

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

November 2023

Please note new address:

Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503

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Dear Readers,

Our most important asset is **you the membership** and we have so much to be thankful for! At this time of year we mail out our annual appeal for donations and year after year you come through with generous support. Your donations go straight into projects developed and implemented in the Nigerien communities we know and love. Our volunteer grant reviewers continue to be impressed by the quality of projects proposed and we can all be proud of the meaningful activities being accomplished.

Please watch for our annual grant report coming soon in the mail. If you don't receive it by mail, we apparently don't have your address-- please consider going to our website and updating your contact info through the membership form.

People often ask me, what is it about Niger? Few of us would say we loved the weather, neither would we say the scenery or tourist spots were the big draw. Most of us grew to love the people and the experience became a part of us. Whether serving in the Peace Corps or working for nonprofits or in the diplomatic service, we have enduring ties of friendship and meaningful connections. Thank you for your loyal support. With your participation, Friends of Niger carries on this legacy of friendship and connection.

Merci, Fofo, Mun godey, Tanimert, Foma, Thank you --

Amy Wilson

1) Nine new grants awarded

Our grant-making process is becoming a well-oiled machine! We received 31 requests for funding this fall, and after deeming 2 of those ineligible, our team of intrepid volunteers reviewed the remaining proposals. Our sincere thanks go out to the FON members who volunteered this round. Their participation adds real value to this process.

Alhassan Ali	Alix (Barstow) Fedoruk	John Heylin
Douglas Steinberg	JoAnn Lewis	Pamela White
John Baird	Kelsey Andersen	Mary Abrams
Scott Youngstedt	Sarah Singletary	Brandon Bragato
Tom Kelley	Amy Harris	Holly Berchet-Hall

Each volunteer reviewed 4-5 proposals independently and scored them against our criteria. Afterward, they met within small groups to discuss their findings and made recommendations to the Grants

Management Committee. The team approach ensures a well-rounded thoughtful result. Since the spring of 2021 we've had 48 volunteers participate with grant reviews!! Way to go FON members! Once selected, each project has the added benefit of a FON Champion. Yet another way for FON members to participate! The champion stays in contact with the grantee and helps make sure they report back to us and helps mentor them through the implementation process as needed. *Please consider joining us in Grant Reviewer and/or Project Champion roles in the future.*

Newly selected proposals related to **EDUCATION** were as follows:

School Benches Tessaoua / CDGES Tessaoua. \$2,869

The local School Management Committee will coordinate the fabrication and installation of school table/benches to serve 160 students.

Sabon Guida School Construction / Tagaz Espoir. \$5,000

Two volunteers who served in Sabon Guida at different times have joined forces to make this project happen. Kristen Patterson (96-98) and Amy Tekié (01-03) are raising additional funds to complement FON funds and working with a non-profit in Niger to build a 'semi-dur' classroom. The community is unusual in that it is both Hausa and Fulani.



Support of Girl Guides for blind and disabled / MICA Women's Center of Maradi. \$4,486

Young girls who are the guides for blind or disabled people who beg for a living do not have the opportunity to go to school and their options are limited. In Maradi, these girls have reached out to MICA expressing their desire for training in income generating activities. This project will provide training to 25 girls and provide career advice to promote financial autonomy geared to improve living conditions for the whole family.

Two School Gardens Agadez / Les Puits du Désert et TIDENE. \$5,054

Following on the heels of a similar successful project last year, this project will install solar pumps and 'California*' irrigation in two school gardens. Training in market gardening is also provided for teachers and community members.

**California irrigation is the network of cisterns built at ground level and linked by tubing underground. When one cistern, typically next to the well, is filled, water finds its own level and fills all the cisterns to the same level. This reduces the need to haul water to different areas of the garden by hand.*

Since 2002 FON has allocated **\$108,654** to 38 projects to benefit education

Newly selected proposals related to **WATER & HEALTH** were as follows:

Latrines for Lycée Tchadoua / MICA. \$4,494

Latrines and hand washing stations will be set up for students. Training and education about the importance of hygiene and sanitation will be provided. In addition to improving health, providing better sanitation facilities also helps keep girls in school.

Well Rehabilitation Tabelot / AFAA. \$4,457

This project will restore a well in a remote area outside Agadez serving at least 100 families. The work will consist of sealing cracks, installing a well cover and providing a solar pump system.



Empowering Women thru Clean Water / ONG Récupération des Mendiants (RECUP). \$4,615

A water tower will be constructed and configured with solar-power to serve five neighbor villages. One hundred women will be trained in water resource management, hygiene, sustainable water practices in the Maradi Region, Tibiri Commune.

Since 2002 FON has allocated at least **\$156,672** for **Water & Health**

Newly selected proposals targeting **WOMEN & YOUTH** were as follows:

Adding Value to Ag Products Agadez / Tamakrast. \$4,646

This project will provide training to women's cooperative members in financial management as well as processing and conservation techniques. Purchases will include a processing and conservation unit, a solar dryer, a freezer, a mill (flour) and necessary other equipment. Processing agricultural products when they are plentiful creates new markets, extends the season for sale and consumption, and it increases profits.

Tailor and Leatherwork Training / DIMA. \$5,000

This grant will provide the final nine months of training in a 27 month-long program for 60 students in tailoring and leatherworking to include instruction, equipment, supplies, and transportation. These students recruited from the city of Niamey, were largely dropouts who had few prospects. This intensive program has made them eligible to join ateliers that produce crafts of export quality where they will earn a living wage.



Since 2002 FON has allocated at least **\$212,314** for **Women & Youth**

2) What about all those dinosaurs!?

There's dinosaurs in them thar hills!

Overlooked until relatively recently, Niger is rich with ancient history and uncelebrated patrimony. FON board members recently met with Professor Paul Sereno, paleontologist and archaeologist at the University of Chicago, who was happy to learn about the existence of FON.

He shared a brief update of his work discovering important paleontological and archeological items- lots of them! He has brought back an enormous collection of fossils and artifacts from more than 25 years of exploration and excavation materials that will be studied, catalogued and eventually returned to Niger.

His big ambition is to develop facilities in Niger capable of preserving and displaying the collection as well as developing educational programs to benefit Nigeriens. An organization called NigerHeritage was launched in 2016 to accomplish this task. The Chicago-based international effort is dedicated to the preservation, study and public appreciation of the world-class paleontological, archeological and cultural heritage of the Republic of Niger.

The program aims to create:

- Educational programs at various levels in museology, cultural studies, archaeology, and paleontology
- New national, regional and local museums as critical centers for heritage preservation, education and celebration
- Artisanal and other economic opportunities related to patrimony
- Renewed national and regional tourist visitation

To learn more about the planned museums and programs go to:

<https://www.nigerheritage.org/>



Paul Sereno, Skull of Carcharodontosaurus

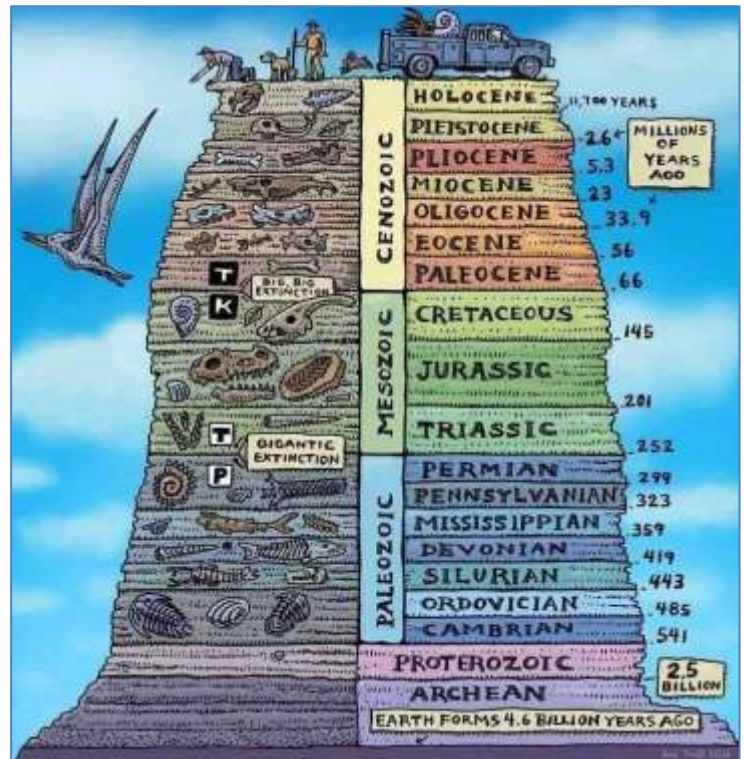
Professor Sereno offered to make a presentation to the FON membership, which we will be planning in future. He also encouraged us to visit the lab they are creating in Chicago, opening early next year. Stay tuned for news about this in future.

More about those dinosaurs and heritage

World-class heritage unearthed in Niger tells the story of African dinosaurs across more than 100 million years. Much more recently, some 10,000 years ago, lakes formed and transformed the Sahara's dunescape into a "Green Sahara," with one extraordinary site in Niger preserving hundreds of burials, thousands of artifacts, and the untold story of desert peoples who predated the pyramids. Finally, thriving today in Niger's oases and mobile encampments are nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples who together comprise the world's richest array of desert cultures.

Dinosaurs and Ancient Life

Niger's paleontological heritage, second to none, showcases an incredible menagerie of bizarre dinosaurs and monstrous crocs, some of the greatest plant- and meat-eaters of the dinosaur era. The spectacular fossils come from a broad arc of rock in central Niger that covers a span of nearly 100 million years across Jurassic and Cretaceous periods. Most of these creatures were excavated on a series of expeditions led by the University of Chicago (1993, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2018, 2019) and have yet to be put on display. Dinosaurs include the long-necked *Nigersaurus*, the “Mesozoic lawnmower” with 500 teeth packed into its jaws. Feasting on it was “Claws,” also known as *Suchomimus*, the best known of the sickle-clawed spinosaurid dinosaurs. These two had to keep an eye out for the world’s largest croc, dubbed “SuperCroc,” a 12 m (40 foot) long crocodile that prowled the rivers. These are but a few of the paleontological treasures unearthed in Niger and waiting for proper display.



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Jobaria skeleton in Niamey



Suchomimus skeleton in Agadez

3) Niger-related News

Niger's military government repeals anti-migration law after eight years

Nov 28, 2023 Aljazeera

The new order also stipulates that convictions handed down under the law passed in May 2015 'shall be erased'.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/28/nigers-military-government-repeals-anti-migration-law-after-eight-years>

Niger businesses struggle to make ends meet in wake of coup -Video France 24:

<https://www.france24.com/en/video/20231128-niger-businesses-struggle-to-make-ends-meet-in-wake-of-coup>

Niger: ECOWAS set to rule on complaint over Mohamed Bazoum's detention

<https://www.africanews.com/2023/11/29/niger-ecowas-set-to-rule-on-complaint-over-ousted-president-mohamed-bazoums-detention/>

The ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) is set to issue a decision on a complaint submitted by lawyers of former Nigerien president Mohamed Bazoum over his ouster in a July coup. Since his toppling, Bazoum has been held at his residence in the heart of the presidential palace in the Niamey, Niger's capital. The complaint with the ECOWAS Court of Justice by Bazoum's lawyers centers on what they called "sequestration and arbitrary detention". The court's decision is expected on Thursday November 30.

Story From The Field: Mariama Gado, Niger.

From USAID The Harmattan Herald



My name is Mariama Gado, I'm 30 years old, and I am one of the participants in the USAID Youth Connect activity who have benefited from several training courses. In October 2023, I received training in sewing along with 152 youth from my community in Tillaberi, after which I joined a local sewing workshop as an apprentice. I've attended this workshop for nearly three years to improve my skills and possibly develop a small business. The lack of working tools was a real constraint, even as an apprentice. I didn't

have my own machine; we took turns using the workshop's machine. Youth Connect has now equipped us with a complete kit enabling me to carry out my job and my passion, sewing. I now have a sewing machine, an iron, a table, a cupboard, scissor kits, and even a few yards of fabric. I will set up my own sewing workshop and work on my own account, undoubtedly making me more independent. I will also introduce some young people to sewing so that my community can benefit as much as possible from what I've learned with Youth Connect."

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4) In Brief –

- We received a question: Does anyone remember a small illustrated booklet showing town to town travel across Niger and into Algeria, circa 1975? Request for info or a copy from a Benin volunteer who used it to travel north. Please reply to the newsletter editor.
- FON is looking for a **Video Guru/Publicist**. We are receiving lots of short video clips from our grantees that could be shared more widely with a bit of editing. Anyone with time, expertise or passion to help with this?? Please contact us!

YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

Friends of Niger is an organization founded by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to initiate and support activities related to Niger and its people. We pursue three main purposes:

1. Connecting and engaging people who have connections to Niger including diaspora, and those who have worked or are working Niger,
2. Supporting development and humanitarian activities in Niger, and
3. Advocating for and educating about Niger

To donate write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to

NEW ADDRESS: **Friends of Niger 4865 Hwy 234 Box 180, White City, OR 97503,**

OR go to www.friendsofniger.org to use PayPal.

Board of Directors

Officers: Amy Wilson/President, Alix Barstow Fedoruk/Vice President, Mary Abrams/Grants Management Committee, John Baird/Past President

At Large Board members: Kelsey Andersen, Brandon Bragato, Paige Pihl Buckley, Alhassan Ali Mamadou Souna, Douglas Steinberg,

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: [\(Friends of Niger\) FON](#)
- Submit news topics and articles: camelexpress@friendsofniger.org
- Contact President Amy Wilson, president@friendsofniger.org

“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”

