

Haiti Trip Report Nov 4-11, 2015.

Anytime you have 63 candidates in a presidential election in Haiti that has to be narrowed to two, the outcome is bound to be interesting as well as have ramifications. Judith Ehmann, Julie Lichay, Darcy



Sylvester, Father John O'Donnell, Lou Galipeau and I left Wednesday morning from Huntsville with 650 lbs of checked luggage and about 150 lbs of carry-on luggage. I was anxious about what we would meet in PAP, but it was in God's hands at this point and thankfully there were no uprisings that day. We were carrying a couple of expensive pumps with us, so I asked my special Haitian consultant to meet us inside

to assist in the customs vetting. Not sure how I will square this with Jesus, but it saved the mission a good bit of money had our bags been inspected.

It turns out the Haitians accepted the results of the presidential primary with only a few tire burnings, but no major violence. On Monday they threatened a nationwide 'greive'. This is supposed to be a peaceful work stoppage and generally goes on for 1-3 days. Peaceful is a relative term because if you drive on the road during a greive you are likely to have a rock thrown through your windshield. This time the issue was the government was going to double or triple the driver's license fees and the greive is a very useful tool the people have to say enough is enough. Perhaps we should employ such tactics in our country at times. The government backed down and the increase was taken off the table. On Monday when the greive was supposed to begin we were not yet sure what the status was and Julie had a 9am flight that morning, so thankfully Fre Olizard loaned us his clinic ambulance and Julie arrived without incident to get her flight. This is all part of the Caribbean tour experience we offer on these mission trips...always something interesting.

We had three main objectives for this trip plus some maintenance activities. First was to install our 20th water purification system in Bas Comier. The second was to build a battery bench at NDC to get the 24 batteries off the floor as well as working with the kids. And the third was to present our concept plan of developing a water technology center of excellence in Leogane that will provide a source for total water solutions. Part of this solution is using remote sensing or satellite imagery to accurately define the location of underground water. At the Haiti dinner this past August I mentioned we were working on this project and this would be the first time we had a chance to present it to some select Haitians who would be the core of the technology center.

Everyone on the trip had been to Haiti before except Judith who spent 30 years in Venezuela, so the poverty we saw on the ride to the monastery was not unexpected. Our first stop was at NDC where we dropped off Julie. Julie is fluent in French and a couple other languages and since she had limited time on this trip wanted to spend it with Eliane and the girls. She got a lot accomplished while she was there working with the teachers



and kids and the school and just building stronger relationships. She's a great asset to have in this capacity and was very much in her element. I checked in with her once a day just to make sure she was OK since we were not together, but NDC is secure and safe and Eliane and the girls watched over her like a mother hen. So we left Julie that evening only to learn that they did not have water at NDC because the well had dried up again, but thankfully the well at the school was still OK so the kids had water, albeit limited; more on this later.

We arrived at the monastery, got our room assignments, ate a late dinner, unpacked and sorted out our bags and hit the sack. The suitcase arrangements are a linear programming project by themselves. We have all this equipment and goods we need to bring in, plus a few clothes and a 50 lbs limit per bag unless you want to pay dearly. So a lot of work goes into moving pieces amongst the bags to even out the weight to 50lbs each. The first evening though is a bit of a challenge going through all the bags and sorting out the pieces that go to various projects or places on various days since when we leave the monastery in the morning we have to have everything necessary with us for work that day.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday were dedicated to building, installing, operating and training on the water system at Bas Comier. Bas Comier is a small community in the Comier valley south of Leogane. As it turns out we oversee the Comier valley from 1200' at the monastery. The Haitian Red Cross (HRC) in concert with the Swiss Red Cross (SRC) and American Red Cross (ARC) have developed a very nice outdoor training facility in the community equipped with a 150' well and full solar power and several buildings. This is all run by the community overseen by the HRC and SRC. The ARC provided much of the funding for the well, solar, building and equipment. HSHM provided the water purification system and during the dedication ceremony on Tuesday it was evident that all three Red Cross organizations were very impressed with the work we had accomplished.



The value of this particular team really became evident now. Since Lou speaks fluent French, he was assigned the task in the morning to review the covenant, system management and project plan with the water committee to be sure we were all on the same page. While he was doing that, Darcy who is a CS engineer was assigned the initial stages of building the water system with Father John and Judith. That left me free to go into Leogane to purchase a number of things and pick up the tank and plywood at the orphanage. Without the talents of this team we would never have been able to accomplish all we did in the

timeframe we had. By midday I sensed we were behind, but by the end of the day at 6p we were pretty much on target. Darcy and Judith and Father had the board mostly built and Lou had all the agreements in order and was now pitching in gluing PVC. Tomorrow we were ready to work on the outside parts hooking up the tank.

I failed to mention that to get to the community of Bas Comier we had to drive up a river, not across it, for about 1.5 miles. Fortunately it wasn't too deep, but Saturday afternoon there was a heavy rainstorm

in the mountains and the river rose very rapidly and we were not going anywhere until it went back down which it did about an hour later; at least enough to be only axle deep. I managed to get the Land Cruiser stuck in the mud on the way back, but without hesitating put it in reverse and did not let off the pedal until we were on solid ground. That evening we found another way out.



On Friday we picked up where we left off finishing the churn, hauling the tank up onto the stand and then routing the PVC. After lunch we were ready for the acid test. Only one leak in the whole system and guess who failed to put glue on that joint? We won't go there. Once the pump was bled the system worked flawlessly. We flushed the tank with chlorine which we call shocking put the filters in and Bertone was ready to begin training of the operators. The next day, Saturday, was dedicated to training those that would then train the community on the use of pure water. This community had a very enthusiastic group of people to do this task. We invested heavily in laying the proper groundwork over the previous 9 months and it was now really paying off. Bas Comier was taking ownership and in a very passionate way.



This training was done by our In-Country Educator, Frantzou. He did an excellent job because the students were all participating very eagerly. Since Bertone was training the operators at the same time, the team had nothing to do. So Lou, Father, Judith and Darcy took a little hike into the surrounding area. Judith came back fairly quickly as part of the hike required walking across the river. But the others went on and this is how Lou told of the experience. *"It was in a very rural community where the only previous water was the river. The area looked like National Geographic in Africa where children were playing in the river without clothes and women without tops"*. They had a grand time talking to people that lived in this valley and with Lou's French they were able to communicate. This is the part of Haiti we all like to think about, not like the intense areas of PAP. This is a spot back in time where the children use a plastic oil bottle with four wheels on it as a toy. Their life is hard but simple and up until now the river is all they had to drink. They are very excited about the new water purification system.

Saturday night is the traditional mass at the monastery and since the brothers have no priests in their order Pere Bleu from DuFort usually celebrates, but he wasn't available that evening, nor were other priests. So about 2p Sat afternoon I get a call from Fre Olizard requesting Father John to say mass. No priest likes to be caught without a homily ready especially for Sunday mass nor having read the gospel and Father had neither. None the less we promised to give him the time he needed and we'd get the gospel in English in short order. Keep in mind the mass is said in French and the Haitian's have a lot of music that goes with their mass including several of the Eucharistic prayers. Father was not daunted. That afternoon while the river was rising, Father worked on his homily right after we dug up the gospel in the internet. In spite of the high water and my getting stuck we got father to the church in plenty of time. I have never come out of that chapel before feeling so alive and full of the Holy Spirit as I did that

evening. The mass had five languages that evening, French, English, Latin, Creole and some Spanish. We have two Cuban doctors in the clinic now and their Spanish is far better than their French or Creole. The music and choir were spectacular and no one cared that Father John said the mass in English because there was such a mixture of language, everyone received God's Graces. The best part though was after the mass the altar servers who were 18-20 years old all wanted father to pose with them for pictures. Father who understands no French or Creole is truly the Pied Piper of young people and children. The girls at the orphanage were the same way. They flock about him at the orphanage and there is so much love shared. What a beautiful grace God gave us on this trip through Father John.



On Sunday we spent the entire day at NDC



with the kids. We played games, made brownies, Father bought ice cream for all the girls (22 pints), we built the battery bench and made volleyball net



Not a spoon moved until Eliane said so

posts and taught them how to play. It was a truly fun day for everyone. Watching 65 kids eat brownies and ice cream is just worth the price of admission. In spite of the fact that there was no water in the well, in October we received a very generous gift of \$5K to dig a new well at NDC. The well cost about \$12K to dig and Water For Life who digs the well paid the other \$7K. The day we arrived the well was dug. We now have a 125' well

with 40' of water in it which I pray will hold from now on. Two days after we left, tanks are once again full. I tell this to you my readers, because we just don't understand what it is to be without water. In Haiti it is almost a way of life and even those that have the wells can lose them just as fast through acts of nature.

On Monday I presented our plans to develop a water technology center to Fre Olizard, the mayor's assistant of Leogane, the Swiss Red Cross, the LWW in-country team and the HSHM team. Water for Life was also invited but had a conflict that day. Beside putting the framework together for this center we have used a tool called ARCGIS that has allowed us to take a 1999 study by the Army Corp of Engineers and overlay onto it a terrain map of Haiti. With these two pieces we can now tell with some reasonable accuracy what the probability of finding water within a general area is. For instance if we had had this tool last year we would have never invested in digging a 400' well at the monastery because the monastery is in an area of low probability for ground water. There were three things I wanted from this presentation: 1) buy in from the Haitians that this was a good idea and something they would take ownership of, 2) information from DINEPA (Haitian government potable water organization) on where all the wells are in Haiti today so we can put them on our GIS map and 3) how this would be best

organized. In essence we got answers to all three items: 1) The mayors assistant will get the well information from DINEPA, 2) there is no technology in Haiti like this period so it would be most welcome and 3) A Haitian organization has been formed already that will manage the core of these services. Our next step now is to find a university in the US that has a very strong remote sensing and geological department that will oversee and implement the critical geological part of this effort. Before December is over we will be putting out a Request for Proposal (RFP) to determine interest from the academic community regarding such a project. If you know of any such schools please contact me as soon as possible.

That afternoon we finished some work at NDC and then went to Pere Bleu's to check out a new site for a water purification system. It is a school that will have 400 children and a surrounding community of about 1500. This is the way the process begins. I don't know if we will ever implement this system, but we have taken the first step. This was the last thing we needed to do to clear the calendar for a free half day off in Jacmel. The team had worked hard all week and you never know when something will go wrong so contingencies have to be planned. Darcy was itching to see the cathedral in Jacmel and Bertone and I had some other sites to show them also. It was a good time that morning and an opportunity to meet some more Haitians on the street. What fun these people can be. We were back at Bas Comier at 3p for the dedication ceremony. All the Red Crosses were represented as well as



members of the community and the Leogane mayor's assistant was there also. Unfortunately there was a storm going on in the mountains and I was very nervous about the state of the river. It was semi-high when we came in and the last thing I wanted was to get stuck there because the river was impassable, so Father John did a blessing of the system with holy water, some nice words were said by all and we left ahead of the next

river rising.

It is always sad for me to pack up that evening and even sadder to leave the next day. I missed home and Kathy and the hot shower but I miss my brothers and sisters in Haiti also. Until the next trip, may God be with each of you.

Bob McCoy - Mission Team Lead