

## **Expedition Journal – Burkina Faso January 30 – February 19 2017**

### **Monday Jan 30**

I was up very late last night sorting out some of the vast number of loose ends relating to the activities of lastminute.lamb (Mark Lamb of my church). Unfortunate really since the alarm went off at 0200. I had considered not turning in at 11.30PM but decided two hours of sleep better than none. Landed again – story of my life. Françoise, my fellow trainer, was of course waiting at her door, around the corner from us, and my long-suffering wife Angela drove us to Heathrow.

Francoise decided that 3 bags, each of which appeared to be identically mahoesive was an appropriate starting point for her baggage, and added two more just for impudence. Brussels Airlines surrendered and let her on with no extra charges. I wouldn't have the neck. For the trip she has been renamed 'Five Bags Lloyd.'

This was always going to be a complicated expedition. Having bolted an Urban Saints training trip (inc. my gap year student's overseas experience with US Global) onto a major project taking 29 people down to Bobo Dioulasso for school build 2 - more of that later.

Anyway 29 visas, including one for an American, 30 air tickets, 27 insurance policies + late activation of 3 more, £35 000 of project funding transfers and enough logistics arrangements to challenge the 8<sup>th</sup> army left me rather ragged. A rather blasé spending spree in Boots Heathrow necessitated a sprint to the boarding gate, and by the time we were over Sandwich en route for Brussels I was asleep. The flight from Brussels to Ouagadougou was apparently very pleasant but I slept through most of that too.

Brussels Air lost one of my bags and immigration at Ouaga was its usual nit-pickingly awful display of inefficiency and disdain for the traveller, so my mood exiting the airport was a little less buoyant than the restful journey might have engendered. We, clutching lost bag forms, were greeted by Marcel and Fidel's smiles in the car park and we were on our crazy way to Gounghin Guest House before you could say 'mind that scooter' and all was again well with the world.

A decent meal was laid on for us at the guest house, where we bumped into Tim Roberts and his Watford AOG church planting team – he has just been a Facebook friend until now and it was great to see him. Our mutual friend Francois dropped by to take Tim's team to the airport, and vague arrangements for the following day began to form. The bed was hard, the shower worked and I had porcelain, all very acceptable.

### **Tuesday Jan 31**

Training has been planned for the evenings this week. This was a new dynamic for us; 5pm – 10pm so discussions could be had all day. Francoise translated tirelessly making room for misunderstanding less of a factor than would normal.

Jonas popped by for an argument over the need for external support as against indigenous solutions, a bit of a dialogue of the deaf but very entertaining and enjoyable. He comes from a NGO background which is almost the opposite of Urban Saints' approach.

We had lunch, paid for by the local team. On the way, I dropped by a cashpoint and may have lost £650.00 – not a fantastic feeling. The transaction went through but no money came out. Much cause for vexation.

Lunch was all about programme and budget. We agreed to both, though there was a lot of complicated maneuvering that was mainly unnecessary. The local team had decided to charge participants. A very positive move, releasing more finance into their operation.

The 5pm start went west immediately. We started at half six, so 1/3 of the allocated time disappeared without negotiation. However once started, despite a lot of dust, there was tremendous engagement from the 30+ people gathered.



*Françoise mixes coughing with leading a training group*

Françoise translated and taught exceptionally well as we grappled with the subject of young people and the Holy Spirit. Her Bronchial scale coughometer went to gale force 9 after my balloon game kicked up all the dust and someone dropped coffee all over the place taking her out of play for a brief first aid moment but she was fully functional most of the evening.

We retired happily encouraged to our little accommodation house and I slept the sleep of the just, disturbed only by enthusiastic cornet practice next door, oh joy.

### **Wednesday February 1**

We were left alone for the whole day so mooched about. Françoise headed out of the gate for provisions to liven up the bread and jam regime of the guest house. I read 'Let Justice Roll Down' by John M Perkins. I had met Dr Perkins at the Global Gathering justice conference in Mexico 3 weeks ago – what a man he is. Every great army has some people who know how to use their weapons. He uses the weapons of Jesus, primarily love. Full of life at 86; an inspirational activist, last arrested aged 83 for a protest against injustice. Never read it? It has certainly touched me; recommended!

Anyway, back to Burkina. This evening there was a very significant football game kicking off at 7.30PM right in the middle of our training evening. Burkina Faso v Egypt in the semi-final of the Cup of African Nations. We were teaching about the Holy Spirit and healing. Unbelievably we had a full

turnout of trainers, including several young men who were torn but came. News came through that Burkina went out on penalties. Long faces all round and then a night of partying to keep me awake. Particularly helpful as we were heading off early with Francois in the morning.

Yumani showed up today. He was at the first training course run by Gareth Webber and I in 2011. He has been running children's clubs in the Badlands up on the Mali border. He came by bus (6 hours) sent by his very poor congregation. It was wonderful to see him again (though I had to be told who he was ...) and to hear his testimony of what God has done with him. He is now leader of his church and has input into many others.

We turned in as early as possible as Francois had plans to take us to do some training for him in the morning.

### **Thursday February 2**

07.45 and we were away.

Francois:

'You will be speaking for 40 minutes to the first and second years of the whole college as well as the leaders with double language translation;' *no pressure then!* 'Talk about children.'

On the way to the college, one of two AOG (ADD) in Ouagadougou and easily the largest, Francois explained his journey with us and with them. All his ministry life he has been very interested in children's work. He ran a national scouting movement for ADD way back before he came to England for college.



Francois has been teaching at this college for many years, on Typology and Church History. However last year he renegotiated with the college to begin delivering our training instead of Typology. The leadership waited for feedback, and suddenly everybody was talking about the children's work training. This year Francois has dropped everything except our training and teaches 2 sessions per week – on Mondays and Thursdays. Today was the first class of term.

On the way to the college Francois dropped into conversation 'we also have a 2-hour training session after you finish speaking, for the whole of year 1 in both languages.'

A brief counsel of war in the car and subsequent mutterings at the back of the main meeting saw us come up with a plan, and a semi riotous session followed, much enjoyed by all including us.

Matthew arrived at Ouaga airport right on time, and we whisked him back to the guest house where a large meal awaited him. He appeared in the training room around half eight – 90 minutes before the end, just in time to get offered some of the training conference food. He could have risen to the occasion and polished some off but thought better of it.

Training tonight was a lot less distracted than before as there was no football. Numbers have risen every day from 30 on day 1 to breaking 40 tonight. We have run out of labels and participants' guides. Francois has been openly relishing the sessions, and we feel good about him receiving a third course for his college students. Françoise's painstakingly written out key points for every session were copied by many of the students between and after sessions.

### **Friday Feb 3**

We met the 10/40 Windo group for Burkina Faso. These lovely men had been working hard all week to facilitate the training. All volunteers, the reach of their work is impressive and as they described their vision and progress so far we were impressed and engaged by them.

Some things were not quite so helpful to hear. As we talked it became apparent that this little team, full of energy and determined to make a difference also has a list of demands without which they will find the way forward difficult. I was at pains to explain that we could help with non-monetary things but would be unable to assist with finance at all. We carry little except what God has called us to in terms of transferring skills and envisioning/equipping children's workers. Financing is not what we do. We did not disapprove of knowing their needs and encouraged them to seek local solutions in addition to external help.

Matt did his first overseas training (first time in Africa too) and handled the participants really well. We did the subject of money; bringing through a generation immune to the prosperity gospel, good with their own money and generous.



We followed it with a unity session designed to jolt people into seeking to help other children's groups and work across their city. Both sessions went over really well and the place was buzzing at the end. 'We never imagined training could be like this.'

#### **Saturday Feb 4**

Last session – Matt Summerfield's 1-2-3 on discipleship and responsible spiritual nurture. As before all went over powerfully, including Matthew's baton relay game being translated into 2 languages among excitable and extremely fast Africans.

We had a feedback session – explaining that the scheduled 4PM start had slipped to after 6 each day with consequent gaps in the programme as we fought to deliver as full a course as we could and still be thorough with the topics covered.

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#### **Feedback**

##### **Q1 What aspects of the course have been most helpful?**

Daniel	The fruit of the spirit
Bafo	Transmission of the Word of God
Benjamin	Unity
Dany	Identity of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit, - the wide range.
David	The way in which everything we have learned shows the skills and the methods
Geanne	The race with a very clear objective
Mathias	God has an individual relationship with each of us
Soumai	God the Father Jesus and the Holy Spirit worked together
Herve	Bank of God

##### **Q2 How will this influence what you will do with young people from this afternoon?**

Dany	Somehow mentoring or running alongside people needs to be intentional
David	Working in new ways, splitting into groups and interactively
Geanne	Sketches and drama
Bafo	God speaks to people and uses even children. I will include children in ministry
Fatimata	I'm going to do games

##### **Q3 Who is going to change nothing – because you are already doing these things in the course?**

Rien (nobody)

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We followed the feedback and prize giving by taking an expensive but excellent lunch at the ADD guesthouse with Francois and then nipped across the city to introduce Francois to Bryan and Christy White, newly arrived American missionaries whom we had chanced upon at the guesthouse a few days previously.

When we got Bryan talking about vision and call we all needed the tissues. It seemed to me that this was an important meeting. We will see what the newly formed friendship between them produces in the years ahead.

## Sunday Feb 5

In order to rest us, Francois scheduled a double preach from me with testimonies by Matt and Françoise, with Françoise doing one of the translations for church this morning.



We went back to Françoise and Beatrice's house for lunch, and Beatrice showed what a determined Burkinabe hostess can do!

Yumani (the guy from the Mali border who'd come for the training) was also a guest. His was an amazing testimony over lunch. The missionaries were shipped out a while back because of the rise of radical Islamist activity but he reported on a move of God among the tribespeople. One church has been burnt out recently. Schools have come under threat (Christian schools as well as state schools) because only the Koran should be taught. The government has moved troops into the area, but recently 12 soldiers were burnt to death in an attack. People are scared up there.



Yumani went on to talk about believers from the Fulani tribe in his own church. (He knows Idrissa from Fulani Ministries – who probably kicked off faith among the Fulani in his area). One young man came to Christ, was told to recant, refused and was poisoned to death. Another was threatened and chased all-round the town by his older brother with a machete. The church got him away and have smuggled him down to Ouaga where he is in hiding.

Just occasionally you get to be in the presence of a person who will follow Jesus at any cost. Yumani lives this way.

A final costs analysis and review with the local 4/14 team saw out the day and we could relax before our 0600 start tomorrow.

### **Monday Feb 6**

The ever-helpful Marcel picked us up at 06.15 and by 07.30 our bus was zipping down the excellent highway to Bobo. Our first proper relax for a few days – I snoozed, read or listened to music.

Jonathan Oubda was ready to meet us at the bus station. There is a strict baggage check – ticket number written on some tape. Unfortunately Matt had lost his bus ticket so we need Five Bags Lloyd to talk us past Jobsworth at the gate.

The Oubda family welcomed us into their home and we set about planning the next 3 days' preparation for the school building team (27 of them!)

### **Tuesday Feb 7**

Mosquito net day! Each team member had been allocated a piece of floor space in two rooms of a kindergarten. One of the rooms contained five mattress spaces, the other 25. For a mixed team with 11 girls in it, arrangements didn't seem ideal – a rather flimsy curtain separated the two sections of the larger room. A swift renegotiation moved five girls (some old girls among them ...) into the Oubda family home. This further demonstration of their amazing hospitality kept us from subjecting some of the women to the nightly abdominal fusillade peculiar (I am told) to the gents' airspace.

We nipped down to the market place to purchase long slim wooden batons (1.00 each to a European, 50p to a local ... Jonathan Oubda secured a shedload at 50p each.) On return Matthew Francoise, Jonathan and I fitted the batons to steel frames (one per mattress) and banged a nail into the top of each. We then suspended a mosquito net from the nails above each mattress.



Finally, Operation WIFI began. This involved going to the stalls in the telecoms part of the dusty main street and haggling like fury for an internet box. Then a SIM card was needed, and for that to be registered passport details had to be handed over. My passport disappeared for a while – a sweaty moment.

Finally, the box with SIM installed needed its settings amended to agree with the particular provider's Burkina Faso's SIM. I Googled how to do this and successfully programmed our three boxes. Each will support 10 build team members (WIFI really should appear on Maslow's Hierarchy of Need) allowing them to WhatsApp their families and access Facebook.

Also, massive amounts of cash had to be withdrawn to get started on the build (payment delays on the UK transfer of 35K had put us a trifle in the red here so Fudge coffers were needed until that untangled).

Finally a visit to the local Gendarmerie revealed that they would be providing a heavy security presence (4 machine gun toting flack-jacketed police officers at night, two in the day.) Comforting and disturbing at the same time.

### **Wednesday Feb 8**

The plan was for Matthew and me to attack tree roots out at the school build site prior to the main team's arrival, allowing them to focus on the build. Francoise was supposed to meet the children in school but WIFI issues relating to Samu down at the marketplace taking our money but not registering one of our SIMs delayed us with exchanges of pleasantries with WIFI bandits.

Another trip to the cash dispenser was also necessary. We also purchased and assembled 20 spades and 10 pickaxes.

By the time we got to the school the kids had gone home (half day Wednesday) so Francoise came to help us address the tree root. We needed her help, and that of Moise. Much sweat was exuded, brows were mopped, pickaxes were wielded, axes brandished but ages of effort the thing looked



much the same as when we started. Honestly a full mashee banzai with the pickaxe produced no more than an eggcup of spoil.



*Finally after a long struggle, we got that stump out.*

Moise and Francoise left us to it, at which point Ashil bowled up. Ashil knew what he was doing and the task advanced rapidly. By the time we left the site beneath a setting sun we hadn't finished the task but we knew we'd win.

Moise dropped a bit of a bomb over tea. a transport workers' strike had blocked the road from Bono to Ouaga. That meant our coach could not meet the plane, and the team would be stranded in the Ouaga guest house for 48 hours (assuming they could get there from the airport). A quick review of insurance paperwork showed we would be abler to fly the team down to Bobo – avoiding the roads. Calls to Francois were not picked up (he was our key to getting the team picked up from the airport), but we had until Thursday evening to sort this.

I prepared to call the insurer, prior to tipping off Mark Lamb (party leader) that there might be a plan B in place by the time he arrived. As I dialled his number, Moise received a call to confirm that the strike was off. Back to plan A, no calls to UK necessary.

### **Thursday Feb 9**

At 04.40ish Mark Lamb confirmed over WhatsApp that the Folkestone team was through security at Heathrow. Jake Little also indicated he was on track a few minutes later. The team was on its way.

We said goodbye to Françoise as she headed up to Ouaga on the coach, and headed out for Stump Wars 2. It took us all day to remove that wretched stump, leaving behind a comedy sized crater akin to the aftermath of the meteor strike that wiped out the dinosaurs.

We took some rest during which final planning for the Barmy Army's arrival were put in place. As soon as the heat began to reduce, to delirious applause from the ever-attentive Jonathan and the normally eager work-horse that is Matthew Mann, I suggested we made a start on the second tree stump. Groans all round but we were out there before you could say 'where's the liniment?'

The sound of Sabaribougou Primary School in full swing in the background will be something I remember for a very long time. We were some distance away from classroom 2 where Headmaster Pascal was in full swing. Gales of laughter and excited chirruping of 6 year olds drifted across the

building site. This was the sound our core team had dreamed of. Kids formerly without hope, learning and laughing in a fantastic school environment. As soon as school was over, Pascal was out of the class, sleeves up and in the trench attacking our tree stump. People like Pascal are rare.



*In class*

News of M Lamb Esq. and his team of worthies' arrival in Ouaga gave us a little extra encouragement with the stump and we left ~~the blasted thing~~ it still in the ground but effectively whipped. Matt's hands were raw where the blisters had rubbed right through, mine just sore.

Facebook pictures announcing the whereabouts of Africa's biggest current kidnap risk to all and sundry started appearing. I sent a curt reminder to those in Ouaga that we had some protocols to follow on this subject. Posts with identifiable locations ceased. Sending one of the WIFI boxes with Françoise may not have been my best move.

### **Friday Feb 10**

Stump Wars 3 took place without Matthew. He was on a visit to the Dorcas Girls' project on account of the state of his hands. Ashil and Jonathan did the lions' share of the effort with occasional contributions from me. At break time Pascal was straight into action with us.

I joined Matt and Moise at the Kindergarten— the team's base for the week around midday. Here 40 chairs and sufficient tables for dining and serving were laid out.

Before too long the hiss of an air brake announced that our peace and quiet was over and vagrants various showed up looking for somewhere to doss down. Someone blocked the loo and a crowd like Wall Street on a bear run formed around my laptop desperate for WIFI codes.

We headed out to the school as soon as a superb lunch had been gratefully downed. Elizabeth Oubda and her team of wonderful volunteers worked their kitchen magic. My friend Michael Hands would have described their creations as most agreeable and apposite to the constitution.

I was looking forward to seeing the reactions of last year's veterans when they saw the school up and running. It is a beautiful school, brightly painted and smart. The children, beautifully behaved

and turned out in uniforms that match the paint job on the buildings twitter happily around the place in break times.

We arrived just as school ended for the day with a flag lowering ceremony began. We joined the solemn ring of silent children, sliding in between them and holding their hands. After a couple of shouts from the head boy, the ring of children around us burst into an enthusiastic rendition of the (interminable) Burkina Faso national anthem. Mark Lamb burst into tears. The shock of seeing his vision come alive in the form of 100 uniformed children perfectly behaved and full of joyous life was extremely emotive. He was not alone in feeling overwhelmed.

A walk through Sabaribougou village followed, with our beautiful raggedy school kids (now out of uniform), along with their chums were delighted to see us.



*Kids from Sabaribougou village, for whom the school is being built*

Night arrangements were more orderly than last year as I recall. Maybe without Steve and Barney Ridgwell's late night disco antics on the light switches, we had a better chance of settling down. All was quiet overnight except for Mark's waterworks issues precipitating multiple loo visits. This minor health issue became a matter for prayer, though some would have preferred him to get prayer for his wind farm.

### **Saturday Feb 10**

Work site day 1 saw the team head out in two minibuses with Webber and Fudge in the cockpits. Now don't hear this as a criticism but Burkinabe road protocol is a shambolic disaster almost on a par with India. The roads were alive with mopeds each with a death wish. They swarmed and swirled all around the vans, making last minute dives through non-existent gaps. Scooter vans (drop head Reliant Robin crossed with Vespa) with precarious loads wobbled along looking for an opportunity to topple over, and anything big just barged through us all with an imperious coup de claxon.





*Trench marks*

formed. One to pick, one to shovel, one to rest – on rotation. We set to the work with enthusiasm and a touch of reckless frenzy. This lasted for a couple of rotations after which dogged determination saw us through to roasted English o'clock (approx. 11.45) at which point we legged it for the showers and a carb rich lunch. By that time, all of the foundations had been dug to a depth required by the builder.



*Yes, there's Mark in the blue T-shirt back left under the shade of the only tree*

Let it not be said that Our Very Glorious Leader was idle in the heat of battle. His contribution to the overall effort was creditable; however it took place in the one part of the site that was shaded by an adjacent tree.



Matt went home, and I managed to walk off with the van keys, stranding the team for a while and delaying their rendezvous with the Mayor. Once we'd turned up (finally) he was extremely pleased to declare his commitment to the project and appreciation of the effort and support we were putting into one of his communities. He apologised for the behaviour of his predecessor (who'd tried to get some money out of Moise for land rights). We returned to base encouraged.

Games of Perudo and Scrabble broke out until dusk, when another superb meal was devoured. Jeremy Russell produced a Bible and introduced us all to the torchlight evening devotions slot which would run throughout the week focussing on the life of Peter. Jezza was excellent, but at one stage lost the attention of everyone as four Stormtroopers in full combat gear (sub machine guns, helmets, flack jackets pistols, combat fatigues) appeared and stood in a menacing row behind him.

The late night shower run (as with the before breakfast run – a daily ritual with a group of 'regulars') was now made more exciting by having to drive towards sentries that indicated where they wanted me to park using guns loaded with live ammo. (Happily, the French sniper incident with M Hollande happened after we came home so I was spared any additional nerves).

We slept soundly but acutely aware of terrorist risks. I found myself thinking about how to get the safety catch off one of those sub machine guns if we were under attack with a guard down. Silly thing the mind.

### **Sunday Feb 11**

0530 is no time to start a Sunday (unless it's a sea fishing trip of course). I sat on the edge of my mattress desultorily tugging on a sock, waiting for my hands to begin responding to instructions from my brain and vice versa. There came a tremendous splintering crash and then someone yelled "Get down! Everyone against the walls!" I raised a curious eyebrow and went to investigate. Apparently, Steve had tripped over his kit bag and face planted through the mosquito net frame onto his bed. Ben had been fast asleep in the neighbouring bed, awoke to Steve's Eddie the Eagle antics, assumed we were under attack and shouted what he shouted in a blind panic.

Matt's having gone home meant that one written off mosquito net frame wasn't a total disaster. Steve dismantled what was left of it, and moved next door to Mark's bed. Mark had taken Matt's as Matt's former position was the best and Mark was in charge....

Church was slightly traumatic for the England team. Just to keep us on our toes Mark made us sing. To make things a little easier he produced two sets of words between 29 of us, half of whom had never sung the song before.

Gareth preached, Ellis held the flag, various choirs sang and we got a fabulous experience of worshipping with 800 or so Africans.

England v Burkina Faso in 95 degrees of heat proved to be a surmountable challenge for the medical team on the bench. Players were rotated according to their state of dehydration rather than tactical deployment. The referee took pity on Les Anglais Rouge and gave every decision in our favour, allowing Jezza Russell to maintain his undefeated record as England manager with a scrabbled 2-2 draw. Happily there were no Mourinhoesque disputes between the manager and the team doctor so the Russell marriage remained intact.

Early nights all round concrete mixing was forecast for the morrow.

**Monday Feb 13**



*Barrowing concrete*

With all of the foundations dug on Saturday, today was concrete mixing and pouring day. Lengths of reinforcing bars constructed on site from rods bent and wired into square-section skeletal prisms running the length of each trench were dropped in. Huge volcanoes of concrete were mixed (fifteen barrow loads of sand, 10 bags of cement 10 barrows of stones – so several tonnes in a mix). The contents of the mixes were barrowed to the trenches and dropped in. Only one of my barrows was sent back for having an inadequate load, so overall an OK performance with the shovel. Oh joy – more foundation digging was needed – this time large square holes for pillar foundations. Once dug, these needed filling. Enough fun available to keep an Alcatraz rock- splitting team happy. Talking of rock splitting, following the digging we had to break up rocks with our needle-sharp pick axes. This process involved walloping large rocks with all our might, shutting our eyes at the last minute and feeling the gentle patter of rock chippings against our eyelids. All good character forming stuff.

Water was a problem. The pressure in the taps was insufficient to send enough through the long hose to out mixing area. Re-plumbing happened pretty quickly but in the meantime just three buckets were deployed to move tonnes of water around. I had an unequal struggle to retain my water bucket with a local woman equipped with a baby on her back and a huge amount of gritty determination. It was lose the bucket or kick the bucket. I found something else to do.

A long line of brick-passers formed and vast amounts of blocks made their way to neat stacks all around the foundations. The sun came out and all the whites magically appeared in the shade by the classrooms whilst the work continued unabated on the site as African volunteers piled in. We went back to our digs to cool off.



Fabric and tape measures appeared back at our quarters and orders for garish shirts and lovely dresses were placed.

The air turned a shocking shade of blue as Steve decided to place all his weight on a bare foot right on top of the square socket that had previously housed his mosquito net poles. He punched a neat square hole in the bottom of his foot, liberally spraying our bedroom floor with blood. Honestly, some people just can't keep the place tidy. Medical assistance was provided and everybody chilled out.

Chilled out that is, until the internet boxes started to run out of data allowance. I received a variety of approaches from seductively sweet talk to veiled threats; all very entertaining. I thought it might be good to wait a few hours before refreshing the boxes, that way one refill would get us to the end of the week (and a refill was around £13.00 per box).

A shower run, some games, Jezza's talk and two meals saw us through to night fall. Red African sand shifting awaited us in the morning – early to bed with a few data sulks.

### **Tuesday Feb 14**

A Valentine's Day card appeared and a small gift. I couldn't help wondering if the box of fudge and its potentially disastrous effect on my diabetic bloodstream were linked to a recent increase in my life insurance cover, thanks darling.



*This stuff got everywhere but once it had loosened up was quite fun to chuck around*

Red sand delivered to site 2 years ago and left to harden in the sun, was pick-axed into moveable lumps and barrowed into the foundations, bringing their level up to that of the ring beam that was being poured simultaneously with the barrowing operation. I don't think it would be possible for the team to work harder than it did today. By the end of the day six lorry-loads of this hateful stuff had been broken up and barrowed. That is 120 tonnes moved by about 30 people so roughly 6 tonnes each (though actually the barrowers moved around 12 tonnes each.) This sand turns your shower water blood red, and after several washes keeps appearing out of crevices. Yep a good day for Mark to find himself some inside work by sitting in on a few lessons. A van load of government workers



turned up – all in hi-vis vests. The mayor had sent us reinforcements. He turned up himself a little later in the day and got involved in brick carrying!

Each day, in the afternoons we held an after-school club. This provided the team members with opportunities to interact with the kids. Language was an issue. We spoke English with a smattering of GCSE French somewhere back in our educational histories. They spoke heavily accented French and fluent M'òoré. Thus it was that I found myself teaching how to make sock puppets to eagerly engaged 6 year-olds whilst not having the first clue how to do it myself. My little group's efforts were styled by Picasso but we were very proud and we may have started a movement.



*The children did rather more running around than the adults at the after-school club*





In the outdoor games that followed Gareth brought down an onrushing 5-year-old with the kind of neck-high tackle that would have pleased a Western Samoan flanker. 'I barely touched him' he postulated 'anyway he was one of the big strong ones.' That would be a big strong five-year-old, Gareth – well done we're impressed!

Our accommodation area was transformed into a street market this afternoon. Moise had invited some local traders who were not allowed to rip us off. That is when he was in earshot. Whenever he was engaged elsewhere the prices rocketed – it really was quite hilarious. Anyway, we got some decent local handicrafts at prices we and Moise were happy with after a bit of renegotiation once he'd reviewed the list.

### **Wednesday Feb 15**

Moise was suddenly called to the capital last night – his father had become dangerously ill. We were left in the hands of Cephass and Da. There was plenty of room for misunderstanding now but Ben Bird and Francoise Lloyd did a stunning translation job and our programme continued to run smoothly.

Elizabeth, Moise's wife oversaw the incredible food we were served all week. Fried plantain and local mangos went down particularly well. I could eat fried plantain every day for 40 years. I reckon it might be what manna was made of. Tonight it was goat meat kebabs ... lip smackingly mmmmmm.

News from the classroom ('I'm securing the long-term future of the school – I can't get my hands dirty as well' – Mark Lamb) was that standards were very high there. The children's behaviour was excellent, engagement near perfect and learning advancing fast.

Out in the heat we were learning to hate concrete. All day we mixed massive African volcanoes of concrete or mortar. Barrowing the ingredients, then mixing, then barrowing the mixed results, then lifting and delivering the concrete. Personally I prefer working in offices, with air conditioning if possible. This was brutal stuff. We completed the building's ring beam and saw some of the walls begin to rise. By the time we knocked off we'd seen enough sand and cement to last a while (and offloaded another 10 tonnes of it into the store for tomorrow at the end of the day).

A walk in the forest lightened to mood – beautiful African riversides with crazy Indiana Jones bridges. Very restorative and helpful too for the local midges that settled hungrily upon us.

Driving around was easy enough – we had been loaned 2 minibuses by the German Kinderhelfen organisation. Gareth drove one, and rather recklessly I had responsibility for the other. Driving these things around was a recipe for a nervous disorder. Hordes of mopeds swarmed around the buses. There was a kind of national collective abandonment to fate shared among the riders, who were quite capable of smashing into each other with no assistance from overseas minibus novices. We didn't kill anyone but they had our nerves jangling.

There was a locust in the shower. Sadly it evaded capture or it would have been transported to the interior of Mark's mosquito net. He has a fear of living things (lizards, seagulls, locusts, moths, wasps ... it's an extensive list.) We told he had to abandon the lavatory block and opt for the bushes for fear of its resident reptile population; honestly!

Harry Taylor produced the most appalling flatulence to help sedate us. Choking was a real possibility for anyone more than 8 feet from the door.

### Thursday Feb 16

More block moving and mortar mixing today. The professional builders had the blocks up to 3 courses, building up from the ring beam. Now we could see the classrooms rising from the ground. Gaps were left in the wall ready for another huge delivery of red sand to be barrowed in and bring the floors up to the correct level.



*Dorcas Girls*

Half the team visited the Dorcas Girls' project this morning. Around 200 girls are involved in this 3-year residential programme run by Moise's wife Elizabeth. She grew up in a polygamous family, very poor, and has dedicated her life to helping girls that are as she was, with little hope.

The girls come in near destitute, uneducated, poorly nourished and with little understanding of hygiene or business. They leave, beautiful clean, well nourished, educated and with a tailoring business including their own sewing machine. They possess the skills and understanding to bring prosperity to their family and many have a faith in Jesus that includes an understanding of personal generosity towards the poor. These girls, transformed by the love of God, have the potential to bring change to their villages and many reportedly go on to do so.

The girls' project is mirrored by an embryonic boys' project. The whole team visited this place after work. They challenged us to a game of footie and it seemed appropriate to accept, though I'm pretty sure one of them remembered that challenge I gave him 2 years ago – and he'd grown a lot bigger and stronger since I'd last seen him. The match was set for tomorrow.

## Friday Feb 17

The last build day; end of term banter, chortle chortle ... whumpf. 100 tonnes more red sand had arrived overnight and we were set straight to work by Mark 'I just need to sit in on a few hours of lessons' Lamb. Admittedly this lot of sand was a lot looser than the 2-years-in-the-African-sun stuff we moved a couple of days ago.



*Pete struts his stuff with a modest barrow load. More challenging loads were to come...*

After a little chill-out time of essential classroom activity, I was joined by him in time for Pete Truss to lumber up to our wheelbarrow filling station with an empty barrow. 'I'm just off to have a drink, fill her up' he foolishly declared. When he returned, we had gleefully got it to epic proportions (the 'Holy' – a good measure, pressed down and running over) with an enormous boulder on top. To be fair to him he did set off with the beast – if a little bow-legged, and with a bit of help he delivered it ok. Mention should be made of a few heroes on this day to end all barrowing days. Lewis, Warren, Russell's various, Chandler and a couple of Earls gave it full beans all day. Young Russell delivered the



final barrow of the day with the last of her internal battery and followed the payload into the foundations as her energy ran out. Whilst all the barrowing fun was happening, the block layers were getting the walls up. By the end of the day, the foundations had been brought up to floor level and the walls had reached to half way up the windows. The back of the building task was broken. All that remained to be done was the pillars, blocks to lintel level, ring beam 2, blocks to roof level, and roof on ready for final fix. The building was more than half way finished, in 6 days.



back at the accommodation area we freshened up for the final celebration round the school flagpole. I got involved a crazy minibus dash around the city, taking in two banks three pharmacies and an airport before somehow getting half the team to the celebration. We were trying to get some antibiotics for child with an infected knee.



The final celebration round the flagpole involved a lot of thanking by parents, a local bigwig, a church elder, the children themselves and the head teacher. It really was very moving and Mark burst into tears as usual. We were all a little overtired.

So it was, that after a hefty shift, on the way home, the England football team complete with blisters and apparently having donned concrete socks, took to the field to play the Burkina Faso Street Boys. They were awfully good, but they were Arsenal in that they played beautiful football but forgot to stick the ball in the net. Consequently, we went in at half time much the worse side but 3-0 up mainly through Jake Little who was everywhere and a referee who gave us everything. Richard Warren



deserves a mention in goal as he beat back at least 7 superb shots from the opposition.

To even things up, the manager brought me on and foolishly my team mates kept giving me the ball. I was up against Pele, who roasted me every time and the scores became even. Richard, our goalie, gets another mention as he waved in their long range speculative equaliser for no apparent reason, making him possibly man of the match for both teams. Mark nicked a jammy winner and we trooped off feeling like injustice had been done.

### **Saturday Feb 18**

Our last day as a team. The last cry of 'ANTIMALARIALS!' was hollered over the breakfast table by team doc Melissa. Her efforts to keep us alive have been greatly appreciated, especially by the absent minded.

After brekkers we paid off our debts to various traders following a bank run into town. Then the team debrief allowed each person to write down some things to help fix memories and connect with emotions. The exercise would also help prepare the team members for describing what happened to loved ones and supporters on their return.

#### **Three things that have you have noticed.**

- 1. What have you observed or experienced that you would describe as excellent – exceeded your expectations?**
- 2. What have you experienced that makes you glad you are going home?**
- 3. Has anything horrified you – left you feeling like you wish you could change it?**

#### **Finally jot down one story you could tell that summarises your experience.**

Participants were invited to tell everyone something they had written, and after a short silence the contributions flowed freely. People spoke of a wide variety of things from local conditions, personal discomfort or appreciation, build site learnings, hard work, actions or words of individuals that had caught their eye, school culture and learning environment, progress, local sacrifices in our favour. Some were a little teary, everyone clearly impacted by this incredible expedition.

So we headed to the airport in our buses – I said goodbye to mine (Lambo 1) with some of the nostalgic attachment expressed by the former Top Gear team after a road trip in something exotic.

We left behind a fully functioning excellent school with a wonderful head teacher, beautiful children, a very competent board of governors and over half the construction complete for their second 3-classroom block.

As I write, the fund-raising for the second project team has just topped £50 000.00 so in all the team has raised around £105,000.00 and is within sight of its original £120,000.00 goal. Our strategy will now switch to long term funding which works out at £5.00 per month per child for the 300 children in the school. Parental contributions are expected for cleaning, school meal cooking and general maintenance. Parents volunteered for the building work too. It is their school and the community accepts both the generosity of our partnership and the responsibility of good ownership.

If you want to hear details of sponsorship, please write to me [jfudge@urbansaints.org](mailto:jfudge@urbansaints.org)

In 2 years' time, we plan to return and help build the school's assembly hall which will also double as a church on Sundays. No other school in the region has such a facility.

If you would like to view the 8, 2-minute video blogs summarising the build trip, they are available here <https://www.youtube.com/user/gw7578>

