

Janet's Diary

Peru trek 2006

DAY 1 – Wednesday 4th October

At last, after all the months of preparation we finally met all of our fellow trekkers at Heathrow, together with Sally and Charlotte from Skyline and the doctors on the trek – Graham and Marc - and set off on the first leg of our journey to New York's JFK airport.



The flight to JFK was fine though a little delayed, and we had to queue for a while at immigration in New York where we were fingerprinted and photographed. We then had to collect our baggage and get from Terminal 7 to Terminal 4 via the air train, which proved difficult for those of us who got on the wrong train and went so far off course we thought we may have to go through immigration again. We all finally made it to the Lan Peru check in desk in time, but ended up with our take off to Lima being delayed due to thunderstorms in New York.

DAY 2 – Thursday 5th October

Dunkin Donuts at Lima airport proved very popular for us weary travellers. As we were delayed we didn't have too long a wait here, though it was longer than we initially thought as we hadn't realised the clocks had gone back another hour (now 6 hours behind UK). The flight from Lima to Cusco was short, and we arrived on time to be met by colourfully dressed locals playing pan pipes at the airport.

It was only a short bus ride to the Hotel Savoy in Cusco which was fairly comfortable, though not quite up to its London namesake! We had a briefing and were introduced to our Discover Adventure leaders – Kelso, Mark and Simon. We found out who our room mates were going to be, and had an excellent lunch. We then walked up to the Plaza de Armas, and after taking some photos we sat in a bar overlooking the Plaza in beautiful sunshine, drinking coca tea which is meant to aid acclimatisation to the altitude. We had a good dinner at the hotel, then had an early night as everyone was shattered.



DAY 3 – Friday 6th October

Everyone woke up with headaches today, probably due to the altitude, but after a good breakfast most felt better. We took a bus to the hills above Cusco and stopped at Tambo Machay, an ancient Incan ruin, for the start of our acclimatisation trek. Ozzy and

Leo, two of our Peruvian guides, told us about this site. The story goes that if you drink the water here you'll be forever young, but we were warned that if we drank it we'd probably end up in hospital! Some of us took photos of some local people for the going rate of 1 sol (about 20p) per photo.



We walked gently across the countryside, crossing streams as we went, then stopped to look at a cave, inside which was an Incan temple of the moon. We stopped shortly after this for lunch which was an amazing spread: tents had been set up for food to be served and for us to eat, there were rows of bowls for washing with soap and towels, and even decent toilet tents! We were serenaded by a pan pipe group as we enjoyed our feast, and had our first chance to try Inca Cola, which tasted like a cross between Iron Bru and Cream Soda.

After lunch we walked to the ruins of Saqsayhuaman (pronounced like Sexy Woman, which it was referred to thereafter!) and learned a little about how this ancient Incan site had been destroyed first by the Spanish conquistadors, then by the locals who used the stones for buildings in Cusco. From here we could clearly see the White Christ statue which looks over Cusco, and which was apparently a present from the Palestinians in return for being able to stay in Cusco during the 2nd World War. It rained while we were all looking out over Cusco, and the MS Trust trekkers were easy to spot by the Blacks jackets they were wearing.

After walking back down into Cusco some of us enjoyed a little luxury at the Hotel Monasterio, where the beers were substantially more expensive than elsewhere in Cusco, but this was more than compensated for by the ambience. Before returning to the hotel we indulged in a little retail therapy, which Lorna and Dot agreed was an excellent cure for altitude sickness!

We went out to a restaurant, El Grano, for dinner this evening. The restaurant was close to the Plaza de Armas, which was as beautiful lit up in the evening as it was during the day. The food was a mixture of Peruvian and Oriental dishes, and we had our first introduction to guinea pig, which was served as a starter.

DAY 4 – Saturday 7th October

The first day of our trek proper! We took a lovely old bus to Calca, stopping on the way to see Pisac and the River Urubamba, part of the Sacred Valley, far below us. We stopped in Calca for 15 minutes to buy drinks and bamboo walking sticks (you could choose your walking stick with a colourful woven top and then get it cut to size for 5 soles). Sue was so impressed by the toilet facilities in Calca that she took a lovely photo

of them, but I thought that the cloud formations and the surrounding mountains were far more beautiful to photograph!

After leaving Calca we left the previously bumpy road and took an even bumpier track into the hills, but the bumps were worth it for the spectacular scenery. We were dropped off at Totora and Kelso got us doing some stretching exercises, watched by some bemused local kids and couple of dogs! We also learned here about the slow pace we should adopt while trekking at altitude – known as the Monty Burns shuffle. We started our trek by climbing up a beautiful gorge, accompanied by a



herd of llamas, walking along a track next to a lovely river, and sometimes crossing the river over a variety of small bridges. Ozzy soon had us singing a strange variety of songs, including We all live in a Yellow Submarine! The weather was beautiful as we stopped for a break to enjoy the first of our daily snacks, and we were delighted to see a humming bird here near the river.

Shortly after our break it started raining and we had to kit ourselves out in our wet weather gear. We trudged for quite a time through the rain to our lunch stop, getting colder and more weary as the rain got harder. The lunch stop was very welcome, to warm us up as well as to eat. Ozzy's brother brought a condor to show us as he works for a condor repatriation organisation, and despite the rain and cold we were excited enough by this huge creature to leave our warm tents and go and see it close up.

Because the weather was getting no better, the Discover Adventure guys decided to bus us to our first night's camp, and when we encountered a snowstorm as we drove over the 4,390m pass we were even more pleased that we weren't trekking this afternoon. We got into camp at Quisuarani in good time but we were all very damp and cold. We were warmed up by tea and popcorn though, a precursor to the way the chefs would look after us throughout the trek. We became acquainted with our tents and, unfortunately, the chemical loos! This camp was in a small village, with snow capped mountains towering around us in the distance, and local people came and set out their goods on the ground for us to buy: gloves, hats and other local goods, and even bottles of beer. Everyone dressed for dinner in their warmest clothes and head torches, and it was another early night.

DAY 5 – Sunday 8th October

We were woken up just after 5 am this morning by the porters who brought us bowls of water for washing and warming cups of coca tea or coffee. After breakfast we did our

stretches again and some of the trekkers handed out the things they had brought with them for the local kids – Dot's bubbles proved particularly popular. As we began our trek the weather was fine and we enjoyed the views as we climbed upwards away from Quisuarani.

We stopped at regular intervals to catch our breath and eat our snacks, and at one such stop next to Lago Kenuacocha, we saw the steep track leading up to the Huchayccassa pass at 4400m. We trudged up this path, gasping for every breath despite not going any faster than the Monty Burns shuffle we had learned. Every breath and every step seemed to be a huge effort at this altitude. It seemed to take forever to get to the top, and when we did several of us shed a few tears – partly due to the sheer effort of the climb and partly due to the spectacular view that stretched before us: a series of turquoise lakes far below us and snow capped peaks in the distance.



The trip down from this pass took longer than expected as the paths were muddy and slippery from so much rain. Most people were just pleased to be descending as our breathing became easier, but we were warned that some people may suffer from delayed altitude sickness. After a very long morning's trek we finally made it to Cuncani for lunch at about 2 pm, most of us feeling that we had already trekked for a whole day, but knowing that we still had some distance to go before reaching this evening's camp.

By lunchtime some people were suffering and felt they had no option but to take the bus to camp rather than trek in the afternoon, but the rest of us set out again, descending for some time and then walking along a relatively flat path. This part of the trek wasn't too difficult, but the evening was closing in fast and it was when we had to take a short cut and climb steeply again that I reached my limit. With what the Discover Adventure guys described as only 30 minutes to go before we reached camp (at least an hour for anyone else!), I was sick and had to get on the bus to return to camp. It was dark by the time the other trekkers got in to tonight's camp in Huacahuasi, wearing their head torches in order to be able to see their way.

DAY 6 – Monday 9th October

Everyone was completely exhausted this morning, both from the previous day's trek and because none of us had got much sleep: there was music playing all night from a nearby house, apparently due to a housewarming party (a particularly important party, due to the fact that the house had two storeys), and most people were kept awake by this as well as the noise of dogs barking and a horse that seemed very close to the tents!

We were very pleased to be invited into one of the local houses before starting our trek this morning, where we met a local family who lived with a bare minimum of goods and absolutely no luxuries. It was so dark inside their cottage that you couldn't initially see much, but as your eyes got used to the dark you began to see their living conditions (and the guinea pig in the corner!). The house consisted of one room with a sleeping area on one side and a cooking area on the other. Above us on the rafters they stored food that they dried and saved in case of a crop failure, which happens at the time of El Niño every seven years (it's expected again next year).



After this we again climbed up out of camp but our ascent today was a little more gradual. When we came across a group of three Swiss trekkers and their guide we realised that they were the only other trekkers we had seen. Whilst walking we had seen many local people, mainly children, who we had viewed running along in the distance to meet us either to stand and say hello or to spread out their wares for sale, but these Swiss trekkers were the only other westerners we saw, and this made us appreciate just how remote this particular area was.

On one of our rest breaks this morning those people who were suffering from the altitude were given the option of going back down the mountain, which meant they would miss the final night's camp and would meet us the next day in Ollantaytambo. Some had little option but to go down as they were feeling so ill, and the trekkers who left were by no means the least fit amongst us, showing that altitude problems seem to strike quite arbitrarily.



We resumed our ascent, to again cross a pass at 4400m, and only just got our wet weather gear on in time when a blizzard of hailstones launched themselves at us. We looked a sorry band as we trekked upwards in thick mud in a variety of waterproof gear, including some colourful plastic ponchos we'd bought locally, with our heads down, trying to shelter from the fierce hailstones. On reaching the pass a group photo was quickly taken, and then we descended into the next valley, leaving the hail behind us. During our descent from this pass we were delighted to see a pair of condors flying high above us. Apparently this is quite a rare sight, so we felt very privileged to have seen them.

Today's descent didn't take as long as yesterday's, which was a relief, and we were pleased to see our

lunch stop appearing in the distance beside a large lake, Laguna Ispaycocha. A few people were again not feeling well and Jean had the most dramatic return to camp after she collapsed and was carried down on a porter's back, with him running her downhill as fast as possible. A few other people had to descend on horseback. For the rest of us, the afternoon's trek was quite stunning as we walked along a narrow path on the side of a mountain and the vast landscape stretched out before us, with mountains all around us and a huge valley below.

We descended into camp earlier today and found that today's campsite in Patacancha was in an idyllic setting beside a river. Some locals set up their wares again for us to buy more goods, and we had our usual tea and popcorn, then our dinner, in a stone building tonight rather than in the usual tents. Tonight was the first clear night and we could clearly see masses of star constellations, including the Southern Cross and Scorpio. As it was clear it was of course much colder, but we didn't mind that as it was quiet, and with no noisy housewarming party next to us we settled down for a more peaceful night's sleep. By now it seemed natural to go to bed at 9 pm as we're up so early each morning.

DAY 7 – Tuesday 10th October

We rose at our usual early time, just after 5 am, and had breakfast before saying goodbye and thank you to all the people who had helped on our trek – the chefs and their assistants, the porters who woke us up with a cup of tea each morning, those who looked after the animals, the guy who looked after the loos (he got a special cheer!). The Peruvians sang us a song, and we then involved everyone in a rousing chorus of Auld Lang Syne. Jacqui sang a beautiful solo of 'Wild Mountain Thyme' after this, which had many of us in tears.



We saw a pair of condors again this morning, circling high above camp.

We got on to our buses and headed to Ollantaytambo where we had just a short time to look around before catching the train to Machu Picchu. Ozzy showed us around this lovely little town very quickly – including a house full of guinea pigs - and we met up with those people who had missed the last night's camp due to illness. The train to Machu Picchu was excellent – very clean and comfortable, with someone bringing a trolley round for us to buy drinks and snacks. The loo wasn't working in our compartment so we had an exciting trip to the next compartment via the outside doors of the train.

On arrival in Aguas Calientes we boarded a bus to take us up the winding track from this bustling town in the valley to Machu Picchu. After a brief packed lunch (no food is

allowed inside Machu Picchu) we finally entered this fantastic site. We had all seen many photos of the place but none of them did justice to the sheer scale and beauty of it all.



Our first task was to take plenty of photos, both of us in our Peru trek T-shirts and our charity T-shirts, and we were then free to explore on our own or join Aldo for a trip to the Sun Gate (Intipunko), Ozzy for a tour of the buildings, or Kelso for a climb to the top of Huayna Picchu. I chose the former and our party started our climb to the Sun Gate. Machu Picchu is at a lower altitude than we had been trekking at, but we still had to stop a few times to catch our breath as we ascended. We also had to stop and apply more mosquito spray as some of us were getting eaten alive! It took under an hour to climb up to the Sun Gate and from there we could see

Machu Picchu from the viewpoint of those entering from the Inca Trail. Aldo also took us a little way past the Sun Gate down the trail until we could see the final Inca Trail camp. We were amazed by the difference in landscape between this lush forested trail and the vast open spaces where we had been trekking.

On the way down from the Sun Gate it started to rain, and the lower part of Machu Picchu became really colourful as everyone donned different coloured plastic rain ponchos. Once we had descended, Aldo took us on a guided tour of some of the most important parts of Machu Picchu, including the Temple of the Sun, the Sun Dial, the Temple of the Three Windows and the Temple of the Condor.

Once we had explored the site we went to catch the bus to Aguas Calientes and found Lewis proving very popular amongst a large group of Peruvian girls, who all wanted their photos taken with him! On our return to Aguas Calientes we went straight to the hot springs, which were about a 15 minute walk (uphill unfortunately) from the Hotel Viajeros where we were staying. The hot water in the springs soothed all those aching muscles, and we could even order a beer to drink while we soaked!

On returning to the hotel we found there had been a power cut, which made showering quite difficult (although thankfully I was aided by a torch borrowed from Brenda), but luckily the lights came back on before dinner. After dinner some of us went to a local bar to have a drink and dance a little. I discovered Pisco Sour, a local cocktail, which went down very well. Many of the trekkers partied quite late, but unfortunately I left before Leo danced on the bar and Sue tried her hand at breakdancing!

DAY 8 – Wednesday 11th October

We were pleased to have a bit of a lie in this morning after so many 5 am starts. After breakfast we had just a few minutes to shop in the market near the station, which was a shame as there were some lovely goods on offer. The train journey back to Ollantaytambo was as comfortable as the outward journey, and on arrival we boarded our buses back to Cusco. Rather than going directly to Cusco, however, we took a detour to a primary school in Chacan which has been supported by Discover Adventure.

We were welcomed by the children, their teacher and some of their mothers, and Sally was able to deliver the pens, paper, etc. which we had bought out for the children. The children sang some songs for us and we returned the favour with a poor rendition of London Bridge is Falling Down! The children then took us into the school and showed us some of their work while their mothers served us with drinks and rolls. We then went outside to see the school playground, which was still being worked on. The Discover Adventure guys were amazed at the progress since their last visit – the climbing frame was almost completely assembled despite only having been delivered 30 minutes before we arrived! The toilet block which was being constructed would be the first toilet in the whole region.



Some music was played and we sang a little more and danced with the children while their mothers looked on. A collection was then organised for us to make donations to the school, and after this we said a prolonged goodbye.

On returning to Cusco we had the afternoon at leisure, so I went out with Dot, Lorna and Amanda firstly to enjoy some coffees and papas fritas (chips) in a lovely café on the Plaza de Armas which overlooked the cathedral, and then to do some shopping for souvenirs to take back home. Many of us had our boots cleaned for just a couple of soles.

That evening a cocktail party had been organised in a bar called Pepe Zeta, but first a few of us went to the Hotel Monasterio, as we'd promised ourselves before the trek, to enjoy a Machu Picchu Special cocktail. We went via taxi, which is a cheap way to travel in Cusco, with all journeys costing only 3 soles. Unfortunately the cocktail tasted a little like mouthwash due to a large amount of crème de menthe, but the surroundings were impeccable! From here we caught another cab to Pepe Zeta and met everyone else for

a drink. Simon was selling maps of the Lares region for USD15, which he was marking with the route of the trek, so I bought one of these as a memento.

The celebration dinner was held in a restaurant called Sumac Misky which was close to the bar. During dinner Simon showed some of the photos which had been taken on the trek, and after dinner a few (rather tongue-in-cheek) awards were handed out. MS Trust trekkers won some of these, including Jo for 'most glamorous trekker', Nancie for 'top fundraiser' and Jacqui for 'outstanding solo performance'. Some of our trekkers were also involved in the cabaret for the evening – a cleverly rewritten version of 'Like a Virgin' which had now become 'Like a Peruvian'!

After dinner some of us went to a nearby bar and met Ozzy, Leo and Aldo for more drinks and dancing. Some of us even made it back to the Hotel Savoy to get some sleep before the return journey!

DAY 9 – Thursday 12th October

We were up even earlier this morning – an early morning call at 4.30 am in order to leave the hotel for the airport by 5.30 am. Some of the people who were going on the Amazon Rainforest extension trip valiantly got up to say goodbye to us even though they didn't have to leave until later.

Unfortunately on arrival at the airport we queued for a while only to find that our Lan Peru flight to Lima had been cancelled. Simon, Mark and Sally did their best, but it appeared that we couldn't get another flight in time to meet our connection in Miami, so a huge delay seemed inevitable. We were eventually told that we could get a flight to Lima later that morning, stay in Lima overnight and then catch the same flights as we had previously booked, but 24 hours later. While waiting in the departure lounge, we met all the people going on the Rainforest extension trip who we had said goodbye to earlier, much to their surprise!

Mark decided to come to Lima with us to ensure that everything went as smoothly as possible, and on arrival in Lima he advised us that we were going to be transferred to the 5 star Sheraton Hotel – if you're going to be stranded overnight in Lima, then it may as well be as comfortable as possible! As well as being provided with a good hotel, we were also given lunch and dinner there, plus Mark had organised a coach to show us a little bit of Lima that afternoon.

We went first to Miraflores, which was much the same as many other seaside resorts, but for many of us it was our first glimpse of the Pacific Ocean, so it was exciting from that point of view. Some of us did a little shopping here for some clean



clothes for our extra day and night, and we relaxed with either a cup of coffee or glass of wine. We then went back into the main part of Lima, stopping at one of the main squares to admire the fantastic architecture, before returning to the hotel for a long, long shower (bliss!) and dinner.

DAY 10 – Friday 13th October

After a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed, we felt refreshed and ready to tackle our journey home. Mark and Sally still had to work hard at Lima airport in order to try to sort out connecting flights for those people travelling on by air from Heathrow to Scotland or Manchester, and to try to get letters confirming that our previous day's flights had been cancelled. We left Mark at Lima, but Sally travelled back with us.

The flight to Miami was surprisingly swift and the views of Miami as we landed were fantastic. We had to wait for quite a while here, but this was helped by a glass of wine and some nachos to keep us going. The flight to the UK took off on time, much to our relief!

DAY 11 – Saturday 14th October

Our landing was slightly delayed due to having to circle Heathrow for over half an hour waiting for a landing slot, but at last we were home! Although everyone was glad to be home there were many hugs as we said goodbye to all those people with whom we'd shared such a fantastic experience. I felt lucky that I only had a short drive home by this stage, with no connecting flights, and I hope that everyone else got home without any more delays. I just look forward to seeing everyone's photos now...