

AICM – VTC News

The academic year in Uganda is now in full swing after their Christmas (summer) holidays. The VTC had a very good 2009 and is now top in the league tables for the South West of Uganda. This has brought an influx of students, which is very good news, unfortunately many of these students are very poor and have little or no means of support. We are therefore putting out a special appeal for sponsorship of a VTC student. £22 per month covers all tuition, residential fees and also provides them with the required stationery. If anyone is able to sponsor a VTC student – or if you know someone who would be interested – please contact Monica on 01303 863599 or m0n1c4@hotmail.co.uk.

Visits and talks around Folkestone

Early November last year we hosted an African Lunch at St George's in Folkestone. The main idea was to tell people about the work of the AICM in Uganda and to find more support. Lawrance cooked a delicious African meal of chicken stew, posho (maize meal porridge) and bean stew a la Batwa, served with fruit juice and a dessert of bananas and pineapple pieces. We spoke and showed photographs of our overnight stay with the Batwa, the craft initiative and the sponsorship programme. Over 60 people attended and we raised more than £500 in craft sales, sponsorship and general donations. Thank you to everyone who supported this event.



Rev Margi Walker invited us to speak at St Mary's church in Stelling Minnis as well as St Peter and Paul church in Upper Hardres where we gave a brief account of our trip and the work of AICM in general. As a result of Margi's work in the local schools, I was invited back to Bodsham, Stowting and Stelling Minnis primary schools to tell the



pupils about the life of children in Uganda. The children are always very interested and are keen to engage in activities to raise funds. We hope to take a book of drawings, letters and photographs from each school to the schools in Uganda, and get the children there to respond. *Monica Titterton*

Treasurer: Canon John Tapper, Mill Cottage, Mill Lane, Sissinghurst, Kent, TN17 2HX. **Membership & Newsletter:** Mike & Gill Henderson, 01480 466101

Sponsorship: Monica Titterton, 01303 863599.

General enquiries: enquiries@aicm.org.uk

Friends of AICM Newsletter

April 2010

Batwa Nights



Rupert Davis, along with Monica and Lawrance Titterton, travelled to Uganda in October, last year. They had a number of items on their agenda, but one of the main ones was to visit the Batwa. It was quite extensive involving a number of villages and schools, but here is Rupert's own description of their night with the Batwa.

Sunrise, with such a panoramic view! It's amazing that there is not much difference in time between darkness and light here on the equator. The community is situated at the top of a hill which is level



with all the other surrounding hills, and there is a large primary school up here, which provides free education for about 112 children ...staffed by 2 teachers who have to walk an 8 km round trip to get to work every day. I feel on top of the world and can see for many miles in all directions. The view is amazing; you look one way and see terraced hills dropping down to Lake Bunyonyi and you look the other way and see virgin forest with a receding mountain range made up of massive volcanoes looming overhead.

Staying here at Rwamahano overnight has been an amazing, if a completely shattering experience ... highs and lows. Yesterday we started giving out the clothes and nets when the elders got back from the bottom of the hill. We gave an item of clothing to all the women, as agreed with the extension worker, and then started on the children. It became obvious that we were hardly going to make a dent in their need. The children live in tattered old T-shirts and shirts ... and its cold up here ... I could only think 'it's not enough, it's not enough, it's not enough' as tears ran down my face. After this point, things settled down a bit. The women started making food, the teenage boys played football whilst the younger children hung around me as I drew pictures of animals with chalk on old pieces of hardboard. I then encouraged them to draw and they drew great pictures - animals, vehicles, girls, boys, trees etc – all with the English names written alongside. Some of the children are very bright and you can't help wondering how full their lives could be if they were given the same opportunities as us... instead of living in a marginalized community struggling to survive.



Supper was a meal of bean stew and big pieces of posho (cooked maize) that I struggled to finish because it was so filling. To complete the meal, big mugs of 'porridge' were handed out, which is fermented sorghum mixed with honey. Later on... 2 mugs down and sitting round a roaring fire... I was feeling pleasantly relaxed. The reason for the fire was to provide a focus for the elders meeting. It started by them telling their stories, and we telling ours, and then moved on to half a dozen elders



sending all of the proceeds back to aid their local community. We had long discussions with the group, purchased a lot more stock and showed them what we were looking for in terms of



quality. They were very receptive and accepting of the goods that we rejected, despite all of the obvious hard work and investment that had gone into making them.

We spent the rest of our time doing management workshops, school visits, handing over medical supplies and uniform to the VTC nurse and drawing up a initial census of the eight Batwa communities. As always, Africa never fails to surprise, challenge and ultimately reward those who are prepared to let it get under their skin. We can't wait to go back!

Monica & Lawrance Titterton

Concluding "The Long Walk"

We told you all of Alessandra Thomas' 500 mile walk for AICM in the last newsletter. She now estimates that she has made about £500 for AICM! Our heartfelt thanks go to her for all the time and effort she put into it and so we let her close the story in her own words.

I think the thing that remains special is how many friends were eager to arrange walks with me on weekends and in their spare time. Most people seem so busy nowadays that they don't have to time to stop and smell the roses anymore, so it was a revelation for so many of them to go out and walk in the woods. Walking is good for the soul...at least I think so.

Some close friends, the Reverend and her husband, took me for a 5 mile hike through the Hole of Horcum in the Yorkshire moors. Now we're talking about three very keen hikers (including my husband), and me! The first part of the journey was a fairly steep, 90 minute descent into the valley, which was very hard on my knees, so I suggested we stop and have an early lunch so I could rest. During lunch my friends seemed unusually quiet, but after half an hour, I got my strength back and we headed off completing the journey in about 4 hours. That evening over dinner, my friends confessed that they'd thought I wasn't going to make it out of the valley and had started to try and figure how to get a hold of emergency rescue to fly me out! "Ye of little faith"...



The reading books in particular were a great attraction with the planned controlled distribution of these soon turning into a glorious free for all. It was amazing to see that within 15 minutes of handing them out, all of the children had split themselves into little groups, each of which was sitting on the grass absorbed in studying every page, despite having no idea whatsoever what the words actually meant. One bright little lad took it upon himself to tell the most wonderful stories to the younger children, based on the pictures in the books and his own imagination. It was a wonderful experience but one that filled us with tears – these children are intelligent, happy and full of energy; the only difference between us and them was an accident of birth.

After our night with them, as described by Rupert, we managed to visit three other Batwa communities – Murubindi, Kinyarushengye (where we also met the people of Nyakabungo who had walked all the way there to save us the trouble of coming to them) and Makanga. We identified some land next to the Kinyarushengye community that we were able to buy for them with some of the funds raised for this trip – they previously had no land to grow their own crops on and were completely reliant on the surrounding community for work and food. At Makanga we saw crops growing (the second lot) on the land that we bought for them in 2008.

By the beginning of the second week we were starting to feel the emotional strain of all the challenges that seemed to crop up all around us – one of which was the AICM’s 4x4 breaking down and needing a new engine. At one point it seemed as if our



second field trip was not going to happen, but eventually we were able to rent another 4x4 vehicle and set off towards Ihunga, the region where the women’s groups supported by AICM are based. The 25 mile trip took around 3 hours over the now familiar, terrible roads. We were met at Ndego by leaders and members of the AIDS Widows group with whom Lawrence had initiated the Craft project last year. We purchase craft items from the group, import them to the UK and then sell them,

explaining their problems, needs, wants, which were mainly better shelter, more farming land, and seeds. It felt like such a privilege to be here at the sharp end, hearing about problems that we could help solve.

As the night wore on, I walked a little way from the fire to look out at the landscape and immediately felt transported back 100’s of years, as the only things that I could see in the darkness were 5 other fires on the tops of other hills. As my eyes panned across the valley the vision was shattered by a far off telecom mast ... you can’t stop progress!



After the meeting everyone started singing and banging drums as we made our way to the schoolhouse to go to bed. This was considered safer by the elders as they didn’t want us to be robbed during the night. Our bed was a smooth concrete floor enhanced by a sheet, me wearing all my clothes and a blanket to finish the effect. It was almost impossible to sleep ... mainly because they didn’t stop singing/banging the drums until the early hours, and even when Lawrence stuck his head out at 3.00am there was still a group of them around the fire. The drumming kicked off again at about 5.00am, which persuaded me to come and sit on the step outside and wait for the dawn. We found out from the extension worker that they stayed outside all night to keep us company ... they didn’t want us feeling lonely and were protecting us.



When we left Rwamahano this morning there was a speech ... and then we waved goodbye after listening to them singing the Ugandan National Anthem, whilst raising the flag ... depressingly ironic.

As we started back down the hill, a faint drum beat and singing started, and then round the corner came the whole village following us 500m down to our truck ... singing a song of thanks and goodbye with big smiles on their faces and children dancing. I wonder if it is possible to run out of tears?

AGM - 2009

The Annual General Meeting took place at South Leigh Church, near Witney on 14th November, 2009. Most of the Trustees were present as were a significant number of supporters.

During the Election of Officers, most remained in office except for Sue Matthews, the Secretary for many years, who resigned due to family commitments. Sue Townsend has stepped in to fill the role.

In the Treasurer's Report for the year ending 2008, a number of items were singled out, including the 4x4 appeal which brought in £3620, Alternative Giving which produced almost £1800, and the generous legacy from the late Graeme Naish of nearly £8320.

The Friends have bought a generator for the VTC, shipped computers to Kabale and set up a new Friends website. Liz Tapper was thanked for her generosity to the Friends in raising nearly £3000 in sales of her retriever, Penny's puppies. Finally, Mike and Helen Peachey were thanked for their very generous donation to aid the purchase of a building for the VTC boys' hostel.

In closing, John Tapper, the Treasurer, pointed out the large gap in funding currently between our mandatory monthly outgoings of £1800, and our promised regular monthly receipts of £800.

A Visit to AICM October 2009



The following is a fuller, overall view of the visit by Rupert, Monica and Lawrence.

We had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Kabale with the staff of AICM in late September to early October last year. A friend from church who had shown interest in the work of Friends of AICM (FAICM), Rupert Davis, wanted to get a better idea of what was being done out there and he accompanied us on our trip.

We had a great start to our time there by flying out to Kigali, Rwanda, instead of Entebbe. This meant that we had a two hour trip to the border on very good roads (no potholes!) where the speed limit of 60 mph is strictly observed by all. Friendly officials at the border welcomed us

and without any problems we were on our way again and we arrived in Kabale about an hour later. What a contrast to the 9 hour trip from Kampala we had to endure on previous visits!

I went out primarily to gather information about the education system and the pupils that we support with the sponsorship programme. I

worked through all the files and was able to learn more about some of the students. I have since then put together a comprehensive folder with information on all the students, with suggestions of how this can be supplemented and kept updated.

Tuesday brought the first of our field trips, an ambitious trek up into the hills between Lake Bunyonyi and the Rwandan border to visit 4 of the 8 Batwa settlements that AICM support. These settlements are located around 4,000m above sea level, an additional 2,000m above Kabale where we were based, and so presented somewhat of a physical as well as logistical challenge.

On the way to the first of these, Rwamahano, we stopped off at Muko Secondary School where a number of orphans involved in our sponsorship scheme are enrolled. It was good to see them at what appeared to be a well disciplined and happy school, albeit desperately poor. Rwamahano sits on the very top of the hills in the area, with only the volcanic peaks of the distant Mgahinga National Park being higher. This is a drawback for the Batwa because the land at the top of the hills is the least fertile, all the nutrients being washed down the hill by the frequent rains.

We arrived at Rwamahano soon after lunch time and spent the rest of the day there, playing with the children, distributing clothes, mosquito nets and maize meal together with materials that we had brought for the school – colourful posters, (not easy sticking drawing pins into mud walls), a clock, pencils and pens and reading books and of course a football. Rupert brought along an inflatable globe of the world to help show where we all lived, and whilst I am sure that such concepts are currently beyond the comprehension of the Batwa, such small things will act as seeds for future development.

