

Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia! We join with the church worldwide this Easter in praising God the Father for the life, death and resurrection of His Son, our Saviour Jesus - that we should have life, and have it to the full.

I hadn't originally planned to issue another flood relief bulletin before I travel to Malawi tomorrow. But, having read Myles MacBean's report on the **zm** visit to Muona on Tuesday 31st March, I thought it would be appropriate to issue a bulletin based almost exclusively on his first-hand account.

Myles MacBean wrote, "last Tuesday we set off on our most recent aid trip, this time to an area on the east side of the Shire River where the road had just been declared open by the roads authority. It turned out that "open" was a loose term! It ended up a gruelling, kidney-jolting, 3 hr/60 km drive from where we left the tarmac at Kanjedza on the M1 to our destination at the little settlement of Muona, and its Zambesi Evangelical Church. I travelled with Rose Chirwa (**zm** Projects Officer), Simon Chikwana (Field Director) and Duncan Chitsulo (a leader in the ZEC Southern Region). However on the trip out Duncan and Simon were an hour ahead of us, so Rose and I were on our own.

Even at its best the road is a narrow dirt track, and after the floods it turned out that every bridge had been washed away from when we crossed the Shire. So progress meant fording rocky dry riverbeds or fast flowing streams coming down off the mountains to join the Shire. A rough road and tight schedule left little time for photography but the picture on the right gives some indication of what we were up against. This 'moon scape' is a broad river bed that I was later told was completely new after the floods. The threatening thunder clouds over the mountains did not bode well for our return trip!

We also had to contend with roads that just disappeared in front of your eyes where earlier in the year storm rains had cut four or five feet deep fissures ready to make a fool of an unsuspecting 'azungu' (Chichewa for white man) in a 4x4. Several times I was very glad of Rose's sharp eyesight when she shouted, "not that way Myles!"

Perhaps we should have taken note of the fact that the only other traffic on the road was big giant Land Cruisers with air-conditioned NGO workers smiling down at us because the biggest challenge was yet to come. At the next river crossing we found that the river bed had been widened to several 100 meters and (I was later told) its rock saturated flood waters had swept away a thriving village just where we were crossing. We were thankful for the welcoming committee of local young men who - for a fee - walked us through the boulder field and across the only fording point where the water crept up to their knees. I was relieved when we crossed and eventually got to our destination.



Travelling along the road to Muona ZEC



Fissures on the Muona road

The people of Muona gave us a great welcome and eagerly crowded into the church building to be swiftly given their gifts of maize, beans, salt and soap in what has become a well-oiled process for us now. However, I have discovered that my greatest pleasure is to step back a little – when time allows – and take time to play with the children, talk with the villagers, and watch how normal things go on. We certainly learn a lot about the culture we are now part of, and the stalwart faith of so many in the face of such adversity. And we hope that in this way we can also show that we **azungu** are nothing very special; just fellow humans on the same challenging journey through life, and representing a multitude of faithful **zm** supporters back in the UK who – as all disciples are called to – want to show their practical love to their neighbour in their time of need.



Sharing gifts maize, beans, salt and soap at Muona ZEC

But the day was not over and as darkness fell we said our quick goodbyes and headed back along the dirt road in the pitch black. Rain had fallen on the higher ground and after only a few hours of rain we got just a taste of the terror our friends here must have felt during the floods as the river levels rose and tried to cut off our return home. I was thankful this time to be able to follow Simon's tail lights even when his trustworthy judgement temporarily failed him and he tried to launch us off a broken bridge into a deep gully. And of course the biggest of the rivers was still to be crossed, and had risen another few feet due to the afternoon rains. As we stopped to talk with our guides – now wading through fast flowing waters coming well up their thighs – we realised we had forgotten to bring the spanner to manually set Simon's older truck to four-wheel drive! But, never one to be deterred, a quick bit of 'Simon Chichewa charm' brought the desired loan of a wheel wrench and we were off. And I must say I was very grateful of my afternoon's off-road 4x4 training in Surrey as we plunged into the water and the bow wave swept up over the headlights!"



Night-time drama on the return journey

Brief Prayer points:

- Please give thanks for the successful and safe visit to take emergency supplies to Muona ZEC.
- Please pray for Mission Director Mike Beresford's forthcoming visit to Malawi. He is travelling with Trevor Matthews, **zm's** Chair of Trustees and Executive Committee and Pastor Jon Mackenzie from Lighthouse Church in Forres. Please pray for them and the Malawian team as together they seek to discern the Lord's will for how **zm** can help the re-building process and determine whether **zm** might fund some income-generating activities to support the flood-affected churches in future.

Yours in Christ

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