

The Canadian Ground Water **Journal** *Canadien des eaux Souterraines*

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Soil Gas Sampling Things to Consider

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Brewster Well Drilling

Lifewater:
Days in the Lives of Volunteers



Days in the Lives of Volunteers Drilling Wells in Africa

Part 1 of 2

Lifewater.ca is a Canadian, grass-roots non-profit group that started back in 1995 after I heard an African Pastor say “It is useless to talk to people about the love of God when they are dying because they don’t have safe drinking water.” Living in Canada, where we flush safe water down our toilets, I felt compelled to respond. With the support of suppliers and drillers, several volunteers and I trained and equipped a team in Liberia and have since expanded to Nigeria, Kenya and Haiti. We train and equip local crews, the crews drill wells year-round, and we help find sponsors here in North America to make safe water affordable (although not free) for villagers living in grass-hut communities. So far, we

have completed over 700 projects, which have provided safe drinking water for over 250,000 people. Because we are run by volunteers working from home, our overhead is under five per cent and every dollar provides someone with safe water for a year! Thanks to each and every one of you who has helped make this possible!

I have now been to Africa over 25 times, and after each time I get asked what it is like to go to Africa to volunteer on a well drilling project. Or when I come back from a Lifewater trip, I am asked "How did it go?" Simple questions but complicated answers since it was not "fun" or "relaxing," but it is always rewarding and challenging. To give you a deeper understanding of how it went, I invite you to make a cup of coffee, sit back and join me on my most recent trip to Nigeria and Liberia. I trust that the following trip report will give you a glimpse of the challenges and triumphs of our work ... and maybe spur your interest in helping sponsor a project or to look at your calendar and start thinking about coming along on a trip!

Back in the African Heat

The sun was slipping below the palm trees when the plane touched down. The sky was hazy with the fine Sahara desert sand blowing over the land and the 90 degree heat filled our lungs. We are back in Africa, spending time with the Lifewater drill teams here. There were many soldiers in the airport, and several dozen at customs showed exceptional interest in the down hole camera we were bringing in to help local drillers assess the condition of problem wells. We were the last passengers to clear the airport as we were not willing to pay appreciation money to those inspecting our items. There was one military checkpoint and then we arrived at our hotel for a late night supper of curry goat.

I am glad to be here. But to be honest, I come with apprehension, since our last attempt was aborted on the runway in Accra, Ghana when the airport here in Abuja was closed due to rioting.

Sunday morning we accepted our host's invitation to join him in church. To my shame, I almost did not go because of concern over the Boko Haram. These militants have caused much death and destruction here in Nigeria over the past two to three years. Last week a compound was attacked and all were killed, and two weeks ago a church was bombed during service and many were killed. Anyway, we went and found roads blocked off close by churches with soldiers inspecting trucks and car trunks for explosive devices. After parking, lady's purses were searched and there were metal detector wands used at the door. Inside, the place was packed ... not a free chair in the building! I was asked to speak and shared from Romans 8:28 talking about how, even in bad situations, God can work for good. Many later expressed their appreciation and thanks. But I think that I was the one who was both thankful and humble for seeing the silent courage of so many people that we hear so little about.

Driving here is not what I expected. The roads are a whole lot better and the fuel availability a whole lot worse than I would have guessed in a major crude oil exporting country like



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Nigeria. Apparently the problem is fuel distribution. We saw lines of cars queuing up for blocks after a full tanker pulls into a filling station. Some minivans fill up with dozens and dozens of jerry cans and after filling roll down the road and set-up a black market filling station – no waiting time, but twice the price for those who can afford it. It is kind of like the banking experience Lynda had here – she was in the bank trying to get some money exchanged, when a street money changer came into the bank to help her with a much better rate. Certainly an unexpected cottage industry!

We spent the next three days teaching and getting to know the six local drillers. Most were well educated and could speak English quite well. When there were communication gaps, rapid conversations in Housa tribal would quickly get everyone up to speed. Some of the technology, like GPS units, Marsh Funnels and electronic water level meters were joyfully received and well understood. Others, like the desander unit, continue to be a mystery and continue to be called “The big thing that is red all over.”

One of the things I have learned over time is that there is always next time. Next time we will focus on sand content tests, drilling mud density and desanders. It reminds me of being in Liberia in 1995 training a new group of workers there. After five weeks of drill training, we were cleaning up to head to the airport when we came across the LaMotte water testing kit that we had brought. Time for one last speedy lesson. I laid out the contents under 12 sets of very confused looking eyes. I had finished explaining the first test and was honoured with bobbing heads, smiles and no questions. I was ready to move on to the next one when Glenn Stronks said, “Too fast Jim, you lost them all.” So I went back to basic principles. I pulled out a thermometer and asked “what is this?” After a few long moments, Joe the brave-heart said, “Yes, Brother Jim, I do believe that this is a device for testing water quality.” I congratulated him on his correct answer, packed up the kit and said we would go over it in more detail during our next trip. Unfortunately, the rebels swept in and it was lost

