

## CHARCOAL STORY

This is a story of one way some of these boys earn a little money to buy mealie meal.

The story is about collecting charcoal. Many houses in the poorer communities do not have kitchens: the family cook on charcoal braaiers outside the house (you can see some photos of the girls cooking on charcoal braaiers for the school party) - it must be awful in the rainy season!

Charcoal is sold on the streets. To collect the charcoal it is necessary to find the right sort of trees (the type which make good burning charcoal) - which are normally quite a distance from the towns.

In the case of our kids, they have to walk for three or four hours to reach the trees which can be burnt for charcoal. Then the trees must be cut into logs (with an axe which has to be borrowed or hired), and the logs have to be moved away from the forest to a place where they can be burnt.

The logs are dragged with metal chains; then they have to be sorted into sizes - larger logs together, and smaller logs together - as the charcoal will be of different sizes when they are burnt down. The logs are then piled up and covered with grass and dirt, then set alight.

When they have burnt down, they have to be separated from the ash with a very long handled spade (they usually replace the handle of the spade with a long branch), because the pile of charcoal is so hot, and the people don't have any protective clothing.

The charcoal is then packed into containers, and carried or dragged back the same distance they travelled to reach the forest. Sometimes it is still so hot that it has to be doused regularly with water.

They usually start off at 3am because they need to be selling the charcoal on the streets in town by the time people are arising and leaving their houses in the morning. The whole process takes a couple of weeks to complete, and the result is simply a bag or two of mealie meal for the family.