossroads of a place, with a spacious stadium, a big



taxi/bus station surrounded by street-food and fruit sellers, a cheerful market and a good post-office. There is a congenial drinking place called Premier Club, which is up a staircase and commands a view over the busy main street, and conveniently too, at Ghana Commercial Bank on the Nkwatia road, there is an ATM which takes Visa.

MIASO The Nteso road from Kwahu Tafo to the charming hilltop town of Begoro (say "Beh-GROH), which lies just outside the Kwahu area, passes through this small market town and some very delightful scenery.

MAAMEKROBO A big market town between Ekyi and Tease on the Afram Plains, it houses the sizeable Osafo Kantanka Motel. Caves and wild goats abound in the area.

NKAMI A community on the Afram Plains in the vicinity of Preda Slave Island. Once upon a time Nkami was the site of a boundary war with the Voltarians, which the Kwahu won. The victory (and the Afram River God) are celebrated every August / September in a spectacular festival. It is said that (at least in 'Gone Days') the River Afram could be walked across in the dry season at Nkami.



THINGS TO KNOW

A LINGUIST is a Chief's chamberlain. He carries the royal Clan's staff on formal occasions, and enters first to announce the arrival of the Chief. He also acts as spokesman -- which means you address yourself to him and not the Chief, even if the Chief is sitting there. The Linguist will précis your speech, adjusting the tone if advisable, and then do the same to the Chief's reply to you. The function is to distance the Chief slightly, and also on occasions, it can be said, to lighten the tone. This particular talent of the Linguist brings to mind the function of the Court Jester, or Shakespearean 'fool', being the King's closest confidant and at the same time someone who (in the days before mass entertainment) could make the court laugh. This essential accomplishment, however, in no way undermines the solemnity of the Linguist's public function, without which no Chiefly event can proceed.



NKAWKAW Until recently this large town was a chaotic junction where you were as likely to get knocked down by a breadseller as by a lumbering truck. Now a bypass means you turn off the main Accra-Kumasi highway to reach the busy town itself, and the most tangled junction (the one you want in order to fork right towards the mountain) is controlled by traffic lights.

If you have come to Kwahu by bus, this is where you alight, and you will be eagerly thronged by taxi drivers competing to take you on to your destination.

Enjoy the chaos, choose one, tell him where you are going, and before you get in to the car, try



a bargain on the price he asks. He will start high because you are a foreigner: you'll be lucky if you get it as low as a Ghanaian would (so you could do worse than get a Ghanaian to negotiate for you!), but no doubt you will have the satisfaction of getting him down a bit. It's relatively not a matter of great expense anyway. A tip at the end of the journey is not expected.

From this town you look directly up to the mast-crowned mountain, and the clearing from which the paragliders jump (see p. 17). Beneath it, it has a very large and fascinating

market, an internet café, three 'continental' restaurants – KitKat, Oboba Village and Starboat -- a Barclays Bank with a good ATM on your way to the mountain road, and conveniently next door to the latter a motor-oil shop where the owner will change foreign currency at a competitive rate.

There are two ways up the hill to the Kwahu Ridge. The one you are most likely to take is a hairraising corkscrew of badly madeup road, with enormous buses and lorries thundering down towards you. Enjoy the ride: you'll get there!



NKETEPA A fishing village on the shore of Lake Volta to the east of Adawso. It has a good market on Saturdays.

NKWATIA A junction town on the road between Mpraeso and Abetifi, it is set in undulating hills and is the home of two well-known schools – one of which (St. Peter's) boasts not only pupils but also a pool full of crocodiles. Local Businessman Bryan Acheampong is building Rock City, intended to be West Africa's largest Hotel and Conference Centre, on an impressive hillside outside Nkwatia.

NTESO A small village a mile or two outside Kwahu Tafo on a road that goes to Ankoma (for Stone City – see Rock Formations page 21) and then Oworubon (not to be missed, see p.45).

It has the usual schools, town square, Palace (ie quite modest residence of the Chief), and a small IT centre. The Chief of Nteso tells us of a spring which shoots water into the air, and a well which in the dry season you can only enter backwards.

OBO is rather surprising. It features plunging hills and some sophisticated buildings (*right*), and indicates one area where wealthier Kwahu people build weekend retreats in some style.

Obo is the home of Hi Life legends Kwadwo Antwi and Nana Ampadu.



THINGS TO KNOW

PALM WINE is tapped from a freshly felled palm tree, and is much appreciated by its customers



as it is ladled from a sometimes flyblown cauldron into an individual gourd for drinking.

Palm wine sellers operate in wooden shacks in towns, and often in grass-roofed pull-ins at the roadside. In the morning the brew is fresh and quite sweet to the taste: but in the evening, a fterith as fermented and become even more intoxicating, who cares?

OBOMENG This mainly one-street town is Mpraeso's immediate neighbour to the northwest. You may find yourself having passed through it surprisingly soon, if you don't make a point of turning off either to visit WAGS Hotel (which has a very spacious open-air bar and a swimming pool), or to find the newer and better alternative road which winds back down the mountain to Nkawkaw, which, with decent tarmac and nearly as good dramatic views, is a route some people prefer to take – even if it's not as much fun.

ODUMASE Cocoa is Ghana's second-ranking export, but it is not native to the country. It was imported in 1879 from Fernando Po, and Kwahu history claims that Ghana's very first cocoa farm was established here, on the way out of Nkawkaw on the Kumasi road, by one Opanyin Mensah. There isn't much to see these days, but the present owner will be delighted by your visit (you may have to take a Twi speaker with you). Opanyin Mensah's last house still stands in Nkawkaw itself.



OFRAMASE

You cannot escape the pottery of Oframase as you approach Nkawkaw from Accra. Thousands of bowls and pots line the street for sale, indicating the age-old speciality of this area. Mostly they are simple kitchen dishes, scored inside for the grinding of your soup's first ingredients (little peppers, ginger, tomatoes, garlic, onions), but there are also pretty glazed jugs and casseroles (see POTTERY p.17).

Oframase is one of the Kwahu towns (another is Kwahu Tafo) which has 'enstooled' (installed) a Development Chief from the

UK, whose influence is widely appreciated by the community.

There is another village of the same name between Asakakra and Oworubon, a route which truly repays a drive (see OWORUBON, below).

BEN ADDO ART

Sculptor and designer Ben Addo lives in Abetifi and has an ambition to people the prehistoric cave in the forest below his house with plaster figures recalling the area's stone- age inhabitants. Anyone interested in supporting this emotive and compelling tourist attraction of the future can reach him on 0207-385-882.





THINGS TO KNOW

RELIGION

There are three religions practised in Kwahu. Christianity predominates, alongside Islam and the Traditional Faith which was universely practised in Kwahu before the Missionaries arrived in the 19th Century. Christianity was enthusiastically adopted because it offered two things the Traditional Faith didn't – schools and the hope of a heavenly afterlife. Today the three faiths lead an admirable co-existence, and are tolerant of each other's different routes towards the Creator.

CHRISTIANITY in its many denominations plays a significant part in daily life for the majority of Kwahu people. Sunday services can last four or five hours and are joyful events with serious preaching, and no meeting or formal event will start without a (usually Christian) prayer for its success. Even a bus journey may kick off with someone praying loudly for safe arrival: in one witnessed case this prayer lasted 90 minutes, of which all one can say is that it worked. Interestingly, whatever the prevalence of the Christian faith, its word for God is the same as that used before the missionaries arrived – Nyame — and it is certainly true that it is very difficult for a Kwahu Christian to completely shake off all the underlying beliefs of tradition.



TRADITIONAL FAITH The Akan people (the wider group that encompasses Twi-speakers as



well as the Ashanti, Fanti and others) have a profound sense of a spiritual world which permeates all daily life. The spirits are not elsewhere on some distant cloud, but actually here with us in a parallel universe that interacts with everyday life. They must be communed with, kept up to date, and prayed to. Spells are common currency, and many events are thought to be caused by them, which is where Priests come in for their doing or undoing: and factual acceptance of the Spiritual Empire even in the modern world can express itself with surprising conviction where the outsider might anticipate something more resembling token respect.

ISLAM travelled with its people from the North of the original territory which became Ghana, and the faithful settled in communities all over the country. Muslims tend to group themselves in an area which then becomes known as Zongo, where Arabic is spoken and the religious customs of Islam are observed. The Islamic community's relationship with the rest of the town or village is amicable and constructive. They also, with their careful tending of sheep and goats, tend to be the only group in Ghana that produces — hooray — cheese.



THINGS TO KNOW

PROVERBS

There are hundreds if not thousands of Akan proverbs (Akan being the large clan that the Kwahus are related to). These sayings may strike the newcomer as quaint ('If you have some cotton tied to your bum, don't jump over the fire') or sometimes near-unintelligible ('It's not until the frog dies that you can measure its length'), but once unravelled ('Don't take foolish risks' and 'Only when a man's life is over can you truly evaluate it'), they are as good to use as 'A stitch in time saves nine'. They provide a (literally) agreeable way of expressing a truth, with a colour and imagery which makes them both timeless and

memorable. For some more visit www.friendsoftafo.org

ADINKRA SYMBOLS

These abstracted images, like proverbs, enshrine the wisdom of the ages, and may declare homilies such as Gye Nyame: 'Without God nothing is possible' (right), Sankofa: 'Don't be afraid to look back and learn from your mistakes' etc. The word Adinkra relates to funerals, when a cloth might be stamped with these symbols in meaningful decoration, and nowadays you will see them everywhere, in building blocks as often as on calendars. They are a uniquely Ghanaian product, and are regarded with respect and affection, even though there are many more than the average Ghanaian would ever be able to remember the meaning of.



BELIEFS ABOUT BRUKU

Bruku protects the citizens of Kwahu even from death. Once upon a time a young woman went to farm in the



Bruku area, not knowing it was a ritual day. Normally she would not have returned alive, but Bruku took pity on her and hid her in a perfumed dust-cloud for 20 minutes, which protected her and she went home safely.

And another time, an old woman took her baby grandchild with her when she went to uproot cassava on a day when it was forbidden. Pausing in her work she turned round to see the baby in the embrace of a huge python: but the baby was sucking contentedly on the python's tail.

When the old woman cried out, the snake slid

away, and she returned home, afraid to tell the story. Only later, in the shrine of the God concerned, could she confess and be reassured that she was forgiven for her trespass, and the God had been taking care of her baby.

OWOROBONG There's a wonderful two-level waterfall here, misty in full flow and half-hidden



below tangled and bird-filled trees, which is well worth a visit: and since your scenic 13 mile journey from Asakakra journey will take you through farmlands and villages under high rocky hills, it will bring you as close to rural Kwahu as you could wish.

Oworobong itself has benefitted from the donation of a splendid clinic built locally and originally funded by two impoverished young Americans who once visited the village. Now it also serves as a very basic but charming hostel for travellers.



If you are interested, you can address your enquiries to Kwahu Tourism Initiative on 02492 02869.



PEPEASE You can reach the mountain-top town of Pepease either from Abetifi or via a rural and slightly rough-road climb from Bukuruwa. The characterful town is poised above huge views of the distant Bruku, and hosts a large

hotel called Modak Royal.

PITIKU For simple charm it's hard to beat this tiny fishing village which has breathtaking crosslake and cattle-fringed views of the Bruku range. It's also quite hard to find it, but set out from Kwahu Tafo in the direction of Adawso, and take a left turn at Pitiku Junction near Kam, and you'll get there.

QUARTERS This is (rather confusingly) one of four names, along with Amanfrom Mpaam and Mpamu, applied to a village beyond Asubone

No.1 which was relocated at the time of the creation of Lake Volta.





To some minds it may seem that the planners of this resettlement lacked imagination in the layout and their (then) modern versions of traditional houses, but to their credit they installed a public solar lighting system. Unfortunately, the task of looking after the batteries defeated the populace, and it has fallen into disuse. On the outskirts you can find a beautiful thin tall waterfall, (left) and in the vicinity some curious phosphorescent rocks to keep the night-time visitor guessing.

THINGS TO KNOW

"You are invited" In your off-piste Kwahu travels you'll realise that with the open layout of a small village you are often at risk of walking over part of someone's swept and dusted compound, but you shouldn't worry: you won't get shooed away – much more likely invited in for a chat (in so far as limited language will allow), and even the offer of some food. 'You are invited' is the polite way of asking you to share whatever is being cooked or eaten: take a judgement about (a) the likely taste (probably delicious) and (b) how many other mouths have to be fed, and decline with charm or go for it. Your hosts will be delighted if you accept – and maybe you've got a cedi to spare afterwards.

PREDA SLAVE ISLAND Preda is the unmarked island marking the transfer of slaves into boats at the edge of the Volta River, now submerged by the creation in the 1960s of Lake Volta, and unknown to many Kwahus. Kwahu Tourism Initiative has hopes of marking the spot with a simple memorial, see 'Slave Island' (*p.22*).

SEMANSHIA The Afram Plains offer the Kwahu people room to expand their farms, and there are several large-scale commercial undertakings in the area. From here produce such as yam and maize is transported by road all the way across Lake Volta at Ekyi/Adawso and onward to Accra.

TEASE One of several spacious maize and yam farming communities in the Afram Plains between Ekyi and Donkorkrom.

TWENEDURASE This small quiet town beyond Obo is worth a visit for its peaceful and hilly setting. It's your starting point if you want to test your vocal powers at Echo Ravine, or find the source of the ocean-bound River Pra.

THINGS TO KNOW

FIRE is supposed to have been brought to the Aduana Clan by a dog carrying burning twigs in its mouth.

You should probably resist the notion that this could be the origin of the term Hot Dog.





THE LEOPARD is the clan symbol of the Chiefs of Abetifi (see the Adontenhene's cloth on p.3, worn specially for this photograph), and is the traditional guardian and bringer of good fortune to the community.

Accordingly, no-one in Abetifi is allowed to keep a dog. Obviously, because dogs frighten Leopards away.

THINGS TO KNOW

DWARVES Kwahu is home not only to humans, but also the mysterious and rather malevolent creatures known as 'Dwarves' (say 'Dwahvs'). They are 3 ft high, yellow in colour, and their feet face the wrong way. You do well not to displease the Dwarves. They cannot be seen by normal mortals – except, some say, by white people: but there are no recorded instances of such close encounters.

A rather intriguing theory has it that they may be a folk-memory of Bushmen, once living in the land that became Ghana. Bushmen are short, light in colour, and so good at disguising their tracks in the forest that surely their feet are not made like "ours?"

PRACTICAL ADVICE

WHERE TO STAY

Blessed Arrival Guest House, Kwahu Tafo: 0244 213 075

16 small doubles with ensuite cold shower and WC: catering and bar by arrangement. Walking distance to the centre of the village.

Dong Bang Hotel, Asakraka: 0201 866 530

Small multi-storey with basic facilities, but probably not food. Between Asakakra and Kwahu Tafo. Not walking distance.

Loop Hills Hotel, Nkwatia: 0248 410 661

Budget Hotel between Nkwatia and Abetifi

Modak Royal Hotel, Pepease: 0208 492 474

Ambitious complex on high ground with dining and bar facilities.

Walking distance into Pepease.

Moonlight Hotel, Bepong: 0208 150 559

Modest but serviceable hotel with good rooms but no catering

Ohene Nana Classic Hotel, Mpraeso: 0209 690 002

Good mid-range hotel with dining and bars. Walking distance or short taxi ride from town centre, on Nkwatia road.

Rojo Hotel, Nkawkaw: 0244 250 593

Attractive hotel with clean pool: generous rooms, dining and bars.

Short taxi ride from centre of Nkawkaw, on the road to the mountains and Mpraeso.

Spendlove Hotel, Bepong: 0265 733 833

New mid-range hotel conveniently placed between Mpraeso and Bepong.

WAGS Hotel, Obomeng: 0246 572 380

Big multi-storey with all mod cons, spacious bar and pool area, and even executive bungalows and a conference room. Short taxi ride from the centre of Obomeng.

CURRENCY

The currency, as you will surely know by now, is the Ghana Cedi (say Ghana CEEDy). This is to distinguish it from the 'old' Cedi which was in use until the Government knocked 4 zeros off and

changed Ghana from a culture of 'millions' to a currency (at that time) in line with the US dollar. Older folk still refer to millions and get confused by the new denomination, but the simple equation is 'for a million say a hundred'.

The Ghana Cedi is divided into 100 pesewas; and sometimes people say simply 'Ghana' instead of 'Ghana Cedis' ('Twenty Ghana').

'Cedi' actually means 'cowrie shell', and these pretty shells, now seen as adornments worn particularly by Fetish



Priestesses but also much liked by tourists, were the original currency for the area. Obviously those were days when money did grow – if not on trees – at least on the ground.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

HOW TO GET AROUND

TAXIS: CHARTER

SINGLE TRIP -- In any town or village you can engage a taxi for your exploratory trips. Taxis are registered, and distinctive: their paintwork is uniformly bicoloured and there is (usually!) a TAXI sign on the roof. They do not have meters, so you agree a rate for your intended journey before you start - probably at around two-thirds of the price the driver first suggests (bargaining is all done



- with lots of laughter, and should not make you anxious).
- HOURLY RATE -- Alternatively you may choose to negotiate an hourly rate and keep the driver with you: it's a reassuring way to make sure of your transport, wherever you intend going.
- DAY RATE -- Kwahu Tourism Initiative (call Bediako on 0249 202 869 / 0264 349 058) will arrange a day's hire for you from its list of approved drivers. Why not let us take the worry out of getting around?

Oh, and the taxis do have seat belts: it's wise to use them.

TAXIS: JOINING

If you are making a short trip from one town to another you can also flag down a taxi which already has passengers in it, enquire if it's going your way, squeeze in and pay a standard rate which is very cheap.

BUSES

You have to know your way round a bit, but before long you may take to the crowded minibuses called Tro-Tro (say Troh as in hot, not Troe as in slow) which pass from town to town, stopping and picking up more or less as requested. Cheap, and cheerful. You pay a set fare on board

THINGS TO KNOW

GMT: GHANA MAYBE TIME

Anyone who travels in Ghana will have encountered the frustrations of African timekeeping, and Kwahu is no 'better' than the rest of the country at making it possible to apportion your day with any predictability. The basic Alice-in-Wonderland paradox is that no one will turn up for the meeting at 4pm because everyone knows no one will come till 6pm: so the organisers advertise the meeting time as 2pm, hoping people will know that means about 4pm. But, knowing that, people come around 6pm. Ghanaians acknowledge it's a problem, but turn aside our clock-tied fretting with a chuckle: "Ghana ...!" As Ryszard Kapuscinski famously quoted in 'The Shadow of the Sun': "What time will the meeting begin?" "It will begin when people get here".

PRACTICAL ADVICE

IS IT SAFE IN KWAHU?

Theft is deeply frowned upon in Kwahu society, and you should have no worries, but of course it is wise to take care with your personal valuables (cash, phone etc), and not leave temptation in anybody's way. You can feel perfectly safe walking around, but remember that night falls promptly at 6.30 pm, and you will be glad you have thought to carry a torch.

If you have anything to report, most communities have a police station, and all have a Chief's Palace. Either will be attentive and helpful.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

Communities generally do not have doctors, so if you suffer an accident or do not feel well, get someone immediately to get a taxi and take you to the nearest clinic or hospital.

If a local dish has upset your stomach it is better to be safe than sorry: and though Kwahu is enviably freer from mosquitoes than most parts of Ghana, any fever should be investigated immediately.

Many villages and towns will have a Pharmacy where you can buy instant remedies, and sometimes a native remedy will be suggested (certain leaves crushed will helpfully staunch a wound for example).

INTERNET

The simplest way to make connection is buy a modem ('dongle') to plug into your USB. Widely available (but perhaps in towns rather than villages) it uses a simcard from a supplier (MTN, Tigo, Airtel, Vodafone etc) which you top up by buying scratch cards. More sohisticated and giving a stronger signal is a portable WiFi, a palm-size device which will connect several pcs in the same place. These take any brand of sim card. Signal strength is patchy and erratic, but improving.



A few towns (Kwahu Tafo is one) have an internet café at the service of the public.







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