

6.

Quito – Banos

The truck is very new. Everyone has a locker that's fractionally too small to fit everything into and the seats are cunningly designed so that you cannot sleep without spinal damage. Fortunately today is a short drive (6 hours) to Banos.

The drive through the Andes is fairly breathtaking. Snow capped volcanoes smoke into a perfect blue sky, houses cling to their slopes. After an hour I had pretty much done scenery & read my book.

Banos sits above a gorge and below an active volcano. It's a lively town with a good feel to it. We book into a very nice little hotel, much better than I expected. I am sharing a room with Phil, a married guy from Hong Kong I think. He is really tidy and organised – everyone seemed to think he was very unlucky to draw me, can't understand why. A group of us piled to the hot springs down the road. Sitting under a waterfall and steaming vents from the mountain this triumph of 60s architecture has managed to reduce this idyllic spot to something very ordinary. Still, the water was nice once you broke the crust of dead flies and some of the girls have very respectable bodies so I had fun ogling them in their bikinis.

I then went out with the girls to get some water. Unfortunately this turned out to be a shopping trip. I am now the proud owner of a pair of stripy trousers, which are ok, and a fluorescent striped jumper/cardigan, which is too small & hideous. At least the girls enjoyed my humiliation.

7.

Banos cont....

That night we all went out for a very nice meal. I bored Alex and Andy with cycling stories and drunk beer. As people staggered off finally only Helen, Brendon (our leaders), Mark (nice bloke), Laura (cute – nice bum) and I were left. Helen suggests we visit the local 'Jack Rock café'. Since she's in charge we can only follow. Much beer is consumed. Politics & religion are 'discussed' (a bad sign). On the plus side I manage to give my hideous cardy to Helen. On the minus side I have agreed to go skydiving in Chile (but I believe there is a weight restriction so I'm feeding myself up). Finally we stagger back to the hotel at 2am. I'm sure Phil was pleased by my return.

Banos – already a day without trucking seems great.

We gather at nine to climb the volcano (well, to hike half way up it, 4 hours trekking seems more than enough). It's a scorcher. I am soaked in sweat before we reach the edge of town. After ten stops I am gasping for breath, I put this down to altitude, which can be a problem even for natural athletes like myself. I pretend I'm waiting for Laura. Laura pretends she's waiting for me. The steps take us an hour to climb. At the top the rest of the hikers wait. It looks like a couple of people must have turned back. Just to be sure Brendon 'pops' back down. When he returns he looks almost as bad as I did having done the climb once. From the viewpoint (spectacular) a path (real goat track) winds across the face of the volcano. I look at the path. I look at the drop. With a cheery 'Bollocks to that' I wave the group off and head back down.

Spent a pleasant day chatting to Sara + Andy (small Andy as opposed to large Andy), eating and mooching. Revisited

8.

The hot springs to share more interesting fungal infections.

Banos – Peru border

Off at 5am towards Peru. We moved slowly from mountains to rainforest through spectacular gorges. After an hour we had tired of scenery. After four hours we had tired of cards, I spy, charades and each other. Fortunately it was only another seven hours to the border. The plan was to drive through into Peru & hit the beach. Unfortunately the border was shut. In theory we could wade the river on foot but the bridge was a mad max collage of tractors, diggers and barbed wire, the truck was going nowhere. No one seemed entirely sure why the border was shut but the general consensus was that it was the Americans fault. We found a hotel – the first place I have ever stayed with no windows – had a great meal (Ceviche – I love it) that took less than an hour to get served & retired, a little down but far from out.

Day not on the beach.

It turns out that the other border crossing is only eight hours drive up the road & rumour has it its open. So off we go

So, to while away the journey here are some first impressions of some of our group (the girls):

Sara – Very up beat, quite sexy in a curvy way. Definite +.

9.

Helen (leader) – Really tiny girl. Always happy and enthusiastic. Like her a lot.
Laura & Sarah – 22 year old welsh sex kittens. Laura is really sweet & cute (& has a great bottom). Sarah is very sexy in a dirty in bed way. Good fun.

Debbie – Small, sweet, nice. Not really got to know her yet but think she's going to be good news.

Alex (with big Andy) – Pretty shoplifting chocoholic. Actually laughs at my funny stories. Actually laughs at everything.

Emily – Mad. Loud. Lots of fun. Good arse. Pretends to be dumber than she is (at least I hope she's pretending).

Pat & Michelle – Party girls (or ladies, as they are my age +). Lots of fun & good company.

Stephanie – European, German I think. Not really talked but I think she's ok.

Helen (Eddie's missus) – Lady of Chinese decent. Very friendly & generous but not overly robust. May find this trip a little tough but Eddie will look after her.

Jenny (Adam's missus) – One of those very matter of fact, get on with it people. Very articulate & interesting. Good company.

Lena – Well, theres always one. A Scandinavian lady in the early 40s I guess. At first I thought people were being a little intolerant as her English isn't great. However, I was wrong. If a toilet blows up because someone flushed paper its Lena. If someone's late its Lena. She does however unite the group in a common cause.

So that's the girls, some fun, some eye candy, some good conversation and a pain in the butt.

So, where were we, oh yes – still on the truck. Already

10.

I am starting to loath it. So finally we cross the border. Its remarkably painless, even for those fools who lost their departure forms (Emily & I). Into Peru, and we camp on a village football pitch. It's the first camp so everyone camps right up by the truck. Phil and I sleep really well, everyone else is kept up by loud snoring.

Football pitch to Hvanchaco

Another seemingly endless drive to Hvanchaco. We arrive late, put the tents up, have a meal and a beer and hit the sack.

Hvanchaco

Off to the ancient ruins of Chan Chan. 16 pre-inca palaces. We meet our guide Michael. He came for a visit and found it so interesting he stayed for fifteen years. He is possibly the most boring person on the planet. On the plus side he has a massive sombrero hat. How we laugh.

Then its off to the largest mud pyramids in the world. Michael remains with us. Several people refused to leave the truck. I actually enjoyed the pyramid tour. There are seven pyramids built within one another. Lots of frescos and a couple of models advertising beer on a photo shoot. All the boys liked that bit best.

Here I shall pause. Posting stuff is proving a challenge so I hope you get this before I get back.

Rich.