

Second Annual General Meeting of Friends of Soqotra

Holgate House, Grey College, Durham University

Sunday 21 September 2003

Present: Miranda Morris, Hugh Morris, John Farrar, Julian van Rensburg, John Dickson, Michael Gwynne, Maureen Gwynne, Diccon Alexander, Sue Christie, Douglas Botting, Roderic Dutton, Martin Corrie, Michael Harrington, Ray Lawton, David Porter, Tony Miller, John Shipman, Bohumil Prazan, Ruth Atkinson

1. Apologies: Peter de Geest, Wolfgang Schnieder, Sandy and Morag Smith, Len and Wendy Pearce, Catherine Cheung and Lyndon Devanter, Alexander Sedov, Benno Boer, Richard Porter, Jane Taylor, Susanna Clymo, Jacopo Monzini, Jenny Balfour-Paul, Mike Mueller, Gale Raymond, Michael MacDonald, Henry Thompson, Roz Park, Grazia Borrini – Feyerband, Cynthia Ehrlich, Julian Paxton, Peter Shinnie, Ian Harmond, Michael Gallagher, David Matthews, Nicholas and Susan Morris, Rob Petts, Karim Nasher, Jose-Marie Bel, Neil Oakman, Phil Haines, Wolfgang Wranik, Rebecca Klaus, Nick Jeffries, Jo Darlington, Dylan Hannon, Soqotri Members in the Gulf (via Ahmad Al Soqotri).

2. Minutes of the Second AGM, 30 November 2002. Approved.

3. Matters Arising. FoS and SCF. In the original Global Environment Fund document it was recommended that two organisations should be created; the Socotra Conservation Fund was to be large, Yemeni based, and deal with governments, policy and large funding applications. Friends of Soqotra was to be international and deal primarily with getting messages about Soqotra out to the wider world; it was to support SCF in actions on the ground. Both have evolved into being, with the change that SCF was told by its donors that it should be registered in the UK. What has yet to be achieved is a clear mechanism of how the two organisations can best work together for the benefit of Soqotra. Roderic and Miranda recently had a meeting in London, organised by the Yemeni Ambassador, with Abdul Karim El Eryani (Chair of SCF, past Prime Minister of Yemen, and Advisor to the President) about how best the two organisations can work together. This was a most positive and constructive meeting, and Roderic was invited to a meeting of all relevant SCF stakeholders in Sana'a in October at which all could discuss matters and work out a solid relationship. Roderic and Miranda are confident that, with the involvement of Dr El Eryani, it will be possible to develop a very positive working relationship with SCF. Two specific projects involving co-operation are the Exhibition at the

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in 2005 and a proposal to the Darwin Fund for developing educational materials for Soqotra based on available scientific information. The latter could eventually be expanded to other areas of Yemen and would increase awareness and appreciation of Soqotra.

John Dickson raised the issue of non-payment of subscriptions. It is hoped that the positive news will encourage people to officially join. It was proposed and agreed that people should receive the next newsletter, but none after that without paying their subscription. It was suggested that perhaps the entire *Dioscorida* should not be available on the website, as this is a major benefit of membership; a summary version might be more appropriate. The difficulty is balancing the FoS role of publicising and promoting the islands with the need to raise funds and therefore provide benefits for Members.

4. Annual Report. Sue gave a quick summary of the Annual Report. John Farrar reported on the update of the website. It was suggested that the application form should be available on line, and that the guest book can form an important interface with members and potential members.

5. Treasurer's Report & Annual Accounts. We should aim to have membership subscriptions cover direct costs (*Dioscorida*, translation, postage) with donations being for projects rather than basic running of the organisation.

6. Election of Executive Committee and Officers. Roderic handed the Chair to John Dickson for election. The following Officers and Executive Committee Members were proposed and elected:

Chair: Roderic Dutton

Vice Chair: Miranda Morris

Secretary: Sue Christie

Treasurer: Neil Oakman

Members of Exec: Diccon Alexander, John Dickson, John Farrar, Phil Haines, Rebecca Klaus, Tony Miller, Wolfgang Wranik.

7. Appointment and Remuneration of Auditors. The current Auditors will be reappointed subject to their and the Treasurer's agreement.

8. Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh Exhibition. This will take place during the summer of 2005 and include the period of the Edinburgh Festival. As of the AGM the Exec has held meetings with the RBGE staff in charge of exhibitions and agreed a general programme. The Yemeni ambassador in the UK and the UK ambassador in Yemen have agreed to be Patrons and provide help, for example with fund raising and contacts. The MP for Soqotra has agreed to be a Special Advisor, and wants to come to the exhibition. The exhibition will be professionally designed with input from FoS and SCF, and will be very much about the natural and cultural heritage of Soqotra – it is not just about plants! A Steering Group will be set up to

deal with practical matters and overall co-ordination, and many Advisors (from FoS and others) will be involved in the design and content of the exhibition.

There will be a full programme of associated events, including lectures, conference, workshops and film shows (building on the Films shown on the previous day of the AGM and others). It will be bilingual, and is designed for part of the exhibition to tour afterwards.

The general theme is adaptations to change, showing how the natural and cultural heritage have evolved and coped with change. It will celebrate and promote the island to raise its profile in an effort to ensure its future. Emphasis will be on a comparison of how it is today, how it was in the past, and how it is changing. The theme is to promote a positive image of the heritage of the people to encourage pride and preservation. A major aim is to promote the image of Yemen as a whole.

Members made a number of suggestions for display topics; full stories of frankincense, Dragon's blood, Aloes and sustainable land management traditions; Cave/dwelling as a mock up; Soqotra music, particularly at the launch with live musicians; Tanuf should be commissioned to write and perform a poem; a replica of the Cave Tablet; marine aspects; a virtual tour; film loops of pottery, rug making, etc.; and using old and current photos.

Funding will be required, and FoS will be tasked with raising much/all of this. Yemania should be approached for tickets for Soqotrans to visit/participate. Yemeni businessmen, the Yemeni British Association in Sana'a, and UK companies with business interests in Yemen (Barclays, Kodak, Nikon, British Airways) should all be approached.

The next step is to have another meeting with Exhibition staff at RBGE. A budget needs to be drafted, and a brochure prepared for Roderic to have when in Yemen. The Steering Group needs to meet and begin detailed planning of contents and fund raising activities.

9. Other Projects and Activities – Discussion. Members want to be of direct assistance to the people of Soqotra. This must be in the form of small scale projects which do not in any way conflict with larger scale programmes being developed by the Yemeni Government, SCF or SCDP. The types of activities engaged in by Friends of Hadramawt were suggested as being of a suitable scale, and the Sultana could be approached for assistance on operational issues. After discussion it was agreed that we should identify two or three projects (providing solar torches, gas cylinders or sewing machines to a village were agreed to be suitable; provision of drugs and medical supplies was decided to be unsuitable due to the paucity of trained staff). The MP will be requested to identify a contact in the east, west and central areas of Soqotra through whom this aid could be given to suitable communities identified by the islanders themselves. A single pilot project should be identified, funds raised, and implemented well.

An application to the Darwin Fund is being prepared to convert information on the island's biological and cultural resources into education materials for schools (and extra curricular work). There is interest in this sort of material and the project could be developed in conjunction with SCF, who would take local credit and responsibility for the long term implementation. This will be discussed with SCF during Roderic's visit.

10. Any Other Business. It has been suggested that as part of the co-operative approach FoS should join SCF as a group, and encourage individual members to join as individuals. This was agreed.

David Porter and Michael Harrington volunteered to have a display on Soqotra/FoS at the British Cactus and Succulent Society National Show. Leaflets and a poster will be supplied.

Julian van Rensburg raised the issue of access to reports and suggested that a library be set up. This excited great interest and it was agreed that this would be a most useful service for Members. A bibliography will be compiled and put on the website (based on Michael Gwynne's and the RBGE bibliographies). This can then be annotated to show who has what documents. Everyone should send a list of what documents they have, and copies of their own papers, to Sue in the first instance; a more suitable permanent home will be investigated, perhaps the Middle East Documentation Unit at Durham. If the author and publisher agree the document could go on the website. FoS should sell the documents when possible to defray all direct costs and contribute a bit to core costs. John Farrar agreed to get started on this as part of his Website work. In the future a similar service could be developed for photographs, but this was acknowledged to be an incredible amount of work.

11. Date of Next Meeting. It was agreed that the next meeting (September 2004) should be at the Royal Geographical Society in London if possible, and held jointly with the British Yemeni Society if that is feasible. The topic should be land use and land management practices on Soqotra, and be well illustrated (films and slides). This meeting should last one day (conference/workshop) and the AGM should take place the next day.

The 2005 AGM will be held in conjunction with the RBGE Exhibition in Edinburgh, tied to one of the major events (conference?, closing event?). In 2006 the AGM should be in Europe; in France concentrating on linguistic aspects or in Germany or Czechoslovakia. The aim is for an AGM someday to be held on Soqotra.