

KIMBE TRIP 2017 – REPORT

The Agony and the Ecstasy

We travelled to Kimbe in mid-September with the aim of meeting the container that we had despatched in late August. We were accompanied by Alexa Giummarra, the Vice President of The Kimbe Assistance Project. (We also went back to Kimbe in early October.)

Unfortunately, on our first trip we were offloaded in Port Moresby and had to spend a night at the Gateway Hotel, courtesy of Air Niugini. Initially it was disappointing not to have travelled on to Kimbe, but it gave us the opportunity to visit our home of 50 years ago at the Goldie River Army Training Depot. We were made very welcome by the CO at the camp, and we also visited the Goldie River Primary School where we were invited to participate in the School's Independence Day celebrations. Barbara had been Head Teacher at the school in 1968/9. The school has grown to around 600 students, from about 60 odd in Barbara's time.



Late in the afternoon we flew on to Kimbe where we were met by Bishop Bill.

For our first two days in Kimbe we visited two Rural Health Clinics that are closest to Kimbe. The clinic at Bitokara is in a dilapidated condition due to flooding and a lack of maintenance. It has deteriorated at an alarming rate since we were there 18 months ago. The staff are quite discouraged as they have been promised a new clinic for a number of years. However, the Health Department in Port Moresby has not yet approved the plans. Because the clinic is due for rebuilding, no money is allocated for maintenance. It is a chicken and egg situation. When the plans will be passed is in the lap of the gods.

On the following day we visited the Valoka Health Clinic. What a contrast. The clinic is clean and well maintained. At a subsequent, spur of the moment visit, we saw the staff doing "make and mend". Apparently each Thursday some time is allocated for small tasks to enhance the clinic. On this occasion the staff were hemming some old towels to make them more useful. This was good to see.

Besides visiting clinics we saw a number of schools. Some of the changes in the past few years have been outstanding. This year the PNG Games are being hosted by West New Britain in late November. New accommodation blocks are being built at schools for the various Provincial teams. When the Games are over these blocks will be converted into classrooms in time for the 2018 school year.



We visited the new Caritas Girls Technical School which is being built by Korean nuns. They have some good teachers, but at the moment the nuns are more involved in admin (Principal) and construction (Sr Sara). They have done an incredible job in less than twelve months by building new classrooms, enrolling students and selecting staff. The two nuns now live in a 40 foot container, which contains two bedrooms, a bathroom, sitting area and a chapel. A second container is used for cooking/eating. Six of us had a lovely dinner in the container one night.



While we were doing these visits, we were waiting on the container to be delivered. We knew that the container had been put into the transit area in Lae on 09 September. But we were mystified as to why it had not been onforwarded. Finally after having spent a week in Kimbe and not getting answers as to when the container would be delivered, we intervened. Apparently there were new regulations being introduced for Customs clearance. We, unfortunately, were caught in the middle. Eventually after much toing and froing and going around to various Government Departments, we were able to get the new paper work sorted out.

Once Customs had cleared the container, we had to wait for a coastal vessel to ship the container to Kimbe. We had been told that it may get on the 27th September afternoon's sailing, but it did not. We were then told it would not be there until the 12th October.

We were not in a position to remain in Kimbe until the container arrived, so we decided that we would go home as planned, and return when the container would be there. This time we particularly wanted to oversee

the distribution as we had special items on board i.e 4 solar power lighting units, computers, tools and a sewing machine for the Tech School, and a hundred and fifty Days for Girls Kits. Accordingly we decided that we would return to Kimbe in the second week of October.

We returned to Kimbe on 11 October and found the container had not arrived, but would be on the wharf the following day. We were told that the cartage and wharf charges from the wharf to the Cathedral would have to be paid before the container would be released to us. We went to the wharf and arranged clearance and actually saw our container on the ground waiting for us at the wharf!



Murphy's law struck again. Quarantine said they saw a spider in the container and it would have to be fumigated. Adrian lost it this time and had to walk away and cool down. The Customs Agent said that the spider could have come from the wharf in Lae, and would not have survived the trip from Australia. Adrian said that the spider did not speak English but was fluent in Tok Pisin (Pidgin)! Eventually the container was delivered to the Cathedral after everyone had finished work for the day.



Chaos again! The container could not get in as it was too high to get under the entrance arch, and it was so late that any workmen who could have moved the arch had gone home. Eventually the container which was completely untouched inside was delivered on Saturday morning.



At this stage we had to remind ourselves of our PNG Motto, **“Go with the flow”**



Great News! Distribution went beautifully. All the priests of the Diocese were in Kimbe for a meeting, so they were told by the Bishop to take the books etc back to their Parish for distribution to the schools and Health Clinics. What a Team! The container was emptied in two days! Boxes marked for Primary Schools were distributed to each priest depending on how many schools he had in his parish. They collected boxes for all the schools in their area being careful to count both Catholic and Government Schools. This ensured that the whole Province would be catered for.



With the distribution out of the way, it gave us some time to visit schools we have not seen for some time. We were particularly impressed with the Elementary School at Ruango. In 2009 this school consisted of one classroom, with a roof and gaps in the walls. It had about 30 – 40



students. It is now housed in permanent classrooms with about 300 students. We did note 70 students in one of the Grade 2 classes though!



Spending time with Callan Services (for Differently Abled People) showed us they are really under resourced. Children and young adults are supported and schooled. These two pictures bring back many amazing stories.



All in all, the two trips were like the film and novel about Michelangelo – the Agony and the Ecstasy. First trip was very frustrating with all the troubles with clearing the container (and driving from pot hole to pot hole!). However, the second visit worked out successfully and showed how the materials can be distributed to where the needs lie. We have already made the first pick up for Container No 7!

