

Photo: Iain Tait



In the Valley of Peace

Photo: Myles Vanni



Photo: Iain Tait

by Iain Tait and Myles Vanni

Photo: Myles Vanni



Photo: Iain Tait



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Everyone lifted and fed the beam through the window hole. Some broke off to scramble up the wall ends and scaffolding while others lifted the end up onto one of the block ends. Up swung the other end and after much grunting, the beam was in place.

This was the start of the finish of the building project; a 30 x 60 foot concrete block structure to replace an old wooden shed. It will serve as the new community centre and hurricane shelter for the village of Valley of Peace in Belize.

The Leader

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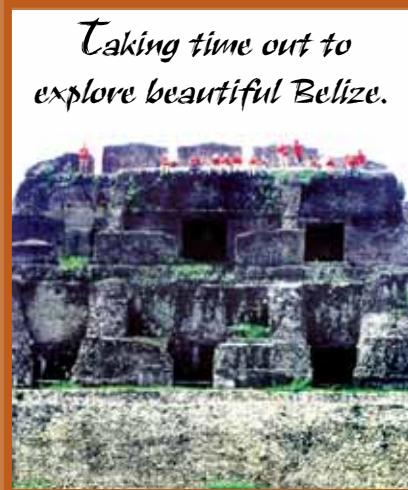
Canada



The journey for these 24 Canadians (18 Venturers/Rovers and six Advisors) from Tri-Shores Council in Ontario to the Valley of Peace began 16 months earlier with a commitment from the Council Commissioner to support a team to undertake a community development project with the Canadian Scout Brotherhood Fund. The Valley of Peace needed to build a community centre, which could also be used as a hurricane shelter and a Scout meeting hall. Although the Canadian Scout Brotherhood Fund paid for all the construction materials and building design (\$21,000), the contingent was responsible for raising the remaining two-thirds of the \$75,000 budget through various fundraising activities. While the end result was to build this centre in Belize, an equally important objective was to help 'build' our youth here; giving them the opportunities to develop life skills through the process — leadership, planning, organizing, public speaking, teamwork etc.

The Valley of Peace has an interesting history. Originally founded by the Belizean government, it started as a refugee camp for people fleeing civil wars around Central America. The plan was to have people from all different countries, including Belize, living in the Valley of Peace (hence its name). However, it is now almost entirely populated with refugees from El Salvador so the main spoken language is Spanish, in a country whose official language is English. A bridge was opened in the last 16 months that now gives road access (a **very** bumpy 45 minute drive off the highway) to the village. The Scout Association of Belize has

been working with the village to start a Scouting program and our visit has helped spur that on. The Catholic School started Cubs after we left.



Taking time out to explore beautiful Belize.

Life in the Village

We set up our tents around the village chair's house and had our meals with her family (Consuela has two daughters, a son and three grandchildren). The house was a concrete building with three small bedrooms, a living room and inside washroom (the toilet had just been installed two months prior and wasn't working properly). The kitchen was in the shed outside (they cooked over a fire most of the time) and the washstand for doing dishes was under a tree. The family had three hammocks hanging in the living room and they slept in them at night. With an invasion of 24 Canadians – space was at a premium!

Wild dogs and chickens wandered freely over the rutted, gravel streets. Our family had a washing machine but most of the village used a con-

crete wash station for doing laundry. There was one pay phone in the village. There was one regular store (a small corner store by our standards) but wherever a 'Coca-Cola' sign hung outside a house, they had a small store inside (you stood outside a window and placed your order). Gas is \$6US a gallon so we tried to use vehicles as little as possible!

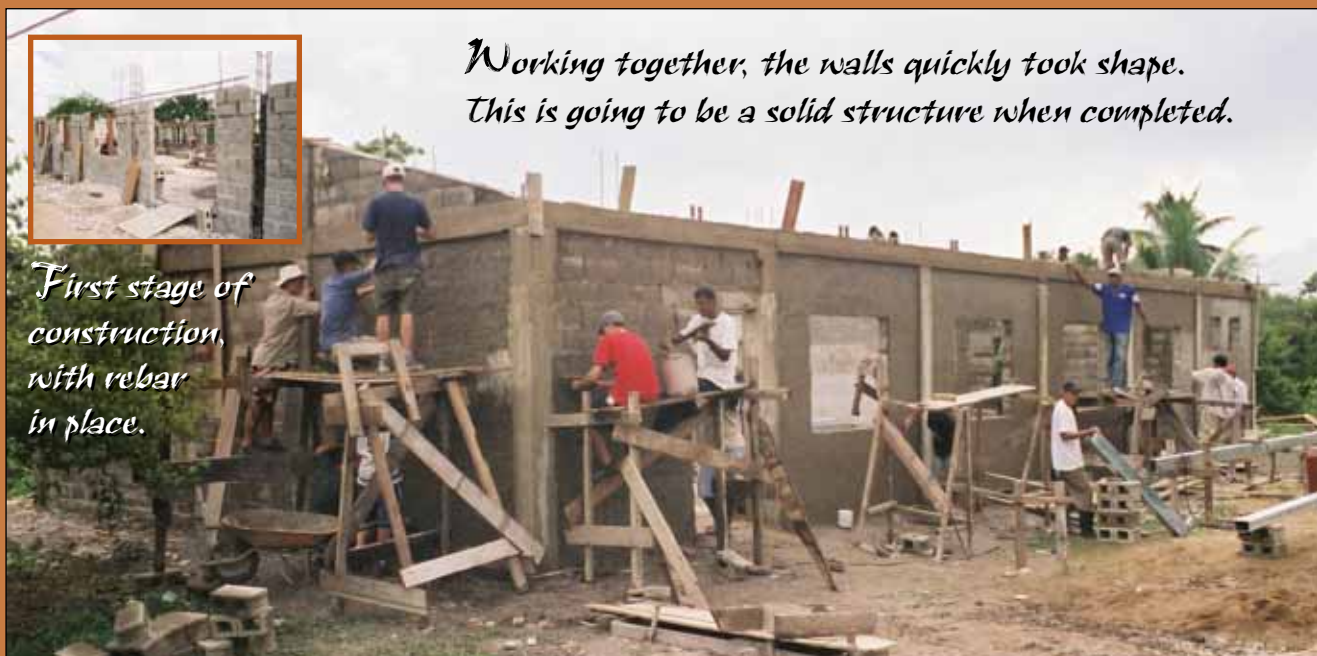
While presenting challenges because of the closeness, staying with the family gave us a lot of insights. Watching how they lived with so very little, leading such a simple life and yet so very happy and content — it was a striking message for us, helping us evaluate our own priorities.

At the Work Site

At the project site, we spent the first two days building the walls towards the desired height. We needed to mix cement (by hand, on the community centre floor), frame windows, lay bricks, frame the perimeter beam above the windows and of course pour *a lot* of cement. When we first arrived, the cement floor was already in place and parts of the walls were already started.

Did I mention that it was hot? When we woke around 6:30 each morning, it would already be 28 degrees Celsius and it only got hotter from there. We were encouraged, and at times loosely forced, to drink four litres of water in the morning and again in the afternoon. Very different from what we were used to in Canada!

Gradually the days fell into a pattern. On our first relaxation break, we went swimming at an amazing set of chutes, waterfalls and rapids, did a



Working together, the walls quickly took shape. This is going to be a solid structure when completed.

First stage of construction, with rebar in place.

Photo: Iain Jait (Photo (top centre): Bernie Avery)

bit of shopping in nearby San Ignacio and went caving. Saturday night, up in the mountains, we slept in tin huts, which closely resembled tin cans lying on their sides. It was a nice way to wind down from everything that had gone on the first week.

Back to work Monday morning. A lot of the same jobs were still being done, just higher up on the building. More cement, more bricks, more tying rebar. This was the main part of the project — building up the structure of the building. We realized that should we not complete the project entirely before leaving, it was important to get the structure up so that it could at least function as a hurricane shelter for the community.

Working together breaks barriers down quickly. Even though we couldn't speak Spanish, this didn't seem to matter. When you hit your thumb with the hammer, it's generally funny in any language.

Wednesday was another break from work with a visit to Xunantunich, a Mayan ruin. Back at the Valley of Peace, over the next two days we poured more cement, filling in columns and beams, and started to plaster over the bricks. Finally we could see that the building was starting to take shape.

One night, we hosted the village to a Canada Night. Over 300 villagers along with area politicians and members of the National Scout Association came out for a night of games, displays and give aways (everyone left with a Canada pin and stickers were seen everywhere the next day!), food (smoked BC salmon, Scout Popcorn and pancakes with real maple syrup).

We did face painting for the kids (big and small), turned the soccer field into a hockey rink and brought a tabletop hockey game for the little kids. Many commented that this was the first time the whole village had been involved in something like this!



The next weekend, we went hiking in the rainforest, caving, rappelling and tubing (all at the same place) as well as horseback riding. Sleeping in tents in the rainforest that night, we did our best to ignore the sounds of the 101 things in the rainforest that wanted to eat us (according to one of the guides).

A Job Well Done

The next four days were a race to get everything completed, while helping with a couple of other community projects at the same time. The most impressive point was when the centre beam for the roof finally went up. We found ourselves brought together, every last one of us, to complete this task. At this point, the 'us' and 'them' seemed to melt away. There were on-

ly us; people from two different countries working together to accomplish something so important.

Finally, we had the dedication ceremony. Politicians of all kinds and many people from the community celebrated the completion of the centre. It really brought home the fact that what we were doing was truly appreciated. A plaque with all of our names was mounted between two flagpoles, flying the Canadian and the Belizean flags side by side. Those donations to Scoutrees all those years before had actually turned into something visible. That money had gone to fund the building of a community centre and hurricane shelter in a village in Belize.

Although the next few days would be spent touring, caving, snorkelling with sharks, swimming, and just enjoying the opportunities that Belize had to offer, it seems that the trip could easily be summed up right at the beginning. At the Belizean Scout Office, there was a poster that read: "Scouting cannot be taught by wording it, nor defining it in print. The method is learn by doing." X

– Iain Tait was the youth contingent leader for the Brotherhood Project in Belize. A Rover and Beaver leader with the 57th Windsor A Colony, Iain believes in the value of Service, the Rover Motto.

– Myles Vanni has led two Brotherhood projects to Belize. When not building hurricane shelters, he is the co-ordinator for the Tri-Shores Council Popcorn committee.

Linking to Strategic Directions #3 and #4.

Project completed. All smiles as the group poses before the dedication ceremony.

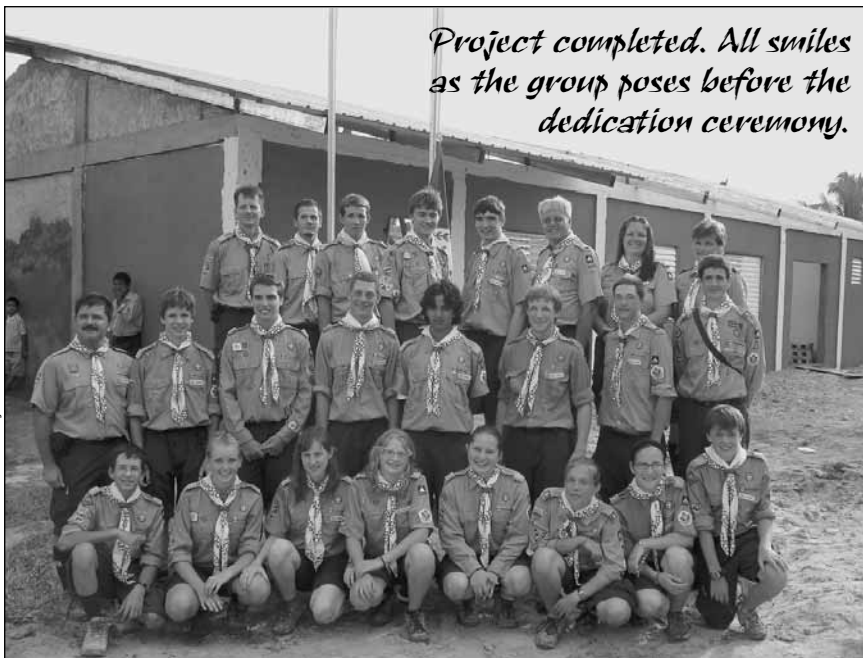


Photo: Iain Tait Inset Photo: Bernie Avery



The Rover Rambler Award

For some Rovers on the trip, this was a great way to earn the Rambler Award. Required to travel to another country, the Rover should meet with other members of Scouting and experience local Scouting for a minimum of two days. Once they return from their adventure, they make a presentation about their experience to other members of Scouting. For the Rovers on this trip, it was twice as meaningful because they were also living up to their Motto: Service.