

The PackRat

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION

JULY/AUGUST 2007



Awesome view of the Pacific Ocean along a trail in Ucluelet, BC.

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The Packrat is published six times a year by the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association. We welcome comments, articles, and ideas from our members and, if content is deemed suitable, will be used as space permits.

E-mail submissions to the newsletter editor at packrat@ramblers.ab.ca or forward contributions to RMRA, c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council, 1111 Memorial Drive NW, Calgary, AB T2N 3E4.

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Part 2

**Springtime in
Guatemala**

I am beginning to take short walks by myself in the daytime. The cobblestone walking areas discourage much walking. Not one of my 'watch dogs' knows that I do this. Cars/tuk tuks/buses/trucks/

traffic consisted of horses, donkeys, carts, etc. Try to picture a long old school bus followed by a long old truck trying to turn onto a one-way narrow road that has similar vehicles coming the other way! It is the beginning of a comical experience of my day, as I watch and listen to all the extended horn screeching, and try not to breathe. Picture also, narrow sidewalks which allow only



PHOTO CREDIT: TRAVIS JACOBS

The bus drivers in Guatemala are very proud of their buses. Each one is custom painted and decorated in bright colors with shiny chrome.

bicicletas/moto-cicletas/have the right of way so every time I mince my way across the narrow cobblestone roads, I say a short prayer that my life will not end. Every am as I walk to school I have to turn a corner, a corner where school buses, trucks, tuk tuks and etc. have to turn. The cobblestone roads date back to Spanish times when the

single file walking, with the sidewalks being about one foot above the cobblestone roads. I always try to be on the inside of the narrow sidewalk and flatten myself against the wall that is the front side of the row housing/stores, when some-one needs to pass. That way I can't be pushed off.

About food...

My supper tonight will be panqueques with miel, and fruta and café con leche. I don't eat much here, and have not had to eat anything except what I order. Frijoles and tortillas don't turn on my appetite and neither do unsanitary food preparation places. Breakfast is my special high protein, dense nutrition smoothie, that has all the nutrients for the whole day, except fruit and fiber. Lunch is juice and some high fiber carbohydrate thing and a banana, eaten at the school while I do my homework. Supper is as now, panqueques (pancakes) and fruit and some form of eggs. There is lots of orange juice here and I found some unsweetened granola at the gimnasio. All this topped up by an iron pill makes for a not too bad diet. I also take Alberta made Fx pills just in case I need a bit of extra immunity. So far the only wild life that I have seen in my room is 2 animal sized cockroaches. Really their size was impressive, a good two inches plus tentacles.

I don't like the butter here so my diet is fat free.

I use skim milk powder(1 cup dry = 3 big glasses of milk), agua pura for the liquid in the smoothie plus protein powder. Liquid milk is usually not pasteurized.

I have not been sleeping very well since my English classes started. Busy mind? And lack of exercise. Today, I went for

Pilates and then worked out on the machines. As I was leaving a gringo lady spoke to me in English. She is a judge (juicio) from Texas and is here alone. She has been going out at night alone and last week-end traveled on a public bus alone. Maybe I am being coddled here with the restrictions put on me, but maybe not either. Because I am here longer than the usual visitor, and I read the local paper and have so many people that talk about their country and its state, to me, I think that

4 hours long, 5 days a week, we do a lot of talking so that I practice speaking Spanish and understanding when she speaks to me. The cost for the classes is \$140 per week.

My accommodation is \$25 a night, Air Canada points got me here free. Volunteering to teach English gets me no benefits, just the satisfaction of helping some people better their lives. English is the widest spoken language in the world and Spanish the second. Arabic tongues, the third. No, French is not at the



PHOTO CREDIT: TRAVIS JACOBS

The dormant Volcán de Agua in the background. This one is always visible and is a great landmark for getting around town.

I am more in touch than most Gringos. By the way Canadians aren't really Gringos. It is a name for Americans. I don't think that gringo has a mayuscula(capital). I'll ask Rosalinda(teacher) on Monday. She is my source for most information. Since my classes are

top of the list. It pleases me no end that Spanish is being taught as an option in some Calgary schools now.

The weather is getting hotter and hotter. It is now in the 30ies. Panama is in the high 30ies and I read that Phoenix is in the mid 30ies. They' say that Guatemala,

El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua, are all in the same situation of poverty, drug dealing, uncontrolled violence, etc. The locals say that Guatemala is in the worst state. It was the last country to have its war ended ten years ago. The Guatemaltecos that I meet love their country and are dismayed about all the killings that occur and the corruption at all levels of government. My teacher said that the attitude here is that if you don't like a situation, the

Tourism is falling off as a tourist destination, much to the disappointment of local storekeepers. The military presence is everywhere, but one cannot be sure if they are 'for real' or criminals dressed in police uniforms. The most recent murderers have not been caught yet. Four men wearing police uniforms walked into the local jail and shot an equal number of incarcerated types, those types being competing drug dealers.

Before coming to Guatemala I

has Belize to the NE, Mexico NW. To the south east there are the Honduras, and then (sort of) El Salvador to the south, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Columbia in a (sort of) row. Drugs pass from Columbia up into Guatemala, through Mexico, and into the USA.

A very positive sight here is that of the many children in their sharp and very clean looking uniforms. Each school has its own uniform so that children can be identified if they

disappear. The girls have short, usually plaid skirts, dark blue vests over sparkling white blouses, and white knee socks and black shoes that are highly polished. The boys usually have light colored pants, navy blazers, and white shirts and ties. I still can't get an answer to where the money comes from to buy these uniforms. Some people have said that the schools supply them. And the really poor kids don't come to school. Grades 1-6 are free and compulsory but if the families are too poor the children have to stay home to work the fields or to sell stuff on the streets. The

pull towards becoming an illegal immigrant to the USA is strong. I have heard that parents will escape into the US, children in tow, and then when they are caught in the US they will deny having children with



PHOTO CREDIT: TRAVIS JACOBS

Here on the weekend are some of the Mayan women selling their textiles. The quality of the textiles in Guatemala is excellent. If you'll look at the clothing they wear' you'll see how intricate the stitching and design is. Many take up to six months to prepare.. The design in the skirt often indicates which village they are from. There is a whole vocabulary just for the clothing items. But they make many things we use in the north, such as blankets and various things for the home.

people, the pets etc. you just shoot them (it.) Being a political candidate can be a very dangerous adventure. The above can apply. There is an election in the Fall.

had only a vague idea of where all the small Central American countries were. I wonder how many Canadians are in the same boat. Guatemala is the largest geographically. To the north, it

Activities

Hiking, Backpacking, Skiing,
Cycling,
Climbing,
Scrambling,
Mountaineering, Education
& Awareness
Programs, Social
Functions

Meetings

Every Wednesday
evening at 7:30 p.m.

Mail

Rocky Mountain Ramblers
Association
c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council
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1111 Memorial Dr NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

Trip Info

282-6308 Information Line,
Website, and at Meetings.

Website

The Packrat is available on the
RMRA website at
www.ramblers.ab.ca.
If we have your email address,
you will be automatically notified
that an electronic copy of the
Packrat is on the website.

them. The children can then be left behind to be raised at the expense of the US government etc. Apparently children can now be adopted to other countries from Guatemala. There are also advts in newspapers, on large roadside signs, offering pregnancies to produce children for specific parents for money.

Recently a 'Chamber of Commerce for Canada' opened here. Canada exports wheat, machinery, telephone equipment, processed food products, petroleum derivatives, paper and even the licence plates (made in Nova Scotia). On the other hand Guatemala exports the following to Canada: coffee, sugar, clothing, vegetables and fruit. The exports from Guatemala amounted to \$170 million last year. Guatemala is beginning to make ethanol (ethanol) from the sugar cane grown here and has begun to export that to Europe. During the next 8-10 years, it is projected that Canada will invest up to a billion dollars in Guatemala for the mining of nickel, gold, hydroelectric and environmental projects and smelters. The locals, especially those of the Maya population (60%) feel that they don't benefit from any money given to the (democratic?) government.

They feel also that Canada is destroying their land and the environment in general. There have been riots against 'Canada' in some Maya villages. Canadian companies are not always innocent of the charges.

There is very little news here except what comes from SA. An exception was that 'Camila la esposa de Principe Carlos (Eng-

land) had a hysterectomy' y 'Enrique el nieto de Reina Elisabeth tiene permiso ir a Irak.

Maybe because the weather is getting so hot and humid, many flowers have stopped blooming. The *Bird of Paradise* is the main one still here and also the huge lilies. We have small earthquakes daily. Once there were nine and big enough to shake the glasses on a table. We were told that in northern Guatemala (Tikal) the temples still stand because that is not an earthquake area and the Maya knew that. There is a strong Aztec influence in the Tikal area, and the locals say that they were responsible for all the human sacrifices and not the Maya. Something else that shakes the house is the setting off of homemade bombs. These are not firecrackers, but rather bombs that are tossed or set to travel along the ground. They are used when the locals want to celebrate some event, such as a birthday, anniversary, or etc. It is really scary. Last night I thought that they were being set off in my backyard because the sky kept lightening up, but it was a few houses away.

Did I ever mention about the lack of lighting here? Electricity is very expensive so very few places have lights. There are very few electric outlets. I get the only major one at the school, and it is in a little cafeteria that they have at the school. I am getting used to walking into the school office, for example, and peering into the dark interior and sure enough the four staff is there. The tiny stores are all the same in that one (se) can't see what is there without going in

and getting close to items. Natural lighting helps of course, and usually the doors are open to let in light. My teaching classroom is very dark, but a small window with glazed glass lets in a bit of light. As with all other places where I have taken classes, all Spanish classes are held outside. My little table and chair are about two steps from the pool so after class is finished I go into the water and exercise. The water comes up to the top of my legs but I bend my knees. The pool has no heat but it is not bad. I wear my bikini under my clothes. Lately there has been a class of 30 American high school kids, and another of 26 Norwegian kids, at the school and so the pool was really one big splash. Most of the teachers are older, and there are always some older students, retired folks keeping their minds active. I just get to really enjoy the olders, of late, a nice couple from Holland, lots from places in Europe, but then they leave.

If any of you know of any Latino who would like to talk to me in Spanish in exchange for help in English, please let me know. All the great Spanish that I have learned will vanish when I get home if I don't use it. Thanks for any help. Also, my students would like to see pictures of Calgarians, especially of

my daughter and friends and exercisers.

Now here is an example of what I am doing with Rosalinda (teacher). It is for those of you who understand/speak Spanish, or others who want a challenge. She reads to me (the whole story at once) and then I have to tell

how to say my name and have given up. There is no 'aw' sound in Spanish. I often look up when someone says 'ahora' because it sounds so similar to 'Aurora.' I am getting to adore my students. They are a teacher's dream. They come on time, do their homework, listen in class, ask



PHOTO CREDIT: TRAVIS JACOBS

This is Semuc Champey a popular tourist area in the middle of the country, about six hours from Antigua. I say "popular" but it is very much "off the beaten trail" and a thrilling nature sight to see..

her the story in English, and then tell it to her in Spanish, and then for tarea (homework) write the story from memory, in Spanish. What a challenge to my concentration and memory! I often marvel at how I can even attempt to do these things when I remember that Avril and I couldn't even remember a whole single sentence when we read to each other. Rosalinda keeps saying 'paciencia' y 'despacio, despacio! Aurora.' By the way, I have tried to teach my students

good questions, and are still light hearted with lots of teasing of each other (and me.) Sometimes things get a bit raucous because we say English words and phrases out loud together so that they can pronounce things correctly, and they get louder and louder, just like a bunch of young kids. And then they laugh! So far no one has told us to 'keep it down.' There are four men and 11 women in the class, age 40-50. The four men wanted

to not have to come to class because they felt they did not need the info. I interviewed each of them alone and heard a lot of sorrowful stories about their home lives, but anyway they decided that they needed to come to class after we talked in English. One man had 4 children and 3 of them have 'ataxia' (MS) and they have to go to special school and his wife can't work because she has to accompany them and look after them. It seems like the teachers make \$300 a month. The cost of living is very low however and a special boon is that the costs of everything that is purchased during a year can be deducted from income tax. Receipts have to be sent in at income tax time. I was curious why people were asking me for my receipts. An average salary is \$125 monthly US.

Anyway...here is part of the latest story that involved Rosalinda reading, my giving it back in English and then in Spanish and then writing it out in Spanish, by memory.

Habia una vez un rey que vivia en un palacio grande que tenia un buen jardin con muchas flores y pajaros. Un dia cuando el rey miraba de su ventana, vio un pajaro, con una herida. Los pajaros eran sus favoritas. El lo llevo a su palacio para ayudarlo.

Despues de algunos dias el pajaro estaba mejor. Entonces el rey construyo una jaula (cage) para el pajaro. Ahora el necesitaba un hombre para cuidarlo. El tenia buena suerte. El hallo un hombre competente se llamaba Ernesto. Tenia una amorada que se llamaba Lucia.

Ellos siempre buscaban una oportunidad para visitarse. Una dia cuando Ernesto veia a Lucia a cerca de la jaula con el pajaro, Ernesto no tenia atencion y e pajaro escapo y volo, volo, volo, y volo. Que lastima!!Ahora quezas Ernesto no tenia trabajo. Era necesario hablar con un rey. El rey le dijo que si Ernesto podia contestar tres preguntas el rey le daria, a Ernesto su empleo otra vez. Etc.....

The three questions were: How many stones are in the structure of the palacio; What is the distance from the ground to the sky; and How many stars are in the sky. Ernesto ran away then, because it started to rain and he met an old man under an old tree and that old man helped Ernesto figure out some answers. Ernesto answered the questions to the king's satisfaction and then...Entonces el rey estaba muy contento. El pensaba que Ernesto era muy inteligente y el le dio trabajo otra vez. El rey di permiso para Ernesto y Lucia se cansaron y vivian con felicidad toda su vida. Everyone can guess at Spanish words. There is such similarity.

This story was an exercise in using the Imperfect tense. I have decided that one must use the Imperfect almost always and should keep the Preterito for the exceptions. What do you think? Rosalinda also said the there should be an 'o' on the end of preterito, and not an e. Some books seem to have an e. A gringo stopped me at school the other day and thought I was part of the 'faculty.' He was angry and unloaded on me because he said...'why is it that

every latin country has different rules for spelling and pronunciation. Guatemala is terrible in this way?' I tried to explain to him that Guatemala has the best reputation in the world for teaching good Spanish (sort of like the UK with English). By the way, I am told that one must be immersed in Spanish for a year to become proficient in it.

Adios, cuidese. Dawn (Aurora) Jones.

“Success is the good fortune that comes from aspiration, desperation, perspiration and inspiration!”

– EVAN ESAR

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The Club offers advertising space in **PackRat** and the following rates apply:

Quarter Page	\$10
Half Page	\$20
Full Page	\$40

Payment **MUST** be received prior to publication.

IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR 2007!

SAGUENAY FJORD - August 25 to Sept 2, 2007

4 spots left

Discover the beauty in your own backyard with our 1-week hiking holiday to La Belle Province. Voted one of the 10 best national parks for wildlife by Explore Magazine, the Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean region offers superb hiking trails along the fjord, whale-watching, and a feast of French Canadian culture.

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**Deadline
for next PackRat
August 31, 2007**

