

ANOTHER DAY IN PARADISE

Every day was a new and wonderful adventure. Every time we arrived to a new place, Dr Steve Purdy used to say: "Another day in paradise". So, I think it's the perfect phrase to describe this magical trip.

I am a 23 years old lady, from Arequipa, Perú; I studied Veterinary in Scientific University of the South, in Lima and since veterinary is such a broad career, students usually could not get completely involved in all areas or specialties. Therefore, internships and externships are absolutely necessary and useful, because they allow you to have more experience and a better view of what exactly happens on the field. At least, this is the way it works in my country.

As happens with most of all newly graduated veterinary student in Perú, I was in the search for my path, as in the meanwhile I was working in my thesis to get the degree; when suddenly, the advertisement for this journey appeared randomly: this would be my opportunity to have a look at the reality of my country. And it really was, in every single way.

The idea of working with camelids, when I started university, was impossible. Fortunately and by accident, I was proposed to work in alpacas for my thesis last year; and that is the beginning of everything. The more I learned about camelids, mainly alpacas, the more I felt in love with the topic. At the same time I could realized the lack of knowledge that still need to be investigated, especially in my country, as it has the highest population of alpacas in the world. This would mean a huge cultural, social and economic positive impact for all andean people, mainly because their animals means everything to them. They are the principal source of food, quickly cash if they need, fiber and skin for cold and sometimes packing (llamas) to transport their products to the nearest town.

Having the opportunity to join this amazing cause was the best journey I have ever been part of. This trip set a before and after in my life. I learned so many lessons for life and clarify so many thoughts I was having trouble with. This trip made me believe in humanity again, realized that there is still people with a huge willing to help the others without any ulterior motive, even with so many difficulties such languages, lack of tools or gadget, distance, geographic location and altitude.

Working with such an amazing group of people was incredible. It was impossible not to learn something new every day. This journey was so full of knowledge. It always happened that if there was some fact that you were absolutely sure about, then you would realized it wasn't necessarily the way you thought before. On the way, you also learn to be flexible with treatments and theory in general, because you never know what you can find in each case. You also learn to work in team, to be quicker in finding solutions and adapt easily to new difficult situation in order to help and succeed in the attempt.

There were so many stories and people touched, including me. Most of families that we visited were in the middle of anything, so far away with no transportation available, with a really difficult access, each one harder than the next one. Houses, cloths, furniture, animals and of course people were so needy, with so many lacks, but thankful with such strong willing to success that every single effort deserved it and made you encourage and keep going. Now I can understand better what Dr Purdy feel with Nuñoa Project and why he keeps doing what he does. He is such a passionate, altruistic, humble and wise person, sometimes sarcastic with a great sense of humor; but extremely courage and determined, that now a days you hardly have the pleasure of meet. Since the first day, he was always encouraging us to try, to never give up for small obstacles, to always keep doing our best, even if it seemed impossible.

This trip not only gave me new truly friends, we were a little family during this 2 perfect weeks. All dinners, mainly in Pucará, with Mexican, Peruvian and Italian homemade lovely

food, after a hard working morning, were not only delicious, but pleasant and funny because of our after-dinner conversations, talking about our own costumes, languages and habits, without stop laughing.

The Nuñoa Project has allowed me to see by myself what really happen in my country, with my people in the andes. I could see how animals hardly survive even with their extremely poor body conditions, with their restricted amount of food, only available in rain season, mostly full of parasites. Genetic diseases were common in some places because of incorrect inbreeding, while infective diseases could hardly be treated, just when governmental or private organizations like Nuñoa Project visited these communities, which happens usually once a year. This people didn't even know even how many males and females had, and unfortunately because of lack of information they had castrated their best animals, while in some other places we weren't allow to examine their pregnant females because they were afraid of abortions.

Each place we went, we changed roles and by the end of the trip, each one was an expert in everything. We organized in groups and activities: catching the animal, doing the ultrasounds, scoring of body condition, evaluating age by the teeth, measuring of testes, examination of external parasites and skin lesions, taking notes and talking with people to get some information about common diseases, abortions and deaths. After examining all the animals, even with the language barriers, we tried to explained them about the general status of their animals and gave some advises about diseases and cares that they had to improve with them. The most rewarding thing about this part was their increasing interest in knowing more and more about their animals, they were always asking and trying to understand, taking notes of all advices. The whole family was involved in the work, even kids were helping.

A personal goal which I was afraid of not achieving was to learn about ultrasound; but fortunately and thankfully, because of everybody's patient lessons, by the end of the trip I could became an expert on it. I felt so proud of me at that moment. This journey made me realized that absolutely everything is possible if you are determined enough to get it, as long as, you are also surrounded by truly unselfish friends like mine. What is more, I could reaffirm my passion for camelids, and feel again that working on the field with them, is not impossible, even with cultural barriers, geography and altitud difficulties and extremely cold weather.

Field work is irreplaceable and If you are thinking of joining this amazing adventure, you need to keep in mind that you should be always ready for work and tons of fun. But the most important think, you must be WILLING TO HELP, that is what characterizes this great group of people. They are always willing to do something better for all this people and their animals, even with all adversities that are involved.

Finally but not less important, I would like to thank Dr. Steve Purdy and The Nuñoa Proyect, for letting me being part of this high quality group of people, not only because of their wide professional experience and knowledge, but because of the great human being I know they are. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to be in all of these paradises, working together and helping all my compatriots without asking for anything. "Valen un Perú!!!". Also I would like to thank Llama Pack, who allowed us to get in contact to all these communities, their energy for field working is endless!.

This life experience trip definitely changes you in so many ways. I feel too fortunate, hoping that in some near future, I would have the honor of taking part in this cause again. It was a great pleasure to work with all of you. Each of you: Gerardo, Lila, Nicol, Ali, Header, Gian Lorenzo and Dr. Purdy, made this trip unforgettable for me.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Jhoana Jimenez



The Nuñoa Project and Llama Pack together.

Our last day of field work: We are making llama faces with hands.