

**OUTBOUND BUJUMBURA, BURUNDI
and NAIROBI, KENYA
March 2006**

There was no difficulty filling this outbound as many were eager to make their first trip to Africa. Our group was made up of 21 from our club and 4 from Lethbridge; we still had a waiting list from across Canada and the U.S. We met at Heathrow airport in London for an overnight flight to Bujumbura, via Nairobi. When we stepped off the plane, we were met with many smiling faces and welcomes, as well as lovely warm air. We were in Africa!

The Burundi club is made up mostly of young people who have jobs and young children. Really old folks are rare in that country, and we were told that there are probably not more than 8 people over 80 in the whole country – a conversation resulting from the note that at least one of our group was that ripe old age. Burundi and neighboring Rwanda have been involved in a civil war from 1993 to 2003, and the economy is just now improving and the country getting back on track. We were the first visitors to the Burundi club, though their members have attended international conferences.

They had done a wonderful job of organizing our week, including a 4-day tour of the countryside. We saw the spot that is considered to be the source of the Nile, memorials to the many children and adults slaughtered during the war, the stone tablet commemorating the meeting of Dr. Livingstone and Stanley in 1871, the production of tea from picking the leaves to the finished product, the noisy exciting city market where many of us couldn't resist the bargains, the sacred compound of the former kings of Burundi, huge fields of pineapple owned by Dole. We brought supplies to a primary school and visited with the children, enjoyed cultural dancing, singing and drumming, were present as the Burundi club provided a meal for street children, stayed overnight at the John Paul II seminary while on tour, bumped over terrible roads, visited an orphanage that now has 15 villages and xxx children, laughed and sang on the bus, and had some wonderful history lessons as we went along by the members of the Burundi club. We loved them! They were so good and kind to us, looking after us, making sure we were well. How about mangoes for breakfast from the trees in the yard, avocados as big as grapefruit and passion fruit and papaya! There were welcome and farewell parties, as well as another one given by our group for the host families. We ate chicken, beef, goat, fish, beans, rice, salads, vegetables, plaintain, sweet potatoes. Sometimes water would be shut off to certain sections of the city. Sometimes the electricity went off for a day. Bujumbura folks cope with these realities every day and we soon got used to them, too. They gave us the best of everything they had, including themselves, and the friendships developed will be lasting ones. The Burundi club hopes to come to Edmonton in a year or two.

Nairobi is the largest city in east Africa, about 2.4 million. The road system has not kept up with the number of cars, and traffic was unreal! But the

Nairobi club members drove us each day to our meeting place in the center of the city and from there we went by bus to our destinations. On the way, the ED would point out various points of interest, including the Canadian embassy. We spent one morning touring a bead factory, where women made a tremendous variety of beads, one by one, from clay. The finished products were marketed in a nearby shop where most of us left behind some Kenyan shillings. Our hosts were a big help when we visited a huge craft market another day, doing a bit of the bargaining for us, and pointing out items that we were unlikely to find elsewhere. Again, what we will remember most about this exchange is our wonderful hosts who accompanied us, fed us Kenyan specialties, and made us part of their families.

We had arranged a short safari to end our time in Africa. We stopped at three lodges, went on game drives, saw the Big 5 and more, marveled at the sumptuous buffets spread before us at each meal, and enjoyed luxurious accommodation for five days. We will never forget this experience and the people we met.

Jessie Parker