

The Leicester Bwana In Botswana 12 May 03

After 4 days of sitting as patiently as I possibly could in the cramped environment of a multitude of planes, trains, buses and combis, I am finally in Botswana where I am so pleased it is winter. Daily temperatures are around 30 degrees C and I have managed to turn from my usual blue colour to more of an off-white colour.

For me, the highlight of the trip was being able to have beers and kebabs in our stopover in Athens, and listening to Colin the Cabbie bang on endlessly as he manouevred our way across Jo'burg from the airport to the bus station (which, I am pleased to say was in a rough part of town). Another highlight was also a crude introduction to African mentality. I was woken by a guy who asked me "Why are you sleeping? What are you going to do tonight?" and he had a point really. The general thought process is fairly short term, and that presents quite an obstacle when discussing protecting oneself against HIV.

Based in Francistown, I seem to have landed on my feet compared to other tales I have heard. The house is newly built with European standard facilities such as running water, electricity, an electric fence and, as of yesterday, a Barbeque built by yours truly. My patrol is around a place called Nata and is about 2 - 3 hours on a combi (typically a clapped out VW Camper van that is crammed full of people and is used like a bus). Rather than do all of this traveling, I have got a tent so I can stay overnight in the Field Officer's gardens (or maybe in their house / mud hut). As the area is too big, I will also be using a motorbike to travel around. I look forward to my family's reaction on that.

Some of the people I have met have some great names and I will drip feed them to you. The best ones so far include Kissme, Sonnyboy and Captain. One of my team is a lady called Doctor, and I have a meeting with Gracious on 21 May. The area around the house can only be described as a slum by European standards . Everyone is so happy though, and there is nothing better than walking to and from work with a load of kids SOOO happy to see you, and people in general shouting "Good Morning, how are you?". There is also a dried up river bed about 10 minutes walk away (through the bush where the Black Mamba and Cobra snakes and scorpions live) . At the river bed there is a troop (?) of Spider Monkeys that come no closer than about 10 metres from me, and they are there every day at 6 am and 5 pm.

I've spent a day with a Field Officer called Goitseman ("who knows" in English) and we visited a Shabeen (a house the locals use to get slaughtered), a family where the eldest brother just found out that he is HIV negative, a family from Zimbabwe whose eldest daughter has 2 kids and is one of 3 wives to a guy who is marrying his 4th wife in a few weeks, a woman whose CD4 count is 300 (yours will be around 1000 and 200 or less means you're not very well) and finished up in another Shabeen. I'm out of the office until 22nd in the middle of nowhere and am looking forward to my first encounter with the bushmen who use the click click language (yes!).

Loads going on, but wanted to give a bit of an insight.....

Rick
Francistown