



Project Walkabout Expedition Journal

Friday, 31st March, 2006: Maiden Voyage

Great excitement today as we loaded up the van with food, fresh water and LPG cylinders as we prepared to set off. We were travelling in convoy with another missionary couple, some church leaders and a Quechua music team. I took the first leg and swung out of the Bible School gates making a slow wide right-hand turn uphill through heavy traffic, pedestrians and animals, then navigated through the narrow streets of Sucre until we hit the road out of town. We arrived in the town of Sopachuy this evening and parked in the church grounds, having to make a 6-point turn to get in through the narrow gates. Leonardo was astride the fence holding up the electrical cable so we wouldn't snag it with our water tank. That night one of the pastors we brought preached a short message, then we were treated to some lively Quechua choruses. The other missionaries had brought a data projector and DVD player and showed the "Jesus" film in Quechua, which finished very late at night, so we stifled our yawns and turned in when it was over.

Saturday, 1st April, 2006: On to Padilla

Sopachuy is a beautiful town sandwiched between two rivers and surrounded by lush, green hills. While I attended to some patients, the rest of the team made a trip to the river. After lunch we headed on to the next town, Padilla, which is about an hour and a half away, but it had rained. Thankfully my co-driver, Eloy, has had much more experience than I on slippery, muddy roads and safely took us through a couple of river crossings and a deep boggy patch. The pastor and his wife in Padilla were very excited to see us. They are actually Bolivian missionaries from La Paz – city folk who got a call to serve God in rural Bolivia about 7 years ago and are still here, despite losing their oldest son to an undiagnosed illness. He died while being transferred to Sucre. Like Sopachuy, Padilla is a very closed town to the gospel and people who change religion frequently face hardship and discrimination. The man who lives across the road from the church was observed surreptitiously tipping liquid from a container around the van, and we noticed later

a strong smell of urine which didn't seem to come from inside the vehicle, so maybe we were experiencing a little of this opposition ourselves.

Tuesday, 11th April, 2006: Presto

Altitude 2513m above sea level, S18 o 20.300', W65o53.696'

Pablo, the pastor responsible for the small congregation in this town, has kindly agreed to accompany us to introduce us to the believers here. A couple of missionary friends lived in Presto for 2 ½ years about 7 years ago when there were no other believers at all. After much prayer the first folk came to know the Lord. Now there are a handful of 10-15 young believers. After lunch I went to introduce the project to the hospital director, who was very keen for us to return to start training her staff. We agreed to meet the mayor the next morning to seek his support. That evening a small group gathered at the elder's house, which is also the church at the moment. After we sang I preached on Jesus and the ten lepers. It was a great thrill to see an old man stay behind after church to tell us he wanted to commit himself to the Lord.

Easter Friday, 14th April, 2006: Now in Naunaca

Altitude 2474m, S18 o 41.736', W65o41.875'

After leaving Presto yesterday, we picked up René, the pastor from our home church back in Sucre who had invited us to visit his home town for the Easter break. He was waiting for us on the main road with a large green wooden bee hive that we loaded onto the van. He assured us large trucks came regularly to his village, but it seemed they hadn't been past for a while as we scraped past overhanging branches on a narrow, windy track eroded by rain. It was quite a spectacle last night as we pulled into Naunaca and parked outside the village school. This morning the kids were still fascinated by our vehicle and trying to read the text (John 8:12) painted on the side in Spanish and Quechua. They would walk off repeating it as if it were a memory verse. Apart from René, there are only two other families in the village who are believers, so he organised to borrow a generator to show an evangelistic film. Unfortunately the generator malfunctioned

and blew out the sound system as well as our DVD player. Thankfully our projector is fine but the audience groaned in disappointment before filing away into the darkness back to their homes.

Easter Sunday, 16th April 2006: Back to Sucre

Much as we enjoyed the hospitality of René and his family, it is time to move on. We left them the live chicken a patient had presented us with, and they farewelled us with a large jar full of wild honey. It had rained steadily overnight leaving a coating of slippery mud on the road surface.

At one stage we had everyone get out of the van and pray as I negotiated a steep downhill left-hand bend where the weight of the van kept insisting it head down the slope towards a gully. Several hours on we got thoroughly bogged in some deep ruts and René and I got out and wallowed in the sticky mud with a pick and shovel until we had cleared the front axle. In view of the road conditions we abandoned plans of proceeding further in towards the town of Tarvita and headed back home to Sucre.

Monday, 1st May, 2006: Presto again

We have now been in Presto for over a week. We returned last Monday as arranged to start doing some health education with the hospital staff, only to find they had been suddenly called away to some courses and evaluation meetings. The doctor left in charge was too busy to have time for training, and in fact was probably glad for my help seeing patients and travelling out by 4WD ambulance to an outlying community to pick up a lady with a retained placenta. Liling was able to advise on some enriched formula for a one year old baby that weighed 3.2kg. We took the opportunity this week to get to know the believers a bit better. The men seem interested in starting a TEE (Theological Extension by Extension) course, and a couple of the ladies would like to learn to read so they can study the Bible. Over the weekend I preached three times and Liling taught the children by torchlight after the sun went down. They are so thirsty for teaching that you can hear a pin drop as they concentrate on hearing the Bible read in Quechua, then all excitedly comment at the same time on what they think it says before the preacher gets a chance to get a word in.

Sunday, 21st May, 2006: San Pedro de Buena Vista

We arrived two days ago together with Casiano, a pastor from Cochabamba; Dale, an SIM missionary and water engineer; and Sara, a newly-graduated doctor. This time we had left the Walkabout bus in Cochabamba for some repairs and adjustments and came in Casiano's minivan. Casiano was keen for us to come because there are lots of people with deformities, mental retardation and other sicknesses here. San Pedro is where George Allen, the founder of the Bolivian Inland Mission that later merged with SIM, built the first evangelical church in Bolivia in 1909. We saw over 120 patients in the previous day and a half in the township of Sacana, and have been asked to return to visit the other villages we couldn't make it to this time because the river is

still too high. In fact, returning from Sacana to San Pedro this morning we had to cross the river seven times and managed to break two fan blades and put a hole in the radiator because of the strong current we had to drive against. Dale and Casiano are gluing the blades back and fixing the radiator with epoxy while Sara and I deal with a queue of patients here before returning to Cochabamba.

Saturday, 27th May 2006: Belen de Urmiri

Altitude 3636m, S19 o 23.181', W66o03.903'

I felt like Scott of the Antarctic this morning – it was 0oC inside the bus this morning and the condensation on the inside of our windows was frozen. The pipes from our water tank on top have frozen too, so that's a good excuse not to shower again today. We're so grateful the Lord provided some sub-zero sleeping bags and thermals through Liling's sister in a parcel that arrived last week. This time we are accompanying the leadership development team from the Bible School in Sucre, who are running a training course in this village set in a beautiful gorge along a fast-flowing river. The girls are thrilled to see llamas grazing outside the bus, but weren't so keen on the sheep lung soup last night. Sara and I have seen over 200 patients yesterday and today at the little government health centre. Many of the believers have walked for hours to come, and are keen to take advantage of the health care we are offering so it's hard to turn them away. I've been using our portable ultrasound to look at livers, gall bladders and kidneys, and also found an atrial septal defect on a boy with Down Syndrome.

Sunday, 28th May, 2006: Iglesia Nueva Jerusalén, Potosí

We left Urmiri early this morning still fighting off patients, and drove two hours to Potosí to meet Ceferino, the pastor of a church there. At 4070 metres above sea level, Potosí claims to be the highest city in the world. Ceferino had invited us to hold a medical campaign at his church to which they would invite their non-Christian neighbours. We were kept busy all day with a break for barbecued llama for lunch. Liling helped out with crowd control, interpreting Spanish-Quechua for Sara, and praying with a lady whose husband had recently left her and her 3 children. This evening I preached at the evangelistic service before retiring to my warm sleeping bag. Alex, Maddie and Annie are already asleep and we're all looking forward to a day off tomorrow when we can have some family time before driving back to Sucre.

Prayer Points:

1. Thank the Lord for safety in travelling.
2. Thank the Lord for the warm welcome we have received in rural hospitals and churches.
3. Pray that we may build trust and good relationships with hospital staff.
4. Pray that we may be an encouragement to the believers in the towns we visit and be able to build them up spiritually.
5. Pray for good health and times of rest as a family in between trips.