

## **A Pilgrim's Tale: Modawa Pilgrimage: 5th - 17th August 2011**

*Christopher Brooks, ABM's Acting Communications & Fundraising Manager, shares his personal tale of being part of a pilgrimage to Papua New Guinea in August this year.*



### **Friday 5th August**

I was "encouraged" a few months ago by John Deane, our Executive Director, to visit one of our Partners as part of my orientation into the role as your Communications and Fundraising Manager. The prospect was both appealing and scary. And then I found out about the ABM Pilgrimage trip to the Diocese of Dogura in the South East of Papua New Guinea.

So, on August the 5th, I packed up my troubles in my old kit bag – along with a mosquito net, water purifying tablets, anti-malaria medication and a host of other first aid bits – and headed to Cairns to meet up with my fellow Pilgrims. There were 8 of us in total from 4 different dioceses – Vicki was from Canberra/Goulburn, Fr. Scott and Tim from Adelaide, Fr Andrew, Joseph and myself from Sydney and Brad, our leader, and Susan were from Melbourne.

We'd arranged to meet at a restaurant in Cairns for dinner. A couple of people couldn't join us but the 5 who were there knew that we had an exciting adventure ahead of us. We couldn't stay long at the restaurant (well, about 2 beers long!) as we had what was to become a regular occurrence of early mornings.

### **Saturday 6th August**

3.30am and the alarm goes off. I'm awake already though as I don't want to keep anyone waiting. So 4am we head to Cairns airport for our 6am flight. Cairns airport is one of my favourite airports on the planet as it means you're always going somewhere exciting – either Far North Queensland or, as I was about to find out, PNG!

There was a quick change at Port Moresby from the International terminal to the domestic and then on to our small propeller aeroplane to Alotau.

We had been warned that we may be sleeping on floors, may not have bed sheets or towels. So when we arrived at our first accommodation in Alotau, I, for one, was very surprised to be handed keys to a room with a shower, bed and mosquito netting on the windows (though that didn't stop me trying to hang my net from my portable washing line!). Dinner in the hotel was the first time we'd had chance to sit down opposite some of our fellow pilgrims and talk to them without the need to be conscious of where we were going. Despite the camaraderie, an early night was on the cards as we had all be up for at least 20 hours.

### **Sunday 7th August**

A moderate starting time was had this morning – at about 7am. Shower followed by breakfast, for some of us, was to be had before heading to church. Some of us had ordered the banana pancakes and were still waiting for them when we were meant to be leaving. We had arranged for an open backed truck to take us to our morning worship at Ascension Parish, Alotau.

The Parish Eucharist was very familiar to me and the rest of our group. There was lots of incense, singing, processing and the usual format of Anglican Communion that we experience around the world. This was our first experience of PNG worship and it was a moving experience – particularly remarkable as the church was packed!

After the service, we were presented to all the parishioners who lined up outside as we went down and shook their hands. We had chance to talk to some of them too before attending a reception that was then held in the priests house. This was lovingly prepared by the Mother's Union of the parish who also greeted us with a Welcome song. Bishop Clyde, Bishop of Dogura and previously Priest at Alotau, joined us for the morning service and welcome reception.



*Morning worship at Ascension Parish, Alotau.  
(Photo: Brad Chapman/ABM 2011)*

After the welcome speeches we went for a walk around Alotau before heading back to the hotel for some free time.

### **Monday 8th August**

Monday morning rolled around and we were all raring to go after breakfast at 9am in order to continue our next leg of the pilgrimage. 10 o'clock came and went and our transport still hadn't arrived. Then, just before 11 o'clock, our transport drew up outside the hotel. It was called a PMV (People Moving Vehicle) which does what it says on the tin. The best way to describe it is to liken it to a vehicle out of the TV programme M.A.S.H. that was used to transport the troops.

So after 2.5 hours wending our way over the mountain on a dirt track with sheer drops off to our port, we arrived at our next transport meeting place – the edge of the Solomon Sea. We were kindly introduced to our dinghy – a sturdy fibreglass one as opposed to a blow up one – but still a concern considering we had 8 passengers, 2 drivers and our luggage.

3.5 hours travelling at about 25 knots getting absolutely drenched (well, some of us did at least!) whilst hugging the PNG coast-line gave us a glimpse of the majesty and beauty of this country. There were tree bare mountains, with homes made of timber and elephant grass built on the beach with happy people waving at us as we sped by in the dinghy.

Then all of a sudden, Dogura Cathedral came into view. On top of a hill with mountains as the backdrop, this building looked oddly out of place after the homes we'd seen on the way. This Cathedral would not have looked out of place in a city in Spain – it was breath-taking.

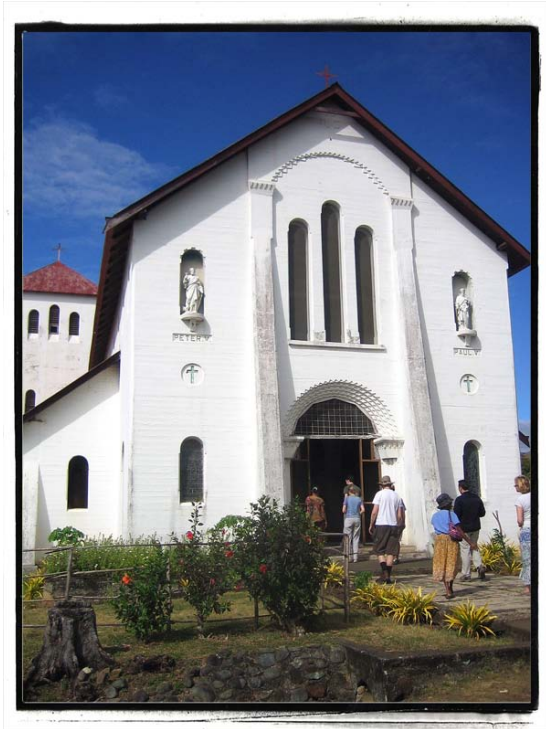


*L-R Susan, Vicki and Fr Scott in the dinghy.  
(Photo: Christopher Brooks/ABM 2011)*

We landed on the beach of the village of Wedau, our home for the next 7 nights, and met by some of the villagers who insisted on carrying our bags for us – carry some of the luggage. And we were escorted to our guesthouse.

Upon arrival, we were guided up a flower path and we came face to face with the Mothers of the village who sang to us the Welcome Song and adorned us with flower garlands. Once we had thanked the Mothers and settled into the guesthouse we were then greeted by Stephen, the Diocesan Secretary of the Diocese and Ivan, the Diocesan Business Manager and told our agenda.

Once our meeting was over, our eagerness to see the Cathedral was hampered by the setting sun and imminent dinner that had been prepared for us by our consummate host, Nita. How she made us such a banquet was a mystery to us as there was no electricity or running water in the guesthouse. At about 8 o'clock, we all gradually retired to bed, whilst working out how to clean our teeth in a bowl whilst holding a torch (the smart ones amongst us had brought torches that strapped to their head!).



*Entering Dogura Cathedral.  
(Photo: Christopher Brooks/ABM 2011)*

### **Tuesday 9th August**

The next morning was the commemoration of Mary Sumner, the Founder of the Mother's Union. We walked up the hill to the Cathedral where the village choir singing us hymns and songs greeted us. Then the Dean of the Cathedral sang us a Welcome song proceeded by a detailed tour of the Cathedral.

Around the Cathedral, that was consecrated in 1939 are stones from other abbeys, churches and cathedrals from around the world. Much to my amazement, there was a stone from Peterborough Cathedral in the UK, where I was a chorister, server, Sunday School teacher and organ scholar. This personal connection brought a new purpose to this pilgrimage for me. My fellow compatriots already had personal connections to PNG – either through parents or grandparents fighting at Milne Bay or knowing friends from PNG through parish connections – so I now had tangible connection to our hosts. How that connection is to play out is an article for another Partners magazine.

After our tour, we then had a reception in the Deanery Garden where some of the older children from the Holy Spirit Secondary School sang 3 songs for us. As we had taken slightly longer than intended to look around the Cathedral the students had to go straight back to classes but the village choir kept us entertained with a few more songs and hymns and then various speeches from the Cathedral Chapter, local government Members and our Leader, Brad.

Once the formalities were over, it was time to be shown around. I should say, at this point, that we now have a unique, if somewhat short lived, insight into how members of royalty, Governor Generals and all other people whose lives consist of duty and official engagements feel. We had a marathon of tours of: the Modawa tree, planted on the site of the first Chapel in PNG; Dogura House where the Missionary's used to stay; the Holy Spirit primary school, where we were welcomed by the whole school who sang the national anthem and a welcome song followed by a reception in the teachers room; a tour and reception of the Health and HIV centre; the Holy Spirit Secondary School where we were shown the cultural villages, the teachers room, the school chapel and then a reception in the Home Economics Room; the Diocesan Trade Store that acts as a Cash and Carry for local businesses and individuals; the Diocesan Office concluding with "lunch" back at the Deanery.

By the time we got back to the Deanery we weren't quite sure if we were on our 8th breakfast or 3rd lunch! So much for us losing that puppy fat on this trip. But this was the level of hospitality we encountered everywhere on our travels. For a nation that has so little by our standards, they gave so much that we felt so poor – we even struggled to repay them with a rendition of the Kookaburra Song – another story for another time!

We were by now exhausted so when it was polite to do so we bade farewell and went for a much needed bathe (yes, I do mean wash!) in the sea. I think it's fair to say that we ALL returned from that day extremely humbled and enlightened. Woh, almost sums it up.



*Re-enactment of the first missionaries landing in PNG. (Photo: Brad Chapman/ABM 2011)*

### **Wednesday 10th August**

The following day was St Laurence Day and the 120th Anniversary of the landing in PNG of the first Missionaries, Albert McLaren and Copeland King. In order to get to the beach that they first stepped foot on, we had to walk from our guest house about 45 minutes. We were all dressed up in our Sunday best (as well as we could, considering we were living out of backpacks!) as we knew that there was going to be Eucharist. Well, no-one had mentioned that we'd have to cross a river that was knee high! So we all took off our boots, rolled up our trousers or hoisted our skirts and proceeded to wade, gingerly, across the pebbly base of the river. We all made it, eventually, safely to the other side where we breathed a collective sigh of relief and got dressed again.

We had only walked about 20 metres when we came across another, even longer and deeper, river. Again, we got ready to cross, except some were too exasperated from the first debacle, so didn't bother and just walked across with shoes on and trousers not rolled up!

We, eventually, arrived at Kaieta Beach, the place where King and McLaren landed. We were a little late and everyone else was waiting for us poor drenched rats. We were ceremoniously escorted to the front where we were to sit and informed that the local tribes people were going to re-enact the first landing.

We were walked down the beach where we came across a group of men in traditional dress on the beach preparing their weapons for hunting. Then a sail boat glided around the peninsula into sight carrying the Missionaries, Albert McLaren and Copeland King. The tribesmen at first didn't notice the boat but one of the elders returning from the village saw it and started shouting to the men on the beach. They rushed back to the village to tell the women and children to stay in their huts, picked up their weapons and went to defend their property.

They chased the boat down the beach until there was an opening where McLaren and King could disembark. At this point, they weren't aware that the tribe's people were cannibals and would have delighted in having some variety in their diet. McLaren stepped out the boat, lost his footing and stumbled into the sea. The elder of the tribe rushed forward to McLaren, threw his spear aside and offered McLaren his hand to help him up.

This was a pivotal turning point for the tribe and the Missionaries. The elder convinced the rest of the tribe to not attack them and led them up the beach to where an altar now stands. McLaren, with the bible held in both hands above his head in a sign of peace, then proceeded to teach the natives the Lord's Prayer at the end of which they all joined in saying, "Amen". Our Eucharist then began.

After the service, we walked down the beach to a village called Wimira. Fr Wallace, who is Assistant Priest at Ascension Parish in Alotau was from the village of Wimira. He showed us around his tribal dwelling, of which a few families make up a clan. The village community is then made up of a few clans and they have spiritual leaders, the priests, and tribal leaders, the Elders. Fr Wallace told me that they had no difficulty balancing their spiritual needs through Christianity and their home-life through the tribal hierarchy as their faith sits above the tribe because it's personal.

We were then treated to an impromptu reception (banquet!) in the village. As this was an impromptu gathering (something happened that meant we couldn't go to the other venue) and we were due back the following day for our official welcome to the village, we departed company and took the hour or so walk down the beach, thinking that we would avoid all the rivers from the morning walk. But then . . . .

### **Thursday 11th August**

The next morning, we had strict instructions to be by one of the river outlets on the beach in order to meet up with the Wimira Village people. After the trepidations from the day before, we decided to leave enough time to get our shoes and socks on and off a few times during the walk. Consequently we were a little early, so had time to practice our three songs – the Kookaburra, We Are God's Family and To Be A Pilgrim. Just as we had decided who should be in which round for the Kookaburra song we were met by the shouting of Warrior Chiefs, brandishing spears and wearing their tradition clothing.

This was the day that the Missionary's first preached the Gospel to the tribes people. We were escorted up the hill with a traditional dance to where an altar had been built on the highest point. Not only was this the first place the Gospel had been spoken it was also the first place a baptism took place – of some of the Warrior Chiefs. A service was performed here in which the Warrior Chiefs re-enacted breaking their weapons and placing them at the foot of the altar. The procession then started off, with cross, lights and thurifer, followed by choirs, traditional drummers, dancers, the whole village, our group and then the clergy. And all this under the watchful eyes of the banana trees.

St Matthew is the patronal saint of Wimira Village. The warriors in traditional dress formed a guard of honour for us to walk into the church through. As we entered, we were taken with the sound of the congregation singing a local hymn that we had heard a few days before in the Ascension Parish. The celebration Eucharist had begun.

After the service, during which we each had had to stand up and introduce ourselves to the congregation, it was time for more feasting. We were, by now, getting quite use to these occasions. The food was usually taro, bananas, a meat stew, kaukau, plantain, pumpkin, noodles and deep fried bananas. After we had eaten, the rest of the village then started to eat. Speeches then started. Firstly from the Bishop, Clyde Igaru, then Fr. Wallace, a member of the government and our leader, Brad. Blessings and prayers were offered up by Fr.'s Scott and Andrew from our group and Fr. Samuel, Priest at St Matthews, Wimira.

Then followed singing, dancing, gifts and the presentation to all of us of every member of the Mother's Union. Tears were flowing, songs of joy were being sung and we felt so, so humble. After our official goodbyes had concluded, it was time to see some of the headpieces that the warriors had been wearing and start saying our personal goodbyes. These took a while. Meanwhile the Bishop's boat awaited us for our return journey home to Wedau. Another end to another unimaginable day in PNG.

## Friday 12th August

Continuing on our “royal” tour of the Dogura Diocese, Friday was scheduled as a visit to the village of Pova. Pova was a good walk from Wedau so we met at the Diocesan office in the morning in order to meet up with our guide. The discussion of foot wear had reared its head and we’d decided to go in walking boots as it was about 2 hours inland – they had omitted the fact that we had 6 rivers to cross to get there though!

Once we arrived, we were met by the Mother’s of the village with the Welcome song, garlands and a special floral archway for us to enter the village. We were then introduced to the villagers, speeches were made and then lunch commenced. The usual banquet was laid on for us and then we had some time to talk with the villagers – about 4 hours.



*Another river crossing on our way to Pova.  
(Photo: Christopher Brooks/ABM 2011)*

Pova was probably the most interesting place that we had visited from a social economic perspective. Everybody was lovely and friendly, made us feel welcome by their hospitality but we got the impression that there were issues here that weren’t present in the villages around the cathedral. This was an extremely poor village with numerous health and education challenges. Having said that, there was an elementary school in the village and we were able to spend some time talking to the teachers and children. They were being taught in their local tongue (Dawawa – which doesn’t have the letters “C” or “K” in it) and also learning English.

After World War II, the government had planned for the North side of the Dogura Diocese to become a tourist hotspot. Money had been spent on educating the people and building infrastructure, such as an air strip. The tourism trade never materialised though and 10 years ago the airstrip had to close. The route into Dogura that we took a few days previously was now the only way, apart from walking, to actually reach the places we were visiting.

Without anywhere for a plane to land, there is no chance of an emergency evacuation if anyone became suddenly ill. If a mother has complications during childbirth, for example, the quickest way to the nearest doctor, is to get to the coast, take a dinghy for anything up to 8 hours and then another 5 hours on a PMV if the weather is bad. That’s 13 hours in bad weather. The quickest it can be done is 5 hours.

Today, if we hadn’t reached the conclusion already, was the day that everybody in the group was touched by how hard life still is for a lot of Papua New Guineans.

Once we had finished all our stories and conversations, it was time to leave. All the villagers made a line and we went down and said goodbye to each and every one of them. For people who have so little to give so much made us feel very poor indeed.

Our walk home wasn’t as upbeat as it had been heading to Pova or on the way home after any of our other visits. Many of us were in thought and prayer about the people we had just met and, if they were anything like me, were feeling extremely helpless. Time for some quiet time when we got back so I took myself off to the stream to wash some clothes and myself.

## Saturday 13th August

Saturday was a “free day” – no official engagements. A “free day” for me though meant rising at 3am and being stuck on a mountain for 2 hours!

Today was the day that we attempted to climb Mount Pasi Pasi. We headed to the Diocesan Office for 4 am to meet Nimeon, our Mountain Guide; a lovely man who brought one of his daughters to ensure the back of the group didn't get lost either.

We set off for Mount Pasi Pasi in the darkness of the Dogura night, lit only by the light of the moon, the lesser light, and our hand held (or head held!) torches. The fresh morning – well, 4.30am – wind blew across the mountain from the sea. The elephant grass whispered to us as we walked through it, wishing us luck on our ascent. The Plain of Dogura gently faded away as the incline of Mount Pasi Pasi approached us.



*Climbing Mount Pasi Pasi.  
(Photo: Brad Chapman/ABM 2011)*

The view as we climbed higher and higher was amazing – all we could see were the silhouettes of hills and mountains, the different shades of black between the sky and the sea. We were all alone, on the side of a mountain, whilst the rest of Dogura slept that Saturday morning.

We weren't able to see where our feet were unless we shone our torches at them. If we did that though, we then couldn't see what was ahead of us. Ahead was more important and so we learnt to trust in our steadfastness. Breathing points on the way up meant we could re-group and take in the wondrous surrounds that we could see and glance

feverishly ahead to see where we had yet to go.

All of a sudden, after many twists and turns, there was a steep incline. The last push to the top of Mount Pasi Pasi? I could do it, I couldn't see beneath me so had no concept of what I was climbing or how steep it was. Hyperventilating, I reached the top. Heights are not my forte. A medical practitioner once told me it was a cerebral fear of heights as I'm OK on top of Sydney Harbour Bridge but put my six feet up without me knowing what's supporting me and I panic. But I'd made it to the top. Deep breaths stopped the hyperventilating and gave me chance to look at what I'd just conquered. I felt rather chuffed and patted myself on the back. Then I looked behind me.

There, in all its glory was the summit of Mount Pasi Pasi. And I wasn't on it! The panic set in again as I remembered what I'd just climbed and saw the 2 peaks we still had to conquer. That was it for me; there was no way I could keep going; fear had well and truly set in. So the others, after asking me if I wanted someone to stay with me, headed off for their rendez vous with God on the top of Mount Pasi Pasi. I came to the conclusion that my God does not expect me to meet Him on the top of a mountain, like I was now trying to do, all on my own, with sheer drops off to each side of the peak that I was perched on like an owl. The still small voice of God said quietly to me, “I'll reschedule for another time!” I think my profound meeting with God is more likely to happen at sea.

The next 2 hours were 2 of the longest I had ever experienced. I was too frightened to take my bible out of my rucksack to start reading; I was unable to stand up in case the wind blew me off my peak; lying down I was afraid of rolling down the mountain; and with my eyes closed, well, I just couldn't do it! Not able to see the incline of Mount Pasi Pasi, I kept glancing to see if the others had reached the

top. All of a sudden they appeared, like ants walking up the side of a wall. I couldn't look for long so got my camera out and slung it above my head (I was facing the other way) and hoped for the best.

They then spent what felt like an inordinately long time at the summit and then started to head down again. Actually, the walk down felt like a long time too (for me, at least). We all met up again and then the biggest challenge stared the group blankly in the face: how to get Chris off his perch!

Elegant was certainly not a word in peoples mind when I started my descent. I was crab-like, with my back to the mountain and my belly to the sun going down on all fours feet first. Towards the end of the steep section that I got stuck on (which was probably only about 40 feet high, but took about 30 minutes to get down) Brad, bless Brad, thought that he'd try some motivational encouragement to help me. "Stand up, Chris, and try to walk the last few feet otherwise the Mountain would have won. You can beat it, you're better than that." I can't publish my response to him, but needless to say, I finished that section on all fours!

The rest of the walk down was a breeze, in comparison, and I treated myself to a can of warm cola from the Diocesan Trade Store when we reached it. I thanked Nimeon for his unswerving support of me and his leadership and thanked his daughter for carrying my rucksack for me most of the way and we went home to reflect on our experiences and enjoy the rest of the day. By the time we got back it was 9.30am!!!

### **Sunday 14th August**

The next morning we were able to have a lie-in so we were all up at 7am. We headed off for Eucharist at the Cathedral for 9am only to find that the service actually started at 8.30. We were, rather embarrassingly, shown to our seats in the Chancel. We then had the opportunity to meet some of the students from holy Name Secondary School. I asked one of them which village he came from. He told me the name and I obviously looked blankly at him as he then said that it was about a 2.5 hour walk up the coast from Dogura. He was a boarder but was able to go home some week-ends to see his family.

I then asked the same question to one of the other boys (small talk's also not my forte!). Again, I must have looked blank as he said that it was a 1.5-2 day walk for him to his village and that his friend next to him came from the neighbouring village so they'd usually walk home together.

PNG is a country without many roads due to its terrain. The mountains are so steep that roads can only be built through them but the cost of doing that is out of the question. So everybody walks. And the majority of people don't have shoes. This was another moment for me of walking between two worlds.

Breakfast was then provided for us at Bishop's Cottage. This was an informal event as we were due back there at 4pm for our final farewell reception.

At about 3pm, we headed up to Dogura to have a last look around. There was a football match on that some of our group stopped to watch. Fr Andrew met a person there who had walked for 2 weeks from Alotau to visit Dogura during our stay there. And was about to start heading home.

We convened at the Bishop's home at 4pm and started banqueting again. We needed to take it easy with the food as the village of Wedau, where our guest house was, were disappointed that they hadn't



*Warrior men entertaining the pilgrims.  
(Photo: Brad Chapman/ABM 2011)*



had chance to Welcome us with a meal, so another reception there had been slipped in at 6pm. The Bishop's bash was full of many of the familiar faces we had met and grown to know over the previous 7 days. Again, there were speeches and gifts showered on us, along with singing and dancing. It was time to go, time to say goodbye but to ensure that we always kept the people of Dogura in our hearts, in our minds and in our prayers. We walked out of Bishop's Cottage with them still singing a Farewell Song that we could hear as we started our walk down the hill to our home for one more night.

And then at our guest house, the whole village of Wedau was waiting for us. It was now 7pm as the previous reception went on longer than its prescribed time. We were met by warriors drumming who then escorted us up to our seats outside the house. The entertainment then continued with more dancing by the warrior men, singing by the Mother's of the village, presentation of more gifts to us, another banquet laid on for us and speeches from the village elders and statesmen.

Although we had been exhausted after the previous engagement, we didn't want this evening to end either. No-one was going home and we were told that the villagers wouldn't leave until we had entered the house. But we just kept chatting, despite our 3.30am wakeup call; everyone was having a wonderful time as new friendships were made with people that we'd never met before and 7-day old acquaintances were turned into friendships. The hospitality of all the Papua New Guineans is one thing that will remain with every single member of the group forever and ever, without a shadow of doubt.

### **Monday 15th August**

It was a overcast night when we awoke for our first transit journey. Even the moon shine was obscured so we carried all our bags and gifts down to the beach by the light of our torches. There was a boat there already being loaded up and we assumed we were late. It eventuated that this boat was taking the first load of people from Wedau to Monday market at Alotau to sell their wares. We didn't get in this boat.



*The view from Dogura Cathedral of the Solomon Sea.  
(Photo: Christopher Brooks/ABM 2011)*

A few minutes after they had set off, the Bishop and his party turned up at the beach. His son was the boat's helmsman (if that's what you call someone behind a Yamaha 4 stroke 3 litre outboard engine) and his assistant who was there to take over half way through our trip. Once our belongings had been loaded up we said our final goodbyes to the assembled party and Bishop Clyde gathered us around for a morning prayer and blessing for the start of our journey home.

As we pushed the boat out of the bay before we could start the engine, torch signals were being exchanged with the people on the beach and then Vicki noticed some glow-in-dark electric blue fish (which you can't see by shining your torch on them, as I found out!). Our return trip had begun.

The sun started to bring the day in as we opened our breakfast parcels, lovingly prepared by Nita, of bananas and bread rolls in the dinghy. We didn't stop off this morning to refuel but instead did it on the run. Thankfully it was good weather for our boat ride to the meeting point with our PMV that we'd booked the week previously. Time was not on our side though hence the mid-ride fuelling.

We arrived at the beach at 8.20 am, nearly 3 hours after we'd set off. We unloaded our bags and started our wait for the PMV. With no imminent sign of it, one of our group dared to find a toilet spot (i.e. behind a tree). Still no sign. We then hear the bells from the nearby Anglican Church ringing out for the Blessed Virgin Mary's Day. A couple of people take a gamble and head to the church to investigate. When they return some 30 minutes later, still no sign of *the PMV*. We then start skimming stones across the surface of the sea, much to the amusement of the other people also waiting. Still no sign. More people arrive on the beach, 2 dinghies from one village with all their local produce to sell at Alotau Market and then a PMV turns up. The people from the same village load this with all their goods – we later find out that one of the people from their village arrived on an earlier dingy and privately booked it in Alotau that morning. Still no sign of our PMV.

So we stop waiting. We start to read, we start to lie on the beach (even though it's as pebbly as an English beach!), we try to find some shade to sit quietly, we chat to the locals. No-one complains. It's just what they all do in those situations.

Then, at 2.50 pm, our PMV, the Little Princess, trundles into sight. Profusely apologetic, they explain that they couldn't wait earlier as it was Monday and there were many people wanting to get to market and there are only four PMVs that operate this particular route. They loaded us onboard, and then loaded as many other people who were waiting to get started on their day's toil as they could. This time, we budged up to make room for everyone else and didn't care about the engine exhaust that emitted directly into the seating area of the PMV. All we had to do the rest of the day was check into our hotel and order our first gin and tonic in over a week. The other people we were sharing the PMV with had their livelihoods waiting for them.

The PMV transit was a quiet affair. Mainly lost in our own thoughts, watching the scenery as it went past or having a siesta after our early start. At 5pm, after we had dropped off all the market sellers at the market we arrive at our hotel. The first thing that everyone does is have a shower. There is a sense of relief to wash the dust and dirt off whilst also trying not to feel that we are washing the experiences of the past week away with them too.

At 6pm we gather for Evening Prayer before heading to dinner. Over dinner, we share some of our stories of the past week, ask some of those unanswered questions and reflect on the people we have met. Bedtime beckons – it's 8.30.

## **Tuesday 16th August**

We have a 2 o'clock flight today so we have a little time in the morning before we have to get our transfer to the airport. That meant time for some last minute shopping, sightseeing and investigating. We check in at Alotau and await our departure to Port Moresby. Once there, we're met and escorted to our compound, the Mapang Missionary Centre in the centre of PM.

On the whole trip so far, this is the only time that I was conscience of my safety. Before I had left Sydney, some of my friends and loved ones had expressed concern for my safety whilst in PNG. Whilst we were in PNG, the riots in London happened and I know where I felt safest that day. We stayed in the centre for the evening as our flights were not until the next day.

## **Wednesday 17th August**

Home Day. But before we got the airport there's just time to visit the Stop Aids Centre in the grounds of the Anglican Diocesan Offices. Stop Aids was set up by the Anglican Church to address the social stigma that surrounded HIV and AIDS and to offer counselling, medical treatment and advice to those, mainly women, who could not receive treatment in a government hospital, for a number of reasons. From their humble beginnings, they have now expanded their services and offer literacy classes to women, safe spaces for people to use if they are in trouble or need help and various treatment programmes for their growing list of out-patients.

Although the Anglican Church does not own the centre, when the centre relocated to its new premises the patients requested a chapel so they could have somewhere to reflect, pray and have some quiet time. We finished our tour of the compound in this chapel. The calm of the open sided space was serene – it was also the first religious building we'd been to in PNG with seating in it. To sit quietly in a church was now an odd experience.

After we bid the people goodbye, we headed straight for the airport. Port Moresby airport now felt like the biggest airport in the world after we'd come from Alotau. And I'm sure Brisbane airport is going to feel ginormous when I get there.



*In the chapel of the Good Shepherd.  
(Photo: Brad Chapman/ABM 2011)*