

Zimbabwe Pensioners Support Fund

August 2009 Trip Report : Bulawayo Route

The August delivery to south and central Zimbabwe was, by all accounts, a record trip in terms of time, and was done by **Daniel & Elza Koekemoer**, while **Pastor Attie and Bob Daniels** did the Eastern side and Harare.

We left **Durban** on Sunday morning, 9th August, and travelled up the North coast **through Swaziland**. We arrived in Malelane at 5pm and met the team at the warehouse. The trucks were already packed and waiting, which was a huge bonus, thanks to Bob, Yvonne and the guys there. Yvonne very kindly put us up at her home and Hannes treated us to a great meal.

We all met at the warehouse at 7am on Monday morning to pack the last few things and the three trucks were on the road by 9am. We had a slow run up through the most beautiful parts and saw fruit, fruit, and more fruit. We passed by Duiwelskloof where we saw Liz briefly. She gave us the tastiest.....fruit for each truck.

We arrived in Musina at 7pm, parked the trucks at the N.G. church (thank you again to those great folk there) and were taken to the home of **Henry and Elizabeth Cameron** who had, once again, organised a lovely dinner and bed for us. After a good nights rest we had to wait patiently the next day for the paperwork to do whatever it does between the two border posts. Eventually at 2.30 pm we were given the go ahead to take the trucks up to the border where we stopped at about 4pm. Once again, a taxing experience followed!! Initially the officials wanted to search our Bulawayo truck but we established later that it was an anxious Bob, whose truck had to be inspected. Huge pantechinons and tankers dwarfed our 3 trucks, in the big “**dust bowl**” as we fought to get through till after midnight for our place in single file leading to the weigh- bridge. Pastor Attie and Bob had to sleep at the weigh- bridge, due to Bob’s search, but we went through by 12.30am. We decided to drive straight through to Bulawayo; Perhaps not the smartest move on a treacherous road but somewhat necessary when we considered the option of a cheap hotel in **Beit bridge**.

Wow, the first 10km of dirt road that hasn’t been graded for years took about an hour to travel; we were in fear of half the truck being left behind on the road. Fortunately the pot- holes on the tar road that followed have been repaired, albeit temporarily. We looked out for cattle, donkeys and game all the way. It was remarkable to see how many people sleep on the roadside with a fire burning, either with their few wares to sell or waiting for a bus. At 4am we passed **Esigodini** but decided it was a bit too early for us to drop their food parcels. We went through two police road- blocks at that time of the morning but they passed us without much hassle. We got to **Southern Comfort** at 5am. We crawled straight into bed and were up again at 7am.to start our deliveries.

Once again **Craig and Lesley Hunt** offered us a room and great hospitality. We met **Marx Gertenbach**, who had gone up on the previous trip to do a photo documentary with a number of the pensioners. We anxiously await his finished work which he hopes to publish and should offer great and possibly very sad insight into the deepest lives of the Zimbabwean pensioners; a great young guy who had, during his month there, developed a beautiful relationship with many of the old folk. He caught a lift with us to Coronation cottages and spent the rest of the day helping us with our deliveries around Bulawayo; A true blessing for the two very wary truckers that we now were.

We delivered first to the Verity Amm soup kitchen where the very able and beautiful human being, Ann, a volunteer there, and her helpers were absolutely thrilled with the new supplies. Ann and her daughters were serving the food into used ice-cream tubs, of all shapes and sizes, which each pensioner from the cottages leaves there for their daily meal. A necessary but appalling arrangement because if there are more than one food type in the ice cream tub there is no way to separate each portion. By the time the poor people have hobbled back to their rooms the contents are sure to be well mixed up and surely quite unappealing. We have made it our mission to find an alternative. The ideal “Tupperware” would be those plastic holders with compartments so that the various foods don’t mix when dished up and obviously with lids. Maybe there is someone who has a contact for about 120 of these? We pray.

We delivered to **Queen Mary Home, Ralstein House, The Masonic Cottages, Jacaranda House, Barbara Burrell for the blind, Elizabeth Gardens**, the White family, some “outsiders” in Queens Park and S.O.A.P. Oh my, how very sad to see where some of these wonderful old folk live. It’s obviously been years since there was a cent to buy food let alone spend money on maintenance. The one lady has no ceilings left in her house and her roof has huge holes in it. A dismal situation indeed.

We learnt from the pensioners that bread is available at R10 a loaf for those who can afford it, but it’s stale within a day and barely edible. Even though the shops have more on the shelves it doesn’t help these folk. The prices are still extremely high and most items are way out of reach for these old folk.

John Anderson from Durban donated some **insulin**, which we gave to Lesley Hunt in Bulawayo. Lesley has a clinic and collects money to buy all the old folk their essential medicines. She does an amazing job and quite remarkably services hundreds of old people throughout Zimbabwe. When we got back to Southern Comfort for a welcome dinner, Lesley informed us that they had just run out of insulin that morning. **God provided just in time again.** We slept in Bulawayo that night. Craig offered to deliver all the Esigodini parcels as he was going out that way. We are blessed with great people all the way.

After breakfast on Thursday 13th we left for Gweru, delivered at Boggies and then drove to Shurugwi to deliver at M.U.U.S. John D’ewes met us here to take the Zvishavane parcels. A very concerned and kind **John Harwood** at Shurugwe gave us a box of the most **delicious avocados** from his tree. These lovely **people are so grateful and just want to give something back.** They kept giving “**thank you**” letters and just asked all the donors to keep praying for them.

We delivered parcels at Huisvergesig and met one of their residents that had been badly beaten up and robbed in his cottage the previous week. Most disturbing!!

We left for Masvingo at about 4pm. When we got there at 6.30pm, all the pensioners were sleeping already, the entire complex in darkness. One can’t **help wondering if they just wait for sunset so that they can get comfort in sleep.** When there’s no T.V or radios or the luxury of reading there’s not much point in staying awake. We dropped their medicines off and decided to head back to the border.

The Beitbridge road south of Masvingo up to the Buby River is a shocker. **Daniel had motion sickness from the suspension in the driver’s seat.** The road is narrow and extremely bumpy, the foundations well collapsed. It took some nifty driving to negotiate the road with huge trucks coming from the front and pedestrians and donkeys on the roadside. We got to the Buby River at 11.30pm and slept. We got to the border at 10am, bought some Mazoe orange crush and real Zimbabwe cokes, but had to dispense the cokes because we didn’t have bottles for a deposit? How odd?

We eventually got through the border at 3.30pm, arrived in Malelane at 1.00am where poor Yvonne had to unlock the warehouse so we could collect our car. We got to bed at 2am. We were up at 6am and back in Durban on Saturday 15th August at 2.45pm.

The Zimbabwe pensioners don’t complain, are content with what they have and are eternally grateful for all the donations. They are truly and utterly astonished at the kindness and generosity shown them by the people in South Africa. The luxury of everyday shopping in packed stores here takes on a whole new significance when one returns from a trip like this and we realise again that we surely blessed with whatever we still have.

It was my first trip with Daniel and certainly not the last. It is an experience that cannot be put in words. I thank God for what we have.

With much love and gratitude.

Elza & Daniel Koekemoer