

The VITAL update from Dannii

September 2011



Hello again!

I'm writing now after just finishing the Pacific Orientation Course (POC), and have had an excellent first six weeks in PNG! POC has been running for decades now, and provides a gentle introduction to life in PNG and other Melanesian countries. In the mornings we had Tok Pisin lessons (one of the national languages of PNG), followed by classes on Melanesian culture. Then in the afternoons we had sessions on various skills needed for village life.

The whole course was very practically focused, and we were forced to adapt to new situations in order to survive! For example, on the weekends we had to cook for ourselves without any electricity. Cooking over a fire isn't that hard, but not having a fridge to keep food in sure is! I was grouped with two German guys and we cooked outside and ate in a cooking house we built from natural materials (and a tarp).



The cooking house we built

Each week we'd go on a hike, and as the POC centre is up a mountain this usually involved some very steep hills. We also went endurance swimming – practise in case we ever need to swim to shore.

But the climax of POC is village living, where we spent a week living with a local family. I had a great time with my host family, and I think that village living really taught me more of the language and culture than the

previous weeks had combined! Essentially all I did was follow my host family around as they lived a regular week; so I went to the garden with my host-dad and helped him prepare the ground for them to sow the next season's crops, went to a local market with my host-mum, learnt how to make a thatched roof for their new house, and almost all the time, "storying" (chatting) with everyone who came visiting. Almost everyone builds their houses right alongside a path so that the whole society is literally at their doorstep!



My host family (and a few extra kids from the village)

I had a great time at POC, and a big part of that was living with and being encouraged by the other people there who have also chosen to come and help the people here. Most of them have committed to staying here for several years, and some have chosen to spend their whole careers here. A daily highlight was each morning hearing someone tell the story of their life and what led up to them moving to PNG.

I'm now in Alotau! Most of the VITAL participants have arrived, and we are about to begin. I'm not entirely sure what all of my responsibilities will be, but a big part of it will be mentoring the Wedau and Topura language groups as they translate parts of Judges and 1 & 2 Samuel, while I myself am mentored by Stephen Emerton, who has been working with VITAL for many years. So next time I write I'll be able to say just what it means to mentor a team of translators!

-Dannii