

CHACHAPOYAS - PERU

4th - 18th July



This expedition was initiated between Phil Dover and his son Rob. Rob helped the BBC to make a splendid documentary on the area of north Peru about 2 years ago, (and there is another in the planning stage) and has lived and loved there for a decade and a half, so we had access to expert knowledge on the ground not only of the archaeology but the area in general.

We also had the benefit of knowledge of Anna Guengerich an American PhD student who has done extensive archaeological digging on Monte Viudo, a Chachapoyan settlement, south of Leymebamba.

Initial interest was from 20 people so I want to try and make those who didn't get there regret it.

- 4th July. We all met at The Grand Bolivar Hotel in Lima.
- 5th July. Museo Larco museum. Lima
- 6th July. Platform dig. Lord of Sipan Museum and Tucume Pyramids.
- 7th July. Minibus to Chachapoyas.
- 8th July. Gocta Waterfalls.
- 9th July. Kuelap.
- 10th July. Leymebamba, Mummy museum and the Kenti café.
- 11th to 16th July. Trekking about 60 miles.
- 17th July. Hotel Laguna Seca.
- 18th July. Visit the continental divide at Cumbe Mayo near Cajamarca.
- 19th July. We all go our separate ways.

Everybody knows of Machu Picchu and I feel that I have almost been there having seen so many images of the place but in the north of Peru there are some absolute gems which until now are off the main tourist routes.

Many of the graves have been robbed but one site, with two graves, thwarted the robbers at the last minute. The artefacts found are compared to Tutankhamun and indeed they are fabulous. Layer upon layer, about eight, of beads, gold and silver all incredibly restored and displayed in the new Lord of Sipan museum plus reconstructions of the grave sites and much more.

Museo Larco was/is the vision of Rafael Larco Herrera and his son who amassed a huge collection of amazing ceramics and gold artefacts. Amongst the comparative poverty of Peru these museums are a beacon of light and air and must have considerable national funding.

After lunch we did our own thing in Lima before boarding the overnight bus, with fully reclining, you could lay out flat, seats to Chiclayo.

The Tucume Pyramids are over a huge 540 acre site and in fact are platforms, some of which are built on volcanic plugs. Successive dynasties built successive platforms so they progress upwards. As they were built of mud bricks they have been considerably eroded by what little rain they have so all the lumps and bumps that can be seen to have vertical flutings all over them are the remains of these constructions. Many are being excavated now.



After a long ten-hour but fascinating minibus journey to Chachapoyas crossing the continental divide on the way to the Marañon River, which is one of the main Amazon tributaries, we climbed up and over the divide which separates water that drains into the Pacific from that going into the Atlantic.



On the road to Chachapoyas

All the towns and cities have very attractive “colonial” squares which are very well maintained. Even small towns like Tingo on the way to Kuelap had a smart, flowered and neatly trimmed square, some with an impressive church along one side.

The 3 hour walk in to the Gocta Falls was a test of our fitness and a good preamble to the main trek.

An impressive fall and amongst the ten highest in the world.

Kuelap is what appears to be a lozenge shaped, stone fortified curtain wall of up to 19 meters high enclosing up to 400 circular structures and measuring 600 x 110 metres. Radio carbon dating indicates that it was started in the sixth century AD. It is situated on a summit 3000 metres above sea level. We were silent after that visit considering the enormity of it all as it probably was not defensive.

The Mummy Museum in Leymebamba was as impressive as the others and contained hundreds of undisturbed mummies and other artefacts including bone flutes.



We now started our trek and 7 nights under canvas with 15 horses and seven trek crew led by Eyrien head horseman and Maddy the chief cook. There was also: Gidmar (Kid), Manuel, (there had to be one of those), Roberto, Daniel, and Magno our trusted and sure driver.

Place names vary a lot as the South American Pre colonial civilisations had no written language but I will use the names that I have.

We walked mainly through verdant valleys and rugged peaks. The Quinas Valley was huge and spacious and the 4100 metre Ulila Pass was the “summit” of the trek. We camped at between 3000 and 3500 metres often waking to hard frost on the tents.

George caught a good sized trout (or two) in Lake Huayabamba, the fresh fish making an enjoyable addition to our diet. We also lunched by the large Lake Las Quinuas on the penultimate day.

The food, three hot meals a day and the atmosphere throughout the trek was really good. An alarm call was not needed as you could hear the crew laughing and joshing from about 05:30 onwards. A lamb was slaughtered for our benefit and 2 chickens shared our camp until they were on the menu.

There were many birds and alpine type plants but also huge spiny succulents and other cacti. We passed many small holdings, one run by a couple called Digna and Wilson Rodriguez, with pigs, cows and in one case, lamas but it was evident from large collections of roundhouse ruins and huge areas of terracing that in the past the population had been huge and self-sustaining. The Incas depopulated and moved large sections of the old tribes such as the Moche and the Chachapoyans and then the Spaniards did the same to the Inca period people. Many people had Western Christian names including Hitler. There were Inca bathing pools in the village of Atuen upon which we had looked, the night before, from our camp site 1400 metres above.

Amazing sights were the cliff burials! Shear cliff walls with buildings - tombs and red pictograms and no visible access. Skulls and ribs still visible and some flat areas taken over by huge, shaggy bird nests. Rob brought along a prismatic telescope so that we could have a really good look. Vira Vira was the last of the archaeological sites that we visited and was possibly one of the best. Similar to Kuelap in that it had part curtain walls and ruins of round houses but the all-round view from there at 3753 metres was breathtaking.

Hotels:

The Grand Bolivar, Lima was old colonial with very high ceilings in the centre of Lima. The food was good.

Mochiks, Chiclayo. Good

La Casona, Chachapoyas. Good

Laguna Seca, Cajamarca. A spectacular spa, with steam pools everywhere, excellent food.

The weather was very kind to us. It rained quite heavily the night before we set out but was dry all the time we were walking. That made a big difference,

Vaccinations, for me, are always a problem. I do not want to put un-necessary stuff into my body but neither do I want the disease. Both Yellow Fever and Malaria precautions were recommended by our local surgery but in the end we took neither. Time will tell.

Hygiene is vital for the enjoyment of such trips. Antiseptic hand gel must be used after toilet and before each meal, even after shaking hands with a local. It is not that they are dirty it is just that their bacteria is different from yours. Drink only bottled water. The other thing which is difficult to get used to, is that you cannot put loo paper down the loo on account of the narrow plumbing!

Thanks.

I thank the clumps of grass and way side vegetation that I used to steady my way, I thank the crew for a splendid effort on our behalf, I thank my fellow trekkers for all of their input from their particular fields and general good humour and I thank Rob (Vilaya Tours) and Anna for the expert input. I thank Sadie, Rob's partner, for looking after Ken and Paul who had to come off the mountain. Finally I thank the wooden loo seat. AaaHhhh!!

Peter Hodge

Camp one:	S	06d	49.721m	W	77d	48.647m	3069m
Camp two	S	06d	51.515m	W	77d	49.237m	3670m
Camp three	S	06d	54.285m	W	77d	47.281m	3670m
Camp four	S	06d	58.659m	W	77d	46.079m	3472m
Camp five	S	06d	59.025m	W	77d	44.211m	3319m
Camp six	S	06d	59.025m	W	77d	44.211m	3319m
Camp seven	S	07d	02.777m	W	77d	48.154m	2513m

As supplied from Michael Smith's GPS.

Peru bird list (Michael Smith)

Chiclayo:

- Mocking Bird
- Turquoise Tanager
- Vermillion Flycatcher
- Burrowing Owl
- Black Vulture
- Cattle Egret
- Great Egret

En route to Chachapoya:

- Roadside Hawk
- Turquoise Jay
- Masked Yellowthroat
- Scarlet Tanager
- Eared Dove
- Amazilia Hummingbird
- Chachapoya area:
- Russet-crowned Warbler
- Torrent Duck
- Black Crowned Night Heron
- Amazonian Kingfisher
- Scarlet-fronted Parakeet
- White-bellied Hummingbird
- Sparkling Violeteer
- White-bellied Woodstar
- Amethyst Woodstar
- Chestnut-breasted Coronet
- White-browed Antbird
- Glossy-black Thrush
- Andean Solitaire
- Golden-bellied Grosbeak

On trek:

- Great Thrush
- White-capped Dipper leuconotus
- Andean Flicker
- Black-crowned Night Heron
- Brown-bellied Swallow
- Collared Inca eisenmauni
- Rainbow Starfrontlet
- Great Sapphirewing
- Plumbeous Sierra-finch
- Mountain Caracara
- Andean Goose
- (White-striped, possibly Black-and-white Hawk-) Eagle
- Bi-Coloured Hawk
- Black and chestnut Eagle



Sixth century Kuelap.

Hut circles inside the fortified ridge surrounded by crags and stone walls up to 19m high

Campsite looking down at Atuen village



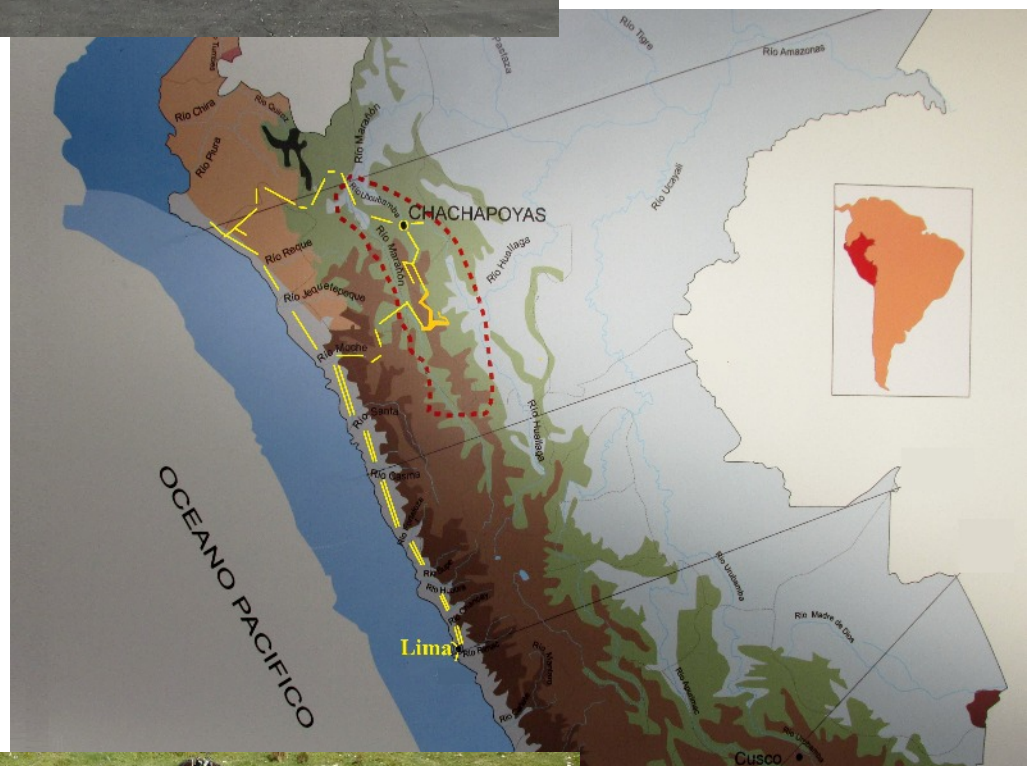
Lake Huayabamba
And campsite

Trekkers present: Michael Smith, Ken Roberts, Barry Dover, Richard Dover, Paul Dover, Evelyn and Phil Dover, Vivienne and George Burfitt, Liv and Peter Hodge.



The team except Peter

The pale dashes mark the vehicle route and tight dotted line the trek route.



Lunch en route

Photographs by Peter Hodge



Lunch at Kuelap



Las Quinuas campsite



Heading for the pass



Rob, Lake Quinuas



Photos
by
Phil
Dover