

KYRLE PROBUS 16 JUNE 2016

Kyrle Probus Club member Geoff Blake told a club meeting on Thursday 16 June that a challenge he was set in the heart of Africa took three years out of his family life. But the experience gave him memories to last a lifetime.

Ross-born Geoff, a Farm Manager by trade, and a farming enthusiast from an early age was familiar with Hereford cattle and he had managed farms of up to 1,000 acres in this country.

But the challenge came in a different category when he was invited to tackle farming problems in land-locked Zambia. "I knew nothing about tropical agriculture, but I decided to go," he said.

The task was to provide a financially viable farm within three years. Geoff, who went to Africa with his young family, successfully met the challenge with the help of a local Chief – from one of 73 tribes in Zambia – who agreed to release 1,000 acres on a leasehold basis for a farm.

Geoff, who was also presented with a Land Cruiser to help him cover the vast distances involved, recruited a team of men and women from the local area who offered a combination of male muscle power and female hard-working aptitudes in the field.

Some only had an axe and a hoe as their prized possessions. But despite some difficulties with the local language, which had 35 dialects, two giant Caterpillar machines were hired to fell trees and tractors started work cultivating land, which produced its first ever maize crop, very much a staple diet; green vegetables; soya beans; banana trees and sunflowers.

A small herd of cows with four Sussex bulls was also introduced to produce calves, and day-old chicks were bought after a £80 donation from a Young Farmer's Club in the UK. "The farm is still going," said Geoff. "It was three years out of my farming life which I enjoyed more than I can say."

At a meeting earlier in June club member Keith Glover described some of his unforgettable experiences during his 22 day visit to Vietnam, Cambodia and the Mekong delta.

There had been so much to see and enjoy, he said, that ideally he would need three meetings to do justice to this magical part of the Far East.

He launched his talk by relating colourful anecdotes during the 1,060 mile rail trip on a 12-hour overnight sleeper from Hanoi en route to Hue.

Keith recalled touring the bustling North Vietnam city with its four million population and five million registered scooters; the all-night flower market with lucky peach blossom just coming into season; exotic roadside food dishes and the cheery welcome from the North Vietnamese.