

Day 1 - To Heathrow

I awoke with a sore head. It had been a very pleasant evening at the Crown, although with hindsight it lacked the proper sense of mourning. Indeed there had been an almost celebratory air, as if people were actually happy that I would be gone for three months. Obviously an alcohol induced hallucination.

Since the house was clean (a relative term, compared to its state two days ago it was immaculate, I had no doubt that pigs would now consider living there, all be it briefly), all that remained was to pack & mosey on down to Heathrow.

Packing. What to say. On the left a pile of things I wish to take, on the right a rucksack and holdall clearly incapable of containing everything. Pack the sleeping bag, ground mat and liner and the rucksack is half full but the pile on the left is no smaller. Halve the clothes and reduce the number of novels from 12 to 6. Throw out anything that you can expect others to take (goodbye washing line, goodbye guide books). Remove anything heavy, regardless of usefulness (including shampoo, aftersun, torch etc.) Dispose of the mosquito net - any attempt to use it is doomed to failure and previous experience has involved ending up with my legs tied above my head. Carefully squeeze as much as you can into the available space and put what's left over into a wardrobe without looking at it too carefully. At last the packing is complete. Then, there on the armchair is my towel and washkit, grinning at me. Begin again.

To get to Heathrow I finally plump for the train. A hire car seems too much effort and although 1:15am coach from Wolverhampton arrives nicely for my 5am check in you need to collect the ticket before the bus garage closes at six - So train it is.

On the train are numerous students returning from an N.U.S. conference. This has clearly involved heavy drinking and substance abuse. Opposite me are six 'representatives' from Kings – London. They are drunk, right wing, public school 'posh' of the worst type and above all loud. The fact that the two girls are fairly sexy is not sufficient compensation. I console myself with the fact that they will not be on the truck and consider different horrible ways of killing them. Just as I am approaching breaking point, that paragon of virtue & newt breeding ken livingstone strolls down the carriage giving friendly mayoral waves to all. The yahoo's follow him out of the carriage to 'discuss' the merits of free condoms on night busses and I am left in peace. God bless you Ken.

The coach transfer from Watford junction to Heathrow was pleasant. I discussed the relative merits of the new Heathrow runway options with the driver and since I am always happy to give opinions on subjects about which I know nothing the trip raced by. At Terminal 3 I found a quiet seating area with no people, removed my shoes and glasses and spread myself across a bank of four chairs. I slept well.

Day 2 – Heathrow to Quito

I woke to find the seating area crowded. People were huddled together and some slept on the floor. Only I had the luxury of four chairs. Ha. Unfortunately someone had got their own back – my glasses had vanished. I searched and swore and searched once more, nada. I unpacked & repacked my bags. Searched and swore. No sign. So now I am in my back up pair, with the defective arm and wrong prescription. I feel this bodes ill for the trip.

The trip out was long and uneventful. I watched the Bourne Supremacy in Spanish and established that my four day computer course in Spanish was a complete failure. I met David and Sara on the Miami-Quito plane. Both were on the same trip as me and seemed remarkably pleasant for people who had been travelling for 20 hours. More on them later no doubt.

At Quito airport things went surprisingly well. Whilst we ummed and ahh'd about which queue to join a man in a uniform saw us, opened a gate & waved us out of customs. Clearly he felt that we were not a threat to national security. I felt a little hurt by that. In the airport was a booth where you arranged and paid for your taxi. Then all you had to do was go out, find the taxi, with your number & get in. Somehow we ended up in the wrong taxi. Still, after a quick radio call we were on our way. David & Sara checked into the hotel. Unfortunately, I was booked in for two nights, neither of which were tonight. The problem was quickly solved & I have a very nice little room. David and I wandered down the road to the local shop & got a beer. David also bought a soft drink which turned out to be undiluted squash. We went back to the hotel where I supped beer & David attempted to drink neat squash. Finally, a shower and much needed bed.

Day 3 – Quito

Went for a pleasant stroll around Quito old town. Its reasonably picturesque and feels very safe (when its light) found a nice café & had Ceviche (seafood soup with lime & chilli). Then went back to the hotel and siesta'd. Had some grub and a beer and then watched some horrible

Film that Sara found. Off to bed early.

Day 4 – Quito

Met Helen & Eddie (couple) and Paul at breakfast and the six of us (with Sara + David) headed out to get a bus to the Equator. More by luck than judgement we found the bus and spent an hour of start-stop heading north. We arrived at the Equator, paid our 'entry fee' and there we were. We stood astride the line & took photos. We climbed the monument and took photos. I bought a Panama hat. We sat and laughed about how rubbish it was and commented on the surprising lack of little boys with buckets with plugs in demonstrating how the water drained in different directions. Then lunch, and the highlight of the day. We saw the man with what must be proportionally the largest bum in the world. At least one third of his body was arse. It made the whole trip worthwhile. On the bus ride back there was a diversion due to rioting & we got off at the wrong place so it was a fair stroll back. On arrival we met Pat and Michelle, who informed us that the equator monument was built in the wrong place. Had we left the official site and gone 300 metres further north we would have reached the real equator, complete with boys with buckets. Well loads of people can claim to have been to the equator, but how many people boast of being 300 metres away from the equator. To celebrate our achievement we spent the afternoon drinking.

The drinking continued through the group meeting, on to an 'as much as you can eat' Mongolian. Finally people staggered off and I was left with Emily.

We decided that we had drunk enough so we went to a bar! Emily seems a lot of fun in a dangerous and slightly insane way.

The Group:

Helen and Brendon, trip leaders

Sara – late 20's, outgoing, good fun

David – late 20's, quiet but nice

Helen and Eddie – nice couple

Paul – late 20's? seems ok

Andy & Alex – couple, rugby fans + booxers ☺

Emily – barking mad

Andy – been travelling 9 months already – pro

Michelle & Pat – my age? seem fun

Laura & Sarah – pretty welsh biology girls

Jennifer & Adam – couple, not met yet

Phil – Quiet but nice Chinese gentleman

Lene – late 30's? Danish lady

Stephanie – not met yet

Mark – not met yet

Debbie – not met yet

It seems like a good group. Tomorrow we start out and I'm looking forward to it.

Cheers Rich.