

South Africa 2015 by Elliot Mulligan

As with any recount, I think one should always start with the journey there. A six and a half hour plane journey from Manchester to Dubai is not something everyone experiences on a day-to-day basis, and for someone whose longest flight so far is the flight from Leeds-Bradford to Amsterdam, I would be lying if I said I didn't board the plane feeling slightly apprehensive. However, I am glad to report that the flight went by without a hitch, and with plenty of books to read, friends to talk to and a T.V. in front of you, we landed in Dubai in what felt like half an hour. We had around two hours to kill in Dubai airport, before we boarded the plane to Durban and embarked on an eight hour plane journey. Sadly, I slept for the majority of this flight, so I have nothing to report on what happened during the flight, but I am reliably informed that it was a pleasant journey.

We arrived at Shaka International Airport at approximately 16:45 and on waking up from my slumber, I found that it was beginning to get dark. At first this was a shock, but then I remembered that the summer months in the northern hemisphere are the winter months in the southern hemisphere, which explained the darkness. Once we managed to make our way through passport control, which was a bit of a hassle as South Africa have recently changed the laws concerning children travelling into the country, we were greeted by a man called Logan and our driver for the duration of our stay, Vusi. Logan and his wife have organised the Bambisanani trip for the past 5 years, so the teachers who joined us on the trip were already familiar with them. We introduced ourselves then boarded the coach for a two hour journey to Eshowe, and the guest house where we were to spend the next 10 days. I tried to absorb our surroundings by looking out of the window, but as it was dark all I could make out were the shadows of the hills.

We arrived at Chennells Guest House at around 19:00, where we were greeted by Graham Chennells, his wife and their two cooks/cleaners. They had prepared a large meal of chicken and rice for all of us, a very popular dish in South Africa, a fact we would begin to realise as the week progressed. Half way through the meal, the lights suddenly went off. Graham informed us that this was normal, and that due to an increased demand for electricity in South Africa, the government would sporadically turn off the electricity in a certain area, usually without warning. This meant that after nearly 48 hours travelling, we would not be able to shower or wash. This wasn't well received by the group but we put on a brave face and drew up a rota for showers in the morning. I had already surveyed the sleeping arrangements upon arrival at the Guest House and found that there were three rooms for the boys, two rooms of two and one room of four. As I am a very light sleeper, a characteristic unfortunately inherited from my mother, I chose to sleep in a room of two with my friend Mitchell sleeping in the other bed. The rooms were spacious and the beds were very comfortable, although I noticed that there were no radiators anywhere in the house. This was presumably because of the heat, even though it was winter it could reach 35 degrees during the day. Before too long I fell asleep.

We all woke up, me for the second time, at 07:00. Friday was the day we visited Mnyakanya High School for the first time. After a big breakfast, we boarded the coach and set off. As it was light, we were able to look out of the windows and see the landscape of South Africa. This occupied us all until 45 minutes late, we arrived.

Mnyakanya High School is situated on a flat area of land surrounded by rolling hills and is opposite Jacob Zuma's house, the President of South Africa. As a result of this, all the roads around the area were perfect, but we were told that if we had visited five years earlier, we would have been driving on dirt tracks. The coach pulled up outside the school and we stepped off. We were greeted by an armed guard sat outside the school in a hut, who explained to us his job was to protect the school and lock up after everyone goes home. We were then led on a tour round the school by a young student called Tabby, one of the 30 young leaders we would be mentoring during our stay. We saw

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the school library, the headmaster's office and the computer room, which had around 20 computers. During our stay, I never saw any students use the computers, which made me wonder how often they are used.

After the tour, the 14 students from St Mary's and the 30 South African Leaders gathered in a small room and did a variety of team building activities in order to get to know one another. After this we went out onto the school field, which was basically a dirt pitch covered in grass and animal droppings. Over the next few days, we had to teach them how to play rounders, tag rugby and handball, so we decided it would be best if we spent that day playing the sports with them, as we thought they would understand it better through playing. This finished at around 3pm, then we boarded the coach and went back to Eshowe



One of the stunning views on the drive to Mnyakanya

As there was no school on Saturday or Sunday, this allowed us to become tourists for the weekend and explore the surrounding region of Kwa Zulu Natal. On Saturday we first visited a traditional Zulu village/museum called Shakaland, named after the great Zulu king Shaka. Here we learned what life is like in traditional villages, such as the fact that a man can have as many wives as he wants, as long as he has the cows to pay for them. We also witnessed various Zulu dances in the big hut, or Kraal, at the end of the tour. After this we had the chance to buy some gifts such as handmade bracelets and hand carved wooden animals. The visit to Shakaland was very eye-opening, but at the same time I felt sorry for them, in a sense, that a once proud nation of people had been reduced to selling small gifts to survive.

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Next the group and I went to see Eshowe Fort Museum and Arts Centre. As we arrived just before closing time, it was clear to see that the staff didn't want to spend ages showing us around. In fact, it



could probably be described as a whistle-stop tour, which all together lasted around five minutes. We saw the fort and an old church, then finished it off with a visit to the arts centre, which had a large collection of old and new Zulu art and pottery. After this we got on the coach and headed back to the guest house, the sun setting behind the white Eshowe fort.

On Sunday we woke at around 04:30, which was hard seeing as though we only went to sleep five hours earlier. The reason for this early start was simple. It was the day of the safari. The safari park was a few hours' drive away, so we set off early so as to get to the park in the best time to see the animals. We all slept the majority of the way there, but I woke just in time to see a glorious sunrise over the trees. We arrived at the Hhluhluwe Game Reserve with Logan at around 10:30pm. Logan has been on the safaris with previous groups, so he was the best person to have with us to spot the animals, and he promised we'd see at least three of the big five. The tour lasted around five hours, with a stop off at a viewpoint for lunch. Unfortunately, we didn't spot any big cats, although there were many false shouts of 'Leopard! On the way out of the Game Reserve, we found our path blocked by a herd of buffalo and a few rhinoceros. I seized the moment and leant out of the coach to try and get a 'selfie' with a buffalo, to a certain degree of success. What the cars behind our coach must have been thinking I don't know, but it's not every day you can say you are in a traffic jam caused by buffalo and

The sun setting behind Eshowe Fort

ons, vultures, zebras,



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giraffes and impala. Whilst typing this, I have decided to attach some photos to this file, as I believe pictures of the animals will do more than words.

Safe to say all of us slept very well on Sunday night. We woke on Monday to a lovely breakfast. I feel I ought to mention the food briefly, which was superb every day. There was also a drink served with every meal, a sort of fruit juice thing, which was possibly the best drink I've ever tasted and I think I shall crave it till the day I die. The staff were also very nice; they particularly liked it when I tried to speak Zulu to them.

Before going to Mnyakanya, we had arranged to stop off at Ntolwane primary school. We were met by a small group of boys of about 10 years old, and they agreed to show us around the school. One boy in particular asked me if he could have my Bambisanani wristband, and obviously I said yes. It turned out that he'd asked the same of six others, and at the end of the day had amassed a considerable collection of wristbands, much to his delight. Whilst at the primary school, we visited every classroom, and read with the pupils and they asked us questions, the most popular question being, 'how old are you?' which for some reason created a lot of laughs when we all replied that we were 17. The last classroom we visited was the youngest in age, and after they did a little dance for us, we went to their tables and talked and coloured with them. I tried speaking Zulu to the kids on my table, but they ended up laughing hysterically. Obviously I was saying something wrong. After this we all gathered in their main hall. Whilst we sat down, the school's oldest students sang for us and did a drama performance about the importance of working hard at school. Nothing quite sounds the same as African children singing, it has a unique sound which I much prefer to the sound of English schoolchildren singing. After this we all posed for a group photo, and somehow my friend Niall and I ended up carrying the boy who had all the wristbands. When this was over, we got on the coach, waved goodbye and set off for Mnyakanya High School.



Ntolwane and St Marys students pose for a photo

The rest of Monday and Tuesday pretty much consisted of the same thing, teaching the 30 African Leaders who to effectively teach Handball, Tag Rugby and Rounders. We split off into three groups and I ended up in the tag rugby group. Although the students seemed to understand the idea of grabbing the tags, it was hard for them to grasp the concept of running forward and passing the ball backwards. If it was not for the four students for Eshowe High School, who could speak English and Zulu fluently, we would have found teaching them extremely difficult. In preparation for the sports festival on Wednesday, where the African Leaders would have to teach 100 Primary School students

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the sports, we taught them how to have all the equipment ready and the pitches set up. As Tuesday came to an end, my group and I felt that the African Leaders were ready for the sports festival.

As well as teaching the students how to play sports, we also had to teach a lesson for them on either Monday or Tuesday. Niall and I chose to teach our music lesson on the Tuesday. Having already planned our lesson beforehand, we had five minutes to set everything up. The lesson began with the students listening to a recording of London's Burning and had the students sing it back to us in unison, then in rounds. Changing from a traditional English song to a Zulu song, we sang a song called 'Siyahamba' in unison, then got the students to add a beat by banging on the desks. After this we handed everyone a kazoo and taught them how to play them. We then split them into five different groups and asked them to compose a song. Whilst going around helping different groups, Niall and I noticed the South African National Anthem being a popular choice of song, with most groups choosing to play it in their groups, singing, banging the tables and playing the kazoos. Therefore, at the end of the lesson, we got everyone to come up to the front of the classroom together and perform the National Anthem. We think that this was the first time the South African National Anthem was played with more than 30 kazoos. But we'd have to check.

On one coach journey back from Mnyakanya High School, we gave two students a lift back home. My friend Niall and I had kazoos in our bags and we played some songs for them which they enjoyed. One of the students, Tabby, kept laughing at me when I started telling jokes and she said to me, 'Elliot, I wish you could stay here forever, so you could make me happy when I am sad'. This is probably one of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me and something I will remember for the rest of my life.

We woke up on Wednesday morning feeling slightly apprehensive. We didn't know exactly how many primary school students would turn up to the festival, the estimated number was anywhere between 50 and 200. When we arrived at Mnyakanya, we had our final hour with the students just to answer any final questions they had. They were relieved when we told them that they could teach the lessons in Zulu, as although their English was better than our Zulu, we both thought the primary school children would understand the instructions better in their own language.

With everything set up and prepared for the festival, we settled down in a classroom and the African teachers treated us to lunch, which turned out to be a take away from a local Nandos. Once this delicious meal was finished, we went outside and waited for the schoolchildren to arrive. The first half arrived on our coach, which had a capacity of 22 people but somehow 52 African children poured out. Once the second half arrived, we split them into three groups and gave them football shirts that were kindly donated by Andy, a teacher at Leeds University who joined us on our trip. Then it was up to the 30 African Leaders to teach three groups of 35 children, one group at a time, the individual sports. What followed was nothing short of amazing. We finally saw all our hard work pay off, and within 10 minutes all three groups were running around playing. The Leaders had everything under control and were able to teach the schoolchildren how to play the sports easily. Each group had an hour to teach their sport before the primary school children rotated. After three hours, everything was finished and we gathered everyone together on the sports pitch for a final thank you. I spoke first and thanked the children for coming, asked them if they enjoyed their day and then thanked the African Leaders for teaching and running the activities so efficiently. Once this was complete, we all headed into the main hall for a reading festival lead by us.

We entered the main hall to find a vast array of books by the side of the wall, all donated by various different people back in England. There are simply too many names to remember, but everyone who donated books should know they will be treasured. Splitting off into 14 groups, each St Marys

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Student lead a group of around 10 children in reading different books. My group read one of my childhood favourites, *'We're going on a bear hunt'*. The reading festival lasted for only half an hour, but the primary school children and the children at Mnyakanya High School were able to keep books, which pleased them greatly.

After saying an emotional goodbye to the primary school children, we headed back to the room where we had our lunch and prepared to give presents to the 30 African Leaders. We had been told previously to keep the present giving inside the classroom, as if the news spread that gifts were being handed out, the whole school would crowd us. When they came, I handed out bracelets, kazoos and my hat. I gave my Bambisanani t-shirt to a girl called Nonotehelo, who I had worked with closely over the past few days. After receiving special South African scarves from the teachers at Mnyakanya, we took numerous photos with everyone before heading to the main hall for an assembly/performance put on by the students of Mnyakanya.

The students who we had worked with all lined up outside the entrance to the hall and there we said our 'official' goodbyes. We entered the hall to find it packed full of students (when I say full, I mean health and safety risk style full). What followed was probably the weirdest hour I will ever experience inside a school hall. There was singing and dancing from the Africans to really loud music, to which they pretended to play the guitar and sing. The whole room exploded when the Principal walked in and started dancing. Admittedly the decibel level dropped considerably when Niall and I walked up to play guitar, apparently acoustic guitar isn't very popular in rural South Africa. It ended in a rather impromptu event in which everyone got up and started dancing. The whole thing seemed rather spontaneous but we were later told they had been up until 4am practising in the dark. We all boarded the coach after saying another goodbye and headed towards a final treat for us, a visit to a natural hot springs. Dangling our feet in the pools of pleasantly warm, if not slightly sulphurous



water, watching the sun set over the hills was a perfect way to mark our farewell to Mnyakanya.

Thursday was our final day in Eshowe and we were scheduled to visit Zulufadder Orphanage. Beforehand we paid a visit to Eshowe town centre, although we were only allowed to drive through the centre for safety reasons, and stopped on the outskirts of town at a local café. This was owned by Graham, the owner of our Guest House and also of the massive hotel over the road. Apparently even after the end of apartheid, the division of wealth in South Africa still favours the white upper class, and it is often the case that the black lower classes do the domestic work, as demonstrated at Chennells Guest House.

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After finishing our drinks, we had lunch on top of a mountain on the outskirts of Eshowe Township. The views were remarkable and you could clearly see the separate Zulu tribes on the mountainsides. Annoyingly a man came and parked his van right in front of us, but the view was still spectacular. Once we had finished our lunch, we boarded the coach and made our way to the orphanage. We drove through Eshowe Township and for the first time were able to witness the extreme poverty some people live in, literally shacks the size of a garden shed with tarpaulin for a roof. We drove



through this for arou **A child at Zulufadder Orphanage dancing on an oil keg**

As the coach pulled up to the orphanage, streams of children ran out and ran alongside us. The woman who runs the orphanage, Poppy, also ran out to greet us and they all started singing, 'Oh this is a happy day'. Once we opened the coach doors, all the children started running towards us, eager for us pick them up, to carry them and give them hugs and high fives. When someone says the word 'orphan' or 'orphanage', most people automatically think negative, unhappy thoughts, but at Zulufadder orphanage there was not one unhappy face. We all immediately gathered in the playground outside the orphanage and formed a circle, where we played different games. We then split off into various groups and sat down on the ground and read different stories. In my group, I tried reading a story to five young children, but after a couple of words they would repeat back what I had just read. This meant that I only had time to read a few stories but the children enjoyed it. After reading, we then proceeded to hand out the gifts we had brought. There was a wide range of gifts, from knitted socks and hats to 60 flip flops, and all were received extremely gratefully.

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We then went over to the main hut, and after a brief game of football outside, we entered and were treated to a show put on by the children, and we reciprocated with a little performance of our own. Poppy then got up and explained, in Zulu, how grateful everyone was for the gifts we had brought. At this point, a little girl of about five or six, called Iona came to sit on my knee so she could get a better view. As I went to give her a bracelet I had brought, she refused and instead gave me a bracelet she had on her arm already. I now believe this was the kindest thing anyone has ever done for me; this little girl had nothing, no parents, no toys, and she had given me what was probably one of her only possessions. After this moving encounter, we all made our way to the coach and said our goodbyes. The children surrounded the vehicle and stuck their hands through the windows and said/shouted their goodbyes.



Reading with the children of Zulufadder Orphanage

Once again we rose early on Friday morning, as later this evening we would be flying back home from Durban. The drive to Durban was a long one but was made bearable by the views out of the window. We met Logan at Shaka International Airport, he got on our coach and proceeded to give us a tour around Durban, starting with the 'wealthy' area and progressing to the poverty stricken townships. The huge difference in wealth and living standards was extraordinary, how one person could live in luxury on the seafront and at the end of the street a family of six would live in poverty. The experience truly opened my eyes to the social injustice in South Africa, 22 years after the end of apartheid.

We arrived at Logan's house in Durban just after midday and were treated to a spectacular lunch, the desserts were some of the best I've ever tasted. However, to me it felt almost rude to be treated to this feast when down the road people were starving. After the meal we boarded the coach for the last time and drove the short distance to the airport.

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Sitting on the plane back home, flying over the east coast of Africa, I felt glad to be going back home but at the same time I felt as though I could have stayed another month. The work the Bambisanani Partnership do in Kwa-Zulu Natal really does change lives, and for the brief time we were there, our eyes were opened to struggles of people on the other side of the world.

