BACK IN TANA

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Category: Madagascar

I'm back in the capital (Antananarivo, Tana
for short) again after my unexpected travels to the Bara area. As Eddie
wrote a few days ago in his post, it is sometimes amazing the way God
works things out - we make our plans, but sometimes amid unforeseen
circumstances, God has other ideas. I was supposed to be working 2
weeks with the Tandroy team on checking John's gospel in Fianarantsoa.
But recently Pere Benolo was appointed as head of his 'congregation'
and so last week was expected to go to Tana to receive a delegation of
African Catholic leaders, and couldn't stay on to work with me as
planned. So what should we do? Mirana and I already had our return
flight to Tana booked, but perhaps this would mean I could go home to
England a few days earlier? I enquired about changing my ticket, but
unfortunately it was of the type that you can't change even if you pay
extra - I couldn't change the date without buying a completely new
ticket..... We set about thinking how we should use the time. I could
stay in Fianar and write my report.... then again the town of Ihosy was
only 3 hours away and a Sister who was traveling that way was willing
to give us a lift. Why not go and see one of the Bara translators,
Manonjo Gabriel, who lives there? After a dozen attempts on a poor
phone line we eventually got hold of him and surprised him with the
news that we would like to come and visit.The mountain scenery on the road to Ihosy is breathtaking (I'll try and
post some photos when I get back). Having barely been outside the
courtyard of the Catholic centre all week, it was so good to be on the
road and to see something of the countryside. But it was so special to
finally get an opportunity to visit the Bara area after working with
the Bara translators since 2001 until we completed Luke's gospel and
the Jesus film last year. Many times I had told them 'One day I'll come
to the Bara area and visit you .....' But I don't know if they ever
really believed I would. So it was wonderful to see Manonjo's delight
as he welcomed Mirana and me into his home, not quite believing that I
had actually made it to his house! After lunch I was resting, when
suddenly I heard a car with a loudspeaker going through the streets of
the small town announcing that there would be a showing of the Jesus of
Nazareth film IN THE BARA LANGUAGE at the Lutheran church that
evening!! What a joy to be right there to hear that announcement -
sometimes God's timing is so special!
When we first arrived, Manonjo wanted to share with us the tragedy

which had befallen his family. He described to us the circumstances in which his second daughter was killed by her own husband, and shared his grief with us. It was very sad, but in our Christian lives, God gives us the privilege of being able to share one another's joys and sorrows. I believe He allowed me to visit the Bara area just at the time when Manonjo was in real need of encouragement.

The next day Manonjo wanted to take us to Ranohira, the next town and his place of birth. He had been planning to go there anyway because his rice fields where ready for harvest, but he had delayed going for a couple of days so that he could receive us in Ihosy. (He is now 70 years old but still works hard in his fields!) Whilst we were there, Mirana and I took the opportunity to visit the Isalo National Park - one of Manonjo's grandsons took us in his taxi while a nephew was our guide. It was fantastic to actually see ring-tailed lemurs in the wild (as well as the cuddly white Sifaka lemurs) and the beautiful rock formations. Many Malagasy believe the name 'Ranohira' means 'singing waters'. However, the first settlement was named Ranohira because in Bara 'hira' means 'lemur', and so the meaning is literally 'water' (rano) of the 'lemurs' (hira) because it was originally the place where the lemurs went to find water. Although we went into the Park by taxi, the visit did involve quite a bit of walking in the heat of the day (quite a shift from the cooler climate of the plateau to the dry, tropical climate of the south where it reached at least 30 deg C) and since this was an unexpected visit I hadn't packed any sunscreen!! Wonderful to meet more Bara people and be able to greet them in their own language and ask them what they thought of the film. Most people I spoke to had already seen it and some had bought their own copy on VCD! They thought it was really good - amazing to see 'Jesus' (the actor) speaking Bara! I hope it will have a real impact on people's lives as they understand the message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection.

So now I'm back in Tana staying with my friend Nelly (whom we originally got to know in Abidjan when our boys were at school together). The bush taxi journey from Ranohira to Fianar was rather hot and cramped, but for many people it is their only option for travel. The flight back to Tana in a 19 seater Air Madagascar plane was pleasant, giving a very different view of the countryside than our 10-hour road journey. It would appear that I've got quite a bit of catching up to do in terms of the recent goings-on in British politics.

Although the BBC do broadcast here, I haven't been able to pick it up, and still can't for some reason here in Tana, so I've been listening to the French station RFI, which inevitably puts a different spin on things. There is also a mini political crisis in process here in Madagascar, as the ruling party has proposed a motion of 'destitution' against the leader of Parliament. It should have been voted on last Friday, but since the method of ballot wasn't agreed upon, it has been postponed until tomorrow (Monday). If the motion doesn't go through, it will leave President Ravolomanana in an awkward position.....

Anyway, I think that's all I have to report right now (except for some temporary tummy troubles which I won't bore you with). I'm really looking forward to getting home - my flight is tomorrow night - and seeing some of you in the near future. Meanwhile thanks for your thoughts and prayers, and your patience in reading this if you stuck with it to the end.

Sue