

**YOUNG
LEADER'S
MERCY
MISSION**

WATER FOR LIFE

*It took two years of
fundraising and
training, plus an Olave
Baden-Powell Bursary,
before Young Leader
Judith Hunter could
make tracks for Kenya on
a Water for Africa project.*



Judith with Venture Scout Philip Thompson and those 'antique' sewing machines

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Clean water and adequate sanitation are among the basic requirements for improving health in rural Africa, where they are so widely lacking.

So what better way to spend an Olave Baden-Powell Bursary than by taking part in a scheme to build a clinic with these facilities in a Kenyan village?

This is what Young Leader Judith Hunter did when she joined the Cleveland and Sunderland Scout and Guide *Water For Africa* project team.

Last summer, after a long bout of feverish fundraising and training in manual skills, Judith set off with the team for the village of Murinduko, where many of the locals had never seen a white woman before.

It proved a memorable experience, which she describes here:

“Murinduko is in a banana-growing area, about 120km north of Nairobi, on the edge of the Mwea rice fields, near Mount Kenya.

Although it is a very beautiful area, vector-borne diseases like malaria are

very common and mortality rates are high, due to lack of adequate medical facilities.

In 1986 the local people of Murinduko decided to build a health clinic. But then there was a big drought and the villagers, being mainly peasant farmers, were unable to raise the money needed and so the scheme came to a halt.

Then *Water For Africa* project leader Doug Corbin, from Cleveland, arranged through the Kenya Scouts Association to mount an expedition to Murinduko in July, '92, to build a clinic with a piped water supply and proper latrines.

It was to be a joint venture, involving British and Kenyan Scouts and Guides, as well as the local people.

The cost was estimated at £50,000 for the project, plus £700 for each team member to cover travel and subsistence. It was decided to ship out in advance a container of tools and other equipment. On completion of the project, these would be left for the

village and Kenyan Scouts.

In the team would be five leaders, ten assistant leaders and 35 Venture Scouts, Young Leaders and Rangers. They would be away for a month.

Training and fundraising started two years in advance. Training weekends, at which we learned skills like plastering and drystone walling, were held mainly at Scout centres in the Cleveland area.

We learned to work together as a team and did jobs like laying patios. Some of these jobs also earned cash for the project.

All kinds of building tools and equipment had to be collected, from trowels to concrete mixers. And, as cooking was to be over open wood fires, we also needed fire grids, along with large pans and all the usual utensils. After use, this equipment would also be left behind for the benefit of the village women.

We also collected hand and treadle sewing machines for them. Some were "antiques", more than 50 years old, but still in working order. For the Murinduko village school we collected hundreds of books, along with paper, pens and pencils.

A great-uncle of mine, Bill Lee, made up a number of bicycles from parts he collected, for use in Murinduko. The team also acquired an electric generator and two vehicles.

To make our needs known I visited Guide and Brownie units, Scout troops and the local primary school. I also put notices in churches.

Our local reporter was very helpful and, after a report in the paper, we were inundated.

All these items were eventually repaired, cleaned and despatched for shipment. I also sent a large box of books and equipment for the Murinduko Guides.

Fundraising was a major task and Doug Corbin advised us to use "any legal method". So we did just that, and set about collecting aluminium and steel cans to sell; holding coffee mornings, fashion shows, jumble and car boot sales; as well as holding sponsored events.

Permission was obtained to collect in clubs, stores and a shopping mall. We also were able to make house-to-house collections. Local firms and trusts were invited to make donations.

Then, at last, we were ready. We had the equipment, we had the money — and we had the uniform, including the logo T-shirt, purple necker and *Water For Africa* badge. Early on Sunday, July 19, we set off to fly to Nairobi and from there in a battered old school bus over bumpy roads and dirt tracks to Murinduko.

The bus could not negotiate the last mile, but waiting to help carry our luggage were the local school children.

At the village I learned that I had been invited to visit the Rev David Hinton and his wife, whom I had previously met in Sunderland, at Meru, where they are serving with the Methodist church.

The Hintons collected me by car and I found the journey very interesting, seeing the villages, roadside markets and several volcanoes.

I attended a service conducted by Mr Hinton at a boarding school which has 72 Guides. The pupils were smartly dressed and very attentive. I explained why I was in Kenya.

On the building site we worked in six teams, on a six-day rota: two days' hard labour, one day's light duties, such as cooking and cleaning, two days' hard work, and then a day off.

Our days started at 6am, when Alan Charlesworth, Project Engineer, from the Cleveland Scouts, ensured we

toe. I returned to my bed, getting up again later for some "light duties" with the catering department!

Because of the uneven size of the blocks, large amounts of mortar were needed to make the joints. All walls were rendered on the inside. We covered our roof trusses with corrugated iron sheets to form the roof.

We made provision for a water



JUDITH HUNTER

▲ Going up:
the building gets
under way



JUDITH HUNTER

◀ At last:
the health
clinic is
ready for use

were awake by banging on a shovel.

We worked until 9am, when we had breakfast, and then continued, with a break for lunch, until 5.30pm. After the evening meal bedtime was 9pm... or even earlier.

The clinic was planned to provide a patients' waiting area, a verandah, giving access to treatment rooms, a water supply and latrines. In addition, it was to have 600 metres of fencing.

All the outside walls of the clinic were built from stone blocks of varying size. Interior walls were of breeze blocks. The lintels over the doors and windows were of concrete, cast by us. We put in a damp course and laid a concrete floor. Window frames were locally made, unglazed but with security grilles. We made the door frames and roof trusses.

The building stones, being large, were very heavy to lift into place, especially when we were balanced on our makeshift scaffolding. Early one morning one of these blocks fell on my

supply inside the clinic and drainage into a cesspit, which we dug. Local children filled it with stones for drainage. We also built the latrines.

The local people were very interested in us — most had never seen white women or girls before. The children would stare at us and they liked to handle my hair. They kept us supplied with firewood and corn-on-the-cob.

It was winter in Kenya but the temperature was like that of a very hot day in an English summer. We also had to contend with a chronic shortage of water, red dust from the eruption of Mount Kenya, which got everywhere, scorpions and tarantulas. Fortunately no-one was bitten by anything more lethal than a mosquito.

Yet, as I left the people of Murinduko I felt I had been privileged to help build their much-needed clinic and to work with the *Water For Africa* team, and the Kenya Scouts and Guides who gave us such valuable support. ♡

JUDITH HUNTER