

John Nystrom

From: John Nystrom [silarop1@crmf.org.pg]
Sent: Tuesday, March 17, 2009 5:58 AM
To: 'Bonnie Nystrom@sil.org'
Subject: NPU: Lessons from our trip to Arop on the sea

Dear Praying Friends,

The short version:

Nathan Miles of United Bible Societies and I arrived on Saturday after a very 'interesting' night trip on the sea.

Translators from all but one language are here.

The "Radio Mercurial" translation data exchange system is working.

Nathan has created a software bridge between two programs, solving a longstanding problem.

Malol translator Joe Anaput is very sick again.

Pray our airstrip re-opens soon

The details:

GETTING THERE IS MORE THAN HALF THE FUN

On Friday 13 March, Nathan Miles of United Bible Societies and I flew to Vanimo near the Indonesia border. Our airstrip in Aitape was and is still closed. The boat that was to meet us in Vanimo never made it there. After a couple of hours, Arop translator Emil Ninkure called us from the beach near Arop (where, believe it or not, you can now get cell phone coverage) to tell us the boat would not make it to pick us up. Lesson: Instead of waiting at the airstrip, go to the area where Arops live and see if they have seen the boat.

Around 2:00 in the afternoon we hired another boat to take us to Arop. We thought if we left immediately, we might make the three hour trip and then the 1.5 hour hike before dark at 7:00. Didn't happen. The boat skipper had to go get fuel, which took about an hour. Lesson: Don't assume skipper has fuel when he says he's ready to leave immediately. When estimating time for a trip, allow time for fuel acquisition.

When he finally had the fuel, he pulled on the 40 HP Yamaha outboard motor and the pull rope broke. Fortunately, the Yamaha dealer was only 100 yards away. The skipper's mechanic friend installed the new pull rope in under an hour, even though he only had a flat-head screwdriver for the Philips screw and the wrong size wrench for the nuts. Lesson: You can use an oversize wrench if you wedge a flat-head screwdriver between the wrench and the bolt.

We finally left Vanimo at 3:45. We were thinking we'd have to walk through the jungle in the dark, but we hoped to make it through the dangerous opening to the lagoon before dark. Waves there can be big. With ocean swells coming from the North, wind-driven waves coming from the Northwest, and the tide going out from the South, wave interactions can be quite complex, confusing skippers who don't know the place well. Many boats have flipped or swamped there. So as we left Vanimo, we were thinking about trying to get there before darkness changed 'dangerous' and 'iffy' to 'impossible.'

As we rounded the wharf and headed into the Northwest wind, the boat sent up spray that

soaked us to the skin in the first 30 seconds. From then on, the spray came and went but never stopped, even though we were travelling with the wind down the coast. We were constantly wet for the rest of the evening. The skipper felt bad for us so he kept slowing down, hoping to reduce the spray on us. But that meant getting to the lagoon later, so he would ask if we were OK and speed up again. Lesson: Tell the skipper, "Just go for it. We'll be fine."

Lots of rain inland meant the rivers were flooded, dumping tons of brown water into the sea and carrying large logs and whole trees into our path down the coast. We came to one large river whose floodwater was causing the sea swells to magnify. We were climbing and surfing large walls of brown water as we past it. We were very happy to get past that and onto the normal rolling swells.

We had an interesting moment when the skipper needed to refuel his gas tank. The engine died as he did so. We were glad the pull rope had broken in Vanimo. If it had broken now--just one pull later--we would be on the sea riding the waves while he tried to start it with a less-than-full-length pull rope. Lesson: Skippers who have their fuel hose rigged to easily move from one container of fuel to the other without stopping the engine are probably safer to travel with.

By the time we go to the opening to the lagoon at about 7:20, it was almost totally dark. The skipper made one attempt to get close to the opening to see how it looked and if he could see it at all. We turned back toward the sea and climbed a huge wave just before it broke. As the boat slapped down the back side of the wave, the skipper said it was just too dangerous. We would have to spend the night in Aitape. We were relieved to not be attempting the opening at night, but we knew our friends were waiting in the mangrove swamp at the land side of the lagoon to help carry our luggage and the translation project's equipment.

There was nothing we could do about it, so we sped down the coast as fast as the boat could go, watching the dark outline of the shore to our right about a mile away as we watched the stars and the Milky Way come out. Nathan and I wondered out loud how many more large logs were in the water ahead of us that the skipper would never see. We finally arrived in Aitape town about 9:15, four and a half hours after leaving Vanimo. As we entered the Aitape harbor, the moon finally came up. We found a car to move our stuff across the town square to the guest house, showered, and went to bed too tired to eat dinner. Lesson: When going to Arop, leave Vanimo at least four hours before sundown.

Saturday morning we were to meet the skipper at 8:00 to go back to Arop. By 9:00 we were on our way and at 10:00 we were through the lagoon. I commented to the skipper that we had shot straight through the opening rather than circling around counting waves as most skippers do. He pointed to his friend who was doing the actually driving. We later found out he was from the village that was right there at the opening until it was wiped out in the 1998 tsunami. Lesson: It helps to have a local skipper.

Because the tide was coming in, the water in the mangrove swamp was rising, so we had enough water to float the boat all the way to "portaw", "Canoe Place." There Emil and family were waiting for us. They sent us on their way with their daughter June and her new husband on the 1.5 hour walk home. We arrived home at 12:30. The rest of our stuff arrived by 3:00. Nothing was ruined along the way. Lesson: It is not a waste of time and garbage bags to double-bag every box.

Nathan and I got the house set up. On Sunday we attended a local church and began

setting up the computers. By Sunday night the translators were showing up and by Monday morning, almost all the languages were represented, even the ones that had not attended recent workshops. Only one language does not have a translator at this workshop. By Monday noon Nathan and I had the new software on the computers and we started training the translators to use it.

NEW SOFTWARE MAKES TRANSLATORS' WORK EASIER

Today (Tuesday) Nathan was able to create for us a sort of software bridge for the translators to use to get their translation drafts back and forth between "Adapt It" and "Paratext," the two programs the translators use. Our old method for doing this was labor intensive and error-prone. Translators would often lose files and have to do things over again. This 'bridge' is wonderful to see after years of wanting a better way to do this task that the translators have to do so often and that has caused so much loss of time and effort.

Also today Ben Pehrson and I were able to exchange data over "Radio Mercurial," the software Nathan has made for us to be able to exchange just the changes to the translations rather than the whole documents. Most of you will remember we have been "stuck" unable to get our translation drafts back and forth since September, effectively sidelining me from the translation process. This whole trip is meant to get us unstuck.

* Pray that as we gradually increase the number of translation projects we are exchanging using "Radio Mercurial," it will continue to work well.

* Pray for Nathan and me to see how well the new software (Paratext 7) is working and how it can be improved. In June it will be released for people all over the world to use it, so we want to find problems and solutions now.

JOE ANAPUT IS VERY SICK

Malol translator is very sick again. He thinks he may be on death's door and spent part of the afternoon "putting his house in order," writing down where all his possessions are so his family would know where things are in case he does not make it home tomorrow. His fellow translator Petrus Brere will try to get him home by canoe.

* Please pray for Joe and his family.

AIRSTRIPE NEWS

The news on our airstrip in Aitape town is that the bank that owns the only bank branch in town is threatening to close that branch if the airstrip is not opened by the end of the month. It is just not safe to transport money by road. The people in charge of the airstrip say it is ready and they are just waiting for an inspector to come and approve it for use. The road from our village to town is closed by two major landslides, so boat travel is our only option for coming and going. Aitape to the East is an hour by boat. Vanimo to the West is four hours.

* Pray that this will be the catalyst to get the Aitape airstrip inspected and approved for use again.

I think that's enough for one Update. Bonnie will be sending this from Ukarumpa since I can't send multiple copies of emails from here.

Thanks again for praying for us.

Serving our King together,

John Nystrom