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Arequipa.
(2 days that merged)

Arequipa is a beautiful colonial city with a stunning plaza. It has a really nice feel to it and restaurants with balconies abound. Much eating and drinking. And shopping. As well as increasing my range of local outfits I invested in a gonk knife. This is a gonk (with real horses teeth and sheep's horns) but when you pull its head an 8' blade appears. How cool is that. OK, not very. Most of my fellow travellers think its horrible, but they don't like the poncho either.

One night we go to an Irish bar (very cultural). Its happy hour. Laura (sweet, cute, innocent, lovely bottomed Laura?!) turns out to be an eating and drinking machine and complete party tart. Helen (our diminutive leader) and I take on all comers at pool and are universally slaughtered. Possibly we would have done better if we could stand upright.

There was a convent, an inca virgin frozen in ice, a cathedral, the inquisition museum (disappointing – apparently they didn't have anything like the European kill rate). More importantly – Laura streaks. I managed to lock myself out of the hotel room and had to knock Phil up at 4am. He loves sharing with me.

To Chivay.

More truck.*

More beer.

Hot springs. Nice sunset over the mountains. Girls bottoms. ☺. Beer.

*Shoulder is a mess. Tears. Eventually they sit me in the front where the bouncing is less. Stunning scenery. A big hairy B to that – I hurt!

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Back to the girls bottoms. Amazing how the pain eased. (Emily & Sarah both score well in the bottom league).

Chivay to the Cola Canyon and bush camping.

I have assumed that the safe maximum dose on my painkillers has a significant safety margin. My shoulder does not hurt. In fact I feel great.

Off to the Cola Canyon. It's the something-est canyon in the world. We watch for condors.

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About 100 miles away a black dot appears, shutters click and condors are crossed off the list. Then, just as we are about to leave two condors circle up out of the canyon in front of us. Its fantastic. I take several great photos of sky recently occupied by condors.

Off towards Cuzco. Altitude headaches abound. But not me. Apparently you shouldn't take painkillers at altitude. Says who. I'm happy, happy, happy.

We camp at 4500 metres. I have fun playing with the fire. Some people are cold. Not me. People borrow my clothes. The girls are even prepared to cuddle for warmth. Its great. The stars are incredible. Its great. I'm happy. More pills please.

I'm up at 5am. It's a little chilly but the sun on the mountains is great (pills). I find a comfortable spot and dig a hole. I'm passing solids. Wahey!!

The rest of the trip are frozen, have headaches and bad stomachs and are not happy campers. I take more happy.

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pills. Hooray.

To Cuzco.

We go to Cuzco.
We go to an Irish bar.
Are you spotting a theme?

Cuzco.

Welcome to touristville. The opportunities to shop for tat are huge. At one point Alex catches me bartering a price up. I go to a 'body specialist' to sort out my shoulder. The massage is brutal but good. Then he 'does' my shoulder. There are not enough pain killers on the planet. Rather than hurting when it moves it now hurts all the time! I resort to beer excess.

Cuzco – Inca sites – alliantambo (or something similar).

Today we do the tourist thing. The first site we visit stands above Cuzco. Its largely destroyed by the Spanish but still impressive. Its apparently a mystery how the inca's constructed huge, perfectly interlocking stones. Hammers, chisels and slaves I suspect. The view of Cuzco is impressive. Cesar, our guide, explains how the city is laid out in the shape of a puma. Its not obvious. In fact I begin to think our guide is a bit of a prat.

There is a rock 'slide'. Provided you don't mind loosing skin and breaking bones you can 'slide' (i.e. fall in a semi controlled way) down the rocks. It's a stupid thing to do. I should know better. Next we walk through

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an Inca aqueduct. Its very dark, and provides an opportunity to smash against rocks those few bits of my body not damaged by the slide. I'm developing a fine scab collection.

>>There are internet café's everywhere. I may have let slip that my letters may be on the web. Just in case any of my fellow travellers can use search engines let me say that all the girls are beautiful, sexy and, more importantly, deep, interesting and genuinely nice people!

(Sue, if I included my "bottom rating league" in any previous letters please edit it out. And anything else that may reduce my popularity. In fact, anything vaguely personal).

GIRLS – I LOVE YOU ALL – PLEASE DON'T HIT ME!

On to the next site. There are perfectly good beaches in Peru, so why the hell do the Inca's build on cliffs. There are edges. I don't do edges. I return to the bus and wake Alex (who doesn't do ruins). Half the group are walking a trail (goat track) to the town, the other half are returning to the bus. The driver thinks only Alex and I are not walking and wants to leave. We have a long conversation, mine in English, his in Spanish. Neither of us have a clue. I resort to shouting "No senior" every time he starts the engine. I try german "Lumpy est mine hunt". It doesn't help. Eventually the others return and explain to the driver why does he point at me and say loco?

Way behind on the diary. Happy New Year.

Rich