

## Kodeni School Build III 2019 - Trip Journal

### Overnight Thursday 14 Feb

Grandpa came to stay overnight to make the 0300 departure from Folkestone on Mark Lamb's redeye express coach to Paris slightly less inconvenient. He got Reuben's room for the sofa-bed in the lounge to be available for Jake and Lewis to cuddle up on (they're mountaineers so quite used to sharing body warmth, and this is the South coast after all.)

After waiting hours and hours for Jake and Lewis to rock up (given that my alarm was set for 0215 there weren't many hours available anyway) I enquired of their whereabouts by text at 2300hrs. 'Just stopped to do our make-up, only 2 hours away' chirped Lewis. I assumed he was joking but no, they appeared at 01.15. A quick transfer of luggage down to the church office, and we were all safely tucked up for the night by quarter to 2. Just in time for 30 minutes napping next to a warm wife – but no, Ange had set her alarm for 0200, so make that 15 minutes sleep!

### Friday 15 February

The 'I've Lamed you all this time' express arrived at 0300, as did the whole bleary-eyed team.

Mandy-Jane, who has been very sick so unable to travel, prayed for us and we were away.

Most people slept on the ferry, and on the coach down to Charles de Gaulle Airport. Our Glorious Leader had made a minor mistake with the air tickets and consequently we had a ticket that didn't match a name. Jean Pierre at Air France check-in played a blinder and Grandpa could board.

A smooth rendezvous with Mosaic Church Coventry's team saw the full party of 37 assembled and in flight. There was Champagne with un menu gastronomique served on the flight, magnifique - we quaffed, scoffed and slept again.

Arrival at Ouagadougou was blessed with the tedious process of multiple pointless documents checks carried out in desultory manner by disinterested unhurried officials. Things got a little more exciting when Gavin and Tracy from Coventry were obliged to follow the 'lost luggage' procedure.

Sneaking 400 water filters past the scanner team was aided by their lack of attention to what passed before their eyes and we were united with Moise, our host and trundling down the road to a



waiting bus of uncertain vintage before you could say 'how are we going to fit all that lot on here?' We did, somehow, and were chomping baguettes, Nutella and bananas, downing hot drinks and heading for mattresses in no time at all. Lights were out, and everyone settled down by 01.30

The angels smiled, and I got a double bed to myself, then frowned as Gavin my roommate started up with an unbelievable banshee snore.

## Saturday 16 February

The Coventry Two missing their luggage, needed clothes. The other 35 team members chipped in and they lacked for nothing. Breakfast and transfer to the 'Elitis' bus for inter-city travel went without incident and we soon found ourselves in fragrant and air-conditioned circumstances for the 5-hour journey West.

Arrival in Laffiabougou meant another bus transfer and our ludicrous amount of luggage (74 cases plus 7 guitars and 30 large carry-on bags) was jammed onto another groaning vehicle.

We were a little taken aback by the seriousness with which the Mayor had taken our safety (he'd taken a personal interest). A van load of heavily armed, flack jacketed police accompanied us everywhere, armed police in all our vehicles for every journey and a variation to the route we took each day.



Our team's 20 men were accommodated in one kindergarten hall – a place not unlike medieval descriptions of Hell in that its temperature and sulphurous smell were as described by Dante. Mark and Lewis immediately began to bid for the 'untidiest male bed area' prize. It would be a close match for sure.

The women were granted use of Philip and Allison Ledune's lovely house near the airport. Philip and Allison lead the charity Aid to Burkina under whose neutral umbrella the good people of East Kent could unite for this project. The house was spacious but with 17 women in it, rather more cramped than usual. Exploring the place, hunting for places to sleep was conducted by some at a pace and merciless deployment of elbows normally reserved for Black Friday. After a brief turbulent spell of prospecting for plots, beds were set up and everyone settled in.

It is amazing how quickly one adjusts to one's circumstances. Initial disappointment that 5-star accommodation is not on offer, becomes 'ok so what have I got to work with' and to 'I can do this' and finally 'this is OK actually.' Then the neighbours kick in with snoring and abdominal orchestral manoeuvres in the dark that defy belief and the disappointment returns.

### Sunday 17 February

Everyone should go to Laffiabougou ADD church at least once in their lifetime. Choirs sang, instruments played, incredible rhythms were thumped out. The sight and sound of people praying like their lives depended on it, worshipping like they'd been set free and dancing like they'd just been reunited with their amazing dad was inspirational, transcendent. We did not get to hear Moise preach, which was a shame, but the fruit of his spiritual labour was there for all to see.



Gary honoured my dad, which was kind, Tracy testified to being clothed by the team – an expression of the kindness of God in people, we did a song and I had the privilege of preaching.

After church the street boys' football team thrashed us 2-2 in a dusty sweltering match where turning was tricky on a dreadful surface and every African seemed to run like Linford Christie. They brought a band and a huge crowd – it really was quite an occasion.

We visited the school site – many of our team had not seen it before. The school assembly hall we were here to build was marked out on the ground. At 65 feet X 82 feet it was enormous. Those who'd built here before were nervous about the scale of the task ahead, especially the amount of red sand we'd have to move.

We were cold overnight – the first time in 6 years that I have felt cold in this location

### Monday 18 February

Very blarily, our day kicked off at 04.45 with departure to the work site fixed for 05.30 so we could begin work at 06.00 to avoid the worst of the heat. Pre-breakfast cereal bars, mosquito and sun

protection, ablutions and gathering our work gear and water supplies preoccupied a compound full of automatons.

We formed into little teams of 3 and began rotating the unbelievably hard work of digging the foundations, beginning with the large square holes from which the building's pillars would rise. One pick-axed, a second shovelled, the third rested and drank. Progress was painfully slow, blisters formed quickly.



At 07.30 the school children arrived for their morning 'before school' ceremony which included raising the Burkina Faso flag, singing the national anthem, being addressed by the Head Teacher and prayers. Today was a national exam day – creative writing.

We watched the school morning ceremony, solemn and earnest, most kids in lovely school uniforms, many veiled. Little bits of pushing and shoving, occasional punches and kicks as they jostled for position in the lines indicated the wildness of many of these largely un-fathered kids. Seeing the veiled girls gave me a stab of deep compassion and pain. Suppression of women and FGM is rife here. Many of these little girls (national stats from 2015 state 67%) will be or have been horribly harmed.



We breakfasted on baguettes, bananas, and hot drinks, then got back to digging. Large numbers of locals started arriving during the morning. This accelerated progress tremendously and it was brilliant fun working cross-culturally.

This first morning set the routine for all subsequent mornings.

We called time early as the hot sun burned off our enthusiasm. We had expected to work to 1.00PM but didn't make midday. It was probably wise to not go too mad on day one. Showers and lunch took us into the hottest part of the day.

Our afternoon visit to the Dorcas Centre showed us what incredible transformation the Church here is doing among 210 young women from the villages. They come in under-nourished, ignorant of basic hygiene, illiterate, verminous, in rags. They leave, beautiful, shapely, well dressed, fragrant, educated, and most in dynamic relationship with Jesus. The love of God expressed through the compassionate and intelligent actions of the church is a thing of beauty.

After our evening meal, the women travelled to their house

### Tuesday 19 February

It was my turn for the Macdonald's cap today. It came to light in the minibus that owing to a bungled communication, my father was slogging away on the worksite, uninsured. Various calls to the UK, e-mails and jerry-rigged payment arrangements had to be made in order to get him underwritten. He's 78 and still charges around like a teenager, so insuring him is essential.

Looking at how much digging had been done yesterday encouraged us. When you're slogging away with a pick axe, chipping out hard earth and iron ore one egg-cup at a time, it's a drag. As the hours pass real progress becomes increasingly visible.

20 lorry-loads of red sand had been dropped off around and within the foundations. Locally made concrete bricks and blocks abounded near to the site. Today's tasks were:

- Finish digging the square holes and link them up with trenches
- Move thousands of blocks and bricks so they are ready to be laid
- Shift the red sand all around the floor area
- Concrete mixing and shifting



Vast amounts of local help – from the Laffiabougou church, the Dorcas Girls, Street Boys turned up after breakfast and the sand flew, barrows barrowed, pickaxes picked, and shovels shovelled furiously. Competition for equipment was fierce so if you started to flag you were side-lined until you could get back in the game.

All of this looked strenuous, so Our Glorious Leader (Mark Lamb) headed off to the classrooms and the homes of the families to gather information on how the school runs and what life is like for the children. We knew it was important so tried not to be bitter, up to our necks as we were in sweat, concrete and hot African mud.

Two things emerged from Mark's research

- In almost every case, the children are using the water filters supplied by Amor Europe and the school has 98% attendance – undeniable 'soft data' that water borne disease has been eliminated. (The 4 or 5 children missing each day were down with malaria).
- Some families have almost nothing. One with children have nothing in their house, just a mud floor. At night they all lie down on the floor with no bedding, to sleep.

Everyone that wanted a shirt skirt or bag, bought some cloth and agreed to pay the Dorcas Centre trainees handsomely for their work in making them. I braced myself for the inevitable onslaught of loud shirts sure to break out later in the week. Nigel (who has colour blindness) sought help this year. Last time we came it was obvious from his choice of fabric, which customer was colour blind...

Wednesday 20 February

Loads of block moving, mixing, and barrowing concrete today. This really was the most back-breaking work. The mixing was mainly done by Africans, some with very impressive physiques. Barrowing seemed to attract the British. Richard Warren pulled something (probably a heart string) and spent much of the day with a lower limb elevated. Still worked harder than Mark though.



After school, the children stayed on for the children's club put together by Jess, Hannah and some of the folks from Coventry, who brought puppets and were not afraid to use them. One black puppet called Jean Claude was taken to the children's hearts – and they chanted his name whenever the team's minibuses came onto the school site, wonderful.

At the club the children rotated round puppets, art and craft, games and a story. I can't think of a trip where we've had more fun than this. 200 kids to play with, all squealing with delight at well run games, absorbed in creative art work, fascinated by puppets and learning stories. When we first came here 4 years ago there were just marks on the ground. Now there's 200 kids being set free from educational poverty, full of joy, mischief and talent.

I took considerable pleasure from observing the obvious joy with which the team engaged with the children and from listening to squeals of delight coming from kids at riotous play with their sponsors and friends from the UK.



The City Mayor threw a banquet in our honour tonight. As our minibuses rocked up at the City Hall there seemed to be some kind of major event going on with dancers leaping about and live music, someone on a horse in traditional costume and a long line of smartly dressed dignitaries. It took a while to realise that the whole show was for us!

Once inside, the Mayor welcomed us introduced his team of important civil servants, each applauded by one and all, made a speech about the importance of international relationships and thanked us. Mark replied, and selected Jeremy Russell as the team's sporting coach (applauded by one and all, having risen to his feet, looking baffled).

We were allowed to ask the mayor questions. In answer to the question 'What is your top spending priority?'

67% of the girls here are genitally mutilated, there is almost no sanitation in the outskirts of the city and the surrounding villages, the hospitals are barely functional places to die in, primary education is accessed by 31% and most of these are boys. In the villages dirty water infects 1/3 of the people every 2 weeks with typhus, infant mortality is sky high and polygamy perpetuates abject grinding poverty for vast numbers of people.

As the highest-ranking civil official in this city of a million or more people, responding to a team that had built a school and addressed the pressing need of clean water, I was interested to hear his insight.



He told us his priority is roads. He may be right, but I felt despairing.

The food was fried chicken, bread, peanuts and fried caterpillars. For a while it looked as though Mark and Olivia went back for seconds of the caterpillars. When the traditional music started up, the English women on the team leapt up and started dancing – not in any way parodying the Africans, attempting to respond. The senior African woman dignitary present quickly joined them. Then most of the women were dancing. I briefly busted some moves, or maybe something in my back. I was the only male that danced.

At the end of the evening the Mayor referred to the dancing as a symbol of how perhaps everyone should learn from the women how to engage with each other interculturally. I think he was right.

## Thursday 21 February

We ran out of water this morning and had none to take out to the work site so had to make decision to get cracking without any and chivvy up arrangements so that as soon as we began to thirst some would turn up. It did – Moise on the case, we were supplied within 20 minutes. There have been almost no issues with supplies and the food all week has been fantastic. In the mornings around 07.30 we have baguettes bananas, jam and hot drinks. Lunchtime is our main meal – an absolutely fantastic procession of culinary delights has awaited us daily courtesy of Elizabeth's team.

I met with Francois Compaore today. Francois leads a church in Ouaga and was entertaining Italian guests all week so unable to be with us, except for this quick visit to Bobo. Last week Francois's beautiful medical student daughter was seriously injured in a road accident. A few days before that, another family member had experienced a road accident. Yesterday (Wednesday) Francois's wife and son had been involved in another road accident and Francois was rushing back to his family to be with them and sort out medical needs etc.

We discussed together his plans for launching a national Scouts movement for which he would appreciate some training for leaders, and our established strategy for training children's workers in all the AOG Seminaries in Burkina Faso (800 pastors in training). We agreed that Amor Europe (the charity I help lead) would return later in the year and work on these things with him.

Francois left his Italian visitors with Moise and rushed back to sort his family out. It occurred to me that extremists may be targeting his family on the roads. A subsequent conversation I've had with Francois via WhatsApp video link has confirmed that this is probably what is happening. In that conversation his face was beaming with joy and enthusiasm. Persecution looks good on him. I don't really feel worthy to be called his friend.

Gavin, and the Coventry team have been involved in investigating how long-term wealth creation and business training could be done effectively in Burkina Faso. They visited Elizabeth's micro-financing operation which has grown from an initial investment amount of £13.00 to £31,000.00 in a few years. They heard stories of how the women in particular have grown businesses from small beginnings and in many cases have come up from desperate straits even buying houses, sending their kids to good schools

There was an outbreak of loud shirts and brightly coloured dresses back at the compound. The Dorcas team has worked wonders. Fiscal arrangements via the cash dispenser and the able administration skills of Nigel at the cash desk meant that everyone got paid on time.



Jeza has been leading a few minutes of devotions every evening, focussed on the relationship between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel from the Bible. After Jeza's short (excellent) talk there has been a time of open prayer. These times of prayer have been a highlight of the trip for me. At was a good honest heartfelt engagement with God, accessible to those who do not normally pray, and a place of dynamic relationship for those who do. there was a riotous game of spoons in the compound after the women had retired to their quarters. At one stage a large scrum of wrestling, kicking, biting men formed up with attendant yells and cries of pain. Grandpa Fudge (aged 78) emerged victorious from the bottom of the struggle clutching a spoon. It didn't really matter who eventually won. What mattered was that spirits were high, and gales of laughter filled the night air.

### Friday 22 February

This was our last day with the children – no school tomorrow, so although we will be here, they will not. There were tears in the eyes of team members at assembly as it dawned on them that this would be their last day with the kids.

The walls on site have risen swiftly through the week. On top of the foundation blocks, a ring of reinforced concrete was poured around the base of the whole building, into wooden shuttering. Then the local skilled block layers began their work. When the walls reached 5 blocks high, another ring of reinforced concrete was poured around the building using wood to hold it in place until set. Today the next 5 blocks went on, taking the building up to lintel height.

Most of the team spent the day shifting red sand – hundreds of tonnes of it, to bring the floor up t



the height of the lowest concrete beam. We paused mid-morning to each pose with a ceremonial brick 'laying' it for the camera.

Instead of a children's club this afternoon, the epic English team V Koden school football match took place. National anthems were sung, determined looks settled on the faces of the school team, and Mark the one-armed ref took to the field.

When their first goal went in, the eruption of joy with attendant cartwheels of celebration was so fantastic that we were really glad they were beating us. Jake Little described genuinely conceding a good goal to the children, as the greatest football moment of his life (!) To be honest, they slaughtered us. But for the heroics of Jodie Earl in goal (her first game for several decades), Jake and Andy, it would have been double figures. They had the advantage of being able to stay on their feet and turn on the gravelly surface. We all just fell over.



This evening Moise and Elizabeth spoke to the team about their work. As always it was truly inspirational to hear of their gentle, intelligent, compassionate responses to the grinding poverty and pressing need of their community. They explained how they address the spiritual poverty arising from unhelpful beliefs, leading to horrible consequences, by demonstrating the fruit of loving wisdom that comes knowing the truth about the one true creator God.

When they spoke of the poor, their eyes brimmed with tears. When we prayed for them, they dropped humbly to their knees.

### Saturday 23 February

The loading of barrows is something of an art and gives an opportunity for the cruel among the team to stitch up their mates. As before the payload was described mainly using breakfast analogies:

The continental	Derisory amount of sand rattling around in the bottom
The Full English	Acceptably heaped
The Holy (not a breakfast)	A good measure, pressed down and running over
The African	Ridiculous towering heap
The Double African	African with large boulder on top

Strangely enough, whenever I brought my barrow to the loading point, a frenzy of flying shovels left me with a minimum of an 'African' no matter how quickly I tried to get away.



Andy, posing for the camera having scaled a scaffold plank with a double African, spun off the track and crashed, to delirious applause. We thought that would be it for barrow entertainment but no; Mark Lamb having finally shown up for manual work attempted to deliver his first barrow load of sand for the week, smashing it into the far wall, making a small hole and getting stuck. He was immediately knighted with the Macdonald's cap.

The huge combined team of Brits and Burkinabe today totalled well over 100 volunteers and about 6 professional

builders. Having completed all the sand barrowing and levelling, we were able to finish up with our traditional interactive final song 'Climb, Climb up Sunshine Mountain' led by Jezza. After a few rounds, it drew in just about everybody and by the end had the volunteers from both nations capering around enjoying themselves.

On Saturday afternoon, our labours finished, we rested, played games, read and snoozed. Everyone ached – we have experienced a brutal week and our tired bodies didn't have much left in the fuel tanks.

### Sunday 24 February

We were back in church this morning, resplendent in newly tailored African garb, a fine sight.

This time everyone knew what to expect and it was wonderfully up to expectations. Some team members brought contributions to the service. Mark and I congratulated the church on the school it has built, and on the quality of education it delivers to the poorest children in the area.

Gavin spoke – referencing his personal journey of faith, and Gary Lamb brought a prophetic insight related to percussion and waiting in the presence of God, allowing him to shape the rhythm. During this time many of us gained insights or saw God-inspired things.

After church it was back to the football pitch, this time against the church team. We welcomed back the real Jake Little (his form had been sadly absent until today) so Andy had someone to work with. Gary and Mark largely spectated from their excellent vantage point on the pitch. Sick Note Warren gave us his expert opinion from the dugout, and Jezza oversaw strategy (long ball down the middle), substitutions (who looks like they're about to die of heat exhaustion?) and made a cameo on-pitch appearance. Mike's back gave out, so he handed his sweaty shirt to me for a walk around in defence – and this time we won!

Huge amounts of clothing and shoes were donated by the team. Yesterday one team member handed his boots to a local volunteer on the build site, complete with a pair of socks at the end of the day. These were delightedly accepted by his beaming beneficiary.

## Monday 25 – Tuesday 26 February

The journey back up to the capital, and on to Paris, was broken by a beautiful meal at the AOG guesthouse – steak and chips! We had a short de-brief time in which people gave brief accounts that summarised their experience. I liked Nigel's the best, so I will precis it for you:

*'I was using a spade to load wheelbarrows. One little boy came up to demand I filled his bucket ... and he hated me. He was determined to work on the site and whenever he brought up his bucket to be loaded he was very demanding. I just couldn't seem to get the amount of sand he wanted right and he kept yelling at me.'*

Nigel is a senior BT engineer, who directs the work of other very skilled engineers. He found himself serving a little child. I love the servant heart he showed in trying to do his job well, even for an uneducated child for whom he was building a school, who didn't like him. Sums up what the team was all about.

There were many stories – all profound, some tearfully given. A wonderful moment to share with one another. It's amazing what this place, these people do to your heart. To have brought such hope and transformation, to have been a small part of a big miracle, deeply personally impactful.

Previous expeditions have seen us traverse immigration and multiple pointless checks very slowly – taking around 2 hours. On this occasion, our first travellers were through in 15 minutes and everyone was found enjoying cold drinks in the departure lounge within 40 minutes.

Our coach driver was most unhelpful in Paris. Just what you need after a largely sleepless (except for Lewis who can sleep anywhere) occasionally turbulent flight. His refusal to bring his coach to us (release handbrake, engage gear, drive to team, all the while sat on comfortable seat) meant we had to carry our luggage to him (approx.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile.)

This did give Grandpa Fudge the opportunity to win the last MacDonald's cap award by driving a fully loaded luggage trolley into an irrigation gully and catapulting everything down the concourse.

The ferry home gave me a chance to reflect on 8 years of God's amazing guidance and provision since first meeting Moise and his church, through his friendship with Gareth Webber, a Volunteer with Urban Saints Global – now Amor Europe.

Gareth took us to Burkina Faso, after becoming a Global trainer.

Mark Lamb and I learned how to run building trips with Amor. Mark's vision for a school in Africa began to look more possible because of this.

Relationship with Moise and Elizabeth through training children's workers gave us confidence in their ability to deliver on time, on budget, to high quality and to handle large sums of money.

Their friends in the UK – Philip and Allison Ledune, allowed Aid to Burkina, the charity they lead to serve the school vision.

Sawyer came to Kodeni and showed us how to save the families from water borne disease. They have saved lives and greatly increased the progress of the kids' education by almost eliminating absence through illness.

The core team in Folkestone has engaged schools, churches, friends, family and businesses in what has become a project of incredible quality.

The school buildings are beautiful. The kids' performance (100% passes in national tests, 86% median score, 98% attendance) places the school at Ofsted good to outstanding in Mark's opinion.

School meals are provided, medicine administered, sports developed.

It would be easy to look at the buildings, hear the laughter of the children, see the seriousness with which the school team delivers education and handles some pretty wild kids, observe the health initiatives and enjoy a beautiful scene; and miss God.

Before a penny was raised, a drawing was drawn, or a pickaxe entered the ground; a small group of women led by Elizabeth began to pray for the children trapped by poverty here. They prayed for 15 years without seeing any sign that God was hearing. Somehow, their earnest cry drew the attention of Heaven and our little team in Britain got called up for divine service. There is something about being engaged in something where God is present that bursts with life and love and laughter.

It has been my experience, climbing mountains for sponsorship, running events, digging holes, making arrangements, explaining and persuading, writing, speaking and planning, that this whole project has been filled with life, love and laughter.

So ... God, thank you for the invitation, the provision, the people, the protection and the completion.





PS

We (Amor Europe) will return for the opening of the school hall – to serve also a children’s chapel welcoming 700-1000 animist Islamic children, and closure to the building phase of the school, in October 2019.

At the same time, we will train 40 leaders in developing outreach children’s work, hopefully inspired by the story of Kodeni.

Gavin will bring a team from Mosaic, including ‘Feed the Hungry’ who will make sure the school meals are excellent going forward. Gavin’s team will look to significantly help the micro credit provision – releasing mums into appropriate prosperity through intelligent investment.

The journey continues.