INTO AFRICA

I'm hooked!

Kenya was the most amazing experience ever, and I'm going back there. The people, the country, the weather, and the wild life - the whole package was way beyond anything that either Lorraine or I had anticipated.

Arriving at Nairobi very late, we stopped at a small guest house for the night. The next day was the real start to our adventure. Travelling across Kenya to Oyugis took about 8 hours. The journey took us across the most wonderful scenery – the Rift Valley.



It's not the distance that is the problem – it's the roads. Once out of the city, the roads dwindled down to just a layer of tarmac that has been set over a dust track. Most of it washes away, especially at the sides and then the rest becomes pot-holed and rutted. Some roads had never seen tarmac. We travelled in an 8 seater bus, driven by an amazingly good driver, interpreter and guide called John. Often the ride was far superior to any white-knuckle ride at a theme park, as huge trucks hurtled towards us on our side of the road, swerving at the last minute, onto the dusty track at the side, throwing dust and stones in every direction. The air was thick with dust as we drove across the Rift Valley and keeping the windows shut meant that we were stifling hot. This picture shows the road used to get to Kombaka School.



The mission, a long low building with a small veranda at the front, was a welcome sight. Not featuring any AA stars, but cool and welcoming. The ladies that cook for us were there to excitedly help us get our bags and kit into our rooms. A hard tiled floor throughout, the rooms were small, but had what was required – a bed with a mosquito net! There was a common room/lounge that also had a dining table at one end. The kitchen was large but had just a sink, cooking gas rings and a table. The pantry held the provisions but these would have fitted into the average house kitchen cupboard easily. The one bathroom was shared by all. With just one cold tap working, a hot shower was out of the question. There was a shower head but the usual method of a wake-up wash was with a jug, standing in the bath, inside a large plastic bowl to catch and conserve the water. Water is precious in Kenya and so we had to take measures to ensure it wasn't wasted. Flushing the loo was more a daily event



rather than done regularly. I'll say no more about that. Washing was done for us – sheer luxury, however the dryer (ha ha) made strange lumps in our T-shirts!



The programme for our days was carefully planned by Jim (our leader and fount of all knowledge) and the team from Amani. These consisted of meeting, talking to and listening to the groups that Amani work with. Amani's work is quite considerable. In a nutshell, Amani have created a network of communities that are pulling together to create a better life for themselves in Western Kenya. Most rural life is hard, poverty stricken, without good education, has no health provision and in a lot of cases – no hope either! Amani encourage the people to work together to meet the needs of the community they live in. Providing these groups with **"Buy a Gift"** donations of seed, fertilizer, ploughs, ploughing bulls, goats, a foot water-pump or donkey and cart enables these hard working people the opportunity to actually start to live a life where they may be able to afford to pay for their child to go to a secondary school, pay for essential medication (AIDS and Malaria are major problems) or get their home a new roof.



Here is Dorcus (in the pink t-shirt) outside her home. She is a bright student with dreams of training to be a teacher. The problem she has, is that there is nowhere for her to study. No light once the sun goes down and no desk or place to keep any book where it's dry and away from the ants (which eat everything).





This is the roof. You can see the problem.

When it rains, especially in the rainy season (a daily event), the rain comes down in sheets and for hours at a time. The house gets flooded, everything is soaked and then starts to dry out again the next day when the sun bakes at it's highest point. All of this could be avoided with a new tin roof, like the one below and Dorcus could keep up with her studies a little better.



Left: A picture of Mary – a lady with a wonderful sense of humour, real attitude and the tinned roof houses that so many Kenyans need, rather the traditional grass roof. They still have mud walls though.

The highlight of our trip has to be our visits to **Kombaka School**. Lorraine and I were so excited about meeting the people that we have been writing to over the last 4 years. We had no idea who would be there to meet us. We visited as a team one morning. The journey was along the seriously rutted tracks and I was sure that our driver would ask us at any point to get out and walk – but he managed to get the bus along the worst tracks I've ever travelled.



We were met by staff and pupils (although the holidays had started at the same time as ours) and shown around the school site by Hesbon Ojoji, the Head Teacher. He was very excited about the help that Cedar Park has given over the years. The new latrines and the help in raising funds to build a new Special Needs block were the "best things to happen to Kombaka". The Special Needs classroom still has a way to go. Just a shell at the moment without a floor or windows Hesbon remains hopeful that God will provide. The fact that there is no running water or electricity at the school are also just two more "challenges".



We met several of the Special Needs pupils that would use the new classroom. One child was totally deaf and so communication was all done through gesture and through the eyes.
Lorraine made a special friend there.

Excited about seeing herself on the camera, she followed us around and tugged at us when she wanted to see the photos.

The next day it was just Lorraine and I that went to Kombaka School. We had arranged to give them a taste of an English school sports day. With very grateful thanks to parents, relatives, Wycombe Wanderers, WASPS and the Handycross Sports Centre, we were able to take out with us a selections of balls, some Wycombe Wanderers strip for a team of budding footballers, coloured sports bibs, a large net to hold the balls in, ball pumps, pens, post-its and a play-chute.

The night before we were due to go, it bucketed down with rain. Pretty sure that the whole event would be a wash-out Lorraine and I wondered:

a) just how we'd manage to get to the school?
b) if anyone else would turn up?
c) if the field would be under water?
d) what the point of going would be if it was still a deluge?

We need not have worried. At 6:30 the next morning (my appointed time to use the bathroom) the sun was up and we had blue skies. We arrived at Kombaka in good spirits – quite nervous about just how our games morning would be received. We need not have worried. We met Hesbon and another teacher as we bumped along the track to the school. As they climbed into the bus, I couldn't help but notice that they were both spotlessly clean: hardly a trace of the red mud on their clothes or shoes. How do they do that?

We went straight into the staffroom to meet the other teachers that had kindly turned out to meet us. The advent of mobile phones has been the lifeline for these people and so the news that we were in Kenya had quickly spread. So much to talk about. Their plans and dreams for the future, their passion and determination to get Kombaka School acting as the hub for the community. Hesbon's job doesn't just stop at the school. He really is Mr. All-inclusive and cares so much for his pupils and their families. We started to show Hesbon and his team the suitcase of goodies that we'd brought. The pack of Blu-tac caused much laughter. Never having seen blu-tac before he thought it was something to eat – sweets. Lorraine demonstrated the way that it's used and they all thought this was MARVELOUS. It really does hold things on the wall! You can take it down again! You can use it again! MARVELOUS!! Hesbon had a go, and then the other teachers tried it – so funny.





By this time a gathering of children were looking out for us and we were welcomed into their classroom like long lost friends. A short explanation of what was happening whilst they sat there looking mystified. Then out onto the field and lots of hand shaking and big smiles, high fives and one or two children watching us

shyly from the edge of things. Once we were amongst them, there was a lot of touching – my hair seemed to cause much amusement (another bad hair day!) and I was told it was like feathers. The other thing they noticed was that my veins in my wrist were blue. Did I have red blood or was it really blue? Of course with such dark black skin you can't see any veins at all on their arms.

Out on the field we opened up the play-chute. They stood mystified as Lorraine and I opened it up to a full circle. All taking hold of the edge, we had the most amazing time playing with them: wafting the chute up, running beneath playing "fruit salad". Then, keeping a ball turning on top of the chute, making a Mexican wave. Peels of laughter when Hesbon ran underneath and only just got to his place in time and much shouting when the ball rolled too far one way. We really needed far longer to give them a taste of all of the possibilities for the chute, but my hope is that the special needs children in particular will be able to share in the fun and be successful at taking a turn.

Below is a photo of the teaching team we met. From left to right:
Hesbon Ojoji (Head Teacher) the chairman of the Board of Governors, two young teachers, Kevin and Elijah and Silus, the master in charge of Physical Education.



The rest of the new equipment was greeted with glee. The balls immediately put into use. A group of boys – who had looked like scruffy urchins just moments before in their torn T-shirts and dirty shorts, re-appeared wearing Wycombe Wanderers strip. They proudly ran onto the field ready for a team photo and in moments had turned into keen footballers - with attitude!



Our Kenyan **Friends of Wycombe Wanderers**

Once the bibs had been given to the girls, the game was on. Boys V Girls. It lasted for most of the rest of the morning, nearly a full 90 minutes with the sun overhead and Lorraine and I visibly wilting just watching them. Running barefoot across the stony field (flip-flops were kicked off straight away and left abandoned across the pitch), kicking the brand new football with fervor, there was not one child without a smile on their face. What a sight!

Saying goodbye was hard and with lots of wishes for us to return again, for us to keep writing to the children and for the links between Kombaka and Cedar Park to grow stronger we promised we would do all of that.

The rest of our time at Oyugis was spent visiting widows groups, seeing the work being done by other linked schools and learning about the enormous challenges they have ahead.

The Easter Sunday church service was wonderful. Fully inclusive with singing, clapping, dancing, prayers and a meaningful sermon. Our team introduced ourselves to the whole congregation to the delight of everyone. As a Deputy Head Teacher my job was translated as "Headmaster" which made me chuckle, but then I got used to it.



The following days were busy, emotional and hot travelling on the unmade roads. Lots of people to meet; I have never shaken hands with quite so many warm and welcoming people before and it's that aspect that remains strongly in my memory. Despite their terrible living conditions and poverty they are so generous hearted and kind.

The last two days were organized as chill-out time, and we certainly needed it. So many questions running through my mind and with so few answers. So, it was onto the bus again and just a 5 hour trip this time to stay a few days at a lodge in the Masai Mara – how lucky we were.

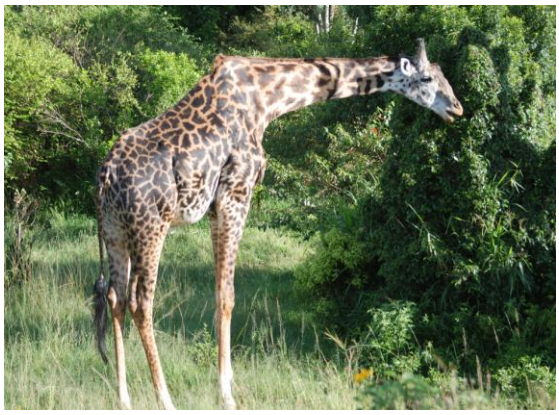
The Masai is another experience altogether. I'll tell this part with just a few of the many photos I took.

























Africa in all it's splendor! And it is a most amazing part of the world – Kenya in particular. The visit has left quite a mark on all of the team that travelled out there. My sincere thanks to Jim Leftwich who ensured that we all enjoyed the trip and that it was worthwhile for each and every one of us. Jim is a born organizer and I can see why Amani has achieved so much with leaders like him at the helm. It all seems so very worthwhile too. Actually seeing that every penny we raise goes straight to the causes we wish to support is a huge plus for AMANI. All trips and visits are personally funded by the people that care enough to do something about it. I know Cedar Park CAN do something about it – and helping Kombaka to become a place of quality education that supports the whole community is just the start for us.

If you are interested in this special kind of help, please check out the Amani web site: http://www.amaniuk.org.uk/ We shall be showing our photos and telling about our African adventure after school one day soon. Notice will be given and everyone is welcome to come.
Pauline Prince

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