

Two months ago I was aboard LATAM 2047, enthusiastically awaiting my plane's touchdown in Cusco. I had spent my whole summer preparing for this moment. I anticipated the physical challenges of working at 13,000 feet above sea level and the mental challenges of ultrasounding hundreds of animals a day. However, I never anticipated how unique my experience with both the camelids and humans would be and how profound an influence Peru would have on me as a whole.

The Peruvian animals never failed to surprise me. The first one I assessed set the tone of the trip: it was a white female llama that seemed healthy on outward appearance. But when I placed my hand on her backbone for a BCS, I could feel her body dramatically cave inwards. I felt no



fat, only sharp edges of bone. The animal was so emaciated I audibly gasped. This level of malnourishment was not something I had felt in camelids back home. I would find out soon, though, that this condition was far from unusual here.

The more experience I gained throughout the trip working with these animals, the more I realized how different their conditions were compared to the camelids in the states. Many animals were skin and bones. Nearly all animals had sarna (mange) and quite a few had eye injuries or abscesses. Some of the abscesses we treated went down to the bone. One alpaca had a tail so necrotic that it fell right off during an exam. In addition to ailments, I saw

interesting genetic abnormalities like polydactyly and hermaphroditism. The most surprising thing I learned was how durable these animals were. Even animals with the deepest abscesses and most extensive mange showed little if any discomfort and required minimal treatment.

Working alongside Dr. Purdy was another incredible aspect of the trip. His passion for the lives of both camelids and the Peruvian people was undeniable. With every community we visited, DP took the time to listen to the farmers face-to-face and address their concerns directly. Rather than speaking in medical jargon or offering expensive solutions, DP always gave practical advice. He found ways to treat common illnesses with inexpensive household items like Vaseline. He took extra care to improve their breeding programs, supplying them with superior males and evaluating the males' success rate. He brought a disease



picture book so that the farmers could visually recognize what diseases they experienced and get the proper advice. DP always encouraged us to educate the farmers so that they could utilize our techniques after we left. As a team, we taught them essential procedures like how to BCS, humanely handle the animals, keep records, and read ultrasounds. Although we had to overcome language barriers, we managed to teach the farmers vital information that they could apply to their herds in the future.



Some of my favorite memories come from the fun times I had with my team. Being without wife for three weeks turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as we relied on genuine human contact with each other for socialization and entertainment. We'd end a long day of work by playing Gin Rummy and Heads Up. We'd have ramen noodle potlucks and Spoons tournaments. We all shared our different stories and backgrounds and the older students gave us advice on vet school. We took our strong bond to the field and worked seamlessly as a team. We rotated shifts by taking turns ultrasounding, catching animals, and keeping notes. By the end of the first week, we were evaluating 150 alpacas in three hours. We operated together like a well-oiled machine.

Being totally immersed in the Peruvian culture, from hearing the beautiful quechua language to trying homemade dishes served by the farmers, was amazing. Exploring the mysterious ruins of Machu Picchu was a once in a lifetime experience. Most importantly, experiencing some of the hardships the people faced changed my perspective on life. The towns we stayed in had no access to clean water. The streets around us were ravaged with feral dogs. Hungry children often came up to us and asked us for food. The farms we visited were dirt-floored huts with thatched roofs. Hot water was nonexistent and wet wipes replaced showering. Most farms were totally cut off from civilization, making travel and communication with other people nearly impossible. Observing these everyday challenges was eye-opening and it emphasized how important our work here was. These farmers were living on the bare minimum and completely relied on their animals for food, warmth, and income. Lower mortality rates and healthier crias

meant more fiber and meat for a family. From educating the farmers on how to improve their herds to simply buying their beautiful handmade blankets, we helped make a tangible impact on the communities.



My trip with the Nuñoa Project not only strengthened my skills as a pre-veterinary student but bettered me as a person as well. I gained unique hands-on experience with hundreds of camelids and met amazing people from all around the world. I was immersed in a wonderful culture and gained a new perspective on life. Most importantly, I got to give back to communities while simultaneously improving myself as a whole. Although it wasn't easy, I would jump on a plane tomorrow and do it all again. THANK YOU DP!!

