

BOLIVIA RETROSPECTIVE

John Sterland's memories of base camp and the Pelechuco trek of the YRC's 1988 expedition to the Bolivian cordillera Apolobamba. On that trip he was accompanied by Ian Crowther, David Hick, Harvey Lomas, David Martindale and Michael Smith.

The route to the Apolobamba started up the motorway out of La Paz and then through the "shanty town" of El Alto to Lake Titicaca, where a right fork was taken when the road ceased to be metalled. It soon became apparent that the driver, his assistant, and the camp minder had no idea where the Apolobamba was. Not one of them had ever been there, although it was only two hundred miles from La Paz. The road was comparatively well engineered, but was very stony and dusty. It evidently followed a centuries-old trail to Pelechuco. We were detained at several military police posts, where it was necessary for us to produce passports. This was probably in accordance with normal arrangements for the locals, who have to show travel permits and passports when they cross from one province to another. We had lunch at a village where one of these provincial posts was located, and it cost £9 for nine people, including beer. The meal consisted of a broth of lamb, rice, traditional-type potatoes, and a variety of black potato.

The trail across the head waters of Lake Titicaca was almost entirely under water, and all hands were required to push the jeep across to firmer terrain. Then at a village called Escamo we had a puncture. This did not surprise us when we inspected the tyres, for none of them would have passed the tyre test in the UK.

As we drew close to the mountains the weather became very cloudy, and visibility was reduced to about thirty yards. We were aiming for Ulla Ulla, a small village in the foothills of the Andes, but none of the locals seemed to know exactly where Ulla Ulla was: they just knew it was a long way. In the event we bypassed Ulla Ulla, and shortly afterwards, three and a half hours travelling time from Escamo the light began to fade as we arrived at another village named Hichocolo at about 6.30 pm. We hoped that we might stay the night in the school room at Hichocolo, which bore the notice "Nucleo Escuela Rural". It is quite usual in normal circumstances for travellers in these remote areas to be accommodated in the local school room. Unfortunately, however, the schoolmaster was ill and was lying on the school room floor, so that haven was not available to us. We were only about ten kilometres from the village of Nubi, which was as far as we expected the jeep to take us, and a young school teacher offered to guide us over the Sierra to Nubi, which we intended to be our base village.

The track from Hichocolo, which would be impassable in the rainy season, was located between two very obscure rows of stones to delineate the general direction and had been made reasonably flat by scraping off the other ubiquitous stones.

The existence of several water courses necessitated frequent reconnaissance to ensure that the jeep could negotiate the terrain. We eventually arrived at Nubi, well after darkness had descended, to a dual reception committee of the inhabitants, who had been alerted to our imminent approach by the head lights of the jeep. The first contingent consisted of children, and the second of adults, who stood behind them. The school teacher from Hichocolo negotiated for us to stay the night in the schoolroom, and we went to bed (in the dark) at 9.30 pm, and rose the next day at 6.30 am. We then set out to find a suitable site for our base camp as far up the Nubi valley as possible beyond Nubi Lake.

Within the compound where the school was located there was a bee-hive-shaped oven with three holes; one at the top for ventilation, and two about six inches from ground level; one for feeding the fire, and the other for inserting the bread. The fuel used is either the grass of the tundra, named lenya, or sometimes llama dung. The main activity of the villagers was looking after the llama and alpaca herds, on which they heavily rely for their existence, and many of the animals had coloured ribbons in their ears to identify the herd from which they came.

The school had twenty pupils, with one school master to look after them. They were taught in the new school house, whereas apparently we had been accommodated in the old school house. Many of the pupils had to walk four or five miles each day to school, and return the same distance to their home in the late afternoon. All the villages we visited in the Apolobamba had school houses provided by UNESCO, sometimes in conjunction with the Bolivian government. Spanish is the language taught to the Indian children, so we were able to communicate reasonably well.

In another part of the village there was what appeared to be a chapel and this, in common with many other buildings, had an earth floor. I located one small building which seemed to have excavations under the floor. I later discovered that it was a "two hole" loo, abandoned for the time being and replaced by another smaller loo in another part of the village. It appears that the villagers used one for a time, moving on to another until the first one had subsided a bit!

Nubi village boasts the inevitable very rough football pitch, and we were given permission to photograph a match between the young men of the village. Football seemed to be the only physical recreation of the village, and the girls and ladies also played the game; one of them was carrying a child in a papoose carrier. The shawl, or papoose, was folded over the child in a very similar fashion to a nappy.

We then set out to find a suitable site for our base camp as far up the Nubi valley as possible beyond Nubi Lake. Nubi Lake itself is three kilometres long, fed by two smaller lakes further up the valley. All were glaciated, and the two smaller ones higher up the valley were heavily silted. Since it was not desirable to drink glaciated water, a site near a small stream was sought, and a suitable place was found near the outfall of the third lake. The preliminary walk up the valley revealed that there were quite a number of flowers in the area, and many birds. In fact on this and following days we

saw black ibis, giant coots, ducks, and a honey buzzard, which seemed to be about the same size as an English buzzard.

Having selected a suitable site for the base camp, at about fifteen thousand feet, we returned to Nubi village where we hoped to hire mules, but apparently none were available. However, it was agreed by the locals that a sufficient number of men would be available on the next day to man-handle our equipment and baggage to the base camp. As things turned out, however, the next day they decided that the baggage was too heavy for them, and they decided to patch up the roofs of their buildings instead!

Fortunately David Hick had seen a muleteer (arrieros) in the locality with a mule and a donkey, and arranged that he would assist us with the transport the next day. This meant that we had to spend another night, the Tuesday, in the school room.

The arrieros, with his mule and donkey, was very late arriving on the Wednesday, and we thought he would not turn up. We therefore had to hump a lot of the equipment ourselves, because it was likely he would not be able to make the two journeys which would be necessary in the one day. Because of this, when the four of us who were carrying the loads returned to Nubi we did not have a full complement of sleeping equipment. I had only one portion of my two-layered sleeping bag, and Harvey Lomas had no sleeping bag at all. Added to this Mike Smith was ill.

However, by sharing clothing and equipment we were able to spend a reasonably comfortable night, and we had decided that the rest of the equipment could be transported by the arrieros with the mule and donkey the next day.

To our surprise the arrieros did return that evening with Francisco, the camp minder, at 8.30 pm and wanted to go up to the base camp again that night, although it was pitch black. In view of the fact that we would have been left without any sleeping and other equipment, or would have had to accompany him, we said it was no go and elected to get up at 5am for a 6am start the next day.

However, loading the mule and the donkey took longer than expected, as it always did, and we eventually set off at 7.00am. The loads were probably too heavy for the animals and very slow progress was made to join Mike Smith and David Hick, who were engaged preparing base camp.



Base camp, located as it was near the outfall of the three Nubi valley lakes, was comparatively handy for climbers on both sides of the valley. As I have mentioned, it was close to a mountain stream, which although it froze solid every night, was very useful for ablutions and washing clothes when it thawed out, as it did half way through each morning. However, the water was so cold that washing clothes was a very uncomfortable exercise.



The temperature varied between 27 degrees centigrade during the day and minus thirty at night. It was dark between 7 pm and 7 am, so it was a long uncomfortable night. Our leader had given us a list of suggested equipment to take with us, and included in this was a "hospital" water bottle. I thought that this was an unnecessary addition to our already heavy baggage, and I did not take one. However, I soon realised the wisdom of the advice, because I always had to respond to the call of nature during the night, and the temperature was always low enough to freeze the proverbial outside the tent.

One of the first things to do on arrival at base camp was to construct a loo, and this job inevitably fell to me. During the excavations for this edifice I noticed a considerable number of green chrysalises underneath most of the stones, but we were unable to identify what variety of moths was likely to emerge in due course.

The next day was spent by the genuine climbers in checking their equipment preparatory to embarking on their attack on three major peaks in the area. On the Friday after our arrival at base camp Mike Smith, David Hick and Ian Crowther made an attempt to climb Cololo, which is 19,404 feet high. I and David Martindale took the advanced camp tent and one or two other items of equipment up to the col overlooking the lake, and then crossed the peat bog to the glacial moraine, in which three small lakes had formed. The whole area was extensively glaciated, and several moraine flowers were found.

On the way up we discovered a miniature house and allied outbuildings, which we assumed was made by an Indian child, in a stone shelter at about 16,500 feet. To surprise the builder we put a bar of chocolate inside the doorway. An alternative explanation given to us later was that it was a model of a house to scare off or satisfy the mountain spirits, and the builder hoped that one day he would own a house like it.

We carried the baggage to about 17,000 feet and handed over the equipment to the climbers at the beginning of the glacier. On the way down we went very close to an inhabited hovel at 16,500 feet where there was a woman and a very fierce dog, which in fact attacked Ian two days later when he returned.

The attempt on Cololo was not entirely successful, the three climbers getting to within two hundred feet of the summit. The main reason for the failure was that the advanced camp was not high enough. Ian arrived back in camp at about 8 pm on Saturday night in an exhausted state and decided not to do any more climbing. Thereafter at base camp we followed the progress of the remaining two climbers through binoculars, and during the three weeks we stayed at base camp they were able to make two first-time British ascents and pioneered a new route on Cololo, which they subsequently conquered at the second attempt.



Cololo with new route on the right skyline

All these peaks were about 20,000 feet, and details of the climbs have been well documented by Mike Smith, who made detailed observations of temperature, snowfall, wind velocity and so on, both on the mountains and at base camp. Being a physicist he was well qualified to make these records.



David Hick on the upper ridge of Cololo - photos by Michael Smith

It had been arranged that if they were in difficulty while they were at advanced camp, each evening when it became dark they would light a red flare. The idea was that if we saw the red glare from base camp we would have to mount a rescue operation the next day. We could not expect any help from the locals because of their superstitions, and so the remaining four in the party, later reduced to two, prayed that at nine o'clock each evening we should not see a red rocket, and that we would be able to go to bed knowing that all was well. Goodness knows what we would have done if we had been called out on a rescue attempt at 20,000 feet.

It was soon discovered that we did not have sufficient food to last three weeks, and it was agreed that on the following Thursday Ian Crowther and I would trek over the mountains (not the 20,000 feet peaks) to Pelechuco to buy more supplies.

David Martindale and Harvey Lomas had only been able to obtain leave from their respective jobs for four weeks, and they had to make an early return to England. They were to accompany us to Pelechuco to board the Saturday truck from Pelechuco to La Paz. Several days before our departure for Pelechuco, a young Indian came to see us early in the morning just after we got up to ask if we had any medication to cure his wife. We asked questions as far as we were able, in Spanish, which he only vaguely understood, and we eventually found that she was sick and had diarrhoea. We diagnosed that she had "the trots", to which all of us had been subject on at least one occasion. We therefore prescribed Imodium tablets, and off went the *composeta* armed with a supply of this medication. This evidently proved to be the wrong diagnosis and treatment because three days later he returned, saying that his wife was no better, and he requested that we go to see her. Further questioning revealed that she was likely to have cystitis or some infection of the urethra. Mike Smith and I therefore packed up our medical equipment and medication in a large bag and accompanied the Indian, whose name was Andres Barreras, to his village at Kelo Pado, which took us about one and a half hours of rough walking.

This indicated to us that the bush telegraph had been in operation, and in fact our presence was known to all the locals within several kilometres. There were no roads leading to Kelo Pado, which is situated in what amounts to a secret valley. The village was almost at the head of six small lakes, marked on all our inadequate maps as only one large lake, connected by an outlet stream to the Nubi valley system of lakes. This proved to be quite incorrect, since the source of the river running into the lakes at Kelo was from the South, rather than the North East, as marked on the maps.

On arrival at Kelo Pado we were taken into a small courtyard by Andres Barreras. Two small boxes and blankets of llama wool were produced and we were invited to sit down. On one side of the courtyard were some sort of living quarters, probably communal for day-time use, and on two other sides were store houses. On the fourth side was what could have been a slaughter house, because there was a stone channel leading from the doorway to the exit from the compound: presumably this was for the blood to run away. No doubt the building was used for killing llamas, and some llama meat, dark red in colour, was laid out on one of the walls to dry. The open gateway into the courtyard had an unnecessary overhead lintel, and the walls of the buildings were made of peaty earth, bound together with whitish mud, and bonded with stones. The roofs were thatched and the courtyard was cobbled.

Many of the members of the family of the Indian girl were inside the living quarters, and very soon smoke issued from the roof. The fire was to heat water to prepare some cocoa, with which we were later served in mugs made of metal. This beverage was very expensive, and only drunk by the locals on special occasions, so we were very honoured by their hospitality. While we were drinking the cocoa two members of the family went to fetch the Indian wife, who was only about eighteen and who we had been told could not walk. She was supported into the living quarters, and then there was another long wait. Eventually Andres said that she was ready to see us. We entered the hut and saw her sitting on a small chair surrounded by members of the family. The building had two beds, one at either end, and a miscellany of various domestic utensils and paraphernalia in between. We asked her where the pain was, and ascertained that it was worse after urinating. Very "wisely" we then considered the medicines available, and gave her a course of antibiotics, and departed hoping our treatment would be successful.

We had occasion to revisit Kelo Pado again shortly afterwards, when the wind broke the middle pole of our communal tent, which collapsed on top of all our stores. We had three smaller mountain tents, used for sleeping accommodation, but our meals were prepared and eaten in this large bell tent, which also housed our stores. The mornings in the district were generally calm, but almost invariably about 1 pm the wind rose, sometimes quite strongly, resulting that day in the breaking of our tent pole. On several afternoons there would be flurries of snow, but the wind would subside about 8 pm. It was therefore necessary to replace the pole, but unfortunately there were no trees whatever in the Nubi valley or on the surrounding hills. We had noticed some wooden stakes at Kelo Pado, so we went to the village again on the pretext of asking how Andres' wife was.

She seemed very much better, and we were encouraged to ask if Andres could lend us a pole for the tent. The Spanish word for pole is "palo", and the Spanish word for chicken is "pollo". For a long time Andres thought we required a chicken, and a good deal of unintelligible conversation ensued on this mistaken premise. Eventually he understood and produced a wooden paddle which was used in their

small boats on lake Nubi for fishing. Apparently quite large fish can be caught in the lake, except in the months of July and August, so the paddle was available for our use.

Andres' wife was very grateful to us for curing her, and asked if we had anything to cure her mother, who had a pain in the shoulder. We did not have anything very suitable, but I did give her a tube of hydrocortisone, which we had for skin eruptions. I warned her, by a series of signs, that she should not take it orally, but I did not subsequently hear how she got on with it! We asked if we could take a photograph of Andres and his wife, and they rather surprisingly agreed to that. They do not like to be photographed, particularly the women, so before presenting themselves for the photograph Andres had a wash, changed his shoes and clothes generally, and donned a very colourful poncho and a highly coloured tall hat. His wife took off her hat – otherwise worn continuously – and posed with Andres, Ian and me for photographs. Andres asked if we would let him have copies, which we agreed to do, and he was surprised that we could not produce them straight away. He seemed somewhat dismayed when we said that it would be six weeks before we could send them to him. When I returned to England and had our films developed I sent two photographs by separate mail on consecutive days, but one was returned to me by the postal authorities. Hopefully the other one did arrive.

As mentioned in part one my special task was to make a botanical review of the area, and I spent a large part of my time in doing that. I was mainly concerned in making a survey of flowers between about fourteen thousand feet and seventeen thousand feet, and I was quite surprised how many varieties there were, but almost all of them were dissimilar from alpine flowers in Europe. Inevitably not all the plants I found were in flower, but some had seeded, so that my collection was split into two parts. The first was of dried flowers, and the second was of seeds. I did not have a proper flower press, so I had to improvise. I did this with the aid of two stout pieces of cardboard, interspaced with blotting paper, between which I carefully placed the flowers. I secured the whole package with elastic bands, put it under my sleeping bag and slept on it. This rather Heath Robinson arrangement seemed to work very well, and I was able to put together quite an interesting portfolio on my return to England. I also took photographs of all the flowers discovered in the Apolobamba, and also in Pelechuco. That village was at the lower level of about 12,000 feet, and many of the flowers and plants growing there were similar to European varieties. All these are recorded in my botanic portfolio of the expedition. I had hoped that Kew Gardens or other similar establishments would be able to identify the plants of the Apolobamba either from the pressed flower exhibits or the photographs, but to my great surprise I was not able to obtain identification of any of them except those for which I had been able to ascertain the local name from the indigenous Indians.

David Martindale had a similar lack of success in identifying the Bolivian birds, of which there was a multitude, both in number and variety, in our camping area. However, we saw black ibis, a wader on the second and third Nubi lakes, a giant

coot, and black and white Andean geese on several lakes, a buzzard-type bird, light brown in colour and two feet six inches across, large brown ducks with white stripes, silver coloured birds about the size of a thrush with a white streak on their bodies, innumerable small brown birds very much like sparrows, and an agilla, which was a larger bird about the size of a plover, black in colour with a white stripe on its body. There was also a smaller bird with a squarish tail and a white belly: its tail had a white tip and a white patch on the top. Once we saw a grey and brown bird about the size of a buzzard, which alighted on a rock in Lake Nubi and stood in a hunched - up position rather like a heron, but it had much smaller legs. Later on we were all thrilled when we espied two small condors high in the hills.

The day after our visit to Kelo Pado four of us trekked over the mountains from Lake Nubi to Pelechuco. This was a combined operation in that Harvey Lomas and David Martindale had decided to catch the weekly truck from Pelechuco to La Paz on the first stage of their return to England, and Ian and I wished to replenish our food supplies.

We engaged the same arrieros, who had earlier assisted us in setting up base camp, to accompany us and Francisco to the village and then on a trek round the mountains surrounding base camp. His name was Vernon Huanca, pronounced "Wanker", and he brought his mule and donkey with him. We negotiated his charge at forty bolivianos, but later we found we had to pay for food for his mule, which cost ten bolivianos in Pelechuco.

The track to Pelechuco started in the direction of the village of Nubi but almost half way along the North side of the lake we branched off North West up the hill and then across very rough boring country to Lake Cololo. Swinging south we passed an old cemetery at an ancient mining commune, where all the graves were covered with a little house-like building. The track passed the old mine and eventually joined the road to Pelechuco which climbed past two lakes on the left to the top of a 5,000 metre (about 16,250 feet) high pass. Then commenced an interminable downhill journey past Lake Katantica to what we thought was Pelechuco, but which turned out to be a small village called Aqua Blanca. Another three quarters of an hour walk brought us to Pelechuco, and the journey in total took us twelve hours. I calculated that it was probably about twenty five miles.

We arrived at Pelechuco at 7 pm, and we hoped to stay overnight at the Pension Mexico. Whether there were normally no rooms available, or whether they were all full we were unable to ascertain. However, the proprietress did not offer us accommodation, and we had to arrange to sleep in the village reading rooms.

Since by this time it was pitch dark it was rather difficult to unload the donkey and the mule and transport our equipment up the rickety and irregular stairs to the reading rooms. All the walls up the stairs were covered with 1965 editions of newspapers, leaves from books, Christmas cards (in English), plus photographs of politicians, both Bolivian and Peruvian, and any other bright posters which were

apparently available at the time. Francisco and the arrieros slept in the reading rooms as well. Since Francisco for some reason had not brought his sleeping bag with him I lent him my bivvy bag.

We had supper in the Pension Mexico, which by English standards was very sleazy, but by Bolivian standards very good. Next morning we had breakfast there, consisting of a cheese sandwich and coffee, and since there was nowhere else to eat we also had lunch there, and on following days breakfast and evening meals. The best part of the evening meals was soup, which was very palatable, usually flavoured with a herb very much like rosemary, which we diagnosed as having been taken from a small white-flowering bush which grew prolifically in the area. The soup was followed by a second course of noodles, potatoes and meat of unspecified variety.

Pelechuco had a very large central square with a fountain in the middle, and where hens roamed at will. The buildings on all sides consisted generally of very small shops, all of which seemed to be selling similar goods. It made one wonder who they were selling them to, since a large portion of the population appeared to be shopkeepers, and it seemed they could only be selling to themselves!

Most of the shops had masses of tins of sardines and evaporated milk and very little else, which led one to the supposition that there must have been some grand national transaction in which the supply of sardines to Bolivia figured very significantly. There was practically no cheese and what there was was very expensive, and little in the way of canned fruit and vegetables, but there were no fresh vegetables at all. The people in the village seemed very honest and trusting. For instance, one shopkeeper left her till unattended for over an hour. With the knowledge of several local people we took two cans of fruit and returned an hour or so later to pay for them.

Against this background we carried out a shopping expedition for base camp stores, which next day were dispatched back to base camp in the care of Francisco and Vernon Huanca. However, the food we were able to purchase was very limited, and comprised of very dry bread, what we thought were llama cheeses at two bolivianos (50p) each, the only two tins of fruit in the whole village, oranges, margarine, the one tin of corned beef in the village, and a bottle of Nescafe.

Most of the male inhabitants of Pelechuco, and indeed most Bolivian men generally, wore baseball-type caps carrying an advertising motif; e.g. Coca Cola or K B Toy stores. These would seem to derive their origin from the American Civil War caps. The average height of Pelechuco women, and generally in Bolivia, was about four feet ten inches, and Bolivia is the only place I have visited where I felt tall, for the men were only about five feet two inches tall. This I assume is because of the altitude at which they live, which would account also for the development of their very large chests. The women generally have long black plaited hair, about two feet long, and the Indian men do not grow beards.

We spent two days exploring Pelechuco and its environs, and took an interest in the buildings of the village, many of which were in a dilapidated condition, although quite a number of them were being renovated, very laboriously, by fairly large teams of local builders. Building techniques seemed to be similar to those in the UK; e.g. lintels are used above the doors and windows, although there is a scarcity of timber. Cavity-type pink bricks were used in many of the renovations, and mud is used to bind the bricks together. There was quite a large school in the village, and perhaps surprising in view of its remoteness, all the children attending wore white coats. This was not the only sign of modern civilisation in Pelechuco, for we observed that electric street lights bordered the main street. However, we found that the cost of these had been met by some international funding, but the village had never had sufficient money to pay for the provision of electricity, so they had never been lit.

Pelechuco is located in a bowl amid the mountains; numerous streams flowed through the village, and all the washing of clothes was carried out in these streams, which also provide the sewage system. Half way through the village there were three "loos", built over the stream for ease of effluent disposal. The great thing was not to live near the stream below these public loos. The village is the Bolivian equivalent of a market town and was the centre for much communal activity for people living several miles around – hence the public reading rooms.

Workmen such as gold miners occasionally congregated in the town. We met several of these outside the Pension Mexico. They had come into town to buy supplies, including explosives, all of which they seemed to be able to purchase from Maria da Alvarez, the owner of Pension Mexico. In addition to the eating place (hardly a restaurant), in the same building she had the largest village shop, selling a variety of food. The explosives were kept, or perhaps hidden, under a pile of rather ancient carrots. The gold miners told us that they earned five bolivianos a day. They enquired how much they could earn in the UK on the one hand, and how much various articles cost on the other hand. I felt in the circumstances I should tone down both answers, since there was such a tremendous difference between their wages and prices and those at home.

The plan of Pelechuco in our guide book was inaccurate, and I spent some time in drawing a more accurate version, which later was sent to the publishers. Whether they amended their next edition I do not know. On return to base camp I drew a very rough map of the area around Lake Nubi, which had also been inaccurately drawn in our guide book. This also was sent to the publishers, but we received no acknowledgement, so perhaps travellers are still being misled who acknowledged our assistance in the next edition. This perhaps is of little consequence, since the only foreign visitors to the Apolobamba since 1912 have been climbers and botanists, and they have all documented their travels. I think that until we arrived there had only been about twenty non-American visitors previously. I am not surprised.

As mentioned earlier, on our trips in and around Pelechuco we found a number of interesting sub alpine flowers, and in

search of these and in general to explore the region we walked about two miles down one of the trails towards the tropical forest, which is not far away. I was somewhat scared when the track narrowed to about eighteen inches under a rock overhang, with a sheer drop of 1000 feet below. On the way back, however, we saw a local couple with two very small children walking on the same route. They were evidently going home, probably after buying their week's supplies from Pelechuco, and seemed completely unperturbed by, or oblivious of the danger of the track.

While walking down the valley we saw a torrent duck, which follows the course of streams in ravine-like territory and swims with the torrent.

One morning we watched a lorry driver and his mate changing the main axle bearing of their lorry in the square; clearly, because of the distance from any garage, the lorry drivers had to be good mechanics. The vehicles in Pelechuco and elsewhere in Bolivia are mainly Japanese, but there are a few Italian and German vehicles. In La Paz a large number of private cars are second or third or even fourth hand American cars: it would appear that old bangers are knocked out in Bolivia.

Later that same day we were accosted by the police, specially drafted in, and who had details in a TAWA (travel agent document) of the imminent arrival of trekkers to Pelechuco. We found it difficult to persuade the police that the party referred to was not us, and there was a long explanation of the word "pax", since the document indicated that there would be several "pax". We suggested the possibility that it was a misspelling of the word "packs". The same discussion continued the next morning with someone who appeared to be a lorry driver. It seemed to us that the police had nothing else to do apart from trying to interpret this quite unimportant document.

David Martindale and Harvey Lomas caught the 2am lorry on Saturday morning to La Paz. This, however, did not leave until 4 am, after the driver spent two hours honking his horn in the village square. The journey to La Paz was reportedly very uncomfortable and dusty, and it took twenty four hours to cover the 22 miles. According to Harvey Lomas, at one staging point a local fat lady sat on his head, such was the overloading of the vehicle. Prior to the departure of Ian and me on the next day we accepted a letter from Maria da Alvarez to Pamela Holt, who was a botanist and climber who had visited the Apolobamba a few years before. I sent it on to Pamela when I returned to England: I saw her at the annual dinner of The Yorkshire Ramblers last year and she confirmed that she had received it and had replied to Maria, with whom she had stayed when she was in Bolivia. We compared interesting notes on the area, including her tale of when she and her female companion were accosted by bandits. We owed quite a lot of money to Maria for the last evening of our stay in Pelechuco, when we had got somewhat tight on Sangria: she said it was "cancellanoed". However, we had to pay one American dollar per night to the village headman (he might have been the mayor) for the use of the public rooms. This was a matter of bargaining, and we wondered how much went into his own pocket.