

NEWSLETTER 2: RFH ON TOUR

community | building together | discovering

On the Road

Just driving and being on the road here is an experience unto itself. It's a truly beautiful landscape going by my windows. Throughout the drive from Namibia to Malawi there is a tremendous shift in terrain, colors, vegetation and whether or not there are people along the road. Whereas in Namibia you could drive for days without seeing a single person, Malawi requires constant attention and frequent honking to ensure no moving 'obstacles' accidentally find their way under the car.

Along the many small roads, with their crumbling edges, there is a continuous bustle of goats, cows, donkey carts, pigs, cyclists, motorcyclists (more often than not without helmet or driver's license) and pedestrians who seem to appear from every which way. Another significant difference with Namibia is the width of the roads. There, I could cruise along on 15m wide gravel roads without other traffic. Here, the minibuses go flying by at the most unlikely moments.

More focus and less sightseeing here in Malawi, then. Even so, I can certainly still enjoy the view as I drive over the mountain pass to Chikwawa, the area I'll be staying for the coming months. Fantastic!!



01-03-2023 Children's event in the dome at Uis-settlement, Namibia

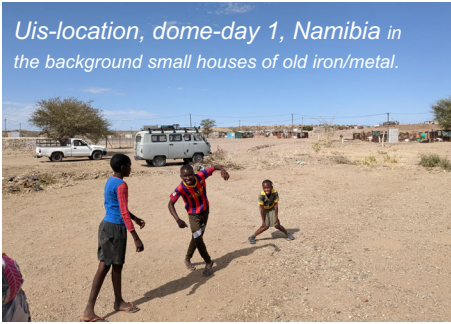
Community Feeling

The first dome has been built! It was a beautiful day full of fun and insightful moments. On Wednesday morning at 9.00am I had arranged to meet with Thyren Russel and his aunt Entenesia at Uis, where his aunt and her family live. Uis is a settlement where mine workers were housed and the end of the 20th century. When work in the mine was suspended at the end of 1999, a result of various complicated circumstances, the remaining village became disadvantaged with many of the small houses falling into disrepair and very poor living conditions.

Thyren told me about these circumstances in a lovely spot in the middle of nowhere between Uis and Korichas, where I spent a night with my buddy at an elephant NGO, EHRA. He shared stories about his aunt, who works tirelessly for the local community, orphans, and school drop-outs, supporting them with a warm meal or clothing, for example. She often does this from her own yard or under a tree somewhere in the middle of the settlement. This is not necessarily an ideal situation, rather driven out of necessity and limited options.

The enthusiasm and passion Thyren showed for this work with, and for, people in the community touched me deeply and we came up with a plan to build the dome, a temporary community space, there amid the dilapidated dwellings. Together with his aunt, Entenesia and other villagers!

Uis-location, dome-day 1, Namibia in the background small houses of old iron/metal.



Always an Outsider?

Though I've been to Malawi often and have lived and worked in the same place, know the people of Lauji and the surrounding villages, I remain an outsider. Every time I ride my bike to the market, I'm greeted from all sides by cheerful voices. 'Muli bwanji Narda!' 'Narda!, bwino bwino!' 'Mwadsuka bwanji Narda!' etc. (different types of greetings in Chichewa) Super fun, but at the same time if I come across a stranger it's always 'Muzungu!!' (white person) And at the market there are still moments where a vendor essentially announces that a white woman is approaching and that the prices can go up...

A bummer really because it always gives me the feeling that I'm an outsider. I feel this both in the Netherlands, where I pursue other things than the system expects of me, and on the road where everyone seems so hospitable but where I'm approached as a foreign exception.

Could there be a place where this feeling is different, where you can be completely integrated with the surroundings, with the people who live there and just be who you are...?

Interesting. Stuff to think about.



Community event, Uis-location, Namibia

Sharing Experiences

During the building process you're constantly active and in conversation. Explaining certain constructions, demonstrating the steps, checking that everyone understands, talking about the 'how' and 'why' of building together and the impermanence of a community space. All kinds of things come up as we build. When the dome is finished, people often stand still to take in what it is we've actually created together. A look of surprise followed by a feeling of pride and even euphoria. I always finish the build off with a collective high five! This time as well, in the beginning of March, in the small village of Uis, Namibia. Great work everyone.

Then everyone is welcomed to enter the space and they go in, one by one. We share our experiences. What is it like to stand in a space you've created? How does it feel? What is the importance of being together? And so many other questions. This information and shared experience are not only important for our Roof for Humanity on Tour research, but for the people themselves to stand still by what is it to build together toward a place where everyone is welcome and what the collective building process itself can mean for the community.

Something which is very nice to share during these kind of building days is that you really don't need much to create something beautiful. It only takes showing up for one another, some creativity and a (rough) plan. More about this first dome-day in another newsletter, but first a glimpse of Malawi.



Beautiful Baobab tree at Ahava Ministries, Lauji

Ahava Ministries Malawi

Why first from Namibia to Malawi instead of traveling around in Botswana and/or Zambia, for example? That's in part due to the temporary repair done on my buddy (see first newsletter). A wire-fix for the gas pedal cable meant I could drive further, but for how long?

Kilometers, Costs and Income

My buddy and I have made significant mileage since the beginning of Roof for Humanity on Tour. Here's a bit of information about the number of kilometers, tanks of gas and other financial aspects of the trip thus far.

From Scherpenzeel to Agadir we drove 4584 km, using 627 liters of gas. After my buddy spent 41 days on a container ship, we went from Walvisbaai 5843 km down the road to Ahava Ministries, in Chikwawa district Malawi. This took 742 liters of gas. **Total distance 10,427km and 1369 liter gasoline.**

These travel costs are part of the RfH tour and are paid in part by fantastic sponsors like you via our website*, and in part by partner organizations that support our Tour. Many many thanks to you all!

The rest of the costs during the tour are covered by my personal funds, from work and savings in the Netherlands. Only the costs for the dome activities are paid by foundation RfH, meaning I pay the cost of living, repairs, visas etc. myself.

This has been a dream for a long time so naturally I've set aside money over the years for these costs and buying my buddy, the bus. Feel free to ask any other questions you may have! We strive to be transparent and open about everything, including finances.

If you want to support our Tour financial, **you can!** via this [link](#).

After RfH on Tour

What's next? A good question that I don't have a concrete answer for now. This tour, together with all the previous RfH projects have made one thing very clear: a plan set in stone is almost impossible to follow. Haha. So for now just waiting to see what comes our way after this...

This meant I went through these two beautiful countries quicker than expected and on to Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi. And from there further to the south, to Lauji in Chikwawa.

Ahava Ministries Malawi, located in Lauji, was the site of my first building project on the African continent, in 2012. With the foundation 'Bouwen,' I lead a team of local men, some builders but mostly lively and willing volunteer workers, for the construction of a nurses' home. It was Ahava Ministries' first building, a health clinic for the local (impoverished) population.

I returned to Lauji in 2019 for another wonderful project with the local team and we had the idea to build an office/meeting room in the future. The timing of this third project aligned perfectly with our RfH tour and provided me with an opportunity to generate some income along the way. *(because, well... savings accounts empty out on such a tour, as you can read in the sidebar about the financial aspects of the trip).*

Achieving more together than alone!?

Our vision about working together on beautiful things that benefit both people and the environment fits perfectly with Ahava's ideals. A few examples are their numerous recycling projects, local initiatives, and use of their garden for food production for seniors.



Preparing the second dome-day together with amaye Cecilia

The Second Dome of the Tour!

Building the dome was a fitting addition to Ahava Ministries' current projects with the surrounding villages, for various reasons. The most significant reason being the discussion of possible ways to limit damage from future heavy rainfall, caused by cyclones like the one that came in from Mozambique last year. Better to create resilient landscapes by growing more trees, for example. Plans and preparations for the second dome-day are underway!

Read more about it in the next newsletter!