

Adrian and Amy's visit to Emau Hill February 2011

I last visited Emau Hill in September 2007. When I arrived back in UK, my daughter Amy, then fourteen, asked when I could take her. Well three and a half years later, in February we finally made it.

Amy and I arrived in Tanga by bus from Mombassa, hot and dusty, the road from the Tanzania-Kenya border being no more than a dirt track. Stephen was waiting with the Red Toyota I had heard so much about – and yes it is a very experienced vehicle! – it has clearly seen better days and overdue for retirement.

The unmade road from Muheza up the mountain to Emau Hill is as long and winding as I remembered, but every bit an experience we will never forget – very scenic with many splendid views as it winds its way up the mountain through numerous villages, with their residents going about their daily lives - children running, playing and waving to us. The road took us on a journey from travelling through the local population to being amongst them, passing Blue Monkeys, Red Squirrels and numerous birds, and several waterfalls on the way.

We arrived at Emau Hill late afternoon. The temperature was several degrees cooler than Tanga and feeling very pleasant. I recalled what a beautiful and peaceful place Tukae operates in – very tranquil with just the sound of the breeze in the trees, the many birds, and punctuated now and again by the occasional monkey. Soon it was time for dinner, and I was immediately reminded how good the food is – indeed this time even better than I remembered. The food the whole time we were at Emau Hill was excellent - even Amy, rather particular about her food at home, enjoyed every meal. We were both pleasantly surprised at the quality of the facilities Stephen and Pia, the staff and volunteers have established. The accommodation as good as I remembered it to be - the washing facilities at each banda great, the two shower facilities excellent, and everything kept clean and tidy. The extension to the kitchen was clearly of huge benefit and worked well. It was nice to meet Stephen and Pia again and chat with them.

I enjoyed meeting the staff, several of whom I remember from last time as well as several new faces. We took the opportunity to spend time talking with them whenever possible. In particular we had some interesting conversations with Mzee Abede, Rosa from the kitchen and Vicky in the workshop. Mzee Abede accompanied us on a couple of excellent walks, including to Shebo Meza and to his house to meet his family. Tukae now employs up to 22 people – it was good to meet most of them and to see how their skills were developing. It was fascinating to meet Martin, a local bird expert – he is a real bonus for Tukae, and is one of the most highly respected bird experts in East Africa who takes visiting birdwatchers on treks – invaluable both as a birding guide and walking guide ie visitors can explore the forests without getting lost! A couple of night walks through the forest were also organised during our stay with Martin as the guide. Those not wishing to venture out into the dark sat on the patio outside the dining banda and enjoyed the log fire. The fire made the patio very cosy, provided some light, and a little warmth, although it was not cold at night.

There were five volunteers staying at Emau Hill when we arrived, two ladies and three men, all from Denmark. Bente,53 and Birgit,66 were helping out in the Amani Womens' Craft Workshop. Soren,44 and Jens,66 were busy building the new brick construction banda. Tobias 24 and in the catering profession, helped advise on the preparation of food and other duties around the dining banda. It was pleasing to see a varied age group.

Amy and I had a memorable walk around the local area with Bente and Tobias. Jens decided to walk up Kilimanjaro after we had been there a week and the others left for a safari trip -I didn't realise we had that effect on people! It was good to see the impact the work of the volunteers is having on the operations of Tukae. The brick built banda will enhance the facilities at Emau Hill considerably and contribute towards the development of Emau Hill Forest Camp.

We met other guests staying at Emau Hill including Duncan from Arizona, a keen birdwatcher, nine Norwegians, staying for one night only before departing for Zanzibar, and two couples from UK who were working in Tanzania in the construction industry, – a varied mix of people, all attracted to the natural beauty of Emau Hill.

Amy and I visited the Amani Women's Craft Workshop a couple of times and admired the quality of products being made and chatted for a while to the three or four girls working at any one time. We could not resist buying several items, from cushion covers to bags.

Half way through our visit Anthony drove us to Tanga where he had food shopping to do as well as picking Duncan up from the bus station, thus we saw how useful it is to Stephen to have staff who can drive. Tanga bus station was very busy but after a while a small overcrowded matutu rolled up, out fell a large white (well reddish pink actually) man with a baseball cap and checked shirt and I realised we had found Duncan in all the confusion.

One of the highlights of the week was a visit to Amani Primary School. Although we arrived without warning, our visit seemed to be the ideal excuse for the classrooms to quickly empty, the children running around us delighted we had disturbed their lessons. The teachers also seemed pleased to see us and in no time at all the head teacher had organised a group of children to sing and dance for us.

One evening Father Baruti, who started Tukae with Stephen, invited Amy and I to his place for dinner. We were treated to a very nice meal, prepared by the nuns, and an evening of interesting conversation.

It was sad to have to leave Emau Hill on our last day and say goodbye. It had been a great experience for both of us, a true adventure, and one we will never forget -. it was of course not just about Tukae and Emau Hill, but about Africa and Tanzania generally - the towns, villages, houses, way of life, poverty, climate, the friendliness of the people, etc. Overall, a wonderful adventure. It has definitely ignited a spark in Amy and I to want to do more for Tukae. It was also good to be reminded of how the work of Tukae is benefiting the local people. We are of course always aware of this, but being so far away from it means reading about it rather than experiencing it - very different things! Amy and I left Emau Hill with a lot of memories, a camera full of photos, a very nice packed lunch, and a determination to revisit Emau Hill again sometime.

A full selection of photos from our visit and videos of the children from Amani Primary School can be viewed on Tukaes website www.tukae.org – please take a look.

Adrian Clive
Chair of Trustees