

The Ramu River Flood of 2002

The river is one of the central features of life for the Mbore people. It is a major source of food, a means of travel, and a lifeline through which they access health and education services. The river can, however, be less than a blessing.

The Ramu river floods almost every year but most years this flooding is contained to a narrow corridor. Some years, though, a higher than normal flood occurs and serious problems result. This is one of those years.



A banana plant succumbs to the rising water

The water began creeping higher and higher around the first week of March and by the middle of the month had invaded the village of Tambapmining. Several houses were surrounded by water but that was a mere inconvenience compared to what would follow. By the end of the month, the community's water source was contaminated and many of the gardens that the people rely on for their food had been destroyed. Also a large number of vanilla plots that the men had planted and carefully tended for the past few years were wiped out just as they were ready to begin bearing their first crops.

The vanilla will be replanted, and because of the abundance of fish and sago (a starchy substance derived from the sago palm tree) no one is going to starve this year but nevertheless it is going to be a tough time for the Mbore.



Sago, while filling is hardly nourishing and it takes several years of work to see the first crop from vanilla. The people have asked for assistance from the government and we are hoping to see some donations of food supplies from the disaster assistance agency. Please pray that God would sustain the Mbore people and that Kathy and I can find ways to minister effectively to them during this time of need.

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Ramu Ramblings

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*Serving the people of the Lower Ramu river valley
of Papua New Guinea*



Spring 2002

Vol. 16 No. 1

Our First Visit to the Bosman Language Group



With the Ramu River flooding, just getting to the boat can be interesting.
Kathy slogs through the water on her way to where the boat is tied.

We woke early on Sunday morning to begin our trip upriver to the Bosman language group. We had been there once before, back in 1985, but that was only in passing. This would be our first time to actually meet the people and discuss the Bible translation ministry with them.

It had rained most of the night but by 7 AM, our scheduled departure time, there was only a dreary, threatening overcast so Kathy and I gathered our supplies for the day and stopped our way down to the boat. A large number of people were already waiting there when we arrived. Several people in Tambapmining have relatives in the Bosman language group and were taking the opportunity provided by our trip to go and visit. By the time we cast off 20 people,

large quantities of food, and a huge bundle of firewood had made their way into the boat.

The Ramu had dropped somewhat and the floating debris and large trees that are so common during the rainy season were absent. That was a relief because it meant that we could speed up a bit without worrying about clobbering a sunken tree.

After 20 minutes or so we saw a man waving frantically from the shore. I slowed down and pulled over. He was a village leader from the Bosman language who had heard of our visit and wanted a ride to the meeting. Good thing we stopped. Leaving a village leader stranded on the bank of the river probably would not have been a good way to start the work.

In short order we arrived at the tributary leading up to the Bosman village of Dongan where the meeting was to be held. We weaved our way along trying to follow the main channel and thereby avoid any sunken obstacles. This was a paradise of wildlife. Fish were jumping around the boat and as we would round a bend, various types of water birds would take flight. Sometimes we feel like we are living a National Geographic special.

Arriving at the village we assembled in the mens' house. This is where all important matters are discussed. Since women are prohibited from

Bosman (continued)

entering the men's' house Kathy sat with the other women at a house close by.

When a critical mass of the leaders of the village had arrived the meeting began. I explained the purpose of the meeting and why it was important for them to be able to have God's word in their own language. We talked about our vision for providing translations for all the languages of the Ottilien family and discussed how that could be accomplished.

In a multi-language program of this type, the community must own and actually run the translation and literacy work. The missionary



Kyle meets with the Bosman leaders to discuss the possibility of starting a translation program there.

translator serves as a trainer, consultant, encourager, and equipper. One leader asked me if I thought I was able to do translations in all those languages. My response was that there was no possible way that I could do it. But by working together, Kathy and I along side of each community, the job could be done.

By the end of the meeting, the people had already reached a consensus. They were ready and eager to start. Already they were discussing names of possible people who could assist with the various aspects of the work.

We have scheduled a two-day Translation Awareness workshop to be held at Dongan in April. At this workshop we will show in detail how the translation project will work and what the various tasks associated with the program will be. After that the leaders will be able to select people to assist in the project.

After the meeting closed, we made our way to the boat and started back down river to Tambapmining. We were very happy with how the meeting had turned out and were looking forward to returning in April. But still I was thinking about the question that had been asked. Could we do it? Even with heavy community support, running simultaneous translation programs in several language groups is going to be a daunting task.

Then I realized that my answer had been incomplete. The job can be done but success does not rest merely on the labors and cooperation of the communities and us. The success of this work depends just as much on the prayer support of God's people back in the US. If we all work together, and only if we all work together, the people of the Bosman, Kaian, Marangis, Mbore, Akihim, and Awar language groups will some day soon hear God's word in their languages for the first time.



The meeting completed, the Bosman people line the banks of the river to see us off.

Fitting In – Language Learning and Relationships

Fitting in, becoming comfortable with the culture, getting to know the people, and learning the language are the main emphases for most new missionaries early in their work. We are no exception. Having been in the village only a few weeks, we are still learning the names of our neighbors and how the extended families fit together. Because relationships and family are such an important part of the lives of the people here, knowing who is who and how they are related is important.

Even though we are starting new in Tambapmining, there is a lot of foundational knowledge already in place. Our previous work prepared us well for our ministry here in terms of understanding the culture and people. In addition, it is great to be able to tackle language learning with a dictionary and grammar paper already in place. The Parrishes who worked here previously did a lot of the hard work in analyzing the language. Now all we have to do is learn it.

Language learning at this stage is mostly memorizing key phrases and words and then using them until they become natural. For example, the other day Kathy and I learned how to say “We are going down the river” and “We are going back up to our house.” Then as we left the house and walked along the river we practiced the first phrase with everyone we met. After awhile we turned around and practiced the second phrase as we returned to our house. It is pretty basic but it is actually fun to be able to communicate a bit. And the villagers love hearing us working on learning their language.

Giving and receiving food is an important part of the culture in most PNG villages. Reciprocation or mutual sharing is a kind of safety net that assures that no one goes hungry. Kathy has her own way of reciprocating. When someone brings us a bunch of bananas, she takes

a few and bakes some banana bread, which we return to the giver. The same goes with pumpkin bread from pumpkins. Once word of this system got around, we received so much food that Kathy was unable to keep up with the baking. And her supplies of flour and sugar ran low quickly. So we will have to fine-tune the system but you get the idea of how it works. Even though it is simple and straight forward, a gift of banana bread does wonders for building relationships here.



Kathy makes extra pumpkin bread with the generous food gifts we received.

Web Site Update

Following are some of the additions and updates to be found on our web site at www.flyingfox.org:

- New Photos in the Photo Gallery
- List of items needed
- Recent prayer and newsletters added
- Some new journal entries.