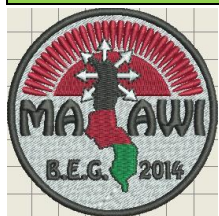


# **MALAWI 2014**



### **A message from Catherine MacDonald, chief leader**

Borders Exploration Group-----Malawi 2014 has taken place.....30<sup>th</sup> June – 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2014

I would like to start out by saying a massive thank you to everyone who made this trip possible! For all your continued support and your generosity. Your kindness helped 41 volunteers get to Malawi to make a difference.

The expedition started in Kuti, a reservation park that's linked with an education centre just outside Lilongwe. Various jobs were carried out here, making fire bricks from recycled materials, erecting a monkey enclosure, painting tired buildings, hoeing fire breaks to stop poachers burning down more than one section of the park, these are only a few of the jobs we did. Then we went onto Nankhwali, what a wonderful reception, children singing and dancing, so delighted to see us. We worked closely with the youth group of Nankhwali in the villages to construct new grass partitions for the old, blind and disabled people. We witnessed how poor the facilities were in the nursery and what little toys the children had to play with. The skills of the team were on point and painted the alphabet and animals on the walls to cheer the room up. Gifts of toys were left too. In the evenings we exchanged cultures with singing, dancing and playing musical instruments.

We visited Lake Malawi, (paradise) as we travelled to the next community phase in Utale with the leprosy community. Our first large gathering with the villagers was a church service. The choir sang like a chorus of angels, truly amazing! After mass we went to the Leprosy Village to meet the chief and his people. The people of the village were so welcoming and very happy to see us. The work in this village was building two new long drops (toilets) and irrigation. Team Malawi 2014 had raised money to pay for all materials and builders. Thomas the Malawian builder, project managed us and carried on the unfinished work when we left. One long drop almost finished and the majority of the second completed. Irrigation work meant we had to loosen up the solid soil that encased the roots of the vegetables, thus allowing the water to soak in much easier.

Our trip finished with a climb up Mount Mulanje, what an amazing experience, pretty awesome but hard 3 day trek!

Overall the trip to Malawi was very humbling, awe-inspiring, rewarding and exciting, highs and lows with memories that will never fade.

Thank you Malawi for allowing us to visit and do a little for you!

He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has.  
*(Epictetus) this little quote is so true of the beautiful Malawian people.*

## And from a venturer's point of view:

### Getting there (1<sup>st</sup> July)

After a year of tiresome training weekends, extensive group fundraising and non-stop personal fundraising the day we would finally head to Malawi was here. We were told to meet at the airport at midnight (despite our first flight being at 06:00). This was no problem however as we were all too excited to need any sleep, so we sat up talking next to the mass amounts of rucksacks we were going to take with us. At 04:00 we were given the go ahead and told we could now start going through customs. Our flights went from Edinburgh to Amsterdam to Nairobi to Lilongwe (Malawi). We arrived in Malawi at 23:00 with bad jet lag and a missing bag. After shoving everything on top of the dodgy looking bus we were on our way to the hostel where we would be spending our first and last nights. In the morning we were able to observe the extent of the shopping achieved by the advance party which included everything from a jerry can for water to crisps. After having breakfast we all hopped on the bus again on our way to Kuti.

### Travelling in general

Throughout all of the time we were travelling in Malawi we used 'Best car hire' buses, which we would chuck all of our bags on top of and attempt to strap on. Despite saying until the last journey that our drive on the bus should never be more than 2 hours, a 2 hour trip often turned into a 7 hour nightmare due to the inaccuracy of the bus driver's time estimation.



Our two drivers Andy and Steven

### Kuti (2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>)

When we arrived in Kuti we were amazed at the wildlife we saw straight away and instantly took pictures of everything that moved. We stopped, unloaded, and were shown where we were going to stay. We were lucky as there was far more than we were expecting - there were showers and even a bed! As we got more used to the wildlife wandering about they became more used to us, so as you were cooking tea you would see the camp ostrich (Evelyn) wandering about or as you were walking back to your A-Frame you would have to negotiate your way through some zebras. The jobs we were given at Kuti included making fire breaks to prevent the mass spreading of bush fires, poacher patrol (looking for snares etc.), construction (making benches to place 3 around the park) and visiting a nearby Village. This work was made so much more enjoyable by the friendly Malawian people who never stopped entertaining us. Visiting the village was one of my favourite parts of the whole trip. Even though we were only making clay pots for the first time it felt like we were helping a Malawian community. But soon the four days were over and we piled into the bus heading for Nankawali.



Our A-frames



Evelyn



Zebras 'getting in the way'



Road clearing



Making pots



One of the guards who made our stay so enjoyable

### Nankawali (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> July)

After another long bus journey we were welcomed spectacularly into the youth centre with music and dancing which immediately made us feel at home. We were split up into four rooms; male leaders, female leaders, male venturers and female venturers. Task number one was to set up our beds and mosquito nets, which for us meant hang up a couple of Scotland flags and do the rest later - fair to say, it didn't work out too well. Nankawali was our first encounter with long drop toilets - fair to say, I hope it is my last. Our tasks while we were at Nankawali included going down to various villages, helping build toilet partitions with the youth group and visiting a nearby school/hospital. Nankawali is also the place where a few people developed stomach bugs (including me) where I had to wake up in the middle of the night to be sick, a lot! While we were working with the youth group we made some really good friends. I bonded with this boy called Samuel who was 18, we traded addresses and we write to each other regularly. But again after a couple of days we were on the bus again.



The girls' room



Shaving on the doorstep





Me socialising with the youth group

### **Cape McClear (10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup>)**

Cape McClear was more of a relaxation part of the trip in between two hard working community phase. It was a hotel based on the edge of lake Malawi. Here we took part in snorkelling, banana boating, and just relaxing in general.



Maisie, Jennie and I snorkelling in Lake Malawi



### **Utale (12<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>)**

Utale is the last remaining leprosy community in Malawi, on arrival it was getting dark so we had to pitch our campsite as quick as we could. The day after was a Sunday, so the locals told us we were not allowed to work. Instead we went to a Sunday service in the local church and went around the village meeting the people we were helping. While we were shaking everyone's hand one man (the youngest in the leprosy community, who had been diagnosed with leprosy and malaria) aged 35 said he was feeling a bit under the weather so he advised us not to shake his hand. The next morning after our porridge we were ready to go to work building toilets, when we were informed the 35 year old man had died through the night. Straight away this highlighted for us some of the conditions faced here. By the end of our stay here we were just short of finishing the toilets due to being unable to

work on the Sunday. Along with the toilets we also helped at a local irrigation project, growing lettuces. It was now less than a week before we were heading home, but we still had Mulanje to conquer.



The toilet project



Me and Father Francis  
(the person who runs  
both Nankawali youth  
group and Utale)



### The safari

We had managed to save enough money on our living expenses while we were in Malawi to afford a big game safari as an extra unexpected treat.







### Mulanje Mountain (18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>)

The highest peak in Mulanje Mountain is 3,002m high. Due to a time restriction we were not able to climb right up to the summit but were able to climb Chambe peak, an impressive 2,500m up. For this we split into 2 groups who would walk round the mountain in the opposite way (meeting in the middle). My group climbed right up to the peak and walked to our mountain hut on our first day while the other group climbed it on the second day. On the third day both groups met at a mountain spring for a

swim and some final relaxation time. Due to this being one of the first trips in a while without BEG's Ron and Jim I decided to dress up as Ron while going around the mountain so it was like he was there in spirit. After the climb we packed our bags for the last time and started our journey home. ☹

Overall this trip has been an amazing experience and no doubt I will be doing another Beg trip as a leader as soon as I can.



The Ron outfit



Holly and I enjoying the views



Group one and Chambe peak

*A big thank you* to Hamish Robertson for this report

plus an important date for your diaries



## **MALAWI PRESENTATION AFTERNOON**

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2014, Selkirk Rugby Club,  
2.30 p.m. See you there!**

## ***MEET THE COMMITTEE***

Meet Ruth Longmuir, Secretary

- *How did you get to know about BEG?*  
I first heard about BEG at a talk in Denholm Church in 1997 about that summer's expedition to Kenya. I was 12 and knew some of the older kids who had been venturers. It looked so much fun, what an adventure! I remember going home and counting up how many years it would be until I was 16 and old enough to go on one.
- *What and when was your first involvement?*  
I went to Romania as a venturer in 2002. It was a great expedition and definitely lived up to the expectations that the 12 year old me had!
- *What expeditions have you been involved in?*  
Romania 2002 as a venturer, Ukraine 2011 as a leader and Cuba 2012 as one of two chief leaders.
- *In the tradition of BEG "highs", what has/have yours been?*  
There have been so many "highs": on the various training weekends I've been to, on the 3 expeditions I've been on and at other BEG events I've attended. The people I've been privileged to spend time with and the friends I've made are a big highlight of my involvement with BEG. I've benefitted greatly from being involved and have seen myself develop and gain confidence as well as new skills.



## ***TRAVELS BEYOND BEG***

Malawi offers enough travel reporting for one newsletter! However, if you have had an adventure you'd like to share with other BEG members and friends in the December edition then please e-mail a report and photos if possible to [pamh225@aol.com](mailto:pamh225@aol.com)

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Also any names of past venturers and leaders and their current locations? Please e-mail [pamh225@aol.com](mailto:pamh225@aol.com)

Look out for a future report on the **Vietnam expedition reunion** which is planned for late December.

## BEG MEMBERS EVENTS

### Past events

#### BEG Beach Day 2014 Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> August

With dark clouds, strong winds and miserable showers of rain forecast on a Sunday afternoon in August, a small but intrepid group met on Coldingham Sands, at the mouth of the Buskin Burn, to hold the annual BEG beach day.

The beautiful bay, protected by the headlands was windswept but dry and with the sun shining, the group were soon tucking into sand specked sandwiches.

The explorers decided that the North Sea looked so warm, that four of them did what explorers do best and ventured out into the surf, where they found that they had been mistaken and returned to the beach.

A treasure hunt full of challenges formed the main activity of the day and soon the group had built sandcastles with flags, made sand angels, taken part in quite a competitive long jump competition, and explored the rock pools for living creatures.

The group rewarded themselves with cake for a job well done and are looking forward to hitting the beach next year!

*Thank you to Christine Anderson*





### Future events/dates

- **17<sup>th</sup> Nov - final date for proposals for a destination for BEG's 2016 international expedition** (See Jim's e-mails or contact Jim or Ron for more details.)
- Christmas night out – 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2014. Possibly in Selkirk.
- Weekend in the Cairngorms: 27<sup>th</sup> Feb – 1<sup>st</sup> March 2015
- Andrew Grant, Riddell estate, will be giving a talk entitled "The History of a Borders Estate" in Hawick Town Hall on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2015, as part of the Hawick Archeological Society's programme of lectures.
- Planning is underway for Tower Trophy, May 2015 – START ORGANISING YOUR TEAMS!

Check your e-mails and the BEG website [www.borders-exploration-group.org.uk](http://www.borders-exploration-group.org.uk) for more details.