

The Journal



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Chapter 8: Malawi & Mozambique

Day 93: Iringa to Nkata Bay, Malawi

After a cold night, we packed the tents away and headed into Iringa for diesel and set off with the hope of getting near to the Malawi border. The drive took us through a impressive range of different landscapes from dusty dry savannah, through eucalyptus plantations and cloud covered highlands to the border post on the Songwe river. The crossing was accompanied by the usual constant attention from the numerous money-changers that hover around nearly all African border posts but we were quickly across and decided to press on south down the western shore of Lake Malawi.

It is a spectacular road with sandy beaches on the left and the Lake stretching out towards Mozambique beyond and a dramatic escarpment towering above on the right. The road had been improved in the five years since we were last on it and we made good time arriving in Nkata Bay before dark.

Malawi was due to have elections during this week but the exact date of the vote was still a matter of some debate as there had been some 'irregularities' in the preparations which had resulted in almost a million names being removed from the list of those eligible to vote....There were reports of some unrest in the south of the country but we did not encounter any problems on the drive south with the local police actually pretty honest and friendly.

Days 94 to 98: Nkata Bay



View from Njaya Lodge

Njaya is a great place on the lakeshore that we'd been to before and we decided to spend a couple days there during the voting week itself in case the troubles escalated as they can do during African elections.

The staff of Njaya was unchanged from our previous visit and it was great to catch up with them and spend a couple of days in and around Nkata Bay relaxing while the elections happened.

At Njaya we met Phil Knowles who was returning to Malawi having delivered a Land Rover to a mission hospital near Livingstonia in northern Malawi a few years previously.

We were encouraged to hear about how the vehicle had made a huge difference to the work done by the hospital and strengthened our hope that ours would have a similar impact. Once the election result was announced, (the current ruling party winning and

the process described by one international observer as a total shambles) we decided it would be safe to head south again.

Day 99: Nkata Bay to Blantyre

We said our goodbyes to the ever delightful staff of Njaya and continued our journey south towards Blantyre. The journey was surprising in the quality of the road and meant that we made good time. I say we but mean in fact Austin and Giles who after a leisurely breakfast took the better coast road south as opposed to Andy and Duncan who charged off at the crack of dawn to get to Blantyre in time to watch some of the cricket (England versus New Zealand, epic stuff).

Even with the time benefit (courtesy of Andy getting up an hour earlier than even Duncan) Giles and Austin managed to virtually catch the other two up. The views of Lake Malawi were stunning and we happily trundled our way through the winding roads towards the capital.

Having arrived in Blantyre we dropped the two vehicles off at Doogles, the same place we stayed last time we were there and set ourselves up just in time to see England despatch our colonial colleagues on the cricket pitch, well done them.

Day 100: Blantyre

Knowing that we would be heading into Mozambique we had to restock with supplies including refilling the gas canister which, after supplying us with fire for the best part of four months, had finally given up. We also took the opportunity to send back, via the slowest and hence cheapest means possible, the various souvenirs we had liberally purchased whilst in Malawi.

Andy and Austin spent the morning heading to the nearby town of Zomba where Andy's dad had couriered our return flight tickets (thank you once again). They had previously visited a Mission hospital 6 years ago and also a rather fabulous tea and cake shop. Luckily the tea and cake shop was still in order and carrot cake was purchased for the drive south.

We also took the opportunity to head to the nearest major bank to get currency for the next few days. We were pleased to see that the charity funds were still looking pretty rosy as we haven't had any technical disasters with Bert or Ernie for a while now and the price of Diesel is pleasantly low in East Africa. Unfortunately the same couldn't be said of our personal bank accounts as the jaunt up Kilimanjaro and meals out have dented the finances somewhat.

Now we were fast approaching our final destination we started to think about how the rest of the charity money can be put into good use. We have been overwhelmed by the support from family, friends and colleagues that continues even as we have been making our way through Africa. It is thanks to this that we have made it this far at all and has now allowed us to provide not only the vehicles to the health posts but look into the possibility of restocking them with materials and equipment. We are waiting

to speak to the directors of Hope for Africa and get to the sites themselves before we will be able to know precisely how best to spend the money. We will of course give all the details as soon as we have them ourselves.

By the end of the day we were re-supplied and ready to go. The only point of interest of the day was watching the crowds of people milling around the presidential offices and vans of armed police looking shiftily around. This was due to not everyone being totally impressed with the result of the election and a bit of a ruckus happening which sadly lead to the police shooting some of the protesters. Thankfully we avoided any of the hassle and it was very much business as usual for the majority of people in town.

Day 101: Blantyre to Chimoio, Mozambique

Up bright and early the following day we began by filling all the jerry cans to the brim as we had heard that diesel can be difficult to come by in the north of Mozambique. Leaving Blantyre and then headed south to the border. The crossing into the Tete corridor was extremely busy and the first time we had queued for our stamps. The Mozambique authorities required the value of our vehicles to be converted into the local currency, at 44500 to the pound Bert and Ernie became worth billions. We felt that was a fair monetary representation of the emotional attachment we had for them.

Border done and the road fair, although potholes still de riguer, we made good time to Tete. There we got bit more diesel and incredibly four king cone ice creams, with kit-kat centres no less.

The weather deteriorated and darkness began to fall but the desire to get to Chimoio for the only campsite we knew about meant we pushed on. Driving at night in Africa is never a great idea but fortunately we found the campsite with alarming ease.

Although campsite is a bit over stated it was actually a restaurant which allowed us to camp in the car park. That said the restaurant served us wonderful food and gave us our first taste of Mozambique beer (very nice) and peri peri (frighteningly hot). The proprietor was super friendly and refused to allow us to pay any “camping” fees happy instead to see us enjoy his food. Refreshed and recharged we slept soundly with a hope to hit the coast the next day.



Palhota de Chicoteco Campsite

Day 102: Chimoio to Inhambane

We continued our journey with the aim of getting to the coast that day. As per usual our approach to travelling dictated we pulled long days of covering great distances before resting.

Throughout this slog our appreciation of the difference between Mozambique and the rest of East and Southern Africa was growing. Originally known as Portuguese East Africa, Mozambique has seen years of highly destructive civil war followed by horrendous floods in 2000 that left the economy crippled and infrastructure almost non-existent. Despite all of these problems (or perhaps because of them) the people are some of the friendliest we had come across, all around the country there seemed to be a crumbling Portuguese flavour combined with sunny African smiles. We were happy to find that our group's lack of Portuguese didn't hamper us thanks to the multilingual capabilities of the majority of the people we met.

We once again drove on better roads than we expected (only slightly pot-holed tarmac!) and made good time to Villanculos, the stepping off point for the Bazaruto Archipelago, a stunning group of islands. Having quickly cased the joint we decided we could still push on further down the coast and to a smaller but equally lovely site called Tofo.

Again we'd slightly underestimated the distance (or perhaps overestimate the pace possible due to the pot holes) and we found ourselves once again driving as the light was fading. Deciding we didn't want to push our luck too far we stopped in a small fishing town called Inhambane, a place the guide book raved about, and a stop that left us with only a short journey to Tofo the next day.

Day 103: Inhambane to Tofo

Inhambane is a wonderfully sleepy old colonial fishing town; even in the dark it was obvious that it's a beautiful place and we weren't disappointed when we got up the next morning. We decided that we'd spend the morning stocking up on supplies, as Inhambane is the main shopping place before Tofo and took a long walk around town to appreciate the relaxed, laid back atmosphere, wide avenues and well preserved colonial architecture. It's a lovely place and a fantastic spot for drinking coffee and watching the world go by.



*View from Pensao Pachica Backpackers,
Inhambane*

However, having heard great things about Tofo from the Kiwi couple we'd met in Blantyre, we were keen to press on and set off just after lunch. The road took us past acres of swaying palm trees and paddy fields that increasingly took on a sandy background until we finally arrived, exhausted at a campsite near the beach.

Verging on the side of masochism Duncan decided he would push on to Maputo very early the following day to enable him to be there in good time to meet the lovely Bethany, his girlfriend (and supplier of the emergency rations that we enjoyed so much in the middle of the jungle), with whom he would be having a few days holiday. Having had a quiet pasta supper and an early night he was ready for the uncomfortable bus journey to Maputo, suffice it to say we said our goodbyes in good style the night before to avoid dawn the following day. God speed Bunky....

Day 104 to 113: Tofo



Mozambique continued to impress us as we took the chance to stop to rest for a few days and make contact with Hope for Africa to update where we were heading for. Another round of e-mails and counter e-mails with the fantastic staff at Hope for Africa found them pleasantly surprised at our imminent arrival and allowed us to find out that there was a site that they had built that is doing some great work in the community near Xai-Xai that we could visit.

We managed to arrange to visit them the following week; we were hoping this would give us a chance to see the kind of work they do, which encapsulates aspects of Religious, Agricultural and Health support.

We were excited to think we might get a sneak preview of the kind of stuff they are doing before we have to head south to register the vehicles, especially given that we may be able to purchase supplies in South Africa that we could bring back up to Mozambique.

The time in Tofo also gave us a chance to start getting in gear ideas about how best we could apply ourselves in terms of research or education. We have a number of different potential projects in mind but are acutely aware that these need to be flexible to allow for adaptation on site. We all very much hope we will be able to do some basic health education whilst we are there and possibly some research into what is known locally about HIV/Aids.

Whilst in Tofo we had the kind of chance encounter that never ceases to amaze us. Staying in the same camp site for a couple of days were Marcus and Nicola, a couple of HIV specialist nurses who had driven down from the UK, via a different route to our own, and had spent time in Ghana setting up a health post and doing health education at a local school (under the name of Africaid).

They were continuing on to further fantastic projects including another site in Durban and working for the Harare based Mildmay project (the same group who's site we

visited in Uganda). We had actually had a series of e-mail contacts with them whilst we were still in England but never expected to meet them in person. Quite apart from being great fun they provided inspiration to us as they gave us a run down of the amazing work they had done both establishing the health post and putting together education about ARV's (Antiretrovirals – the mainstay of treatment of HIV/AIDS). Given that we have no specialist knowledge of HIV we were encouraged to hear that the majority of their work outside of teaching about ARV's was on basic health education such as sanitation, nutrition and information about sexually transmitted infections. This is all very much along the lines of what we hope to achieve ourselves and was a timely boost to our efforts.

Around all of this excitement we fully recuperated and enjoyed the beautiful surrounds of Tofo, meeting the locals as well as the many South Africans and other nationalities. We were fortunate to meet a fellow Englishman who talked of current plans in the community to establish a health post and the great needs for education and health support there are here, and it has certainly been added to the list of potential sites that need future support.



Tofo Beach

It was with a sad heart that we prepared to leave Tofo but excited at the prospect of seeing some of Hope for Africa's work first hand.

Day 114: Tofu to Xai-Xai

The day began with a final breakfast overlooking the Indian Ocean in beautiful Tofu. The journal needed updating and as both vehicles had been static for a few days inspections were more involved than normal. Happily both vehicles were in good order so off we headed to Inhambane to send the journal. The journey down to Xai-Xai was marked by our first encounter with the Mozambique police. With prior warning of an impending speed trap Austin slowed to 10kph below the speed limit. This limit had been imposed at the bottom of a hill by the unique method of repainting the sign to 50kph, the very first time any limit below 60kph had been imposed. Needless to say the police stopped us and presented a radar gun with 57kph displayed. Neither Giles nor Austin had seen this gun being fired and it became laughably apparent that this was a method of increasing wages. The officer duly imposed his fine which was halved with a little gentle persuasion from Austin, no receipt naturally. Doubly frustrating since we have had no such problems since leaving West Africa and so were a little out of practice. The Nigerian defence may have been a possibility. He was never going to be strong enough....

Thanks to this delay and a later than expected departure time we found ourselves driving into the darkness with the best part of 100 miles to go to Chiaquelane. Given the poor state of the roads and the suicidal driving we have encountered at night we

decided to stop for the night at Xai-Xai and then get up early the next day to make Chiaquelane for early morning.

We made camp at a strangely desolate caravan park with howling offshore winds shaking the tents alarmingly and settled down to a relatively sleepless night.

Day 115: Xai-Xai to Chiaquelane

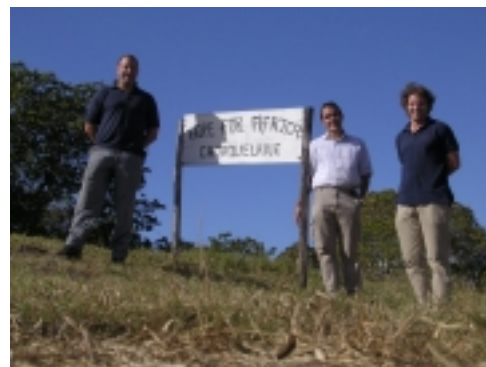
Up early as promised we drove the final few hundred kilometres to Chiaquelane and found ourselves surrounded by increasingly open countryside hinting at the proximity to the Kruger National Park just over the border.

Soon after getting underway we came across the broad expanse of the Limpopo River, the nominal endpoint of our journey as it is located roughly near the sites in Southern Mozambique and South Africa (and sounds good after London).



Unfortunately we were unable to stop at the river itself due to strict security restrictions that had led to someone we met coming the other way being thrown in jail for stopping to take a picture. Naturally we courted controversy by taking a sly photo as we drove past the sign (that was Dr Andrew Shawyer officer....). And seemingly in an instant we were across the river with barely time to appreciate the significance; 4 months, 18,000 miles (roughly), one puncture and a whole heap of stories. Quality, well done us.

The journey soon came to an end and having driven straight past the Hope for Africa site we executed a swift about turn and found ourselves drawing up to the mission. The first impression was very positive as the mission was set in attractive open ground just off the road with a colourful playground by the side of the cluster of buildings.





Pastor Isaac outside the school

First to greet us was Pastor Isaac, the man in charge of the mission. With him was Pastor Clatus, originally from Zimbabwe he was heading the Agricultural training regime. The mission itself has been there since 2000 when it was established in response to the terrible floods. Isaac has been there since then and has overseen the construction of over 140 houses built for people displaced by the floods.

He has subsequently gone on to aid in the building of 14 brick buildings for other local pastors as well as large open-plan buildings that act as a church, school and meeting place for the community. All of this whilst still living in a small tent with his wife.

After their warm greeting we were beckoned into their office/dining room/meeting room where we had tea and heard more about their set up. It was here we discovered the pastor was to be our first contact with Malaria as he had been struggling for the last few days with the effects of this potential killer. Having established this was a benign form of malaria we were able to provide him with the appropriate treatment and hoped his condition would improve swiftly.

We discovered the mission was primarily there to provide religious support to the community and establish an agricultural programme. This involved them taking on 10 students from the area and training them over a three year period in the essentials of farming and a basic theological training. It seemed strange that in an area of such fertile land there just didn't seem to be the knowledge or resources there to farm it. We found out that of a potential 4000 acres in the area a mere 500 were being actively farmed, and a great deal of that was ineffective.

The idea seemed to be to provide the knowledge to a select few who could then take that back to their communities and allow them to propagate that knowledge. The students were coming to the end of their three years and there was palpable excitement at prospect of them fulfilling their potential.

Having had tea we learnt we were to meet the local chief, whose approval would greatly help us. We piled into the back of Clatus' dysfunctional van and headed up the road to the chiefs home. With a crash course in the appropriate words of greeting in Shangani (the local language) we introduced ourselves to the top man. He proved to be a charming, benign character that very much resembled the type cast African community chief. Grey haired and quiet he proved a fascinating source of information on the health issues affecting the local population.

He told us that the community was made up of around 4000 people who suffered mainly from conditions such as Malaria, Cholera secondary to a lack of clean water and HIV/AIDS. It seemed to come down to the lack of the most basic health requirements and education. There were local health posts staffed by competent nurses however they lacked the materials to deal with anything other than the most

basic of problems. The nearest hospital was over 30 kilometres away in Chokwe, an impossible distance to the significantly unwell with no transport available.

After this constructive meeting we were taken to see one of the local health posts and meet another pastor who worked with the nurse there. A bumpy trip up the road saw us arrive at the home of Henni who, with his wife and daughter, had relocated from South Africa to the area. Amongst his pastoral duties, Henni made time to help out at the local clinic becoming the resident expert in the treatment of minor injuries. With basic training and a paucity of materials he was working wonders treating a huge quantity of cuts, scrapes and burns that walked through his door. A combination of common sense and perseverance meant he coped, even with a rather unconventional use of animal disinfectant as a cure for septic wounds.

We went on to tour the clinic itself and meet the nurse who dealt with anything and everything. In the absence of ARV's she was limited to symptomatic relief of the many manifestations of AIDS in the multitude of patients suffering from this widespread problem.



Giles with Mwaxicolane clinic nurse

It was after dark by the time we got back to the mission and after a very welcome dinner we collapsed into bed exhausted, our minds buzzing with information.

Day 116: Chiaquelane

Rather unexpectedly we were awoken at four the following morning by the sound of the morning service getting underway. The reason for the pre-dawn start being the need to get to the fields early in the morning. Far from being upsetting it proved to be quite magical as the melodic voices singing hymns drifted across the night.

Slightly later in the day we rose for tea and established that we were to go en masse to Chokwe to meet the area chief, local authority head and local minister for health. We had the feeling that this 'brief visit' was rapidly snowballing into a major undertaking. Along with Isaac, Clatus and the local chief we made our way to the office of the chief of the Chokwe region.

He was far younger than his local counterpart but no less impressive as a result. As before we discussed the relevant health issues facing the community and he proved a highly intelligent and useful source of information. He expanded on the theme of Malaria, Cholera and AIDS telling us that the majority of people were unable to afford mosquito nets and the lack of accessible water pumps led to people drinking the standing water in the fields with disastrous results. We discussed the attitudes of the community to people with AIDS and he told us that those known to be infected were thought of as being already dead and as a result no real attempt was made to provide comfort or support.

The issue of health education on AIDS as well as other basic health matters was raised and the Chief told us of a theatre group that toured the area providing entertaining and educational shows about AIDS attempting to banish some of the myths and get people talking.

Again a fascinating insight into the local views on the issues and it gave us hope that with people like the Chief in charge real progress could be made.

From here we went on to the local Government office where we met the Deputy Chief Administrator and Head of Health for the region. They were effusive in their greeting and spoke of the dire situation following the floods. The flooding led to the entire town of Chokwe being underwater to the point where people sought refuge on the roof of the three storey Administration office as it was the only building not completely submerged.

They had generously and enthusiastically put together a two week plan for us allowing us to tour the many different health facilities of the area, sadly given that we had to get to South Africa to register the vehicles we had to pass on the offer with the sincere hope that we would have the opportunity to return to the area.

With warm farewells we made our way back to the mission where we found a group of locals waiting for our return. The word had gone out that there were some doctors staying there and it didn't take long for a queue of people with medical problems to collect.



Chiaquelane 'Clinic'



Falciparum Positive Malaria Test

Slightly nervously we agreed to see if we could help and set to work. An impromptu clinic was set up and it was with trepidation that we started to see and treat what we could. This was all made possible through the help of Pastor Anton who had a talent for translation. We saw everyone from a two year old child with breathing problems to a local guy with fully blown Falciparum Malaria. We treated what we could and gave advice when we couldn't.

It was an extraordinary privilege to be in a position to help out and the experience gave us a real sense of purpose and fulfilment. It also provided an insight into the potential value of our medical training, something that one can lose sight of when in the thick of it in the UK. Of course we all rather hoped that we hadn't horrendously misdiagnosed some serious problems and sent our unsuspecting victims off to their

doom. I was reassured by the thought that we could only be of value ultimately as if we didn't help out then the likelihood was that nobody else would.

After we had seen all of the people waiting we were asked into the main building where a number of the local community had gathered to ask us questions. It was another remarkable experience as we walked into the building to be confronted by the local womenfolk singing a welcome, surely this couldn't be for us, don't they know who we are?



Q&A Session

Again with the help of Pastor Anton we did our best to answer the questions asked of us, this time it proved harder as they talked of issues such as the need for another water pump, medicines and a working generator. Having established our limited resources we discussed the other problems facing the community such as difficulties in childbirth in the absence of a midwife. Child mortality and death in childbirth was worryingly high and the views on these issues fascinating.

As the meeting drew to a close we were once again treated to a thank you song and made our way to have a final dinner with the pastors and then fall into bed and contemplate the barrage of experience and information we had come across that day.

Day 117: Chiaquelane to Maputo



Austin & Bert in the Agricultural Field

Once again we were awoken in the wee small hours by the harmonious church singers. With breakfast duly laid on, Pastor Clatus took us out to the fields where the agricultural fieldwork is accomplished. This area spans 16 hectares, irrigated by channels left over from the Portuguese era. As the HFA fields are the last in a long series along the water channel, their water supply is sporadic at best. As a result they can only really farm one crop a season, despite a large amount of water in the area. Currently they are only farming a one third of a hectare, but there are plans to extend to the full 16 hectares.

This will be farmed by both students and local villagers with the hope of not only providing food but also additional income which can then be channelled into setting up similar projects. It became clear that with the addition of a pump they could

redirect flow from the local river and plant more than one crop a season, dramatically increasing the yield and hence the amount of people they would be able to support. Once returned from the fields we said our goodbyes and headed on to Maputo to pick up our missing member, Pastor Clatus in tow as the Mozambique authorities require him to visit the border every 10 days to get his visa renewed. This is a considerable undertaking, both financially and in terms of deprivation of his expertise in teaching the students. As such we agreed to take him down to the border to attempt to minimise the impact on this occasion.

The journey down to Maputo highlighted the investment of South Africa, in terms of roads and filling stations. This made the journey relatively quick and we drew into Maputo by lunch that day. The city itself is on a raised spit of land overlooking the sea and the main deep water port of Mozambique. A vibrant city of crumbling colonial houses and broad tree lined avenues, cafes and live music. The afternoon was spent tracking down various people who'd been in Tofu, and finding our missing member (Duncan) and his girlfriend. That evening we had dinner with them, regaling stories and generally catching up on all the news from home. It was lovely to see a face from home; all of us were feeling the length of the tour by now, and the huge task that still lay ahead. The later part of the evening was highlighted by watching a live band of incredible talent, and bizarrely, opera singing.

Day 118 to 19: Maputo

Foolishly (in retrospect) we got up early to “enjoy” the rugby surrounded by Kiwis. Still the cricket was going well. The city itself afforded good opportunities for internet and some fabulous eating establishments.

It had become clear in Chiaquelane that the problems facing the locals were fairly large so we spent the days formulating plans as how best we may be able focus the resources to deliver the maximum sustainable result. None of us wanted the prospect of leaving the vehicles only for them to end up slowly rotting due to a lack of mechanical or financial support. As the accounts of Mobilemedics are looking healthy at present, we discussed the ways in which we could commit to keeping Bert and Ernie functioning for as long as possible. We decided to aim to assist to the upkeep of the vehicles after our return to UK and looked forward to discussing with HFA exactly what form this would take.

The cricket went better, the football worse, but the food in Maputo stayed on excellent form. With Bethany safely on a flight home it was time to head down to Pretoria to get the vehicles in as good a shape as possible and finally meet with the Hope for Africa team to discuss where best the vehicles could be utilised.

