

FOAG takes me back to Uganda

Exactly ten years ago, aged 19, I picked up a pin, stuck it in a map and it landed on Uganda. Not the most scientific method to choose a gap year destination but it proved to be effective all the same. I ended up spending 5 months teaching in a small rural school just off the northern shores of Lake Victoria. I was mesmerised by the people, by their spirit and by the sites, sounds and smells of an incredible country. I was hooked, but had not been back since.

Not, that is, until FOAG gave me the opportunity to join them on their annual tour in May, earlier this year. Now, I have been a member of FOAG for several years, I have run the London Marathon to raise money for them and have flicked through their newsletter. But it wasn't until six months ago that I decided to become more involved in the charity.

As a sign of how uncomplicated FOAG is, it only took one phone call. Me: **“Hi FOAG, I want to get more involved.”** FOAG: **“Great. Do you want to visit the projects in Uganda with us in May?”** Me: **“Yes.”** Actually, I nearly bit their hand off.

Every year, come-what-may, a team of people – from chancers like me to founder members – will visit each and every FOAG project to carry out a full audit. This is a side of FOAG I hadn't fully appreciated. This year there were seven of us, in two 4x4s, with two weeks to cover thousands of kilometres of dusty roads in our quest to visit all 12 projects. We spent at least a day on each stop to get under the skin of the project, to make sure donor money was being spent effectively and to see where future funds could be used.

But auditing the projects was just part of the job. Because FOAG is a relatively small operation its members have developed strong relationships with the local project coordinators and our visit helped cement those relationships. It is this personal touch which stands FOAG apart from many other charities and helps strengthen the good work of its projects.

Now I am back in London, I do not intend to wait another ten years before I return to Uganda. I have seen first hand how FOAG changes people's lives, I have made new friends and I am hooked, all over again.