

Ashanti Kente weaving is difficult for women

KUMASI, Ghana--Nana Okai-Ababio is the village chief and he is glad to meet visitors who come to Bonwire to admire and buy the distinctive kente cloth woven by the men of the village.

Bonwire is at the end of a rutted dirt road which forks off a main paved road serving the regional center of Kumasi, 170 miles northwest of the Capital of Accra.

In his simple house, the chief is surrounded by his counselors, the leading men of the village, and he seats his honored guest to the right and greets them with poise and dignity. His language is Twi, as it is of all the people of the Ashanti tribe, and for most visitors, that means an interpreter. That is fairly easy to arrange for English-speaking tourist. Most of the people of the region and virtually all of the younger generation, speak English and Twi.

Several hundred families live in Bonwire and the village tradition is that its men climb inside the racks to operate the kente looms. The visitor is told that the work is too hard, too tedious for women.

It is, certainly, hard and tedious for anyone. Each of the luminous threads crossing the warp is passed by hand and an hour's work is measured in parts of an inch on a strip of cloth perhaps four inches wide. The strips are then sewn together to create a predominately golden material heavy, rich and the best quality of traditional dress in all of Ghana.

Visitors see the material in terms of table settings, wall hangings, shawls and, if their budget is sufficient, draperies. Kente cloth is not cheap: a piece 20 inches by 7 feet will run about \$30, but yields cents per hour to the artisan who makes it.

Not too many visitors come to Bonwire. The village would like to attract more. Chief Nana Okai-Ababio will tell his visitors that he needs money to build a crafts house where the work may be done, viewed, stored and sold. If he had a further wish, he would want money to build a facility that would accommodate guests and he would like an improved road into the town. But he does not complain.

Life is, perhaps, a little easier for the people in the carving village of Ahwia and the adinkra



Family portrait: the chief and his counselors sit outside his home in Bonwire, Ghana, West Africa. The chief, seated, with two young men behind him,

presides regally but gently over this village where all the men are weavers and the cloth they weave is called kente.

cloth printing village of Ntonso, both located on a paved highway where travelers may comfortably stop, browse and, if inclined, buy.

Both are also near Kumasi, the capital of the great Ashanti people and the home of their King, the Asantehene.

One of the recent Ashanti kings, Prempeh I, resisted the British for 24 years and then was exiled for 28 years, returning here in 1924 for the last seven years of his life.

Kumasi evokes and preserves the history of the Ashanti people in the palace of the Asantehene, the Kumasi Cultural Center and in the various museums which record and interpret the life of the people. The Ashantis are the most powerful ethnic group in Ghana and were the last to be defeated (in 1874) by the British occupying forces although, in fact, the Ashanti and the British clashed until 1924.

Wednesday thru Sunday LIVE
at the plush

HIDE-A-WAY LOUNGE

STONE GUMBO

just returned from Albuquerque

Big A's



Hide-A-Way

COCKTAIL LOUNGE

900 W. Bonanza

ORIGINAL DEFECTIVE