

British Commonwealth Essay

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1955

Heavy
rain in
Bournemouth
at night
but well
insulated

My Visit to a Cocoa

Village in the Gold Coast

By

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February 16th 1956.

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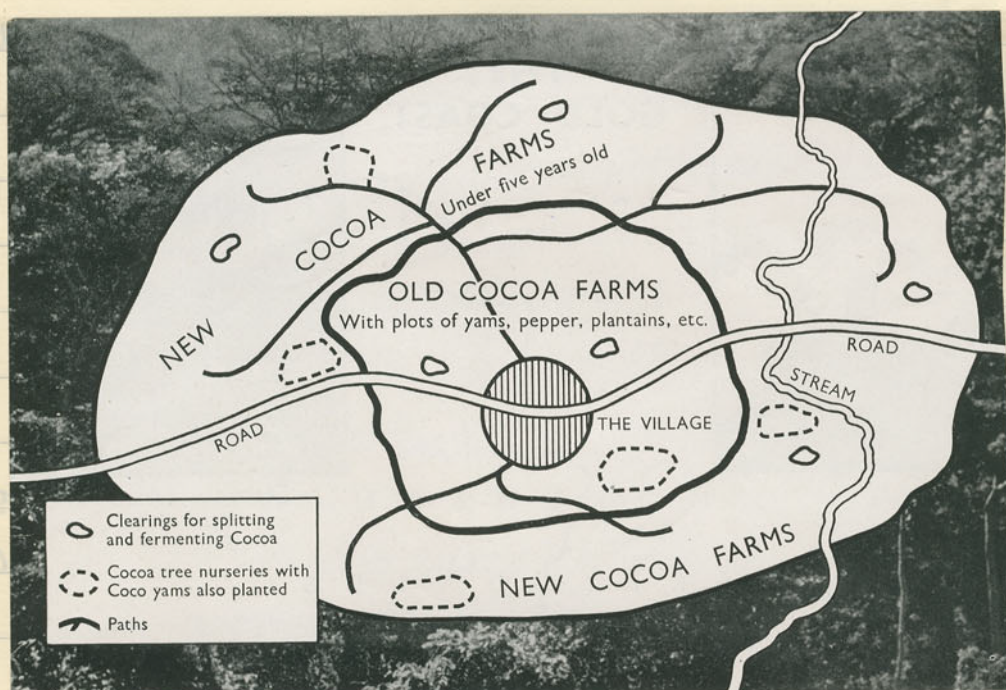
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My Visit to a Cocoa Village
In the Gold Coast



Sketch map showing cocoa village and surroundings

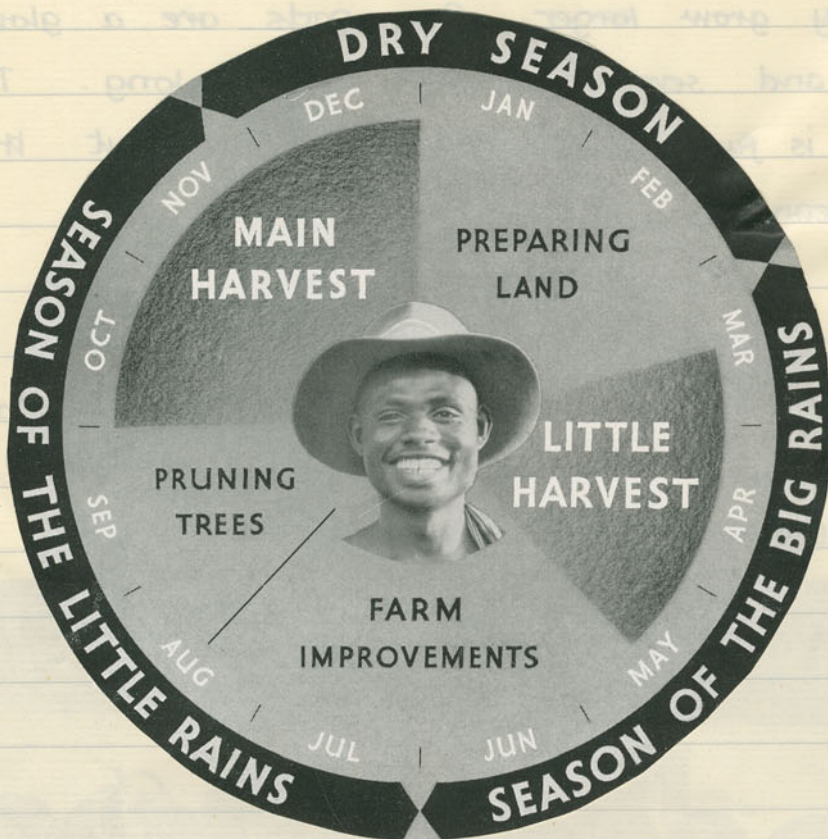
Here is a map of the village I am visiting. Like most of the newer cocoa villages a motor road goes through it. Round the village is a dense mass of trees and undergrowth. Here, mahogany, vines, creepers and huge ferns all force themselves upwards

in a race towards the light and air. Within the forest there is steaming twilight, quietness and the smell of strange flowers and rotting vegetation.

The cocoa country is an area of dense forests, where rainfall is heavy and the soil is fertile. Cocoa can be grown successfully only in the hot wet forest areas lying between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, where there is shelter for the young trees from hurricanes and tornadoes and where there are no great variations in temperature. All these conditions are found in the Gold Coast.

Every year the dry season is followed by the big rains and these, in turn, are followed by the little rains. During the days of bright sunshine and cloudless skies between the two harvests, many cocoa farmers are busy preparing land for new farms. Between the little harvest and the main harvest there is also much to be done. In April before the little harvest is finished the farmer is already planting out new farms. This is followed by pruning and cutting old trees.

The farmer's year.



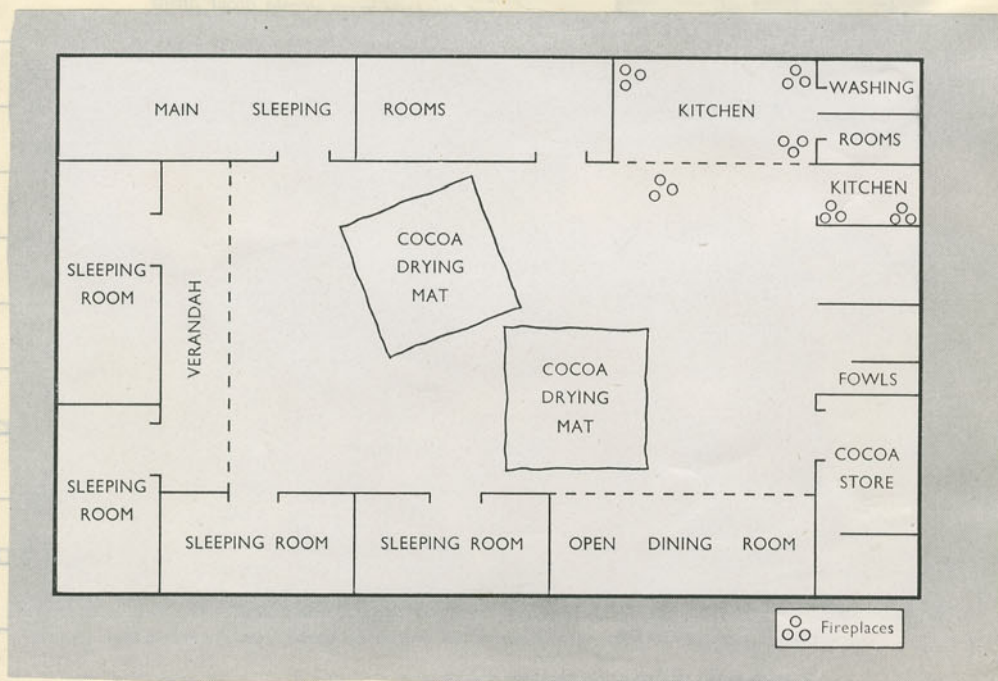
The Cocoa Tree and its pod.

I saw some cocoa trees which were about the same size as some moderately large apple trees and were not unlike them in appearance. The pods grow from the branches and the trunk. Blossoms and fruit appear at the same time. The pink and yellow petals are very fragile and the buds are as tiny as grains of rice. The reddish, grey bark may be nearly covered by grey and green lichen. The leaves are about nine inches long and three to four inches across. When young

they are rosy-pink, changing to a rich green as they grow larger. Ripe pods are a glowing yellow and seven to twelve inches long. The surface is furrowed, and inside are about thirty white beans in a pulpy mass.

The House of a farmer and family.

Kweku, a cocoa farmer whom I am staying with, lives in a compound with his wife and many relations.



Plan of compound

The compound is built round an open courtyard and is rectangular. The courtyard is used for cooking and also for drying cocoa beans. The short-side of the compound faces the road and opposite are the sleeping rooms,

a kitchen and an open dining-room. In the courtyard are two platforms covered with mats of rushes and bamboos and raised about three feet off the ground. On these cocoa beans are spread to dry in the hot sunshine.

The Life of the family.

AT Dawn, Amba wakes up and goes down to the stream for water and then returns to chop wood. For breakfast the family sit round in a circle and share one dish of soup or stew made from farm vegetables. Next we eat dried fish and some figs.

After breakfast Kweku and his son set out for the cocoa farm and Amba goes to the vegetables patch and brings back yams for the market. While she is away "Grannie" sees the children make themselves neat and tidy before going off to school.

Amba and I and some of her friends walk to market. She has got an enamel bowl on her head with vegetables piled in it. The market place is filled with bargain hunters and already the sun is hot. There are cloths in many colours, bangles, necklaces, and snails, grilled meat, dried fish and fruit of all kinds. Also

farm implements. There is a great deal of gossiping and happy laughter.

In the afternoon Kweku and the family do not work outside as it is too hot, so they do a craft. Kweku has made a hand-loom, Amba makes pottery. She uses the clay from the village stream, shaping it with her hands. The eldest boy, Kuwesi makes baskets. He makes them from raffia palm and they are used in the cocoa harvest, while I watch them.



Off to market

About four o'clock in the afternoon Amba prepares the evening meal. This generally includes "fu-fu", which is made from root vegetables such as yams and plantains. At suppertime we share

one very large dish of food, around, which all gather in a circle. The day ends with games and singing round the fire.

The story of Cocoa.

At harvest-time on the cocoa farm there are jobs for everyone. Pods are severed from the trunks with cutlasses and they fall to the ground. The women collect them into baskets. One cocoa tree gives two harvests, a large one and a small one and although Kweku's farm is only four acres, he has more than three hundred trees on each acre.

Amba and I with some friends gather up the golden pods and take them to a clearing. The men split open the pods with cutlasses and the woman scrape the cream-coloured beans from the husks to the baskets.

Kweku leaves the beans in a heap to ferment for five days, to improve the quality. Then they are taken to the compound and spread out to dry in the hot sunshine on tables covered with rush mats. Every day we rake the beans. After six days Kweku takes a final look at his crop and pours the beans into sacks.

They take the sacks to the broker on

their heads through the forests, for twenty miles. They cross deep fords and go along forest trails. When they get to the coast Jacob, a Cadbury buyer makes a test before the cocoa beans are shipped to England.



Harvesting cocoa pods

He pierces every sixteenth bag with a wedge-shaped prodder and takes out a few sample beans. These beans are split in two and he places a half on the board. The beans are inspected again this time by Government officials and often have their ~~of~~ approval. Soon the bags are put into the liner's hold and so begin their four thousand mile journey to Bournville.

Approx 1,000 words.

The books I have used = Cocoa Farmers, Chocolate Workers.