



ECUADOR

Oct. 4, to Nov. 4, 2003

By Ken McCarthy

For months prior to leaving home my brain was scrambling to grasp a clear picture of what was to come. My wife, Jen, and I were planning a one-month trip to Ecuador. We would spend the first week living with an Ecuadorian family and going to Spanish school. Then we would travel around the country for three more weeks experiencing the country and practicing our new language skills. But we would be traveling with a couple of wild cards, their names, Ria and Addison. We were going to be spending thirty-two days in a Latin American country with our 3 and 5-year-old daughters. It was going to be a different experience for both of us I was sure of that. But how different? Could we even do it?

The picture before the girls was of us climbing volcanoes, kayaking rivers and canoeing through steamy jungles with naked natives. But when I put two little girls in the scene that looked questionable. I started picturing all the dangers lurking in the corners of the adventure, things like robbery, abduction, injury, bugs, snakes, and the most likely, sickness and disease, malaria, E-coli, hepatitis or even AIDS. As these things crept into the picture I had to make some adjustments to my vision of the coming trip. Could I even prepare well enough to insure that these girls wouldn't catch something? Other people think about these things all the time and their solution is "don't go."

I have done a lot of crazy things in my life and I always assumed nothing bad could happen to me. I have always thought the people who worry were paranoid and over protective. But on September 24, 2001 something did happen to me. When I crashed my paraglider it changed my way of thinking. I found myself asking the question, "Is it worth the risk?"

I know from experience that I am really not a very good traveler. I don't do well wandering around looking at things. I get bored going to museums or seeing another waterfall or bridge. Cities I have no need to see. I need a major goal, something to be striving for, working for, fighting to get to. If I have that to fill my main focus then I love all

the little side events like waterfalls, markets, and maybe a swinging bridge or two. Anyway my vision of this trip was mixed between the big adventures I knew were waiting and boredom.

My vision of our Spanish classes was also mixed. I was excited about the prospect of having a full month of contact with Spanish speaking people. I could see the potential to really learn to speak Spanish, especially with the week of concentrated lessons at the start. My fear was that I might get overwhelmed with the classes and not learn much. I was really hoping for a good teacher.

WHY ECUADOR?

After we failed to get everyone up Mt.Orizaba in Mexico last year I told Jen that maybe we could go someplace else to climb a big mountain. Chimborazo, in Ecuador, was the first mountain that came to mind. Also, I had it in my head for sometime that we should go someplace and take some Spanish lessons. It turned out that Ecuador has several good schools for learning Spanish. The political situation in Ecuador is as stable as any place in South America. It would be a fairly safe place to take the girls. That sounded good to us. The draw of the jungle was a big thing for me. I had hopes of spending some time in the deep, dark Amazon Jungle. The image of this deep Amazon adventure was taking form in my head and it was looking good. Then I tried to fit Ria and Addison into it and the reality hits, Girls? Me? Girls? Me?

I also was hoping to spend time kayaking. Ecuador has some incredible rivers. Many of the rivers are on the tough side so I had some apprehension about that. My abilities aren't what they once were. But then, again, there was that girl thing. Girls? Me? Girls? Me? They wouldn't be kayaking but could I leave them while I went off on my own adventure?

FINALLY IN ECUADOR

As our airplane neared Quito, the capital of Ecuador and the starting point of our trip, the we were informed that the airport was too foggy to land. We were diverted to Quayaquil. By the time we got our bags, went through customs and got a taxi, and checked in at the Hilton Hotel it was 2:00 AM. Continental Airlines was paying for our stay and I would have liked to have had more time to enjoy it but they said we had to be back at the airport at 6:00 am so we were up again at 5:30. It took us until 9:00 to get a flight out of Guayaquil to Quito.

The director of the Spanish school, Augustin, met us at the airport and drove us to our host family's house. Manuel Ayala, Zaida Ayala, Coya Ayala, Aaron Ayala and Envar Ayala all live at the house. Manuel is 73 years old. For many years he worked for the government in some kind of accounting capacity but now he is retired from that job. He spent many years being an artist too. From the number of paintings he had displayed around the house and piled in his



studio he had once been a very prolific painter. He now has a heart problem so he is taking a break from painting. According to his wife, Zaida, he gets too rapped up in the work and it could be bad for his heart.

Zaida is quite a bit younger than Manuel, only 57, with white hair and a little bit of a nervous personality. She is a great cook and fed us very well the whole time we were there. Envar is their son, age 21. Coya is their daughter, age 34 and Aaron is her son, age 11. The house was quite big by Ecuador standards. It had at least 6 bedrooms, a big kitchen, a dinning room, living room, utility room, 3 bathrooms and a little restaurant on the front. We never saw the restaurant open. I would guess all this was in about 1800 square feet. Manuel designed the house 42 years ago and has been living in it ever since.



Manuel's English was better than our Spanish and he didn't mind practicing. He fit the eccentric artist stereotype well. But he was also extremely friendly and polite. He loves his homeland of Ecuador and would often say, "Isn't this the most beautiful city you have ever seen?" or "This is the best country in the World." Or "In Ecuador we have the best drivers in the world." These are hard statements to comment on. He was very active and energetic for a 73-year-old. Zaida spoke no English but that didn't stop her from talking. Jen got pretty good at having conversations with her but I don't know

how much either side understood.

Quito is a little over 9,600 feet above sea level and, apparently, the elevation is hard on a lot of tourists. Coming from 7,000 feet we didn't have any problem. We had more trouble with the air pollution and just the size of the city. It's a pretty city as city's go, but it is big, busy and crowded, 1.8 million inhabitants.

Our first morning in Quito Manuel took us to the school and we met our teacher. His name was Ivan and he turned out to be quite good. I learned a lot. We went to his class every day from 2:00pm to 6:00pm, for 5 days, a total of 20 hours for each of us. That cost us \$91 each, but with the home stay and daycare for the kids we spent \$672 for the week. When we were planning the trip we thought we would go to school 4 hours a day and then go traveling and see the country surrounding Quito the rest of the day. But the reality was we had no time for any running around. Between eating meals with the Ayala's, taking care of the girls, studying and homework we were very busy.

At least my fears of being overwhelmed by the class didn't come true. I think I could have done another week at least.



I couldn't live in a big city like Quito. It is crowded and dirty but maybe the worst thing is that everyone lives in fear. Living behind locked gates and barred windows with

guards and security systems just doesn't seem right. Everyone was telling us we had to be careful. Don't carry anything valuable. Don't go here. Don't go there. Don't let the girls get away from you. What kind of life is that? I don't want to be always worrying like that. Later we learned why everyone was so worried.

We got a bit of a lesson one morning while trying to ride the trolley system. We got on the trolley and rode it one-way no problem. When we went to get on to go back all the cars were very crowded. We let several go by but then finally just pushed our way on like everyone else. I had my fanny pack in front and I put my daypack in front. I had to pick Ria up so she wouldn't get squished so I was holding her in my arms too. A man rushed in at the last minute and pushed hard to get on after us. He stood smashed up against me saying something in Spanish that I didn't understand. Jen had Addi in her arms and was having a hard time keeping her feet under her. It was obvious we didn't belong here so we pushed our way back off at the next stop, less than 2 minutes away. As soon as I was off I noticed my fanny pack was open and my wallet was gone. I looked at the trolley car as the doors closed. I could see the guy smiling as the car pulled away. I only had \$5 or \$10 in the wallet but I also had a credit card. The only credit card we had. It was our backup money source and now some underworld pickpocket had it.

Loosing the card added a lot of stress to our lives for a few hours. Addi had a fit and cried and we weren't very patient. Ria was very bothered by the robbery. She came up with several solutions from going and asking for it back, to her going and stealing it back. We were supposed to be in class but we were still trying to cancel the card. I was stressed even more over missing class. We realized we didn't have any phone number to call to cancel the card. We called everyone we could think of in the U.S.A. to help us cancel the card but no one answered. We must have called 15 people. Finally we just started calling any phone numbers we could think of. I came up with my sister's winter phone number and Cheryl her roommate answered. We couldn't have done better. Cheryl is a take-charge kind of person and she had it all under control in 20 minutes. Thank you Cheryl! We went to school an hour late. It turned out that Ivan's kid was sick and he was late too. We made up most of the hour at the end.

The robbery may have been a good thing because for no more than \$10 we learned that we needed to be at least as careful as everyone told us to be. We also learned that it cost fifty cents for all of us to ride the bus or trolley but for one dollar we could get a taxi and it would take us right to the door.

Manuel really liked to talk and he gave me lots of insights into the lives of people in Ecuador. The country has huge debt and is under the control of the United States and the World Bank. Over the last 10 years or more these outside forces have demanded large taxes in the form of mandatory price hikes on the necessities of life. A 10 gallons tank of propane was three dollars. After the price hike a year ago it went to \$7. When large parts of the population only make one or two hundred dollars a month and a car costs \$10,000 owning a car is out of the question for most people. Inflation has been a problem for many years due to the huge deficit. Manuel said that the Sucre had been devaluing at hundreds of Sucre to the dollar every month and just before they replace the Sucre with the dollar it was more like two and three thousand a month. About three years ago the "higher forces" said Ecuador had to give up their Sucre and start using the US dollar. When the switch happened the exchange rate was 25,000 Sucre to the dollar. It helped slow the inflation problem but it re-arranged

many prices. The huge gap between the “haves” and the “have not’s” is very clear and has to be causing problems for the country also.

MITAD DEL MUNDO - Middle of the World



On Saturday, after our last day of Spanish class, we went to the monument at the middle of the world. It is a point on the equatorial line. They have a big monument and the line painted on the ground. It is a little Disneyland-like with tourist shops and entertainment. Coya and Aaron went with us. For the kids the best part was playing in the playground. The playground had a zip line and swings that hung from bars off a pole and the kids could be pushed around the pole by their father and mother.

On the bus to Mitad Del Mundo it occurred to me that if we were to get separated from the girls we might have a really hard time getting back together. They couldn't speak Spanish so they wouldn't be able to understand someone who tried to help them and they couldn't tell anyone what they needed. I thought what if something happened to Jen and I. What would happen to Ria and Addi? How would they find their way back to the U.S.? I made tags with their names and the address and phone numbers of the Ayala's and pinned them to the girls. If they got lost and the person who found them didn't want to return them a note would be of little use. It would need to be tattooed to their foreheads in that case. At least it made me feel better. Later when Addison did disappear it didn't make me feel much better.

Oct. 12,

WE LEAVE QUITO!

We finish our week of school on October 10th. We spent the night of the 11th and the morning of the 12th packing and sorting our stuff, filling our big suitcase plus another small bag with things we figured we wouldn't need. We stored it in the back room at the Ayala's. We were planning to be back in two or three weeks. Then Manuel and Zaida drove us to the bus terminal. We caught the 10:30 bus to Baeza.

The Ayala's treated Ria and Addison like family. It was a great way to get the girls started in foreign travel. They felt right at home. They didn't seem to notice that everyone was speaking a different language. At the market in Quito Ria was playing the shy girl, putting her face in Jen lap when the ladies talked to her. But in Baeza, walking back to our hotel from the restaurant she sang “Buenos noches” to everyone on the street. We learned the word “linda”. It means very beautiful. Ria and Addi are “linditas”, little beautifuls. Everywhere we went people called them linditas.

They did great on the 3½-hour bus ride from Quito to Baeza. Ria was becoming quite the little salsa dancer, dancing to the bus driver's music much of the way. She stood in the aisle and wiggled from head to toe. Not necessarily to the music but because of it.

In the afternoon we were waiting at a bus stop on the side of the road. Several people were sitting on the bench waiting for the bus. Addi went over and sat herself between them and proceeded to tell them all about her family and pets. All the people could do was say “muy linda”.



The main reason for going to Baeza was to kayak. The Rio Quijos and its tributaries are some of the best kayaking rivers to be found anywhere and it is the home of “Small World Kayaking.” I was in touch with the owner before leaving the US. His name is Larry and he said he would be in Baeza by the 10th of October. We went in search of his cabins but when we finally found them no one was there but the caretaker. Larry had not shown up yet even though it was now the 12th. That meant I couldn’t get a kayak and even if I could I had no one to kayak with.

Even though I wasn’t successful at Small World our adventure finding it and returning was good. It was a beautiful walk with a big swinging bridge over the Rio Quijos. We watched a family milking their cows; we took a dip in the river and we talked to several people along the way. We got a ride in the back of a pickup truck on the way back. We found a restaurant, Gina’s, and had fresh trout, French fries and plantanos, rice and carrot salad, \$8.80 for everybody. The place was very clean and nice. We got all this adventure just by going 10 km down the road to see a man about a kayak.

That night we stayed at the Samay Hotel. It wasn’t very impressive, kind of a shack, dirty and noisy. I checked one of the other two hotels in town but they were full. There was some kind of police academy near by and they were having a graduation. That hotel was full of policemen dressed in camouflage uniforms. We were told that the other hotel was full of oil pipeline workers. The Samay Hotel was our only choice. It cost \$15 for the four of us. The hotel owner told us that there was a man named Rodrigo Morales who could help us with kayaking.

Oct. 13, BAEZA – COWS AND SUGAR CANE

It rained all night and not just sprinkling. It pounded down. By 8:00 am it had let up to just a soft rain so we went out. In Quito we had to keep close tabs on the girls. In Baeza we felt it was safe to let them go. They ran up the street laughing and splashing in their new rubber boots. We bought them each a pair, Ria’s blue and Addi’s green, in Quito, \$4.50 for both pairs. We stopped by a little store for a jug of water, some “Yupi”, cool aid, and some Maria’s cookies. Then we splashed our way off up the street in search of Señor Morales.

We were told Rodrigo Morales is the local kayak shuttle driver not a kayaker. He knows all the rivers and their put-ins, take-outs and some about the runs. We thought we should track him down to see if he could get us on a river. We were told he lived across the street from Gina’s, the restaurant we had been to the night before, so we went there. Jen went into the restaurant to get some coffee and I sat on the bench in front. Before long a red pickup came by and stopped at the house across the street. It was Rodrigo Morales.

Rodrigo was between 25 and 30-years old. He taught himself English by talking to oil workers, kayakers and watching American movies. He is second-generation Quijos Valley. His father came to the valley 30 years ago with the first road into the area. Our girls really liked him. He couldn't help us much with kayaking but he really knows cows and the Quijos Valley. Soon we were all in his truck headed out to his farm.



We hiked up to his personal waterfall. We cut sugar cane and ate it. We saw his guinea pig and we took pictures of his ducks and chickens. Ria and Addison got to pet the big cows and let the calves suck on their hands. After a few hours on the farm Rodrigo drove us up the road to see some of the river and lots of waterfalls. Everyone had such a good time that we made a plan to go out the next morning to help milk cows.

Around 12:30 or 1:00 he dropped us off at the Samay Hotel.

It was hard to get a good walk in with the girls so I offered to take the girls to the park while Jen went for a hike in the hills behind town. She said she didn't feel good about hiking alone. So it ended up that Jen took the girls to play in the park and I went for a hike. It was nice to get out into the hills but the going got tough as soon as the road ended even though most of the country was pastureland. The worst part was the water and mud. It was everywhere. All the locals wear tall rubber boots and I could see why.

The mountains around Baeza, where I was walking, were once covered with "cloud forest." Not that long ago much of the area was cleared of trees to allow the grazing of cattle. In the Amazon basin or in the flat lands of the coastal regions the soil is quite deep and can sustain very large trees and plants. In the steep mountain country like that around Baeza the amount of soil is much less. It can't support the big trees of the flat lands so even though it is a tropical rain forest it is different from that of the flatter lowlands. In the tropical mountains of South America there is almost always a band of clouds floating somewhere between the tops of the high peaks and the steaming lowland region. This mid-level mountain country is shrouded in clouds much of the time. Cloud forest is the name given to this dense, mountainous forest area. In the mountains above Baeza the forest was gone and all that was left was heavily grazed hillside with lots of mud.

We went to bed early so we could get up early to go with Rodrigo to help milk the cows. The hotel didn't get any better the second night. The bathroom was down the hall and was real dirty. They were remodeling upstairs and the downstairs was dark and dingy. People came and went and when they talked in the hall it sounded like they were right in our room. We figured for a night or two we could handle it.

10/14

A LONG ROAD TO TENA

Around two in the morning we woke to Addi coughing and fussing. This was nothing new but then Jen realized she was about to throw up. Jen grabbed a bag and got it in front of Addi before she lost everything all over the room. That was the end of sleep for us. Addi woke up every half hour to do it again and again. Jen and I lay awake waiting for the next

one, fearing that if we didn't get to her in time she would make a mess of the place. Her last round was probably 5:30. At 6:00 we got up to go milk. It had rained all night again and it was still raining hard when we got up. Neither Jen nor I were very interested in going milking in the rain but we had told Rodrigo we would. We flipped a coin and Ria and I went milking. Addi and Jen stayed at the hotel.

Ria and I rode out to the farm in Rodrigo's little, red pickup. When we got out it was still raining pretty hard and there was a cold wind blowing. We put on our rain gear and Rodrigo had a pair of rubber boots for me. We walked out to the pasture where one of Rodrigo's workers and her little girl were already hard at work milking cows. The little girl had an umbrella but the wind was blowing the rain in at an angle making her umbrella pretty ineffective.

Rodrigo showed Ria and I how to milk and then asked Ria if she wanted to try. She said "NO". I gave it a try but I wasn't very good at it. Most of what I got out didn't go in the bucket. Eventually the rain let up and we could take off our rain gear. We spent another hour doing things around the farm including taking Ria for a horseback ride. The horse was named Relampigo (Lightning).

Around 9:30 Rodrigo took us to look for Larry at The Small World cabins again. This time Larry was there. He had just gotten there and had too many things to do. He wasn't able to go kayaking. We stood in front of his house looking at the river and it was raging. Two days before we had gone down and sat on the rocks at the edge of the river. Now the rocks were long gone and the water was up in the trees. We guessed the flow was around 10,000 cubic feet per second (CFS). It had been around 1,800 CFS the first time we were here. The Borja and Cosanga Rivers must have been causing the high water because the upper Quijos, up by Rodrigo's farm, looked just the same as it did the day we came.

Rodrigo said he had heard the road to Tena was closed due to mudslides. The road follows the Rio Cosanga to the east so it all made sense. They must have had even more rain over that way. We were planning to take the bus to Tena in the afternoon. We would have to take that road. Mudslides could seriously mess up our plans for getting to Tena.

We went back to town to find Jen and Addi. Addi had eaten a little and taken a nap. Workers had turned all the water off at the hotel and torn the bathroom apart while she napped. Jen sat in the dungeon of a room listening to the guy bang away on the walls and hoping Addi didn't get sick again. With no water or toilets it would be really messy. By the time we got there Jen was convinced we needed to move on.

Rodrigo thought the road should be open by noon but when we asked about it in the restaurant they said it wouldn't be open before 4:00 pm and maybe not even then. We had just sat down on our packs under the eaves of the building to watch the rain and think about what to do next when a bus rolled up the street headed for Tena. We flagged it down and jumped on.

We hadn't gone to the bathroom before getting on the bus. The bus was crowded and we had to squeeze into the back seats and it was hot and bumpy back there. I could tell it was going to be a very long bus ride. At first no one on the bus seemed to know about the mudslides. But then some cars coming down the road stopped the bus and warned the driver. Still he kept going. About an hour after we left Baeza we rounded a corner and came to a stop. There was a big mudslide in front of us. Everyone piled out of the bus to look. It was 60 yards across and 8 feet deep. There were people wading through the mud coming over it from the other side.



The stories were very confusing but the gist of them was that there were several slides over a distance of 2 to 10 km. At least one of the slides was huge. There were buses and trucks stuck between the slides. Some people coming across were saying one hour to cross others were saying at least 5 hours and impossible to make it all the way.

Jen and I talked it over. What were the options? What were the consequences? What were our chances of making it? There was a group of Europeans on the bus and they told us it was crazy for us to even consider taking our little girls over the mudslides. The bus would return to Quito, 6 hours, then go south to Ambato, Puyo and then up from the south to get to Tena. That was maybe 15 hours on a bus. It would take us 3 days with the girls. Going back to the Hotel Samay would be worse then sleeping on the side of the road. That was out of the question. What was the worst that could happen if we didn't make it across the slides? We would have to spend the night out. We had a good tarp, blankets, food, a water filter. We know about camping out even if it rains. It wouldn't freeze. The girls were the only unknown. Without them we wouldn't have hesitated but were we putting them into some unseen danger? Decisions with the girls along became much more difficult. If I make a bad decision and suffer for it, that's life, but what if I make a bad choice for them? Could I live with that?

Under these circumstances you would expect the mother of two little girls to be very apprehensive but after weighing all these things Jen was okay with going on. Unlike most mothers we know, she has no problem letting her little girls get a little muddy at times.

We watched several Ecuadorians roll up their pant legs and wade into the mud. Most of them weren't prepared even half as well as we were. One lady had a 4-year-old girl with her. We put the girl's rubber boots on their feet, loaded our packs on our backs and marched forward. The Europeans shook their heads and muttered but we marched on. The bus driver even gave us half our bus fair back. As we marching forward I knew one thing for sure; it was going to be an adventure.

Only a few yards into the first slide Ria the little trail people were following and got stuck in the mud. Jen tried to get her out but sank up to her knees. She was able to lift Ria out but the effort only made her sink deeper. She leaned forward trying to pull her feet up out of the mud but then her hands sunk in. It was looking like quicksand. The more she worked to get out the deeper she went. With the heavy pack on her back it was impossible to get out. She told Ria to go yell for me to come back and help.

Just then she felt the weight of the pack lifted up. One of the Ecuadorian men had seen her predicament and come to help. While he lifted the pack she worked to free her feet. It was hard not to panic but by slowly wiggling one foot at a time she was able to get free and without losing her shoes.

After the first slide we walked along the road getting to know the others on the march. There were 15 of us that opted to cross the mudslides. Marco, the man that helped Jen out of



the mud, was a tourist guide in the Amazon. He was meeting some clients in Tena and he was going to be late. He spoke English and was a great addition to our group. There was the lady with her the 4-year old, Rosa and Lesli. Gorge was some kind of businessman. Tilman was pretty young, maybe 19 or 20. He may have been an oil worker. One man, I didn't get his name, and his wife looked like they were going to a formal dinner party they were dressed so well. He was carrying an extra suit on a hanger and she had high-heeled sandals on. Another lady had an 11-year-old girl with her. There were also three other gringos from Switzerland.

Every now and then we met others coming the other way. Most of them came from buses stuck between slides. They told us it was impossible to get through and we should turn around. Our group was determined. No one turned around.

We met a bunch of truck drivers trying to roll rocks out of the way so they could get their trucks out but we walked around them. We past one last landslide full of rocks and boulders and it seemed we had made it. There were cars, trucks and several buses. It had only taken us a little over an hour and a half to get past what we thought was the impassible. Two of the buses were leaving for Tena so we all climbed on. Marco, the tourist guide, and Gorge, the business man, told us not to pay until we were in Tena because they had a feeling this wasn't over and if we didn't get there we wouldn't get our money back.

We drove along for several kilometers and it was starting to look pretty good. The conductor started trying to collect money and was encountering a lot of resistance. Just then we came around a corner and there was a huge slide. Once again the bus had to stop and everyone climbed off. This slide was much bigger then the others, 200 yards across and maybe 20 feet deep in places. On the other side of the slide was a big track hoe working to move the debris. There were rocks the size of cars and water was still running through the mess. We stood and watched for over an hour but it became apparent that it was going to take a long time to move this pile. We would have to cross it or spend the night on the side of this mountain.

From our side of the mudslide we could see a few trucks waiting on the other side but no buses. It wouldn't help much to cross if we couldn't get a ride down the mountain and we were still high in the mountains, in the middle of a steep cloud forest and no sign of civilization. We had been very lucky so far. It had only sprinkled a little on the walk. As we debated the crossing it started to rain. Everyone pile back into the buses. When the rain ended our little group prepared for an assault on yet another obstacle. There where a lot of other people on the buses and perhaps some of the others made their move the same time we did but I wasn't able to pay much attention to who all was crossing but it was a lot of people.

That's when I made my biggest mistake of the adventure. I put my sandals on thinking I could keep my shoes from getting messed up. I put my pack on my back and Addi on my shoulders and started over the pile. It was soon obvious that I weighed too much. I sank deep into the mud every step. I only made it 30 or 40 feet into the crossing before my sandals came off. The pile wasn't just mud. It was full of rocks. As my feet and legs squished down into the mud the rocks cut and scraped my legs and feet. I fell down, got back up and fell again. I had to put Addi down. She had no trouble walking on the mud but I was still sinking in and falling. Most of the others were having far less trouble than I. They didn't weigh as much.

As I was fighting my way across I looked down the steep gully that the mudslide had filled. We were only 10 feet from the edge of the road cut. The pile was mostly still a liquid,

no doubt very unstable. If the road cut gave way like the mountainside above had, all of us, and the tractor, would all be gone. Even if the mud on the road decided to slither on over the edge and down the gully there would be no hope for any of us. I kept moving even though my feet were cut and bloody.

We finally made it to the big tractor. The driver had stopped digging because of all the people in his way. The guy in front of me climbed onto the tracks of the tractor and the driver waved us onto the top of the machine. Addison and I climbed up but then I made another mistake. I didn't understand that he was going to drive us out. I climbed down the other side. When I figured it out it was too late. I couldn't get back up. Jen and Ria made it on and I left Addi with them and started walking the rest of the way across.



This section of the slide was like a thick, rocky soup, more liquid than dirt. I was knee deep and the rocks cut into my feet every step. I almost fell into the soup several times. The big shovel rolled past me and unloaded the others before I made it out. It took several minutes to go the last few feet to the other edge. When I finally made it out of the mud I put down my pack, put my sandals on and waded back out to help get some of the others across. The shovel driver had started helping people across in his scoop. He would set his shovel down, 3 or 4 people would climb in and then he would swing it around and let them out as close to the edge as he could reach.

When I finally washed off the mud and looked at my feet and legs I was in bad shape. I had lots of cuts and scrapes on my legs and feet. Blood was running down both shins. One cut on my left foot was especially bad. It would be hard to keep it from getting infected here in the tropics. I put my shoes back on and prepared to move on.

While I was helping the last people cross Gorge, the businessman of the group, was negotiating a truck ride to Tena. The question was whether we had to pay \$1.50 or \$2.00 each and if it would get us to Tena or a little short of that. The truck was like a one-ton cattle truck and would easily hold the 15 of us. When we climbed into the back of the truck I wasn't sure what the outcome of the negotiation had been but that wasn't my department. It was good to have someone else looking out for us. It was good to be part of the team. We put our packs down in the back of the truck and the kids lay down on them. All the adults stood. It wasn't too bad to begin with but as we went along the truck picked up more and more people. It got up to 29 or 30 people in the back of the truck and it wasn't holding everyone all that well. We bounced down the dirt road for what seemed like forever. We watch storm clouds dropping rain all around us but our luck held. We didn't get rained on.

Ria laid face down on the bed of the truck and fell asleep. We had to put a little backpack under her head so she wouldn't get slivers in her nose. Addison and the other little girl, Lesli, fell asleep on my big pack. Jen and I straddled them all the way trying to keep them from getting squished as more people piled into the back of the truck. Finally we pulled into Tena just as it was getting dark.

It was surprising how unified the 15 people became on this adventure. It was good to see the people of different nationalities, languages, social classes and occupations work together like this. The group met and passed many other people along the way but the original 15 people stuck together from start to finish. It had been the kind of adventure I look for while traveling. We never felt in real danger but we felt like we were still taking a risk. We were walking in to the great unknown and we were forced to get to know people we wouldn't have even talked to otherwise. We got to see and do some things we would never have seen or done if it hadn't been for the slides. As the saying goes, "You can tell the quality of the adventure by the number of times you tell the story afterwards." We have already told the story many times.

Marco, the guide, took us to a nearby hotel. He was supposed to meet his clients there but the front desk lady told him they had left with another guide. It was okay because the three Swiss folks who made the crossing with us decided to go with him.

At the front desk they had candles burning for light. At first I thought it was for atmosphere but then I realized there was no power. All the lights in town were out. It just added to the adventure of the day. We had been so lucky all day long. Even Addison had no trouble after her night of being sick but we were all pretty tired.

The hotel was okay. It had a color TV and a fan. Of course the fan wasn't mounted right so it had a hard time turning and made a lot of noise. The room was pretty small and was right over the kitchen so it was noisy at times. There was only one bed so we put pads on the floor for the girls. Even with all that, it was way better than the Hotel Samay.

10/15

READY FOR THE RIVER

The next day we just took it easy. Jen took our dirty clothes to a laundry to have them washed. I delivered a CD from Larry to a local kayaker named Jamie. We checked the Internet for messages from home. We got a lot of them. While we returned the massages Addi and Ria dance up and down the street in the rain. They got really wet but it was very warm in the Orient. The Ecuadorian Amazon is called the Orient.

We arranged a jungle tour and rafting trip for the next two days on the Rio Jatinyacu. It cost a lot but I really wanted to get on a river. We paid \$255.00 for two days with everything included. They told us it was a big volume river, maybe 8,000 CFS. I wanted to do it in kayaks and inflatable kayaks but with that volume it would be hard to be sure I could keep an inflatable upright. To have the girls swimming in the sucky, swirly water of a big river could be very dangerous. If they fall out of a boat someone can always jump in and get them. But if the boat flips you lose control of everything. There is no way to keep track of a kid. I didn't want to run the risk of that. We worked it out so the girls and Jen would go in a big raft and I would kayak. The guides said they had never flipped a raft without trying. That sounded good to us.

The company was called "River People" and the owners are originally from Ireland. They moved their whole family to Ecuador 10 years ago and now most of the kids are grown and are working as guides for the company. The dad and manager of the company is Gary. Alex and Tim are Gary's sons and in their twenties. Abby is his eighteen-year-old daughter.

They had a young man from the Netherlands living with them. His name was Martin and he was quite a character. He was from a very wealthy family and his grand mother had

told him he needed to go out into the world and learn about life. He was really quite artistic. We saw some very pretty and interesting candles he had made and he wove little headbands for Ria and Addi. Jen was asking Gary how they knew Martin and he said, "He's a Witness".

Jen was confused, "What kind of witness?"

"You know, a Jehovah Witness," was the reply.

Gary and his family had come to Ecuador as missionaries, Jehovah Witness missionaries. Martin's family had sent him out into the world to travel from one Witness family to another. Martin would be going along on our trip as an extra body to help paddle the raft.

10/16

ON THE RIVER FOR ADDISON'S BIRTHDAY

Addi turned four in Ecuador. On the morning of her birthday she was having trouble waking up so Jen decided to give her the birthday present we got her. We sang Happy Birthday to her while she opened the present. It was a little Indian doll holding a baby. She really liked it and perked right up. She said, "I'm four now, I need to go tell Noah." Noah is her friend who lives down the street in Park City. I bought a piece of cake for breakfast that morning, Addi's birthday cake. We split it between the 4 of us. It seemed a little meager but she would do better as the day went on.

We left most of our belongings at the "River People" office. We took only the few things we would need for two days on the river, a change of clothes and cameras. We loaded into the back of a truck pulling a trailer loaded with raft, inflatable kayak and a Perception, RPM kayak. We drove about 45 minutes and stopped at the end of a road along the Rio Jatanyacu. While Tim and Martin got the boats in the water Abby, and her friend Carlos took us for a walk up a side creek for some swimming.



It was very beautiful with clear, green water foaming over waterfalls and gliding through deep pools with lush tropical forest all around. We dove off rocks, swam in the pools and slid down waterfalls.

When we returned from swimming the boats were ready to go. I hadn't had a good look at the river until then and WOW! It was big. There were big, muddy boils surging up several feet in the eddie just in front of the launch. I was impressed. I got in the RPM and paddled out into the eddie and was even more impressed by the sheer power of the river.

Tim had assured us that the raft wouldn't flip. He had only flipped a boat once before several years back and it was a much different situation. But as I paddled the kayak across the main current I thought, "I couldn't guarantee I wouldn't flip a 14 foot raft in this river." I should have given more attention to that thought. I should have listened to myself.

The others were in their boats ready to go. They pushed off and were swept down river by the strong current, Abby and Carlos in the inflatable, Tim as captain in the raft with Jen and Martin paddling with the girls hanging on in the middle. Martin had floated the river a few times but had very little experience. Carlos was Abby's boyfriend and knew almost nothing about rivers.

Abby and I were following just behind the raft as we bounced through the first big waves. I was feeling a little unstable in the new boat. The big, pushy water and the fact that I hadn't paddle much for a couple years didn't help. But I knew it would all come together with just a little time. We were only going a few kilometers down the river so it would be a good warm up for the longer second day.

We ran two rapids. Then I watched the raft enter the third one. It was a right hand turn in the river. The current was pushed up against the river left wall/cliff in a series of big waves. As the raft bounced over the waves Tim turned the boat a little to the right to get away from the wall. The small angle he put on the raft lined it up perfectly parallel with the next big angle wave. The wave hit the left side of the boat and pushed it up, higher and higher. I watched as the kids and adults tumbled out of the raft into the surging water and then the raft tipped over on top of them.

Later Jen told me she had come up under the raft thinking, "This can't be happening." She started frantically looking for the girls. The raft was still in the rapid making it a very violent ride underneath. She bumped into Tim who was also looking for the girls. Jen got a quick glimpse of Ria but the raft took another leap over a wave and then Ria was gone. When Jen got out from under the raft she saw Ria again only this time Abby and Carlos were approaching her in the inflatable kayak. Her relief at Ria's rescue was short lived. She still hadn't seen Addi. She screamed at Abby "Where is Addison, where is she." Jen had the horrible thought that Addison was going to drown in Ecuador on her fourth birthday. Jen thought, "I have to find her. How could I have let this happen?" She moved around the boat holding tight to the safety line. Then she heard Abby yell and looked where she was pointing.

I could hardly believe it, the worst-case scenario had just happened. I paddled toward the overturned raft as fast as I could but I couldn't see anybody. I knew they must still be under it. What if the girls are caught under there? How long could Addi and Ria last in this kind of water? I was of no use in the kayak if they were underneath. I pulled the spray skirt so I could bail out and swim under to help. Just as I pulled Addi came out from under the raft. She was immediately swept up stream away from everyone. In less than a second she was 60 feet away. I turned my kayak and went after her knowing I could only stay afloat for a few seconds without the spray skirt to keep the water out of my kayak. Then she was sucked underwater.

Where was she? How long could she hold her breath? What if she came up even farther away? What if she came up but was sucked back down again before I could get to her or without her getting a breath? I had plenty of time to think all this and more. It seemed like she was down forever.

I was paddling hard against the current to hold my position but if she didn't come up pretty close to me I might sink first. Suddenly she surfaced only 10 feet in front of me. I flopped out of the kayak into the muddy water and we grabbed each other. She was as glad

to see me, as I was to see her. She locked her arms around my neck face-to-face and said, “Dad, I don’t want to get back in the boat.”

That was where we were when Abby pointed us out to Jen. The kayak and paddle were just beside me so I grabbed them thinking that if we were going to have to swim another rapid it would be good to have the extra flotation. I started swimming hard to the right shore. I was finally able to look around at the big picture. Tim and Jen were in mid-stream attempting to right the raft. Ria was now in the inflatable with Abby and Carlos. Martin was swimming toward Addi and me. I could see that we would make it to calm water and the shore easily if I didn’t have to pull the kayak. Martin was almost to us so I told him to take the boat. I would get Addison to shore.

When Jen saw that I had Addison in my arms she was able to look around too. Tim had started the process of righting the raft. Together they got it righted before the next rapid. While I was swimming Addi to shore Jen looked at me and gave me the “Are you okay” sign. I patted my head in reply, “We are okay.” She went back to the business of saving the raft.

Abby, Carlos and Ria were paddling hard for the right shore also. For a moment I thought they were going to miss the eddie and be swept into the next rapid. The rapid wasn’t bad but it would mean Addi and I would be a quarter of a mile up river from everyone else and all the boats. It could have been a tough walk but luckily they make the eddie. In a few minutes Addi and I were sitting in the water at the shore beside them.

After a few minutes of scouting Abby and I decided we could sneak the right side and miss almost everything in the next rapid. That would be important with five of us in a two-person inflatable. Addi didn’t even complain about getting back into a boat. We made it easily down to where Jen, Tim and Martin were.

Even if Ria and Addison seemed fine, Jen and Tim were quite shaken by the whole thing. It was going to be hard to get back in the river. We decided to deflate the inflatable. Abby could paddle the RPM and Carlos and I would get in the raft to add weight and power. We had no trouble floating the couple more kilometers on down to camp. Even so there was a feeling of gripped intensity in the boat. Still Addi and Ria found it in themselves to let out some “Wheees” as the raft flew over the big waves.

We paddled the raft out of the muddy, powerful Jatinyacu and into the mouth of a clear, blue stream. Here we pulled the boats up onto a white sand beach. This was the river camp of the “River People”.

In the trees above the sandy beach were four or five thatched roof huts with hammocks and chairs on the front porches. We had lunch, including chocolate cake for Addi’s birthday. Before the day was over she had birthday cake three times. Then we went for a walk with Abby to look at plants and bugs and such. The rest of the day we played in the clear blue water in front of the camp.

Before dinner Abby, Tim, Carlos and Martin left and headed back to Tena. It was a surprise to us. We thought they were



staying with us. It turned out that Martin and Tim ran the inflatable the remaining 20 km down river to the take out. Abby and Carlos walked out a half mile and then got a bus back to town. Something must have been pretty important back in Tena. We were there with just the Indian family that cooks and takes care of the camp.

10/17

CABAÑAS

We slept in two upstairs rooms of one of the huts. It was the only time we didn't sleep in the same room with the girls. During the night we were visited by a couple strange critters. One was a giant green grasshopper like thing; the other a giant cockroach that liked Addison's hair. After we found the cockroach Ria moved in with me, and Jen slept with Addison.

By the time we finished breakfast Tim, Abby, Martin, and Gary had returned. We spent the morning kayaking and inner tubing on the small clear river and playing on the beach. I made another critical error at this time. I forgot to put sunscreen on and I didn't wear a shirt. I got quite sunburned. We also got quite a number of bug bites while playing.

When I took my lifejacket off the line I found my rescue knife was missing. I told Tim and he was pretty sure who had it. Tim asked the caretaker and sure enough he just happened to have it. During the night he did a little rummaging through our stuff and apparently he liked my knife.

After lunch we prepared the boats for more river running. Addi and Ria would go back to Tena with Abby on the bus. After the adventures the day before Jen decided they didn't need to do more rafting on the Jatunyacu and I wasn't going to disagree. I got to kayak with Tim and Jen rafted with Gary, Martin and an Indian named Eduardo. It was a beautiful float with big rapids although it really wasn't tough. They did manage to tip the boat up and dump everyone but Gary out, but there were no little girls in the boat to worry about. Everyone scrambled back in the raft and floated on. It was a 20 km run but it went pretty quick. We got back to Tena before dark and checked into a different hotel. It was off the main road and looked out over the river. We each had our own bed for \$15 per night.

That night we noticed that Addison had a rash on her face and down her neck. Her face was red and swollen.

10/18

TIRED IN TENA

Addi's rash was much worse in the morning. It was now on her arms, chest and back. We thought Ria was showing signs of the same rash. We all had lots of bug bits from the last few days. It was quite hot in Tena and we weren't really ready for heat. With my sunburn I was really feeling it. I also had sore muscles from two days of kayaking. Every night we had to change the bandages on my feet. It was becoming apparent that we were spending more money than I had planned. I figured too low. I thought \$50 a day average would do but \$80 to \$90 would have been a better guess. We were doing okay but the money problem just added more stress. My Leatherman Knife turned up missing. I'm pretty sure that the guy who got my rescue knife got this one too. Ria and Addi both said they wanted to go home. I started wondering if I was too old for this kind of travel. It wasn't feeling like as much fun as I thought it should be. All in all it made for kind of a low day.

I had planned to take a bus ride and see some more of the area but instead we rested. I found a little hole-in-the-wall shop while wandering around town. The guy was selling watches and some other little things but he also had a coin collection displayed and some stone objects. I stopped to look at the stones and found they were axe heads. The man told me they were from the Cosanga civilization, 400 to 1000 BC. They came from near the Cosanga River just outside Baeza. We did some bargaining and I bought 3 of them for fifteen dollars. I got a lot of grief for buying rocks when we were suffering from money stress.

Jen spent quite a bit of time trying to figure out Addison's rash. The girls were taking an anti-malaria drug called Malarone. We thought maybe their rash was an allergic reaction to that. We stopped giving it to both girls. Ria didn't have any more trouble but Addison's rash stayed and stayed. Jen talked to the local druggist who was very helpful. She sold us some anti-histamine that we were hoping would at least slow it down. The druggist thought it could be related to the heat also. Jen made several phone calls to the U.S.A. First she called the International Immunization Center but got a recording. Then she tried the medical clinic in Park City and got Jane the nurse. Jane didn't have any better ideas but recommended higher doses of anti-histamine.

10/19

TO AHUANO TO SEE A FAT PIG

In the morning we got up early, packed everything up and took our big packs to the front office to be stored. If we found ourselves in another adventure like the mudslides I didn't want to have to rush back to Tena just to spend the night. I wanted to be prepared to spend the night anywhere so we told the hotel manager we might be back in the evening but not to worry if we didn't show up.

We walked to the bus terminal to get a bus to Ahuano. We missed the 7:30 bus by 10 minutes so we had to wait until 9:30 for the next one. We sat on some benches and watched people while Addi and Ria played in the courtyard. Once on the bus we bounce along a dirt



road on the south side of the Rio Napo for one and a half hours. The bus was full but we had good seats. It is always interesting to watch the people getting on and off the bus. I tried to picture their lives from the small glimpse I got from the bus. There are kids going to school, oil workers going out to the pipeline, ladies returning home after shopping in town, farmers taking goods to town. When someone gets off the bus in the middle of nowhere I wonder how far they will walk to get home. What does their house look like? Everything is so different from what we are used to, the people, the vegetation, houses, and towns.

The book I brought to read, "The Party's Over", is about what will happen as the world oil supply runs out. The people here use so much less energy than us. Will our lives be more like theirs when the oil runs out?

The bus stopped at the end of the road on a

pebbled beach along the river. As near as we could tell they call the place “La Punta”. It’s a transfer point from bus to boat. There were maybe 6 motorized canoes parked along the beach. They are impressive boats, 40 feet long and 3 feet wide for the majority of their length. At first I thought they were made from a single tree trunk but then I saw one being built and I realized they were actually three pieces, a bottom, and two sides. It looked like a 40 or 50 HP outboard motor on the back of most of them. Each boat had five or six small benches.

People were getting in the boats and going across the river. From there they could get a ride in a pickup to the town of Ahuano. We told one of the boatmen that we wanted to go to the “Center for Animal Rescue.” He said “Oh the Zoo, \$20.” (In Spanish of course.) That was way too much. It was only 25 cents to cross the river. After some negotiation we got it down to ten dollars. We all climbed in and headed down the river.

The river was quite swift and powerful even though there were no rapids. The Jatinyacu River that we ran a few days earlier is a tributary of this, the Rio Napo. The Jatinyacu joins a few other rivers and becomes the Napo. We went down river for a while then turned up a smaller side channel almost too small for the boat. The strong current really made the boat and the driver work hard. On the way we saw a monkey in a tree. When we pulled up in front of the “Zoo” there was a man sitting in a canoe.



Beside the man sat another monkey.

There were monkeys everywhere and some kind of raccoon like animal called a cuchuchu, and birds all running wild and many of them very friendly. There were also animals and birds in cages. We saw toucans, parrots, macaws, peccaries, ocelots, turtles and snakes. We took a guided tour for an hour and a half. It was in English so we learned a lot.

We spent another 45 minutes sitting on the beach while Ria and Addi played with a couple very friendly monkeys. Brenda was perhaps a little too friendly, stealing Ria's hair clips and trying to get things out of our packs. We were told that just up the river one of the local Indian villages had set up a hostel and we could get a place to stay. Eventually a boat came by and gave us a ride up to the village. It might have been okay but when we got there the adults had all gone away. There wasn't anyone there who knew

anything. The lodging looked good but when we tried to figure out how the eating would work we got nervous. We had very little of our own food and the only way to eat in the village was with the Indians. That could be very risky. We decided it would be better to move on. Then we had to figure out how to get back to civilization.



girls joined us on our walk. One looked about Ria's age, the other a couple years older, were very interested in us. They walk behind us and in front but they never got very far away. Ria got all giggly and hid in the grass along the trail. She would have loved to talk to them but the language barrier was a problem. I was glad to have them with us because there were many trails going all directions and it was much easier following them then figuring out which way on my own. Addison fell asleep on my back.

As we walked out of the forest and onto the beach I saw a boat unloading people. I hurried across the rocky, riverbed and whistled. The boatman had already pushed off but he turned back in and picked us up, good luck. He took us across to the town of Ahuano for

We waited for over an hour and no boats came by. There were a couple of small canoes on the other side of the river. I thought maybe we could get across and find a trail across the island. Then a man and a woman came out of the trees on the island. A canoe slid out from the shore on our side and a young girl paddled it over and picked them up. When they landed I went and asked if they could take us across. Ten minutes later we were walking along a little path across the island. We walked through jungle and banana plantation headed for Ahuano. Two little

fifty cents. We walked through town stopping at a shop to buy a bottle of water before starting the 2 km walk to the next river crossing.

I had heard that there were two evening buses, one at 5:00 and the last bus of the day at 6:15. We wanted to catch the five o'clock bus so we wouldn't be doing the whole bus ride in the dark. But with two little girls you go as fast as they go. They were happy and walking well but they were slow. It became apparent that we would miss the five o'clock bus. We walked down to the river crossing at 5:25. Across the river I could see a bus sitting on the beach. We flagged down the only boat on our side. Once across I went to the bus and asked when it would leave. The guy said five minutes. Perfect. More good luck. We were back in Tena by 7:00 pm.

At times Jen and I got mad at the girls for whining or not minding what we said or for doing something that scares us. We were constantly nagging at them about not putting things in their mouths, not even their fingers, fingers that had just been playing with monkeys. They are kids and everything they can fit in their mouths eventually ends up there. It's really scary. But they did very well. They played whatever games they could with what they had. They went along with our changing plans and they walked, walked, and walked. It crossed my mind that if they got fed up with it all and started saying, "We want to go home", it could have gotten very difficult. I don't know how we could have dealt with that one. We didn't have an option to go home early. Our flight wasn't changeable.

10/20

PUYO AND THE MISSING GIRL

If my friend Craig hadn't warned me that most of the country wouldn't take travelers checks we might have been in big trouble. By our standards the banking system is pretty backwards. First, the banks always have long lines. They only have two or three tellers and they aren't in any hurry. If there is an unemployment problem in the country why don't they hire a few more tellers? I stood in line for 20 minutes while the tellers counted thousands of dollars in fives and tens. Why were they counting all that money while people stood in line? Bills bigger than tens are a problem because no one has change for anything bigger. Because Craig told me to bring cash we had a lot of fifty and one hundred-dollar bills. Six hundred dollars in fives and tens is a big bundle of money, kind of hard to hide on your person. So we would change one or two hundred at a time and then split it between the two of us. You would have thought we were trying to get away with something shady the way we were treated when making the exchange. Sometimes they couldn't give us ten tens. I don't know why. The tellers never smile. It makes the banks in the USA look real friendly.

We like getting breakfast at bakeries. Most of the bakeries serve coffee, hot chocolate, sandwiches and eggs. The four of us could eat for two dollars and have a pretty good breakfast.

Puyo is the next town of any size to the south of Tena. As usually I sat by the window for the three hour bus ride and watched the world go by. From the window of the bus I would get quick views of people, the rivers, geology, plants and animals as they flashed by. As I watch the people getting on and off the bus I imagined I could tell their station in life by how they got on and how they acted once on. A poor man is waiting and ready when the bus comes into view. He has his little bag, or maybe a very big one, full of potatoes or grass or what ever. He rushes to get on the moment the bus stops. He stands or sits quickly.

The wealthy man is still strolling up and he doesn't speed up when he sees the bus coming. He takes his time getting on and then he takes the jump seat beside the bus driver.

Two Dutch girls were sitting in the seat behind Jen and the girls. Ria and Addi entertained them and themselves by talking and playing over the back of the seat. Ria and Addi are very excited when they find someone who speaks English. On the second half of the ride they fell asleep in our laps. Ria is very big for sleeping in my lap. It makes getting off the bus more challenging when they are asleep. It is kind of a rude awakening for them.

In Puyo we got a hotel and settled in. It was called "Hostel Libertad" and it was the nicest place we had been in so far. It seemed the quality of each hotel was going up but the cost was going down. Hostel Libertad was only \$10 a night with a big, bright and clean room.

After getting settled into our hotel we went out to see some of the town. We went downstairs and out the front door. The hotel owners also owned two little shops next to the hotel and they were sitting at a table on the sidewalk in front of one of the shops. We stopped for just a few words with them. When we were done we looked around and Addison was gone.

We looked up and down the block and couldn't see her. Jen took off running up the street and I started sticking my head into each shop along the way. Jen ran around the corner and still nothing. She saw a policeman and frantically tried to ask if he had seen a little gringo kid.

It was amazing how fast we got panicked. Lots of cars were driving up and down the street. The sidewalk was full of people. Someone would only have to step out of a car and grab her and she would be gone. Before I got to the corner Jen had already come back. We were both in full panic by this time. Jen started yelling at the top of her lungs, "ADDISON, ADDISON". We ran back to the hotel to make sure she wasn't somehow still there. I may have been speaking English by then because the people at the table didn't seem to understand what I was saying. Just then we heard some loud whistling from around the corner so we raced back that way.

The policeman had taken the missing child seriously. He got another policeman and some civilians looking. I don't know exactly how it happened but apparently Addi had run down the street, around the corner and up the next street and then gone into a building to hide. Jen had gone almost that far but Addi was hiding so Jen didn't see her. One of the policemen found her in the building and started whistling for us.

I don't have any idea what Ria was doing during all this. My brain isn't real clear on the whole thing. I assume she was running back and forth with us. We had a serious talk about running off and hiding after that. It took some time for our heart rates to come back down.

We went to a biologic reserve and took a guided tour of the plants and buildings of the Orient. The tour was \$10.00 and usually came with a guide but the girl at the desk said there were no guides that day. I complained about paying \$10 but not getting a guide. She went away and came back with the director of the reserve. He would be our guide. His name was Cuema and he talked a lot about the medicinal qualities of different plants. He told us a great native story about the leaf cutter ants and why they are so busy. I only got part of the story because it was in Spanish but he did his very best to make it understandable to

us. He also did a ceremony with some special leaves that were supposed to make Addison more relaxed and calm. I think maybe Jen and I needed it more than her.

He also showed us houses built in the style of different native tribes throughout the Orient. He didn't speak much English but he did a great job of reducing his Spanish to our level. It was actually good practice for us.

Once again I had to cut out some of my plans. My hopes of getting several days of kayaking evaporated in Tena. It would have taken too much time and money. I had hoped to take a major jungle expedition from Puyo. I wanted to go to a place called Canelos but once again it would have been a lot of time and money and we were running out of both. It would have also been a lot to ask of the rest of the family.

I am used to the "never stop, never give up," get to the goal, philosophy. But I think this time the goal was wrong. I set it for me but I needed to set it for all four of us. It's easier to set a goal for myself. Usually it's all the way, the top, the farthest, the most extreme I can imagine. If I can conceive, I can achieve. But life is different with two little girls. I have to admit it is also difficult being almost 47-years-old and out of shape. Ten years ago I would have had no fear of kayaking anything the locals wanted to take me down. Now I was afraid I could get in over my head. I no longer have endless reserves of energy and strength. I guess it's all part of life and aging.

10/21

BAÑOS FOR TOURISTS

It rained all night and was still raining in the morning. We had planned to go to an animal preserve, a place that raised jungle animals for domestic use, but it didn't seem like much fun in the rain. We got some breakfast and checked our e-mails before taking a taxi to the bus terminal. We got a bus going west into the mountains. It followed the Rio Pastaza out of Puyo and across the remaining lowlands. After about 45 minutes the road entered a canyon cut deep into the mountains. The river was churning and foaming its way down the canyon. Side creeks made great waterfalls as they dove over the final vertical walls into the river. After about two hours we pulled into a city perched on a basalt plug that had flowed down from the volcano not too many geologic years ago. The river had cut a deep trench around one edge of the lava. The town of Baños is squeezed between the steep side of the volcano and the 300-foot vertical drop into the river.

As soon as we got off the bus a couple guys started trying to sell us on their hotels. We went with the guy named Victor to the Hotel El Oro and it seemed okay, \$8 for all including breakfast. It keeps getting cheaper.

We spent the rest of the day wandering around town. The name Baños mean bath or bathroom. In this case it is the former because there are hot spring baths near the town. It is a tourist town, tourist shops, tourist tours, tourist bike rentals, tourist rafting, tourist volcano tours, even tourist horse back riding. They told us that October is low season. June, July, and August are the busy months. That is why the hotels weren't very full.

Three or four years ago Baños was forced by the government to completely evacuate because it was believed that the Tungurahua Volcano, which towers over the town, was going to erupt and bury it under a river of lava and volcanic debris. It didn't happen so after 3 months everyone moved back. The volcano is still smokes and spews out lava and ash but it just adds to the attraction of the area. How many places can you stand at the foot of an active volcano and watch it spew?



We bought some animals carved from the nuts of a certain palm tree called a “Tagua”. They call it vegetable ivory. It looks and feels a lot like ivory. They make all kinds of things out of it. We also watched them make sugar cane taffy. In front of many shops they were pulling a big wad of the brown stuff. One place broke off a little piece and gave it to us to try. We ate it and it was good but Jen and I just couldn’t believe that after they pulled it with their bare hands and threw it against the wall right out on the street that it could be considered clean. Addison and Ria really wanted some but we were mean parents and didn’t buy any.

We took a hike up the hill on the far side of the river. There was a great view of the volcano from there. We stopped to talk with a little old man and woman with a very old burro. The man and woman were so old and shriveled they were not much taller than Ria. The burro was so old that he got to walk along with no load while the man and woman carried bags of potatoes on their backs. They said their house was about an hour up the road and they invited us to go there with them. It would have been very interesting but it would also be dark in an hour and then what would we do?

The town of Baños was celebrating for the month of October. I understood it had something to do with the “Day of the Dead”. There seemed to be an unusual number of funeral processions walking through town, at least three or four a day. Bands were playing in the streets all day and most of the night. There was a band playing just around the corner

from our hotel. We stopped and danced with the people for a while before retiring to our hotel for the night. The band and general rabble rousing went on until four in the morning. Fortunately I was very tired and was able to sleep through most of it.

10/22 WEDNESDAY, WATERFALLS & TRUCK RIDES

We had been shopping around for a waterfall tour. The one that we finally picked had a very colorful and interesting old truck to ride in. It was a 1950's vintage, one or two-ton truck with a homemade wooden body built on top. It had been painted with lots of bright colors and fitted with a big rack on the roof so people could ride up there when the weather was nice. The inside had bench seats and could hold up to 25 people. There were only eight of us on our tour, ten counting the girls. I don't think the old truck would go faster than about 25 miles per hour and it made a lot of noises that sounded like the body and the frame could soon be parting. It was a bumpy, slow ride but we didn't mind. We had a lot to look at. We stopped at four or five waterfalls. The last one we hiked down into the gorge to get a look from the bottom.

The whole place is quite touristy but not even close to Yosemite or Yellowstone. We saw a lot of gringos riding bikes along the road down to the waterfalls. There were a number of shops that rented them in town. I would have liked to do our tour that way but I didn't see any bike trailers for the kids. In the bottom of the gorge there was a restaurant to serve all the tourists hiking down to look.

We also saw a Spanish school in Baños. It would be a wonderful place to take classes at least in October. It would be cheap living and a great place to spend time. It has Quito beat hands down.

A couple days after our raft adventure in Tena I developed a strange bump on the front of my leg just above my ankle. I knew right away what it was. I have no clue what gave it to me but I know how. I was wearing my wetsuit booties and shorts. I brushed against some plant in the jungle, the equivalent of poison ivy. In Baños I was breaking out nicely in the same rash I get from Poison Ivy. I had to tie my shoes just half way up so the tongue wouldn't rub on it.

The cuts on my feet were looking real good. Addison's rash was looking better but wasn't gone by any means. Her whole body was covered with a rough, grainy, colorless rash almost like tiny blisters. Baños was a very nice cool temperature. If her rash was going to go away once we were in cooler temperatures it should have been gone. Once again Jen went to a druggist who looked at Addi and sold her some cream. It was kind of spooky not knowing what it was. Ria and I were suffering from liquid poop, I assume the basic travelers kind.

Besides these little problems it was a good day. Baños was a good place for us.

10/23 BAD NIGHT IN BAÑOS

When Victor first took us to the Hotel El Oro he told us how tranquil it was. It was out of the busy center of town with less traffic and no bars. To call the place tranquil was not even close. Someone played pool upstairs until 10:30 bouncing balls and pool cues off the floor. Then, for about an hour there was only the usual night-in-the-city noises, I could handle that. But around 1:00 am people started gathering outside the hotel. I didn't know what they were doing but around 4:00 AM I figured out they were buying liquor from the

guy across the street. They were loud and drunk. When we saw them waving a pistol around I knew we wouldn't be spending another night at the Hotel El Oro. One of the drunks was still lying in the street when we went out around 8:30 in the morning.

The owners of El Oro were very nice people and it was a little uncomfortable when we had to tell them we were leaving. We found another hotel and moved in. I was not so sure it was any different but Jen thought it would be okay. We were still right over the street and not all that far from El Oro.

Clear back before we left home Jen wanted to hire some horses and take Ria for a ride. Several places around Baños were advertising horseback tours so Jen lined us up for a ride. It was raining in the morning but we weren't starting until 11:00 and by then it was a beautiful day. Our guide was a woman named Pania. She was just what you would expect from a professional horsewoman. She was very confident around the horses and she knew what to look out for well before it happened. She wanted to take us on a waterfall ride along the river instead of the mountain ride we had planned. She thought the mountain ride might be dangerous for the girls. Jen and I have a hard time when someone tells us we can't do something because of the girls. It didn't take too much to convince her we could do the mountain ride.

I was more worried about the horses than any of us. I am a much bigger person than most folks in Ecuador. Maybe that was really what Pania was worried about too. I was more than willing to walk as much as needed, up or down. I was also worried about four hours of riding with a four and a five-year-old.

The ride up was no problem. It was a road all the way. Even so I walked for a while. Somewhere along the way I wanted to take some pictures and the camera was in my backpack. I took the pack off and held it in front of me. The horse started dancing around and hopping up and down. I was paying more attention to the pack than the horse but when Jen and Pania started yelling at me I got the picture. The horse didn't like me waving the pack around. He was running pretty fast by this time and it seemed like a good time to drop the pack to the ground and solve everyone's problems. As soon as I did the horse settled down and all was well.

We took a break high on the hill overlooking Baños, with a view of the volcano. When we started down the trail on the other side of the mountain we could see what Pania was worried about. The horses teetered and rocked as they stepped down the steep, rocky trail but Addi and Ria sat up there like real horse women. Jen and I walked. We were back in town before the afternoon showers began.

Ria was doing well with "Como se llama" and "me llamo Ria". She liked asking "cuanta queda". She seemed to be getting several other little phrases but maybe subconsciously. Both girls can now count to 20 in Spanish.

At restaurants in Ecuador they have a house meal, breakfast is Desayuno, lunch, Almuerzo and dinner Meriendas. These meals are very cheap. Meriendas is usually something like juice, coffee, rice, lentils, meat, soup and some desert. It cost between one and two dollars. Jen and I could each order one meal to split with a girl and then order an extra soda and be happy for \$3.00.

10/24

OUT OF BAÑOS TO GUARANDA

In the morning we had breakfast at the bakery and caught a bus to Riobamba, a two-hour bus ride for four dollars. We had planned to stay in Riobamba and go to the Saturday market but when I saw what a big city Riobamba was I knew it wasn't anyplace I wanted to be. As soon as I compared thoughts with Jen it was unanimous. We needed a new plan. I had already been working on it. Guaranda was much smaller, had a good Saturday market and was not that far away. We got the next bus to Guaranda.

The bus ride took us three quarters of the way around Mount Chimborazo. It is the highest mountain in Ecuador, over 20,000 feet. We went right over it's southwest shoulder. At our highest point we were at 14,400 feet.

Guaranda is in a mountain valley, mostly agricultural, with a lot of traditional people living in the area. They wear the colorful, wool outfits that are traditional to the descendents of the Inca Empire. These people and colors make for great photos but they are opposed to having their



pictures taken. I understand it is because they believe it steals some of their soul. It was harder to find a hotel in Guaranda. They were more expensive and not as many to choose from. We finally found one we liked and after Baños it was very quiet. We stayed for three nights and were the only ones there the whole time. Guaranda is not a tourist town.

10/25

TAMBANG FOR GUNS

Around 2:00 am Addi woke us up complaining that her legs hurt. I gave her some water to drink and put her back to bed. Five minutes later she threw up all over the bed and herself. To make matters worse we discovered the water had been turned off for the night. The toilet didn't even flush. For the next two and a half hours she threw up about every ten minutes. Jen lay next to her so she could rush her into the toilet if she looked like it was happening again. Who knows what it was that got her? We suspected the dinner but we had all eaten the same thing and the rest of us were fine. Her system may not be as strong as the rest of ours. By the time we went out for breakfast she was just fine. At least she recovers fast.

It was Saturday and Saturday is market day in Guaranda. The town was bustling with activity, people buying and selling everything. The open-air markets were packed and the streets too. Thousands of wool, felt hats and bright, red, pink and green shawls decorated the dark faces of the indigenous people from the surrounding countryside.

Jen shopped for some hats and decorations to dress the girls up with. I shopped for antiques and axes or any other interesting things to put on our wall back home. I didn't find

much but Jen did. She got a hat for each of the girls and material for a skirt. The native women wear bright colored woven belts around their waist and another wrapped around their long black hair. We bought one of the hair ties and the lady put it in Ria's hair.

Around noon we walked out to the main road and caught a bus headed to a town called Chimbo. I had heard that near Chimbo was a little town that was famous for making replicas of old guns. I wanted to get one to add to my antiques collection. I figured I would need to get a pistol because a rifle would be too big to get back to the US. I was imagining trying to get through the airport with a rifle strapped to my pack. In Chimbo we hired a taxi to take us up the hill to the town of Tambang. I thought there would be a factory where they made the guns but it wasn't so. Almost everyone in Tambang made guns in their houses. We had to walk around from house to house and ask about guns. Jen thought it was a very strange thing for us to be doing. The historical guns really weren't available. But I bought a couple old pistol that one guy had lying around. They looked old and that is what counts for me. I paid \$12 for the both of them. We spent a couple more hours wandering around the countryside before catching a bus back to Guaranda.

It was about this time that we started really worrying about the amount of money we had. We were running out. We had planned to be able to use the credit card to get more money if needed but it was gone. We had money, just not a lot. We would have to skimp on everything if we were going to make it last. We wouldn't have any to buy souvenirs with either. We needed to get to a bigger city where we could get money wired to us through Western Union.

10/25

TOURING THE COUNTRYSIDE



Ria and Addison took everything in stride. Their major crises were the same ones they have back home. Ria did something to Addi or Addi got more or someone fell down. Climbing off the bus at 14,000 feet in the middle of a landscape that looks more like the moon than a tropical country in South America, they take it without question. Climbing into the back of a pickup with little old ladies with bags of live chickens or climbing out of the pickup in the middle of nowhere to walk through the countryside past pigs, burros and barking dogs, they seem to think nothing of.

We got on a rattletrap of a bus crammed full of Indians and bags of farm products. Ria climbed on top of some bags of potatoes and made herself comfortable as though she had been doing it all her life. She acted like it was no different then taking a ride on a Park City bus. How will this view of life, so different from ours in Park City, effect how they see our world?

We saw a man crawling down the street on his hands and knees because he had something wrong with his feet. We walked past an 800 lbs. pig hanging from a post. They had just killed and bled it and were working on butchering it. There was a pool of blood running across the ground. The ladies were cooking up its entrails right on the spot. In our day and age we never see these kinds of things, certainly not in Park City. What thoughts were Ria and Addison having? Will it change them?

In the morning we caught a bus to go up near Mount Chimborazo. We could see the snow capped mountain shining against a clear, tropical sky. Ten minutes later clouds were starting to form behind the mountain. Half an hour later when we got off the bus at 14,000 feet on the shoulder of Chimborazo it was completely clouded over. Fifteen minutes later we were inside the cloud and it was freezing cold and threatening to rain or snow. We walked for a little while in the strange place before deciding to make a hasty retreat. We stopped a truck, jumped in the back and headed down the mountain. We jumped in and out of the back of several trucks throughout the day. We were trying to get to a little place called Salinas. We didn't make it there; a shortage of rides and a little too much rain made it more difficult then we had planned. But we saw a lot of interesting country and people, burros, pigs, llamas, houses and more. We spent \$5.50 on transportation and \$3.60 on food.

Jen was the one who came up with the plan to go to Salinas. It sounded like a nice place, an out of the way, back roads experience. It's good when she comes up with a plan. I think she was disappointed that we didn't make it there.

Originally we had planned to go much farther during these three weeks of travel. We were going to go on south to Cuenca and then across to the coast before looping back around to Quito. It would have been feasible but it would have meant moving fast the whole time. After about three hours on the bus Addi and Ria would start to get restless and that was hard on Jen and I. The buses didn't stop for food or bathrooms much either. We were much better off if we could keep our bus rides to three hours or less. When we left Baños we gave up on seeing everything.

We eventually laid a plan that would take us on a slow loop back up to Quito on back roads and out of the way places. It was a good plan but much harder to execute then I would have thought.

Next to our hotel was a woodworking shop. I had been studying it every time we past it. Finally I stopped to ask my question. Did he have any old wooden wood planes he would sell? I was a little surprise when he said he did. We were on our way to catch a bus and Jen and the girls had already gone on ahead. They would be mad if I didn't catch them soon. I

had to buy it quick. It was a big plane and well used. It would look really great on my wall with my other old woodworking tools but the guy wanted \$20 for it. I only wanted to pay ten. I didn't have much time to bargain. I quickly agreed to \$15 and I ran off after Jen with the heavy thing under my arm.

10/27

HARD DAY ON THE ROAD-QUEVEDO

The hotel guy probably made an honest mistake but still he tried to over charge us. I bought a bottle of soda and was told it had a fifty-cent deposit. It also had a cap on it that could be redeemed for sixty-five cents off another soda. The ladies in 2 different stores wouldn't give us the deposit for the bottle but they both tried to switch it for one that wasn't a deposit bottle. Then a security guard stole the 65-cent cap off the bottle



while were trying to get the deposit for it. The bus company lied to me so we would ride their bus even though it didn't go where we wanted to go. I showed them on the map where we wanted to go and they said, yes, that is where this bus goes. Just as the bus was leaving I figured out we would be taking the long route through big cities not the back roads and small towns I wanted. It wouldn't even get us to the town I had told them. We would have to take another ride 10 km up another road to get there.

The whole bus ride I was fuming about everyone trying to cheat us. When you have big packs and two little girls it is hard to know how to keep everything and everyone safe. We could never get away from somebody who meant us harm and there seemed to be plenty of people you couldn't trust. We weren't even quick enough to jump off the bus when it was the wrong one.

I was questioning my desire to travel. Why was it that I wanted to travel? Is it worth all the cost and danger and hassles? If we needed to travel why didn't we go to Florida and relax on the beach? Why didn't we just take the girls to Disneyland? I was feeling ready to be heading home. Of course at Disneyland they would simply rob you right up front. The bus in from the parking lot could cost more than any bus ride in Ecuador. One day at the Disneyland could cost the same as what we spent on two weeks of travel. And more than that is none of it would have anything to do with reality.

We spent 2 hours dropping 8,000 feet off the west side of the mountains and then another 3 hours driving across flat, tropical farmland. The only crop I recognized was the banana, miles and miles of banana fields. The signs said, "Dole". Two weeks later when we were back in Park City Jen bought a bunch of bananas. When I looked at the label on them it said "Ecuador, Dole" on the sticker. They probably came right from these fields.

The lowlands are hot and steamy. Babahoyo and Quevedo are big, dirty, crowded cities. When the bus stopped in Babahoyo Jen and the girls made a dash for the bathroom but I had to stay and watch our stuff. The bus pulled out as soon as the girls were back on so I didn't get a chance to go to the bathroom.

All this stuff keep piling up making me more and more stressed. By the time we were in downtown Quevedo working on getting more money I was really getting stressed. We needed a phone to call Bev and there were none. The bank wouldn't let me use their bathroom to pee. People were warning us it was dangerous on the street. "There are many thieves here," they would say. I was wandering up and down the streets, trying not to pee my pants, looking for a telephone and not having any luck. Fortunately Jen and the girls were sitting in the air-conditioned bank waiting, not tagging along behind me. Time was ticking away and I was afraid the bank was going to close before we got the money. After a half hour of searching I found a phone store and they had a bathroom. I called Bev and got her on the first try. She was able to run straight to Western Union and send the money. I was finally able to relax little. It was almost five pm when we finally got the money, too late to move on. We would have to spend the night in Quevedo but at least we could catch the first bus out in the morning.

The hotel wasn't bad and the little restaurant downstairs had great fried chicken and french-fries. Interestingly even after all the warnings everyone we had dealings with in Quevedo were helpful and friendly and no one tried to cheat us.

10/28

HOT TO COLD ZUMBAHUA

When we left the hotel at 7:15am to get a taxi to the bus terminal we were already hot and sweaty. The temperature was probably 80° F and high humidity. We rode the bus through banana plantations and lush vegetation. We made a transfer to another bus and it started to climb and climb and climb. Twenty miles per hour was our top speed. We climbed through dense cloud forest and heavy fog then through green pastured mountains and finally into a dead, arid looking high altitude region. We climbed more than 11,000 feet in three and a half hours. I checked the temperature in the afternoon and it was 38° F and drizzling. We ended at a place called Laguna Quilatoa at 12,700 feet.



The bus let us off in a place called Zumbahua and from there we got a ride in a truck/taxi to the Lake. To our surprise even though it was cold and barren it was a popular tourist site. We hadn't seen any other gringos since we left Baños almost a week earlier. I was thinking we were still out of the tourist

loop but here at Quilatoa there were quite a few gringos. The truck pulled into a little group of buildings perched on the edge of the volcano crater and the driver let us off in front of one of them. It was a hostel. We did the usual check the rooms and settle the price. It was much more crude than most of the places we had been in but we were out in the boonies. There was no town. It cost us \$12 for the night including dinner and breakfast. It was a great deal when you looked at the cultural value of the stay.

We ate dinner with a room full of Indian men, women and children all wearing traditional outfits. They grilled bits of meat on the wood stove in the center of the room while we drank tea and coffee and kept warm. They had a 2-day-old llama living in the kitchen because it was too cold outside for it. Several of the ladies had babies on their backs.

When they nursed they let both breasts hang out regardless of who was in the room. We slept out back in one of the guesthouses they had built when they started the tourist business.

The lake was inside the volcanic crater. It is eight or nine hundred vertical feet down into the crater to the water. We were told the lake is close to 800 feet deep. Jen and I and the girls went for a short hike in the afternoon. We walked part way around the crater. It was cold and wet. When we got back we sat around the stove and talked with the hotel owners while we dried and warmed ourselves.

In Quilatoa the locals painted pictures on llama hide to sell to the tourist. It is a very happy, colorful style of painting. One of the ladies was trying to sell one to Jen. When the price got down to \$2 she had to buy it.

There were three Dutch guys staying at the hotel. We spent quite a while talking to them. They had some different views of the USA after Iraq. I was getting the idea from them, and other Europeans I had talked with, that most of the world is not too happy with the U.S. actions in Iraq.

Two of them were feeling pretty sick. Back in Europe they live below sea level so it was no surprise they would be feeling bad at 12,700 feet. We were feeling smug. Coming from 7,000 feet we weren't feeling anything. That was before we went to bed.



10/29

THE MORNING AFTER

Addi didn't eat dinner. She was tired and wanted to go to bed early. The rest of us went to bed around 9:00 pm. Within half an hour Addi was once again throwing up. Shortly after that Ria started. Jen didn't throw up but she started feeling bad too. It was freezing cold in our room and the pit toilet was outside and across the courtyard. We talked about the

possible causes of the sickness and altitude came out as the most likely. Addison really only threw up twice. Ria threw up many times. By 11:30 Jen was really getting worried. Every time Ria got up to puke she got more worried. She was ready to pack up and leave right then.

I felt like a decision to get up and move would be serious. We would have to suffer with the cold temperatures and get someone up in the middle of the night to drive us who knew where. We would have to find a new place to sleep at an ungodly hour. To say the least it wouldn't be easy. I didn't think the sickness was life threatening. It might have been more dangerous to try to move. The fact that it was very difficult to move kept us where we were.

After her second episode Addi slept pretty well the rest of the night. Ria kept it up pretty much all night. Jen was not feeling much better either. She got up before dawn and started packing up to leave. When she was ready both girls were finally sleeping well so we let them sleep. It is possible that it wasn't altitude but rather some kind of flu. Jen and Ria didn't feel perfect for a few days.

Jen found us a ride back to the main road. We left around 8:30. We lost only about 600 feet when we dropped down off the volcano to Zumbahua but that was enough to make everyone feel better. It was warmer too. When we got to the main road we were told that there were no buses until 1:00 pm. We had 3 hours to wait. Then the Dutch guys who were staying at our hotel showed up. They were also trying to get a bus ride out. Now it looked profitable to the local shuttle driver. With a little bargaining we were on our way to Latacunga on the other side of the mountains.

When we left Guaranda we had a plan to follow the back roads all the way north of Quito and return to Quito just a couple days before we were to fly home. The bus company that lied to us messed us up when we left Guaranda. The plan had then been to go north out of Zumbahua to another road on the west side of the mountains. I talked to people in Quilatoa about going that way. It turned out to be difficult and expensive, \$160 for the 100 kilometers to the next main road. Once again the back roads plan wasn't working.

In Latacunga we were only one and a half hours from Quito. While we were trying to decide what to do next a bus going to Quito pulled up. We got on. By 2:00 pm we were back at the Ayala's having pineapple juice.

We only had five more days in Ecuador and two of those we planned to be in Quito. We had two more places we wanted to see. The first was a place called Mindo the other was Otavalo. Both places were more touristy but maybe that was good for our last few days.

10/30

MINDO IN THE TROPICS

Ayala's house was feeling like home at this point. It was clean and safe. Manuel, Zaida and the others made us feel welcome. They treated us like family. Their locked gates and security guard were there to keep the unfriendly world out. Three times a day we sat down and had delicious safe food. Without them Quito would have been a terrible place to be. The rest of Quito was dirty, dangerous and harsh. If they lived in a more appealing place it would have been hard to go back out into the world of the unknown, but extra days in Quito wasn't very appealing.

The bus to Mindo took us off the northwest edge of the mountains. Once again it dropped straight down into the lowlands. We didn't go all the way down. The Mindo Valley

is at 4,100 feet in a little valley surrounded by steep, green hills, for the most part covered with cloud forest.

The town of Mindo is very small but because it's a tourist town it has lots of hotels. We found a nice place called "Hotel Rubis". We liked the hammocks on the front porch and the fact that the owner spoke English. She had a 4-year-old girl who was mentally handicapped. The hotel was named after her. In the afternoon we took a walk up the river, about 4 km, to a place that raises butterflies. It was very interesting. They had about 25 different kinds of butterflies including the electric blue Morfo Butterfly.

We met a woman named Erin from Canada at the butterfly place and she spent the afternoon with us. She made us feel real good about our ability to speak Spanish because compared to her we knew a lot. She was alone in Ecuador. I think she was feeling very alone and was looking for someone familiar. We spoke English and we were a family with two little girls. We look pretty safe and not unlike the family she knew back home. And we were willing to take her in and include her. She decided to move to our hotel.



It was good to feel like I knew some Spanish because I had been feeling like I was regressing. I think what was happening was I learned enough to know when I was getting it wrong but I was having a hard time changing it to be correct. I would get all tongue-tied and nothing would come out. Sometimes I would say something and the person would look at me like I was from Mars. Then Jen would say the same thing and they would understand. It was frustrating. But, really, I think I learned a lot of Spanish.

10/31

BIRDING -SEARCH FOR THE COCK OF THE ROCK

We were up early the next morning, 4:30 am in search of the elusive "Cock of the Rock". We went with a bird watching guide. Erin went along with us too and she is a biologist. She was just starting a six-month stay in Ecuador as a bird watcher for some foundation. We took a truck out to the Rio Numbillo and then hiked for half an hour in the dark. Just as it was getting light we came to a little shelter in a thick wooded area. We could hear the loud squawking and flapping of birds all around us. We started seeing them, brilliant red heads and shoulders, grey or white midsections and black tails and wing tips. Their heads are very strange looking with a big knob on the top.

We learned that this little spot in the woods was what is called a "lekking". The birds use the place to congregate. The males come to the place to show off for the females. Apparently every morning they gather at this particular place and the guides can bring people here to see them. Even if seeing the birds wasn't worth the \$20 we paid, the adventure of it was. We got out in the woods and did things we wouldn't have done otherwise and that was worth it.

Ria hiked like a soldier even in the dark. She is really too heavy to carry now but she walks great. Addi was sometimes a pain because she sometimes refused to walk, demanding

to be carried. She too can walk great when she wants to. At least she doesn't weigh too much.

We got started so early that by 10:00 am it felt like we had had a full day. I took a nap for a while. There were several places that rented inner tubes and took people for guided tubing trip on the river. Addi said she wanted to go tubing on the river with me. Ria said she didn't want to. We paid \$6 for a guy to drive us up the little Rio Mindo and another to guide us down. Erin went with us but Ria and Jen took pictures from the truck.

Once again our back roads plan failed. We had hoped to go to Otavalo from Mindo on some smaller roads to the north. Once again we were told it would be very tough and expensive. I had a hard time giving up on the idea but the more people I talked to the more impossible it sounded. We would have to go back to Quito and get a bus from there to Otavalo. That was the only way. We decided that Mindo was a pretty nice place and we could easily spend another day there. We gave up on making it to Otavalo.

11/1 BACK TO QUITO

We got a ride in the back of a pickup headed to Quito. The pickup was a much better way to see the country than the bus. You get the full view in the back of a pickup. I even got sunburned. There was some very beautiful cloud forest on the way back to Quito. I wanted to take a hike there before returning to Ayala's.

We were supposed let the driver know where to stop but it didn't happen. I would have had to push much harder. I saw a good place to get out but Jen didn't sound very excited and Addison had just fallen asleep. So I didn't push it. The driver let us out at Mital Del Mundo, the Middle of the World, so we took the girls to the playground for one last round on the toys there. Once again it was a big hit.

We were going back to Quito because we had made a date with Manuel to go to the crafts market in the park on Sunday, November 2nd. We would buy our souvenirs and some artwork. Then we were to go do something with the Ayala family on the 3rd before flying out in the evening.

Manuel had taken my stone axe heads to the government anthropology department and gotten a favorable report. They **were** from the Cosanga Civilization sometime between 400 and 1000 BC. He thought they could be worth as much as four hundred dollars each. I had been taking a lot of grief from Jen about my artifacts but this bit of news was just what I needed to prove that I was not just spending good money on junk. My fifteen-dollar investment is worth maybe twelve hundred dollars!

11/2 SHOPPING??? WHO US?

Yes, we spent around \$200 dollars shopping at the crafts market. We bought all kinds of good junk, artwork, t-shirts, table clothes, antiques, jewelry, toys and more. I can't remember all we bought. We had to go twice because Manuel didn't leave us enough time the first round. He wanted to take us to his sports club. So we left the market and drove to the sports club. The girls swam in a very nice swimming pool. Everyone got wet except Jen and I. The pool had one problem. It wasn't heated. Needless to say it was freezing cold.

Our adventure was basically over. All that was left was getting back home. I'm pretty sure that if someone had asked me on that last day, "Would you do it again?" my

answer would have been “NO”. It was a lot of work. Much of it was not very satisfying. I didn’t do much of the kind of adventuring I have loved in the past. When I left home I was not fully aware of the risks I would be exposing my children to. Or more correctly I may have understood the risks but I was not fully aware of the implications that could have come from something actually happening to one of them.

But already that part of the trip is wearing off and the whole adventure is looking better and better. There is a little saying in the mountain climbing world that could apply here. “To be a climber (travel with young children) it is important to have no imagination and a very poor memory because if you had any imagination you would be able to imagine how it would be and you would never do it in the first place and if you could remember what it was really like the last time you would never do it again.”

Jen and I both love adventuring and seeing the world. The fact that we now have children doesn’t change that. I have no idea what this adventure has meant to Ria and Addison. Has it changed them? Will it make a difference in their lives? Are they better because of it? I want to believe the answer to these questions is yes, I know that in my life the answer is “YES”. I have a different view of the world than I would have if I had not wander the streets of Venice as a teenager or slept in a Shiek roadhouse in India. Riding a train across the arctic circle in the middle of winter and watching the sunset from the side of a mountain at 20,000 feet in Peru are things that I did many years ago but are very clear in my mind today. They had to have changed me. This adventure has changed me. I know the fear of a parent who lives in a place without drugs and other lifesaving facilities readily at hand. I know my daughters better because I spend 33 days without being away from them for more than a few hours total. I know how lucky I am to have a wife as strong and resourceful as Jen, a wife who is willing to not only allow me to follow my dreams but is willing to dream with me. And maybe I learned to be a little more patient. I certainly had plenty of opportunity to work on it.

Maybe it is just the biased view every parent has for their children but I see Ria and Addison as being different from most kids their age. They are confident and outgoing. They take change as well as can be expected of any person. They can think for themselves and they are certainly not overly attached to their parents.

So would I do it again? “No”, but we have a new connection in Brazil and that could be interesting. Maybe we could canoe up the Amazon.

THE END

We didn’t go do anything with the Ayala family because Manuel’s car wouldn’t work. We spent most of the day sorting and packing. We had to figure out how to get all our souvenirs home. That was made a little more complicated because we were trying to get guns and ancient artifacts, my axe heads, across the border.

Around 8:00 pm we got a taxi to the airport. Addi fell asleep laying on my pack while waiting in line. Ria and Addi both slept pretty well on the plane. Aunt Kathy met us at the airport in Salt Lake City the next day. She brought extra coats because it was very cold and snowy when we landed.

The guns look real good on our wall as do all my other treasures. The biggest problem we have now is that I read the book, “The Party’s Over” and I’m obsessed with figuring out what we should do about it. Is the world really going to run out of oil soon?



Urucum seeds

Throughout the rainforest, indigenous tribes have used Urucum seeds as body paint and as a fabric dye. It has been traced back to the ancient Mayan Indians, who employed it as a principal coloring agent in foods, for body paints, and as a coloring for arts, crafts, and murals. Although mostly only the seed paste or seed oil is used commercially today, the rainforest tribes have used the entire plant as medicine for centuries. A tea made with Urucum is used as an aphrodisiac and astringent, and to treat skin problems, fevers, dysentery, and hepatitis.



