



# LOST

SERIES 7 EPISODE 4: PROJECT WALKABOUT AFL O A T



We awoke blurry-eyed with stiff knots in our neck and back muscles. The light was green and dim as the sun was only just coming up. "¿Dónde?" called out the skipper from the stern, "Where?" "¡P'allá!" the guide in front called back confidently, "That way!" Peering ahead, all we could see was a thicket of tree branches. It was 5 am, and we were cramped, hungry, and still lost.

Our team of 7 doctors, 4 church workers, and a volunteer from England had left the city of Trinidad, in the lowlands of Bolivia, at 8:30 the previous morning. We were in two canoes lashed together, powered by one small outboard motor. One canoe held several tonnes of rice, flour, pasta, oil, sugar and other items that had been donated by World

Vision to help victims of the worst flood to hit the lowlands of Bolivia in over 20 years. The other canoe held medications, our backpacks, sleeping bags, and us. We had seen dramatic scenes in the news of people wading chest-deep in water with their belongings held over their heads, and of tens of thousands of cattle – drowned or dead from starvation. We felt the Lord wanted us to do something about it, so rallying together a group of Christian doctors from Cochabamba, another doctor who is one of my students from Sucre, and other volunteers we organised

to fly down to Trinidad and help out where we could.

The first few days were hot, sticky and frustrating, dealing with the State authorities and health department. They were grateful for our offer but swamped with bureaucracy and political agendas. They suggested speaking with the Bolivian Navy, who asked their Argentinean counterparts to take us to some of the townships cut off by flood waters.

The Argentinean naval captains were initially enthusiastic, but after a few days of stalling, we realised they didn't

actually want to risk puncturing their inflatable boats on branches and cattle fences in the murky water. With the help of Pastor John and other local church leaders, we ended up hiring our own boats and organising our own trip. Meanwhile, the rest of

the team kept busy providing health care to the refugees in the tent city that had grown up on the outskirts of Trinidad.

We loaded up the canoes in high spirits and pouring rain, and set off down river at a brisk 7km/h. The poor outboard motor wasn't built for the kind of load it was pushing.

We saw river dolphins frolicking among the tree tops and houses submerged to their thatch roofs. After several hours, we turned off the river and cut across cattle fields –

## Bolivian Lowland Delicacies

Banana soup O Cow's feet jelly O Rotten banana pudding O Wild pig O Feral cow  
Some chicken-like meat served with spaghetti, later described as an animal about the size of a cat with scales - armadillo?  
yucca powder mixed with beef jerky

LAWRENCE AND LILINGTAN NEWSLETTER APRIL 2007

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still submerged in 2-3 metres of water. The shortcut was meant to have saved us hours of travel down tortuous rivers, but as we drew closer to our destination, the lack of landmarks and dense foliage made it hard for us to work out how to get back onto the river. As we pushed past the tree tops, the branches would flick back and shower the occupants of the canoes with leaves, ants, and spiders. We even found a small snake reluctantly hitchhiking in the canoe the next morning. By 9pm we decided the light from the torch held by the guide in front was too dim and we might as well camp on board for the night. We dined on tinned sardines and dry bread, then fought for space in between the planks and luggage and stretched out as best we could.

The next morning, we soon found ourselves in a patch of long grass in which the propeller kept getting tangled. Pastor John and the skipper's mate immediately stripped off and jumped into the brown water and towed the canoes past the grassy patch. "Wouldn't it be great if we had a pistol," someone said, "We could fire it as a signal for help." "A pistol?" said Pastor John, "I've got a pistol." He reached into the bag where he kept his bible, pulled out a revolver, and fired a shot into the air. Nothing. We kept navigating through a maze of tree branches, reversing back, and trying another possible exit. Then we heard another motor in the distance. We all shouted out, and before long a dinghy came into view with the owner of a local hacienda on board. "Oh, it's you, Pastor John!" he said. "And what do you make of this guide, who gets you lost!" He showed us the way out of the water-logged undergrowth and led us to his farm, where the ladies on board gratefully made for the pit stop, after 29 hours without a bathroom!

We saw over 650 patients all together during our two weeks in the lowlands, mostly with skin infections, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, malaria and dengue fever. Meanwhile, the rest of the team were distributing the much-appreciated food items we had brought. Priscilla, a missionary from Switzerland, was a star. Wherever she went she gathered together a crowd of small children,

taught Bible stories and handed out evangelistic material for them to colour. Pastor, our helper from Sucre, and Pastor John also spoke to people about the gospel while they were waiting to be seen by the doctors.

We returned home exhausted but content, harbouring a few stowaways from the dirty river water. It was an unforgettable experience for us, who are used to working in the mountains of Bolivia, and we pray the Lord will continue to use this display of practical help as a demonstration of His love. I particularly enjoyed the fellowship in ministry working with a mission team of Bolivian Christian doctors for the first time. [Liling and the kids were dying to come on the trip, but were reluctantly persuaded to hold the fort back in Sucre, where they slogged on with home school via distance education.]

## PRAYER POINTS

- Thank the Lord for the opportunity to serve the flood-affected people in the Bolivian lowlands
- Thank the Lord for the medical team who sacrificed their time and personal comfort to serve Him. Pray that He will continue to use them to reach the lost through medical missions according to His plan.
- Pray for the continual witness of the Bolivian church in the lowlands, that they will be a shining light to those lost and seeking the Lord.
- Pray for the Tans as we get back on the bus and resume our normal schedule of travel to rural hospitals and churches in the mountain areas, that we will be filled with energy and enthusiasm to teach and encourage the doctors and believers that we meet.
- Pray for Alberto, Lawrence's non-Christian student, that the Lord will speak to his heart of all he learned about Him on the trip to the Beni.



## STOP PRESS

We'll be coming back to Australia for a 3 month home assignment in December. Please contact Cindy Lim (02-9614 2233) if you would like us to visit your church.