

Day 6 – Banos to Chimbarazu

Last night we enjoyed a pizza feast at a fine Italian restaurant in Banos. Service was on Ecuadorian time which means “whenever it arrives at the table”. I will say that I enjoyed the change from the rather plain tasting Ecuadorian typical food. Another interesting event for me was to use one of the many “Cabinas Telefono y Internet” that line the streets of Banos. Calling back to the states was as simple as going into one of these telephone booths and dialing home. There was a meter on the wall that clocked the minutes at about \$0.25 each. Not bad! And the reception was clear as a bell.

Our day began with breakfast at the Sangay Hotel in Banos followed by an 8:30 am departure. After traveling through beautiful rolling hills patch worked with corn and other crops we have entered the Chimbarazu Refuge, so named for the volcano it encompasses. Along the road into the Refuge we entered the snow zone. With snow on the ground and clouds in the air there is almost a complete white out. Passing several other vehicles along the way proved to be interesting, only a slight scrape with one. Leo (pronounced Layo), our intrepid driver for the week, once again has negotiated some treacherous Ecuadorian roadwork to bring us to the Refuge at approximately 4800 meters (15,700 feet.) Unlike some of the other roads we have traveled where a misplaced wheel would have sent us careening down a 1000 foot drop, the same mis-step on this road would have only sent us down a 1000 feet of rolling hills, sort of like Danny Devito in “Romancing the Stone”. Nevertheless, the result would probably been the same.

Within the Refuge we have seen some Vicunas, an animal that looks much like a llama. How they live at this altitude, foraging on meager scraps of bushes is beyond me. At this altitude breathing is laborious. Just taking three steps to get back on the bus makes us dizzy. With every breath it is as if you cannot fill your lungs. Despite the rarified air, our adventurous group has elected to push the final 200 meters on the hiking trail to reach 5000 meters (16,000 feet). Everyone is completely out of breath. Now we’re headed down hill, thankfully, to a lunch break. Interestingly enough we just saw a hummingbird! We all marvel at its ability to keep itself aloft in this air.

Now that we’re heading out of the ionosphere we are all feeling a lot better and looking forward to lunch and traveling on to Urbina, an old train station now used as a hiker’s hut.

Our adventure continues...!

Jamie Walker