



Alongside International

Ten Days, Nine Nights & Three Very White Guys in Liberia – West Africa



Partners International investigative trip to Monrovia Liberia March 2007.
David Miclash, Ted Dutaud & Tom Newell

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Friday March 23/07

We three are on a mission. David Miclash, Ted Dutaud and Tom Newell are headed to Liberia to “spy out the land,” looking at the opportunities for Christian humanitarian development and also potential obstacles. David Miclash is the President of Alongside International and this is his 48th international trip. He brings with him an array of experiences and leadership. This is his first trip to Liberia. This is also the first time he left his wife behind on their anniversary. (44 Years) Congratulations to Linda and David. Ted is a water engineer complete with an incubator and several small bits of test equipment. Lack of safe drinking water is a serious issue in Liberia. Ted plans to perform tests on the water in places where the quality is unknown. As it turns out, this is nearly everywhere. Ted is working on a separate and comprehensive water report based on the samples taken and some post trip analysis. His detailed report will be available through Alongside International. Ted has traveled numerous times with Alongside International. Various places have received new wells or have had their existing ones restored. Tom (that is me) is a Pastor and currently serves in the Kenora Jail as the Chaplain. I am the Media Director for this team, so I get to take many pictures and tell the story in writing through my eyes. Ted and I are both camera nuts and each have a Nikon, so between us we shouldn’t miss a thing.



Greetings from Monrovia Liberia. 58-hour trip but arrived safe at 7 p.m. We had a nice stop over in Brussels, which is the capital city, in the centre of Belgium. The three of us booked into a room for rest – felt good to stretch those legs out! After a few hours rest, and in order to make the best of our layover, we went exploring in the Center in Brussels. The architecture and cobble stone streets belied their age. It was nice just to be on foreign soil, the bonus was the rich history we found at every turn. All the local restaurants vie for your attention by offering something free. It was quaint and yet far from what was to come, in every way.



On Arrival at the Monrovia Airport, we deplaned into a blast of 85F degree heat. While waiting with all the other passengers in lineups for customs, we were suddenly whisked off by a woman who identified us as guests of Bishop Klibo. She led us back out onto the tarmac and brought us into a V.I.P. section typically reserved for UN officials. We were greeted by 5 or 6 people connected to Bishop Klibo and representatives of the A.I.C.A. (Association of Independent Churches in Africa).



While discussing our arrival and long flights, the same woman told us we needed to present our passports, but she would do it on our behalf. Trusting we would get them returned, we freely gave them to her. On her return, she said we have to report to customs to clear our luggage into the country. They took us by van around to the front entrance of the Airport. It is somewhat awkward to be allowed to bypass the regular rules and processes just because you are a foreigner. We are not diplomats, but we take quiet comfort in that we are ambassadors for the King. We certainly do not expect special treatment, but could adapt to accept it with graciousness.

Just try to explain to the security guards that we left the customs line, went back out onto the tarmac & all around the terminal, and now are returning to the front door to claim our baggage, all this without passports!

That was not an easy task and the security and our guides raised their voices. Bishop Klibo joined in and said to the security officer, "I beg you to let them back in" then he said it louder and more insisting to the point of commanding. Tension was mounting. It looked like it could have been a problem, but with the power of prayer the mood changed, and they said..."Okay, go ahead". Once we got to our bags, clearing them was a snap. Bishop Klibo said he was amazed we were not charged tax on the "New Items" we were bringing into the country in three large hockey bags. They seemed to not notice what he saw so clearly. I became aware of our passports just sitting on an old desk counter across the room. Someone soon picked them up and asked to whom they belonged. We left the terminal with passports and baggage in hand.

It was now pitch black outside. People quickly crowded us as we approached the van. It was a little intimidating, as they are not selling trinkets. A police officer quickly came to us and greeted us assuring he is there to make sure all the bags end up in the van. "Where else would they go?" I wondered, as I looked around at all the white eyes. It may have been necessary given the nature of the crowd, but it also seems apparent after a short while here, anyone with authority wants to perform their duties to the fullest and be part of the V.I.P. process.

The long drive to the city of Monrovia was in darkness, except for the roadside fires at people's homes that dotted the county side. In the van with us was The Bishops' Executive Secretary, Rev. Arthur Horton, who we nicknamed "Tim", (after Tim Horton) A.I.C.A. Founder, Arch Bishop Rev. Dr. Augustus Marwieh, the Board Chairman –

Pastor George Davies, A.I.C.A's Treasurer, Lasannyah Seequeh and Bishop Jerome Klibo.

Our ride proves to be an informative introduction to Liberia's recent history as we tap into the knowledge of those jammed together with us. It is estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 lives were lost in the civil strife, with hundreds of thousands of refugees having fled the country.

In Oct. 2003, the West African force was placed under UN command and was reinforced with troops from other nations. The country also has rich iron ore reserves, which are a major source of exports. The principal cash crops are rubber, coffee, and cacao; the staple crops are rice and cassava.



The civil warfare that raged from 1990 to 1997 and from 2001 to 2003 had a disastrous effect on the Liberian economy, with many business people fleeing the country as rebels gained control of vast quantities of gold, diamonds, natural rubber, and tropical hardwoods. Until the 1950s, Liberia's economy was almost totally dependent upon subsistence farming and the production of rubber. The American-owned Firestone plantation was the country's largest employer, which held a concession on some one million acres (404,700 hectares) of land. With the discovery of high-grade iron ore, first at Bomi Hills, and then at Bong and Nimba, the production and export of minerals became the country's major cash-earning economic activity. Gold, diamonds, barite, and Kyanite are also mined. Mineral processing plants are located near Buchanan and Bong.

Much of the main staple, rice is imported, but efforts have been made to develop intensive rice production and also to establish fish farms.

Much of the country's industry is concentrated around Monrovia, where civil war disruption was highest, and is directed toward the processing of iron ore, food and rubber, and the manufacture of construction materials. The lack of skilled and technical labor has slowed the growth of the manufacturing sector.

Service stations are plentiful here, but the pumps do not work without electricity. They sell gas by the glass jar full, one gallon at a time. In-between fill up stations, yellow porous looking termite mounds protrude out of the ground sometimes 6 or 10 feet high. Now that is an anthill! The roads are dark and the air filled with the smell of kerosene lanterns. The exhaust from the van fills the cab as we slow for UN Checkpoints. The UN has a very significant and positive presence here. They are overseeing the rebuilding of the Liberian Army and training the Police force. We later found out they are involved in many facets of the infrastructure rebuilding process. In Canada, television news from

around the world shows the UN's involvement in developing countries; however, now that we see what they do, they are inadequately portrayed. Thank God for their all-encompassing work force and overwhelming humanitarian contribution.



The city of Monrovia is still devastated from the civil war. Without running water and electricity for a city of 1.5 million, they have adapted well.

According to the World Bank, the average Liberian struggles to survive on an annual income of about \$120; or 30 cents a day. Extreme poverty is defined as \$1 a day. By some estimates, a staggering 80% of Liberians are unemployed and nearly half of Liberia's children are still out of school. Electricity and clean water, basic services that many of us take for granted, remain beyond the reach of many citizens.



The hotel we stayed at has security guards. This compound is surrounded with razor wire, which feels just like being at work, for Tom. The hotel does have its own water system. On the roof, is a large water reserve tank. It is gravity fed and does not need to be pressurized. Our rooms are air-conditioned, when the generator is on.

The hotel is far better than anticipated, likely low on "star status", but comfortable. In Monrovia, it is known to be difficult to get accommodations, so we are grateful for what we have. The food is not bad either; the menu changes every day: One day, it is Rice & Chicken. The next day it is Rice & Fish, and then it starts at the beginning again.

Saturday - March 24

Happy Birthday Tom! Tours of ministry in the area were the order of the day. It is very exciting to see the local outreaches that are under the A.I.C.A umbrella.

First, we visited Pastor George Davies church, **Messiah Temple**. The congregation recently installed a new Tin Zinc roof sponsored entirely by Partners International. Pastor Davies said the attendance in worship has grown from 60-75 to 150 people since the new roof was installed.



Current needs: A church floor to get out of the sand, and plaster walls, to brighten the interior. The exterior cement block walls could also use a simple coat of paint for a more finished appearance. Pastor Davies joined us for the balance of the ministry tour.

Emmanuel Temple. This was our first adventure into the heart of Monrovia. Nestled deep within the city are several slum type communities and Emmanuel Temple is ministering to a classic example of this. Driving to the core of this community was like something out of a movie.

Endless people in slow mode, surrounded by piles of burning garbage, rag-a-muffin kids clad in brand name, but war torn t-shirts and untailored pants. Here we found a well that is one of the very few not destroyed by the rebels and serves a wide area. Ted, “take the rest of the day off!” It was not long before scores of children surrounded us. If you love kids this is the place you will want to be. Some were apprehensive and others begging for their picture to be taken. The elementary school is a crude and airy bamboo-walled structure. It also has a new roof and the un-engineered truss system that was re-cycled from another structure. Nothing goes to waste here. Most of the school desks and supplies were taken by the rebels and sold for cash elsewhere. (They did this to support their relentless pattern of murder and destruction to the very people they stole from.) The school needs a floor because the children are tempted to play in the sand. They need more desks, proper walls & doors.



The church Emmanuel Temple, next to the school brought wonderful music to our ears with singing and hand percussion instruments. The women of the church were inside fasting and praying while singing and dancing to the Lord! That was neat to see. They must have wondered about the strange delegation that came into their sanctuary, but this did not stop them from praising God. Emmanuel Temple needs a new roof; this one is rusted out and leaking badly.

Hope Tabernacle Church, which we were really looking forward to visiting, is Bishop Klibo's church. The church is not far from our hotel and like other places; it is undergoing a major re-construction project. The roof of the church recently collapsed, and miraculously a family that had been staying there was not hurt. For the short term, the church worships at the A.I.C.A's office compound on a second floor terrace just a few blocks down the street. Bishop Klibo shares the preaching with his wife Martha and two other staff. We had a tour of the property and saw the construction workers preparing and securing more homemade scaffolding. They are trusting God for a new Zinc roof that costs \$2,225 US. The church has collaborated with Partners International 100% on this project.



Bishop Klibo expressed how very thankful they are. "We can do nothing without God putting someone in our path to come alongside".

This day blends a variety of leadership and ministries, which have their finger on the pulse of the communities needs. **PHP Evangelical church**: lead by Bishop Koban, is the strongest church in the region. This was an interesting place to visit, with lots of community action. We came around a corner to find a young girl was working-out pulling up bucket after bucket of water from a 20' steel cased well.



Ted wishes he had scooped up a water sample, for interest sake as he discovered a large septic holding tank about 20 feet from the well! He indicated it just did not look right to have those two in such close proximity.

The church building has a brand new roof thanks to Partners International, a solid floor, doors and windows.





The only thing they do not have, which is sorely needed are bathroom facilities. We toured the back of the church that boasts of reeking garbage and a waste dumping ground. It is dry today but, in the rainy season, this ditch swells with fast moving water and carries all this disease-laden content with it downstream through their living areas.



In the background, across from where we were standing is a meandering community, many are out doing their laundry, or cooking or sitting in the shade watching us. We saw people going thru dumps, just as we have seen in pictures from Maputo, Mozambique in South Africa.

A starving woman begged me for food today in a village we walked thru.... it was heart wrenching. We have to remind ourselves we are here to help the people of Liberia, it is just not possible to demonstrate that in each individual.

Returning to the hotel we had to find some proper attire, we have been invited to a wedding. One problem, we did not bring suits. Pooling our resources, we had only two ties for three guys!

Hey, I know what you are thinking; we did not have “wedding garments”. Yes, we thought of it too, and experienced it. Reading the story from the bible is one thing, being in it, is another. Today we are attending a wedding and have no formal or even semi formal clothes to wear and to top it off our names are not on the guest list. We had to rely solely on the graciousness of the wedding hosts. (It helps to have an influential Bishop in your corner.) Not unlike how we are given God’s grace when we come up short. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. Apart from Christ’s righteousness, we cannot get to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Unless our names are written in the Lambs Book of Life, we would be tossed out.

Today this couple from the church is getting married, and we were thrilled to be able to be intertwined in the body of believers on such an auspicious occasion. We were not tossed out on the street for not having the proper clothes. There was no weeping or gnashing of teeth, and to the contrary, not only were we last minute invitees, but also we sat up on the platform with Bishop Klibo as special honored guests. It seemed that we were living out a series of bible stories today.

This was an awesome cultural experience for all of us. The groom and his attendants



were all at the front of the church, and then one by one, EIGHT bridesmaids came in. The Master of Ceremonies would introduce them; tell humorous anecdotes about each, as they danced very slowly down the aisle. The Liberians sure have rhythm. It almost felt out of place to be in an all black church in a foreign country, watching everyone swaying to the melodic jazz music. What an incomparable honor to be a part of that whole celebration.

The Bride had a full veil on, and during the ceremony everything came to a stop so the groom could end the suspense by lifting her veil and tell the Bishop by name who was under there. Can you imagine? This was the turning point in the ceremony... how exciting is that! The bride was unaware I was taking her picture and as the groom was about to lift her veil the camera zoomed in with precision accuracy caught her playfully sticking out her tongue at her husband to be.

A friend of the Bride sang a solo,

"I almost let go,

I found out I just couldn't take it anymore

*My problems had me bound,
The pressures wore me down,
But God held me close -so I
wouldn't let go.*

*God my sweet held me, -so I
wouldn't let go.*

*I am alive today because of His
grace,
He held me close – So I wouldn't
let go."*



How appropriate. The church was in an incredibly poor area where people laid their laundry flat on the street to dry. With little to do, kids and moms just looked on at the crowds trying not to drive or step on their clean clothes.

After the motorcade of attendants and the Bride & Groom left, we made our way by van to the reception. Not knowing what to expect but expecting it to be different came true.

On arrival, several women in ornate clothing gathered up some spoons, steel bowls, and a fellow with a drum. They began an intense series of solo dances. One by one, a woman from the crowd would pop into the center and perform a “Liberian Break-dance”. Music would intensify and arms & legs would try to keep up to those lightning fast feet. This was cultural arts at its finest.



Wouldn't you know it; we were seated at a table of honor, next to the head table. Soon the Bride and Groom & wedding party was introduced and the homemade food was served up – mmm so yummy.



Dare we ask for the recipes? We are not sure what festivities followed as we left the celebrating after the meal. I wonder if they do the funky chicken here?

In the evening, we visited an Internet Café to send home some email. Feels great to stay in touch. The Internet was poor at best, during the entire trip. If you are planning on going to Liberia, do not count on it.

Sunday -March 25



We visited Hope Tabernacle at their temporary location – the A.I.C.A's head office.

Worship took place on the upper terrace and the streets below were filled with worship and celebration of our Jesus while kids across the street picked mangos with a 30-foot bamboo pole picker.



Bishop Klibo's wife, Martha preached on love. Bishop Klibo told the people of his faith and challenged them to sacrificially give toward the rebuilding of the church building. He is asking his congregation to raise 60,000 LD. (\$1,000 US).



The congregation is committed and joyfully counted their fund raising efforts after each meeting. When the service ended, we went into the courtyard to inspect the well they are using for their main source of water.



Bishop Klibo showed us where two men were digging for water when the quick sand gave way and two men in the hole were buried alive. The locals filled in the rest of the grave and dug a new well about 10 feet over. Another illustration that almost nothing comes to these people without sacrifice.

This new source now supplies water to many in the surrounding communities. The

hand pump & well is maintained by a local company and treated from time to time. Ted took a water sample anyway out of curiosity, which proved to be one of the worst water sources he tested.

After enjoying a lunch together at the hotel, we went through the main part of the city and saw many buildings and a bridge destroyed in the war. A testament to a time that still weighs heavy on the Liberian people.

The Lord's timing is perfect. Dave and Ted both know a young man serving on the Mercy Ship. The ship is docked here at Monrovia's Port. Jeremy is the son of a board member of Alongside International. We had the opportunity to visit him on the ship and get a tour.

The ship that many call home is named "Anastasis". Founded in 1978 as a global Christian charity by Don and Deyon Stephens, Mercy Ships is the leader in using hospital ships to deliver free world-class health care and community development services to the forgotten poor. The crew consists of volunteer professionals from around the world. Doctors, dentists, nurses, community developers, teachers, cooks, seamen, engineers, and many others donate their time and skills to the effort.

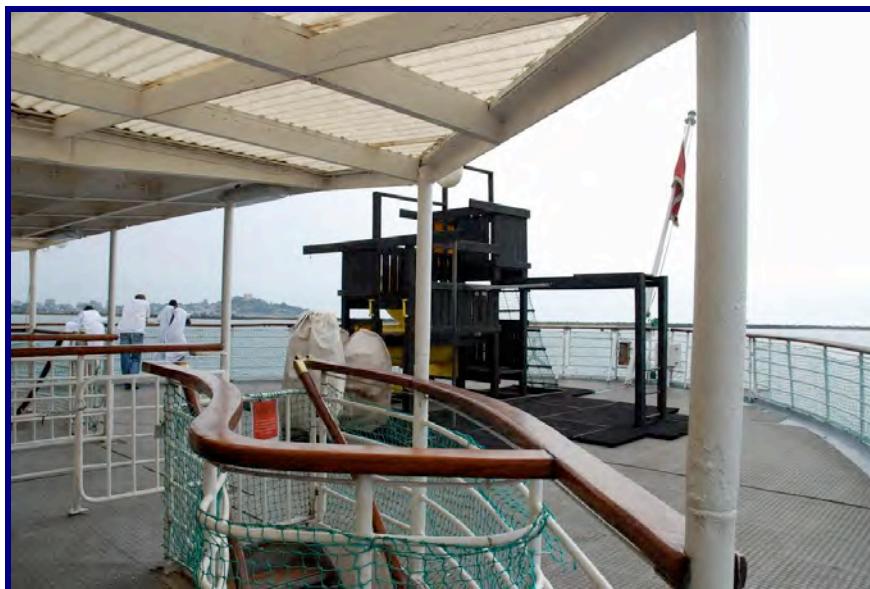
"Liberia has been known as among the worst places to be a woman on earth. Fourteen years of civil war cost a quarter of a million people their lives and splintered families and communities," states Deyon Stephens, Mercy Ships co-founder. "We look forward to helping them rebuild their lives, families and structures in any way we can."





The Mercy Ship charity “partners” with the local Gracie A. Reeves Memorial Baptist Church. Jeremy is on the construction team building a much-needed medical clinic for the Gaye Town community.

He loves his work and has many bright and talented friends on the ship. We will hope to see him again at the end of the week and perhaps have dinner with him then.



In a cursorily look around the city it only takes a few minutes to realize no NGO (non Government Organization) works in isolation. We are not here alone. Each organization has its focused ministry or humanitarian objectives, all of which serve to rebuild Liberia.



Nevertheless, is it enough? Of course, construction and infrastructures alone will not rebuild Liberia; its citizens need healing and hope for the future. Many people still tear up as they talk about their plight. Our small cluster from Alongside International is here to connect with its local partners A.I.C.A. In this unfolding process, the needs & opportunities for ministry are becoming self-evident.





It is almost certain that if the logistics of bringing a group of people here becomes feasible, Alongside International will consider with its local partners, the possibility of returning with a team.

In the evening, Bishop Klibo came to the hotel and shared his testimony and experiences during the

civil war. God has a unique calling on his life. His authenticity and love for his people was resoundingly clear. As we travel with him it is obvious he commands a lot of respect and is well known throughout the region.

Monday - March 26

Central Prison

In the ride from the airport, I asked Pastor Davies about prisons here; as it turns out he works closely with Prison Fellowship and is very involved in prison ministry.

Dave asked if we could work it in to the schedule and before you know it we were making plans to visit Central Prison located in the heart of Monrovia. After meeting Rev Kallie, and some board members involved in Prison Fellowship, we went to see the Minister of Justice and just missed her.



However, we did meet The Honorable Edwin Volawuo who is the Director of Prisons. Our whole group met in the Minister's office.

The Director told us for the first time in Liberian History he was granting permission for us to have complete and unlimited access to any prison in all of Liberia and to bring a camera in with us to take unrestricted photographs and we were given freedom to speak to whomever we wished.

This was amazing! On arrival at the Prison, someone I had not seen before came in and told the Superintendent about our special granted privileges from the Director of Prisons.



The superintendent said they had nothing to hide and in fact, it would be good for the world to see how they are falling short in the human rights department, through no fault of their own. If our visit would help in any way to inform others of the less than satisfactory conditions,

he was all for it. He genuinely thanked us for coming.

“The government of Liberia has nothing to hide” he told us, and wants us to show the world the unsustainable overcrowding, poor conditions and to see all the malnutrition. Inmates are literally starving to death. Two inmates died last week from complications from malnutrition.



The first prisoner I saw begged me for food. The women are staying in small rooms, four to a cell on the floor with only one mattress. The men have much smaller cells and have up to eight in a cell. We went right in, met them in their cells,

and shook almost all their hands. Some pleaded for food others wanted 5 dollars.



We are told the cost to feed a prisoner here is \$175.00 us/mo.. They only have 50 cents/mo. for each inmate; hence, they can easily die in prison. Many prison outbreaks result.

I saw a headline today, while driving to the prison, about a prison breakout.

This situation is further complicated by inordinate court delays, and ignorance of the new legal system, resulting in many cases, long unnecessary periods of incarnation.

The whole legal system is in the process of being completely restructured and is closely monitored by the United Nations.

We walked in the cells with the prisoners, surrounded by people with convictions & allegations against them of various crimes such as murder and rape and or being a rebel. Some doing their time while others wait for justice. Our presence was exciting and brought such joy to the prisoners to see us simply walk in and shake their hands uninhibited and even take their pictures. We went to the outdoor kitchen and watched them prepare rice, beans and cornmeal for the inmates. Ted inspected the well and we could not help wonder how potable the water is. We could only imagine some of the

health problems they are experiencing are perhaps exacerbated by poor water.

The prison guard in the picture recalled how the prison came under rocket fire during the war and they had to run for their lives. We saw how the prison was then utterly destroyed by the rebels and or inmates who wanted to get out of harms way.



A prison Guard in this prison earns about \$25 US per month. This is equivalent to the cost of rice for an average family for a month.



Christ Vision Church



After this adrenaline rush, we went to a slum here in Monrovia called “Paety Community”... Loved it there actually! As we meandered thru the maze of tin shacks and dusty walkways, we met the Pastor there. Wow, he was so happy to see us. He was full of joy and is doing a great work there.

(Community Well & Filter System)



The Pastor showed us his church building, Christ Vision Church and then took us down a lane to show the “new building project.”



Christ Vision Church Building



New Building Project



Don't let those words throw you... the new building looks like a bomb hit it!! Actually, it is just an old decrepit foundation with some partial walls. Get this... for a floor they are dumping garbage on it, it is going to be compacted & covered with sand and eventually cement will be poured. I cannot help but wonder if toxic problems will develop because this makeshift landfill site that may include solvents, pesticides and volatile organic compounds, many of which have been linked to cause fetal damage.

This project is midstream and it seems unlikely anything we say will dissuade their plan. Not because they are stubborn but because they are unaware of health risks while struggling to be resourceful with what is at hand. Maybe that is why at least in part, the life expectancy in Liberia is under 48 years.

Moving on we visited Pastor Matthew Chea who has served at his church for 35 years. This is the oldest and founding church in the A.I.C.A. His wife died and she is resting outside the church in a concrete tomb. Something about this gives a sense of permanency to his ministry. The church building needs a new roof. (Hit by rockets-what else.)



The roof and some of the main supports have significant wartime structural damage. We huddled for prayer with the Pastor and prayed a blessing for his ongoing fruitful ministry. This place needs lots of work, as they tell us the recent structural repairs are only a temporary fix.



At the risk of sounding repetitive, we drove to another series of tin walls, wooden windows and well-worn paths linking all the residents together. It is unbelievable here. Whisking through of this slum me just want to with whoever was We saw bright and subsistent dusty spoke volumes to physical and In the heart of this **Bishop H. Memorial Church** that is in need of a ceiling. This would be during a worship service.



the passageways community made stop and connect there in that spot. curious faces in spaces. This us of their emotional needs. place, we toured

Marwiea

– A large building floor, doors and a be a neat place to

Mixed with a little Liberian rhythm, it would be like a sand storm in there!



We can only anticipate our presence here will bring some sense of hope to the people that look as if they have little. Many will no doubt live out their whole life in this community.



In their own way, they do seem productive and purposeful. Our hope is that they will be purpose driven with the help of the local ministries that are spotted throughout these communities.

Next to the church is the **Wonjaia Memorial Medical Clinic**. I can find no words just now to describe it. The clinic is without electricity and not even a generator. The water is

from a shallow dug well, (likely contaminated) and there are no medicines. They do perform surgery here. They call in an anaesthetist and a surgeon and who will do surgery in this dumpy room with only light from the window. When they took us to the pharmacy, we saw some old wheel chairs and nearly empty shelves.



It is hard to conceive they operate a clinic and yet have almost nothing. What they do have is a full staff. Not just sure how many, if not all are volunteers, but they are a dedicated group. We did meet one patient there who had fallen out of a palm tree and damaged several internal organs.





They desperately need furnishings, general supplies, and a generator so they can see what they are doing, run the necessary equipment and a fan for the surgeon. Under the heat of the day, we grouped in a circle and had a time of prayer for the staff.

Tuesday - Mar 27

Just returned from a day trip from a Home and Training Center for Orphaned Children, (Bethuelwa) called **Zou Mission**. It is located in Bgarpolu County, what an interesting trip.



Through the city and way out in the country... took us over 3 hours to get there, but saw many interesting sights and we took many pictures. The kids are adorable.



We ate a typical Liberian meal there. Rice and bush meat... the bush meat is like fish of the day... today the meat was porcupine. It was scrumptious!



The center just completed a well project last month and after finishing it, the fellow doing the work unknowingly used the wrong type of back fill and the well is now contaminated. Ted has taken a sample for testing cholera and other bacteria.

The well was in a low level area and almost next to a potentially polluted stream about 20 ft. away. Ted tested the water and found it E-coli positive. They had also dug a (dry) well on an elevated area some distance away but had to abandon it before reaching water because they encountered a large boulder that they could not get past. This stream meandered around the site to a pool area downstream, next to the highway where a number of ladies were doing laundry. (Wonder what was going on upstream?)

Ted suggests an alternative to correct the situation is to introduce a simple method to disinfect the water (Sodis) or preferably to drill a new well down into the aquifer rather than to rely on a shallow hand dug well.

What a resourceful and knowledgeable guy he is. He will perform the test here and then bring a small sample home to test for chemicals. It turns out that the test results are not good at all. These children need clean water. It is a shame about the well. They are very disappointed at the home for the kids.



They have about 60-80 children and range in all ages. Some kids are there because their Muslim parents abandoned them when the kids became Christians.



Others lost parents to AIDS or the war itself. The Director and his wife are doing a fine job and are committed to the welfare of these children. They have little and yet they make it through.

Alongside International in conjunction with Bishop Klibo brought some wonderful gifts, shoes, toothbrushes and some candy. The staff told us they and the children had to leave several times during the war to run for safety.



The government's troops and the rebels approached one another and ended up meeting right near them. A large battle ensued and several of the out buildings were damaged. The school and chapel were hit particularly hard and left some gaping holes in the roof!





The dormitories are no longer usable in their present state so the kids are bunked in two rooms in another building. Bunk beds are being built which will greatly enhance their living arrangements. They have a large piece of property here and several out buildings. Much work is needed to bring this center to a more functional standard. They need basic changes that will make this home more conducive for learning and general living. They could use a “water treatment education program” that will provide ongoing safe drinking water. This is easier said than done. Much of the process in maintaining clean water is in consistent and long-term education. They really need new roofs and roof repairs, especially to the chapel. They have outhouses, but need toilets and showers with a overhead water tank supply system.





We felt after the dust settled that this was a productive investigative day. Our days are filled with so many people to see and places to go. Each night we sit and retrace our steps and make some general notes. We do not want the people we meet and the needs of each place we visit, lost in a cluster of fond memories.

A miniature GPS tracker is tracking this whole trip. It will later link to our digital pictures showing a ground shot and a satellite image of our travels. It should provide a breadcrumb trail of the places we have been and illustrate them on Earth Google. Ted anticipates using the geographical data files to research water databases.

The Global Positioning System (GPS) is another technological advance making it easier for land managers to develop a GIS (Global information System) database. GPS units allow people to determine the geographic coordinates of landscape features. For example, GPS units can be used to locate management units (pastures, fields, stands) on a map more accurately and easily than before. GPS coordinates can also be taken at the site where water quality samples are collected. These coordinates can then be entered into the GIS database allowing these features to be positioned on the watershed map.

A GIS database is used to track actual changes taking place over time within a watershed. Satellite photographs and other spatial data generated at different points in time (some of it mapped using GPS units) are used to measure changes in land use, land cover, density of roads, houses, the presence or absence of buffer zones around streams, and other items of interest.



As this information is collected and evaluated, it is possible to make connections between water quality data (if available) and the changes in land use that have occurred in an area. Ideally, there will be water quality data available from several different points in time. As you can imagine, Ted and I had some interesting technical chats.



Wednesday - March 28

We are headed out on a long journey to Bong County. We will stay overnight at the village in Whomqbay.

With much preparation, an arduous trip began thru the central part of Monrovia. It was dotted with several typical short stops to get this or that and add to our passenger list. We ended up with 9 in our vehicle. So we took a squishy ride to Bong County, somewhere near the central interior of Liberia.

GPS data will later help pinpoint just where we were.

We stopped at a small village ("en route") to give greetings to a church there called **New Land Bible Church**. The children and the villages were waiting for us and sang as we arrived. We had a quick gathering there which included some children's presentations. Bishop Klibo challenged them to remain faithful and to persevere in the face of unprecedented hardship. God is faithful and He is able. David Miclash gave greetings from all of us and spoke some encouraging words about why we have come to Liberia.



When we piled outside back in the hot sun, Ted inspected the water well. Kids several rows deep crowded me as I asked them to sing a song. In a few seconds, they burst into song and they all joined in. I recorded it on my mini digital recorder and when Dave gave me the high sign that we had to leave now, I played it back for them. They gave a resounding unified squeal of delight and were amazed to hear themselves.





The trip carried on and thru the peaks and valleys of the road, (aka potholes) we headed deep into the jungle of Liberia. Bishop Klibo received a call on his cell to tell him the

children are lined up on the road waiting to greet us. They have been waiting 3 hours for us to get there. On Arrival we entered an archway of Palm Fronds. They took palm branches and formed them into an arch interspersed with flowers. They were very excited on our arrival, they sang, and clapped for us. The children and leaders proudly led us on foot to the central part of the village. Now this is a village

in the true sense of the word. Some mud huts, with thatch roofs and others with tin roofs and walls of local made clay bricks.





A solid house made of cement was near the middle and that is where they had us stay. We ended up in-between two huge cotton trees that are not unlike Redwood trees in California.



The pictures are stunning. We were not there long when Bishop Klibo had us call our wives back in Canada. I think the only thing that works well in Liberia is the cell telephone network. I was very impressed.



It was good to call home from so far away. We toured the school and the area near where we were sleeping. For supper we had beef and rice... and it was very good. As we ate, the group set up for the meeting. We had brought drums, a loudspeaker system, and a keyboard with us.

Because I was speaking at the revival type meeting, I had asked the Bishop what the greatest need for the community was. He replied "their need for reconciliation and to forgive the rebels from the war times". The rebels hit this community hard because it is on the path from Guinea. So I spoke on forgiveness.



That night, many people became Christians – Wow, there was standing room only in the dirt in our outside auditorium. Several others also stood and raised their hand high to signify they will clean out any bitterness in their hearts and make room for forgiveness for all the past harm done to them. I told them how I work with

prisoners all the time that I challenge them and their victims to forgive those who have harmed them or killed a family member of theirs... I know it is not easy and the first step is committing to the process of working on it. The message was warmly received. God did



heart surgery; it was moving to witness it. Bishop Klibo was so happy after that, he uncharacteristically danced for the people in the village. They laughed and gave him a thunderous applause!

That night I had spoken about Joseph in the well and how he did not hold his brothers accountable for their evil deed. The next day, the leader of the nearby villages gave us a tour. He showed us a well that when the rebels came, they shot several men and threw their bodies into the well. Last night's message was so real to them personally. Later the villagers filled the well with dirt and left the bodies there, as they had no way of removing them. It is sad testament to the



heavyhearted people to go on from one-day to the next with seemingly insurmountable suffering and pain.

We encountered many small children, women getting water, and cleaning deer hide. It was truly like going back in a time machine! Yet cell phones worked there. Another contrast.



This is not a tourist area and so they do not get many visitors. Down by the water stream from where they carry drinking water, there is one of two hand pumps in the village. Like most wells, this one is nicely finished in a firm concrete base. It was only completed in October of this past year and yet has never worked. The village used to get their main water from this former dug well, but a contractor came in to complete all the wells in the area.





The villages were not happy because the contractor did not finish the process and it was just left not working. It looks complete, so they got paid. So even the poorest of the poor are taken advantage of. The good news is Ted tested the water from the other well (shown Below) and it passed with flying colors!





It was not easy sleeping with a generator running until 2:30 in the morning. They did it for us to supply power for a fan and provide light. The light had no switch, and the exhaust took out a few more brain cells! Ted was ahead of his game; he unscrewed his light bulb and slept in the dark just like you're suppose to. Thank God they ran out of fuel, none of us wanted carbon monoxide poisoning.

We awoke in the morning to a chunk of clanging steel hanging in the center of the village. It routinely wakes everyone and gets the kids ready for school activities. It was fun to be in this place. The people are loving, sincere and overjoyed with our presence. They could not thank us enough.



David brought gifts to the elders of the village. He presented gifts of shoes, candy, soap and toothbrushes. Unless someone brings these things, they will clearly do without.



A woman came to us and told us of her stomach sickness, and that she had had it for a long time. It is from the water but they have no choice but to drink the water. They also need education for disease prevention. We did notice back in the capital city, many signs with basic life skills on how to wash your hands and prevent communicable diseases of every kind. However, not so in the deep remote areas, such signs are not on display here. Wow, there are so many opportunities to help. Simple life skills, education and disease prevention teaching along with some well restoration work, could turn their world around.

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The Elders and our contingency met on our borrowed veranda, between the huge Cotton trees and heard about the communities need for two bridges and a medical clinic. We prayed with them and Dave tried hard not to instil false hope, (As we did everywhere we went). Their expectations are high and our resources are so limited. Being a part of Alongside International here in this needy country will require focus and prayerful planning if we hope to do anything in an effective manner.



With a nice egg and bread breakfast, and a group shot with the Elders, we set off out of this village. The villagers returned to the habits of daily living, but many now with a new faith and clemency towards their former enemies.



Thursday – March 29

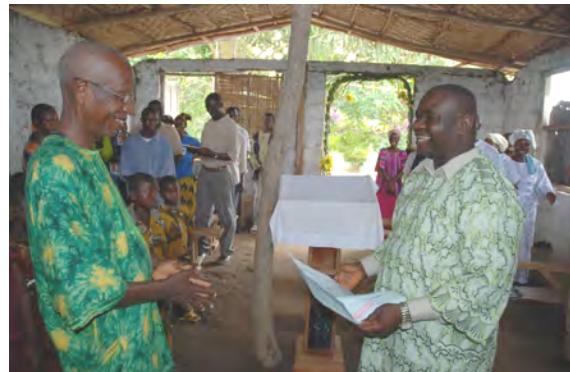
On the way back to the city, we stopped at Gbarnga Congregation.

Children paraded us in again and went thru an arbour arrayed with flowers. Pastor Fredrick along with his assistant Pastor Moomoo led a small program in Bishop Klibo's honor. Today he met these people and spoke there for the first time. In the ceremony, Bishop Klibo received the deed to the new property, where a new church is being constructed. A traditional gift chicken and nice shirt were presented to him in keeping with a local custom.



He urged them to have their new building filled with people by the time they moved into it.

Before leaving, we enjoyed a meal together. We ate fish and vegetable rice and a local drink, Fanta.





We did a photo with the whole group and then they “gave us the road”. We were given a cheerful and warm send off.



Had to stop and take a picture of this!

We arrived in Monrovia at rush hour or peak of the market and wiggled our way back to the hotel. Washed off the busy traffic black diesel exhaust, had dinner and got some rest.



In the hotel lobby, a soft-spoken man with a humble demeanour asked to speak to me privately outside. I suspected he wanted to hit me up for money, so I came right to the point. “Is it about money?” He was insistent that it was a private matter. Being Canadian, I did not act harshly towards him, as perhaps a local would have to get rid of him.



He then pulled out his Immigration I.D. card and spoke in a more authoritative voice saying, “I saw you at the airport and I want to discuss official business with you outside now! He got my attention, but I was still sceptical. Once outside he put his official I.D. in his pocket and burst into tears. The man told me his son just died and his body was at the hospital. He has to get the body to the morgue and prepare for burial. (Now I saw the pitch coming) I asked how much does this cost. “\$20 US”, he said with a heavy heart. I told him, “I cannot help him but I know someone who can.” As anyone learns on a trip like this, the leadership tells us repeatedly, if anyone asks you directly for assistance of any kind, it is to be directed to the local partner. So my response was “Bishop Klibo is in the hotel and is coming out any minute now, he is well connected and will help you get what ever you need done.” The man in tears began to walk away. I called out to him, “Your son is dead, he can wait five more minutes.” The man said, “No, he could not wait.” As he walked past the hotel security and out onto the street, I knew without a doubt this man had tried very hard but was not authentic. Moments later Bishop Klibo came out and I told him the reader’s digest version and he went to see if he could find the man, but he was gone.

This was not the only person who came to one of us for financial aid. After a few days in Monrovia, you realize it is not dangerous there, and the hotel security is primarily there to keep you from solicitation of all kinds. A few got through, so you have to wonder how many did not.

Friday - March 30



Today we went to visit the **Bishop Marwieh School** staff and students. It is almost across the street from the A.I.C.A. Office. Dave brought greetings as we visited all the class rooms. Of course they do not have any electricity, and the rooms are dark, but they are forging ahead and doing so successfully. The students were "stiff" and seemed like it was hard to crack a smile. Dave told his best jokes and still did not penetrate. We determined later they were not hard hearted, but carried guarded hearts. We did get them to smile!

It is not a right for these kids to be here, but a privilege. Someone has to pay for their education and so we came away sensing a deep commitment to the education process. Some of these students are sponsored from people in other countries. We had a chance to speak frankly about their current lack of possibilities the way the county is now. However, the Principal is optimistic for the future. The education they are getting will serve them well and their country as they rebuild. It was a joy for the three of us to go through all those classes and have no homework at the end of the day!





After some coaching, we saw teeth.



Borrowing the Principals' Flag off his desk, it was set to this back drop

When we had some quiet time in Bishop Klibo's office just before a meeting with his Board, I told him an insightful story about a man that was about to have surgery. The Dr. told him that the pending surgery would damage his eyesight or his memory. He had to choose which one he wanted to keep. He quickly told the Dr. he wanted to keep his eyesight. When asked why, the man replied, "I would much rather see where I am going than to remember where I have been." That is what we are observing here, people want to focus on the future and not dwell on the past. It is encouraging for us to see. Bishop Klibo agreed and said it was a fitting story for his fellow countrymen.



We went into the meeting with his regional board members and they shared enthusiasm and hope for rebuilding Liberia. They were totally amazed that we would come to them. They know now, they are **not forgotten**. It was very informative; we had some prayer and talked about God's work.



More gifts to be presented to Bishop Klibo

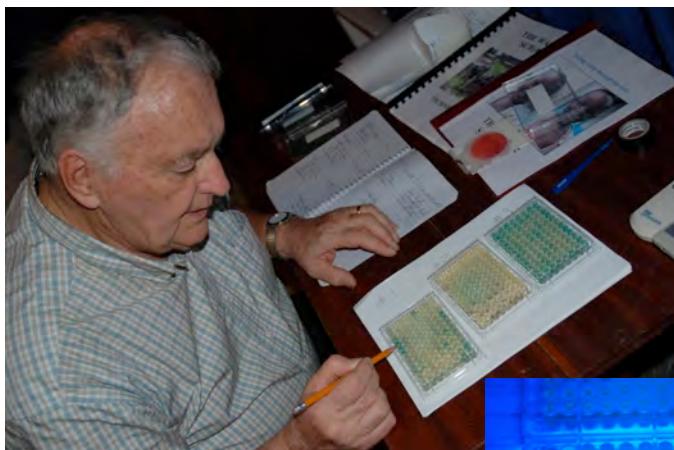


Founder of A.I.C.A.
Arch Bishop Rev. Dr. Augustus Marwieg

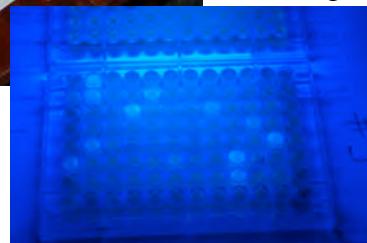


Unofficial Observer

Friday evening we went to the Royal Hotel to meet Jeremy and several of his friends from the Mercy Ship. We had a great time. David showed some PowerPoint shows and we had an astute discussion about ministry in Liberia and topped it off with Italian Ice cream in a local parlour called Mono Lisa.



Ted was doing some water tests, using the incubator to grow potential pockets of bacteria and then tested some samples with Ultraviolet light in his mini lab. The results were becoming self-evident and you can read about it in his report.



Saturday - March 31

Bishop Klibo took us to the market area and we bought some local souvenirs to take home. David was our chief negotiator, and managed some good deals for us. Thanks Dave!



Tourist shops!





During some down time, I had the opportunity to ask **Rev. Arthur Horton** how he was called into the ministry. He told me an remarkable story that happened to him during the war. At that time he was very involved in discipling new believers. He would walk from place to place, spend time with new Christians, and guide them in a series of short Bible studies. Then suddenly when he was walking home one day, he was deliberately approached by a group of Liberian soldiers, arrested, and accused of being a rebel. Someone had actually reported him to be a rebel and anything he said fell on deaf ears. He felt powerless. The soldiers took him to a remote area for what he calls "Jungle Justice." He knew enough from seeing dead bodies on the street that rebels had their shoes and watches removed and then murdered. The Liberian Justice system had all but collapsed, and had been replaced with Jungle Justice, which was to

kill the suspect and dump his body in the street to warn others. Arthur knew his end was near when they took his watch and shoes and handcuffed him to a pole. Moments before they were to execute him he saw a military vehicle drive past. The man in the passenger seat was someone he had previously discipled and was now an officer in the army. They made eye contact and that was enough to save his life in the nick of time! The man ordered the vehicle stopped and told the soldiers he knew the Arthur and he was not a rebel. He ordered them to release him. Arthur quickly retrieved his belongings and got out of there as quickly as he could. On the way home, he dedicated the rest of his life to serve God in full time ministry. I told Author every time I go past a Tim Horton's he will come to my mind.

Sunday - April 1

Today we walked to the service at Hope Tabernacle Church were Bishop Klibo preached. We encounter many people also walking & all dressed up for Sunday, and many carrying bibles. We could not help notice the nice embroidered shirts some of the men had on, and I said, "Sure would like to get one of those shirts."

When the service we attended was near the end, the people presented all of us with that same type of shirt, pants, and a "pope hat" to go with it. We gave thanks to the church and prayed a blessing for them in all that they do.



Dave gave a brief presentation about the extensive work of Alongside International in Africa.



Ted and Dave presented Bishop Klibo with a Discovery Series with Theological Training on CD re Assemblies of God African Hope. It was gratefully received.

It could not get much hotter outside when seven men including us, piled into the van for the 45-minute ride back to the Monrovia Airport. As you can imagine it was bitter sweet to leave. Nearly 2 weeks away from family and friends, and now we had to leave a whole newfound batch of brothers and sisters!



Brussels layover was only 14 hours this time but it provided a window for us to see the city in an open-topped tour bus. Now we have some daylight pictures of this historical city. To start the day off properly, we took out a mortgage to purchase a Belgian waffle!



The flights were all comfortable and gave us time to debrief and discuss the embryonic beginnings of future aid possibilities in Liberia.



The trip was just as anticipated; investigative, overwhelming, insightful and challenging. Traveling with David and Ted proved to be a positive memorable adventure. However the Lord leads in the follow-up of this “spy out the land” mission, it will only serve to give God glory. The “Church Universal” wakens in your mind when you visit a foreign land and meet different people with whom we share so much in common with as believers. Being in the family of God transcends our over-inflated view of our own North American self-importance. In addition, it motivates us to love the church as Christ did. We are not even on the same playing field as Christ – as he gave his life. I count it a privilege to be a small part of this quiet demonstration of love & look forward with anticipation to what will happen next!

The Beginning

**Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Tom Newell
April, 2007**



A quick look at Liberia and its culture.

The government derives a sizable income from registering ships; low fees and lack of control over shipping operations have made the Liberian merchant marine one of the world's largest. Internal communications are poor, with few paved roads and only a few short, freight-carrying rail lines. Iron ore, diamonds, rubber, timber, and coffee provide the bulk of the export earnings. In general, the value of imports greatly exceeds that of exports, and the country has accumulated massive international debts. Liberia's main trading partners are the United States and the countries of the European Union.

Liberia



Republic, western Africa. Area: 37,743 sq mi (97,754 sq km). Population (2005 est.): 2,900,000.

Religions: indigenous beliefs 40%, Christian 40%, Muslim 20%

Capital: Monrovia. Liberia's ethnic groups include the Americo-Liberians, descendants of the black freedmen who emigrated from the U.S. in the 19th century; and 16 indigenous peoples of the Mande, Kwa, and Mel linguistic groups.

Languages: English (official), indigenous languages. Religions: traditional beliefs, Christianity, Islam. Currency: Liberian dollar.

Mealtime Customs

In Liberia, the table is set with turned over plates and glasses with a napkin on top, so that the guest may turn over the clean dishes for use. Those at the meal greet each other by shaking hands. While shaking, they take the middle finger of the other person's right hand and snap it up and down. This tradition comes from the days of slavery, when the slave owner would break a slave's finger in order to establish ownership. The handshake (or "snapshake") celebrates Liberia's freedom from slavery.

The cook brings out all the food at once, and stays seated at the table during the entire meal. All the dishes remain on the table until the end of the meal. Most Liberians will eat with their fingers, although American customs have brought utensils to the dining rooms of many city people. A typical Liberian dinner consists of *dumboy* or *fufu* served with palm butter and palava sauce, meat stew, country chop (a mixture of meats, fish, and greens cooked in palm oil), jollof rice, and beef internal soup. Rice bread and sweet

potato pone are served for dessert, and ginger beer is drunk throughout the meal. Coffee is served only on special occasions.

In the city of Monrovia, there are some modern restaurants, such as Mono Lisa with the Italian ice cream. But in most towns there are small "cook shops" that offer stews and fufu. Most cooking is still done outside on a stone hearth.

Recipes for the brave of heart

Palava

Recipe origin: Liberia

Ingredients

1½ pounds cubed beef

1 onion, sliced

2 tomatoes, peeled and sliced

Ginger, to taste

Red pepper, to taste

¼–½ cup peanut oil

2 10-ounce packages of frozen, chopped spinach

Procedure

Boil meat in a little water until tender, about 45 minutes.

Fry onion, tomatoes, and spices in oil.

Add spinach and meat to the onions and tomatoes, and simmer 10–15 minutes.

Serves 6.

Jollof Rice

Recipe origin: Ghana

Ingredients

1¼ cups white rice

1 medium onion, chopped

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast

2 teaspoons vegetable oil

1 can (6-ounce) tomato paste

3 cups chicken broth

Procedure

In a saucepan sauté rice and onion in oil.

Cover and cook until onion is translucent and soft.

Cut chicken into ½-inch cubes and add to sauté mixture.

Mix in tomato paste and then broth.

Bring mixture to a boil.

Cover pan and reduce heat to low.

Cook until rice is tender, liquid is absorbed, and chicken is cooked, about 20 to 25 minutes.

Fufu (a doughy food that accompanies most meals) can be made from rice, plantain, cassava, corn, or yam. The starchy food is dried, pounded until ground, boiled, and rolled into two-inch ovals. Most Liberians use cassava to make *fufu*; a variation, called *dumboy*,

is boiled before mashing. *Fufu* is swallowed instead of chewed. It is popularly eaten with a spicy soup. *Beef internal soup* is made with beef, dried codfish, tripe, and other smoked fish caught from the nearby ocean. Hot peppers are added to many foods for an extra kick, and ground cayenne peppers are used as flavorings and preservatives. Favorite dishes include *palava* sauce, made traditionally with *plato* (okra) leaves, dried fish or meat, and palm oil; and *jollof rice*, a chicken, beef, and bacon dish with vegetables and rice. Palava sauce comes primarily from the counties of Maryland and Grand Kru.

Rice Bread

Recipe origin: Liberia

Ingredients

2 cups rice, cooked and mashed

3 Tablespoons sugar

4 teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

1½ bananas, mashed

2 eggs

1½ cups milk

1 cup oil

Procedure

Mix together rice, sugar, baking powder, and salt.

Add bananas, eggs, milk, and oil.

Bake in a greased 9- by 12-inch pan at 375°F for 45 minutes.

Goat Soup – National Soup

Recipe origin: Liberia

Ingredients

2 pounds goat meat (can substitute lamb or beef)

Hot peppers

2 medium onions, sliced

2 quarts water

3 tomatoes

8 ounces tomato paste

Salt, black pepper

Procedure

Cut up the meat into 2–3 inch pieces.

Marinate with peppers, salt, black pepper, and onion for about an hour.

Add water and boil until meat is tender.

Add tomatoes and paste and cook until tomatoes are soft

For more information please contact:



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