

PADDLE PERU 2012

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Contents

Introduction	1
The Team	2
Country Profile	5
First Descents	6
Itinerary	7
Expedition Diary	13
Food	66
Wildlife	67
Transport	68
Training	69
Equipment	70
Medical	72
Accounts	73
Acknowledgements	73



Introduction

In terms of whitewater kayaking Peru is relatively unexplored and unknown to the European community. The main aim of the Paddle Peru 2012 expedition was to explore some of the whitewater rivers of Peru and relay our findings to the British and European paddling communities, whilst enjoying some incredible exploratory kayaking.

Outline Aims

- To enjoy independent and self-supported exploratory whitewater kayaking in remote parts of the Peruvian Andes
- To work with local whitewater rafting companies to explore the potential of new rivers or sections
- To increase awareness of Peru as a suitable whitewater kayaking destination and report our findings to the UK (and worldwide) paddling community
- To collect scientific samples of river diatoms on behalf of Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation (ASC)

The primary aim of the expedition was to explore whitewater rivers in Peru independently. The team enjoyed 12 weeks of whitewater kayaking and in total paddled 19 sections of river of which we believe 2 were first descents.

There is limited information on the nature of rivers suitable for kayaking in Peru and as such it remains a largely unexplored destination, especially by British expeditions. Whilst we were there we were successful in uploading many photos and river notes on the rivers we paddled on our online blog, a resource which we hope will be used to help plan further expeditions in the future (<http://paddleperu2012.blogspot.co.uk/>).

The river diatom study was postponed by ASC however we were put in touch with the Pacific Biodiversity Institute who we collected cultural, land use and environmental observations for.





The Team

Alby Roseveare – Joint Leader (Logistics)

4th Year Mechanical Engineering, Imperial College London

Alby first got in a boat at the age of 11 and enjoyed paddling on family summer holidays until he learned what it was really all about upon arriving at Imperial in 2008. He joined IC Canoe Club at the age of 18 and since then has enjoyed paddling whitewater in France, Norway and all over the UK and organised the club's first tour to Ireland this winter. He has completed a BCU approved Student Whitewater Safety and Rescue course and has travelled independently around Kenya, Tanzania, Morocco and India. He is currently President of IC Canoe Club.



Adam Holland – Joint Leader (Sponsorship)

Graduate Architect (2011), University College London

Adam began kayaking at school and has gained 10 years of whitewater paddling experience since then. He began paddling in racing whitewater kayak slalom before turning his attention to more exploratory whitewater paddling at university. Throughout his studies he paddled with IC Canoe Club (and continues to do so) and his paddling CV includes trips to Norway, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Ireland, India and Nepal. In 2008 he was a member of an Imperial supported expedition to India which gave him experience in self-supported multiday trips, including a number of first descents, in the Indian Himalaya. He has also completed self-supported multiday treks in Peru and Ecuador and helped to organise a UCL expedition to the Altai Mountains in Siberia in 2007 in which he trekked for 14 days. Adam holds a certificate in Advanced White Water Safety and Rescue techniques and has completed outdoor first aid courses in the past.

Alex Robinson – Webmaster

2nd Year Physics, Imperial College London

Alex started flat-water paddling in 2002 and enjoyed family surf kayaking trips to Devon. He started whitewater kayaking with IC Canoe Club when he joined in 2010 and has paddled all over the UK and in Norway. He holds some basic first aid certificates gained whilst he was working as a swimming coach and this will be updated by the Outdoor first aid course in February. Alex has experience in maintaining the IC Canoe Club website and so can help in the online publishing of the expedition's findings.



Derfogail Delcassian – First Aid

2nd Year PhD (Biomimetic Nanomaterials), Materials Department, Imperial College London

Derf started paddling whitewater in 2006 whilst at York University and hasn't looked back. She has paddled in the French Alps, Austrian Alps, Norway and all over the UK and recently completed a BCU approved Student White Water Safety and Rescue course. She holds an excellent level of first aid training with REC Level 2 and Marlin Outdoor First Aid certificates. She is also an avid independent traveller with recent self-organised trips to Nepal, India, South Africa and North America. She is currently president of IC Canoe Club.





Tim Lamb – Media

1st Year Adult Nursing, Buckingham New University

Tim first started paddling when he was 9 on family trips on the local lake Derwent Water and at 15 bought his first white water boat. Whilst studying Physics at York he was an integral part of the University canoe club, and during this time took on the role of safety officer (2008-2009) being responsible for organising and running weekly club river trips. In addition to this he also organised two club Alps trips paddling throughout France and Austria. Tim currently holds First Aid, Medical Gasses and Community First Responder qualifications through St John Ambulance and is currently training to take his SPA assessment having successfully completed the training in 2010. Tim is also a keen independent traveller having recently completed independent trips around India and Nepal, including trekking in the Himalayas.



Tom Leeman – Treasurer/Food

3rd Year Civil and Environmental Engineering, Imperial College London

Tom began paddling when he was only 7 years old on various family canoe trips down the river Wye. After becoming a member of Wydean Canoe Club he was introduced to whitewater at Symonds Yat and got hooked. University offered him many more kayaking opportunities and he has subsequently paddled all over the UK, as well as trips to France, Italy and Norway. He has recently completed courses in BCU Student White Water Safety and Rescue and Marlin outdoor first aid.

Country Profile

Peru is located on the North West coast of South America and borders Ecuador and Colombia to the North, Brazil and Bolivia to the East and Chile to the South. The Andes mountain range runs the length of the country from North to South and is the source of the majority of Peru's whitewater rivers.

Terrain, Geography and Climate

Peru has 3 distinct terrains – *la costa* (coastal desert), *la sierra* (highlands) and *la selva* (jungle). Whitewater rivers are found in each of the terrain types and we were successful in experiencing whitewater kayaking in each one.

The country's dry season runs from April to October and is subsequently the most pleasant time to visit Peru, predictably coinciding with the peak tourist season. In these winter months there is less likelihood of weather related logistics problems (mud slides, floods, etc) and the level of the rivers is usually more predictable due to the lack of changeable conditions (they are fed through these winter months with the summer rains and snow-melt which collects in the Andes). Generally the volume of the rivers follows the rain pattern and is highest between January and March, and drops off until October where they are at their lowest points. Many rivers can be run year round however the levels are generally preferable between June and October.

Language

The national language of Peru is Spanish however in rural and highland areas Quechua is also spoken. With little Spanish experience in the team Tom underwent intensive language classes for 6 weeks before the expedition whilst the rest of the team learnt basic Spanish in their own time. By the end of the expedition we were all competent in communicating in Spanish.



Peruvian Whitewater

Most of our knowledge about the rivers in Peru came from Kurt Casey's website www.peruwhitewater.com which provides good guides as to how to reach some of the best rivers and any hazards which one should be aware of.

Due to the remoteness of most rivers, many runs were completed as multi-day trips, taking food and camping supplies with us in our kayaks.

As expected from Kurt Casey's guides, Peruvian whitewater is characterised by high volume rapids formed by boulders which have fallen into the river from often deep cut canyon walls. This creates powerful yet technical rapids, where moves must be made to avoid large recirculating stoppers or siphons created by boulder chokes. The majority of the rapids were read-and-run style. Some rapids required definite inspection from the bank before being run, to identify hazards and to be sure that one could make the line safely. It was sometimes necessary to protect rapids (e.g. with throwlines), often however, throwlines were of limited use since the width of the river means that any swimmers or equipment would be carried downstream rapidly, requiring pursuit by kayak.

A number of whitewater rafting companies operate in Peru, particularly on the Rio Apurimac. Kayaking with the safety kayakers of these raft companies was very useful for us as they are well experienced and knowledgeable about the rivers in their area.

First Descents

One of the aims of our expedition was to investigate the possibility of achieving first descents – navigation of previously unpaddled rivers. Whilst it is very difficult to categorically say that a river has never successfully been navigated by kayak before, we took the following signs to reach that conclusion.

- No previous record, either published online, written in the South American Explorers notes or knowledge from local rafting and kayaking guides of a previous descent by any group
- No local knowledge within living memory of kayakers having travelled to the region or paddled the river before
- General confusion over what a kayak is and what we were doing there, often accompanied by numerous hand gestures indicating “very bouncy water, big waves, danger” and looks of terror. These were all good signs.

As the specific rivers we attempted required the use of local accommodation and transport or were situated in remote areas where unusual traffic would be noted, it is unlikely that a previous descent occurred within living memory without being noticed by local people. Prior to living memory, boat design would have seriously hindered attempts to navigate this type of water by kayak. All of the first descents we attempted were in the context of multiday trips, where we carried food and shelter for several days on the river and intended to make camp at various points along the way.

Aside

One of the novelties of first descents is also in naming rapids, ‘Ensalada Peligrosa’ (‘danger salad’ – a prominent feature of our trip,) was highly commended by the team as a rapid name however we never found a rapid which would quite live up to the esteemed title.

Itinerary

Shown here is the expedition itinerary and the locations of the rivers we paddled during our stay in Peru (highlighted in red).

Our expedition paddling was split into 3 main regions:

Pozuzo North East of Lima on the edge of the jungle

Cusco In the heart of the Andes at high altitude

Arequipa Towards the coast in the South of Peru

Large maps showing the areas in more detail appear on the following pages. More information can be found on the 'Maps' page of our blog.



Pozuzo

Rio Pozuzo

Rio Santa Cruz

Rio Huancabamba

Rio Mallampampa

Rio Palcazu

Parque Nacional
Yanachaga
Chemillen

Abra la
Esperanza

Cusco



Rio Lucumayo

Rio Urubamba

Rio Sacsara

Rio Santa Teresa

Rio Apurimac

Rio Velille

Arequipa

Rio Cotahuasi

▲ Coropuna

ACP
Uchumín

Pampacolca

Chivay

▲ Sabancaya

Rio Colca

Majes

Rio Chile

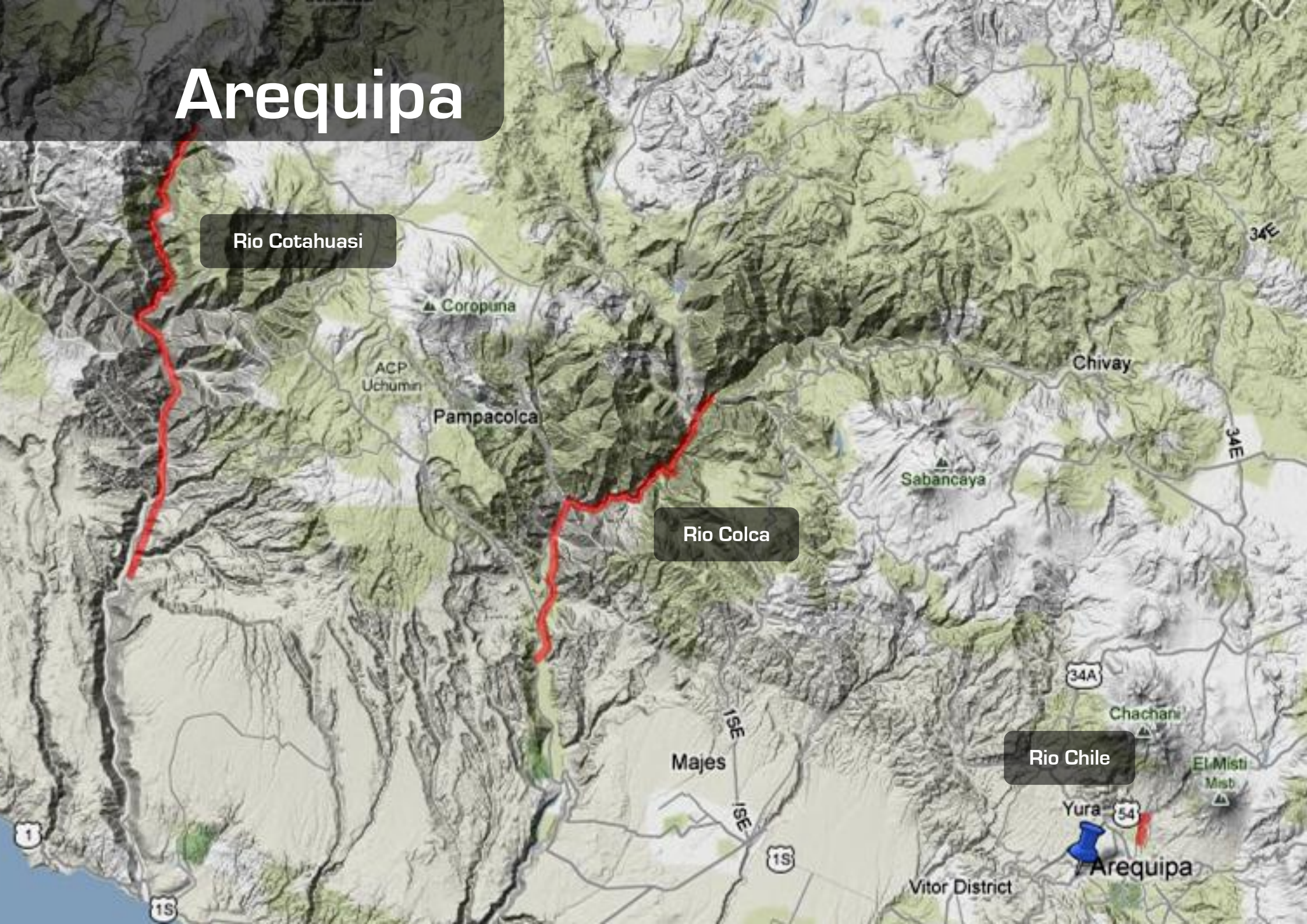
▲ Chachani

▲ El Misti

Yura

Arequipa

Vitor District



The expedition itinerary differs slightly from the original one proposed prior to our arrival in Peru due to the difficulty in pre-planning our exact day-to-day activities. With whitewater kayaking this is especially difficult since activities depend on local water levels, weather conditions, transport availability, etc.

Rest days

In order to acclimatise to altitude (especially in Cusco) or after days of intense kayaking it was necessary to spend some days of the expedition winding down, catching up on sleep and organising transport for the next river trip. We spent most rest days planning rivers, shopping for multadays and updating our online blog.

Multadays

This is the name given to a river expedition in which we were completely self sufficient for a number of days. On these expeditions we carried food, water, camping and navigation equipment in the back of our kayaks.

Day	Activity	Description
1	Arrival in Lima	
2	Rest day in Lima	Organising transport, etc
3	Rest day in Lima	Organising transport, etc
4	Travel to La Merced (Pasco)	Public bus
5	Travel to Oxapampa,(Pasco)	Collectivo
6	Rio Huancabamba	Day run
7	Rio Huancabamba	Day run
8	Rio Santa Cruz	Day run
9	Rest day in Pozuzo	Expedition hair cuts
10	Rio Pozuzo	Multiday (day 1)
11	Rio Pozuzo	Multiday (day 2)
12	Travel to Oxapampa (Pasco)	Collectivo
13	Rio Mallampampa	Multiday (day 1)
14	Rio Huancabamba; travel to La Merced	Multiday (day 2); colectivo
15	Travel to Lima	Public bus
16	Rest day in Lima	Organising transport, etc
17	Rest day in Lima	Organising transport, etc
18	Bus to Cusco	Public bus
19	Cusco	Organising transport, etc
20	Bus to Accha; Rio Velille	Public bus; multiday (day 1)
21	Rio Velille, travel to Tincoc	Multiday (day 2); cattle truck
22	Rio Apurimac (Upper)	Multiday (day 1)
23	Rio Apurimac (Upper)	Multiday (day 2)
24	Rio Apurimac (Upper)	Multiday (day 3)
25	Rio Apurimac (Black Canyon)	Multiday (day 1)
26	Rio Apurimac (Black Canyon)	Multiday (day 2)
27	Travel to Cusco	Cattle truck
28	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
29	Rio Apurimac (Commercial section)	Day run with Julio Cesar
30	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
31	Rio Urubamba (Chilca section)	Day run; Derf returns to UK
32	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
33	Bus to Arequipa	Public bus
34	Rest day in Arequipa	Tim arrives
35	Rio Chile	Day run with Daniel Rondon
36	Rio Chile	Day run with Daniel Rondon
37	Travel to Cotahuasi	Public bus
38	Travel to Vellinga; Rio Cotahuasi	Pick-up truck; multiday (day 1)
39	Rio Cotahuasi	Multiday (day 2)

Day	Activity	Description
40	Rio Cotahuasi	Multiday (day 3)
41	Rio Cotahuasi	Multiday (day 4)
42	Rio Cotahuasi; travel to Arequipa	Multiday (day 5); private car
43	Rest day in Arequipa	Organising transport, etc
44	Rest day in Arequipa	Organising transport, etc
45	Rio Chile	Day run with Daniel Rondon
46	Travel to Cabanaconde	Public bus
47	Travel to Huambo	Public bus
48	Travel to Canco	Donkeys
49	Rio Colca	Multiday (day 1)
50	Rio Colca	Multiday (day 2)
51	Rio Colca; travel to Arequipa	Multiday (day 3); public bus
52	Rest day in Arequipa	Organising transport, etc
53	Rest day in Arequipa	Organising transport, etc
54	Travel to Cusco	Public bus
55	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
56	Rio Apurimac (commercial section)	Multiday (day 1) with Mono
57	Rio Apurimac (commercial section)	Multiday (day 2) with Mono
58	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
59	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
60	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
61	Travel to Santa Teresa	Public bus
62	Rio Sacsara – Rio Urubamba	Day run
63	Rio Santa Teresa – Rio Urubamba	Day run with Gian Marco
64	Rio Urubamba (Upper)	Day run with Gian Marco
65	Rio Urubamba – Rio Lucumayo	Day run
66	Rest day in Santa Teresa	Walk to Machu Picchu Pueblo
67	Rest day at Machu Picchu	Visit Machu Picchu

After 68 days together the team split into 2 – Alby and Tim left to explore the rural islands of Lake Titicaca whilst Tom, Alex and Adam stayed in Santa Teresa to tackle more whitewater. After 8 days apart the team re-grouped to fly back to the UK.

Alby and Tim's itinerary for the 8 days:

Day	Activity	Description
68	Travel to Cusco	Public bus
69	Travel to Puno	Public bus
70	Paddle on Lake Titicaca	Multiday (day 1)
71	Paddle on Lake Titicaca	Multiday (day 2)
72	Paddle on Lake Titicaca	Multiday (day 3)
73	Travel to Cusco	Public bus
74	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
77	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc

Alex, Adam and Tom's itinerary for the 8 days:

Day	Activity	Description
68	Travel to Rio Vilcabamba	Too low so return
69	Rio Urubamba (Hydroelectrica)	Day run with Gian Marco
70	Travel to Cusco	Public bus
71	Rio Apurimac (Black Canyon)	Multiday (day 1)
72	Rio Apurimac (Commercial section)	Multiday (day 2)
73	Rio Apurimac (Commercial section)	Multiday (day 3)
74	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
77	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc

On regrouping after 8 days:

Day	Activity	Description
78	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
79	Rest day in Cusco	Organising transport, etc
80	Travel to Lima	Public bus
81	Rest day in Lima	Organising transport, etc
82	Leave Lima for the UK	

Expedition Diary

The following pages give an account of our activities on the rivers in Peru. Much of the content shown is also available on the pages of our online blog.

Arrival

28/06/2012

After our battle at the check-in desk at Gatwick with Air Europa we finally managed to get the kayaks onto the flight to Lima! The first drama of the trip happened only moments after arrival when we found one of the paddle bags had been mangled by some heavy handed baggage handling. The result was 3 destroyed Werner paddles, luckily our spare paddles remained intact.

It also turns out that roof racks on cars are not as common as we expected in Lima (perhaps even illegal we later found out). This resulted in some hilarious and creative methods for transporting the boats, on, in and around a selection of vehicles.

Next stop is the Pozuzo valley for what we hope to be some great Jungle boating.



A sunny day in London ↗
Our broken paddles →



Rio Huancabamba – Middle Section

The Pozuzo region lies approximately 400km north east of Lima on the edge of the jungle. The area was explored in whitewater kayaks by Kurt Casey for the first time in 2000 and still has much potential for first descents.

03/07/2012 – 04/07/2012

To get to the Rio Huancabamba we first got an 8 hour bus from Lima to La Merced across the Andes over a high pass of 4800 metres. After spending the night here we then proceeded to travel to the small jungle town of Pozuzo via Oxapampa, completed in a lively 15 seater minivan, known locally as a colectivo. Pozuzo is an interesting colonial town founded by German settlers some 100 years ago and the architecture and feel of the town is quite Alpine. Many of the people we met were German in appearance with blond hair and blue eyes. Weiner Schnitzel and German sausage were all on the menu!

After spending the night in Pozuzo we got up early and drove for half an hour up-stream to the edge of the National Park, 17 km above the town. The river gave us no warm up and we were immediately thrown into pushy grade 4+ rapids. We progressed slowly as each rapid required inspection. The scenery was fantastic with the river flowing through steep sided jungle gorge, with the road 75 metres or so above.

As the day progressed we realised we wouldn't be able to complete the river in one day, so we left the boats in the gorge and hiked out, hitching a lift in the back of a pick-up back to Pozuzo. The next day we hiked back into the gorge and paddled for 6 hours finishing in Pozuzo. The river was a fantastic medium volume grade 4/4+. With its warm, green water, huge boulders and jungle wildlife it was reminiscent of paddling in Nepal!

The river has seen few descents since the first descent in 2000 and it was a special feeling to be one of only a handful of groups to have paddled this stretch of water.

↑ Tom on day one

← Alex in the glorious sunshine

Rio Santa Cruz

The Rio Santa Cruz is a tributary to the Rio Pozuzo and we found no record of further descents after it was pioneered in 2005 by a 2 man British kayaking team. The river turned out to be a fun bouncy medium volume run.

05/07/2012

We paddled this 10km section in about 3 hours, putting on in a village called Tingo del Paso and taking out at the confluence with the Rio Huancabamba. The river was a similar volume to the Huancabamba, but paddled at a grade or so lower at grade 3-4. The character of the valley was quite different to the Huancabamba, being slightly more open with less jungle and more large gravel banks. Again we managed to hitch a lift back to Pozuzo in a pick-up truck after walking for an hour to find transport. Derf saw a snake on this run which was the first dangerous animal we have seen on the trip so far!

The day after we thought it best to celebrate the beginning of some fantastic Peruvian boating with customary expedition haircuts. Fair to say we provided much entertainment for our hairdresser as we tried to describe the ridiculous looks we wanted to inflict on each member of the group. Alex was quickly dubbed the new Richard Branson and Derf rediscovered the joys of an awkward fringe.

Adam at the get on →





Rio Pozuzo

07/07/2012 - 08/07/2012

Having run the Huancabamba a few days before we were keen to experience how the river developed further down the valley. The 50km stretch of the Rio Pozuzo (the Rio Huancabamba changes its name as it passes the town of Pozuzo) proved to be a great warm up multiday for the team.

Day 1

We rolled out of our hostel at 9am and got on the river at Pozuzo enjoying 15km of large volume grade 3 water in relatively open jungle. After a bite for lunch we entered what was to be a stunning 20km long grade 4 jungle corridor, reminiscent of the Sun Kosi in Nepal, until we emerged finding a perfect beach to set up camp on at about 3.30pm. Large cat prints in the sand and the sight of a couple of Macaws were enjoyed by all.



We devoured a dinner of sardines and spaghetti and spent some time stargazing by the camp fire before hunkering down in tents pitched under the watchful eye of a huge Tepui – a sharp mountain which protrudes the surrounding flat jungle.

↑ Alex lining up
← Derf paddles the gorge

Day 2

One Thunderstorm and a somewhat soggy night's sleep later we rose to a breakfast of porridge and manjar (a typical Peruvian toffee like syrup) and got on the river again. Within an hour of similarly friendly whitewater the river flattened out completely and we had arrived at Codo del Pozuzo ('elbow of Pozuzo') where the river does a 180 degree bend and continues to meander towards the Amazon.

We were met at the river bank by a friendly restaurant owner and his family who fed us our first cuy (guinea pig) and kindly arranged a colectivo for our return to Pozuzo.

The return journey was an epic undertaking in itself. The thunderstorm the night before had caused all of the tributaries of the Pozuzo to flash and much of the road seemed near impassable. Three hours of nail biting ferry glides in the colectivo across brown torrents covering the road and driving across some questionable 'pedestrian' bridges saw us arrive back at the hostel after dark, glad to be home.

We make camp under the Tepui →





Rio Mallampampa – First Descent

10/07/2012

Some research before our trip lead Adam to discover what looked like a great possible first descent of a large tributary to the Rio Huancabamba. The Rio Mallampampa (or Huaylamayo as it is marked on some maps) winds its way down from the town of Mallampampa some 15km before it enters the Rio Huancabamba. We paddled this section in one day, camping that night at the confluence and continuing down the Rio Huancabamba to the town of Huancabamba.

We initially decided that 2 people would inspect the river on foot whilst the rest of the team bought provisions for the run, however transport issues made this impractical in reality. Instead, from our base in Oxapampa we organised transport with all of our kit to the village of Mallampampa by taxi, and decided to inspect what we could of the river from the road on the journey to the get in. The drive took several hours and whilst we couldn't follow the river entirely the glimpses we caught showed promise before the river flattened out somewhat and was easily inspected from the road. From this point, travelling upstream the river lost a considerable amount of volume as tributaries fed into the river below. On reaching Mallampampa we realised that this low volume upper section would create quite a slog for several kilometres so we decided to put on at the earlier road bridge about 3km downstream, shortly after the confluence with a very high, dry waterfall. Here the river became a low volume technical run and the gradient steepened before continuing into the valley – we immediately kitted up and put on.



Alex picking his way through a boulder garden ↴
Derf tackles a drop on the first descent →



The river initially started out as class 3-4 and after 1km flattened out to provide 10km of small and short grade 2 rapids and several long stretches of low volume water on a gravel base in a very open valley. After we stopped for lunch, the valley steepened to provide around 4km of grade 4 of a somewhat gorged in nature. At this point, large boulder gardens with boulders approximately 4-6m in diameter, provided a more technical run with a variety of lines whilst the gorged in nature of the valley increased the volume of the river, providing both read-and-run rapids and those requiring inspection. The beginning of the gorge is marked by a road bridge crossing the river. We completed the run that afternoon with about an hour of daylight left when we came to the confluence with the Huancabamba and set up camp on a somewhat gravelly bank. We refuelled with sardines and (slightly off) cheese before a romantic campfire was prepared; after the exertions of the day (including many inspections and one pin and rescue) an early night was had by all before continuing down the Huancabamba the following day.

Rio Huancabamba - Upper Section

11/07/2012

Leaving camp at the confluence of the Mallampampa and Huancabamba we paddled this 10km stretch to the national park before the Quebrada Honda which turned out to provide many glorious class 4 rapids. No portages, great kayaking... 'nuff said.

← Alex enjoying the run down





After a week of incredible boating it took us two days to make the long trip from the Pozuzo valley back to Lima in what was quite an efficient journey. Once in Lima phase two of our trip was put into action as we booked tickets for the bus to Cusco and got all the maps we needed from the Instituto Geographico Nacional in Lima. The bus took 22 hours and we were soon in Cusco for the second leg of our trip.

Rio Velille – First Descent

18/07/2012 - 19/07/2012

We identified a section of the Rio Velille, a tributary to the Apurimac, as another potential first descent. The section started in the town of Occotuna and continued to the confluence with the Apurimac at Tincoc where we could continue downstream to tackle the “radical grade 5 section” and the commercially rafted sections of the Apurimac below in multiday style. Kayakers Piero Velutino and Kurt Casey previously paddled a short 2km section upstream of where we intended to put on in August 2007. They reported this short section as a “mini Apurimac” which gave us an indication as to the nature of the river. Geographical data indicated that the section we wanted to paddle would be a 12km stretch with approximately 7-8km in a steep gorge with an average gradient of 20km/m for the duration of the run.

Day 1

Unfortunately, attempting to organise logistics to the nearest town, Occotuna, proved to be expensive by private transport. Discussion with local rafting companies confirmed that to their knowledge, this section had not been previously attempted. We arranged transport to the nearest village, Accha, by bus from Cusco and hoped to find a way of getting from Accha to Occotuna when there. We arrived in Accha at approximately 8am and managed to hire a vehicle to take us to the road bridge crossing the river at Occotuna. Upon reaching the road bridge we could see a class 3 run upstream that seemed to continue and steepened before running into a gorge downstream. We reached the river bank at approximately 10.30am and put on immediately.



Looking down the valley of the Velille ↴
The put on bridge at Occotuna →



The first kilometre or so provided us with read-and-run rapids before we reached a large boulder rapid that required inspection. Inspection showed that this rapid and the one immediately following were unrunnable with several siphons which looked to have been caused by recent landslides. The decision was made to spend the next few hours investigating the nature of the river downstream before attempting to carry the boats around these siphons and recommence the run. The boulder chokes and siphons continued for several hundred metres, interspersed with short flat sections, before the river flattened and rounded a corner. Attempts to inspect the rest of the run from the right hand bank proved unfruitful.

We decided to send two members to inspect the corner from the opposite side, involving a swim and some safety set up. Derf and Alby swam across then inspected from the left hand bank before being unable to continue due to the river entering a 5-6m wide sheer sided gorge which continued for approximately 800m before turning another corner. Whilst the rapids in the gorge looked runnable, we noted that others may require inspection and possibly bank side safety and from our vantage point at the mouth of the gorge it was impossible to determine whether bank side support or extraction would even be possible. Whilst there were no immediate siphons or obvious landslides in this section, we were unsure whether the boulder chokes we had encountered were representative of the rest of the river.

← The entrance to the 7km vertically walled gorge

After lunch, we discussed our options. Due to the landslides we had encountered upstream of the gorge and the possibility of further unknown landslides within the gorge which would risk not being able to evacuate in an emergency we decided to abandon the descent and turn back. This turned out to be an arduous task in its own right.

A plan was made to return to Occotuna and then to Accha, before making our way to the confluence with the Apurimac by road to continue our planned multiday. We portaged our kayaks some of the way back upstream to a suitable riverside campsite before bedding down for the night.

Day 2

The next morning we started portaging back upstream which required some intense team rope work. After eventually making our way back to the road bridge attempting to get out of our situation was a little trickier than we thought; Adam and Tom quickly found that there was no transportation in Occotuna and a walk to Accha would have taken several hours by foot. Luckily, a motorbike appeared and after a 3 person pillion ride Derf made it to Accha where the only taxi in an otherwise deserted town was commandeered for our extraction. Accha being a largely arable farming hamlet, there were no adults nor transport available during the day, however later that evening Tom and Alex managed to secure us a cattle truck to take us from Accha to Tincoc (Tincoj) where our adventure with the Velille would have ended. On starting the Apurimac the next day just below the confluence with the Velille, we noted that the river looked to contain large boulders and rocky rapids at this end of the section too.

In this instance our descent of the full 12km section of the Velille was unsuccessful. The remaining 10-11km from below the bridge remains unclaimed, however the team was confident in its decision to abandon the attempted first descent of this run.



Alby paddling back up the river to exit the canyon ↵
Adam and Derf travelling in style to Tincoc →



Rio Apurimac – ‘Radical’ Upper Section

20/07/2012 - 22/07/2012

The Upper Apurimac is an intense 7km section of grade 5 that is paddled from the villages of Tincoc to Naihua (Nayhua). The trip took us two days and to say that our descent was an epic would be an understatement...

Day 1

From Tincoc the river is flat for a few kilometres before rounding a bend where the gradient rises sharply. Rapids are formed around and over huge boulders, with long and complex lines with the constant hazard of siphons – we inspected every rapid and set up safety as necessary. Our efforts were rewarded with some amazing lines and aesthetic moves in this kayaking game of chess.

At the end of day 1 we were buzzing. We had paddled a series of great grade 5 rapids with no portages. The final rapid of the day stands out as particularly rewarding. A long 300-400 metre grade 5 with a complex set of moves around huge boulders. We have some good video of this rapid which we will put together back in the UK.



↑ Adam leading the charge down one of the first rapids of the section
 ← Adam in the mix





Day 2

Day 2 was to turn out to be a more nerve-racking affair to say the least. We began by making a gruelling portage around a messy bouldery rapid which may have been paddable (none of us fancied it.) Unfortunately on the next rapid Derf swam and despite being quickly rescued her boat sailed off to be pinned 500 metres downstream. The extraction of the boat involved live baiting Derf to a rock in the centre of the river and then hauling the boat out from the pin.

After lunch we continued down the river enjoying several more good rapids but with two more portages that were very physically demanding. By this point the team was very tired and the end was almost in sight only 2 km away. Sadly Derf had another swim and whilst she made it to the bank safely we chased her boat for about 1 km down some read and run grade 4 / 4+ but we couldn't retrieve the boat before it became pinned in the middle of the river above a messy grade 5 drop. At this point the river was 60-70m wide. With the boat in the middle of the river, there was no easy way for us to retrieve it. We decided to set up camp and have another look in the morning.



Day 3

After breakfast we re-considered our options. Due to the width of the river it was not possible to live bait a person to the boat. The only option was a tricky break-out and ferry glide above the main drop to get to a small rock where one could potentially climb onto the rock and try to attach a line to the pinned boat. We eventually elected to leave the boat and Derf made her way back to Cusco after walking to Naihua in the hope that we might come back to retrieve it sometime soon! (We managed to get the boat back 3 days later).

- ↑ Our camp midway down the canyon
- ← Some serious rope work

Rio Apurimac - Black Canyon Section

23/07/2012 - 24/07/2012

After a day of rest in Naihua topping up our food supplies, enjoying an evening beer by the camp fire (the first ever multiday with beer?) and bidding farewell to Derf, the remainder of the team embarked on the Black Canyon section of the Apurimac. The canyon owes its name to the dark rock of the surrounding mountains and lack of sunlight the gorge experiences.

This infrequently rafted section starts at Naihua and follows the river through an amazing gorge for 60km until the get out bridge Puente Hualpachaca. By raft the section takes 3 days however we predicted it should take us no longer than one and a half days in our kayaks. The commercially rafted section of the Apurimac lies directly beneath the Black Canyon section and we planned to continue on the river and paddle the whole lot in one go.

Day 1

The first rapid of the day, dubbed "breakfast rapid" was perhaps one of the best – a clean bouncy grade 4 to get the team buzzing. The rapids (mostly grade 4 read-and-run) continued to provide us with a good amount of entertainment for the first 10km including only one portage which, with what Adam could only describe as a "difficult and heroic boof", could be run. The gradient slowly began to level off and with only one stop for lunch we continued to a nice beach about 30km downstream where we set up camp.

Unfortunately due to the loss of the water filter the team were subjected to drinking river water boiled in the sardine pan which, when enjoyed luke warm, prompted a disgusting fishy acid reflux. An early night was had.

The bustling metropolis of Naihua →





Day 2

Unfortunately both Tom and Alex had picked up a river bug from the day before and were not feeling their best, the perfect conditions for finishing off a committing grade 4 run.

The breakfast rapid today provided us with less amusement than the day before – Adam and Alby reached the eddy at the bottom from where they watched both Tom and Alex drop into a sticky hole beneath a large pour over. After a couple of back loops and some intense side surfing mania swims ensued and a swift rescue was complete, all that was left to do was find the boats and paddles. An hour of chase boating and Adam and Alby managed to retrieve both boats and but only one set of blades. Tom and Alex continued down the river on the bank.

The group was reunited and continued down the river to enjoy (Adam and Alby) and simultaneously paddle and vomit (Alex) down the remainder of the grade 3-4 rapids.

On reaching the Puente Hualpachaca, the get out for the Black Canyon section, we decided to abandon our plan to continue down the Apurimac due to episodes of violent vomiting and the lack of toilet paper. A rough night camping by the bridge later and we managed to catch a cattle truck back to Cusco – a 6 hour journey across an amazing Andean landscape.

The grim return journey back to Cusco...in the back of another cattle truck →





Rio Apurimac – Commercial Section

28/07/12

After a couple of rest days in Cuzco with some long sleeps and salsa lessons, the team arranged to return to the Apurimac to complete the final section. In trying to find someone capable of removing Derf's boat from the tricky pin we spoke to many of the rafting companies and met Julio, a local kayakista and raft guide, who offered to help us find transport for the run and accompany us down the river. The commercial section is around 40km long and takes most rafting companies 3 days to complete – again we have heard that in a kayak it is more than do-able in a day.

As arranged the taxi arrived at the hostel at 3am to pick us up. Unfortunately due to an eventful night of gastrointestinal distress neither Tom nor Alex could face the river leaving Alby, Adam and Julio to tackle the beast alone. Four hours later we arrived back at the river and put on just under the bridge we had taken out from a couple of days previously.

The river threw us continuous grade 4+ rapids from the start but with Julio to show us the lines made it to the first (aptly named) rapid "portage" in record time. After a swift portage around the grade 5 siphon garden we continued down the river with few inspections and some great lines provided by Julio's boss-like memory. Paddling with such a skilled kayaker who knows the river like the back of his hand was a great experience and meant we finished the section in less than 7 hours. A great days paddling enjoyed by all.

We went on to paddle this section of the Apurimac a total of 3 times on different occasions, joined by the whole team.

← Alby paddles 'Purgatory'





Rio Urubamba - Chilca Section

30/07/12

On the advice of local kayakista Julio the team ventured to the Chilca section of the Urubamba, the river which runs alongside Machu Picchu and through the Sacred Valley of the Incas. There was no time to admire the ancient archaeology and vistas however as the river promptly served up a rock hard portion of Grade 5. This is without doubt the hardest river we had run so far.

Putting on in the rain, the river rapidly became essentially a single long grade 5 rapid with small and difficult must-make eddies. We had fun paddling some very hard rapids and stood in awe as Julio ran a very long, very challenging grade 5+.

Challenges of all forms struck, as Alex broke his emergency split paddles twice (both times in the midst) and Adam took a refreshing swim. With the odds mounting we were forced to make a heinous, steep portage off the river and return to Cusco.

↑ Tom and Alby warm up on some grade 5
 ← Julio shows us why he's the boss





Rio Chili

03/08/12

After the excitement of the Chilca section of the Urubamba it was time to say goodbye to Derfogail who flew home to the UK as planned. After one last day in Cusco (spent like all proper rest days – eating) Adam, Alex, Alby and Tom caught the bus to Arequipa. Much ticket faff and a glorious eight hours on the bus later we found ourselves in Peru's second city.

Tim planned to meet the team in Arequipa flying from London via Madrid and Lima. Luckily/ somehow he managed to blag his kit and boat onto all three planes. Despite strict instructions to meet him at the airport Tom and Adam managed to turn up late, leaving Tim to make his own way to the hostel. Ooops.

With all five kayakers reunited it was time to take on a new river, the Rio Chili. Tim was given a generous 12 hours to recover from his epic journey and then shoved onto what turned out to be a beautiful class 3/4 river on the outskirts of the city. After spending hours travelling all over Peru it was fantastic to be able to paddle a river that was only half an hour drive from the hostel.

We ran the river with Daniel Rondon of Expedicionas y Aventuras and a couple of his rafts. It was a great 2 hour run, and a nice change to feel relaxed on the river after the more challenging Chilca. We ran this river on two consecutive days. Next stop, Rio Cotahuasi.



↑ Squashing into tiny taxis quickly became a theme of the trip, especially in Arequipa
 ← Daniel watches Alex





Rio Cotahuasi

05/08/12 - 10/08/12

The Rio Cotahuasi flows through the deepest canyon in the world (3535m deep at its maximum depth) and offers a phenomenal kayaking expedition experience with great whitewater and historic Inca ruins. From Arequipa the whole trip took us 6 days - 2 days of travelling and 4 days of kayaking.

Day 1

We got the comically named "Immaculate Conception" bus from Arequipa to the town of Cotahuasi, leaving at 4.30pm and arriving a full 12 hours later at 4am.

The boats were not able to come on the same bus as us and had to come in a separate cargo truck. This created some confusion as Tom's boat did not arrive with the rest of ours. We proceeded to bivvy in the town square for a couple of hours kip. After a worrying few hours it transpired that his boat was stuck in the Cotahuasi bus depot and eventually we were reunited.



- ↑ Alby lets the girls in on his little secret
- ← Kayakista tramps in Cotahuasi

Day 2

After a hearty breakfast of pan con huevo we continued our journey in a pick-up truck which we hired in town down the valley to the put-on hamlet of Vellinga where the road ends.

On the way to Vellinga we made a quick detour to visit the spectacular 150 metre Sipia waterfall.

Once at Vellinga we carried our boats the 100m or so down to the river. By this time it was 4pm so we paddled a kilometre downstream to find a nice beach to camp for the night.

Contemplating the line on Sipia falls→





Day 3

A great first day of paddling in which we covered approximately 20km. The first 5km started out as grade 3 read-and-run, progressing to grade 4 later in the day. We inspected and ran a few harder grade 4/4+ rapids. After a lunch of tuna and pittas we paddled the first named rapid – “the wall” a long rapid against a left hand cliff with a tricky boof half way down.

We set up camp above a hard grade 5 rapid which none of the team decided to run and quickly relaxed into the multiday routine of pasta and sausage in tomato sauce before an early bed at 7pm under the stars. To save weight we opted to take the tent inners and leave the pegs, poles and flysheet in Arequipa – this proved to be a good decision as the moscas (flies) were relentless and the night was warm.



↑ Alby on a typical Cotahuasi rapid
← Tom boofs 'The Wall'





Day 4

The day started with several hours of high quality grade 4/4+ read-and-run rapids until we reached a long technical rapid called "marpa". The rapid was perhaps 200m long with a number of must make moves and a sweet boof half way down. Alex and Adam elected to paddle the whole rapid with the rest of the team putting in half way down. The final drop catapulted the paddler into an impressive walled in gorge, which three of the team rolled on.

After lunch we reached "metre canyon" and "centimetre canyon". Each of these rapids are given their name as the river passes through a narrow slot at the end of the rapid. "Metre canyon" was particularly impressive as it was lined with ancient Inca ruins which the team had a careful peek at.

The canyon walls started to open out slightly and we began to see sparsely spaced houses with vineyards now growing on the ancient terraces. The wine made from the grapes of the Cotahuasi Canyon is a local speciality. A roaring fire-fuelled evening was enjoyed before another early night.

Day 5

Today was also packed with lots of great grade 4 read-and-run, with 3 [runnable] portages. We spent a while looking at the rapid called “high side for your life” but in the end decided to walk it.

All the portages involved some interesting seal launches back into the river. We made it to the confluence with the Rio Maran and continued down the river, now called the Ocoña for about 15km before making camp.

Alex contemplates “high side for your life”→





Day 6

A full day of grade 3 paddling and a 1km walk out across farmers fields saw us reach the small fishing town of Iquipi mid afternoon. We travelled the bumpy road along the remainder of the valley to Camana in a local bus which took us 4 hours.

After some time was spent hunting down a bus to Arequipa we ended up getting a ride in a brand new Mercedes Sprinter still with the new car smell and an owner who fancied making a quick buck. With boats and kit stuffed in we made it back to Arequipa by 3am.



The team makes it to the end of the canyon – the confluence with the Rio Marañón
Our final camp on the banks of the Ocoña →
45



Rio Colca

14/08/12 - 19/08/12

The Cañon del Colca is a stunning canyon and the second deepest in the world which is beaten in depth by only 335m by its nearby cousin the Cotahuasi. Unlike the Cotahuasi the banks of the Colca are totally deserted and uninhabited – even the Incas couldn't muster the strength to build along its infertile and vertical walls. We found it a truly remote and exhilarating adventure through moonscape rock formations and azure blue waters.

Day 1-2

The Lunar Canyon section of the Colca took us 3 days to paddle and 3 days of transport to get to the put-in from Arequipa. The journey began with the team piling into a bus from Arequipa at 2pm to Cabanaconde where we checked in to a hostel for the night. The following morning at the less sociable time of 5am we took a second bus to the town of Huambo. From Huambo the plan was to hire burros (donkeys) to carry the boats down to the river.

Arriving in Huambo at 8am we were greeted off the bus by a group of Spanish kayakers with their tales of woe with regards to hiring donkeys to get to the river. We were surprised to meet another group of kayakers in this remote village and expected to complete the first descent of the canyon this year (as it turns out, we were the second). They pointed us in the direction of their donkey driver in the hope he could acquire a few more and get us to the river with them. Unfortunately this was not possible and we spent a day wandering around town under intense negotiations to try and reach the river the following day. By evening there were still no confirmed plans so after checking into a hostel alarms were set early to get organised and leave Huambo the following day.



↑ Alex deep in negotiations with a donkey driver, Grimaldo Chuquicondor
 ← Huambo all becomes too much for Alby

Day 3

We awoke before sunrise and were up and out to continue our search for donkeys. Within minutes we found the man used by our Spanish compadres! By the time the sun was properly up over the surrounding mountain peaks plans were in place to take a truck to the end of the road before loading the boats onto donkeys and then trekking down to the river. All that was left to do was have breakfast; a dose of egg sandwiches and coffee later and we were ready to move.

By 11am the donkeys were loaded up and the 8 hour trek down to the put-on hamlet of Canco began. The first km or so was nerve racking with boats falling off donkeys about every 100m. Eventually we refined our tying-on technique and continued down the valley of the Rio Huambo which after 12km meets the Rio Colca. The scenery was stunning and the donkeys easily negotiated the difficult terrain with the boats – traversing scree slopes with precariously balanced kayaks on the back of tired donkeys above an almost sheer 400m drop into the whitewater below was a testing experience.

We reached Canco at 5pm having descended a total of 2000m from Huambo and after a brief discussion with the locals headed to the aguas calientes (hot springs) in the river. The only access to the springs was via a rope bridge but getting into the hot springs (I say hot springs but perhaps "tepid eddies" is a better description) after the day of stress in Huambo followed by the arduous trek was bliss!



Adam with Derek the donkey ↴
Tackling the walk in →



Day 4

After a long couple of days the decision to have a lie in until 8am was made. However we were all woken during the night by rock falls down the face of the cliff on the opposite side of the river. At one point sitting up in the tents we could see sparks flying as the rocks bounced into the river.

After a leisurely start we were on to the clear blue waters of the Rio Colca. The river started with pleasant grade 3 whitewater through massive cathedral like structures gouged out of the rock walls. After a few km the Rio Mamacocha enters with warm crystal clear waters and doubles the flow of the river. The rapids now start to pick up and the gorge opens slightly. Here we came across our first big rapid of the trip.

This rapid began with some nice grade 4+ boulder gardens before rounding a corner and forming 3 terminal looking holes up against a huge wall. Not knowing what lay in wait around the corner we all dropped into the first half of the rapid before jumping out to inspect. No one fancied the questionable line weaving through the huge holes on the second half of the rapid so we had a quick walk round it followed by lunch.



Alex takes on a rapid the rest of the team decide to walk ↴
Tom and Adam →



After lunch the gorge began to steepen up around the river and the rapids became fun read-and-run grade 4, giving out to some absolute gems within stunning surroundings.

The day ended when we found a nice grade 5 where the water dropped between some huge boulders, the left hand side held a slotty mess whereas the right had a nice clean tongue charging into a big curling wave. Alby, Alex and Tim elected to run the rapid in the evening perhaps to avoid carrying their boats back up from the campsite to run it in the morning.

An early night was enjoyed by all.



↑ Tom leads the charge

← Alby enjoys the final rapid of the day

Day 5

This morning we awoke early to our morning gruel as we still had a lot of ground to cover in the canyon and after yesterday's late start wanted to crack on. Adam and Tom ran the drop above the campsite before we continued down the river to discover a recent landslide had formed a massive Norwegian style grade 5 rapid (small pebbles and sand were still sitting on top of the boulders). After a good hard look everyone decided it was too early to attempt something this big so boats were shouldered, roped and dragged around it.

Below the big rapid the river continued to give more classic read-and-run grade 4 for a few kilometres until the canyon opened up and we reached the spectacular condor shower. This is a water fall which crashes down the entire canyon wall giving off nothing more than a fine spray by the time it reaches river level. We had been told that in the afternoon condors fly through the spray using it like a shower. Unfortunately none made an appearance whilst we had a chocolate break on the rocks below. Past the condor shower the canyon again gorged up and the rapids came thick and fast. Before long the walls had become a chocolate brown colour and we were deep in the "chocolate canyon".

We stopped for lunch at a grade 5 rapid, although the line was not the hardest half the flow went under a rock and into a siphon on river right. Because of this only Alex stepped up to run the rapid the rest of us snuck past sheepishly on the bank.

The "Condor Shower" falling from high up the canyon wall →





As we continued through the canyon the walls really closed in and created a steep sided gorge with an increasing gradient. More rapids required bank scouting and everyone made their own decisions on what they wanted to paddle and portage.

Finally the walls closed into an ominous looking gorge with a corner we could not see around, Adam snuck into an eddy and clambered out onto rocks and peered into the depths of “reparez” – the must-portage siphon hell at the end of the “chocolate canyon”. Everyone jumped out in the last eddy and we started to pass the boats through the boulder caves formed by various landslides across the river.

It took us about an hour to complete the portage and below it we were rewarded with the canyon opening out and soon found a sandy beach to set up camp on. Having been on the water by 8am and only stopping at 5pm this was our longest day on the river and everyone was excited about the dinner of pasta, salchichas and tomato sauce.



↑ Adam getting his gurn on
← Alby waiting for boats at Reparaz

Day 6

This was our third day on the water and we awoke to find everything covered in dew. The stove was lit and we sat with coffee waiting for the sun to rise and dry our thermals for the day's adventure. With everything packed away the team was on the water by 9am. After a few kilometres of grade 3 warm up we rounded a corner to discover another steep walled gorge with ominous horizon line. This was "poles canyon". Eddying out we discovered an unrunnable boulder jumble with no way to portage from our current position but a promising looking ledge on the opposite side of the river. A must make ferry to a small eddy on river right and we were underway roping the boats up the vertical cliff to the ledge before carrying them down to an even smaller eddy above an unscoutable must-run grade 4 drop.

Unfortunately Tim had an explosive bowel movement midway through the portage and then had a tactical chunder in the eddy above the must run rapid. He made the line and everything was fine in the end.

After the portage the gorge again opened up and the river continued with beautiful rapids in stunning scenery down to the confluence with the Rio Andamayo. From here down to the take out village of La Central was, for me, one of the best read and run grade 3/4 sections of the trip so far.

Arriving in La Central we managed to hitch a lift with a cattle truck from the river bank up to the main road. From there we flagged down a colectivo who took us to the larger town of Aplao, 30 minutes drive away, from where we caught a 4 hour bus back to Arequipa.



The portage of Poles Canyon in full swing ↗

The kayakistas in a colectivo to Aplao →



Rio Urubamba – Santa Teresa to Santa Maria

30/08/2012

After our adventures in the canyons of Arequipa we returned to Cusco to explore some of the rivers around Machu Picchu. We got in contact with Gian Marco Vellutino, a veteran Peruvian kayaker who completed many first descents in Peru and who owns a campsite and zip-line on the banks of the Rio Sacsara in Santa Teresa and decided to spend some time with him exploring the area.

The section of whitewater between Santa Teresa and Santa Maria became one of our favourite day runs in Peru. A non-stop roller coaster ride of continuous IV+ (V) that didn't let up for 20km! We ran this section 4 times as read-and-run with no portages.

What also makes the section particularly special is that part of the way down there are some hot springs where filthy kayakers can take a much needed bath.



↑ Mono, our Colombian kayakista friend
 ← Tom





Rio Santa Teresa

31/05/2012

The Rio Santa Teresa is a tributary that flows into the Rio Urubamba at the town of Santa Teresa. We paddled a 10-15km section of this river to the confluence with Gian Marco. It took us a couple hours and was a continuous small volume grade 3 read and run. A very pleasant creek.

Rio Urubamba – Upper Section

01/09/2012

This day section of the Urubamba began close to the train station for Machu Picchu and ends at the waterfall where the water is extracted for the hydroelectric power station re-enters the river. The removal of water from the river here has turned an otherwise un-paddleable stretch of whitewater into a great low volume class 5 creek with some great boof drops amongst giant boulders!

We paddled this section with Gian Marco, who pioneered the first decent last year. We expect we made the first British descent of this section.



↑ Tom tackles one of the drops
← The team watch Alex

Rio Lucumayo

02/09/2012

Tom asked of Gian Marco "will we have enough daylight to finish the run?". The answer came "well you are English kayakistas, I hope you have your head torches!"

After another sporting run down the Urubamba from Santa Teresa to Santa Maria, we met Gian Marco in Santa Maria. From here it was a 45 minute drive to the put on for the Lucumayo, a tributary that meanders down the valley before entering the Urubamba at Santa Maria. This run was also to be Alex's birthday treat. And he was certainly treated to an enchanting jungle gorge and some great kayaking. However he was also treated to a heinous walk-out from the river in the dark after we missed the painfully obvious take-out!

After hiding our boats in the jungle bush the night before, the next day we trekked down a steep side tributary from the road to retrieve the boats. It turned out to be quite a slog but overall a great river experience.



Tom deep in the jungle gorge ↴
Adam awaits Tim's signal →



Rio Urubamba - Hydroelectrica

06/09/2012 (Alex, Adam and Tom)

In the last couple of weeks of the expedition there was a division of forces in the team. Whilst Adam, Alex and Tom decided to stay in the Urubamba valley and continue to chase the white water dream Alby and Tim took a different adventure to lake Titicaca.

"Don't forget your handbags and makeup ladies... today we paddle class 5" exclaimed Gian Marco as the remaining kayakistas prepared for this difficult section of the Urubamba. Steep, high-volume, continuous rapids provided the most intense and difficult river experience of the trip.

After visualising some fantasy lines on the enormous man-made waterfall which marks the end of the upper section it is then possible to paddle to the confluence with the Santa Teresa. We paddled the run in about 3 hours, though without Gian Marco leading us it could have taken twice as long as inspection would be necessary.

With Gian Marco demonstrating some big lines, eddies were only available every hundred metres or so. The routine goes: arrive in the eddy, get your brain together and then quickly turn to see how GM avoids the next set of big holes!

A fantastic river experience.





Lake Titicaca

06/09/2012 - 09/09/2012 (Alby and Tim)

Day 1

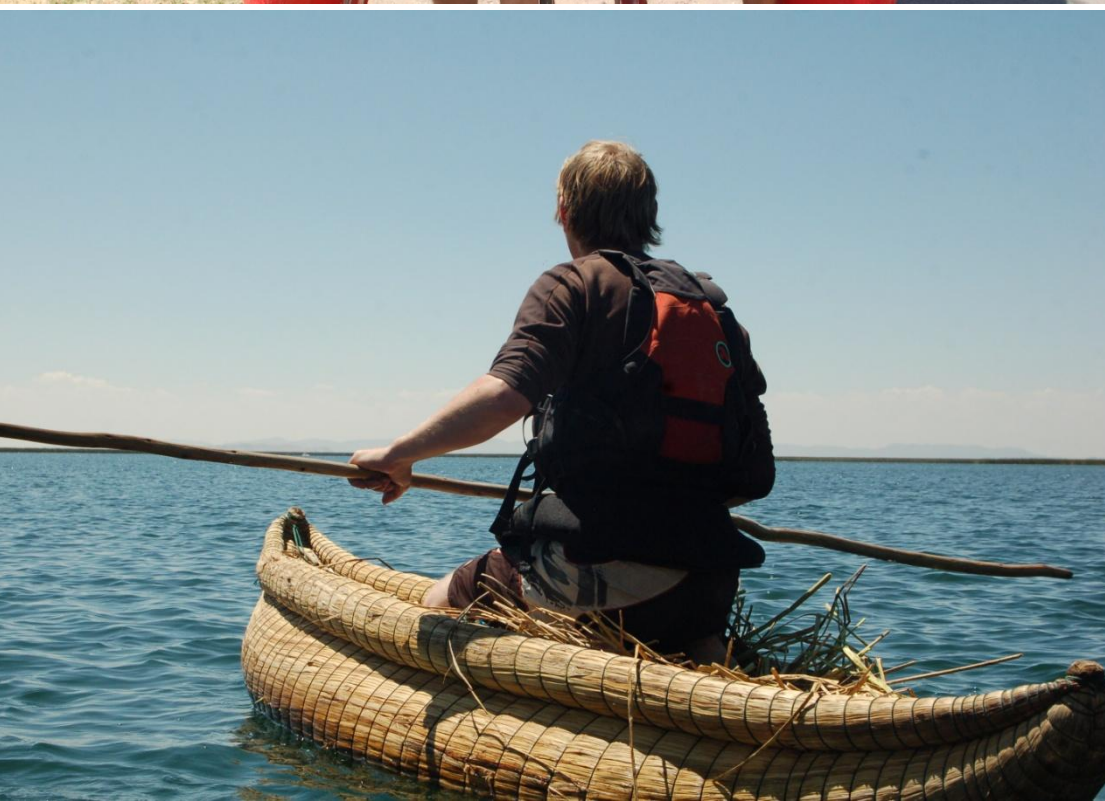
Heading back to Cusco Alby and Tim paid a visit to Paul Cripps at Amazonas Explorers to collect Derf's Mamba as Tim took the decision to sell his beloved Jefe to Gian Marco back in Santa Teresa. Having retrieved the boat we jumped on a bus and whipped down to Puno where we planned to begin our journey across the lake. Arriving late in the evening we quickly sourced a tasty polleria (Peruvian roast chicken restaurant) before heading to bed ready for an early start in the morning.

Day 2

By 11am we were underway and on the lake having acquired supplies in Puno's market. In the taxi to the port we asked our taxi driver if we needed a permit or license to paddle on the lake. He didn't seem to know but radioed his HQ to find out - the operator on the other end shouted (in Spanish) "Sir we are a Taxi company, how should we know?!" Guess not then.

Heading off into the reed beds we quickly made our way to the Islas Uros. These stunning man made floating islands are made from dead reeds which are matted together to create a floating structure for people to live on.

The first islands we reached are a tourist attraction and as such are not lived on in a traditional manner, however we heard that behind the reeds there are islands where people live as they have for years. Great we thought, we shall paddle there and spend the night!



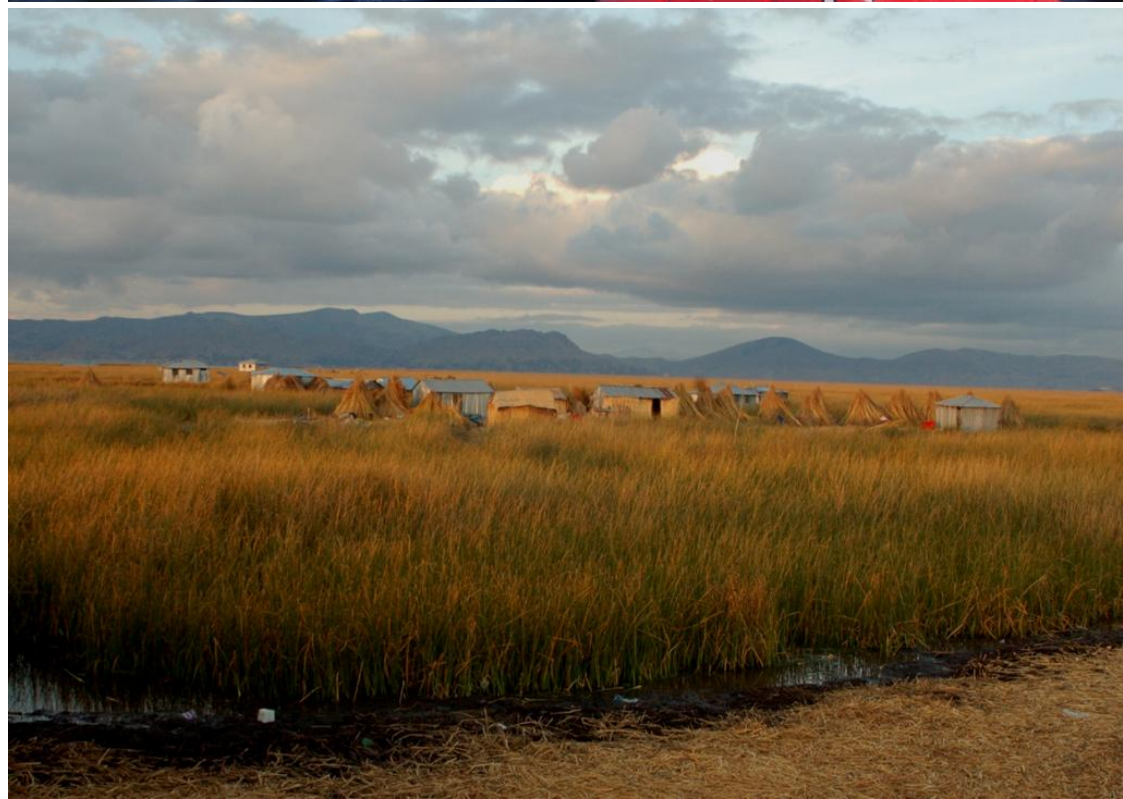
↑ Tim and Alby before setting off on the lake

← Tim swaps his plastic kayak for a more traditional model made from reeds

Stopping for a quick spot of lunch and a chat with a couple of locals to find the best way to get to the none touristy islands, we were met with worried faces. The locals tried to dissuade us from leaving as the islands and were adamant that they were too far away, we would get lost, the lake was choppy, we would drown, etc. Having finally convinced them that it would probably be fine we set off.

After two emotional hours of navigating the narrow channels through reed beds the lake proper finally appeared. It turns out it's pretty big. Skirting around the huge expanse of reeds looking for a village to stay in it wasn't long before we saw some islands and headed in to speak to the inhabitants. First paddling into the village we were ignored but then the children spotted us and came across for a chat. After negotiating with the children to speak to an adult we started asking around trying to find somewhere to sleep. The question "is it possible to stay here" was answered with "si..." so you obviously ask "so we can stay yes?" however the reply was "no, not here go and find somewhere else".

It was now 5pm and getting towards sun set. We were directed to stay "over there" on what looked like a floating piece of waste land with a couple of buildings on stilts. A sneaky look through the windows and we discovered it was the local school surrounded by an expanse of floating reeds (play ground?). Excellent - a camp site! We decided to bivvy out on the wasteland and leave at first light the following day so as to avoid any unpleasant confrontations. It should be mentioned that we brought some beers to share with anyone who would put us up, however as we were on our own and needed to reduce weight for the paddle across the lake the following morning we felt it sensible to drink them ourselves whilst enjoying a beautiful sunset.



Finally we reach the open water ↴

The view of the non-touristy floating islands from our school ground vantage point →



Day 3

At 5.30am we awoke, packed up and escaped from our bivy/school site. The plan was to paddle across the lake to the Peninsula de Chuquito and from there paddle on to another island or find another camp site depending how tired we were. A quick breakfast of biscuits and the long, flat slog began. Unfortunately the weather had turned and it had become quite overcast but with some paddling we were soon warm and within an hour and a half across the lake to the town of Luquina Grande on the peninsula.

We arrived at the town in the middle of a three day fiesta and was welcomed into the party and fed coffee, soup and beer (it is 8am in the morning!). We spent an hour relaxing and chatting to the locals who were very excited to have two heroic kayakistas join their celebrations. As much fun as it would have been to stay we wanted to see more of the lake so returned to the boats and paddled on around the peninsula. After a brief coffee stop at 11.30am at the next town along, Luquina Chico, the decision was taken to man up and charge across to the island of Taquile, visible in the distance.



The island looked quite small however it is in fact 7km long... paddling away in the afternoon sun it took us three and a half hours to cover the distance and we were rewarded with a very excited harbour master who was surprised to see us and impressed that we had paddled from the main land. He kindly offered to store our boats in his shed before giving us directions to a homestay up in the main town.

↑ Our kind coffee, beer and soup sharing friends in Luquina Grande
 ← Thumbs up with Taquile in the distance





Day 4

After an amazing night's sleep and the best breakfast in a long time [coffee, fried bread, donuts, pancakes and eggs!] we went off to explore the island. The people that live on Taquile continue to wear traditional and very unique clothing and fish and farm the lake itself.

Obviously the water was too inviting to turn down, but we had both forgotten our trunks! Needless to say we made do...

After lunch we caught a local boat back to Puno as we couldn't face the thought of the 35km paddle back.



↑ The sun rise over the Cordillera Blanco in Bolivia across the lake (5.36am)
← Alby on the boat back



Food

During the expedition food became an extremely important part of everyday life. The food which we took on multiday trips went through several iterations until an optimum menu was found. Each meal had to be considered against the following criteria:

1. Calorific content
2. Weight
3. Nutritional balance
4. Taste

In general for long trips we took around 30% surplus food in case of unforeseen events delaying us on the river. This was very flexible however, with a smaller amount of contingency taken on shorter trips or those closer to civilization.

A typical day on the river would consist of the following food:

Meal	Food	Quantity per person
Breakfast	Porridge	100g (dry oats)
	Sugar	20g
	Raisins	20g
Lunch	Pita bread	2
	Tuna	60g
	Cereal Bar	25g
	Biscuits	40g
	Nuts	40g
	Chocolate	30g
	Pasta	200g
Dinner	Tomato sauce	50g
	Sausage	2
	Sweets	5-10

This scheme provided ample energy and nutrition for the group whilst reducing the weight of food to a manageable level. However for a future expedition groups may wish to take note of the following suggestions from our own experiences:

- As we quickly learned, food hygiene on the river is very important. When several members of the party became ill on a trip it severely hampered their paddling ability and could have lead to dangerous situations.
- We found high energy snack food very useful. Locally produced cereal bars especially helped all of the group stay energised and motivated whilst kayaking or carrying the boats. Sublime – cheap Peruvian chocolate bars available for 1 Nuevo Sole – became a staple snack.
- Keeping food safe and dry proved to be a challenge. We found that many things did not require careful waterproofing however the pasta, sugar and cereal bars were definite exceptions.
- We learned the importance of dividing all types of food up evenly so that if a boat was lost we could continue to eat normally until the end of the river
- Powdered milk is difficult to come-by. Had we known this we would have considered bringing our own rather than suffering the porridge-made-with-river-water delicacy we developed.

Wildlife

Sightings of wildlife we were treated to varied across the country and as such the distinct terrains have been separated. Notable sightings included:

La Selva (Pozuzo)

- Green macaw
- Weaver bird
- Torrent duck
- Grass snake
- Evidence of large cat (paw prints)

La Coasta (Arequipa)

- Condor
- Vulture
- Fish eagle (or similar)
- Black heron
- White heron
- Otter

La Sierra (Cusco)

- Hummingbird
- Scorpion
- Funnel web spider
- Vicuna
- Llama



Weaver bird nest ↗
Funnel spider web →



Transport

Based on the advice of previous expeditions to Peru, it was decided that public transport and taxis could satisfy most of our transport needs to and from rivers and between cities.

Bus depots in Lima, Arequipa and Cuzco allowed relatively easy travel to the smaller towns near rivers, although a degree of haggling was usually necessary to secure a reasonable price for our impractical-looking kayakers. Despite the protest of many a bus driver fitting kayakers into a bus's cargo hold is pretty easy. Sometimes this had to be demonstrated quite forcefully, putting the boats in the hold before we were told that it is impossible. Bus journeys were usually several hours long, at an unpleasant time and pace with intolerable music played at an unbearable volume. They were, however, cheap and often took us pretty close to our put-ons.

Away from the cities, journeys were made either by taxi or colectivo. In the smaller towns and villages local taxis were found to have a very can-do attitude, allowing us to strap our kayakers to their vehicles in some very artistic ways.

For our journey from Huambo to Canco, the put-on for the Rio Colca, donkeys were the only feasible mode of transport as it is a long hike on dangerous paths. These donkeys were difficult to organise, and not cheap. We used our straps to attach the kayakers to the harnesses the handler provided but this was not entirely stable and required constant attention and maintenance.

Recommendations for future expeditions include:

- Travelling with inflatable roof-racks. We spent a lot of time trying to find taxis with suitable roof-racks to transport our boats which could have been reduced.
- Travel with as many roof-rack straps as you can. On seeing your kayakers every taxi/colectivo/truck driver will disappear to the boot of the car and reappear triumphantly with a magic piece of 2m long, seen-better-days twine with which he intends to tie your boats on. It is in everyone's interest to politely decline and use your own.

Training

In addition to general upkeep of paddling ability and fitness there were a number of other areas of expedition training which required commitment from all team members:

	Group Responsibility	Outcome
First Aid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Ensure Outdoor and Expedition First Aid training undertaken → Ensure first aid equipment and medication is well understood and sufficiently practised with before expedition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Five members fully trained in Outdoor and Expedition First Aid (provided by Marlin)
Kayaking Skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Continue paddling as a group on ICCO trips and advanced spring tour to the Pyrenees to develop communication and group dynamics → Remaining ICCO trips to be used as opportunity to practice higher level paddling on 'morning missions' and at the recently opened Olympic (Lee Valley) whitewater course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Successful advanced trip to the Pyrenees in March prior to the expedition → Weekend trips used to push personal paddling
AWWSR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → All complex techniques and equipment practised and understood before expedition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Four team members attended Advance Whitewater Safety and Rescue (AWWSR) course training prior to expedition
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Gain language skills in Spanish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Two team members focused on gaining more advanced language skills by attending a summer course → Other team members learned basic language skills in their spare time
Fitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Maintain paddling fitness through white water practise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Each team member had responsibility to ensure a good level of fitness was maintained until departure

Equipment

Group

Kayaking Equipment

2 x Emergency split paddles
3 x Paddle bags
6 x Waterproof document cases (for maps/passports)
Assorted spare plastic for welding
Aquasure neoprene glue
First aid kit (2x off-river, 2 x on-river)
Tools (1 x Leatherman, 1 x Gerber)
Duct tape

Camping Equipment

1 x Vango Banshee 200 2 person tent
1 x Vango Banshee 300 3 person tent
1 x MSR Miniworks extrema water filter
1 x MSR Whispalite stove with wind shield
6 x 1l Fuel bottles
4 x Lighters
2 x Lightweight aluminium cooking pots
120 x Water purification tablets

Navigation

1 x GPS
1 x Satellite phone (with inbuilt GPS)
1 x Topographic map of each region
1 x Copy of appropriate river notes
2 x Compass

General Expedition Equipment

1 x 1Tb Hardrive
1 x Spanish dictionary
1 x Spanish phrase book
1 x Canon Powershot D20 waterproof digital camera
1 x Olympus Tough TG310 waterproof digital camera
3 x DSLR
2 x GoPro Hero waterproof video camera

Personal

Kayaking Equipment

1x Buoyancy aid
1x Helmet
1x Drysuit (or dry pants and cag)
1x River shoes (Palm gradient, canyoneers, or salomans)
1x Spraydeck
1x Cockpit cover (either spare spraydeck/tarp)
2 x Paddles
2 x Full set thermals (long johns, tops, fleeces, socks)
1 x Board shorts/bikini
1 x Watershed futa 30l airbag
1 x Ortleib 35l drybag
1 x Portage pack

Safety and Rescue

1 x Throw line (15-25m)
3-4 x Locking karabiners
1 x Wide fit snap gate karabiner
1 x Palm safety tape
2 x Sling
1 x Knife
1 x Prussic
1 x Pulley
1 x Whistle

Camping Equipment on River

1 x Sleeping bag
1 x Roll mat (EXPED Synmat or Thermarest)
1 x Water bottle
Mess tin or tupaware box
Spoon, Fork and Knife

General Expedition Equipment

1 x Large rucksack/duffel bag
1 x Small rucksack/day pack
3 x Assorted drybags

Clothing

2 x Trousers
1 x Walking boots
1 x Other shoes (flip flops/canvas shoes)
3 x T-shirt
2 x Jumper/lightweight fleece
5 x Underwear
5 x Socks
1 x Towel
1 x Down/insulated jacket
1 x Waterproof jacket
1 x Pyjamas
1 x Hat
1 x Gloves

Toiletries

Toilet roll
Sun cream
Insect repellent
Anti-malarials
Toothbrush
Toothpaste
Glasses/contact lenses and solution
Sunglasses
Deodorant
Shower gel/shampoo/conditioner

Documentation

Passport
Wallet or purse
Insurance Dogtag
Emergency contact numbers card

Accessories

Mobile Phone
Assorted chargers and cables
Pelicase waterproof camera case
Head torch
Watch
Diary or notepad
Appropriate reading material or novel

Medical

Vaccinations

Prior to the expedition the entire team were required to ensure they were up to date with the following vaccinations:

Hepatitis A
Typhoid
Hepatitis B
Tetanus
Diphtheria
Rabies (optional)
Yellow fever (optional)

Malarial Prophylaxis

Every member of the team took Malarial Prophylaxis for some or all of the time that we were in Peru and always during time we were at altitudes lower than 2000m. This varied from Malarone and Doxycyline to Larium.

First Aid Kits

The lists below and right detail the contents of our first aid kits. Approximately half of the equipment was taken on the river with us whilst longer term medical treatments were left at base.

Creams/ Ointments	Number
Anusol	1x
Cloramphenicol	3x
Fudicin cream	3x
Clotrimazole	2x
Locorten-Vioform	3x
Hydrocortisone	2x
Drapolene	1x

Anti-sickness/Diarrhea	Courses
Stemetil tablets	2x
Stemetil injections	2x
Loperamide	Many

First Aid	Number
SAM splint	3x
Burn Dressings	3x
Field Dressings	1x
Dressings	Many
Dressing Kit	2x
Retention Bandages	5x
Triangular Bandages	2x
Eye pad	1x
Mesopore Tape	1x
Suture needle holders	1x
Tweasers	1x
Shears	1x
Scissors	1x
Plasters	Many
Dioralyte	Many

Sharps	Number
Canulars	2x
40mm needles	8x
25mm needles	8x
5ml syringes	8x
Suture kit	2x

The health of the expedition team was generally good for duration of the expedition and apart from the occasional plaster the only medication administered was to control gastrointestinal infection. The medication which was administered is summarised below:

Ciprofloxacin	[1x course]
Metronidazole	[1x course]
Loperamide	[multiple doses]

Antibiotics	Courses
Ciprofloxacin	6x
Metronidazole	4x
Flucloxacillin	2x
Clarithromycin	4x
Amoxicillin	2x
Trimethoprim	2x

Painkillers	Courses
Diclofenac tablets	2x
Diclofenac injections	1x
Paracetamol	Many
Ibuprofen	Many
Lidocaine	4x

Accounts

Shown below is a breakdown of expedition income and expenditure.

Category	Details	Income (£)	Expenditure (£)	Notes
Grants	Imperial College Exploration Board	3,000		
	Old Centralians' Trust	1,600		
	Hereford Cathedral School	300		
Equipment	Group equipment		544	
	Personal kayaking equipment		4,914	
	Other personal equipment		400	
Training	WWSR		440	
	Outdoor First Aid		150	IC Exploration board subsidised
	Expedition First Aid		250	IC Exploration board subsidised
Medical	Vaccinations and medication		525	
	Insurance (IC students)	720	720	IC Exploration board funded
	Insurance (non IC students)		360	
Transport	Flights		6,032	
	Additional flight cost due to kayak		864	
	In country transport		2,443	
Resources	Maps		646	
	Sat Phone	750	750	IC Exploration board funded
Subsistence Accommodation	Food and drink		2,066	
	Hostels		1,259	
				Total cost
Group		6,370	22,363	£15,993
Average per member		1,062	3,727	£2,666

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Hereford Cathedral School for their generous support.

Kent Canoes who gave us a 25% discount on Dagger and Palm equipment and coordinated the supply of much of our kayaking kit before we set off.

Lyon Outdoor who awarded us the Lyon Outdoor Expedition Award and supplied us with the following equipment for the expedition:

- 6 x Aquapac waterproof document holders
- 3 x Ortleib dry bags 35l
- 3 x Exped telecompression bags
- 3 x Petzl Tikka 2 headtorches

Canon who lent us one of their Powershot D20 waterproof and shockproof digital cameras for the duration of the expedition with which we took lots of photos and video footage.

Armourgel who provided us with a selection of prototype elbow pads to test.

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Daniel Rondon and family of Expediciones y Aventuras Rafting for an amazing birthday paddle party down the Rio Chile on Tim's birthday (Arequipa). [www.expedicionesyaventuras.com]



↑ The man himself, Gian Marco Vellutino

← Hostesses with the mostest Mercedes and Dani

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