



Prospecting for Christ in Curahuasi, Peru

December 2004

*"For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability."
2 Corinthians 8:3*

In December 2004, I was travelling through Peru on holidays and spent a week in the mountain town of Cusco. During this week I met Alejandro and Jenny de Silva, who run the only bible college in Cusco (Casa de Biblia), and was privileged to be able to stay with them for five days.



Alejandro & Jenny

Alejandro and Jenny have been tireless workers for the gospel in Peru for many years and have been closely affiliated with IntersVarsity Press and the Church Missionary Society. Many have benefited from their warm hospitality, from visiting missionaries to holiday makers. They have persevered through times of real poverty and intense persecution and still to this day are a blessing to anyone who has spent time with them.

During the week, they introduced me to Nandez Bouby, a civil engineer who spent many years working in the mining industry

in Peru. Nandez now works several days a week on campus at Cusco National University (Universidad Nacional del Cusco) as a Christian student worker, and he also has a vested interest in a small gold prospect 50km west of Cusco, above the small rural town of Curahuasi, which he manages with his spare time.

With a fascination for all things mining, I was keen to visit the prospect, so Alejandro, Nandez and I set out one morning before sunrise from Cusco in a rented ute. We stopped at a street stall not far out of Cusco to pick up some "chancho" or fried pork crackling for breakfast. I politely declined, and opted for the squashed banana in my bag.

Although the prospect was only 50km 'as the crow flies', it took us more than three hours to get to Curahuasi, crawling along unsealed mountain roads, with a reconditioned generator to take to site bumping around in the back.



The team & Nandez (back left) and me (front left)

On our way through Curahuasi, a sleepy agricultural town nestled a deep valley, we picked up eight men who work on the site. The men live in the village, but stay on site during the week away from their wives and family. The site itself is perched on top of a mountain overlooking the town, and it took us at least two hours to ascend the winding unsealed road up there, with eight men and a generator bumping around in the back.

On the way up, Nandez explains to me that he was granted the prospect by the government despite his lack of financial backing and influence within the Peruvian mining industry. He believes it was granted only through much prayer and he has a vision: to see a gold mine developed there, owned by the Christian community in Curahuasi to raise up money for gospel work in Peru. He says each of the eight men are committed Christians that have left full time work to dedicate to the prospect. One is a geologist, another a missionary, one a doctor and another a teacher, and several of the others have backgrounds as labourers and tradesmen.

Despite my broken Spanish and Nandez's stilted English barely connecting, I started to understand the wonderful irony developing: a Peru that was once torn apart by the Conquistadors in search of Incan gold, now aiming to use its gold to bring Peru to Christ.

We arrived at the top of the peak just before midday. We now stood at more than 4,500m above sea level, looking out at a vast backdrop of snow capped mountains. Next to us stood several flimsy looking wooden shacks, erected to shelter the equipment and the eight men.



The view from the top

Several hundred metres away stood the tailings and overflow ponds with a simple mechanized crusher. Quartzite is crushed then treated with mercury, with water provided from rainwater tanks. In the several months of prospecting, less than an ounce had been extracted, but they remained hopeful, and prayerful.



Prayer and devotion

The men cooked lunch, pray and did a short devotion before heading over the other side of the mountain to start prospecting. The geologist took Nandez, Alejandro and I over the back of the mountain to a series of small adits where Incans once worked the rich gold veins. Further on, we saw the remains



Checking out the ancient Incan adits

of several ancient dwellings, now just circles of stones, overgrown by dry Andean grass.



Checking out the ancient Incan miners' huts

With labouring breaths in the scarce high-altitude air, we then followed the intrepid geologist down a narrow adit, aided by a single paraffin lamp. He pointed out a well defined quartzite-calcite reef running down dip into the mountainside. We clambered over boulders down to where the adit got too narrow for us to go any further.



Underground workings

When we surfaced, one of the men was loading bags of samples to take back to the crusher and the testing lab. He lugged the bags back several hundred metres with the strength of an ox and the footing of a mountain goat. As we ran the samples through the manual crusher they were

explaining that the overflow pond is designed for unprecedented rainfall. Just as well, as the town lies directly below the prospect!



Putting the samples through the crusher

At Cusco National University, some geological models of the prospect are being constructed and metallurgical testwork is being carried out, and here Nandez is also very active in running student Christian ministry and Bible studies. The week I was there, the university council had just given the Christian group permission to run public meetings on campus. This was exciting news.



Trying to get the generator working

To this day they have only been able to prospect on a small scale, but they are now

looking to obtain some used drilling equipment perhaps as in-kind or capital investment in order to better define the resource. To date all of their activities have been personally funded and at great personal expense. In the future, they prayerfully seek to make the mine a profitable venture, not to make themselves money, but to make money for gospel work.



About to call it a day

Nandez, Alejandro and I left just before dusk with the sun setting behind the spectacular snow capped mountains, leaving the others behind for a hard long week of prospecting, away from the comfort of their town and families but wholeheartedly relying on the Lord for everything.

Later that week, we went to a local church in Cusco, and the sermon was on 2 Corinthians 8: the extravagantly generous Macedonian church, serving the Lord with all their time, all their energy and all their resources. Here I had seen this same conviction and determination alive in these men, to the glory of God.

*By Richard Fortune
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