

Tuesday, September 3 – Rafting the Urubamba river and an afternoon of loafing around

Rafting today, about an hours' drive from K'yuchi Rumi. We are picked up at 8:30, so not an early day. Our river guide is Abel and his assistant and driver is Juan. We arrive at the put-in point and get the raft onto the bank and inflated. Well, Abel and Juan do the work of inflating it, while Ann and Ed struggle into their wet-suits.



Ann thinks, “there is no fool like an old fool” and she feels foolish river rafting at our age. But Ed loves it and once we get going, so does Ann. First Ed and Abel walk ahead along the bank to get a read on the first stretch of water, then we launch.



We were told that the section of the river we were rafting today is a class 4, but it certainly isn't today. Mostly class 2 rapids, but with a few nice drops and hydraulics to either avoid or run through. It has been a couple of years since we've gone rafting, so even this “mild” section was a lot of fun.



One long stretch of water MAY have been a 3+, and there was continuous heavy action for almost half an hour with no breaks. Just prior to this stretch, Abel pulled in briefly and had his assistant Juan and our driver Virgilio don wet suits and join us in the raft. I think he wanted some extra muscle on this stretch of water and didn't trust us two old farts to get the raft through without help.

Aside from being a few years older, we had forgotten just how much exertion was needed to run thru rapids while avoiding obstacles and various water-traps. Honestly, it would have been much more work without our two additional paddles, but we felt we could have made it fine without them. A few times we were able to get a 10-20 second breather by ducking into the eddy's behind huge rocks, but it was a lot of work to hold there too. Right after this stretch was run, Abel pulled out again and sent Juan and Virgilio back to the car. There were some great whitewater photo-ops here, but certainly no time to take a picture.

After a while back in the water, there was one spot we had to portage around. There was a big fallen tree lying diagonally, almost entirely across the river. We could have run at it diagonal to the bank, perpendicular to the trunk and managed to slip over, but it was acting as a partial dam and the water was running over it with about a 2 foot drop on the downstream side. The danger is that if you go out of the raft in a spot like that you are likely to get tangled in underwater branches, and if that happens you won't be coming up again. We agreed with Abel that it would be wise to play it safe here. Don't know why we took no pictures of this tree. It was an unusual water obstacle. We probably just forgot about pictures for a while in the rush of the water and exertion of the paddling.



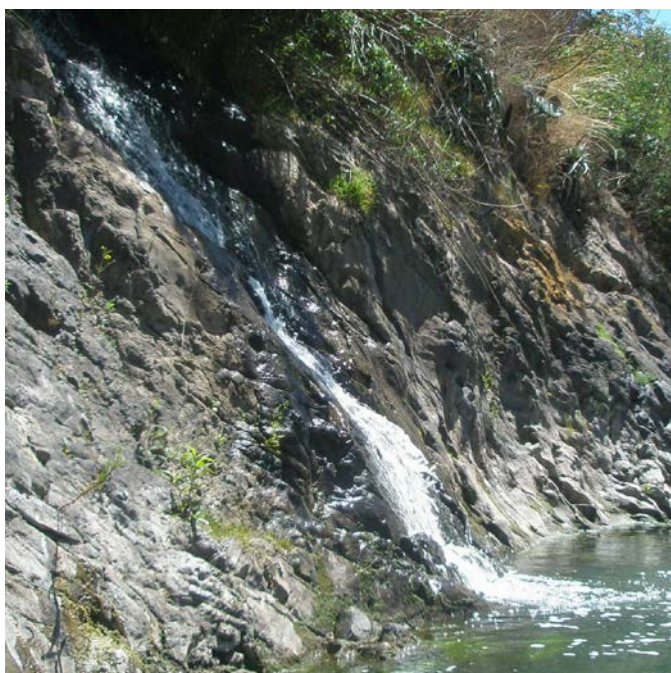
We pulled out and again, Ed and Abel went ahead along the bank for a "read" while Ann stayed behind in the raft. Then we pulled the raft along the rocks past the tree. This was very difficult since the rocks were large, and footing was bad. And man, these were big boulders, BIG and slippery! We worked harder doing this than we did running the rapids.

Portaging is Ann's least favorite thing as her balance is awful. But she had on a good pair of water shoes and with Abel's help (think hand-holding, pulling, pushing and encouraging), she made it through to the raft without a mishap. Brought back memories of a raft trip in Panama where they were damming the river and working on it as we rafted it! We had to watch ahead for construction machinery up on the bluffs along the river. They were pushing down huge trees, rocks and boulders.

Sometimes calling out (LOUDLY) to them worked, but sometimes not. If the work didn't stop we just had to hug the opposite bank and hope none of the trees and boulders coming down "bounced" across the river (and it wasn't very wide). At one point we had to scramble for about 1/4 of a mile. That was particularly awful because the rubble was a combination of boulders and felled trees IN the water with no bank to walk along, only steep cliffs on both sides. Boulders aren't likely to hurt you except in very fast water. Trees in the water are far more dangerous than the boulders, the boulders can bruise you and even break a bone or two (no big deal, eh), but the trees will "grab" you. Even in slow-moving water, getting caught underwater in fallen tree branches is a likely death sentence. O.K. enough digression, back to Peru . . .



The last couple miles of the trip were a float with nice scenery, an occasional riffle, springs and small waterfalls feeding the river. A relaxing ending to a fun run. And a happy rafter . . . ANN! We think by the time we pulled out at the end Abel had gained some trust in us as competent rafters, but the trip was over.



Ed is impressed with Abel. The raft trips we've been on over the years have had river guides with varying levels of knowledge and skill, ranging from brilliant to absolutely ignorant (one of whom almost got us killed in Costa Rica several years ago, a long and sordid story of river guide incompetence). Some of this may be pandering to "thrill-seeking" tourists, by being sure they all get soaked, fall into the water, etc. But the real skill is avoiding problems and running the river as efficiently as possible. The less skilled guides "fight the river". But the more knowledgeable guides know how to use the water, make it work for them instead of against them. Abel was one of those guides who knew enough not to fight the river, but "use" it in his favor. Even with a comparatively mild ride it's a good trip, and it IS fun to be running the water in a raft again.



We have a "rustic" picnic lunch along the road, but not very scenic as you will note; with the usual assortment of dogs sniffing around. We were hungry and didn't really care. The dogs are all well behaved and don't beg, they just come near, lie down and hope for some generosity. Abel had brought a nice lunch of grilled veggies and various cold things, including some very tasty big, BIG avocados. The avocados we have had in Peru so far are truly superior to what we get at home.

It becomes harder and harder for Ann to abstain from raw veggies and lettuce. Usually we go ahead and eat these, but they have mostly been cooked or peeled. We did eat some while in Puno and have had no bad effects, however, that was a 4 star hotel. In our casita, we are using a bactericidal food spray that we brought from home. You spray the fruit and let it sit overnight,

then eat without worries. Lettuce is just not recommended in ANY case. But we've come to realize that Doris was correct when she told Ann that people in the tourist industry take great care not to poison their customers.

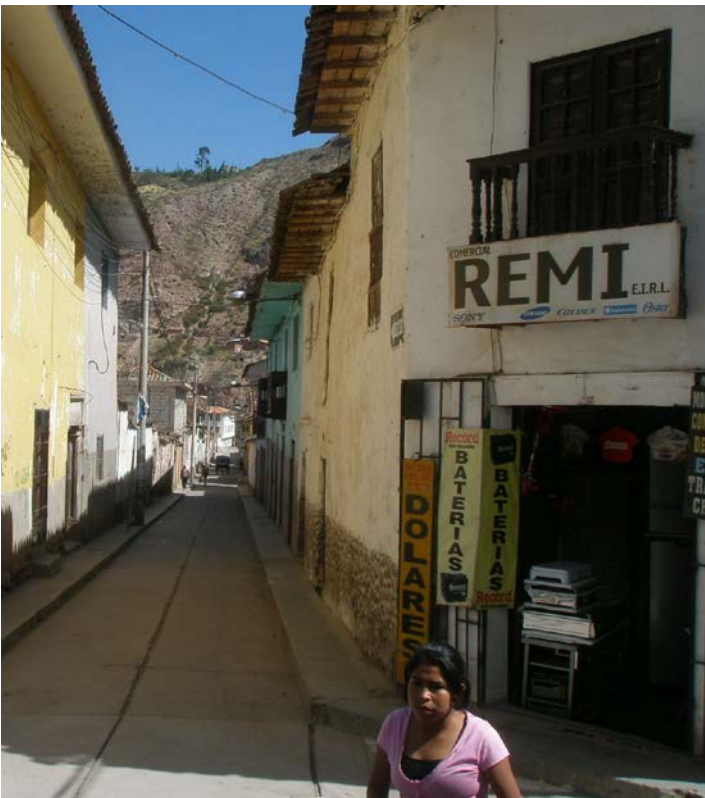
After lunch we meet with Vergilio for our drive back to K'yuchi Rumi. But first we make a stop at our favorite convenience store, and then go to the central market in Urubamba. Tasting those avocados at lunch time made us realize that we really "needed" some. Although Doris left us a monstrous amount of food at our casita, avocados were the one thing she hadn't left for us. Vergilio agreed to help us navigate the town and act as our translator at the market.

Vergilio is the driver that was with Doris when she first picked us up and has been driving us since. He will be our driver for the remainder of the trip, until we are down in the Amazon basin where we abandon automobile transportation, and Vergilio, in favor of boats. There will be no roads beyond a certain point in that part of our trip. As it turns out, during the last 7 days of our trip we only see a road and an automobile on our last day on our way home. Even then the first half of our trip to Puerto Maldonado for our flight to Lima is by boat.

Vergilio is a nice young man and his English is good, but he is shy and speaks only in response to a question. It is work to engage him in conversation, but he seems glad when we make him use his English. He is always helpful and responds to all of our requests, and is indispensable at the market this afternoon.



It is a bit of a drive through town to reach the market. It is a good-sized town and very clean, no trash on the streets at all. Urubamba is not crowded, and we find a spot to park near the market easily.





The market is wonderful. It's also very clean, and with almost anything you could imagine for sale. We are here to concentrate on the produce so we don't spend any time looking at other things.



Ann buys a bag of Limones. We get a few dozen, and they last for the next 2 weeks, until we're down in the Amazon basin.



It is an early-ending day and we are back at our casita by 3:00. We read and relax until dinner time (early). About 5-5:30 every day we have Julio, a K'yuchi Rumi employee, come and start a fire for us. It warms the place, and by dinner time the downstairs living area is cozy. We leave an opening to the upstairs bedroom open so some of the warmth drifts up there. We only have a kerosene heater (the Peruvian standard for warming tourists) up there which we turn on about the same time we have the fire started. By bedtime the bedroom is toasty.

Internet connection here in the Urubamba Valley is poor. They have no hard wire, it all comes through satellite, so right away, it is degraded. Then they try to route it via wireless to the casitas; there's always some problem. Ann can usually download email, but cannot upload anything, so posting her trip blog is stalled, as it has been since we arrived in Peru. This will continue until we are in Cusco, 5 days from now, where we hope we can get a "real" internet connection.

For dinner tonight we have jambalaya with chorizo along with some hard-boiled eggs and a wonderful Peruvian avocado. And fruit for dessert of course. Ahhh, those home-cooked meals. We read for an hour or so and go to bed, early tonight since Doris is meeting us at the lodge tomorrow at 6:00 am. Tomorrow we will spend a full day with her birding at very high altitudes. So it's up at 5:00 for breakfast.