



## Reaching the Andes

Report on the International Miner's Mission (IMM) Peru Visit, March 2008

*"Man puts an end to the darkness; he searches the farthest recesses for ore in the blackest darkness. Far from where people dwell he cuts a shaft, in places forgotten by the foot of man; far from men he dangles and sways."*

*Job 28:3-4*

In March I had the privilege of joining three very fine spiritual fathers on an inspiring trip through the Peruvian Andes.

Stuart Burns, a quietly spoken South African with a steely resolve to take the gospel to miners, and Tom Gilliam, a loud and big-hearted farmer from North Carolina first met me at the airport in Lima, though it took them a little while to spot me; they had their eyes out for someone 'bald and very tall', a description courtesy of Peter Robertson of the IMM in Australia. Thoroughly unimpressive at 5'10", despite the rumours that had spread across the Pacific, I stood there with a hat on my bald head waving to them for attention. Then they heard the 'Aussie' accent and the penny dropped.



(L to R) Tom Gilliam, Alan Turner, Richard Fortune and Stuart Burns in Lima.

Once acquainted, we were on our way: the three amigos. Until there were four: Alan Turner, a lanky Englishman with pulled-up socks joined us once we landed in Arequipa, the largest city in Southern Peru. Alan had spent almost 40 years as a missionary in Peru, and he was our critical link in establishing contacts, arranging travel and providing seamless translation between Aussie-American-English-Spanish. His level-headedness and local knowledge made the next fortnight possible, as we traveled up and down, through and across the formidable Andes mountains in cars, taxis, planes, tricycles and whatever else would carry four 'gringos'.

The aim of the trip was to meet all the IMM supported missionaries in Peru. The IMM committee in the USA, of which Tom and Stuart are the founding members, support local mission workers in South America who have a vision for reaching miners in their region with the gospel. Once a year, some of the committee travel to Peru to meet the workers they support, and to make new contacts where possible. This year, I got an invitation and gladly joined them, hoping that Out of the Pit might be able to support IMM's work in some small way.



Started by a wealthy industrialist who had a saving encounter with Christ in his twilight years, IMM has now been reaching miners in developing countries for over 100 years. They continue looking for ways to grow awareness and support for the ministry. Out of the Pit is steadily growing an online global network of Christians in the mining industry, and we are trying to put mission to the industry on the agenda. The connection between the two ministries was made two years ago in Perth, and we have been building a relationship with the IMM since. This trip was a chance to gain an appreciation of how the IMM operate, and to understand how we can support them better.



The mountain plateau north of Arequipa, on the way to Caylloma

Over the next fortnight we travelled over 3000km along bumpy and winding mountain roads, in an effort to meet current missionaries and as many potential mission partners as possible. The buses were surprisingly very good: quite comfortable, timely and safe. Peruvian drivers never cease to amaze me with their skill at negotiating treacherous mountain roads at high speed, though there were certainly more than a few occasions where I was getting ready to meet Jesus in person. The car trips were something special, often with six crammed in a car. Alan and I, the boney ones, took turns at

being sandwiched between our United States companions, who kindly provided lateral cushioning support from the rough roads.

The first leg of the trip had us in Arequipa, a city in the south of Peru, surrounded by numerous copper, gold and silver mines. We used this time to meet with all of the IMM missionaries that work in and around the region. Many of them have a clear calling to work with miners in more isolated communities and will travel away from their families to do this. Rene Churata is just one example. We travelled along a very rough road with Rene to Caylloma, a town where he had been ministering



Congregation in the mining town of Caylloma



to miners and their families through the local church. We had an opportunity to talk at the local church, and meet the small congregation of about 20 to 30 indigenous locals. It was quite an experience to see the simple and quite rugged conditions he lived in as he sought to serve them; he chose this over the comfort of his own home and family back in Arequipa. It reminded me so much of Jesus and how he left the comfort of heaven, and His Father's side, to come and live in the proverbial pig-slop with us, to minister to us and rescue us.



The IMM mission team in Arequipa



Alan preaching in Spanish at the church in Caylloma, with Rene translating into Quechua

The next leg of the trip was to Huánuco, a city nestled in the mountains, 250km north-east of Lima, the capital. It was a day trip from Lima by bus through mountainous landslide territory, although our driver was trying to make it half-a-day by setting the world land speed record on the downward stretch. By the amazing grace of God we arrived there alive and intact, though I spent the night recovering from motion sickness!



Processing plant for a small mining operation near Huánuco.

Visiting Huánuco gave us an opportunity to meet IMM sponsored missionaries in this area, and to interview new candidates. IMM's model is to support missionaries who already have a vision for mining ministry, by providing about half of their monetary support through a local church. In addition to this, IMM mails out a regular prayer letter to an extensive intercessory prayer network which upholds each of the missionaries. Several students at the Bible College in Huánuco are also supported by the IMM and it is envisaged that they will be ministering to miners in the Cerro de Pasco region on graduation.

There are numerous mines dotted along the mountainous road to Lima, but Cerro de Pasco is by far the most significant mining area. It is the highest city of its size in the world at 4,338m and host to a very large copper mine in the centre of town. Like so many of the mines in Peru, people choose to live very close to the mine, even building their houses next to waste stockpiles despite the health risks.



Large open-cut copper mine in the town of Cerro de Pasco

We stopped by for a fleeting visit, before being whisked down the mountain to Lima by Peru's next Formula 1 hopeful... in an overcrowded Daewoo.



View of the Cordillera Blanca mountain range from the main street in Huaraz

The final destination on our trip was the beautiful mountain town of Huaraz. North of Lima, it is touted as the 'Swiss Alps of Peru'. Here we hoped to make some new contacts and meet people from the two large mines in the area.

Though we didn't meet any miners, we were blessed to be able to meet dedicated Wycliffe Bible Translators, Ade and Rachel Yanac. They have been working on a Quechua Bible for the locals in the area and they in turn gave us some very useful mining contacts.

Huaraz is a new area for the IMM and they pray that it will become another hub of IMM mission activity in years to come.

It is hard to share the whole experience in this short account, describing all the amazing people we met and all the sites we visited, let alone to capture the atmosphere, the culture, the food, the music, the sounds and smells. You would have to be there in person. Instead, I thought I would share four truths that have really stayed with me.



**We don't need to have our life sorted out to work for God.**

*"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me"*  
2 Corinthians 12:9

Tom, Alan and Stuart all shared their real life stories with me: of lost loved ones, disillusionment, depression, sickness and financial pressure. We often hear of and admire the 'victorious' Christian, but to me it is the raw God-honouring honesty of these guys that inspires me the most.

**Work for God needs to start with overflowing love from our heart.**

*"We love because he first loved us" 1 John 4:19*

All the IMM team exuded a generosity that went beyond just money, but I still have an image burned in my mind of Tom walking down the street like a mobile cash machine, bellowing out a big Southern laugh as he emptied his pockets for the beggars. Tom knows God's love and blessing is too much for him to keep to himself.

**Following Him involves sacrifice.**

*"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" Mark 8:34*

I was subjected to an environment out of my comfort zone, and it took remarkably little time for me to become tired and grumpy. All the missionaries, and especially Alan inspired me. Alan has spent half his life in this country, where things can be incredibly frustrating at times. He showed me what it meant to be patient, cheerful and to trust in God.

**Life is short, pray hard.**

*"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" Matthew 25:13*

On the way back to Lima from Huánuco, our car driver darted through a bus and oncoming truck at 120km/hr. It would have been an ironic way to go: being taken out by a chicken truck after having spent the last two weeks eating nothing but chicken. It made me realise how delicate our lives are, and how each breath we take is a new mercy of God. The time is short and we need to make the most of it.

In conclusion, can I commend the International Miner's Mission to you. Please be praying for it and looking to support it anyway the Lord leads you. This is one great opportunity to reach out across the four corners of the world in our own industry; if anyone will have a heart for reaching miners it will be those of us in the mining industry.

For more information and to register for the 'Safety Lamp' newsletter, go to [www.minersmission.com](http://www.minersmission.com)

Richard Fortune, May 2008