

Tuesday, October 25, 2005



Ahhhh! Sommersville. I awake with a smile on my face, as this is our day to go to one of my favorites places. After breakfast and a walk around the quiet neighborhood by our host's father named Gilmore, Percy and Melikhaya arrive. We are soon off for the one hour drive to Sommersville.

At our turn off the main road at Tsolo, we take a slight detour to visit a government sponsored school for mentally challenged children. It is a modern series of building behind. The school's presence is largely due to the dream and efforts of one woman, Thozama Goso. We visit several class rooms where the children work on various crafts: beads, paintings and sewing. Until now they have not marketed any of the items, but they hope to someday.



We re-board our van and are off to Sommersville. We arrive and the beauty of the site is very much as I remember it in 2002. Unlike in 2002, when they thought we were coming on another day, the Sommersville Congregation is VERY ready for us. Rev. Phindile Nqakwana (Phindy), his elders, including the first woman elder of the church, and other women of the church await us in the pastor's manse. We go through the standard Xhosa handshake and hugs and spend a few moments in conversation.



Larry leads us in a brief devotional service. We eat wedge sandwiches and exchange greetings as well as thoughts on the garden project that has slowly begun. I'm anxious to see the site as we came in from a direction that does not offer a view of the project. So, I am glad when we make the long walk down the long abandoned terraced hills (which date back to the Scottish Mission days in the early 1900s) to the project land. Soon the project comes into view.

As I said, the work has slowly begun. The two hectare field has about 60% of the fencing in place. An initial plowing has also been completed. One of the churches elders shows me the plan for the field's crops. The two hectare field has sections plans for onions & carrots, butternut squash, pumpkins and potatoes. He also shows me an order form for the seeds, fertilizer and other items needed to get started.



The church owns 94 Morgans. No one knows what that means, but I estimate it to be at least 200 acres. Larry, an old farm boy, upon looking at the huge area of unused, terraced church land sees, as I do, the potential for much, much more. He speaks to the men of the church about the possibility and benefits of rotating crops like alfalfa grass and soybeans and incorporating livestock into the production, which would increase the long-range fertility of the soil and lessen the need for fertilizers and would also stop the erosion we see on the long neglected terraced fields. Covering the hills with crops and grazing livestock could potentially employ many more of the church's young people (lessening the need to emigrate to the cities looking for jobs). It would also be much more profitable. But for now the immediate dream is to get the current two hectare garden plot off the ground. But, with God's help much, much more is possible.



The need for fencing for you from America, is needed to keep the open grazing animals from eating the crops. The soil is very dry and hard and it is difficult to hand dig the fence post. This combined with difficulty in getting a good price for the treated posts helps explain the delay in completing the fencing. Larry envisions a solution based on the large number of gum trees in the area. Gum trees grow very fast and straight and are prolific. It would be possible to harvest them as a crop on the terraced hills, stabilizing the land from erosion and provide fence posts for the project and provide income by selling to others. All that would be necessary is to purchase creosote to treat the posts. I attempt to catch the beautiful setting using the panoramic mode of my camera, as well as its movie projector mode.

As we walk back up the hill, Percy tells of the big battle here in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century between the Brits and the local Xhosa tribe. It seems the British had a settlement here named Tsolo. The magistrate of the town was negotiating with the surrounding Xhosa tribe, but there was one term the tribe's chief balked out, namely it necessitated his bowing to Queen Victoria. This the chief refused to do. When informed of this, the town's magistrate told the chief that only a dog would refuse to bow to the Queen. Insulted, a small battle resulted with the magistrate being killed. The hastily appointed new magistrate managed to steal away and make his way to Grahamstown and a British Garrison there and call for reinforcements. The Brits returned, the town was burned down and the local tribe pushed out. All that remains are some foundations and an old rusty safe.



As we reach the top of the hill, we find Barb and Aaron with the woman of the church, and in particular playing with Rev. Phindy's young son. Remember, we met his wife the school teacher who is away during the

week in Kisinisiki.



After a tour of the church, we re-enter the manse for more food, chicken, beef, potato, rice, greens and soda (including TAB .... Remember from the 1970s, it lives on in South Africa). More discussion ensues and I show everyone my pictures from our 2002 trip as well as my Amish picture. They can't get over particularly how green lush our homeland is. Before we leave, our team each gets to express their feelings to our new friends at Sommerville. God's love is truly all around us. A definite bond has been built in the little time we've been here.

We depart for a drive to another congregation about 20 kilos (12 miles) away. The congregation is the S. B. Ngcobo Memorial Congregation and its pastor is Loyiso Bashe. Dusk is setting in, but there is just enough time to view their ambition project to build a very large new church. They have the walls constructed, and hope to get the roof on soon. Until completed the congregation meets in a local recreation hall. A fund-raiser will be held on November 27<sup>th</sup>. We come to realize that Pastor Loyiso is part pastor but also part salesman and looks upon us as source of funds. He asks us to pray for their project ..... but to also send money! After our tour we are of course fed chicken, beef, rice, potato, peas, carrots, and fruit juice. There is no danger that any of us will be losing any weight during our stay in Mthatha.



We drive home for some tea and pound cake and talk as Rev. Tandy from the Erskine Congregation arrives to take Sarah and Denise to their guest house.

So ends the day. Tomorrow is set for us to meet the Presbytery in a special meeting to discuss the extension of our Covenant Agreement and the possibility of beginning church-to-church linkages. Unfortunately, as I go to bed, I feel a scratchy / sore throat, which can only mean one thing, a cold coming on ..... ARGH!