

Howell's e-Mail News

Saturday, March 6, 2004

March 2004 Newsletter or "Travel Tales and Kamikaze Bats"

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from northern Mozambique! When we sent our first newsletter from Africa, we had spent most of our time here in Nampula, sharing one borrowed vehicle between six families, running around trying to complete government paperwork, get our residence/work permits without too much red tape, research vehicle purchases, plan survey trips, and learn our way around town...

Since that newsletter, however, if you have wondered why we have been hard to reach by email or otherwise, it is because we have been traveling more than we have not! We have covered more kilometers than we can count, and we are more than a little road weary! First, we purchased Toyota 4WD double-cab trucks, and we flew down to Maputo (Moz's capital) to pick them up so we could drive them across the border to South Africa to have them "outfitted" for Mozambique. We stayed in Johannesburg while the trucks were in the shop in Pretoria, and in about a week's time, we had a bull bar, long range fuel tank, rear bumper, canopy, roof rack, mud tires, diff-lock, spotlights, and side bars put onto the truck to make it road worthy for northern Mozambique. Other than vehicle stuff, we spent our time running lots of "we-are-in-a-developed-country" errands like getting Abby's six month shots, buying good mosquito nets and malaria home test kits, stocking up on shampoo and mosquito repellent and diapers and wet wipes, and of course, seeing "The Lord of the Rings."

After the work on the truck was completed, we began the long trek back into and up the country of Mozambique. The journey required over four full days of driving, and though national highway number one has a few stretches with nice, smooth asphalt, most of the trip was dirt washboard roads or used-to-be-asphalt-but-now-full-of-potholes... Probably the most interesting and challenging bit of the trip was crossing the Zambezi, the river that divides Mozambique in half and doesn't have a bridge that crosses its entire width. The 20-ton Ferry at Caia, Mozambique was broken down, (we hear that it is unreliable at best, breaks down often, and has more than once dumped its entire load of vehicles into the Zambezi (yikes!). So we had to take a detour that involves a railway bridge boarded over for cars followed by a hand-cranked ferry across the Shire branch of the Zambezi. Yes, I said hand-cranked! You can see pictures at www.makuateam.org. We eventually arrived back in Nampula with a week to gear up for the first survey trip.

Which brings me to tales of...more traveling! Back in Lisbon we began planning as a team six survey trips of different areas of northern Mozambique to better learn the situation in these places so we can discern where will be the best location for our team to live and base our ministry. Some of the main questions we have about these areas are: is there any Christian presence in the area (national churches, foreign missionaries, Christian relief organizations), and what is the mix of people groups in the area (Makua, Makonde, Lomwe, Mwani, Makwe, Ngoni), as well as questions about language dialects, levels of development, and presence of Islam.

For the first round of surveys, we paired up with Kyle and Ginger Holton to cover the northern and eastern portions of the Cabo Delgado province. Alan and Kyle began the trip without us to research a few of the more remote areas, and five days later Ginger and I and the babies flew up to meet them. We covered a LOT of ground, and learned quite a bit about Mozambique's northern-most province. Cabo Delgado has a fairly low population density, and in many of the areas we covered in this survey we found an overlapping of people groups. It is also a fairly wild province; while various monkey species and some exotic-looking lizards remain the only wildlife we have seen of yet, we heard stories all over Cabo Delgado of other wild animals, mostly elephants that ruin people's machambas (small farms). This survey took us so far north that on a few different occasions, we were in areas where we could see across the border into Tanzania (and just a few weeks after being so far south!) and the people were using Swahili and Tanzanian currency instead of Portuguese and Mozambican Meticals! One of the more memorable moments of the trip was (thankfully) before Ginger and I joined our husbands, when they got Kyle's truck stuck in the mud overnight for about 24 hours. They were in such a remote area that only one vehicle passed them on the road during that time, (Kyle and Alan were told that it was rare to see more than two cars pass by in a week!) which turned out to be the vehicle that pulled them out of the mud. When they finally made it back to the town of Mueda where we were waiting for them, they were so covered in clay and mud that they were orange from head to toe! Fortunately, the

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rest of our trip went smoothly in comparison. Our teammates also returned from the other two first-round surveys full of information and experiences, and we spent several days reporting to each other and processing what we found.

We saw many places that lack Christian witness, especially along the Muslim coast, and many of the places we saw would be possible places for missionaries to live and work, though ministry would take different forms in different places. We also saw physical suffering, especially in the more remote areas. In one village near the place where Kyle and Alan got stuck in the mud, several people had died of starvation already that month, and others were eating grass just to fill their bellies. Alan and Kyle left with them what food they had then, but evidently what rain is falling isn't enough to sustain their crops, and we hear this is always a difficult time of year to grow and get food. It is humbling and sobering to be rich westerners here in this place, and we will continue to grapple with the tension of wanting to identify with the people but being able to provide for our families because of where we are from.

On Monday (March 1st) Alan left again for our second-round survey, this time with Rusty Caldwell, to survey the southern and western parts of the Cabo Delgado province, and next Monday Ann Caldwell and Abby and I will join them in Montepuez to finish the survey trip with them. After this round, we will again report and process together as a team, and then begin the process of deciding where to locate. We are eager to move somewhere and begin building homes and getting settled, and learning language and becoming part of a community, and we are praying over this decision constantly and ask that you continue to join us in those prayers.

In addition to where we've been and where we're going, we want to be sure and share a few of our "life in Africa" moments with you in hopes that you'll almost feel like you're here with us... The house we are staying in does not have a ceiling, just a roof, so we have had to get used to a number of critters climbing in over the top of the wall and living with us in the house (mice, geckos, and various bugs). Of course, we do what we can to get rid of them, but they just keep coming. The night before Alan left with Rusty topped all previous critter experiences, though. We had been without electricity all day, so Alan was packing in the dark when it began to rain, and it was then that I noticed something flying around in the candlelight. We had a bat in the house with us, and it was not content to remain in the rafters - it was flying circles, dipping lower and lower. We were quite a sight, the two of us squatting down in the dark trying to figure out what on earth to do to get rid of a bat by candlelight in the rain (they just didn't cover that in our missions classes at Harding). Finally, for lack of other options Alan picked up the large plastic tub that we bathe Abby in and started waving it around, back and forth over his head, not really even aiming, and after a couple of passes, with a big hard smack the bat met his end - death by plastic baby tub. Alan dropped the tub down over the bat and scooted it out the door.

Abby has adjusted to Africa well, and is doing wonderfully as a happy, bright, seven months old, eating bananas like a pro and showing off her two tiny teeth when she grins. All that blond hair she got from her daddy is getting long, and it curls around her face in the African heat! She handled all the traveling much better than we thought she would - seems the car seat puts her right to sleep, which we were very thankful for!

As we close, we ask that you pray with us for:

- Health and safety as we finish up survey trips
- Understanding, wisdom, and insight as we process through information from survey trips
- "Kingdom eyes and ears" as we decide together where to live and base our ministry
- Patience and endurance as we are far from family and as we experience culture shock

We are so thankful for you, our loved ones who we miss so much and who God has used to enable us to be here right now. And though we hate to be so far from you, we are excited and humbled to be here because of and on behalf of our great, merciful God.

Keep the emails coming - we love hearing from you! And of course, don't forget to look at our new pictures at www.makuateam.org.

Grace and Peace,
Rachel, Alan, and Abby Howell