

# Mission trip to Camalote, Belize

Flexibility is the name of the game when considering a medical mission trip to a foreign country. For example, during my recent trip to Camalote, Belize I had to serve as a surgical assistant, a “shot gun” van rider, a mechanic and as a construction worker. How you ask? Well... the story goes like this.

We are a small team of missionaries based out of the First Baptist Church of Marion, North Carolina. The team has gone to Belize for over 15 years but with the Covid 19 lockdown we had to pause our work. This was to be the first medical mission trip for our group to the country since Covid. Preparations and fund raising began at least a year ago in anticipation of the trip. We were scheduled to leave February 4 and return February 11 th , 2023. However, one month prior to leaving the Belize government changed its ruling on medical mission teams and decided to not allow them to enter the country. For myself, it was not a difficult choice. I am a farmer as well as a sonographer so construction skills gained on the mission trip would be time well spent. I was off to an adventure.

The map details the peninsula of the country. Our usual medical mission trip involves five stops at various churches and villages. Our group usually provides: Imaging (all ultrasound), lab, pharmacy, dental, eye and basic doctor visits. During our last trip we saw a total of five hundred and fifty patients all with various medical needs. This trip however was pure construction. Our mission was to repair a metal roof over the kitchen and eating area of the BTC (Baptist training center) located in Camalote, Belize and to construct and paint a guard shack for the Elementary school located in St. Elena. We had done a great deal of construction on this school site before, even finishing the second floor for this 225-student location. A great deal of this construction is coordinated with other groups like the Rotary group who erected a new set of bathroom facilities complete with running water. This in a country like Belize is something to be proud of.

We always carry a doctor, nurse and translator on the trip. Fortunately, we do not have to usually use the skills of these medical personnel however we had to this time. On the last day of construction work we had on/off rain showers. The metal roof repair had turned into a complete replacement of the entire roof system of the kitchen and eating area of the BTC. The new metal roof pieces have a light coating of oil on them for protection. However, when you are on top of a second story roof and it rains any amount, it gets slick fast. All our roof workers are highly experienced at construction, so they knew safety rules. One of the workers felt himself slipping, grabbed the roof peak and in the interim impaled himself with a metal piece. This piece cut through the skin layers of his leg and fortunately spared his arteries. Our doctor took care of it with a few stitches. We made an impromptu bed with a mattress on the floor and used our first aid kit for patient care. I was thankful for my sterile procedure training

I had received earlier in my career and my boy scout first aid. I was able to provide basic patient information to the doctor as he worked. Information like pulse rate and respiration rate, all done on a wristwatch with mental math of course. The nurse who would usually assist was also our translator and had been called to assist the pastor in a visit at the other end of the country. It was exciting and I was glad I could help.

The other adventure I had was on our return trip to the airport. Our caravan had a total of two vans and a car. I was in the third vehicle with the doctor driving, and we came to a traffic circle. We then lost sight of the other two vehicles in front of us but continued straight through the circle. In front of us we saw a big group of cars going slow. My job as “shot gun” was to call out to the driver when I saw a speed bump. In Belize you see, the bumps are not painted a different color as the regular pavement... Also unbeknownst to us a bicycle race was scheduled for the West Highway of Belize. This was the road we were on. The road is a two-way highway only but during the race it turns into a “free for all”. Before we knew it, cars, motorcycles and bicycles were going all around us and beside us resembling the traffic through a beehive. At one point traffic was going three abreast in one direction with bicycle chase cars handing out bottled water all the while going down the road. Then the rain began. We used our wind shield wipers for a time, but the wind shield wiper motor gave out. We continued down the road, with the doctor looking through the cracked windshield area about the size of a small pancake with the wiper in a vertical position to block the rain. Next, we lost a cylinder in the engine. We tried to contact the lead cars but since it was an international call, the answer to a text “where are you” generated only a “here” answer about another 10 minutes down the road. Fortunately, the driver had been to the airport before, and we continued onward now looking at a gas tank nearing the “E” mark crossing our fingers for luck. The airport now came in sight, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. We arrived at the terminal late, but we were able to catch up with our group and check in for the flight home.

If this adventure sounds like a goal for yourself in the future, I highly encourage you to volunteer with a group going to another country. It not only provides much needed assistance to our neighbors in need, while it will test your diagnostic skills providing you with a goal to set in sight for your self in the future.

For our mission trip group, a fund raiser occurs in the form of a festival known as the “Big Foot Festival”. The festival is held yearly in Marion, North Carolina. The festival is scheduled for May 19-20, 2023.

More information is at: WNC Bigfoot Festival 2023, Marion NC ([romanticasheville.com](http://romanticasheville.com))

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Map of Belize: [https://www.gifex.com/imapa/americas/Belize\\_Small\\_Scale\\_Map.gif](https://www.gifex.com/imapa/americas/Belize_Small_Scale_Map.gif)