

EXPERIENCES IN KENYA AND UGANDA

Beekeeping Skills? Will Travel

Dave Bonner

Standing on the edge of a steep hill overlooking the Rift Valley, to the North is the Kerio Valley and off to the west is the Masai Mara National Reserve. Sam, my driver/guide, is pointing out aspects of what is a stunning landscape.

This is the first day of a trip through Kenya and into Uganda doing work for Bees Abroad. Training village communities, who live in the bush, in various aspects of beekeeping and transferring skills, which in these areas where abject poverty is the norm, will be life changing.

So how did I get here? And I don't mean the 5 am flight from Birmingham to Amsterdam and from there to Nairobi. Then, more importantly, what am I doing here?

Visits with Global Care

I first travelled to Uganda in 2008 with a Coventry-based charity, Global Care. Global Care look after and support the families of vulnerable children. Their definition of vulnerable is quite simple: 'without support the child may die'. On this trip I was part of a team helping to build a new skills training

Global Care training apiary

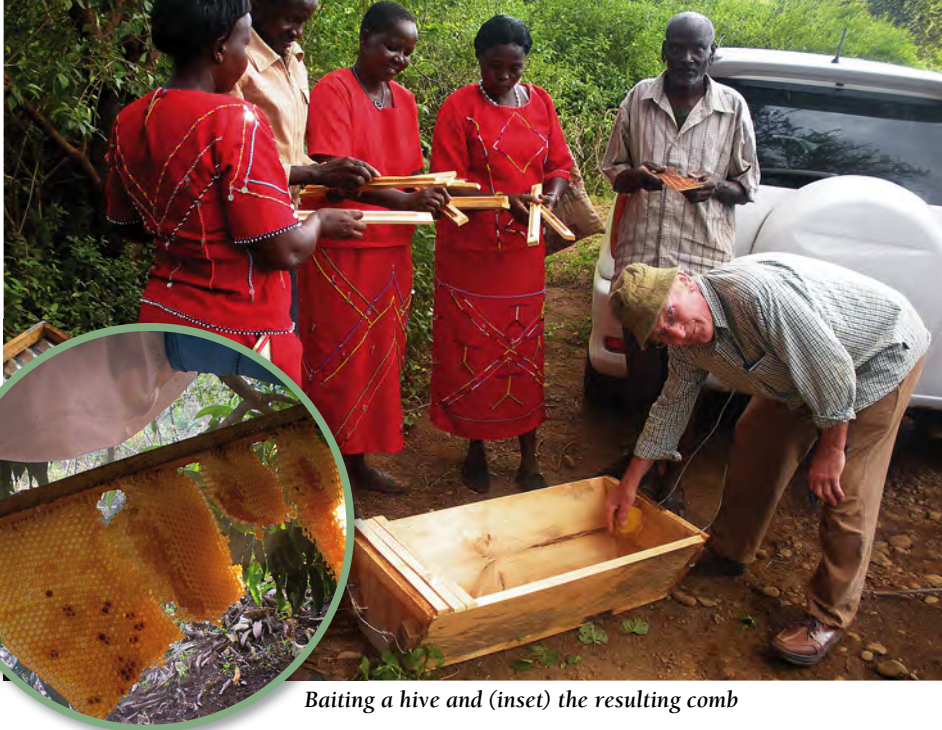


A view of the Rift Valley looking north west

centre. Then, on my next trip in 2009, it struck me that beekeeping was a very valuable skill that could be taught to the children. Global Care had a large field where farming skills were taught and a corner of this was an ideal place for a training apiary.

Consequently, plans were put in place with Global Care, and my fiancée Cathy and I raised the money to establish the training apiary, which by the time of our next visit in 2010 was up and running.

By now I had heard of Bees Abroad and the work they did, thanks to the excellent communication efforts of John Home. Having seen first-hand with Global Care the level of poverty in Uganda and the potential life-changing impact that beekeeping skills could have, I realised that by using my beekeeping experience and skills to support Bees Abroad and doing this work at the village and community level, the effect could be immense. So, Bees Abroad got a volunteer and, as a result, I came to be standing on a hill in Kenya overlooking



Baiting a hive and (inset) the resulting comb

the Rift Valley, with Sam pointing out the landmarks.

What Am I Here To Do?

My role is a Volunteer Project Manager for Bees Abroad. That means I give my time freely and undertake, with the help of Bees Abroad, the fundraising required to support the projects that come my way.

In this trip I am helping John and Mary Home who have several active projects in Kenya and, once Sam and I leave this viewpoint, we will travel further north to meet up with them. Then, during the course of the next week, we will travel from project to project conducting training courses in the most unusual places.

The training covers all aspects of beekeeping and making value-added products. This includes baiting and preparing hives, making beesuits from maize sacks, using beeswax to make candles and hand lotions, producing a luxury shampoo by introducing honey to it, and a cough medicine using honey and aloe vera, to name a few of the things. We also did some basic financial and cost management. Once we demonstrated how much money could be made from these value-added products, attention levels of the students soared.

All this training required a supply of tools and ingredients. Therefore, as we travelled each day, we stopped at markets and local stores to buy the things we needed. This also demonstrated to the students that these materials were readily available.

While all this may seem complicated, it is not. The big difference is that we tour the

local markets instead of using Amazon and we use an open fire instead of our stove in the kitchen. The students' skill at controlling an open fire and balancing pans on them is incredible. You need gas mark 5? They will achieve that by raising the pan up using a stone, or adding a stick or removing a stick which is fascinating to watch.

Into Uganda

Having spent a week with John and Mary it is time for me to do it alone. I leave them at a place called Malaba and walk across the border from Kenya into Uganda. Sam accompanies me in case I need any help with the language. The only slight difficulty is when the Ugandan border guard asks me what is in a cardboard box I am carrying. I tell him, honestly, ladies underwear. He shrugs, rolls his eyes skywards as if to say 'Brits abroad' and waves me past. Why ladies underwear? That is a story for another day, but nothing to do with beekeeping or Bees Abroad – oops, when in a hole, stop digging!

I meet my friend Charles at the Uganda passport office and he will be my guide and driver from now on.

My role changes now in that there are no active Bees Abroad projects in this area but several requests for help have been received. So my job is to visit these groups and assess their needs and decide if Bees Abroad can actually help them. If the charity can, I will work with the group to produce a more detailed project proposal which, when approved within Bees Abroad, becomes a project for me to manage and progress, in

much the same way that John and Mary are doing with their Kenyan projects.


There are four groups to visit in the next four days. Then I have a brief visit to Global Care in Soroti to see the training apiary, before going back to Kampala and a flight home.

You can read the complete blog of this trip at <http://ba2africa.blogspot.co.uk>

Privileged Position

As a Bees Abroad Project Manager I am in a very privileged position. I am able to use my skills and experience to help others who have far less than I do. I meet and make friends with some incredible people. I see parts of countries which are off the beaten track. What do I have to do? Give some of my time, organise fundraising activities, participate in the wider Bees Abroad work and organise the trips. Is it a holiday? Very definitely not. It is not for everybody. Being by yourself in a foreign country, at times in remote places, is not everybody's cup of tea.

However, if some of what you have read touches a chord with you and you think you want to experience this, then why not come along to the Bees Abroad Volunteer Day on 13 April? Learn more about the work of the charity and decide if there is a role you can play. As well as project managers, Bees Abroad is always looking for volunteers to help around the country, arranging talks for our speakers, raising awareness of the charity, etc.

Bees Abroad will also have a stand at the Bee Tradex at Stoneleigh on 1 March and at the BBKA Spring Convention at Harper Adams University on 4–5 April, so do come and talk to us there too. 



**Bees Abroad Volunteer Day –
Sunday 13 April
National Beekeeping Centre,
Stoneleigh
info@beesabroad.org.uk or
0117 230 0231**