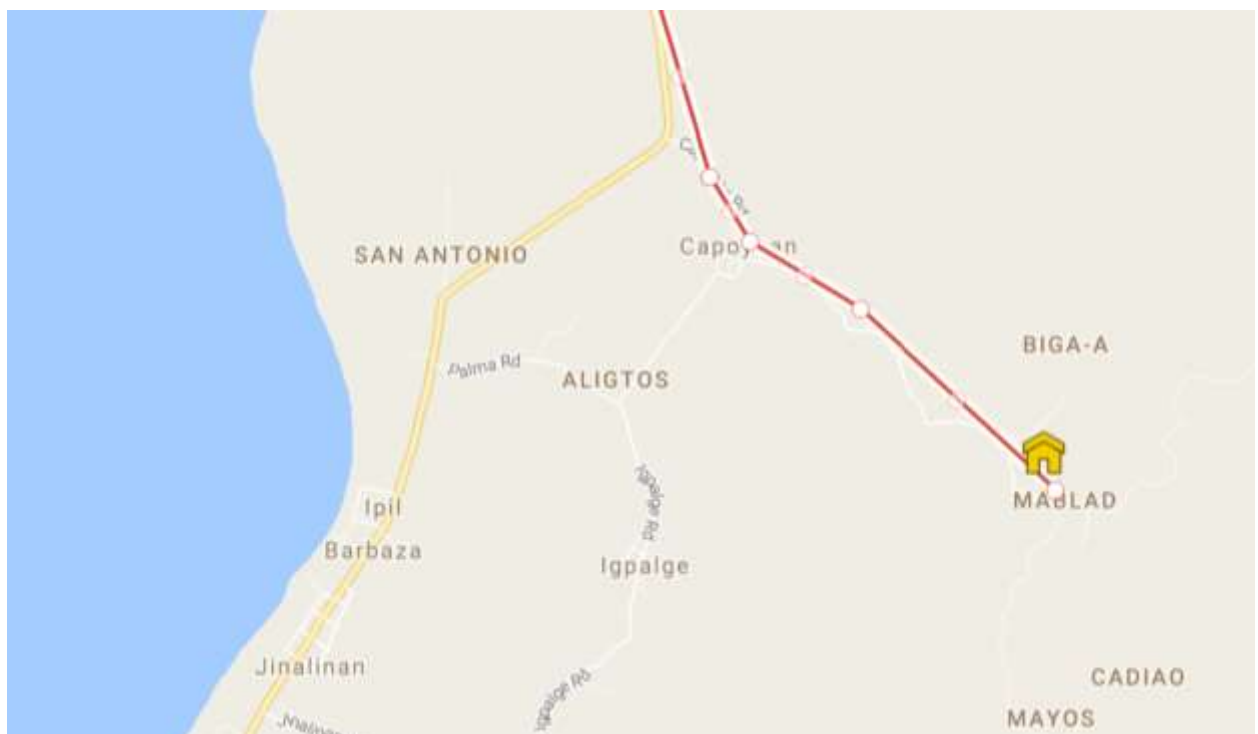
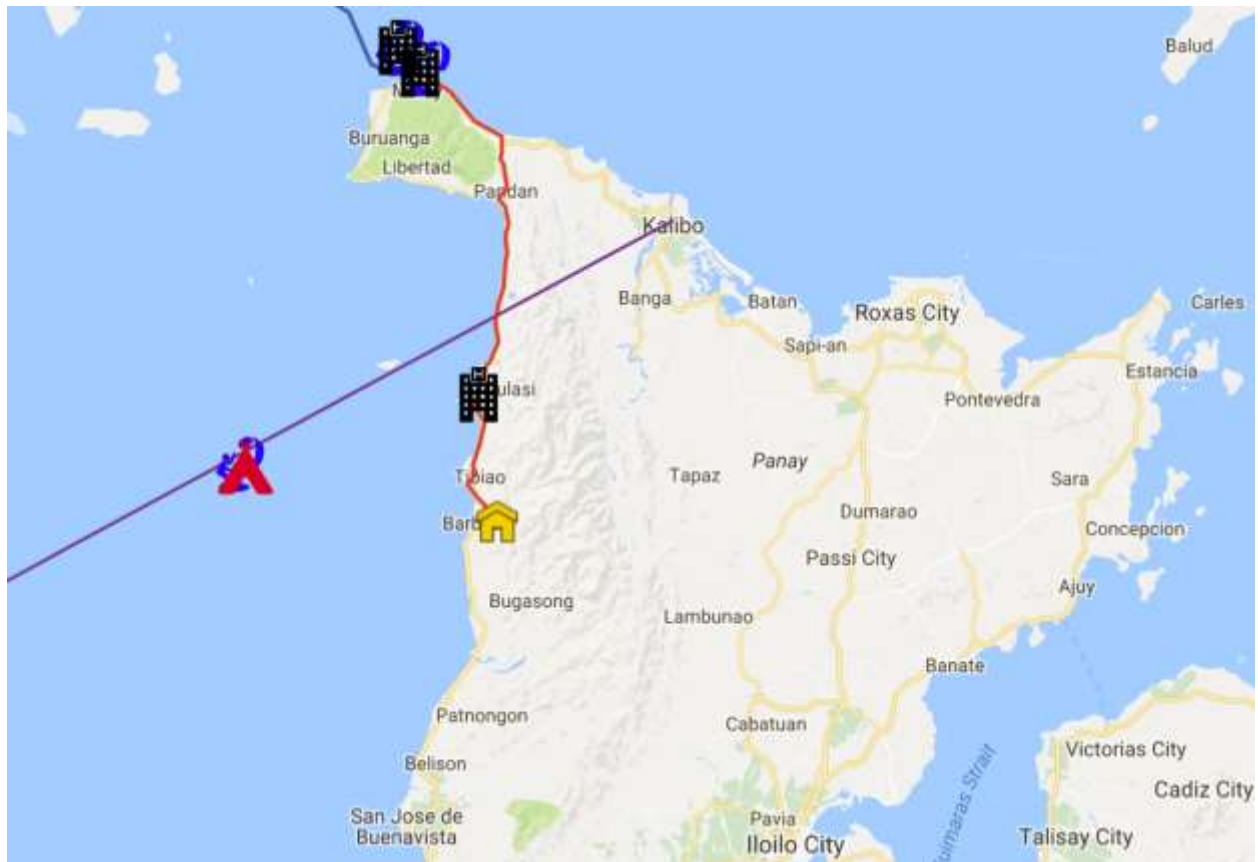


Season 6 – Part 3. The Permaculture Field School in Mablad.



23.2.2016 to 20.3.2016, days 225 to 252.

Some thoughts

I often say, somewhat jokingly, but in actual fact I am very serious about it, that everyone should have an obligatory intermediate retirement starting on their 40th birthday. Retirement should last for 3 years. After this time everyone can return to the workforce refreshed, healthy and full of energy and motivation. What often happens now, is that people get stuck in a job they don't really enjoy, get bogged down with a house, mortgage, car, family and simply go on working themselves to the ground fearing that if they ever quit their job they will never get back into the system. The tragic result is children who hardly ever see their father and/or their mother, burn outs, stress, depression, things that cost our society dearly. Intermediate retirement would give everyone a long time-out during which time they could spend time with their family, re-educate and fulfil their dreams. The "missing" three work years could be compensated by continuing working until the age of 68.

In our current society people often put off their dreams until their regular retirement at 65. This is crazy, it's like saving up sex for your old age!

I am very happy, that I summoned up the courage to really go ahead and live according to my principles, to quit my job and to go out and fulfil my dreams. One of the things that was very important to me, was that I not only quit my job, but also got rid of my flat and most of the things I owned and quit Switzerland. The reason for this is that you must first create emptiness in your mind to give new ideas and passions space to grow inside your mind. One thing that started growing inside me was my love for nature and a passion for nature conservation. While biking through the US we learnt about something called Permaculture, or permanent agriculture. This was first brought up by a girl called Jana during one of our Warmshower stays in Chicaco. She had made a business out of keeping bees on the rooftops of Chicago. She tends to the bees by bike and rents a small garage in which she keeps a small centrifuge to make honey. We had several other discussions with people about permaculture, the last and probable most in-depth one with my old friend Jeremiah in LA. The principles of Permaculture are quite simple: Care for the Earth and care for the people. Basically it is a call to live in a sustainable way that starts with each and every one of us. The main focus (at least according to my interpretation, others will certainly disagree) is that everybody should maximize their self-sufficiency by thinking of way to grow his or her own food and should reduce his or her reliance on fossil fuels. Everybody should also engage themselves on a community level to start moving towards self-sufficiency. Of course Permaculture then goes into great details on HOW food should be grown, what the design principles to use, what seed to use, how to fertilize and do pest control in a sustainable way, how to reduce and store energy in a system, how to minimize water consumption, etcetc...

The reason why this thought intrigued me is because I started to think of what a movement in this direction would actually mean. I just started to imagine what an effect it would have if all the huge lawns we passed in Canada and the US would be eliminated and be replaced by vegetable gardens or fruit tree orchards. The amount of food that could be produced would be astronomical! This simple step forward would have huge knock-on effects. People would not go to the malls to buy food, they would live and eat more healthily, they would reconnect with nature, they would spend less time in front of the TV as they would be outside enjoying the garden, it would revitalize community life as they doubtlessly would start sharing seeds and produce with their neighbours. All this would of course be a

catastrophe for big business as mindless consumption would doubtlessly shrink. The other thing I started to think about was all the things that could be done in cities. What if all roof space was given over to urban gardens, what if all parks and roads were planted with fruit trees? What if all concrete walls were turned into vertical vegetable producing gardens? What if all parking lots were covered with trellises and planted with climbing plants? The face of cities could be completely transformed. While biking through the Philippines I started looking at the land surrounding all the small little huts where people lived. I never once saw any sign of someone planting vegetables. Why not? Many of the people we saw were clearly malnourished. Space was available, the climate is ideal for growing stuff and the people seem to have more than enough time to take care of a garden.

All this lead me to understand that people all over the world have simply lost the instinct to grow stuff. Even I have lost this instinct. instead we all rely on gigantic food companies that source their produce from huge industrial style monoculture farms that use all sorts of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and then process our food by adding all sorts of preservatives, colorants, taste enhancers and other stuff, then truck the food to the malls where we then go and buy it in our cars.

I feel it would be far nicer to simply walk out the front door and pick some stuff and maybe collect some eggs from the chickens. This then is one of the realizations I have had thanks to this trip. It mightn't sound like much, but for me it is a big deal and I have the feeling it will change my future life.

Our time in Mablad at the Permaculture Field School

The permaculture field school in Mablad was initiated as an aid project after the Typhoon Yolanda ravaged this small mountain village killing several people and destroying much of the farmland and infrastructure. It was built on a small rice farm and is now run by Steve Cran, who is slowly transforming the place into an organic permaculture farm. He attracts western students to volunteer as interns or to attend his permaculture courses. This brings some business to the village. Also he runs some projects with the locals and with the school kids thereby teaching the principles of permaculture and giving them new ideas for making sustainable livelihoods for themselves. The place where the field school is now located was an empty field two years ago, now there is a class room, composting toilet, showers, kitchen, two eco-lodges that can sleep about 15 people, a pig pen, duck and fish pond and several vegetable gardens. He has planted lots of papaya, coconut, mango and other trees. Things are slowly starting to grow, but it will take time for the garden to be really productive, as the soil is rock-hard clay, ruined by years of growing rice.

We were originally only planning to stay for 2 weeks to get a taste of the place, but we finally ended up staying for a whole 4 weeks taking part in the Eco Lodge design course, in a teacher training course and also took part in the 2-week permaculture design course.

The time in Mablad was very intense, the courses were from 8am to 5pm every day and before and after the course there were all the day to day jobs to get done to keep the place running, like feeding the pigs, tending to the garden, watering, sweeping, cleaning, cooking, washing up.

We spent an absolutely fascinating 4 weeks in Mablad and got to know some fantastic and very interesting people, all of whom shared an infectious passion to stop the destruction of our planet. Highlight for me was definitively all the music I got to play together with the band GW Vibes we got

going. I won't even get into all the people we got to know and all the stories and adventures we experienced during our time. I would never stop!

But I can definitively say, that we both learnt a huge amount and can't wait to get a nice garden going in true permaculture style whenever we get back from this trip.





































