

Three Trips to Northern Peru in 2025

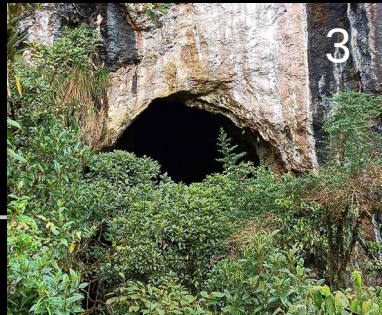
Trips to Canaán (1), Iquitos (2) and Cerro Tragadero-Valle Andino (3).



1



2



3

Caving Expeditions and Tourism in Northern Peru (Amazonas, San Martín, and Loreto Regions)

Organization: ECA Espeleo Club Andino de Lima (Peru),
GSBM Groupe Spéléologique de Bagnols-Marcoule (France),
and other speleologists from Great Britain.

From September 4th to November 1st, 2025

2 – Arrival in Lima



5-9-25

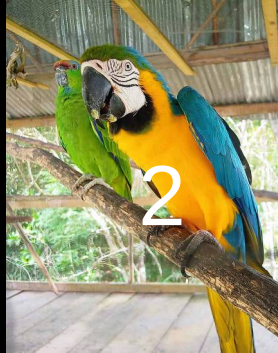
Jean-Yves Bigot at the Victoria bus station

Arriving very early in the morning at Lima airport, I dropped off my checked luggage at the Movilbus bus station in Victoria. Then, I took a taxi to Miraflores to exchange euros and buy a phone card (Bitel).

3 – Three Trips

I'm staying in Peru for two months because I have the following planned:

- a caving expedition to Canaán (San Martín) with British friends,
- a sightseeing trip in the meantime, and
- another caving expedition to Cerro Tragadero and Valle Andino (Amazonas) with French and Peruvian friends.



For these three trips, I have with me José Antonio de Pomar Cáceres, known as Tonio, a long-time Peruvian friend, who will accompany me during these two months.

4 – Journey to Canaán

The first part of the journey, which we will call "Canaán," begins with a reconnaissance mission in the San Martín region, in a small village also called Canaán.

This speleological reconnaissance mission, "Canaán Super-Karst 2025," is being conducted by a team of British friends led by Peter Talling (United Kingdom).



Polvosa Gorge (Canaán)

5 – Bus Trip



Departure from Lima bus station at 12:10 with a Movilbus coach that will take me to Chachapoyas tomorrow.

5-9-25

It is rather cool in Lima and the coastal desert has turned green again, especially on the peaks reached by clouds coming from the sea.



6 – Coastal Desert



The water from the Andes irrigates the coastal desert, where many fruits and vegetables are grown.

7 – Eastern Slope

To the east, on the other side of the Andes, water is more abundant and allows for rice cultivation.



The climate is warmer, especially in the city of Bagua Grande where motorcycle taxis are plentiful.

8 – Luya

I arrive in Chachapoyas in the early afternoon of September 6, and I immediately take a taxi to Luya where our caving equipment is stored.



I am greeted by Ema Sánchez, the mother of Liz Hidalgo, a student who is now a hydrologist in Lima.

9 – Luya

Wilder Sánchez is an electronics and computer specialist; he develops software that allows for the remote location and tracking of vehicles equipped with GPS trackers.



In the morning, near the San Isidro Labrador church, I discovered an archaeological site in a section of land between the church and the slope of a hill.

10 – Cajamarca

I leave Chachapoyas on the night bus which takes me to Cajamarca, where Tonio de Pomar is waiting for me with all my luggage.



I have my own equipment with me, as well as the equipment that will be used for the speleological reconnaissance of La Morada and Canaán area. The expedition is being led by Peter Talling (United Kingdom). The meeting point is the Portal del Marqués Hotel in Cajamarca. There are now three of us: Peter, Tonio, and me.



11 – Cajamarca

Meanwhile, Martin Holroyd, Andrew Atkinson and Darren MacKenzie (United Kingdom) have arrived in Cajamarca.



The last shopping trips are done on September 9th and on the 10th, Darren is ready to load the luggage stored at the entrance of the hotel.

12 – Cajamarca

Jean-Yves
Bigot

Andrew
Atkinson

Martin
Holroyd

Antonio de
Pomar

The whole
team is
here, and
after a few
Pisco
Sours,
tongues
loosen and
we
understand
English
better...

Peter
Talling

Darren
MacKenzie

13 – Cajamarca - Atuén Trip

We rented a special touring vehicle where we could stretch our legs.

All our luggage fits in the vehicle, in which we'll spend eight hours traveling to the Atuén cabin, where we're meeting three guides from La Morada.



With a lunch stop at a restaurant in Balsas on the banks of the Río Marañón.



14 – Atuén



Our three guides are Oblitas Chiguala Silva, Feder Antonio Chávez Chávez de La Morada, and one of their cousins, Dehuel Llaja Silva ?, who lives elsewhere. It rained heavily all night and is still raining this morning. The path is full of mud. We decide to postpone our departure by taking the time to scout the valley we will be hiking through tomorrow for a few hours.

15 – Atuén

The valley exhibits typical geological features, such as glacial moraines; there is no doubt that a glacier shaped it.

While the rock is indeed limestone, only a few disappearing streams indicate the presence of a karst system.

16 – Atuén

After loading the mules,
we finally set off.



12-9-25

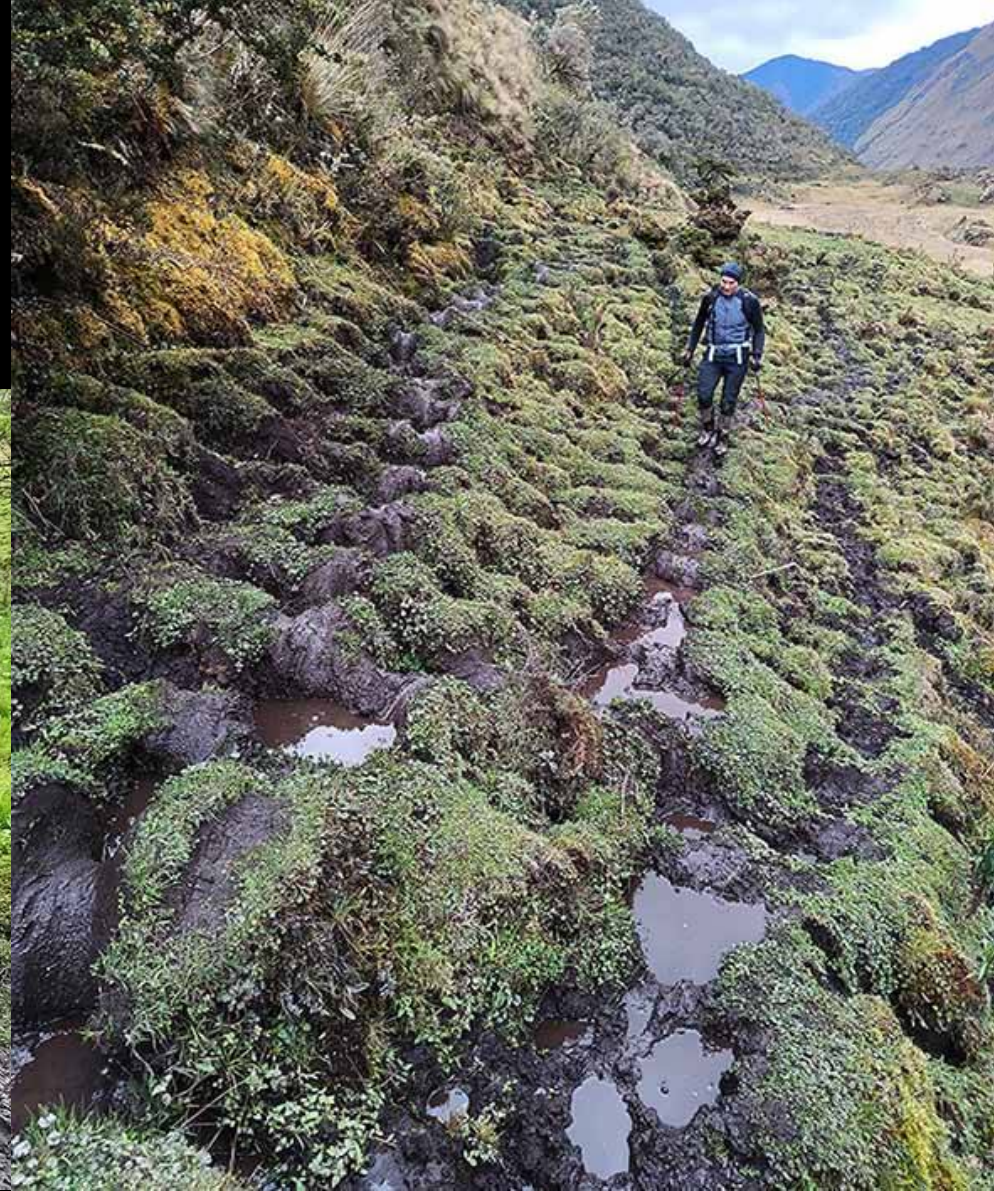


We leave behind the road we'll rejoin
in 10 days.
The weather and the road are awful;
we left in an atmosphere of the end
of the world.

17 – Atuén

It's cold and damp
and the ground is
completely
waterlogged.

12-9-25



18 – Abra del Cruce



We cross a pass at 3620 m altitude (Abra del Cruce de la Piedra alta) where there are many lakes (peat) whose waters disappear into the land.

Near the pass, Darren is short of breath; this is one of the effects of the altitude. The cold weather and rain make the hike quite difficult.



19 – Laguna Jardín

After the pass, we descend into the Río Jardín valley with its very steep slopes.



12-9-25



La Laguna Jardín looks unreal with its waters covered in aquatic plants.

20 – Jardín Cabin



At the end of the day, we finally reached the Jardín cabin where we were to camp for the night.

This cabin, located on the trail, is used by all the residents of La Morada when they go to town.

We often saw convoys of mules passing by...

This muddy path is the only way to escape their geographical isolation.

12-9-25

21 – From the Jardín Cabin to La Morada

13-9-25



One of the longest sections we hiked was the trail that starts at the Jardín cabin and leads to the village of La Morada.

While it's downhill, we traversed all the layers of the forest, following the mighty Huabayacu River.

22 – Towards La Morada

13-9-25



Numerous wooden bridges allow passage across the streams.

23 – Towards La Morada



Some of the cabins do not allow for a very long stop, as the village of La Morada is still far away.

24 – Towards La Morada

13-9-25



The trail passes by inaccessible caves covered in ochre paint, notably those of Callejón Gorge.

The ruined bridge of La Morada has been rebuilt and allows access to the village after a steep climb up the hillside.

25 – The Wait



At La Morada, an unexpected event disrupts our plans.

The people of Canaán know that foreigners are coming to their village...

However, they don't want the people of La Morada to accompany us.

They intend to participate and offer their services with their guides and mules...

The day is a waste, and we're watching the football and volleyball matches live.

The village is located at an altitude of 2100 m, and the air is very fresh.



26 – The Wait

The remaining issue is the price of the mules and the horsemen, as the rates skyrocketed upon our arrival...



On September 14th, through Ever Jeu Caballero Chávez of La Morada, Tonio negotiated acceptable prices with Artemio Chávez of Canaán.

We camped in La Morada at the home of Oblitas Chiguala Silva and Lesly Samamé Chávez, his wife, who were taking care of the mules.

27 – The Wait



In the village of La Morada, there's Starlink, a satellite internet service provider from SpaceX. It's convenient and inexpensive per hour. You connect to people's homes.

28 – Departure from La Morada



15-9-25

From left to right, Oblitas' father, Darren MacKenzie, Jean-Yves Bigot, Oblitas Chiguala Silva, Peter Talling, Andrew Atkinson, Tonio de Pomar, Ever Game Caballero Chávez, Martin Holroyd, ???, Artemio Chávez, Artemio ???'s son-in-law, ???.

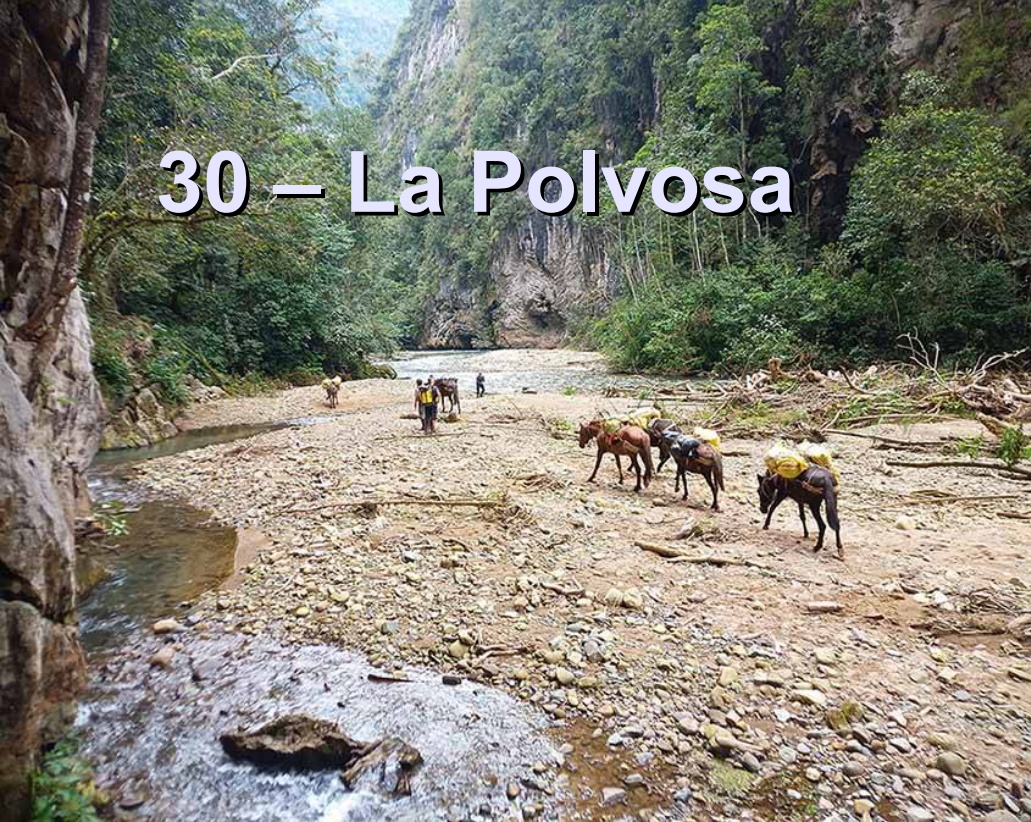
29 – La Polvosa

The Polvosa Gorge is impressive, as it's where the Río Huabayacu disappears into a narrow gorge.

For now, we're only crossing shallow river channels, but we'll get quite wet further on.



30 – La Polvosa

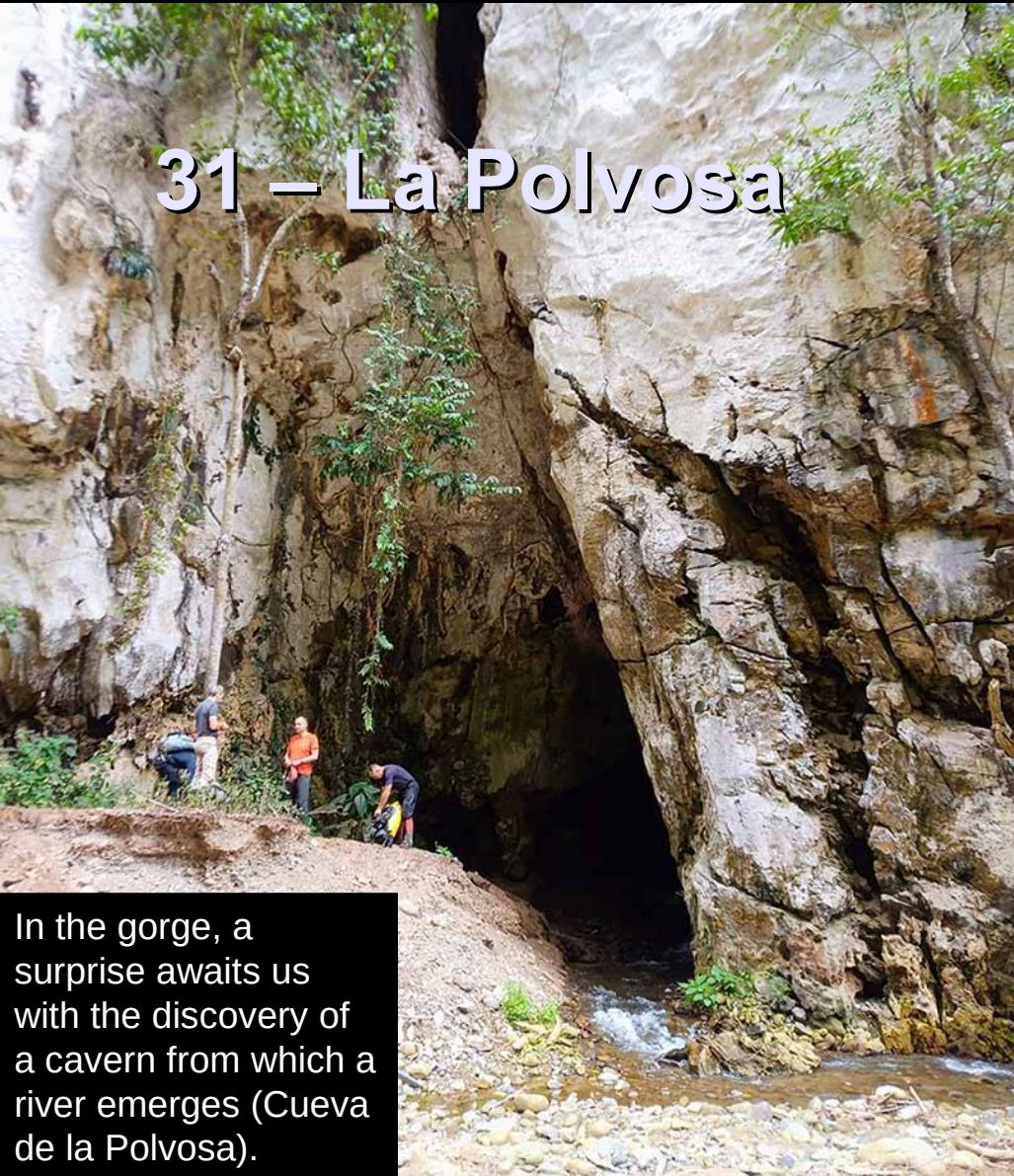


Things get serious when it comes to crossing the river. I make the mistake of crossing with my boots on, and what's more, in a spot where the current is stronger. Even with a walking stick, I almost got swept away.

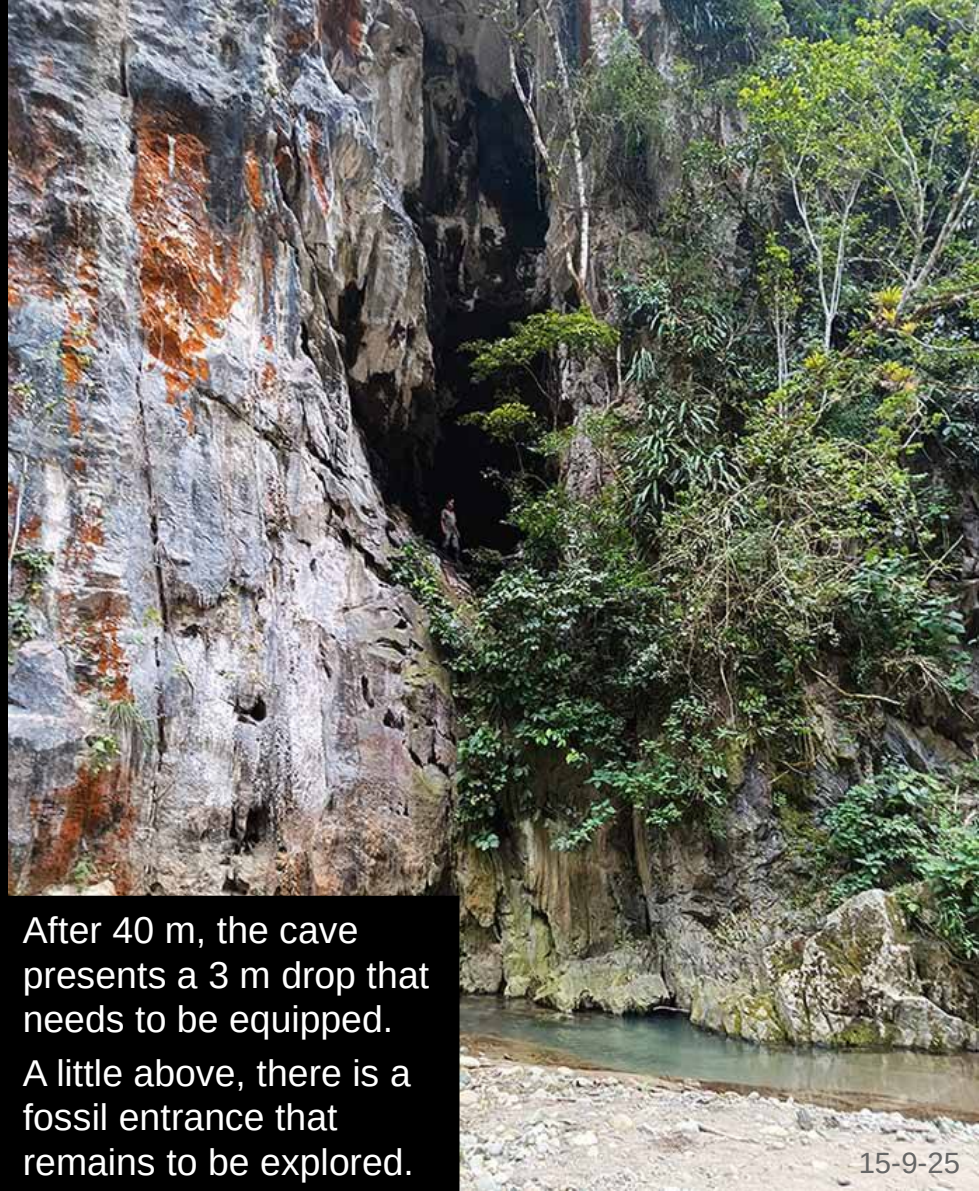
Certainly, guides and mules pass without problems; but it remains a significant obstacle between the villages of La Morada and Canaán.



31 – La Polvosa

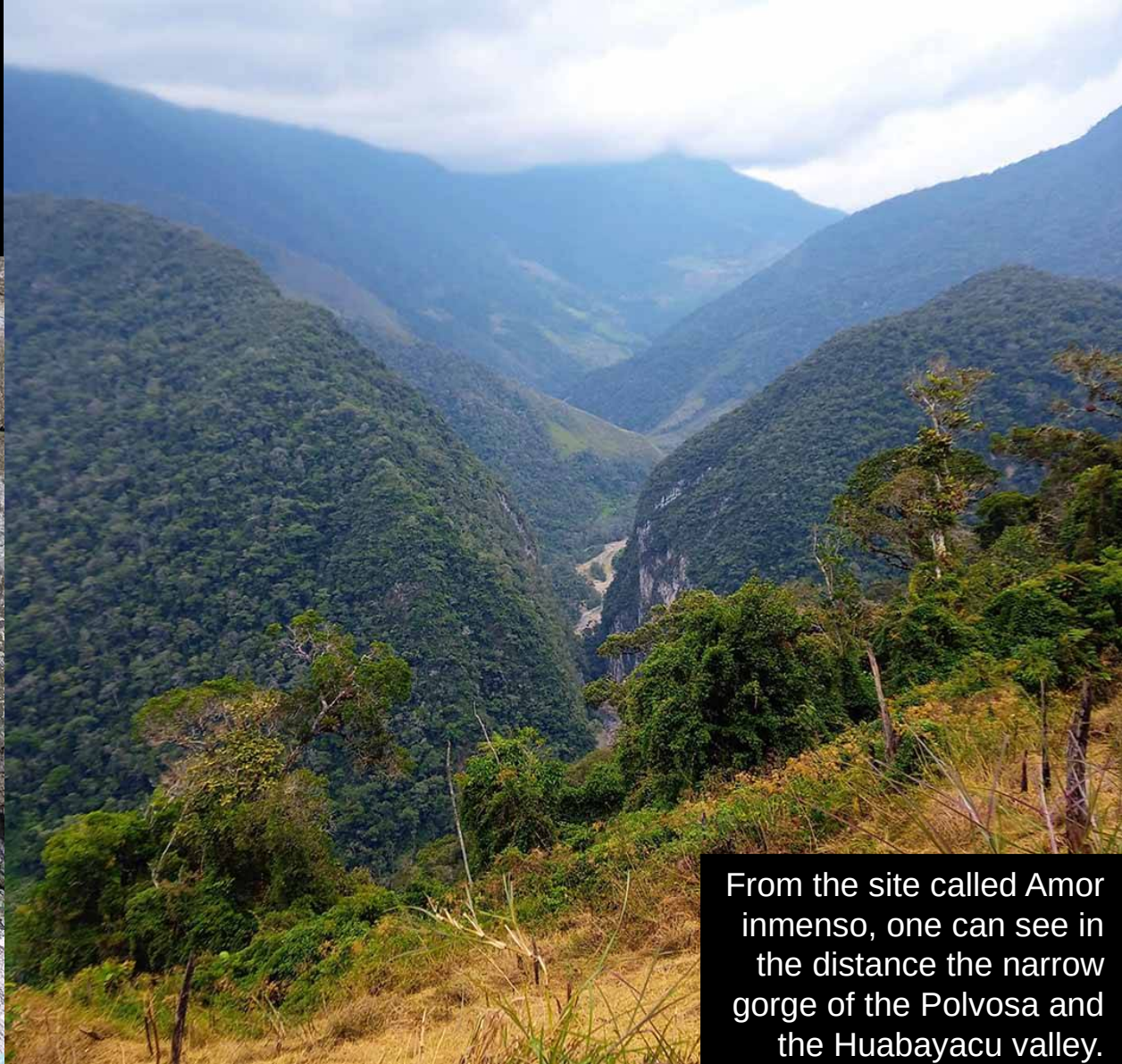


In the gorge, a surprise awaits us with the discovery of a cavern from which a river emerges (Cueva de la Polvosa).



After 40 m, the cave presents a 3 m drop that needs to be equipped. A little above, there is a fossil entrance that remains to be explored.

32 – La Polvosa



From the site called Amor inmenso, one can see in the distance the narrow gorge of the Polvosa and the Huabayacu valley.

33 – Canaán

Unfortunately, Darren is sick and remains in Canaan.



16-9-25



Artemio Chávez leads us to the site known as El Túnel (The Tunnel), named for the water of a stream that disappears into a sinkhole.

The cave was equipped by Martin, but unfortunately, it ends at a siphon at a depth of -46 m.

34 – Canaán

Luber Dávila (left), the owner of the property, and Artemio Chávez (right) are waiting outside.

A little higher up than the Tragadero del Túnel, there's a cave entrance...
I'm going to explore the cave with Luber.

It appears to be a large, dry cave that likely corresponds to the fossilized section of the Tragadero del Túnel.

There are high galleries and numerous archaeological remains.

I immediately inform the others, who are leaving the Tragadero, so they can grab ropes and equipment.



35 – Cueva Luber Dávila



The entrance to the cave (length: 333 m) is vast and shelters the remains of a mysterious stone terrace.

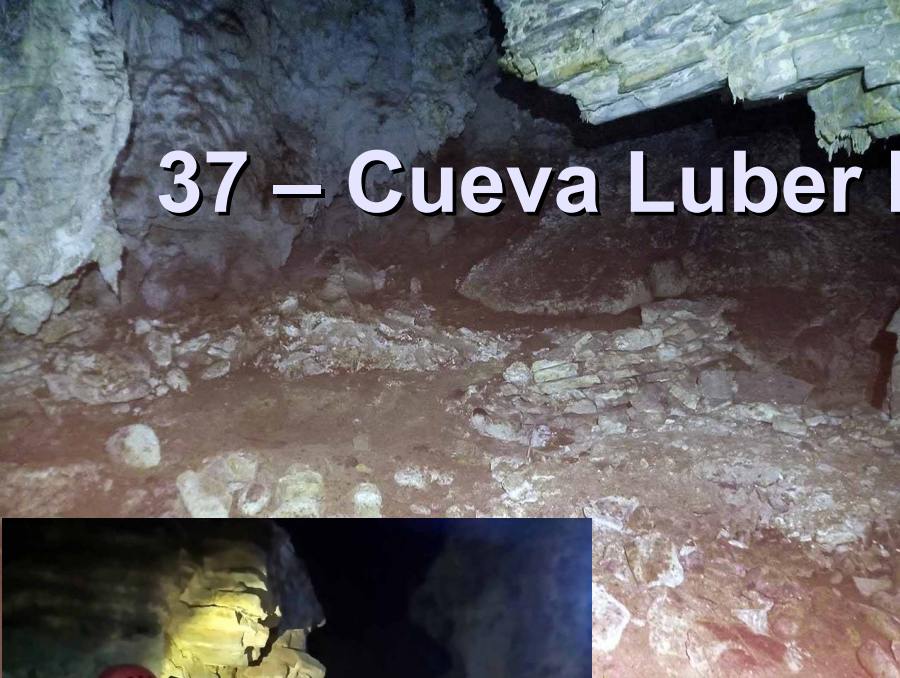
36 – Cueva Luber Dávila



Further into the cave, human bones are found lying on the ground.

These are burials, some secondary, some more or less disturbed.

37 – Cueva Lubber Dávila



A dry stone structure, pierced by a door, separates the sloping part of the entrance from a flat area dominated by the high vaults of a canyon.



38 – Cueva Luber Dávila



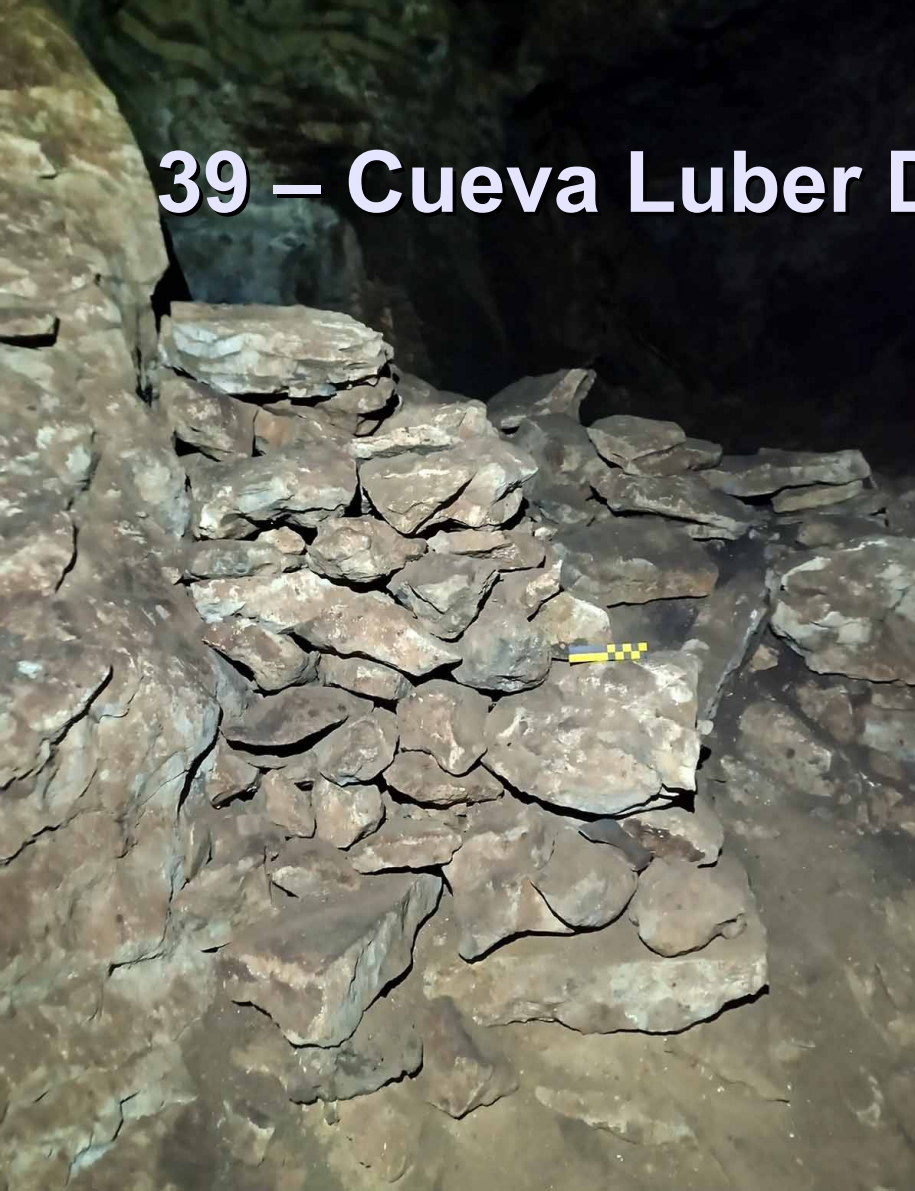
16-9-25



The gallery then takes the form of an underground canyon at the bottom of which a rope is needed to climb a calcite flow.

39 – Cueva Luber Dávila

At the top of this flow, on the right, there is a terrace supported by a stone wall.



40 – Cueva Luber Dávila



Charcoal indicates the existence of an ancient hearth and the dry environment of the cave (presence of gypsum) allowed the exceptional preservation of coca leaves.

However, the archaeological site was visited and the container (ceramic?) which was supposed to be above the hearth was probably taken away.



41 – El Castillo



Artemio hands the baton to his neighbor, Neiser Rodríguez, who, like him, owns a cabin in the area known as El Castillo. It takes three hours to reach this remote area via muddy and difficult-to-navigate paths.

42 – El Castillo

The area is being deforested, but the grass tends to grow back and also hinders progress.



We finally reach Artemio's cabin, then Neiser's. The Tragadero del Castillo opens not far from his cabin.

17-9-25

43 – Tragadero del Castillo



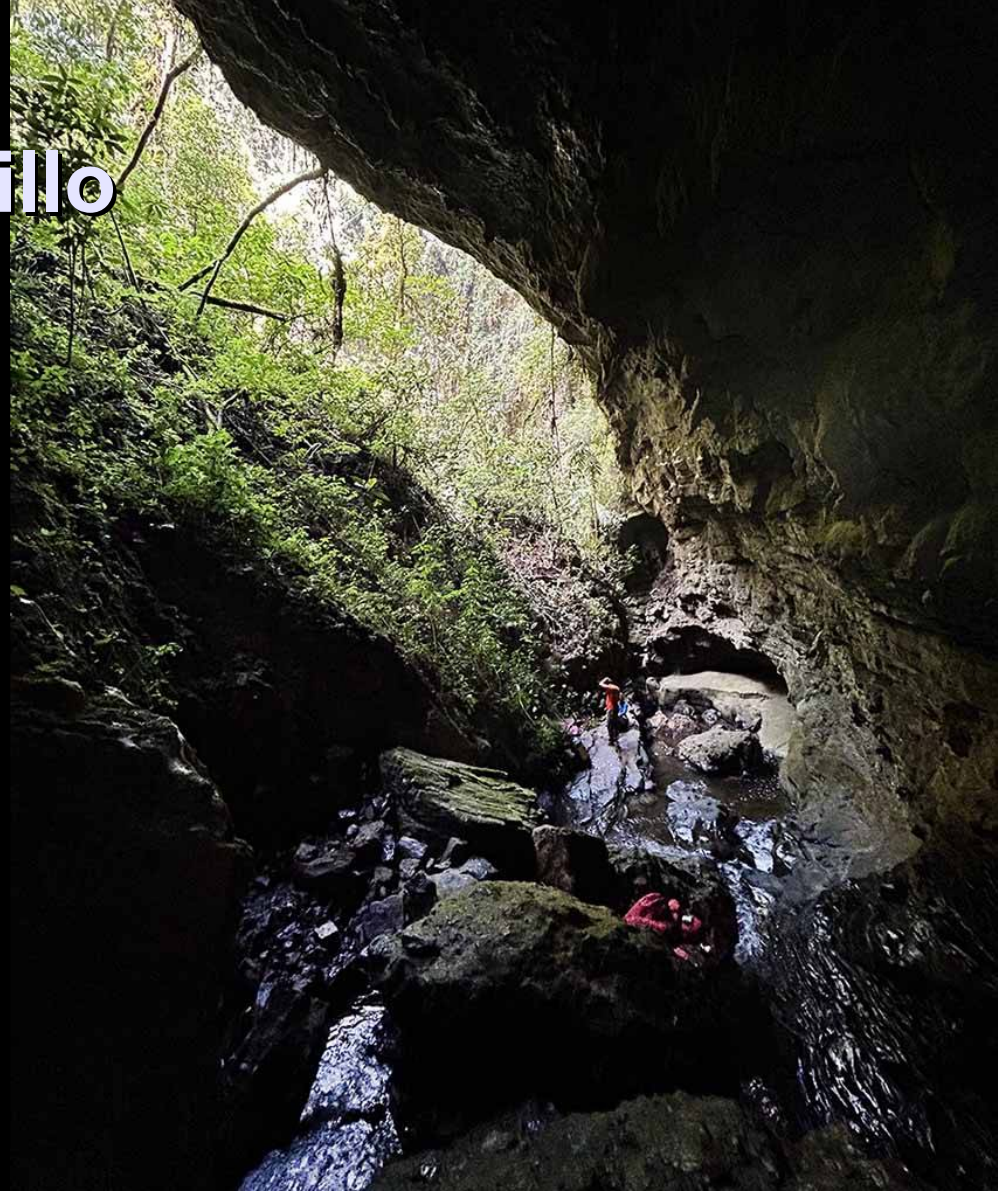
17-9-25

Soon, we hear water gurgling at the bottom of a large sinkhole (Tragadero).

A rope is set up to facilitate the ascent.

At the bottom, there are two options: the upstream and downstream sections of the underground river.

The upstream section is the easiest to explore without equipment.



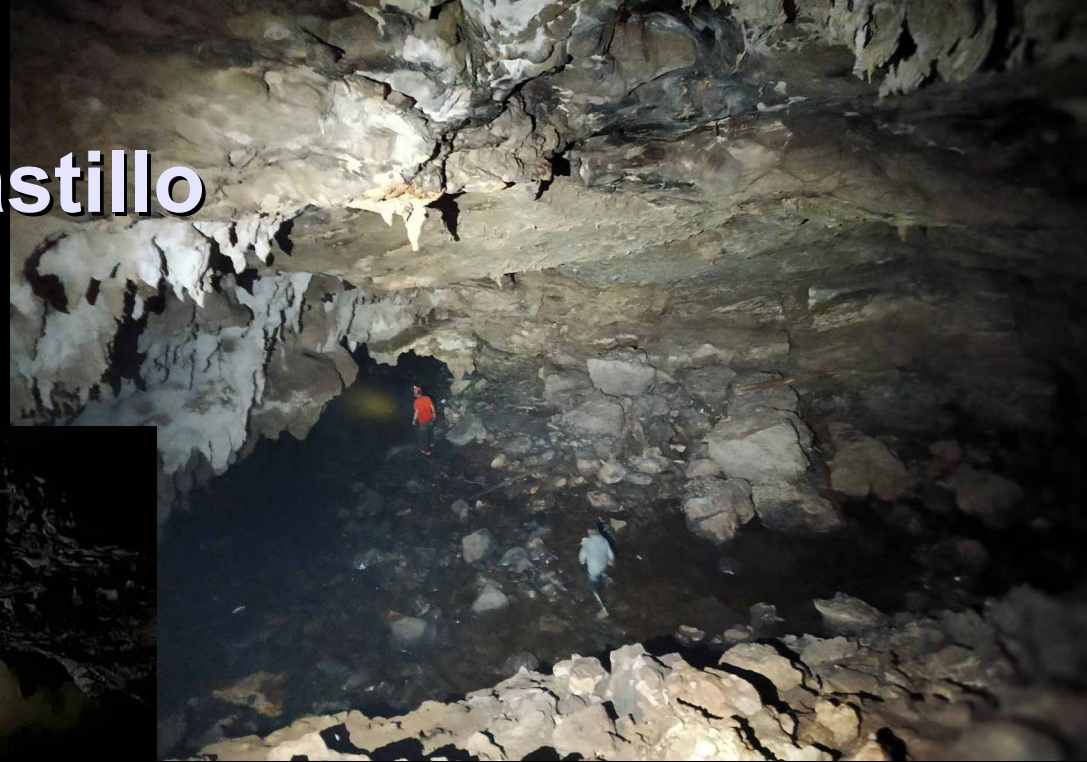
44 – Tragadero del Castillo



The galleries carved by the river are interesting.

Martin takes advantage of this to take some beautiful photos.

45 – Tragadero del Castillo



Overall, these galleries are vast and suggest promising prospects.

46 – Tragadero del Castillo

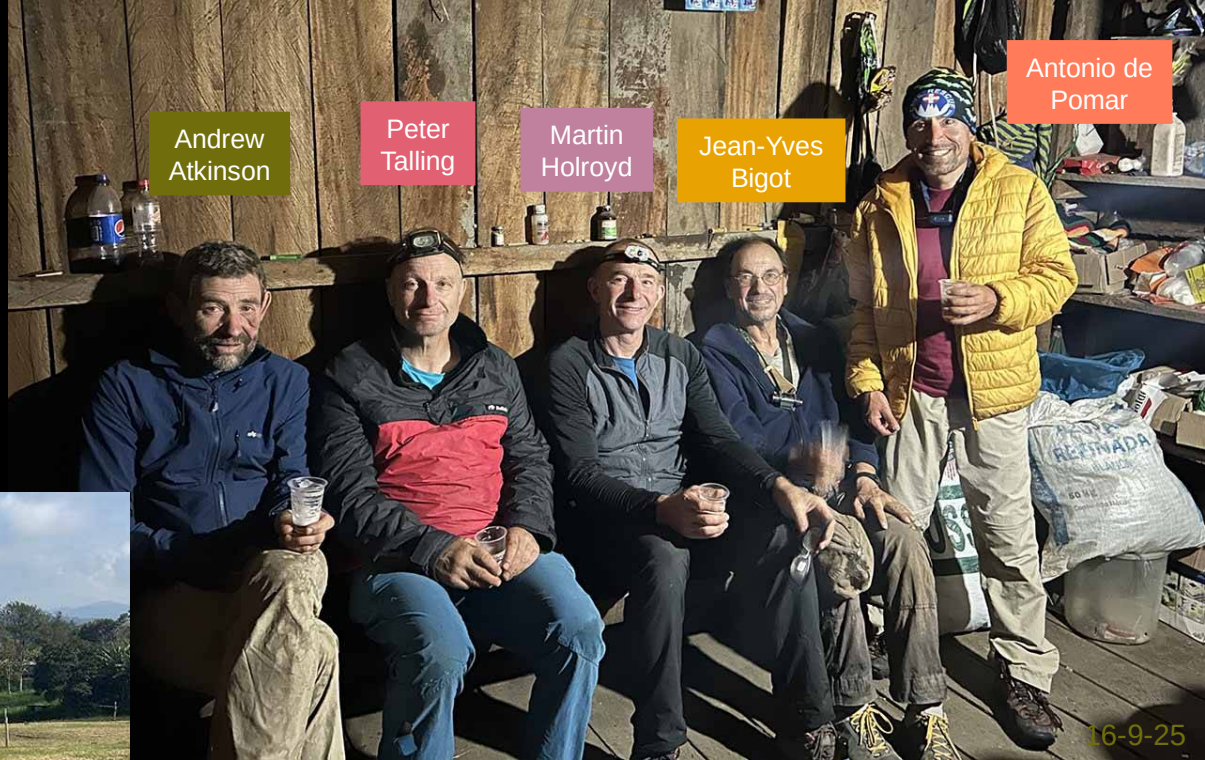
But very quickly, we come across two separate sinkholes into which streams rush.



That concludes our visit to the upper section.
We still need to explore the lower section...
and survey the upper section.
But we won't have time for that, as we need to
return to Canaán before nightfall.

47 – Canaán

We are quite satisfied with the Canaán area,
full of great discoveries.



Andrew
Atkinson

Peter
Talling

Martin
Holroyd

Jean-Yves
Bigot

Antonio de
Pomar

We're going to celebrate in the only bar in
the village that sells beer.
We'll have to go back the same way.
Good news: Darren has recovered from
his traveler's diarrhea.

48 – Canaán – La Morada



The rain has continued to fall and we are worried about the Huabayacu river crossing in the Polvosa Gorge...



Indeed, there's more water, and it's a bit murky. Martin has a plan and gets the group across using a rescue technique he's perfected.

49 – Crossing the Río Huabayacu

The mules hesitated for a moment,
then crossed the Huabayacu river.



Artemio's son-in-law, who replaced
him in the task of guide, got his family
across without difficulty.

50 – Crossing the Río Huabayacu

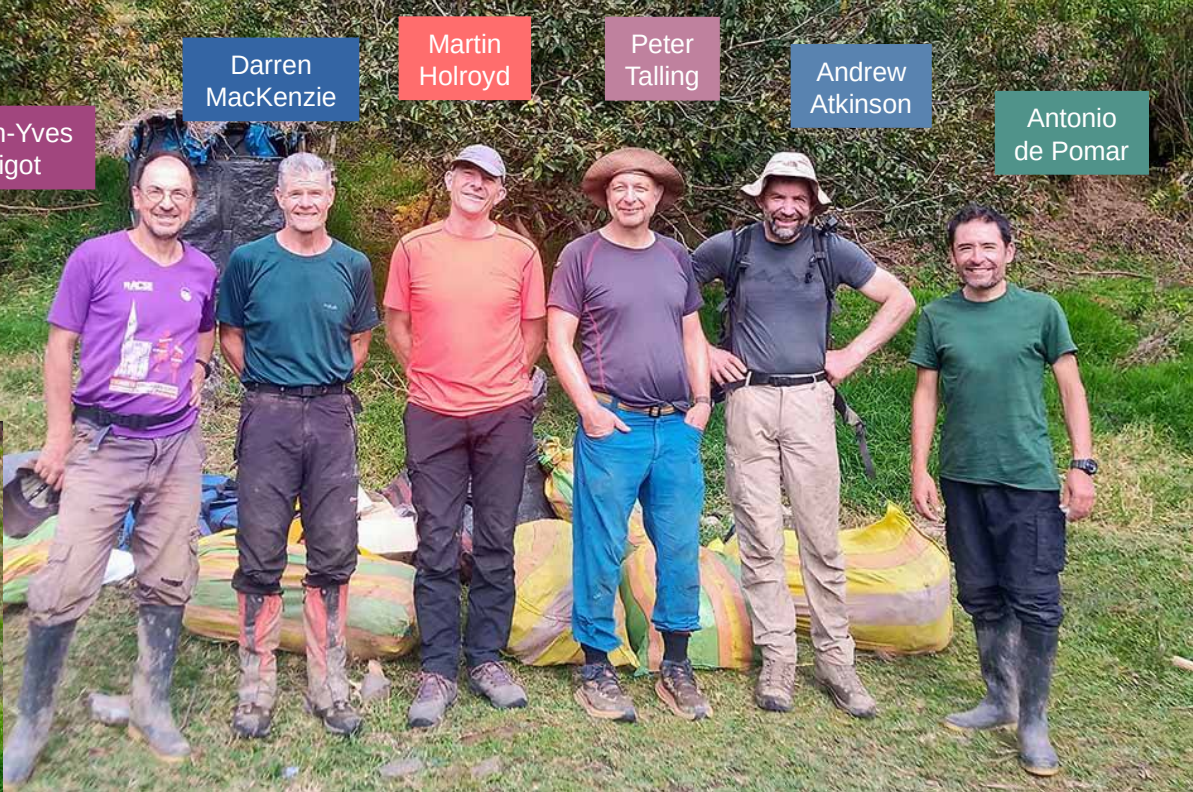
Once the
Huabayacu
river is
crossed,
everything is
better and
everyone is
pleased to
have
crossed it.



51 – Departure from La Morada

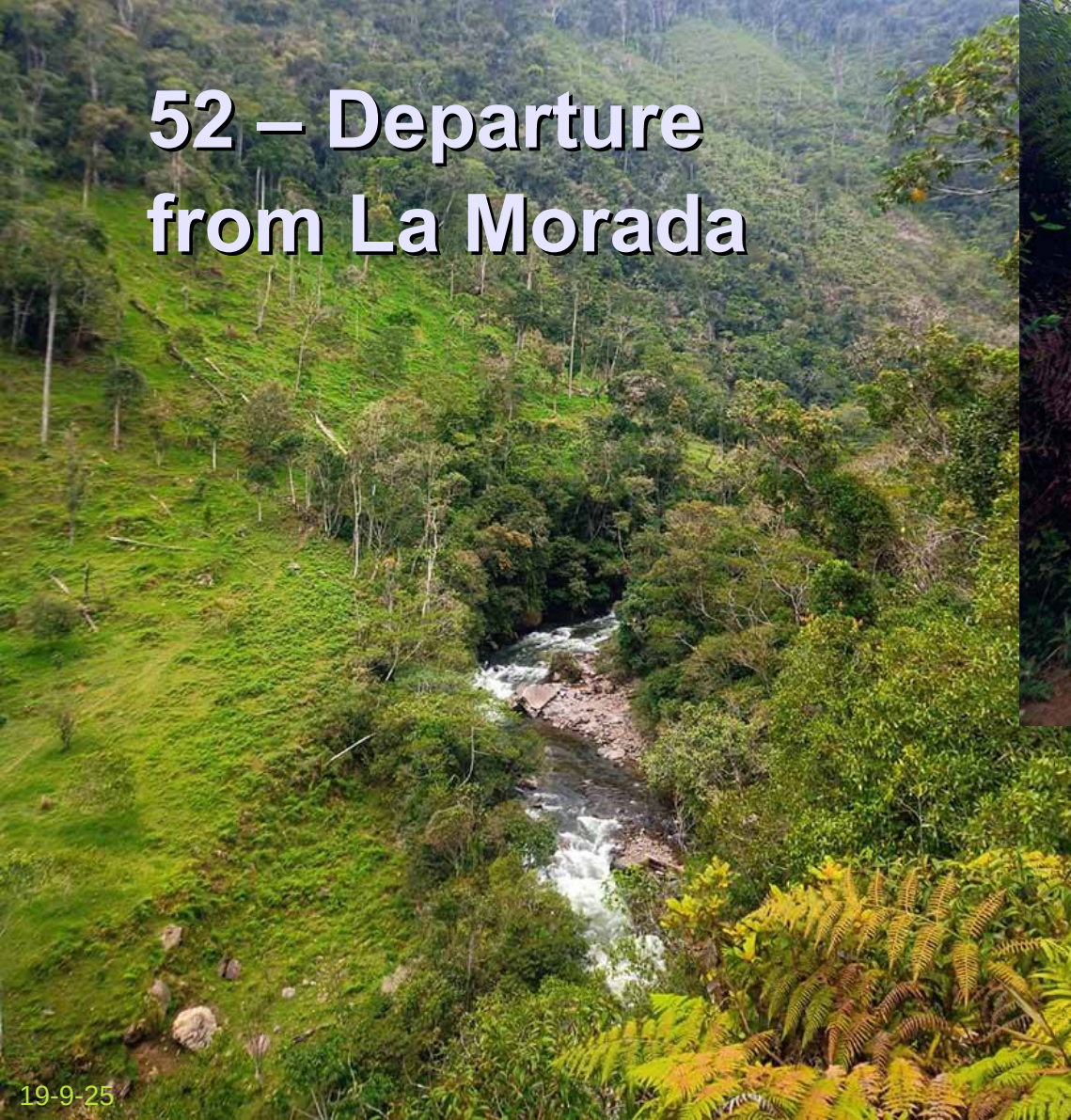


19-9-25



For the return trip, we were accompanied by three guides, from left to right: Lesly Samamé Chávez (and her son), Oblitas Chiguala Silva, and Feder Antonio Chávez Chávez. To make the return to Atuén less arduous, they suggested stopping at an abandoned cabin called Burgos, located just before the Callejón Gorge...

52 – Departure from La Morada



Instead of returning to Atué in two days,
we will return in three, because we know
that it's always uphill...

53 – Burgos Cabin

On site, the problem isn't the abandoned cabin, but the bees that have taken up residence there...
As soon as we arrive, they attack and sting us on the head.



Indeed, a wild beehive is hanging on one of the walls of the cabin.



54 – Burgos Cabin

Darren
MacKenzie



Martin
Holroyd



Peter
Talling

Everyone has their own strategy against the bees that constantly attack us.

Hammocks or tents outside, or even inside the Burgos cabin...



Jean-Yves
Bigot

55 – Burgos Cabin

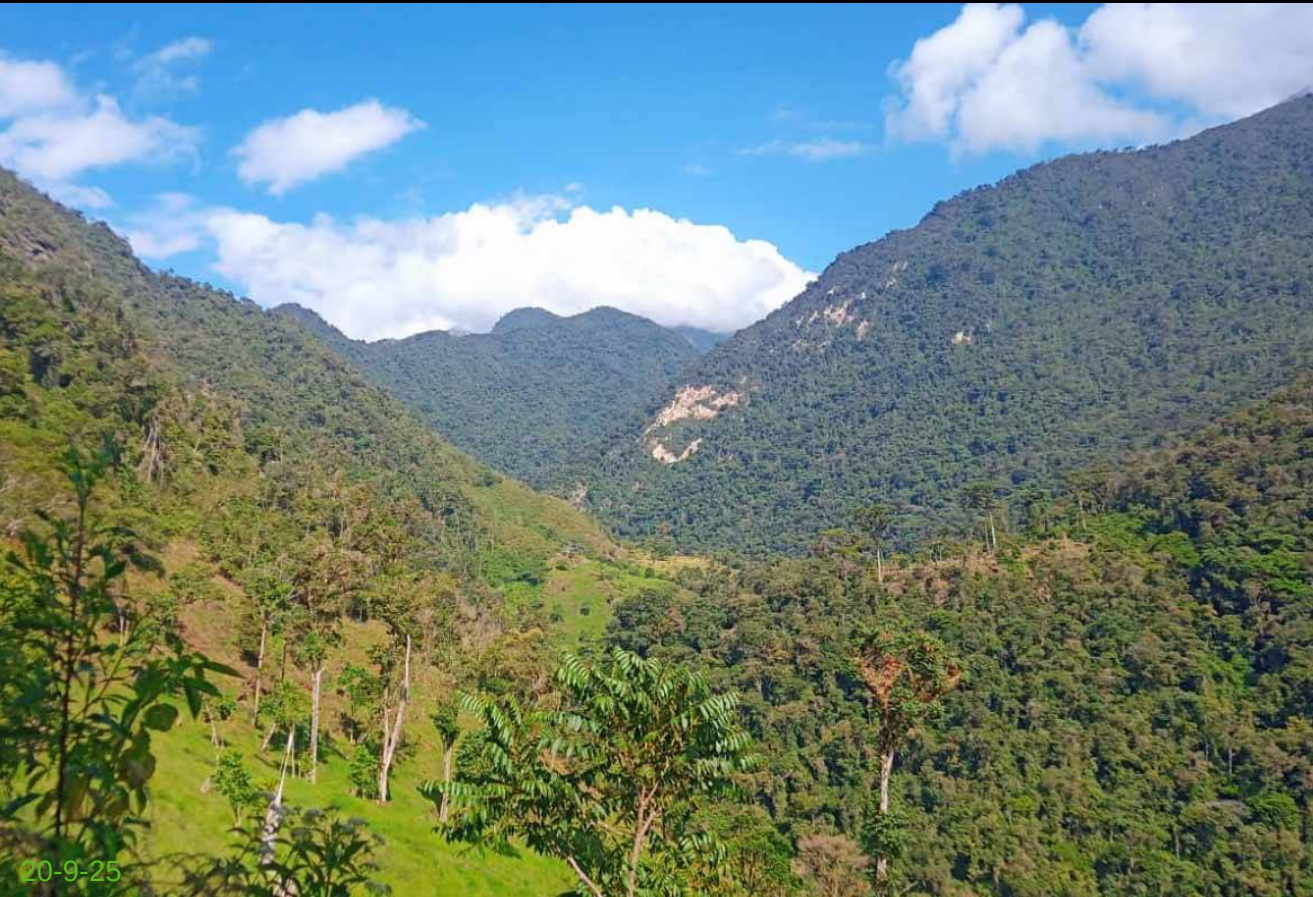


Lesly and Oblitas are busy making a fire in the cabin.

On the menu, as always, rice and potatoes; but they're still waiting for the trout that Feder went fishing for in the river.

It's much better than our dehydrated ready meals...

56 – Burgos Cabin – Abra del Cruce



We have to leave very early without having time for breakfast, because the bees are awake and attacking us again.

After a rainy night, we resume our walk on the path from where we can see the gorge and the ledges of Callejón where the rock shelters are located.

57 – Río Jardín Flooded



The Río Jardín is flooded, and we have to walk in its bed to follow the path.

58 – Bivouac near the Pass

We camped at over 3,000 meters,
practically below the Abra del Cruce
de la Piedra Alta pass.

All this came at a price.

The long days of hiking in boots
ended up taking their toll on my feet.



21-9-25

In the meantime, I'm taking
care of my feet, which will
carry me to the Atué road.



20-9-25

59 – Bivouac near the Pass



Last night it was time to arrive, as we were tired from the endless climb to the Abra del Cruce.



Our gas stoves are working well, at least better than the kerosene stoves.

We're loading the mules for the last time, because the next stop is the stable.



60 – The Atuén Valley



After the 3620 m pass,
it's downhill...

The glacial valley of Atuén is sunny, but still very wet
and the paths are still very muddy.



61 – Back to Cajamarca

On September 22nd, as agreed, the van was there to pick us up at the Atué cabin.

It's better to see the mountains through a car window...
After going 10 days without fruit, we stopped in Balsas to eat some mangoes.



62 – Cajamarca



In the late afternoon, we return to the colorful streets of Cajamarca.

63 – Cajamarca



22-9-25

It's a carnival parade taking place right outside our door. This event isn't the Cajamarca Carnival, but a festival organized for children.

Everyone longs for a good shower. While we were seated at a table in the Portal del Marqués Hotel, we heard noise in the street...



64 – Satellite View of the Area Covered



Peter told us we walked about 80 km on our journey to Canaan...

But when you look at the satellite images with the scale, you see it's much more.

In fact, it's closer to 100 miles (about 150 km).

Starting from a cabin in Atuen (track), we reached the Cueva del Castillo, the furthest point located 37.5 km (as the crow flies) further east...

10 km

65 – Journey to Iquitos

The second part of the trip is called "Journey to Iquitos."

Indeed, while waiting for the next caving expedition, we need to find something to do from September 24th to October 10th...

Tonio suggested an idea I hadn't thought of: taking a boat to Iquitos (Loreto), the largest city in the world not accessible by road.



Couple of parrots at the Centro de rescate (El Serpentario) in Iquitos

66 – Cajamarca



We have no time to lose and we prepare our things: a light backpack, of course without caving equipment.

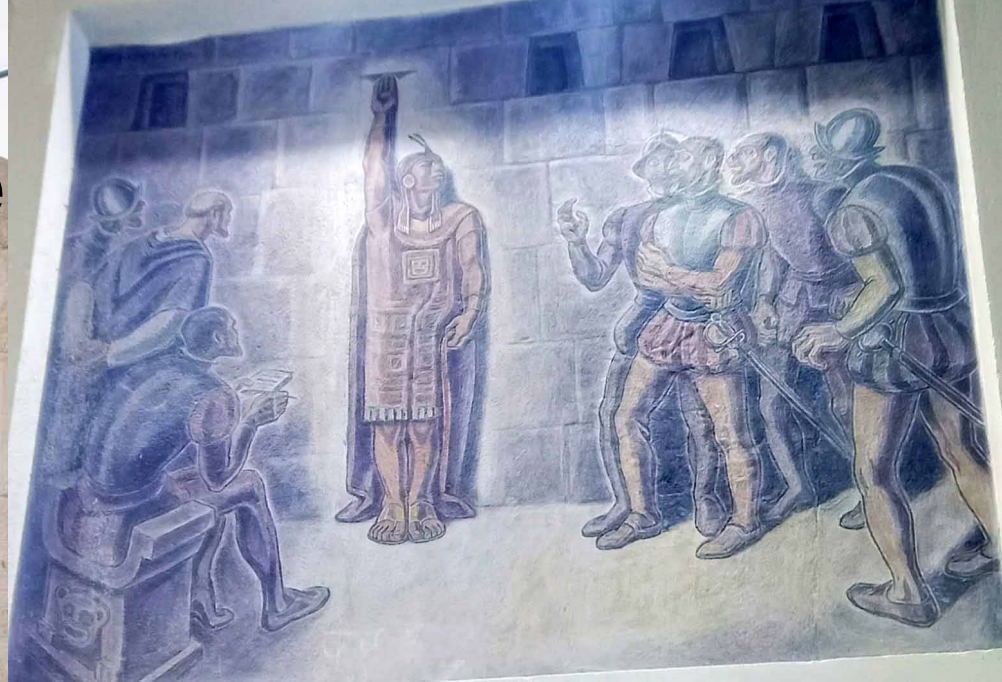
Once our bags were packed, we took the opportunity to visit some tourist sites in Cajamarca.

67 – Cuarto del Rescate



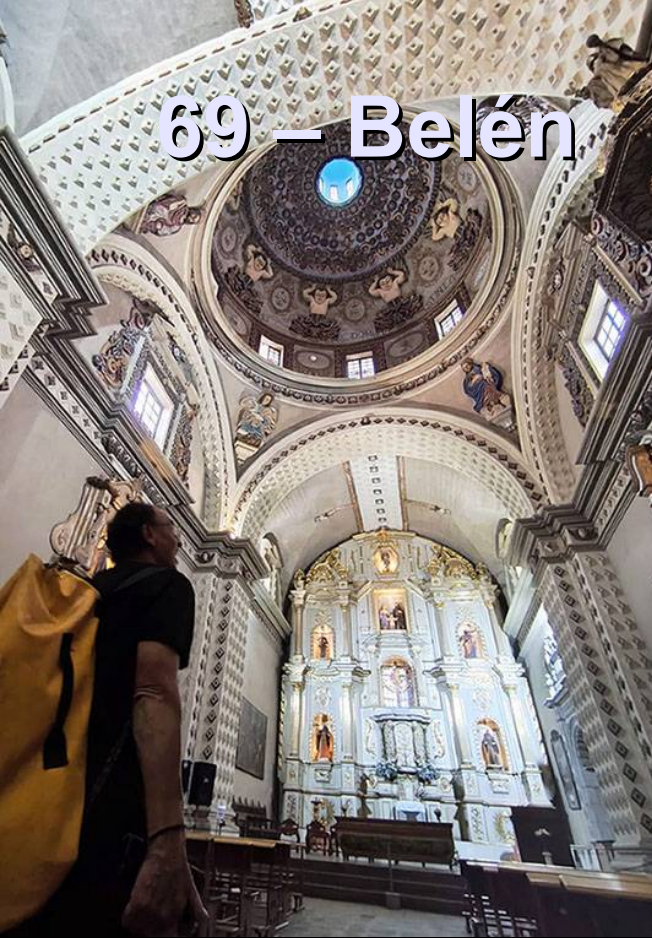
In Cajamarca, the Cuarto del Rescate is open to visitors. This is believed to be the historical site where Atahualpa was imprisoned.

68 – Cuarto del Rescate



The Cuarto del Rescate d'Atahualpa ("Ransom Room") is the place where the Inca emperor was held prisoner. The large quantity of gold that Atahualpa promised the Spanish in exchange for his release is displayed.

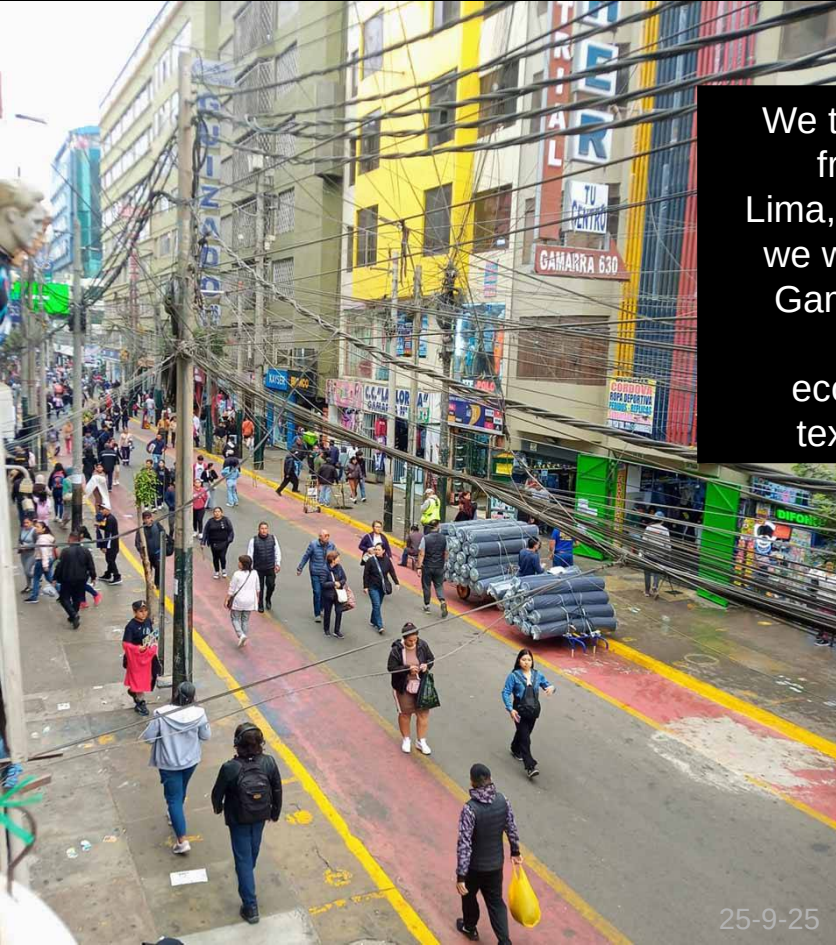
69 – Belén



24-9-25

The Belén Monumental Complex (Conjunto monumental de Belén) houses various museums or exhibition halls, including a small archaeological and ethnological museum in the former women's hospital (Hospital de Nuestra Señora de la Piedad).

70 – Gamarra



We take the night bus from Cajamarca to Lima, and the next day we walk the streets of Gamarra, a district of Lima where the economic miracle of textiles takes place.



It's the equivalent of the Sentier quater in Paris; you can find everything there cheaply. I'm taking the opportunity to replace my pants, which have finally given up the ghost. That same evening, we're taking the night bus to Pucallpa, a river port on the Ucayali River.

71 – Milton and his Company

Tonio was able to buy some red caps for next to nothing. On the way back, we passed through Ovalo Los Cabitos, where Milton and Carlos's company, which distributes Petzl brand equipment in Peru, is located.



Luckily, it was Milton Orlando who opened the door. He recognized me immediately; I hadn't seen him since 2011 when we explored some caves near Rodríguez de Mendoza.

72 – Port of Pucallpa



In the afternoon, we arrived in Pucallpa after traveling all night by bus.

Once there, there were no signs in the port.

Men in rags were loading scrap metal freshly unloaded from a ship; it was all rather unsettling.



You have to ask people to find out that a boat will leave tomorrow around 5 a.m...

We're told to report to the Don Segundo deck tomorrow to leave...

We could almost identify with the migrants.

73 – Port of Pucallpa

We can see the Don Segundo, the ship where we will have to report tomorrow... If all goes well.



26-9-25

We'll rush to the market to buy a hammock and some supplies.

In reality, we have very little information about what we need for this trip.

74 – Port of Pucallpa



A barge is attached to our boat, which is slowing it down considerably.

Cranes unload logs of wood every day from the Amazon rainforest.



75 – Port of Pucallpa

We are truly in a commercial port where many products from the Amazon pass through.



27-9-25



Timber, in particular...

The Ucayali is a vital artery of Amazonian trade.

The three rivers - the Apurimac, the Ucayali, and the Amazon - together form the longest river in the Americas, stretching 6,400 km from its source to the ocean.

76 – Boarding at Pucallpa



27-9-25

We bought our tickets: the equivalent of 40 euros each for a journey of approximately 5 to 6 days over 1000 km of winding roads (Pucallpa - Iquitos).

77 = Boarding at Pucallpa



Approximately 10 hammocks are strung up.

This is a small number compared to the number of passengers the boat could accommodate.



For now, we're settling in and enjoying the view. We're waiting for the bell to ring before presenting our lunchbox at the kitchen counter.



78 – The Cargo



The captain showed us around the upper decks of the ship and the wheelhouse.

The barge moored to the left was quite full.

Our ship was carrying more manufactured goods than passengers.

Everything Iquitos needs that can't be transported by plane was on deck (cement mixers, mattresses, pipes, etc.).

79 – The Toilets



At the rear of the boat are the toilets and access to the water.

The shower, which leaks a little, is located in the toilet, which keeps it clean.



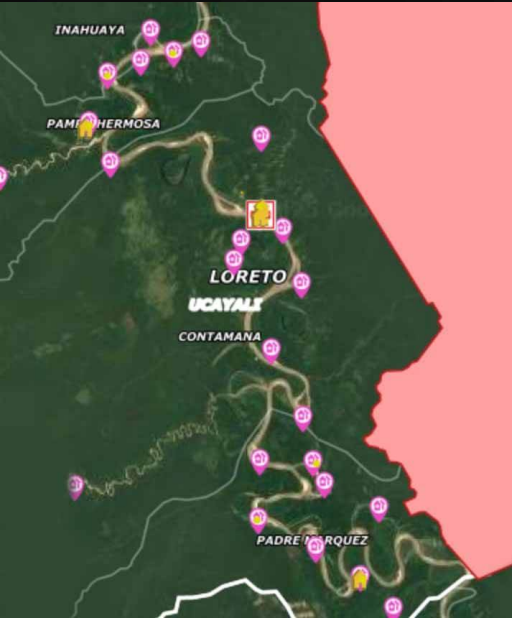
From time to time, we have to sweep, because the bridge also serves as a dining room.

80 – The Banks of the Ucayali River



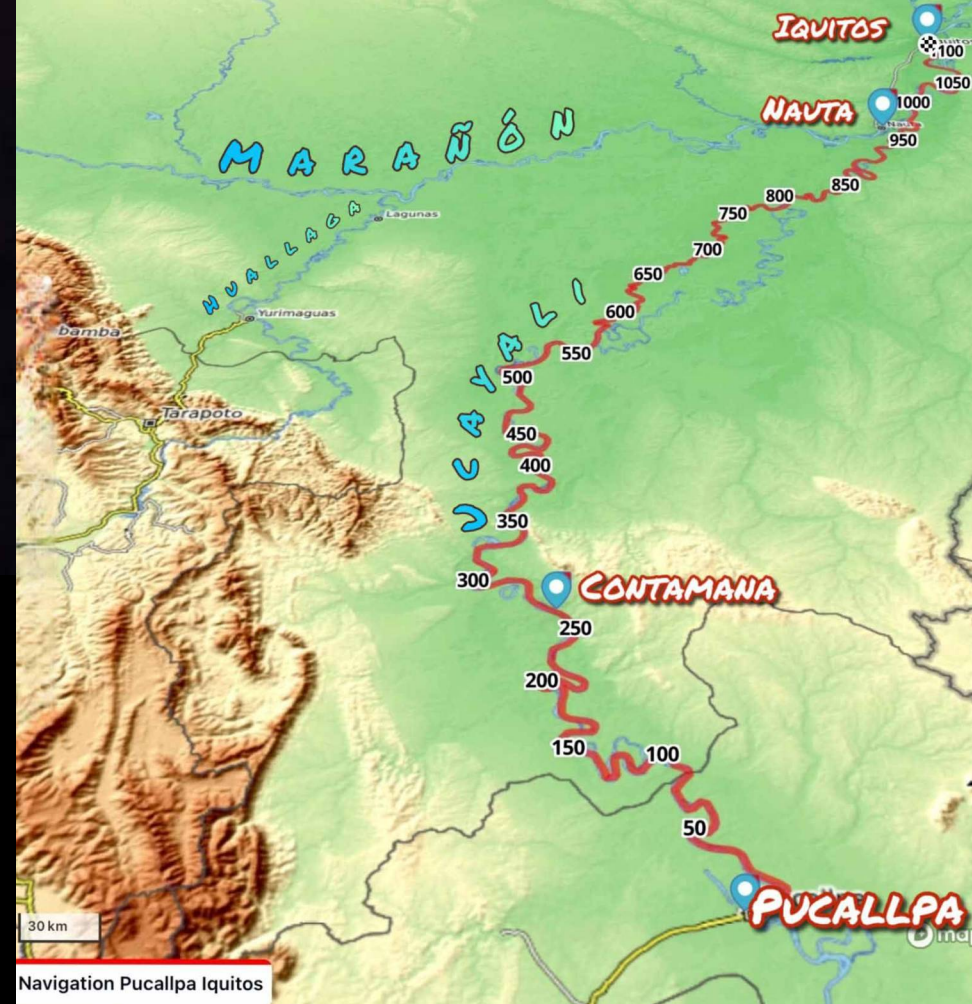
The landscapes pass by, but the banks of the Ucayali remain the same, with no hills or mountains appearing on the horizon.

81 – Contamana



As we approach some villages,
we get cell service that allows us
to access the internet.

When we look at the maps, we
realize our boat isn't moving...



At the end of the 2nd day, we see the town of Contamana in the night;
there are still 850 km to go through the meanders of the Ucayali.

82 – Hills on the Horizon

The first hills appear in the distance; these are the last foothills of the Andean range, somewhere near Tarapoto.



29-9-25



Rain is coming, accompanied by strong winds that are stirring up sand on the banks of the Ucayali.

83 – Onboard Menu

We might end up eating crocodile, which would be a nice change from the fish and chicken that are usually on the menu.



84 – Traffic on the Ucayali River

At this rate of traffic, it's doubtful the Amazon rainforest will ever recover...
It was good, though...



85 – Ucayali Wildlife

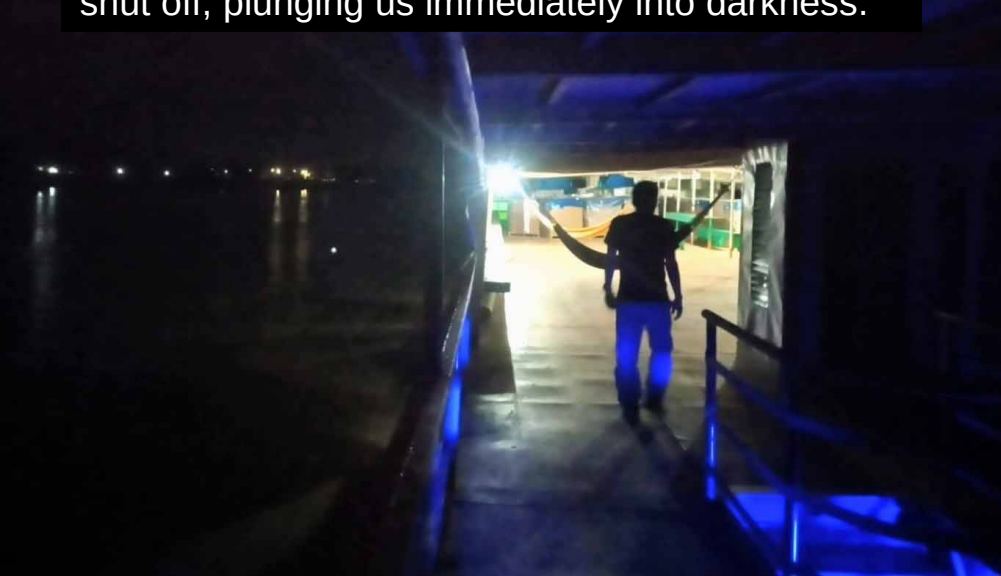
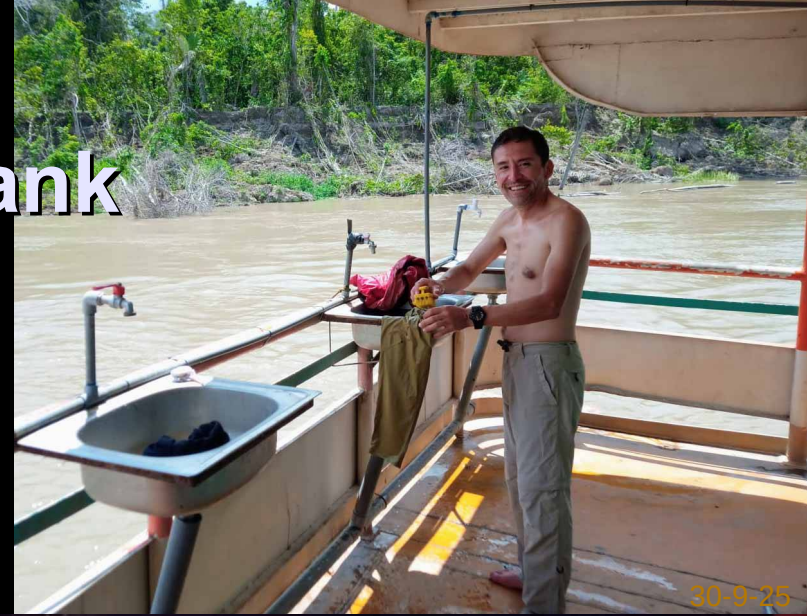


Two more crocodiles arrived
on the boat this morning...
The local wildlife is being put
to good use.

86 – Stranded on the Riverbank

On board, Tonio is doing his laundry; but when night falls, the barge gets stuck on the bank...

Despite several attempts, the boat's powerful engine couldn't pull us out of the predicament. The captain ordered the engine and electricity shut off, plunging us immediately into darkness.



87 – Slowness

After a ten-hour wait, our boat finally pulls away from the shore and we can continue.



But it's all happening very slowly; we keep getting overtaken by other boats...

The "cruise" could be longer than expected; we won't arrive in Iquitos very soon.

88 – Special Menu

We're served crocodile, but it's
nothing special.

A special dish is reserved for a
pregnant woman traveling with us
on the boat.

It's not a medical prescription;
she simply has the secret to
extracting the meat from the
crocodiles' heads!



89 – Oil Terminal

For some time now, we've been seeing ships transporting hazardous materials.



1-10-25



2-10-25

They come from the PetroTal S. A. oil terminal (lot 95), located near Bretaña in the Puinahua district.



2-10-25

90 – Oil Terminal

We can see this terminal located on the banks of the Ucayali River.

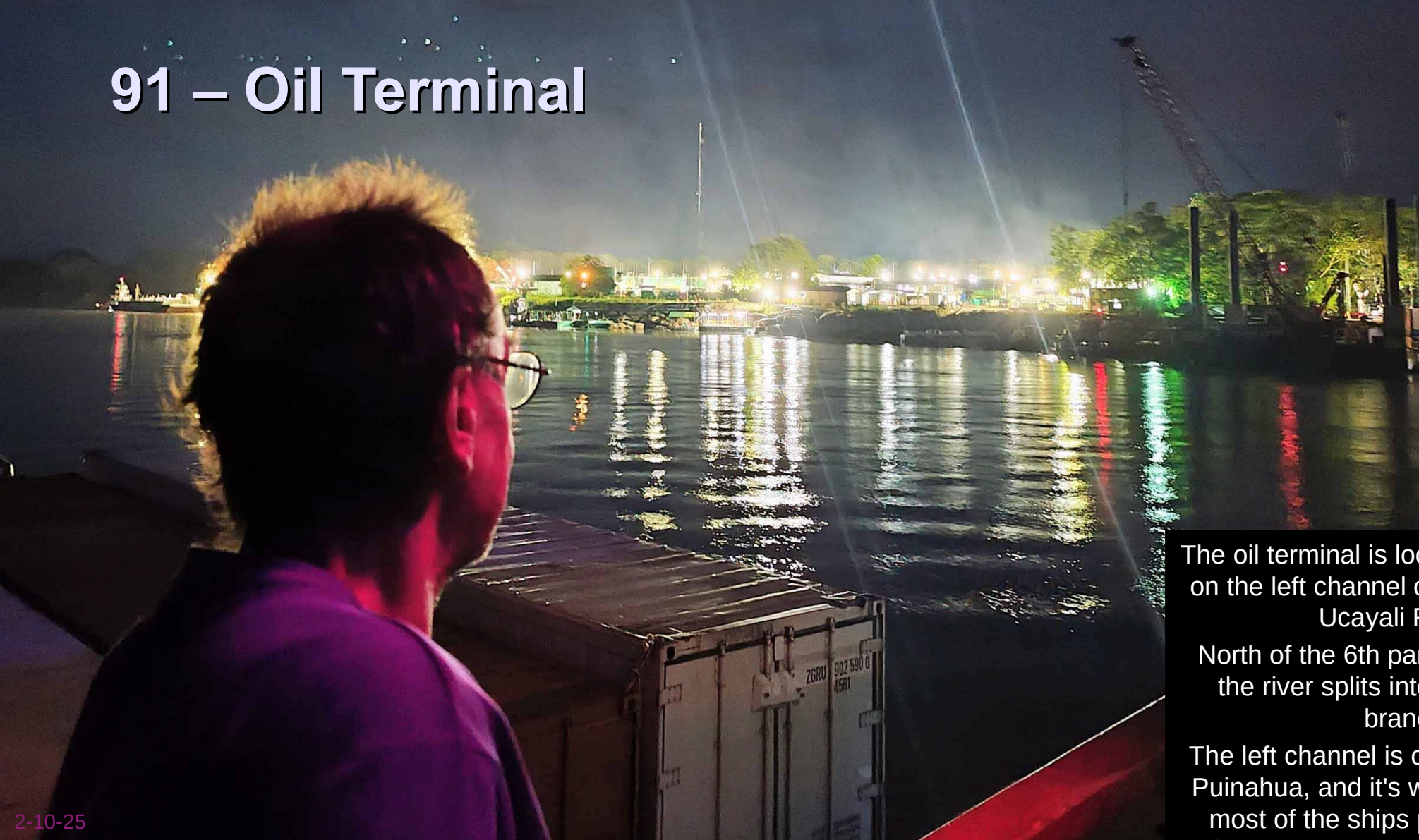
Next to the terminal, a ship is moored; it's the Delfin II.



This is a cruise ship costing \$4,000 per person (for 4 days) reserved for wealthy clients.

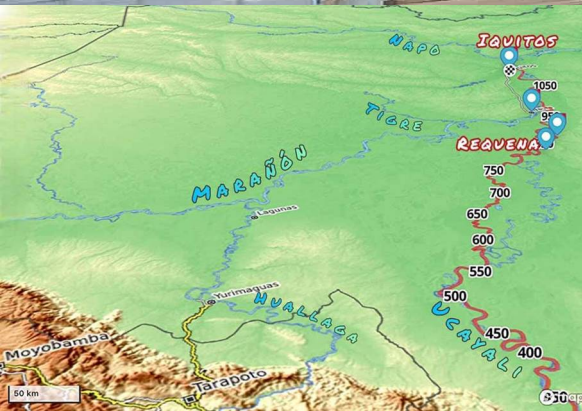


91 – Oil Terminal



The oil terminal is located on the left channel of the Ucayali River. North of the 6th parallel, the river splits into two branches. The left channel is called Puinahua, and it's where most of the ships pass.

92 – Port of Requena



2-10-25

We disembark at Requena, as some goods need to be unloaded. This gives us a chance to stretch our legs and explore the town.

93 – Requena

Near the port, there is quite a bit of activity, evidenced in particular by the fishing boats.



In town, you can also get your hair done, but we don't have time for that... and especially not enough hair.

94 – Requena

The decor is a bit kitschy, but it evokes the dolphins we saw on the Ucayali River.



95 – Ucayali River



3-10-25

Last sunsets on the Ucayali, because
tomorrow we land in Iquitos.

Excerpt from the map of
Ecuador and Peru by the
German Eduard Pape
(Hamburg, 1930).

97 – The Amazone River



3-10-25

We have reached the Amazon river, meaning we have passed the confluence of the Ucayali and Marañón rivers.
From this point on, the river becomes much wider and its flow doubles.

99 – Port of Iquitos



3-10-25



After 7 days of sailing, we leave the port of Iquitos (Terminal Portuario Fluvial Henry) which looks very similar to that of Pucallpa.

99 – Plaza de Armas

In the Plaza de Armas of Iquitos, you can find the Casa de Fierro, a building designed by the French engineer Eiffel.



Another distinctive feature of Iquitos is its wooden buses that resemble boats.



100 – Museo de Culturas Indígenas Amazónicas

We visited the Museo de Culturas Indígenas Amazónicas, it's nice but very poorly lit: lots of very colourful things that deserve better.

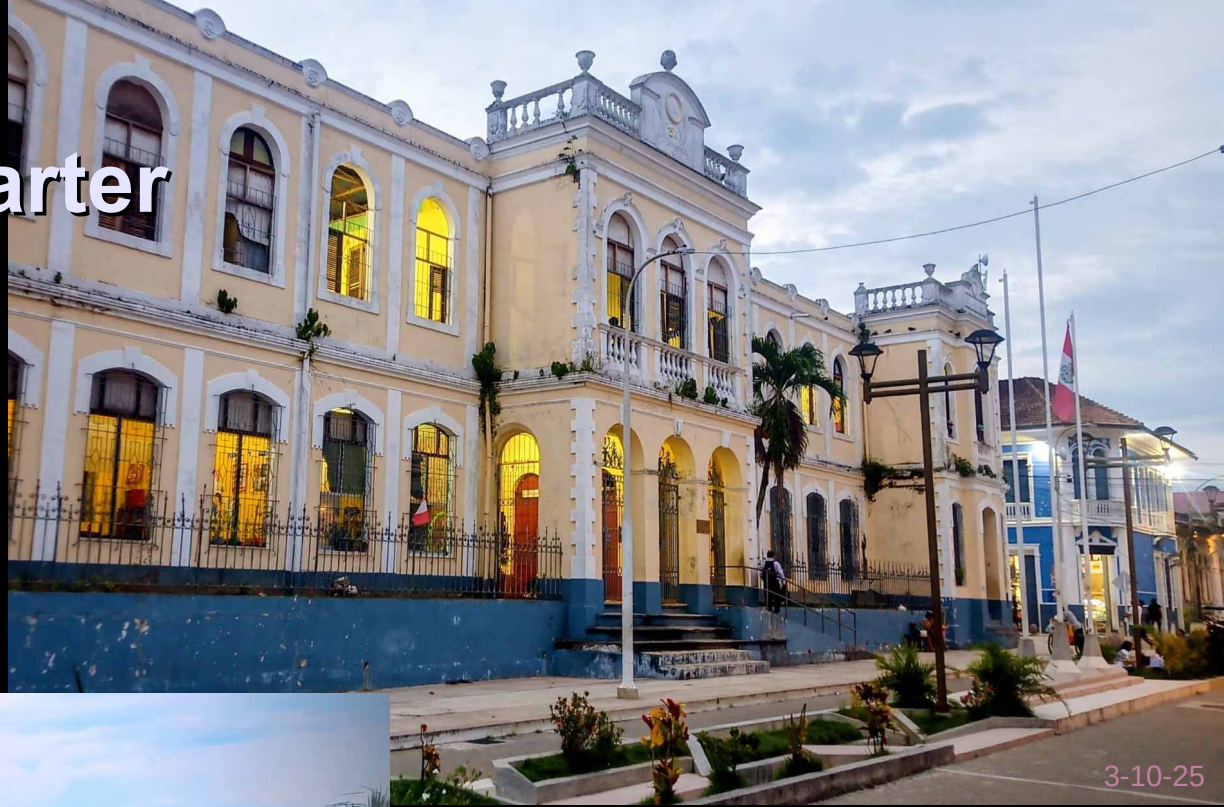


Thanks to an additional lamp, I managed to take some photographs.

101 – Colonial Quarter

The colonial quarter of Iquitos is located near an old wharf (Malecón Tarapacá), but the river is now several kilometers away.

The meanders of the Amazon are untamed...



3-10-25



This neighborhood is reminiscent of the prosperous era of the rubber industry.

102 – City of Iquitos



The
bustling
streets of
Iquitos.



103 – Our Destination: the Nanay Market

We were recommended
the Nanay market.



4-10-25



We then boarded
charmingly old-fashioned
buses with neither doors
nor windows.

104 – Nanay Market



The Nanay market is not very touristy, but it is authentic.



105 – Nanay Bridge

Near the Nanay bridge, you can see cabins on stilts.



4-10-25



Nearby, a seaplane belonging to the Peruvian Air Force (Fuerza Aérea del Perú - FAP) takes off on the Río Nanay.

Peru needs to secure its borders in the Amazon.

106 – Bora Community

At the Nanay market, a man offers to take us to visit the indigenous communities settled on the banks of the Momón River.



4-10-25

We don't know it yet, but this is a tout leading us straight into a tourist trap...

Once we arrive in the Bora community, we find some real natives living here, like the old women cooking a snake in a pot, but the rest is just a staged scene to extract money from tourists.

107 – The Serpentario

Still on the course of the Río Momón, we visit the Centro de rescate El Serpentario, a kind of menagerie where you can see some animals... in cages.



108 – Nanay Market

At the Nanay market, you can find plenty of local produce.

You might be tempted by some fish, chorizo, and grilled larvae.





109 – Outing Day

Tonio and I are big fans of raspadillas, a type of frozen sorbet sold on the street.



On Saturdays, the bars are full and everyone is out.

110 – Muyuna Beach



About ten kilometers from Iquitos, there are white sand beaches along the Nanay River.

We take a boat to Muyuna beach.

In the morning, there aren't many people, the water of the Río Nanay is warm. Soon, the sun is at its zenith and the beachgoers bring the parasols we don't have. We end up getting a nasty sunburn...



111 – Laguna Quistococha



5-10-25

In the afternoon, we go to Quistococha Park, officially a "Parque Turístico Nacional", in practice it is a zoo with a white sand beach (Tunchi Playa).

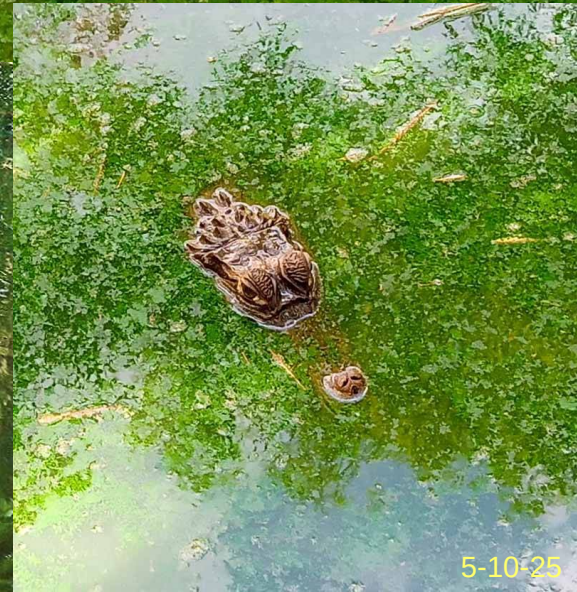


112 – Parque Turístico de Quistococha

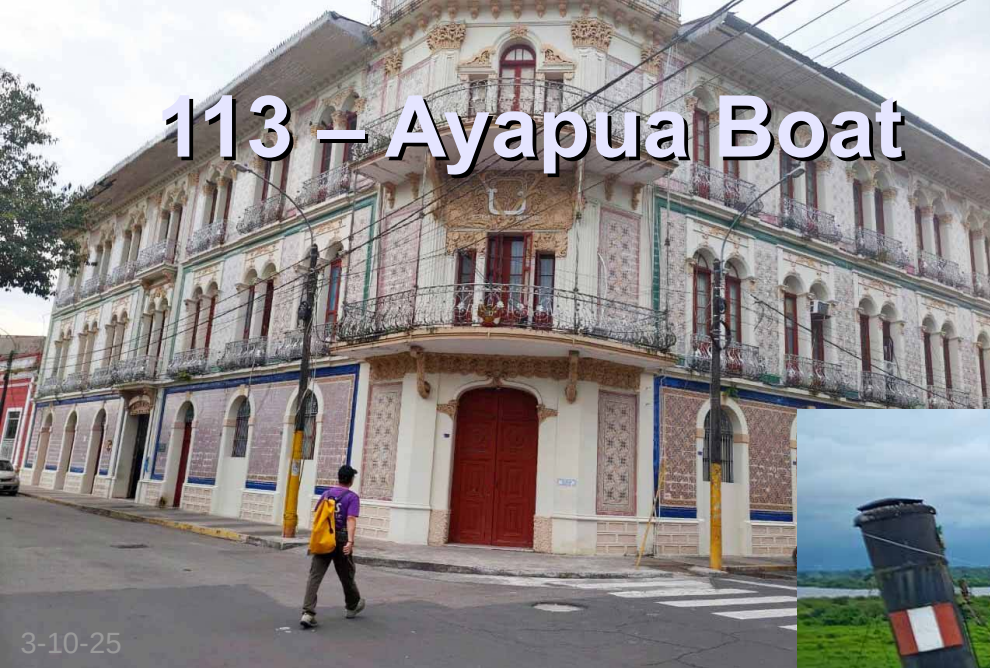


You can see many animals there.

Including turtles and... crocodiles.



113 – Ayapua Boat



Just steps from the colonial quarter, the historic steamboat "Ayapua" offers a journey back in time (Museo Barco Historico Ayapua).

This boat is located on the now distant banks of the Itaya river (Malecón Tarapacá).

This riverboat was built in 1906 in Hamburg, Germany. It transported bales of rubber from the Peruvian Amazon to Iquitos and Manaus in Brazil.



114 – Ayapua Boat



The interior of the boat is filled with period objects and old illustrations.

That's the kind of cruise we would have loved to take...

115 – Ayapua Boat



Rubber was what made Iquitos rich.
A visit to the Ayapua boat museum offers
a glimpse into this prosperous period.

116 – Nauta – Yurimaguas Trip



We finally managed to get hold of a ship's captain on the phone, as we wanted to leave Iquitos quickly.

There's a port in Nauta on the Marañón River where you can take "lanchas", a type of streamlined boat that travels at high speed.



Indeed, we don't have much time left to get back to Chachapoyas, especially since we have to go to Cajamarca to pick up our things.

117 – Port of Nauta



In Nauta, we see travelers coming to stock up on supplies.

They are Indigenous women, belonging to the Urarina ethnic group, originally from the Chambira basin, located on the left bank of the Marañón River.

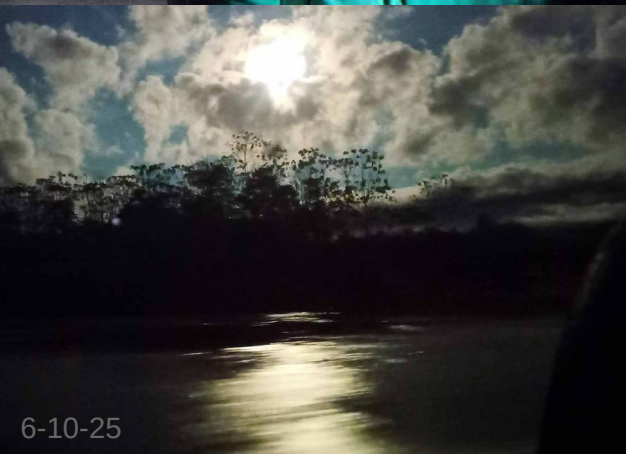
118 – Nauta - Yurimaguas



One night was all it took for the lancha to take us to Yurimaguas.

From there, we took a bus to Tarapoto, then to Jaén; or rather Bagua Grande, because the van driver didn't want to go any further due to strikes and demonstrations.

6-10-25



We're staying in a hotel in Bagua and will be heading back to Chachapoyas the next day, as the road is closed between Jaén and Cajamarca...

6-10-25



7-10-25

119 – Chacha - Cajamarca

After meeting Leslie, who will be participating in the Franco-Peruvian speleological expedition, we take the night bus to Cajamarca.



8-10-25



8-10-25

I go to a hairdresser recommended by Tonio who gives me a haircut like a 48-year-old man...



9-10-25

120 – Granja Porcón

Our French friends are running a little late with the cancellation of their Lima-Chacha flight.

They won't arrive in Chachapoyas until October 11th.

So we have a day to plan a visit to a tourist site in Cajamarca.



10-10-25

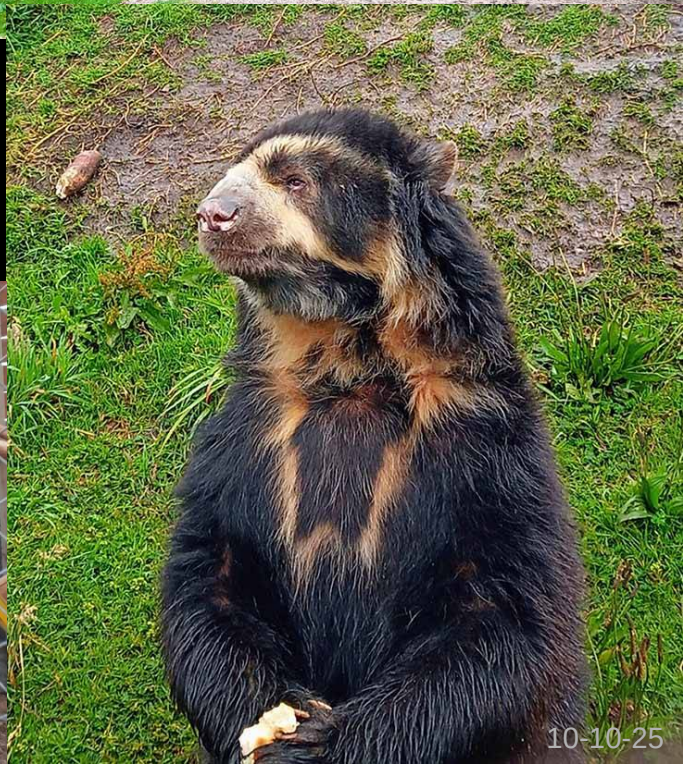


Tonio chose the Granja Porcón site. It's a Protestant community (Iglesia Evangelica de Cristo) that has developed a certain business acumen. However, the site's greatest asset is its trees (sawmill), pines of all species, planted several decades ago by pioneers.

121 – Granja Porcón



Excerpts from the Old Testament
are reproduced everywhere.
It's touristy, but heavily imbued
with religion.



122 – Departure from Cajamarca

Our friends arrived in Chachapoyas yesterday during the day and we are going to meet them.



We set off again for Chachapoyas with 100 kg of luggage... for the 3rd part of the journey: a Franco-Peruvian speleological expedition programmed on Cerro Tragadero (Soloco) and Valle Andino (Alto Mayo) in the Amazonas region.

123 – Journey to Cerro Tragadero and Valle Andino

The third part of the journey, which we will call "Cerro Tragadero - Valle Andino," begins in Chachapoyas (Amazonas).

A Franco-Peruvian caving expedition is planned in the mountains of Cerro Tragadero (Soloco), and also in the village of Valle Andino (Alto Mayo).

This caving expedition, "Cerro Tragadero 2025," organized by the Espeleo Club Andino de Lima (ECA) and the Groupe Spéléologique de Bagnols-Marcoule (GSBM), is led by Jean Loup Guyot (France).



Cathedral cave (Soloco)

124 – See You in Chachapoyas



All equipment and supplies are gathered at the Tintaya Hotel.

We are starting to close ranks to form a group.

125 – Chacha - Soloco



13-10-25

After collecting caving equipment in Luya,
we take off in a van from the Tintaya hotel with an impressive number of bags.

126 – Soloco Barrack Room

In Soloco, no houses were available, so we settled into a single room on mattresses lent to us by the Rojas family.

A misunderstanding delayed our departure by a day, and some took the opportunity to visit the Cueva del Río Seco.



127 – The Big Departure



15-10-25

Spanish
reading
session.

Then the next day, we loaded the horses for Cerro Tragadero where the mythical cave known as the "Cathedral" opens. Indeed, Google Earth satellite views are in good definition, which made it possible to identify disappearing streams, huts and trails.

14-10-25



128 – Walking and Botanising



In the mountains, the
flowers and plants are
truly astonishing when
you observe them.



But we must
also move
forward,
because the
others have
distanced
themselves
from us.



129 – A difficult Climb

Thanks to the recorded GPS tracks, we follow a path through the sandstone.



Indeed, trees are sparse on the sandstone, making it easier to follow the paths.

The goal is to bypass the limestone massif of Cerro Tragadero via the impermeable sandstone terrain...

130 – Berezina Camp



The group is certainly making progress, but at different paces. In the late afternoon, the rain arrives and doesn't stop.

After tackling one last climb that marks the start of a mountain pass, we decide to pitch the large tent before nightfall.

There's a little water leaking inside, and the ground is quite steep.

In the morning, after a bad night, some give up: it's a complete disaster.

We have to split into two groups: those who want to continue and those who want to return to Soloco.



131 – The Backpack Raid

Five of us were packing our bags to leave with the horses, but 200 m after leaving the Berezina camp, the horsemen abandoned us, saying they didn't want to continue... because the trail was too slippery for the horses.

So we returned to the Berezina camp and repacked in 30 mn, but this time for a multi-day backpacking trek.

We took only the bare minimum of equipment: tents, sleeping bags, and a little food for four days.

So, no caving gear or anything to heat food...



Leslie Vila

Antonio
de Pomar

Julien
Jeannin

Jean Loup
Guyot

132 – Go Further

The landscapes that unfolded before us gave rise to an irresistible desire to go further.



We need to descend the valleys
to reach the limestone where
the forest grows.
We're far too close to our goal
to give up now.



133 – Windy Camp

In the distance, we can see a strategic location for setting up our camp, which must be near a mountain pass.



For beyond this pass lay our objective: the "Cathedral."
The chosen campsite is relatively dry, but it is swept by strong winds...

134 – Towards Y06



Around 8 a.m., the rain stopped falling with the sunrise.

We crossed the pass and headed towards the Y06 sinkhole where we hoped to find the famous Cathedral.

135 – Water Crossings

The path is fairly well marked and includes several water crossings.
You do indeed have to cross the river several times.



Some decide to take off their trousers and socks to avoid getting them wet.

17-10-25

136 – Tragadero Y06

Around 10 a.m., we arrive at the Tragadero Y06, but is this really the "Cathedral"?



The site is magnificent, but the river is blocked by a limestone cliff where all the water seeps in between boulders and debris: this sinkhole of Shocol river is impenetrable...
It's a huge disappointment!



137 – The Drone

But Jean Loup persists, heads off to the left
and hears the sound of a waterfall...



He starts up his drone, because there's
no aerial river in this area...

And that's when a large cave entrance
appears above the forest. Bingo!

138 – Cueva de los Guácharos a.k.a. the “Cathedral”



The cave entrance is huge and as grand as a cathedral.

Without a doubt, we are indeed in the Cathedral cave, also known as the Guácharos cave or the Palace.

It is in this cavern that the Shocol river disappears.

139 – The Guácharos

The floor of the entrance hall is littered with seeds left by the guácharos. There's even one flying over our heads.



140 – The River Found



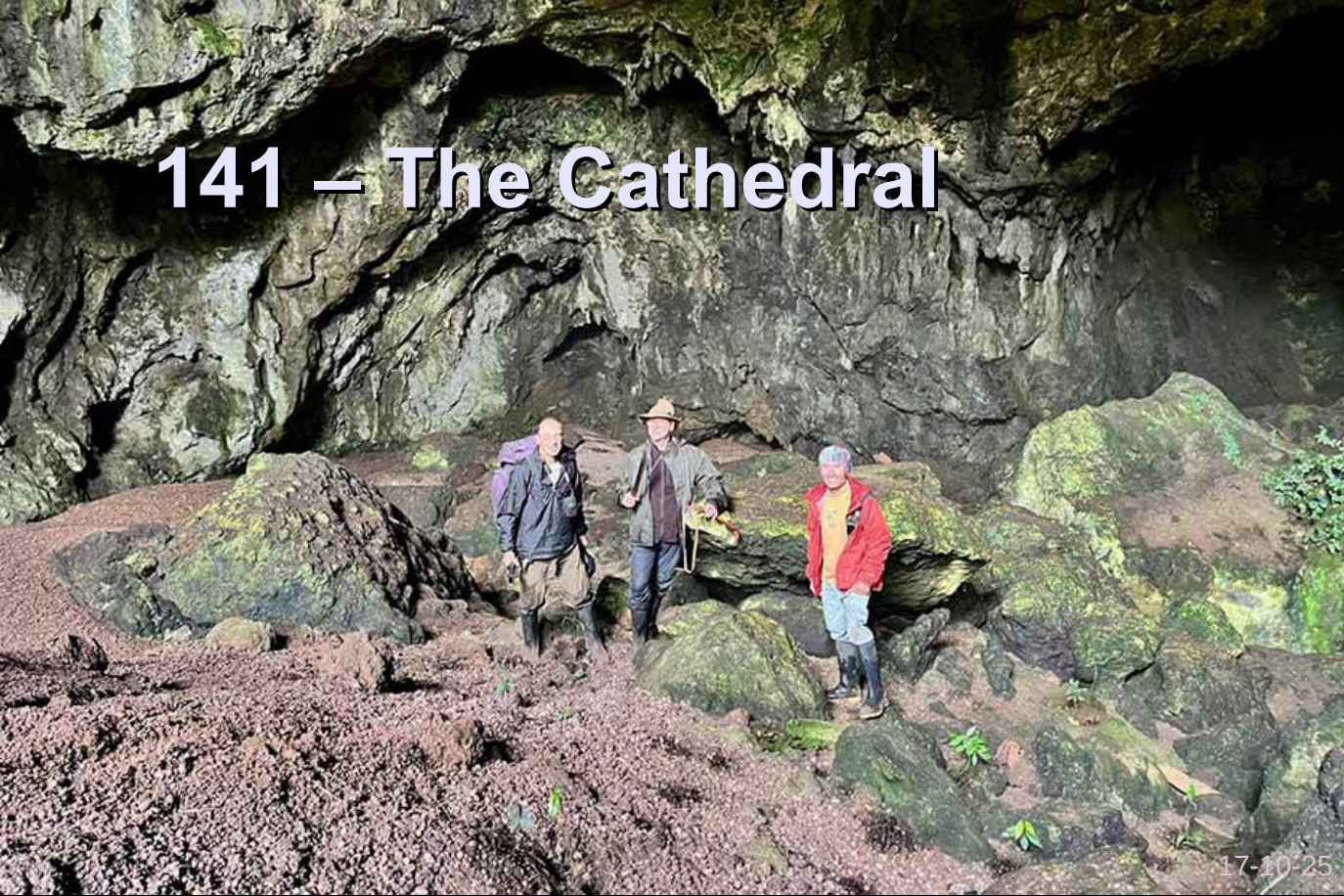
17-10-25

Below, the muffled sound of a river can be heard.

Equipped with small headlamps, Julien, Tonio, and Jean-Yves descend to the river, walking about a hundred meters before stopping at a 5 m waterfall.



141 – The Cathedral



For 15 years, we had been searching for the
"Cathedral," and we found it.
Jean Loup is overjoyed.

142 – Back to the Windy Camp



We returned in under two hours along the same trail, reaching our campsite around 2 p.m.

This time, the rain was late, arriving only at 3 p.m., and we remained confined to our tents for 17 hours.

Tomorrow will be a new day...

143 – Departure from the Windy Pass



It rained all night, with a very strong wind.
But this morning the rain didn't stop at sunrise.
Jean Loup showed us the way... but sometimes
the weather wasn't very clear.

144 – Tragadero del Río Saupucro

We broke camp in a downpour, then descended towards sinkhole Y05. This is the Tragadero del Río Saupucro, but it is impenetrable.



18-10-25



From the stone hut of Saupucro, we continue along a path that leads to other huts, because we hope to set off again via unknown paths towards Soloco...

145 – The Cabin 5

We finally arrive at cabin 5,
not exactly close to Soloco...
We settle in.



18.10.25



146 – The Cabin 5

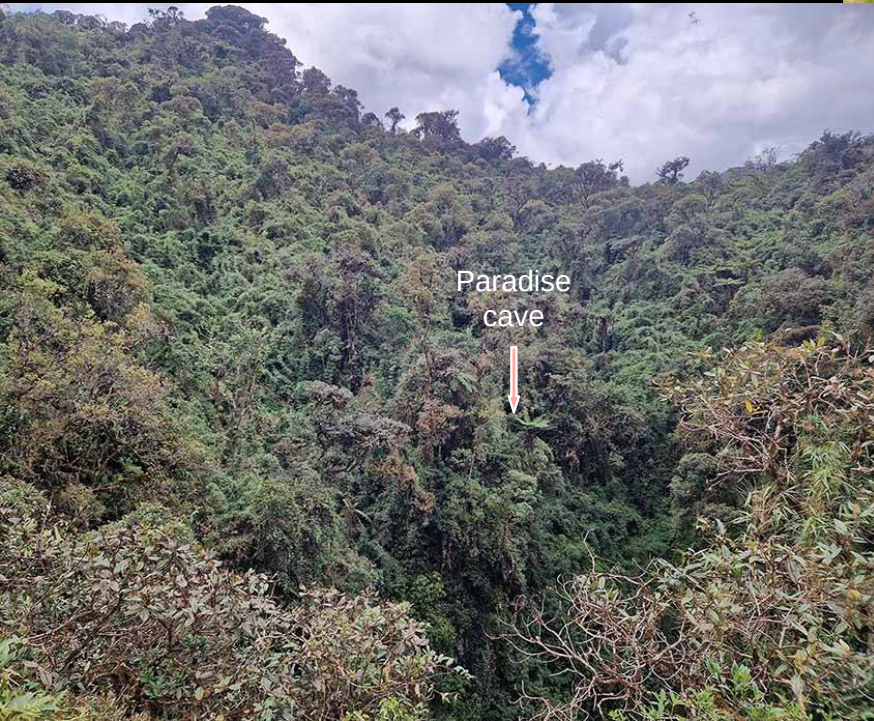
The cabin is very comfortable compared to the tent.
Leslie makes us cheese wraps, warmed over the fire.



It's excellent.
We're feasting and eating quite a lot of
food, because we're convinced that
tomorrow we'll find the path to Soloco...

147 – Failure

Convinced that we could quickly reach a cabin seen in the distance, we opened a path with a machete in the sides of a huge hole, the Tragadero del Paraiso.



We follow vague paths
strewn with cow dung...
But it's only the cows that
have blazed these trails
through the forest.
Exhausted, we are forced to
return to cabin 5 before
nightfall.

We have failed.



148 – Back to Square One



We're heading back to cabin 5, as it's still the safest shelter.

The problem is, we'll have to take the same path we came back on, and what's worse, we have almost nothing left to eat!

On Leslie's suggestion, I decide to search the cabin, and I find a bag of rice and some onions!

With salt, it will be easy for Leslie to make us some rice... because she's good at it.

149 – Sunday Cowboys

Okay, we just don't want the owner to show up and catch them red-handed stealing food! And that's exactly what happens around 7 p.m. Leslie is our contact, explaining that we're lost.



But the cowherds (Luis Salazar Torre and his son Gian Franco Salazar) are quite happy to see people; they come here once a week to feed the animals salt, on Sundays...

A fruitful discussion ensues, and we note down the names of the rivers, the caves, and the landowner, as well as the rental rates for horses that come from the village of Taquia.

150 – The Return

After eating a good portion of rice, we left the hut and retraced our steps.



20-10-25

We expect it to take two days to get to Soloco... just in case things go wrong.

151 – Geomorphology



20-10-25

We eventually climb above the forest that covers the limestone.

The sandstone that rises above it (to the left) is rather bare.

The landscape is easy to understand: to the left, the sandstone and the rivers that disappear into the distance, and to the right, the limestone covered in forest.

152 – The "Phone Booth"

Before reaching the Berezina camp, there is a place where you can pick up a little 4G network.



20-10-25



This place is known as the "phone booth", open to the elements at the very top of the sandstone cliffs.

Tonio calls Josefa so she can order a van to pick us up in Chaquil (Soloco). In the end, we cover the distance in a single day.

153 – The Descent towards Soloco

Once we've crossed the mountain passes, we begin the descent towards Soloco. We can enjoy a delicious bowl of Josefa soup before going to bed after a 10-hour hike.



154 – Soloco and Chacha



Manuel in his carpentry workshop



21-10-25



In Soloco, the morning is dedicated to drying the tents and washing and sorting the equipment. In the afternoon, we return by bus to Chachapoyas where we meet up with the rest of the team.



155 – Luya

We take the equipment back to Luya.

Wilder is waiting for us there with a few bottles of Chilean wine.

Once the equipment is put away, I suggest to Julien and Michel that we take a look at the San Isidro Labrador archaeological site, which I discovered in September.

The site is much larger than I imagined.
Michel finds a ceramic cabochon depicting
the head of a bat or perhaps a bear.



156 – Chachapoyas Museum

The Chachapoyas museum is open,
it's a good opportunity to visit.



In addition, there are
discounts for seniors
(over 60).
Together, we get a
good price...



157 – See You at La Cueva!



In the evening, we have a meeting at La Cueva bar, high above Chachapoyas.

The establishment was opened especially for us speleologists, as it's a cave we've never explored before.



158 – Departure from Chachapoyas



We leave Chachapoyas in search of warmer temperatures.

Our destination is Alto Mayo, including the Palestina cave, near Nueva Cajamarca (San Martín).

159 – Cueva de Palestina



After a five-hour drive, we arrived in Cueva de Palestina where a surprise awaited us: it was Tonio's birthday, and a small party was being held to celebrate.

Unfortunately, the baby sloth that had been entrusted to our host family died after only two days. Such is life.

160 – Cueva de Palestina

The party was very well orchestrated by Leslie and the singer Cinthia Sánchez Herrera.



We received a very warm welcome at Lázaro and Celmira's.

However, it rained very heavily last night; the rainy season has definitely begun in the region.

161 – Cueva de Palestina

The family hosting us owns a plot of land in the forest where water is plentiful, ideal for creating a swimming pool.



Now it looks like a Club Med, but everything was done by hand, like the Cautivo cave-sanctuary.



162 – Stop at Salas



Our driver, Joel, who is taking us to Valle Andino, stops us in Salas at his father's house, where he presses sugarcane to extract the juice. We taste it; it's very good.

A few hours after pressing the cane, the juice begins to ferment.

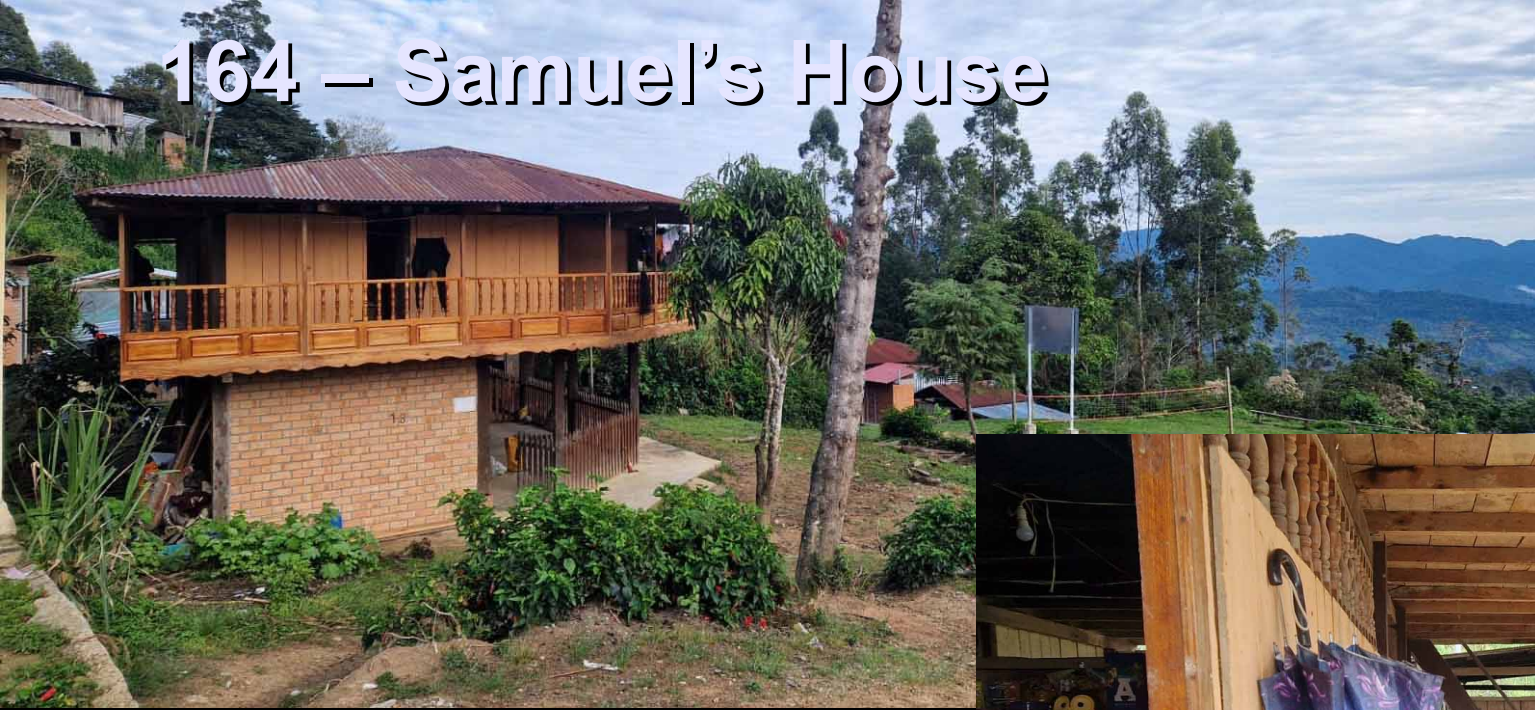
163 – Valle Andino

We climb into two 4x4 pickup trucks to travel the distance between Soritor and Valle Andino where Samuel Heredia and his family are waiting for us.



The village is peaceful.
There's no segregation here; men and women
all play volleyball.
Leslie immediately joins a team and proves his
worth with some excellent plays.

164 – Samuel's House



Samuel Heredia's house is perfect, as it's located an hour from the Valle Andino caves and offers ample accommodation. Plus, there's a grocery store nearby, which is very convenient.



165 – Valle Andino Team

A photograph taken in front of the sign announcing the "Cavernas de Valle Andino" does not mean that they have all been explored, far from it.

These caves are larger than one might imagine.



166 – The Lower Part of the River

The exploration of the downstream section of the Caverna de Valle Andino collector, known over 1500 m in 2024, is proving to be worthwhile.



25-10-25

One kilometer of galleries is surveyed up to an inevitable siphon (length: 2922 m).

167 – The Lower Part of the River



25-10-25

We lose track of the river for a while in a huge, rocky gallery.

Then, further downstream, we find the active stream again, which disappears into a siphon.

168 – The "Endless Gallery"



I can only find Julien and Michel to accompany me to the Caverna de Valle Andino.

I plan to survey the "Endless gallery", a dry gallery whose bottom we didn't reach in 2024.

169 – The "Endless Gallery"



26-10-25

And the "Endless gallery" ends in an enormous chamber called the "Marshalling yard" (estación de triaje).

The chamber offers several possibilities for continuation.

We have identified approximately 400 m of conduits; the rest will be explored later.

We have greatly underestimated the potential of this cavern.

170 – Reporting of Topographic Data

The topographic data indicates that we are very close to the cliff face.

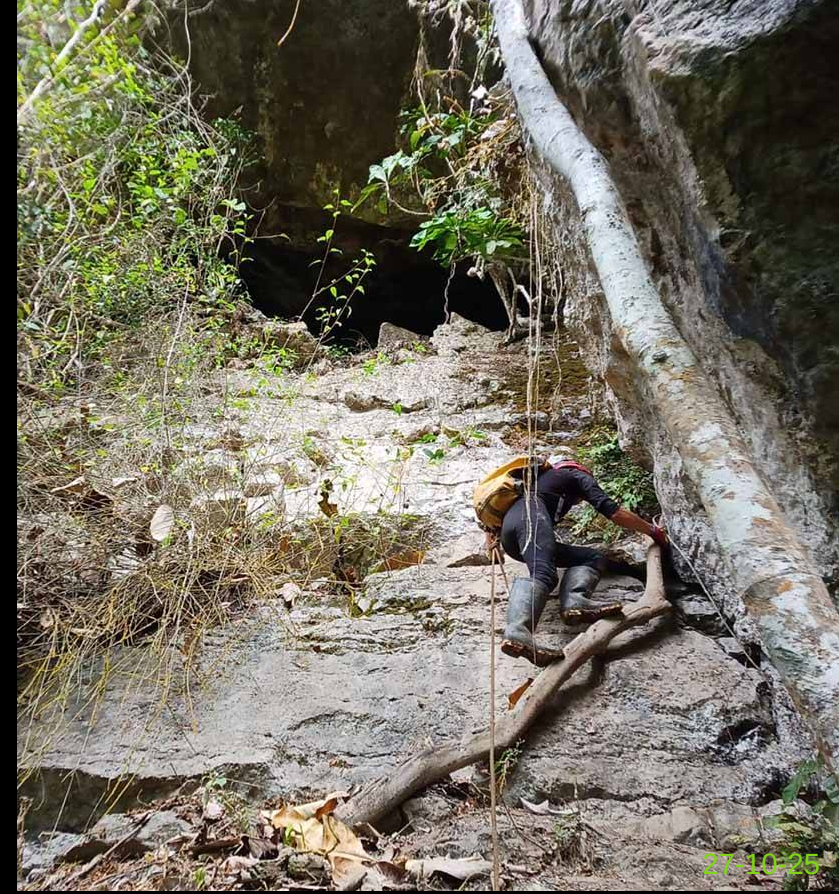
A connection with the caves opening in the escarpment is being considered.

However, when we were in the large chamber "Marshalling yard," we saw no sign of a connection to the outside.

Only a stream seemed to want to disappear ever deeper...



171 – Cueva de los Huesos

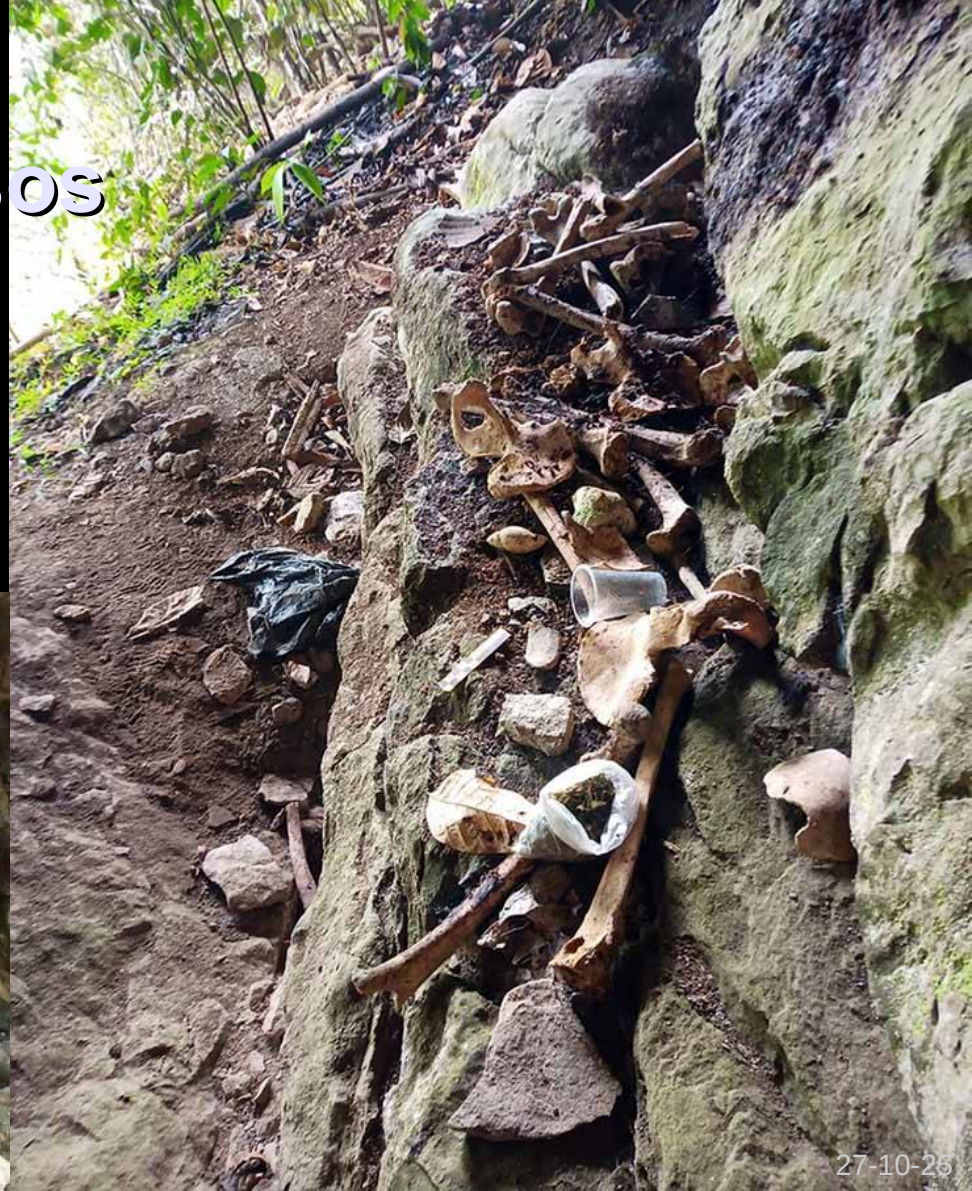


After surveying two small cavities (Cueva 1, length: 34 m, Cueva 2, length: 108 m) without continuation, we climb the wall which gives access to the Cueva de los Huesos.

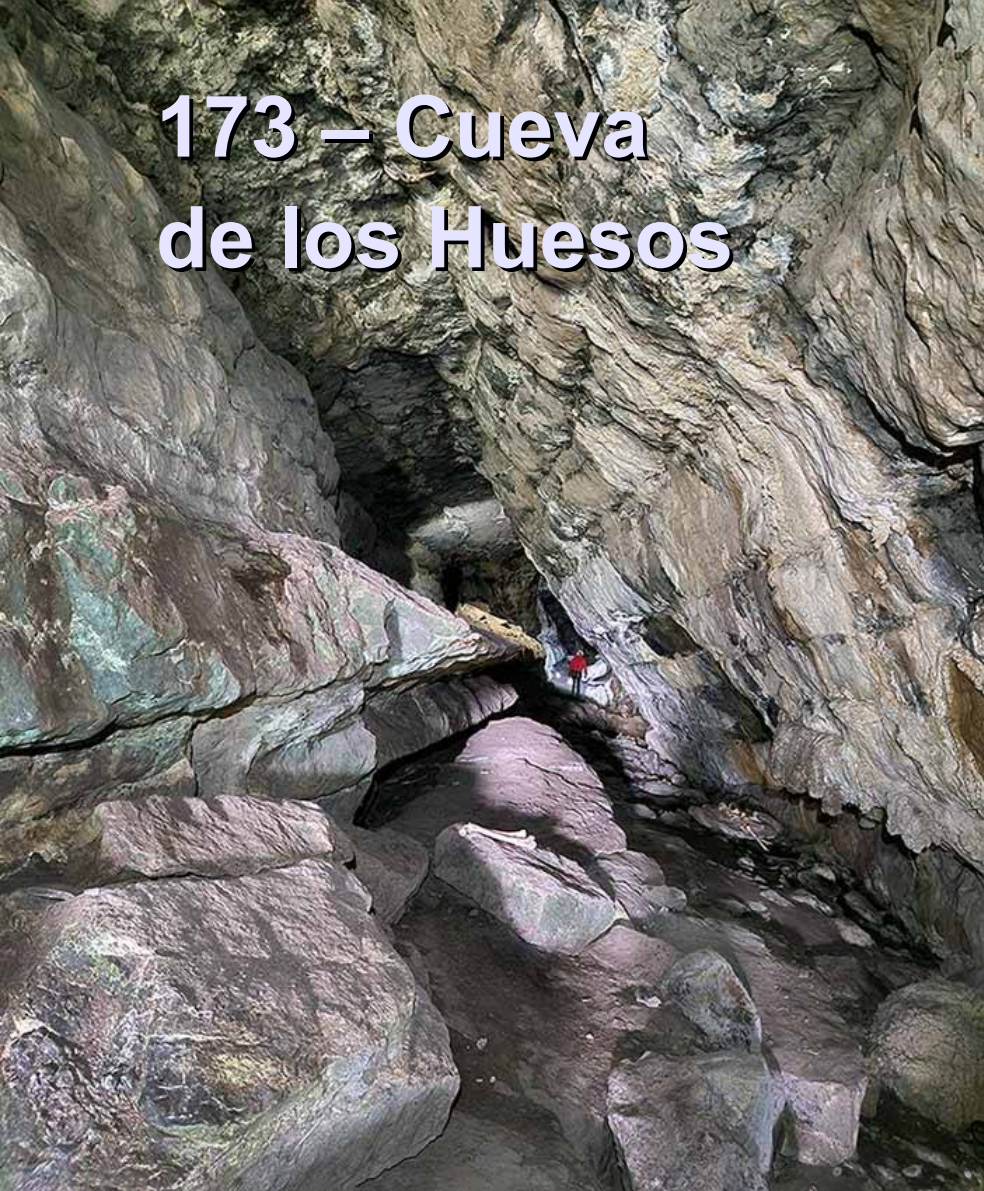
172 – Cueva de los Huesos

The cave is known for the numerous human bones lying on the ground.

It is the site of offerings to Pachamama, as evidenced by a plastic cup (containing alcohol?) and a bag of coca leaves.



173 – Cueva de los Huesos



Despite our certainties, the perched cave of Cueva de los Huesos (length.: 697 m) does not connect with the Caverna de Valle Andino... which is located much lower in altitude.

174 – Summary Valle Andino

Entrance of
the Caverna
de Valle
Andino

Cueva de
los Huesos

Sump

Marshalling
yard

The main network runs parallel to a valley (north-south).

It closely resembles an ancient shortcut meander (self-capture).

At the extreme south, the "Marshalling yard" chamber is indeed close to the slope, but it lies at a much deeper level where underground streams flow.

The caves visible in the ledge are fossil cavities containing large sandstone pebbles brought down by an aerial river.

These are ancient sinkholes, now perched high and disconnected from the current network located much lower down.

Zone	Cavité	Latitude	Longitude	Altitude	Topo 2025	Topo Total	Dénivelé	Date	Observations
Soloco	Tragadero del Rio Shocol (Y06)	-6,37548	-77,73041	2860	0	0	0	17/10/25	Impénétrable
	Cueva de la Catedral (de los Guacharos)	-6,37470	-77,73067	2890	0	0	0	17/10/25	Exploré sur 100 m, ça continue
	Tragadero del Rio ? (Y05)	-6,36049	-77,73827	2870	0	0	0	18/10/25	Impénétrable
Valle Andino	Cueva de Valle Andino	-6,23345	-77,27784	1620	1401	2922	195	25-26/10/25	Ca continue vers les amonts, 600 m non topo
	Pozo ?				0	0	0	26/10/25	Non exploré
	Cueva ?				0	0	0	26/10/25	Non exploré
	Tragadero ?				0	0	0	26/10/25	Non exploré
	Cueva de los Huesos	-6,23553	-77,27810	1640	697	697	35	27/10/25	Ca continue, puits non descendu
	Cueva 1	-6,23879	-77,27755	1660	34	34	4	27/10/25	Ca continue, puits non descendu
	Cueva 2	-6,23821	-77,27780	1660	108	108	16	27/10/25	Terminé
	TOTAL				2 240	3 761			

175 – Iquitos Cigars

The cigars bought at the Belén market (Iquitos) turned out to be of good quality, because they had just been made and the tobacco had not yet started to dry.



Tonight,
everyone is
smoking big
cigars.



176 – Pig Farming

Samuel is also a pig farmer; he has found a way to sell the whey his cows give him.



He only feeds them every other day, and his pigs love him dearly.

As soon as they see him, they stand up to get petted... and fed.



177 – Tarapoto

We leave Julien and Tonio in Soritor. They'll go first to Nueva Cajamarca, then to Luya to drop off some equipment for Tonio, and to Palestina for Julien, who's planning a trip to Cusco. In Tarapoto, we find a hotel, then a good restaurant: La Jardineria.



28-10-25



29-10-25

With the nighttime activities limited to a procession, Pierre and I are going for a walk in the city. The next day, we're flying to Lima.

178 – Lima



30-10-25



Today's activities:

- Visit to the Huallamarca pyramid, surrounded by buildings.
- Shopping at the Petit Thouars craft market.
- Walk down to the seafront, near the Rosa Náutica (pier), where surfers offer equipment and lessons.

179 – Lima



On the beach near the surfers, a fisherman is mending his nets. It was this side of Peru that interested me for two months; but it's over now, because tomorrow I'm flying back to France.

180 – Fin

Fin