

Date: September 18, 2003
Location: La Paz, Bolivia
Subject: Update #7 – The Northern Expedition, Part II

Dear Friends and Family,

As promised, my next update includes all the happenings since my last update from San Pedro de Atacama and revolves around my journey through Bolivia and concludes in the highest capital city in the world of La Paz at 3000-4100m.



<left> As has become standard procedure, my first image is one of a random micro in Santiago. This really is a *random* micro as I have no idea where #399 goes and have never actually been on it. =D

Just wanted to capture an image of one of thousands of Santiago's micros that serve as alternate public transportation to the Metro.

In case I hadn't mentioned it before, micros work like this: All the micros have a sign in the front and side windows listing the major streets that the bus travels along. So, if a bus sign states: "...Alameda, Providencia, Los Leones ..." it will go along Alameda to Providencia and turn onto Los Leones. So it's pretty easy to get around once you figure it out. Of course, that doesn't mean you still can't mess up and get on the wrong bus like I did once... Saw my street and got on... only to realize that the bus did turn onto the street I needed... but turned onto another side street long before my destination! =P

<right> To my surprise, the buses in La Paz were also called "micros" and seemed to function the same way that the micros in Santiago do. However, the La Paz micros did seem older than Santiago micros and came in a variety of colors unlike the standard yellow of Santiago's micros. =)



Unfortunately, we only got to stay in La Paz for one day and left to return to Arica, Chile this morning in order to be back for Chile's Independence festivities. We would have stayed longer in Bolivia but we were informed of transit strikes that were to occur on Friday so we took the only available bus from La Paz to Arica at 7AM.



<left> This is the only photo of me in La Paz. => I had allotted one 128MB CF card for the Bolivia portion of “The Northern Expedition” and it was full by the time we were on our return leg to Chile.

La Paz was a busy little city with people everywhere peddling all kinds of goods including phone calls on cell phones! The city seemed to have been built into a basin and it was interesting seeing tens or even hundreds of thousands of houses all along the sides of the valley/basin.

Going back to the beginning of Part II of The Northern Expedition, we crossed over into Bolivia for a 3-day 4WD jeep tour through the *Salar de Uyuni*, the largest salt deposit in the world.



<right> The border crossing was at a supposedly un-official location and was pretty much this one building where there were probably three Bolivian customs/immigration agents and where we definitely got ripped off exchanging money. =>



Anyway, this is where we began our journey into Bolivia in an early 90s model Toyota Landcruiser packed to capacity.

<left> Our expedition team included three French, three Americans and two Bolivians. First row left-to-right: Frank, Abram & Dan. Second row left-to-right: Jerome, Karine, Sara, Ami & Jasmine. Other than that it was really cramped in the last row, it wasn't too

bad of a journey for about \$20 a day including food, transportation, & lodging. =>

Even though we saw so many amazing sights while in Chile, it was amazing that there was so much more to be seen in Bolivia! God definitely is an artist. =>

<right> The first lagoon/lake was the *Laguna Blanca* (tr. White Lagoon). You can probably guess why it's called the White Lagoon. Parts of the lagoon were frozen and there was crystallized salt all around the edges of the water. Additionally during the whole first day, we experienced the icy, piercing winds of the Bolivian *altiplano*.



<right> The next lagoon was an incredible blend of colors that took my breath away! I never would have imagined that a lagoon could be a color other than different shades of clear to blue... but the *Laguna Colorada* definitely lived up to its name showing reds and whites and a toss up of other colors.



really can't see. I managed to get close enough to get this shot of them flying across the horizon. =)

<right> Once again, your stealthy photographer managed to sneak into the



<left> Can you guess the name of this laguna? Did you guess *Laguna Verde*? Good! => This very green laguna was an amazing sight due to the heavy winds which stir up the chemicals/minerals in the water that give it that amazing shade of green!



<left> The *Laguna Colorada*, in addition to being an amazing sight in and of itself, was home to thousands of flamingos which you



flock of flamingos to capture this image. These mini pictures really don't do these flamingos justice but it's the best I can do for now. =(Over the course of I lost count of how many days, we saw countless flamingos of possibly 5 different breeds that inhabit the regions of northern Chile and Bolivia. Now, who can tell these apart? Not me! =)



<left> In Bolivia, I managed to also sneak up to this fuzzy little rabbit-like creature. => Known as the "biscacha" this furry rodent is part of the chinchilla family. No luck catching one of these either though. =>

<below> One of my new favorite pictures and soon to be my background, I saw this picture on a lot of postcards! Of course, this picture's better because of

the little person at the foot of the tree! => But wait, have you figured out what's wrong with this picture? That's not a tree! Is it? => Known as the *Arbol de Piedra* (tr. Tree of Rock), this is another amazing natural sight in the Silosi desert of Bolivia. God's works of art are way too cool! =>



<below> Near the end of the 2nd day



of the journey, we found ourselves near some caves in the region of Atulcha. Inside these caves we discovered a mini-museum of mummies from the 17th century. The people of the area preserved the discoveries of their ancestors who had died in despair after hiding from the invading Spanish Conquistadores who had been pillaging the area. The high salt content of the region naturally mummified the remains. An unexpected history lesson in the midst of nature.

<right> Another lesson learned in the town of Atulcha is that Bolivians are a lot smaller than I am... =D The doorway to our room was just below my head level but above my eye-level... meaning it was just high enough to look like I could clear it but just low enough to cause a lot of pain every time I forgot to duck entering and exiting... ouch! I think I lost a lot of brain cells.



<left> Another picture I found on a lot of postcards in La Paz was this one taken on the *Isla de Pescado* in the *Salar de Uyuni*. It's a pretty cool view from inside a cave looking out at the giant cacti on the island, the white salt of the *salar*, mountains, and finally sky. =)

of growth per year, this years old! =) I hope to live live through three centuries! come! =P

<far-right> A pretty little bird on the *Isla de Pescado*. One more example of my stealthy animal tracking. =P



<left> Probably the largest cactus I have ever seen or will ever see in my life... this one was a whopping 12m high! At a rate of 1cm baby is only about 1,200 maybe 10% of that... gotta If God wills... 2101 here I



<left> Where's Dan? Can you find me amidst the giant cacti? =) This little island of giant cacti was a welcome change of scenery as we spent the last day driving across the *Salar de Uyuni*.

We had some fun pretending to be lost in the middle of a gi-normous desert. Except, the entire *Salar of Uyuni* is a giant slab of solid salts including lithium. Blinding white salt as far as the eye can see in any direction and crystallized geometric patterns that made this an unimaginable sight.



<right> Please... must find... water...
ooh... palm trees... I think I... see water...
hehe. =)



<left> The last of the pictures from the *Salar de Uyuni* is the inside of a *Hotel de Sal*... a hotel built out of salt. The walls, beds, chairs, tables, etc. were all made out of salt. Of course it was also \$5 more expensive to stay there so we just went inside, took pictures, and chose the cheaper place to stay. Now, why would you want to stay in a salt Hotel? =)

Lastly, we arrived in Uyuni on Tuesday at about 2PM. We immediately hurried to the train station to see if the train might still be there as our Lonely Planet guide stated that the train to Oruro left only twice a week at about noon on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Now, the reason we wanted so badly to find the train was that we'd met some Dutch girls on the way to Uyuni who told us about the nightmare of a bus ride from Oruro to Uyuni due to the extremely bad roads and the freezing 9 hour journey.



<above> Chile Huntsman's representin' in Uyuni, Bolivia. =) As we snuck onto the train to quickly take this picture, we realized that the two of us are the only Huntsman's who chose to study in Chile this semester. I wonder how everyone else is doing all around the world. =)

<below> Left-to-right: Jerome, Dan & Frank. Just a picture of the “tourist” guys who



were part of the 3-day 4WD jeep tour. The real reason for putting this picture here is to get your feedback on my recent haircut. =) I definitely know my parents are not going to approve... =P

So, now you have a reason to respond! Even if you have nothing else to say, just drop me a line to let me know what you think! =D

- Dan