

On Friday, January 4th, 2013, I was fortunate to have opportunity to travel with six other men from the Pembroke area (Gary Lively, Vijay Ram, Merrill Rosenow, Chris Smerdon, Jamie Smerdon, and John van der Kuur) to Burkina Faso in West Africa for a sixteen-day short-term missions experience. Our purpose in going overseas was to assist an evangelical Christian organization named Friends in Action (www.fiainl.org) with their Water of Life well drilling initiative. While this particular branch of FIA is largely responsible for the practical labour involved with drilling wells, they do so in partnership with existing Christian organizations such as the Christian Missionary Alliance and SIM (Serving in Mission), who already have local village churches or ministries in place, or are in the process of starting new evangelical works in these regions.

All of our team members were encouraged to record their experiences in a personal journal, and as there are many people who supported our trip with their finances and prayers from afar; I would like to offer this collection of my own personal journal entries available to you in this way, in an effort to share about this experience with you all. Please be mindful that these entries stem from my own personal recollections of the trip while “living in the bush;” exact details and particulars may not always be entirely accurate or available, but I believe these writings will give one a general idea of the overall experience.

*His Grace and Peace to you,
Pastor Tim Roddick, Calvary Baptist Church*

Friday, January 4, 2013

- Our team met at the church for 8 am Friday morning. Many close friends and family members gathered in the church parking lot to see us off and pray before we departed. Len Frolander along with Harvey and Judy Kuehl volunteered to drive our team members to the Ottawa airport for the initial leg of our over 24-hour trek to Burkina Faso in West Africa. Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in all of the world, and the region is currently in the midst of their “winter,” the driest time of the year. The previous few nights, temperatures in the Ottawa Valley had dipped to -25° C, and before the weekend’s end we could expect to experience a close to 60° shift in temperature once we arrived in BF.
- The team had been asked to bring along some extra supplies and materials from Canada including Sunday School curriculum, a submersible pump, and “luxury” items requested from the FIA team members already in country, such as maple syrup and Cheerios. We were required to shift around some items at the airport to meet the airline’s luggage requirements, but we managed to fit everything within 10 checked bags, in addition to our carry-ons.
- Our trip began with a one-hour flight from Ottawa to Toronto, followed by a seven and a half hour jump across the ocean to Brussels in Belgium, from where we would then head south to Africa. While we wouldn’t arrive in BF until close to 5 pm on Saturday afternoon, there is a four-hour time difference between our region of Canada and BF’s capital, Ouagadougou (pronounced wah-ga-doo-goo).

Saturday, January 5, 2013

- Our plane arrives in Brussels early Saturday morning, and it is incredibly foggy at the airport, preventing us from seeing much past the tarmac. Our last flight of the journey possesses a final destination of Delhi, India, and the meals and snacks onboard our last plane, consist of Indian cuisine.
- As we board the final plane, it has been close to twenty hours since we initially left home, and the team is becoming increasingly fatigued; many of us cat-nap as able throughout the flight.
- When we arrive in BF, the pilot announces that the weather in Ouaga is 30° C and sunny. We disembark from the plane right onto the tarmac and take a shuttle bus to the airport terminal.
- The team is required to pass through a number of checkpoints: the first checkpoint reviews our individual cards containing our proof of vaccination from yellow fever; at the second checkpoint we submit an entry card outlining our purpose for entering the country; a third checkpoint reviews our passport and visas, ensuring we have received prior approval to enter the country; and lastly, we swiftly pass through customs with nothing more than a quick exchange of greetings.
- The predominant language spoken in BF is French, although as one travels further out into the more remote rural areas of the country, close to another seventy languages and dialects can be found. The national currency of Burkina Faso is the West African franc, and during our time there, 1000 francs are worth about \$2 CDN, with the average family in Burkina Faso earning perhaps 1-3000 francs a day.
- We are met at the airport by our two in-country FIA hosts, Matt Durkee (Canada) and Mark Collier (Northern Ireland), who are themselves joined by “Tall” Tim, a 6’6” childhood friend of Mark’s who had made two separate trips to BF to assist FIA prior to signing on for this year’s entire five-month drilling season.
- FIA typically hosts 7 separate teams each drilling season (November thru March), consisting of six individual two-week drilling teams, and one team that comes strictly to perform maintenance on the drilling rig and vehicles. We are the fourth drill team of this season, and the work of the prior three teams combined to drill 12 successful wells from 14 separate holes.
- On Saturday evening, we receive a bit of a team briefing at a SIM (Serving in Mission) guest house in Ouaga, where the team will be staying prior to going out into the field. Most drill teams arrive in BF on Saturday and stay at the SIM guest house, before leaving the city to drill wells after church on Sunday afternoon. However, our team is scheduled to begin our drilling over 600 km from the capital, so a decision has been made to stay at the SIM guest house for two nights prior to getting an early start on a full-day of travel Monday morning.
- Matt’s wife Megan, who is an art teacher for a local international school, joins us later in the evening; and after spending some time allowing our newly assembled team to introduce themselves to one another over pizza, we finally head to bed, now almost a whole 34 hours since we left our homes in Pembroke.

Sunday, January 6, 2013

- Sunday morning, Mark, his wife Louise, and their three children (Joshua, Rachel and Anna) join us at the SIM guest house for breakfast.
- We attend a worship service at a recently birthed English-speaking church in Ouaga that is comprised of a number of present missionaries from a variety of different ministries and ex-pats living in the area. A visiting pastor from the UK leads the service, speaking from Psalm 33. We're told the church is fuller than usual with probably close to 120 people in attendance. Our team, in addition to a team of young adults from Messiah College in Pennsylvania account for some of the weekend's growth.
- Following the worship service, we go to Mark's home for a spaghetti lunch. Mark and his family live in a modest walled-in home that is right in the midst of a typical BF neighbourhood community. Mark's home, as does Matt's and the SIM guest house, employ individual guards, who typically work in two daily 12-hour shifts. It is the guard's responsibility to watch and protect the home, and these guards essentially wait inside the wall, prepared to open and close the gate or entranceway into the home. Grass is a rarity in Ouaga, as most of the ground is simply covered in red dirt - - yards however remain populated with resilient trees, that offer some welcome shade.
- After lunch, the team heads to the FIA "yard," located outside of town where the drilling rig, trucks, trailers and equipment are stored. The yard is situated on rented land, and is surrounded by a concrete wall. FIA also employs a guard to secure the yard, he is the brother of a BF pastor with the Christian Missionary Alliance. He and his family live right on the property in a home that FIA built for him. He raises both goats and chickens, and has been granted permission to "work the land" surrounding the compound by the property owners as well.
- FIA has already drilled two separate wells within "The Yard," that has additionally been graded for future development. They are in the process of putting in a pair of showers and bathrooms on the property with hopes of the potential to house future teams within its walls.
- Driving to and from the yard, permits us to get a better view of BF's capital city. The roads in Ouaga are incredibly hectic, and while speed is not a factor, the streets are filled with motorcycles, the nation's vehicle of choice. The main streets do have traffic lights, but with motorcycles weaving in and out of traffic, accidents are fairly common, and can have tragic results as even though motorcycles are plentiful, helmets are a rarity. Most motorbikes have two people on them, and young mothers even ride these motorcycles with infants sitting on the gas tank, and babies strapped to their backs.
- Roadside vendors in awkward shacks line both sides of the street selling coffee, fresh bread, spare bike parts, phone cards and gasoline repackaged in glass bottles for individual sale.
- The team is still getting adjusted to the time difference and change of climate, so we return to the SIM guest house in the early evening to prepare ourselves for an early start the next morning. The FIA Yard is situated on the east side of Ouaga, and as our drilling will begin far to the southwest of the capital, Mark and Matt ask for a couple of volunteers to get up at 5 am to begin the trek across town with the trucks and trailers before the city streets become too congested Monday morning; Vijay and I volunteer.

Monday, January 7, 2013

- Maybe it's the anticipation of getting started, but Vijay and I awake well before 5 am. We grab a quick breakfast of fresh bread and fruit and leave the SIM guest house at 5:30 am, heading towards The Yard to pick up the trucks and equipment. Vijay will ride "shotgun" with Tall-Tim in one truck, while I join Mark in the other; Matt and Chris Smerdon will later follow, and catch up with us in two other vehicles later in the morning with the rest of the team.
- In the early hours of the morning, on our way to the FIA compound, we see women in the darkness sweeping all along the roadside with handmade straw brooms. The brooms have no handles and the women are stooped over at the waist sweeping dust and dirt into piles. We're told that most of the women are widows, and they are paid to sweep the roads daily, each woman possessing their own portion or section of the road to care for. We're told that they begin sweeping probably around 3 in the morning, and will continue working until 7 am, once traffic begins to pick up.
- After we pick up the trucks, we notice that activity is beginning to increase throughout the city, as children are seen beginning to make their way towards school. There are no public schools in BF, and tuition is set at about \$200 per child. This cost makes it difficult for families to send their kids to school, and the decision is made even more difficult when a family has more than one child, but can only afford to send one.
- Several of these children have coffee or tomato cans strapped over their shoulder. I ask Mark if these metal tins contain their lunch or school supplies, and he informs me that the cans are actually used for begging. Muslim children in BF are expected to collect for their mosque for a minimum period of at least one-year, and will stand at street corners rattling their cans to collect spare change, with all monies collected being returned to the leaders of their local mosque.
- When we arrived by plane in BF we could see a great number of Islamic temples from the air, and even in the early morning prior to our leaving the guest house, we could hear Muslim prayers being broadcast to the neighbourhood using outdoor amplifiers.
- At around 8 am, just as we are leaving city limits, the rest of the team catches up with the larger trucks, joining us for the remainder of our 600 km trip SW of Ouaga.
- We arrive in the town of Tiefora, some 50 km inside of the border of the Ivory Coast at around 5:30 pm in the afternoon. It is beginning to get dark and we have been invited to set up a "base camp" 3-4 km from the site of our first projected well site. The local pastor has offered us the use of their church, but all of us (with the exception of Gary) opt to sleep outside. The temperatures rise to the mid-to-high 30's during the day, but can drop down to the high teens at night - - and many of the locals consider us crazy for even considering to sleep outside.
- Each of us has our own cot with a pair of thin foam mattresses, and optional mosquito netting. Pretty much everyone begins our two-weeks with the netting, but towards the end of our trip, most opt not to use it, as mosquitos are practically non-existent during this time of the year.
- In addition to the modest one-room church building where we can store our luggage, get changed, and prepare meals, we have also been offered use of the pastor's toilet and shower. The toilet consists of a small 4'x4' mud-brick enclosure, with a 5' wall surrounding it. There is a

1' hole in the floor, and this toilet is little more than an outhouse with no roof to speak of, or bench to sit upon. The shower is fairly similar in nature, but the enclosure lacks a hole in the floor, and water is provided by way of a bucket.

- Because we will be working long-days in a fairly remote region, we are fortunate to have a “cook” join our team for the next two weeks. Our cook, Sam is from BF, and also speaks one of the local dialects we will be interacting with as well. This first evening, after we get our cots in order, we enjoy some time around a campfire, as Sam prepares a meal of spaghetti paired with fresh baked bread. The local pastor informs us that as their guests, they will be providing us with fresh baked bread (baguettes) every morning.
- We’re told that our first drill-site is located in the midst of a “farming area,” where villagers raise crops. The local pastor currently leads a weekly service there, and prays for people in a covered “hangar.” He hopes to develop a fuller church in the area that he expects that a community well will certainly attract people towards. Some of the locals refer to this area as Tiefora2, while the more populated area where we are staying in the village is Tiefora1; most of the people presently living in this area regularly walk 5 km one way to get proper drinking water.

Tuesday, January 8, 2013

- I awoke to a number of goats strolling alongside my cot; and some nearby donkeys and roosters were competing with one another regarding which breed could make the most noise. The night was a bit cool, but not unbearable, and I mostly used my sleeping bag as a blanket.
- This morning during our devotional time, Matt shared with us about a man they had come into contact with named Pastor Ezekiel. Ezekiel possessed a passionate desire to minister in a particular village in BF where the Muslim faith had developed deep roots. Soon after Ezekiel’s arrival, the local Muslim community drove him from the village by stoning him. But Ezekiel healed, and he returned to the same area. Most of the village was situated on one side of the road, and Ezekiel was permitted to live on the other, providing he keep to himself. FIA came to drill a well in the area to support Pastor Ezekiel, but their initial attempts were met with no success. After the team left the area, their failure to draw water served to add fuel to the Muslim community’s ire; as they gleefully mocked and ridiculed Pastor Ezekiel and his God. But... a couple of weeks later, FIA returned, and on this second occasion, their drilling efforts proved fruitful, and a well was established just behind the Christian church that Pastor Ezekiel had established, on the opposite side of the road of the nearby villagers and the Muslim community. Pastor Ezekiel did not deny his former adversaries use of the well, and now, whenever anyone passes by his home and church to draw water from the well, Pastor Ezekiel uses this opportunity to share with them about Christ. Ezekiel and his God are no longer the mockery of the area, and the village’s chief, who also provides oversight to 63 other villages in the district, has personally given Ezekiel his permission and blessing to share the gospel message with all of these other village communities with impunity.
- Pastor Ezekiel was faithful despite the opposition he faced, not just from these villages, but also from other difficulties as well; as Ezekiel’s own son was also a deaf mute, who required

additional care and protection - - and yet in the midst of it all, Ezekiel chooses not to curse God, but serve and worship Him.

- Following our devotional time and some prayer, we left basecamp at 8:30 am to drive the 5 km to our first drill-site.
- In my mind's eye, I always envisioned a wide, open space to drill; but such is not always the case. FIA employs an advance surveying team to personally visit and review the areas they plan to drill within, their findings leading to the suggestion of two optimum locations to potentially drill from to find water. These potential locations could be on a hill, or under a tree, and our team does not know what kind of situation we have until we personally arrive at each site.
- This morning's location is situated in a field that has been tilled with deep furrows. There is a significant ditch leading into the field, so the team unloads some shovels from our equipment trailer to begin leveling out the ditch to allow the trucks and trailers to gain access to the field. A number of locals have already gathered at the site, and they take the shovels from our hands; and in addition to their own homemade tools, they begin leveling the ditch for us. Many of the locals are barefooted, and in the process of working on the ditch, one of the men gets a large splinter embedded close to an inch and a half into his foot. Mark performs a bit of "triage" from the back of the Land Rover, but in spite of the man's pain, he doesn't cry out at all, and he has to be talked out of returning back to the ditch once he has been bandaged up.
- We locate the first preferred drilling location, and the ground marker falls alongside a groove providing a natural run-off in the middle of a field. We park the drill rig and compressor in the desired location, and rope off the area to restrict access to our newly established "work site."
- FIA's drill rig that we will be using for the next two weeks permits the team to drill 10 feet at a time, using 150 lb. drilling rods each measuring ten feet in length. The rig contains a carousel that will hold six rods at a time. The drilling process that will be repeated dozens of times over the next two weeks involves loading up the rig's carousel using an overhead winch, and drilling to a depth of ten feet before attaching an additional rod by threading the rods together to extend the hole's depth another ten feet. FIA's current rig can drill to a depth of 300', but one must discover water prior to that depth as a proper well would demand a depth deeper than the surface level of the water line. The time it takes to drill ten feet is relative to the hardness of the ground or stone we are drilling through, but on average it takes about 10-15 minutes.
- Once a particular depth has been reached, or signs of moisture are found in the debris being recovered from the hole, heavy duty plastic piping measuring 8" in diameter, also ten feet in length, are one-by-one lowered into the hole to prevent the prospective well from collapsing in upon itself should water be struck - - but of course, this casing can only be inserted after removing from the hole, the rods that have already been used.
- Once the "casing" pipes have been lowered into the hole, and drilling resumes, should water be found, we will proceed drilling to a desired depth of about 50' below where the water is first discovered. After which, the rods are removed once again, only to have a smaller piping (about 3.5" in diameter) placed inside the initial casing practically the full depth of the well. These second pipes will remain inside the hole, acting to protect the final stainless steel piping that a "finishing team" will later place in the hole to transport the water from the depths of the

well to the surface with a hand pump. Before the wider casing is removed from the hole, gravel is dropped into the well outside of the pipe to provide this smaller pipe with proper support.

- At around 2:30 in the afternoon, at a depth of around 130' we begin to witness signs of water, and less than fifteen minutes later, water gushes from the hole. The team feels well rewarded, and joyfully continues drilling to a desirable depth of 180'. It is getting close to 5 pm, with the evenings here typically getting dark around 6 pm. Tomorrow, we will return to finish what needs to be done with the hole, flush out the water, and pump water for the locals with the use of a gas-powered generator.
- In trips past, FIA teams had paid locals to wash their clothes and to additionally provide them with water that could be run through a filtration service overnight to make it drinkable. More recently, FIA have begun bringing 250 litres of clean, drinking water with them, having faith that God will enable them to find clean water to replenish their supply before it runs out.
- Before we leave the site, we ask for local assistance to "guard" the equipment we will need to leave at the site, and some people take this responsibility very seriously, and as we leave, we can see them better securing the perimeter's rope and gathering wood for a fire.
- Back at base camp, the team begins taking turns having a "bucket shower," and we are treated to an awesome meal of rice and a stir-fry mix of soy sauce, green beans and garlic. A little before 8 pm, a number of young boys and teen girls visit our campsite and one-by-one individually shake our hands and say "bon soire" (good night). We anticipate that word will travel quickly overnight, and many more people will be attendance at the well-site tomorrow. As I lay in my cot, I can hear joyful singing at the pastor's home, their voices accompanied by some djembes.

Wednesday, January 9, 2013

- This morning we return to the well-site; and the locals have already lined up their buckets, barrels and 250L drums for us to fill with water.
- It doesn't take long to finish the work that needed to be completed on the well, and at this time we discover that this present well is measured at producing over 700 gallons an hour.
- Less than 100 meters from the successful well site, there are mounds of dirt surrounding a previously unsuccessful well attempted by the locals. The older site consists of a wooden frame nervously resting overtop of an open hole with a depth of close to 26 meters (85 feet). We're told that initially people would have been able to dig the hole much like any other hole, but as the hole deepens, people would need to volunteer to be lowered into the hole headfirst by their feet, extending their arms in the hole's tight confines to dig and scrape the dirt, regularly sending a bucket of soil and rock back up to the opening.
- As we begin filling people's water containers, some of the local women begin to express their joy in song and dance. After we have completed filling containers, we make a presentation to the village elder and the local pastor including a blanket provided to us from some kind ladies from within our church community (Manon O'Connor and Melanie Healey), making use of the colours of the wordless bracelet - - and we use this valuable time when everyone's attention is focused upon us, to briefly share the gospel. We have also brought items for the church and

community's use, as well as the pastor's own family - - and Mark has additionally brought along 40 separate 11"x17" colour illustrations, each depicting a separate bible story with text printed in French on the back for the church's use. Mark translates our English to French for the local pastor, and the pastor then translates in their own tribal dialect to the surrounding villagers.

- Following our presentation, the villagers make a presentation of their own, offering to us a pair of guinea fowl. Through a translator, one of the village elders shares with us that they have no words to express their gratitude to us for what we have done. He shares with us how tiring the past year has been, and how this well will finally offer them some relief from all of their exhaustingly hard work.
- Not long after noon, we pack up all of our equipment, and hit the road again, leaving Teafora, heading for our next well-site.
- Our next well-site is in Kuere, located 70 km away, and our base camp will be set-up in a village 20 km beyond that, at the site of our projected third well in Ouo (pronounced "woah"). The road to Kuere is very rough and the 70 km trip on rough, backroads takes us close to 2.5 hrs to travel. As we first arrive in town, we notice a sizable mosque prominently located in the centre of town, and we anticipate a heavily Islamic presence in the community. The CMA has just recently installed a pastor in the area, and they have not yet even a building to hold any worship services in; their hope is that a well might offer a reliable foothold in the area, which might help establish a church's presence and credibility, providing them with a community "cornerstone" for a future church building.
- Prior to arriving in BF, I was prepared for a desert terrain, as much of its northern region borders on the edge of the Sahara desert. But we are in the southwestern edge of BF, closer to the coast and the terrain is littered with defiant trees and hilly climbs.
- We stop briefly at Kuere, before continuing on to Ouo, where the set-up is much like our previous village, as we are permitted use of the church building to hold our luggage and change, and use of the pastor's shower and toilet. The pastor's family has even been kind enough to warm up buckets of water for use with our showers, which is a welcome surprise.

Thursday, January 10, 2013

- We began with an early start this morning: up at 6 am, breakfast at 6:30 am, and on the road by 7 am. Our well-site in Kuere was about a 25-minute drive from our base camp in Ouo, and with this being our second well, set-up went a lot more quickly than the first time around.
- The ground in Kuere was very different than that of our first site; earlier this week, the ground was very sandy, today the ground was predominantly clay-like.
- At about 90 ft. we found signs of moisture, with water present at 120 ft., but we drilled to a final depth of 160 ft.
- Today was a long day, up at 6 am, and not leaving the site until 6:30 pm. We plan to return tomorrow and fill up water jugs, lay a cement platform and make another presentation to the villagers before heading on to our next drill-site, which is thankfully, immediately adjacent to our present base camp, probably less than fifty yards away.

- Our plans are to finish up well #3 prior to Saturday afternoon, which will permit us to stay at a CMA guest house (with plumbing) in Bobo-Dioulasso for two evenings. Tonight's meal consists of a handful of 20 rabbits that the local villagers had recently snared.

Friday, January 11, 2013

- Sometimes it's the "little things" that keep one going. One of the good things about sleeping outside when the weather is in the teens, is that there is no "cold side" to the pillow... the whole pillow remains comfortably cool. ☺
- This morning, the team headed back to finish the well in Kuere and fill the water containers brought there by the local villagers. Partway through the morning, most of the team headed back to the basecamp at Ouou, while a handful of others remained to finish filling jugs.
- When we return to camp this morning, I am informed by our cook Sam, that I had been personally selected to marry a local's daughter - - all I could think of, was that maybe my belly gave one the appearance that I would be a good provider for a family. ☺ I told Sam that I was already married, but he said that wouldn't be a problem in Burkina Faso, as a man is permitted to have more than one wife.
- In an earlier discussion with Matt, he had shared with me that when a man in BF first becomes legally married, there is a section on the formal marriage license where the groom is required to identify himself as a "polygamist" or a "monogamist," and a person is expected to hold to whatever position they identify themselves with; so most BF men simply fill-in "polygamist," just so they can keep their options open.
- Today is a very hot day, the team does not have access to a thermometer, which I think is probably a good thing, because a fuller awareness of how hot the temperature is, might be more disheartening than informative. Jamie has been feeling under the weather since last night and spends the majority of the day resting in his cot; Tall-Tim and Vijay also spend portions of the day in their cots as well - - working in this heat is beginning to take its toll.
- The team continues to work hard, and we are well rewarded for our efforts, striking water at less than 100 ft; however we continue drilling to 150 ft.
- With our plans to travel the close to six-hour drive to Bobo-D as early as possible on Saturday, we work well into the night, to get as much work completed as we can.
- Matt and I volunteer to "jet out" Ouou's well. "Jetting" is the process of manually pushing a hose down into the hole beneath the water level to "blow out" lingering debris caused by the drilling. Air is forced down into the hole, causing the water to "jet" back out the opening on the surface. Although it is late at night, completely dark, and hard to definitively tell, the water appears to be jetting some 40-50 ft. into the air. Matt and I take advantage of the abundance of flowing water to wash up, and we bring along soap and shampoo to our "natural shower." Having taken off my shirt in the process, I later commented to Sam, "Now that some of the locals have seen me with no shirt on, maybe I should expect more marriage offerings tomorrow." ☺

Saturday, January 12, 2013

- The well in Ouou has a really good flow, estimated at producing somewhere between 1,500 – 2,000 gallons an hour.
- Prior to this well that we dug in this community, there were already two wells in the area, but the pair of them service probably close to 2,000 people. The pastor's wife shared with us, that it is not uncommon for her to go to the local well at 4 am, and have to wait in line to get water, not returning home until 9 am.
- We begin pumping water for people at around 8 am; a lead team, with the larger trucks leave the site at 11 am, and the remaining team members finally had to turn people away at 12:30 pm, so they could join us on the road. No one at the well is disappointed however, they recognize that once the "finishers" come to affix the handpump, the well is there to stay; and many of them had already drawn water which they brought home, and were repeat visitors to get more.
- Today was another long drive down red dusty roads with the slow moving trucks and trailers. The lead team left Ouou at 11 am, and didn't arrive at Bobo-D until close to 6 pm. We are spending the next two evenings at a Christian Missionary Alliance guest house. The CMA has two bible schools to train pastors in BF, one of them for pastors with an education of grade six or higher, the other for prospective pastors with little or no education, some of them unable to even read or write.
- The team is looking forward to real beds, hot showers, cold pop, and a stew that Sam is brewing up for supper - - those more adventurous are even planning to stay up and watch the movie, *Men in Black* on VHS.

Sunday, January 13, 2013

- Today was a pretty "slack" day around the CMA guest house that allowed everyone to partially recover from our first full week of work.
- Rather than attend a local church, the team held our own "church service" at the guest house; individually sharing some thoughts and reflections about the trip thus far, along with some reading of scripture; most of the focus of our discussion related to God's grace.
- The team hired a local woman to wash our filthy work clothes, and although we paid her 5,000 Francs (\$10 CDN) to wash ten people's clothes (\$1 per person), we're told that was a very generous amount.
- Some team members continued watching movies on VHS, while Chris and myself tried to teach Merrill and Gary how to play euchre; Gary struggled a bit as he hadn't ever really played cards before and couldn't wrap his mind around the ranking of the face cards. ☺
- Later in the afternoon, we re-organized some of the loads on the trucks as the vehicles had left our last site at different times. Our next two well-sites are only about 5 km. apart from one another, so we are planning to use one basecamp for both wells. Neither village is too far off of the "black-top," so we're looking forward to a bit more of an easy drive - - hoping to travel 90 km in around 2 hours.

- Tonight, we ate out at a local restaurant; most of the team opted for burgers; it was a good opportunity to unwind - - and also watch some international soccer on the television ☺

Monday, January 14, 2013

- The team wakes up early with a goal to be on the road by 7 am; two nights in actual beds softens us a little though, and we get a later start than expected, but back on the road nonetheless.
- The next village (Dossi) is 90 km away, but it takes us close to two hours to reach our destination - - the clutch on the drilling truck is beginning to fail, preventing us from going too fast.
- At this next village, we are going to be met by some local missionaries with the Christian Missionary Alliance. John Arnold was raised in Africa as a missionary kid, and as an adult, he personally served for close to 15 years in the very area that we are going to be drilling in today. John has lived in Africa for 34 of his 55 years, and after some time away, he has more recently returned to the area. Ryan (in his 20's) has been in BF for close to five months, he is from North Carolina, and is expecting to lead short-term teams to BF with the CMA; so he is looking to gain some firsthand well-drilling experience with the FIA team
- Dossi has a thriving church community already in place, with close to 800 people gathering to worship on a weekly basis, but such numbers are still a minority in this very populated area. The broader community still remains largely animist, with a strong belief that everything possesses a spirit (plants, animals, trees, etc.) and offerings and sacrifices must be regularly made to appease these spirits. Near to where we are drilling, there is even a pile of stones that we are told to avoid, as we are later told that it is on these rocks that the animists will perform an annual ritual sacrifice (usually a lamb), with the community gathering to dance naked before the spirits they are trying to please with their offering.
- The community is very large, and many people come to watch us drill, amongst the spectators is a young albino girl; she appears to be accepted by others in the village, and later we also see an albino boy, the two children quite possibly being from the same family.
- God is faithful, and we drill another successful well, attaining water at a depth of 60 feet, requiring us only to drill to a depth of 90 feet. There are two other wells within sight of the well we have drilled, each with a depth of about 60 feet, but we are told that within a month, in the midst of the dry season, these other wells will likely run dry. Both of these wells are of the "drop-down-a-bucket" fashion; and there always appears to be lines awaiting their turn to draw water from them.
- It has been awesome to have John Arnold (the CMA missionary) along with us, as he is able to share a lot of background and history, not just of the people of BF, but of this very community in which we are currently ministering to. John shares that the CMA will place pastors within different communities throughout BF, away from where they may have been raised. Before being placed within a CMA church in BF, pastors must complete 4 years of theological training at one of the schools I had mentioned earlier, but after graduation, resources and reference materials are very limited, and they rely almost solely upon the text of the Bible.

- Trying to mix things up, we decide to split the team into two groups today - - one group of men over 41 years of age (Tim, Vijay, Chris, John vdK and Mark); and the other, 40 and below (Gary, Tall Tim, Jamie, Merrill and Matt) - - the separation allows for some playful competition; and in my humble opinion, I think the “oldies” carried the bulk of the load. 😊
- Tomorrow, we will finish well #4, and begin work on well #5 in nearby Boni (only ten minutes away on the other side of the blacktop), so we will be able to remain at the same basecamp as we continue working. If things continue smoothly, we will seek to start a 6th well before the end of the week, but we continue to take things one day at a time.
- In between the two villages of Dossi and Boni, there is a rather sizable gold mining camp that has been set-up there recently. A number of temporary shacks and tarp tents crowd the side of the road, as word has spread about the possibility of gold in the area, and people have traveled here from all around hoping to make their fortune. The people here mine for gold much the same as people in North America would have done centuries ago, digging up dirt and then manually shuffling the dirt through screens and filters.

Tuesday, January 15, 2013

- This morning we finished up the well in Dossi and jettied it out. I had the opportunity to fill up the long line of awaiting buckets and barrels with a hose - - people kept coming and coming; they would repeatedly fill containers, bring them home, and then come back with the same containers for more.
- About mid-morning, John vdK was feeling a bit under the weather and stayed back at basecamp with Sam the cook, while the rest of the team packed up and traveled to our next site - - to help preserve our steadily failing clutch, we made two separate trips with one truck towing both of the trailers separately, to save the wear and tear on the drilling truck.
- Today, a couple of other CMA missionaries visited with us at the well site (Larry, Jack, and his young adult son, Simon); there were on their way to Bobo-D, where they were planning to host and demonstrate a seder dinner for over 100 people.
- After unloading a lot of gear in the hot, midday sun, I began to feel a bit ill myself, and I gracefully bowed out of the bulk of the afternoon’s work. Thankfully, the ground we were drilling in was very hard, demanding the drill rig take close to thirty minutes to drill only 10 feet, so work was very slow.
- Having now completed four separate wells, and in the midst of the fifth, each well has featured different materials for us to “cut” through. Today’s site contained a very hard “blu-ish” rock that caused a fine dust to blow everywhere; we stopped the day’s work at 100 ft. and plan to return to continue drilling tomorrow.
- John Arnold continues to share some insightful stories around the campfire about both Africa and the immediate area - - one of the stories he shares this evening involved a Muslim community that experienced some Christian converts in their midst, so as punishment, the Muslims refused to allow the Christians to use their community well. The Christian community had no other choice but to dig their own well - - and soon after a successful well was

established, the Muslim community's well dried up. And without even being asked, the Christians invited their neighbouring Muslims to freely use their well. We're told that many times when a Mosque is established within a community, people are told of the negative consequences that would befall them should they not convert to Islam, whereas by contrast, the Christian community will instead share of the blessings to be had when a person commits their life to Christ.

- In this community, probably more than any other so far, we also see many people in the village who have submitted themselves to "scarification" on their faces. Their faces will feature wide or fine lines, in an intentional order or succession. We're told that families typically mark their children in this fashion when they are younger, cutting their children's faces, and then placing something in the wound to prevent immediate healing and to help form a deep or wide scar, this practice is usually done to identify individuals with a particular area or family.
- The team is visibly getting very worn-out and tired, and everyone is looking forward to a good night's rest; but at about 10 pm in the evening, the community begins to have a time of worship and celebration in the immediate area surrounding the well, thanking and praising God for His provision of this newest source of water. Many from the team go to the well to watch the energetic singing and dancing, but I am simply not feeling up to it. At this point in the evening, I have already been physically sick, and I am hoping that my nauseous feelings are simply the result of the heat, and that I am not coming down with something. I am hoping that I will feel better in the morning after a cool night's sleep.

Wednesday, January 16, 2013

- I feel better after the night's sleep, and I head out with half of the team to continue work on the well we started the day before in Boni. The rest of the team stays behind to fill some final jugs, make a presentation to the village and pastor, and form a cement pad around the piping.
- It is another extremely hot day, and even though there is a bit of a breeze, it is a hot breeze, with little, to no shade in sight.
- The current well continues to be difficult as we continue drilling through some incredibly hard rock. We continue to drill deeper, but with the exemption of a couple of moist patches, after drilling 260 feet, we decide to abandon this attempt at a well, and after removing the rods, we fill in the hole.
- An advance survey team will mark off the two most likely spots to search for water, identifying these spots with a marker on the ground. But with Mark's background as a geophysicist, he identifies what he considers to be a more advantageous position to search for water that falls next to two fault lines in the ground that he has spotted; and it just so happens that this spot is situated right adjacent to an intersection of walking paths.
- This new site isn't on the church's property however, and the person who does own the property is unavailable. But after a brief discussion with some of the local elders, it is determined that the property owner would be in favour of a well, wherever it lay - - and this man was also the same person who donated his land to the CMA for their present church.

- In a further testament to the local pastor's determination; we're told the wife of the CMA pastor in Boni (probably in his 40's), passed away late last year, and he has since been caring for their many children on his own.
- After we have established a new location to drill, we move all of the equipment 200 yards away. Accepting that we are likely in for a loooooong night; we make plans to have Sam bring supper to us, collect all of our headlamps and flashlights from basecamp, and prepare ourselves to work until midnight.
- When some of the team briefly returns to our basecamp to prepare for the night, the pastor informs us that the owner of a well fairly close to where we have drilled in Dossi is quite upset. The owner of this well charges people for the use of his well, and over the past couple of days, he has lost a tremendous amount of income with people collecting water at the new well for free. Matt makes a recommendation to the local church that after the well is fully operational, that they consider charging a minimum fee for the use of the well; as it would not be their desire to cause unnecessary conflict in the community, particularly for the church. Earlier in the afternoon, the pastor had observed the well owner repeatedly circling the pastor's house, church, and the new well, on a bicycle, and he shares with us that this man is probably attempting to place a curse on us all. But the pastor is confident that our God is more powerful than anything this man thinks that he might be able to conjure up.
- The drilling at the second location continues much the same as the one before; hard rock with lots and lots of dust.
- We drill 60 ft... 120 ft... 180 ft... Matt and Mark make an executive decision that there is not much sense to go deeper than our fourth, full carousel of drilling rods would allow (240 ft.); and that if after 240 ft. we found no signs of water, we would abandon this well also, and begin a third well in a different location first thing tomorrow morning.
- At 10:15 pm, with rod #24 in the ground, our last rod from the carousel, the hole gushes water!!! After a long, hard day, the team joyfully celebrates with hugs and handshakes all around. Suddenly, everyone isn't so tired anymore, and we determine to continue on into the night, and drill an additional 40 ft. into the ground to reach a depth of 280 ft.
- We stay on the site until 12:15 am; after working late into the night, some of the truck's batteries need to be switched around, but on the ride back to basecamp, we are tired and energized all at the same time - - so back in Dossi, we hook the generator pump back up to the well to have some "quickie" showers, with some welcome, cold water.

Thursday, January 17, 2013

- It's amazing how things can go from such a high, to a dreadful low in a span of less than twenty-four hours - - Thursday, January 17 was for me personally, by and large, the lowest point of the entire trip.
- Early Thursday morning, we arrive at the well in Boni and begin to remove the various rods and liner pipes, to replace them with 22 smaller casings (220' of pipe) that will remain in the well. We hope to be back on the road by 1:30 pm with a goal to arrive in Ouaga around 7 pm in the

evening. There is a CMA school in the BF capital of Ouaga that has asked for a well, so Matt and Mark figure that we can return to the city, stay at a CMA guest house for the night, and Friday morning begin work on this last well. We're told it will be a much easier day, and are promised cool drinks on the work site as we will be back in the city. It is less than 300 km. back to Ouaga, but we expect the drive to be slow-going, with a steadily failing clutch.

- Ever since the early morning, my stomach has been rumbling. After a good night's sleep on Tuesday I wonder if perhaps I jumped back in to work too quickly, and that my body was perhaps not ready for a more than full day's work on Wednesday. My stomach is upset, I have no appetite, and zero energy.
- After we finish up at the Boni site, we have the "healthy" truck pull one of the trailers out of the field onto the road side in an effort to go easy on the drill truck's clutch. After the trailer is dropped however, it takes us close to 40 minutes to hitch it up to the other truck, with the truck jumping and lunging, as we attempt to shift it into reverse - - my stomach is increasingly churning, and in my mind, we cannot be in Ouaga fast enough.
- I am riding in the faulty-clutch truck with Matt, opting for a seat with immediate access to a window, but it's a very rough ride - - and the air is dry, dusty and hot, anything but refreshing.
- About two hours outside of Ouaga, the truck really begins to rock; we initially assume it is the clutch beginning to kick up a fuss, but it's not - - we get a call from the truck trailing us, and the trailer we are towing behind us is actually responsible for our troubles. A "spring-leaf" on the trailer has broken, demanding we pull over and shift some weight around, and additionally perform some welding repairs - - needless to say, my gut does not welcome the extended stop.
- After 1+ hours, we get back on the road, but within about 15 minutes of travel, we determine that our welding repairs need to be more extensive, so we pull over to spend more time on repairing the trailer more fully. Another 2+ hours on the side of the road permits me numerous occasions to acquaint myself with the roadside bushes; and the hours drag on, it feels as though we will never arrive at Ouaga.
- We finally get back on the road once more, and I have reduced myself to doing "slow-breathing exercises" in the passenger seat; I don't know if it's helping, but it's certainly not making things any worse. Thirty minutes after our last pullover, we have to stop again to repair a blown tire - - thankfully, the tire is changed in a flash, and it seems like we are back on the road in minutes, when compared to our first two stops.
- By this point it is getting super-late; we have decided to drop off the team at the CMA guest house and Matt, Mark and Tall-Tim will continue on from there, taking the trucks and trailers back to the FIA yard; we have humbly resolved that there will be no well-drilling the following day - - Mat chalks up the evening's difficulties with the phrase "wawa" (West Africa Wins Again).
- When we get to the CMA guest house, I take some stronger medication to aid with my stomach problems; and I am thankful that I am experiencing this illness now, and not 48 hours from now stranded over the Atlantic on a plane.
- In the end, it takes the team close to 12 hours to drive less than 300 km, as we arrive at the CMA guest house on the west side of Ouaga just before 1 am Friday morning.

Friday, January 18, 2013

- Over the course of the night, I was up every hour on the hour at the CMA guest house, but in the morning I am reassured by one of the CMA missionaries staying there that the medication I had taken typically takes 8-10 hours to take effect. By mid-morning I'm feeling better - - but I am still incredibly cautious; and I have concluded that I will not be signing up for an extended roadtrip anytime soon.
- The team lounges for a bit in the morning, enjoying pancakes at the CMA guest house and watching another movie on the television. Later in the morning, we plan to move our gear back to the SIM guest house, and take a stroll through the local artisan's market. We will be going to the market again on Saturday, but this brief trip will permit us all to get a glimpse of what is offered there.
- After a trip to the market, I am feeling better, but still not 100%, so I try to lie down in the afternoon and get some rest; later opting to stay in rather than go out to dinner with the rest of the team at a local "American/Italian" style restaurant.

Saturday, January 19, 2013

- I wake up early Saturday morning, and thankfully my appetite is starting to return. Everyone is packing up and trying to determine what they are going to take home with them, and what they will leave behind in BF.
- In the late morning, we return to the artisan's market. The day before I decided that I would purchase some musical instruments to bring home for family. I opted to get both Brodie and Danica mid-sized balafons (hand-crafted wooden African xylophones), and Stephanie a pair of kalimbas (finger pianos), a medium-sized one made from a gourd, and a smaller one crafted from a coffee tin. I spend about \$20 CDN equivalent for each balafon, and less than \$8 CDN for both kalimbas combined.
- We spend the afternoon at Mark's home for a bit of a debriefing, looking at some pictures from our past two weeks, and reflecting upon the experience we shared together.
- In the evening we go to a restaurant that is housed in a former U.S. embassy establishment that now hosts activities for any number of ex-pats and visitors to the country. Many of the team choose once again to have burgers, and there are also a variety of tex-mex items on the menu as well - - I personally opt for a meatball sub with a banana milkshake.
- We leave directly from the restaurant to head to the airport. Our plane leaves at 11 pm, so we plan to get there at 9 pm. There are a number of forms that have to be filled out, and checkpoints that we need to pass through, but the process is more time-consuming than anything else, and we file through with little to no difficulty. The terminal is very crowded, with all of the seats taken, and many more people forced to stand.
- Minutes before departure, we board a bus to take us from the terminal to the plane, and we get one final breath dusty BF air before we load the plane.

Sunday, January 20, 2013

- Some of us are able to cat-nap on the plane, but the flight is very crowded and busy. We arrive in Brussels at around 5 am. The airport is pretty empty and it is snowing outside. Some of us grab some breakfast, while others grab some duty-free Belgian chocolates to bring home.
- We find an area in the airport with darkened lights, a series of cots and couches, and the team lies down for a brief rest; our next flight doesn't board until after 9 am, so many of us are able to get a brief rest, ever keeping our eyes on the clock.
- At around 8:30 am, the team slowly rises and gets prepared to pass through customs once more to get to our boarding area. Our flight to Toronto leaves at 10:15 am, so we find our gate and get prepared to wait. The snow continues to fall outside - - it's hard to believe that just a day earlier the weather was 40° C.
- We surprisingly are called to board the plane earlier than usual (around 9:30 am); but in the end there was no need. After being on the plane for about a half an hour, the pilot makes an announcement that due to the current snowfall, the Brussels airport had suspended all departing planes, and was presently only accepting arrivals. He instructed us to get comfortable for the wait, tongue-in-cheek suggesting that we do so, because everyone on board essentially has no other choice.
- So we waited... and waited... and waited... We only had a three and a half hour stay-over scheduled in Toronto, where we would need to disembark, get our baggage and check back in, in order to catch our last flight of the trip to Ottawa. When we reached the three-hour mark waiting in the plane at the gate in Brussels, it became obvious that we would not catch our connecting flight out of Toronto, so I was able to use Vijay's phone to text my wife, Stephanie, so that she could inform those picking us up at the airport in Ottawa that we were delayed.
- We finally got off the ground at about 2 pm in the afternoon, missing our connecting flight in Toronto. Upon arrival in Toronto, the airline was very accommodating, fast-tracking us through customs, and scheduling us all on a plane that was leaving for Ottawa within the hour. We are able to call home and arrange for people to pick us up at the new time (7 pm).
- Friends and family awaited us at the airport in Ottawa where we were reunited. Six holes dug, and five wells completed in five separate communities; an estimated 1600-1800 kilometres traveled by truck; dozens of baguettes consumed; but most importantly, God's name was lifted up; and while we were thankful to be home - - adjusting to the once again cold temperatures is going to take some time.

On Sunday, January 27, our team of seven men each personally shared in our Sunday morning worship service about this missions experience, and if you'd like to hear from others their own reflections about the trip, you can listen to an mp3 of the whole missions report online, under the "Sermon Audio – 2013" heading in our resources tab found on our church's homepage (www.calvarybaptistpembroke.com).

***"... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds
and praise your Father in heaven." - Matthew 5:16***