

Date: September 13, 2003
Location: San Pedro de Atacama, Chile
Subject: Update #6 – The Northern Expedition, Part I

Dear Friends and Family,

Some of you may have wondered why my update (which had been arriving weekly) failed to arrive last week. Or perhaps you were wondering what exciting thing I may have done last weekend. Perhaps you fall into the category that was glad to have a break to catch up reading my other updates! =P

<right> To continue with my series of seemingly random intro photos, I'd like to share that somebody back home loves me and sent me these! Thanks Mom! =D (I think these are going to last me through 2004... haha =P)



Anyway, continuing from my last e-mail... and to answer the question of what I was doing the past weekend... I was pretty much lying in bed the whole day feeling yucky and unwell... I'm pretty sure that the culprit of my illness was a combination of some bad Peruvian seafood, too much sun and UV radiation, and being out in the cold with not enough layers. Anyway, I recovered by early this week and went to classes on Tuesday and Wednesday.

This past Thursday was September 11th which has two completely different meanings for Americans and Chileans... for Americans, it's the 2nd anniversary of the terrifying terrorist attacks of 9/11/2001... for Chileans, September 11th was the 30th anniversary of the *Golpe de Estado* in which Pinochet's military dictatorship took over the country... anyway, I'm sure there were massive protests and violent disturbances in Santiago on Thursday that were probably worse than what happened during the *Dia del Paro*.



With classes cancelled for the 11th and next week being Chilean independence week, most of us students/tourists have left Santiago to explore Chile or Argentina... myself, I'm taking a nice break which began Sept. 11th and will end Sept. 22nd.

<above & right>

Anyway, we left Santiago bright and early around 7AM meaning we were out of our houses by around 4AM... it was nice seeing a sunrise for a change... I think. =)





Our LanChile flight to Calama took 2 hours during which we saw the landscape transform from snow-capped Andes <left> into barren desert <below>.



Once in Calama, we found transportation directly from the airport to San Pedro de Atacama.

Once in San Pedro, we found lodging for an expensive 6,000 pesos (US\$9) and pretty much arranged a few tours to check out the surrounding areas... Lots of amazing pictures... too bad I can only share a few...



<left> The landscape around San Pedro de Atacama could be the set of any Mars movie... I could only think that I was on Mars as I looked around because it really did look like what I had watched the night before on TV... haha =>

Quick overview of the first day follows:

0700 - Left Santiago for Calama

0900 - Arrived in Calama

1200 - Arrived in San Pedro de Atacama

1600 a 2100 - Tour of Valle de la Luna, Valle de Muerte, Tres Marias, Sunset and full moon



<left> The “Tres Marias” and the “Dinosaur-head” formations were some crazy natural salt

mounds in this barren salty desert-ish area. =>

<below> From there, we continued to the main Valley of the Moon area where we proceeded to climb the sand dunes in order to view the sunset from above. It was a funny looking line of people walking along the top of this sand ridge.



various colors due to the effect of minerals and such in the ground? It was nice. =)

<below> From above, we watched the sunset and watched as the valley transformed in



Our second day in the Atacama Desert was an all day tour of the *Salar de Atacama* (2nd Largest salt deposit in the world, I think) and *Lagunas Altiplanicas*.



far away to be seen by my 3x zoom camera.

<left> Our first stop was the *Laguna Chaxa* in the *Salar de Atacama*. The area looked like it had been plowed up but all the salt formations there were said to be natural. We also saw flamingos in the lagoon. Too

<right> The landscape was incredible as we drove around and saw more salt



deposits around the *Salar de Atacama*...

<left> and the ultra-clear waters of *Laguna Miscanti*. The tour included many more spectacular views but I can only share these pictures for now. Looking around, I definitely saw the artistic touch of our Creator! Awesome! =)

In addition to the scenery, we definitely saw plenty of wildlife in the *Salar de Atacama*. However, as I mentioned before, my 3x zoom couldn't capture many of the sights. But, I



have a few pictures to share as I, your stealthy photographer, managed to approach and capture the following images! =D

<left> This little fox, known as a “zorro”, is the natural predator of the flamingos we saw earlier. Good looking animal that I’m sure would make a fine pet. =D Too bad I

couldn't bring one home!

<right> The north of Chile is known to be the home of llama, alpaca, guanaco and vicuña. They all look the same to me (except for the vicuña) but hopefully I'll be able to tell them apart by the end of the trip. I think these were llama in the foreground and alpaca in the background. =)



<left> As you can see, your stealthy photographer *almost* managed to sneak up to and capture a baby llama! =D Considering that we were at an altitude of about 3500m (9000-10000 ft?), I was definitely huffing and puffing after that little chase!

And to conclude the day, we were served lunch (which in Chile is served late... between 2-4PM usually).

<right> Gussed what yet? No? Well, it was a delicious meal that as we starving tourists said: “La llama nos llama!” (tr. “The llama is calling us!”)

So yes, llama meat with rice, *kinoa* (local grain), potatoes and such. Delicious. =)

Our last and final tour in San Pedro de Atacama had us wake up at 0400. I don't think I like waking up so early so often... =)



Two hours north-east of San Pedro de Atacama, we arrived at the Tatio Geysers around 0630. The geysers are also at an altitude of around 3500m and it was freezing cold. So freezing cold that the water in the tube of my CamelBak literally froze!



<left> The geysers were definitely a sight to see. The mist was ultimately impressive in the pre-dawn freezing cold.



<right> In being so absorbed in the sights, I completely forgot about all the people that I met during the trip! Our little tourist group included people from: America (us!), Costa Rica, Brazil, and Spain. We also met Germans, French and many others but the small group

above had a full day through the *Salar de Atacama* and the geysers together! They're all going south to Patagonia in the next weeks so hopefully they're having a good time! =)



<left> Oh yeah, we all jumped into the hot springs and had a nice time bathing in the natural bathtub! =) I swam across the pool which was no more that 25 ft. across and was huffing and puffing. Talk about being at a high altitude!

Well, too much stuff happened in the past few days and I'm exhausted... however 9 days of travel remain... still, the landscapes are stunning and amazing and everything I've seen in the past 3 days are testaments of

God's fingerprints and the majestic beauty of His creation that is displayed throughout all nature!! Leaving tomorrow morning to journey through Bolivia and hopefully will get to write another message from perhaps La Paz...

Hope all is well wherever this message finds you! Please keep me in your prayers as I travel through these extreme desert conditions at extreme altitudes and for my traveling companions as well!

- Dan