

## Cycling Across Peru...recap of our 2016 tour

Pampamarca, Peru. Elevation: 14,000 feet.

Population: 100. Temperature: 28F degrees, Heat: none.

It takes a strong person to roll over in bed when covered with three heavy wool horse blankets. That what we learned when we spent the night at the local city hall at the edge of town. They had eight beds with some extra mattresses on the floor. The building is used as a winter shelter for the local people living in stone huts higher up the mountain.



For our group this was an upgrade from the downtown hotel that didn't have an indoor bathroom. We were cozy and this was one of many memorable nights (and favorite) during our bike tour across Peru.

Two weeks earlier we started cycling from the jungle city of Puerto Maldonado located on the Rio Madre de Dios (Mother of God River) near the far southeast corner of Peru near Brazil



and Bolivia. We would ride 1,200 kilometers across Peru in 11 cycling days to the desert city of Nasca located near the Pacific Ocean. Along the way we would cross dozens of mountain passes with elevations of 11,000 to 15,000 feet. Our average elevation during the middle eight days of the tour would be 12,000 feet.

We would follow the National Trans South America Highway which was paved about 60 years ago. This road has to be one of the best designed and impressive highway projects in the world. The road needed to cross numerous mountains and 5,000 foot deep valleys. The road is either going up or down with very few flat sections. It was possible to be on



the top of one mountain overlooking a valley and see the next mountain in the distance. The line of sight might be 20 miles but the cycling distance was 50 miles. The road transversed down into the valley on a spaghetti bowl of hairpin turns so sharp that the road seemed to overlap its self many times. One section had 40 hairpin turns of 15 mph during eight miles. Most of the roads had three foot shoulders and less than ten cars per hour. Except for the busy traffic for five miles in and out of the city of Cuzco most of the roads had excellent cycling conditions.

Our group had ten riders from the United States, three women from the Peru National Cycling Team and three Peruvian crew members in a mini van. We have known crew member Clara from Cuzco for 15 years and she has helped us on many past tours. She brought her 7 month old baby who traveled wrapped in a blanket on her back most of the



tour. All the riders had ridden PAC Tour events in the past. Only three riders had not been to Peru before. We were an assorted group of personalities who all had a sense of adventure for the interesting experiences we would encounter along the way.

A common question asked by the riders during our tour was "How does riding across Peru compare to riding the Northern Transcontinental across the United States". Since many of our riders had done both tours, there was a common agreement that each tour was about equal as far as physical intensity.



Riding 120 kilometers in Peru was equal to cycling 120 miles in the United States. The extremely high elevations in Peru made the 8% to 10% mountain grades challenging. Each day in Peru averaged 8,000 feet of climbing. The fast downhills were balanced by many long three hour climbs. The weirdness factor of traveling in Peru also added to the challenge of each day. Even with good support and eating in restaurants, the days were full, which made riding a basic 120 kilometer day feel like 120 miles.

The culture and conditions in Peru are as diverse as the terrain. Our hotels ranged from basic rooms with cot type beds to first rate tourist hotels with air conditioning and swimming pools. Some roadside restaurants prepared all their meals on a simple one burner propane stove and other restaurants had professional chefs making elaborate tasty dishes of the best quality. The differences between the jungle villages and the highland lifestyles changed as fast as the mountainous terrain. In the jungle the people wore the lightest weight clothing but in the highlands everyone wore layers of heavy wool sweaters. Particularly the women from each village, who's colorful hats were different for each region.



Most of our group were riding bikes that were donated from riders in the United States. We reconditioned these bikes with lower gears for the mountain grades. Most of the shift levers were converted to 9 speed bar end levers that would be trouble free in the remote areas of Peru. After the tour we would donate these bikes as prizes for the races we sponsor in Lima. Many of the bikes had classic steel frames from the 1990's. Lon was riding a 1977 Schwinn Super Letour. When the bike was originally made Schwinn bragged that it only weighed 26.8 pounds. Even though the bike was heavy by today's standards, it rode great and Lon is looking to build up another Super Letour.



On of the highlights of this tour are the two days we stayed over in the city of Cusco. Riders had the option of taking the three hour train ride to the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu in the afternoon and spending the night in the Village of Aguas Cliente. The next day they returned to Cusco in time to visit the cathedrals and sights of the city. The extra tour to Machu



Picchu costs \$250 including trains tickets, guides, entry fees, hotel and bus shuttles. It is a classic tour and destination for thousands of tourists each year and worth doing while you are in Peru.

Riders who stayed in Cusco had plenty of things to keep them busy. There were local guided tours of the city and longer bus tours that went to the ruins surrounding Cusco. The cost for these day long tours including entry fees were \$50-\$75. For riders who wanted to stay closer to the hotel there were still plenty of sights within walking distance of our downtown hotel. Either way having two rest days in Cusco was nice for the group after five challenging riding days. We still had six more cycling days to reach Nasca.



For 2018 we are adding an extra day to the tour to visit Nasca and Paracas. The city of Nasca is famous for the "Nasca Lines" which were drawn in the desert. Many of the outlines are of spiders, monkeys and other shapes that are bigger than four football fields. Their origins are still not known, but they could be over 1,000 years old. After our bike tour ended in Nasca we had the option the next morning to take a small airplane tour over the Nasca Lines. This airplane ride costs about \$90 but it allowed riders to view another classic tourist destination in Peru.



In the afternoon we will depart Nasca and make a three hour bus ride to the oceanside resort village of Paracas. This village is famous for inventing the popular "Pisco Sour" drink. There are many upscale beachside restaurants where it will can have a final dinner together.



The following morning we will take our final four hour bus ride back to Lima. We will arrive in early afternoon in time for riders that are departing home in the evening to repack and go to dinner before going to the airport. Riders who are staying longer in Lima or going to the bike races the following weekend will be able to relax in the upscale area of Mira Flores an extra day.

Even though the roads were great, not many cyclists ride across Peru on this route. Our group was a spectacle for the local people who were not used to seeing a bicycle. Because of the small hotels our group size and crew is limited to about 16 people. If you like riding in the mountains, and you have a good sense of adventure, you would appreciate riding across Peru in the future.

