



We wish you a very happy New Year.

The start of the new year is often a time when we anticipate changes and opportunities that lie ahead in the next twelve months. For us, we know that there are going to be massive changes as we leave PNG in February after 25 years. Already there are painful moments as we do things for the last time, or say farewell to a friend whom we're unlikely to see again. These are all part of the leaving process, but made more extreme by the fact that we're not just relocating within the country, but to the other side of the planet.



Packing our wooden crates is already quite advanced.

Deciding what to give away, what to sell and what to send home is a challenge!

The months since the last Diaries have been as busy as expected:

- Farewell to the Eastern Highlands
- Handing over to the Flight Operations Manager again
- Operations Director cover
- Friends visit and time together in Telefomin
- Earthquake disaster relief
- The last PNG trek: Lapalama to Kompiam
- Tok Pisin courses and new opportunities
- Brand new Cessna Caravans to arrive soon



Farewell to Eastern Highlands

During November Michael flew for probably the last time in the Eastern Highlands. Here coffee is being loaded at Gema, while women wearing *tapa* capes, made from tree bark, look on.

FOM to deputy FOM to OD!

Brad Venter returned from leave at the end of November and has taken over the Flight Operations Manager role again. Michael moved to a support role for Brad as deputy FOM.

Now he's back Brad will go through the approval process with CASA PNG, the

aviation regulator, to formalise his FOM appointment.

In the meantime ... at the end of December, Doug Miles, the Operations Director (the line manager for the FOM, Crew Training Manager, Engineering Manager and others) has gone on leave. Guess who has been asked to sit in his chair (though with his responsibilities shared around) until he returns at the beginning of February!

Earthquake relief

The after-shocks from the major earthquakes last February and March have died away. The mountainsides that were scoured clean of trees and left with the red soil or white limestone rock exposed have begun to darken and look less vivid.

For the villages affected in the Southern Highlands and Hela provinces, life has continued to be difficult. In Hela Province the situation is complicated by the fact that the province has a reputation, not wholly undeserved in some places, for anarchy and violence.

As a result, some major aid organisations will not supply communities within its boundaries. One of the worst affected communities, Huya, falls in this category and, despite them being the same people group as Dodomona a few miles to the west, and with no security issues, Dodomona gets help while Huya doesn't.

There are some people and organisations that are helping communities regardless of political boundaries. For some of the communities like Dodomona and Huya, hunger is an issue. Even after nearly a year since the earthquake gardens are not producing adequately yet and food supplies of rice have been needed.



Top rt and middle rt: Unloading bales of rice at Dodomona and covering it with a tarpaulin to protect it from the rain.

Lower rt: Sally Lloyd, who has done a huge amount to help earthquake affected communities, with Michael's First Officer, Glenys Watson, sheltering under an umbrella.

Lower lt: Children using locally produced umbrellas.



A special visit

During October our very good friends, Dave & Jane Lister, came and stayed for nearly three weeks.

For about half that time we were in Telefomin, in the west of PNG and not far from the Indonesian border, which gave them an opportunity to see what life is like in more remote parts of the country, rather than in a major town like Mount Hagen.

While Michael was out flying, Nicki, Dave and Jane visited the local market, explored the community and enjoyed talking with the people they met.

There were a couple of opportunities to take them to even more remote communities, including Blackwara, or Blackwater. It was fun telling the local people that this is the name of where we live in the UK! Thousands of miles apart, two places almost unimaginably different, but with the same name.



Dave & Jane at Wanakipa on the way to Telefomin.

The Telefomin valley

The last epic PNG trek

In 2010 Dr Dave Mills and Michael walked in to Lapalama to see if it was possible to reopen the airstrip after years of disuse due to tribal fighting.

When the community heard we are leaving next year, they asked if Dave and Michael could return for a visit.

We already planned to visit Dave and Karina and their family at Kompiam, so this also provided the opportunity for one more epic hike! It also provided Nicki the chance to spend time with Karina discussing an exciting option for Tok Pisin and cultural orientation after we leave.

On Wednesday 28th November we flew to Kompiam in the little Cessna 172. The following day one of the Cessna 208s flew Dave and Michael to Lapalama, a flight of only 5 minutes compared with the gruelling 4 hour trek (only 8.3 km horizontally, but over 3000'/950m vertically) and 20 minute road journey back a couple of days later.

On Sunday the Baptist Church honoured us for our time in PNG, which was unexpected but very moving.



Top row: Lapalama health centre from the mission house where we stayed. Morning view of the valley.

Top middle: Two interesting bridges en route

Lower middle: Lapalama airstrip after over an hour's walking. Dave and some local men who escorted us and carried our rucksacks.

Bottom: The welcome ride for the last part of the journey. The new road halves the time it used to take to walk from Lapalama to Kompiam.

Kompiam airstrip from the new road.

Left: We were given a lovely thank you for service to PNG at Kompiam Baptist Church on the Sunday, including a song by some young people.

Bottom It: Dave has been integral to the development of Kompiam Hospital, including these new buildings.

Tok Pisin teaching in the future ...

Karina has offered to have new MAF staff stay at Kompiam for two weeks to learn Tok Pisin with a strong emphasis on speaking it with local people. As there is nobody immediately able to take over the orientation training from Nicki, this is an exciting option that is now being considered by the MAF PNG Leadership Team.

It will be encouraging to have an option like this in place before we go.



Left: Peggy & Nicki. Michael medevaced Peggy with birthing difficulties in 2009. Nicki (named after Nicki!) is now a lovely young girl.

Middle: Medical supplies being unloaded at Bomai in Chimbu Province.

Right: A lovely view down Ubaigubi airstrip in Eastern Highlands Province.

Lower It: Flying for peanuts, an alternative cash crop to coffee in some Chimbu communities. It can be a challenge to fit nearly 50 bags into the Twin Otter!

Coming soon: New Cessna Caravans

On 6th March 2017 a brand new Cessna Caravan, P2-MAH, joined the MAF PNG fleet.

During the first half of 2019 a further six new Caravans will arrive as the GA8 Airvans and DHC6 Twin Otters are phased out.



Plans are in place for the transition which includes training current pilots on the Caravans from the other types, and for new pilots to be trained directly on them.

Praise & Prayer

- Give thanks for all the flights that have been possible over the last few months, bringing help and support to remote communities.
- Pray that the transition to an all-Caravan fleet will go smoothly over the next few months.
- Please pray for us as we pack up and see what God has in store for us next. We arrive back in the UK on 4th April.

As always, we send this with our thanks for your support and prayers over so many years. With our best wishes for 2019

Michael Nicki

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