**MALAWI 2018**

From the 27th June to the 15th July, 13 pupils and 2 teachers from Lockerbie Academy embarked on the trip of a lifetime to their partner school Thawale Primary School in Mulanje, Malawi. This is the 4th trip that has been organised, however this was by far the largest group going out.

Students on this trip was Rachel Hogg, 14, currently in S4; Halime Yildiz, 15, S4; Ciara McGhie, 15, S4, Aiden Kevans, 15, S4; Daniel Paget, 16, S5; Iona Ross, 16, S5; Ava Gordon, 16, S5; Mark Beattie, 16, S5; Rory Holden, 17, now former S6; Heather Beattie, 17, former S6; Elouise Borthwick, 17, former S6; Erin Lowery, 17, former S6 and Laura Webster, 18, former S6. Accompanying these students was now retired teacher and former head of the Malawi Link Committee, Helen Wright and probation history teacher Lauren Dohartaigh.

The cost of the trip for each student was met by a variety of fundraising activities both individual and as a group. These activities included ceilidh nights, sponsored bungie jumps and runs, bag packing, quiz nights, bake sales, coffee mornings as well as a pre-loved clothes sale. In addition to this, some pupils also applied for grants from organisations like The Livingstone Volunteers and local community councils.

**In Malawi**

After a gruelling journey across on three different planes we finally arrived in Lilongwe on Thursday 28th June, where we spent the night in Kiboko Town Lodge as a short respite from travelling. The following day we loaded ourselves onto a bus and travelled for 6 hours to our next accommodation; Kara O’ Mula Lodge in Mulanje District. The weekend was spent recovering from our flights and familiarising ourselves with the lodge.

Monday was our first day at Thawale and the welcome we received was overwhelming. The children flooded the road and surrounded our bus, giving us a chanting escort. We were given a welcoming ceremony where we were introduced to teachers and tribe chiefs and we presented our various gifts that were kindly donated by students, parents, teachers and other members of the Lockerbie community. Pupils from Thawale also performed acrobatic tricks and recited poems for us. The rest of the day was spent meeting and interacting with the pupils while the teachers sorted through the vast amount of donation which would later be distributed among the school community.

Tuesday morning we got up at 5am in order to be at the school in time for the feeding stations. We would serve the children porridge that had been cooked in the building that Lockerbie Academy provided in 2013. For some of the children this was the only meal they would receive that day. We continued to take part in this each day that we were at the school.

As part of the donations, hockey sticks and other sports equipment were given and on Wednesday we got the opportunity to teach some of the girls how to play. While the girls were playing hockey the boys played football and it was an afternoon enjoyed by all.

On Thursday the scholars that we sponsor through secondary school visited Thawale and we were given the opportunity to meet them and also give them a school bag containing stationary, jotters, a toothbrush and toothpaste. We also distributed the other items that were donated to various parts of the school community.

As Friday 6th July was the Malawian Independence Day, schools were on holiday so we spent the day at the Lodge. Unfortunately, it was raining the whole day so we were stuck indoors, however, thankfully, for the afternoon we were entertained by a group of traditional African dancers who were wonderful and encouraged us to join in with the dancing. Some were better than others, though everyone enjoyed it.

Saturday was a day for ourselves, to relax and reflect on the weeks experiences and on Sunday morning we visited a Presbyterian church. Unfortunately we missed the English service but sat in on the Chichewa service and gave our best shot singing the hymns.

On Monday it was a local holiday so again the school was closed so we spent the day climbing Mt. Mulanje. We climbed to the natural pools, where we were able to jump in and swim in the freezing water while enjoying a beautiful view.

Tuesday we were back in the school and Trinitus from Tina Pads visited with the reusable sanitary products that we had purchased for the standard 8 girls as well as the female scholars. We sat in while she explained to the girls how to use and wash them while also disproving misconceptions held about menstruation. It was very rewarding to see as the pupils were very happy to receive these packs and we knew they would make a considerable difference to them as they no longer would have to miss school.

Our last day at the school was Wednesday, much of the day was spent either observing classes and marking exams or playing various games with the students. A goodbye ceremony was held and we were given gifts of beautiful hand-crafted baskets in addition to being entertained by a variety of performances from the pupils, such as a choir and more acrobatics. The last day was very emotional and tears were shed by pupils at Thawale as well as ourselves.

On Thursday the 12th we headed to Mvuu Camp in Liwonde National Park. After the 5 hours bus journey from Mulanje to Liwonde we climbed into a boat and headed to our chalets in which we felt very spoiled. We then clambered into the land rovers and embarked on our first of 4 safaris. We saw a variety of animals from impala to porcupines and got to enjoy the beautiful African sunset. The next morning, we headed out on the morning boat safari where we saw elephants, hippos and crocodiles, as well as a variety of birds including kingfishers. That afternoon we went out on the boats again where we saw even more hippos and crocodiles, as we as buffalo and some rare African water skimmers, which our guide told us that birdwatchers from around the world would visit the park to see. On the Saturday morning, on our last day, we had another land safari where they took us to the Livingstone tree which we were all able to stand inside and a few climbed out of.

That afternoon we had another 5 hours on the bus back to Lilongwe where we spent a few hours in Kiboko again until heading to the airport for the horrendous and tedious journey home.

The trip was like no other any of us had every been on nor will ever go on again, though a few have already vowed to go back, sooner rather than later. The experience was very humbling and changed our perspectives, as seeing the pupils who have, in comparison, so little and yet seemed incredibly happy showed us what really matters.

From all us we would like to thank everyone in the community who contributed to the fundraising and donations, as well as a thank you to Lauren Dohertaigh for keeping us in order when we were out there. We would also like to say an especially big thank you to Helen Wright, without whom this trip would never have happened, she has faithfully kept the link going for nearly 10 years, setting up the scholarship programme and organising everything to do with our link with Malawi. We wish you a happy retirement!