The dream of a disc golf course in Zambia started as a joke four years ago in the office of Push The Rock, an international sports ministry. Eric Thuma and his wife Corie were preparing to move to Macha, Zambia to open the second international office of Push The Rock. Dustin and Hannah Leatherman were just starting to think through the idea of adding a disc golf ministry to Push The Rock, and joked about one day bringing disc golf to Zambia. In May of 2016 that idea became a reality and the first disc golf course in Zambia was installed in Macha!

ABOUT PUSH THE ROCK AND EAGLES WINGS DISC GOLF

Push The Rock began as a one-week, summer basketball camp located in Emmaus, Pennsylvania in 1997. Today, it has grown to be a year round, international sports ministry, building into the lives of thousands of children a year through summer sports camps, after school programs, home school gym classes, and mission trips to various destinations around the world. In addition to three offices in the United States there are full-time offices based in Macha, Zambia and San Jose, Costa Rica.

In 2015 Eagles Wings Disc Golf was launched by Dustin and Hannah Leatherman, along with Jim Schultz as a division of Push The Rock. Eagles Wings Disc Golf exists to carry out the vision and mission of Push The Rock through the great game of disc golf! This is done through youth and family programs, course design and installation, a disc golf chapel ministry, and disc golf mission trips.

ABOUT MACHA, ZAMBIA

Zambia covers slightly over 752,600 square kilometers, which is roughly the size of the state of Texas. The population is estimated at around 14.2 million. In comparison, Texas has a population of just over 25 million. Macha is located in southern Zambia, a three-hour drive north from the tourist city of Livingstone, and a five-hour drive southwest from the country capital of Lusaka.

Like many countries in southern Africa HIV/AIDS is leaving its mark on the country, forcing nearly an entire generation to be raised by their grandparents. The number of people in Zambia living with HIV/AIDS is close to one million, about 20% of that number being children. Recent estimates say that there are close to 1.2 million orphans in Zambia with HIV/AIDS being responsible for over half of them.
ORGANIZING THE TRIP

While there were many options for the first Eagles Wings Disc Golf mission trip, Macha stood out as the best choice for a number of reasons. There is a great need for recreational activities, not just for the youth in Macha, but adults as well. The Push The Rock Zambia staff runs after school programs for youth every day at their recreation center teaching soccer, basketball, volleyball and offering help with school work. The missionaries there had land available to be cleared for the disc golf course, and based on the description believed it would be a great fit in Macha for people of all ages.

After we determined that Macha would be our destination we set out raising money, resources and a team to go. Receiving the Marco Polo grant from the PDGA was a tremendous blessing, and went a long way in making the trip possible. This allowed us to cover the cost of materials for the course, employ people in the country to build the course and clear the land, and help with some of the equipment costs. On top of that Innova Champion Discs donated 2 traveler baskets, and 40 new discs to be taken to Zambia. Paragon Disc Golf also stepped up by helping us with fundraiser t-shirts, and donated 50 shirts to be taken to be given away to staff and kids as prizes! Due to the generosity of many we took 100 shirts, 120 discs, and 5 traveler baskets to be left with the staff in Macha.

Travel to Macha is expensive, so recruiting a team for this type of trip is never easy. Fortunately we found a great team that was just as enthusiastic about being part of the first disc golf course in Zambia as we were. In total we recruited a team of 8 people including 2 current Liberty University disc golf team members, 2015 US Women’s Champion Hannah Leatherman, and former AM World Champion Jim Schultz.

BUILDING THE COURSE

Before we arrived there was much discussion about baskets. Shipping baskets was not an option as there is no guarantee that what is shipped will make it to the destination without being taken. After going back and forth with various ideas we eventually settled on hiring a local welder to build baskets using materials purchased locally. While the welder had no idea what it was he was building, the baskets came out great and surprised the entire team by how well they caught. We got to see the prototype basket while we were there, and were very grateful there were multiple runs before settling on the final product!
The land we had to use turned out to be great for a disc golf course. The PTR Zambia staff cleared a good bit of the land before arrival, and we spent the first day mapping out the course, cutting additional trees, and clearing a few additional sections. Our goal was to put in a beginner friendly 9-hole course with a second, more advanced set of tees. The area we had to work with was the perfect size, and just so happened to have 2 walking paths running through it that each had a fair amount of foot-traffic! We got a number of strange looks the first couple days of work, but many of those same people were stopping to throw with us later in the week.

By the end of day 3 we had 9 baskets installed, 18 tees, 9 hand painted tee signs, and a beautiful course sign. The unique terrain made for some great holes included some quite large termite mounds, and some very cool looking trees. The course turned out better than any of us expected coming into the trip, and we looked forward to teaching the sport to the community for the rest of the week.
TEACHING DISC GOLF

Throughout the week we had great opportunity to teach disc golf to the community. Our first official clinic was with the after school program that comes to the Push The Rock Zambia rec center on a daily basis. The prospect of learning a new game brought out approximately 100 kids ranging from age 4 to 18. We taught the basic skills of the game, and played some fun group games. It went over better than we could have expected as the kids could not get enough! Later in the week we had the chance to expose these same kids to the course we had built.

One of the most valuable things we did in terms of teaching was doing a special in depth clinic with the Push The Rock Zambia staff. They have about 14 Zambians on staff and a few other people who volunteer, so we took the time to teach them how to play, rules of the game, and most importantly how to teach. We concluded with a doubles tournament that was a lot of fun. The staff caught on quick and were very eager to get better, and to compete with one another. Later in the week as we did clinics this same staff would assist, translate, and at times lead the teaching! It was awesome to see them get involved, and exciting to know that teaching would go on long after we left.

In addition to these times, and some other unofficial teaching times, we traveled to a local church to offer a clinic, and also did another clinic for the community on a National holiday when people had off work. The church was thrilled with the time, and could not thank us enough for the opportunity to bring their entire community together for the event. Teaching the local community was also great as it gave us the chance to teach adults from the surrounding area. We had doctors, nurses, teachers, church staff, and others come out to learn disc golf. Many left eager to return to the course, and we even had questions about how to build a course in their community, school or church!
**A LASTING IMPACT**

While teaching and interacting with people was great, our goal with this trip was to leave the missionaries in this community with a tool they could use to make a great impact on the people they interact with long after we left. As we prepared to leave the missionaries and the Push The Rock Zambia staff assured us this was the case. They were genuinely grateful for the course and what it means for their community. They took pride in the fact that it was the only course in Zambia, and it was right there in their own community. This is what Elem Katambo, the first full-time national staff member of Push The Rock Zambia, had to say:

“The way I see disc golf here is that it is not something that will be finished after this week. I see it as something that will have long life here!”

This is what Eric and Corie Thuma, the missionaries we worked with, shared with us after we returned to the United States:

“Thanks to the group of professional and recreational disc golf players who sacrificed their time and resources to spend time in Macha, we can now boast of having our very own 9-hole course. Not only is it the only course within the country, it is one of very few across the continent. In our small community, our course is one of the few spaces that provides a healthy outlet for competition. It has been encouraging to see friends enjoying the game and each other's company, and the same is true for husbands and wives who play together, and local school staff who take their students to play. The group’s willingness to teach and mentor our staff and the community have proven invaluable as the sport continues to grow at a very fast rate. There have been multiple hole-in-one shots and negative score lines already! We’ve also seen a local school put in their own three-hole course after their students learned and enjoyed the game so much. We can’t say enough good things about a sport we knew very little about prior to the team visiting us a few months back, but have since grown to love. We’re grateful for the time, resources, and talent shared with us here in Macha and are anxious to see how disc golf continues to grow. Thank you to the PDGA, Innova Champion Discs, and Paragon Disc Golf for your investment in Macha!”

It has been less than a month since we installed the course, and we receive regular updates like this about how the sport is growing!

**THE FUTURE OF ZAMBIA DISC GOLF**

The future of Zambia disc golf appears to be very bright! Push The Rock sends between two and three teams to Zambia each year, and we already have requests for more discs, minis, and tags to be sent with the team that will be traveling in August. This will also allow an Eagles Wings staff member to join a trip to help with additional teaching, course improvements, additional holes, or possibly additional courses! Maybe one of the most exciting things is that for the first time, one of the Zambian PTR staff members will be coming to the United States in October, and plans to enter an Eagles Wings PDGA sanctioned event! More to come on this as plans are made.
The Marco Polo grant was a huge part of making this trip possible. We are incredibly grateful to the PDGA and all who contributed to make this dream a reality!