



Scottish Charity No. : SCO34336

Newsletter
June 2016

MEET THE COMMITTEE

Christine Anderson

How did you get to know about BEG? - During 5th year at Hawick High School some of my friends took part in the expedition to Romania and there were posters up in the school advertising the Peru 2003 expedition.

What and when was your first involvement? - I applied to join the Peru team as a venturer in 2002 and my first experience of BEG was the selection day for that expedition. I joined a field full of other applicants, in the early morning sun, where we were addressed by a man in a hat, standing on a chair (Chief Leader Allan McGee). That day we climbed trees roped together, pulled water, in leaking buckets, up a muddy slope from the river and rescued people with suspected injuries from certain peril. We were heroes. It was like nothing I'd ever done before and it was great!

What expeditions have you been involved in? - I was fortunate to be selected for the Peru team and travelled on the 5 week expedition in 2003 helping to build a medical centre in Pometales near Cuzco. I was then involved again in 2011-12 as co-chief leader for the Cuba expedition where we worked in the ecological community of 'La Platica' in the Sierra Maestra planting trees, reinstating paths and making additions to their community hut. Most recently I was part of the training team for Austria 2015.

In the tradition of BEG "highs", what has yours been? - Each expedition experience has had unique highs: spotting the Southern Cross in the night sky while washing dishes at camp in Pometales, arriving in Havana to begin the Cuba expedition and listening to team Austria give their post expedition presentation, but the lasting high is that through BEG I now know so many generous, fun-filled and adventurous people, with whom I've shared these experiences.

BRAZIL 2017

... is now underway! The Leader team has had meetings and a very enjoyable weekend away together near Kincaig. The Venturer team is now formed and the first "getting to know each other" and information evenings have taken place. Some have already started fundraising! All look forward to being together for the "Selkirk Common Riding clear up day" and initial training. Exciting times ahead!



PERU 2003 update

[The Health Centre in Pometales](#) – Sara Maclennon's blog

The train to Machu Picchu trundles past through the narrow valley, slow enough for the tourists to take their photos, but close and loud enough to halt the Sunday morning meeting in Pometales. The Mayor from Huaracundo is here. The themes: disruption from roadworks for the widened, asphalted carretera, irrigation problems, and health. Only 50 people live in Pometales, but over 500 are in the immediate area, in isolated communities at the end of mountain tracks which no cars can access. A health centre in Huaracundo is only 12km away, a hospital no more than 30km. But these services are inaccessible without cars, cycles, combis, let alone the money to pay for public transport if any existed. Huaracundo does have a part time staff member and medical vehicle, but this one vehicle is often out of service and serving 15,000 people in an area the size of 7 London districts combined. There is no phone signal in the valley, to contact in an emergency. 'Minor' health problems become life threatening with no means of accessing health care.

I've been in Pometales before. 12 years ago, I was part of a group of enthusiastic 18 year olds from the Scottish Borders Exploration Group, on a mission we thought would solve things: build a health centre in the village. Bring on the adobe bricks, large wheelbarrows, a community coming together to exchange Scottish with Peruvian dances, and a shiny new building. Success! We

continued with our lives, to University or college or jobs, fresh with our experience of learning and sharing cultures.

Those in the village also continued with their lives. The health centre stood proud - a symbol of what could be achieved with many hands, a plan and some money. A symbol standing ready, painted, but empty. We heard a year later that Victor, the community president, was still seeking a medical worker.

Returning 12 years later, we cycle in on Sat evening (by chance avoiding the hours between 7am-5pm where the road is impassible for the roadworks). A man from the village takes us up the path to the health centre and I'm struck by how well the building has been maintained. Victor, our host from 12 years ago, trudges along the road - dusty and tired from his day working on the caretera - then surprised as he is told he has a visitor from Scotland. Even though he can't possibly remember any particular of our fresh faces from 12 years ago, he greets us warmly.

He tells me sadly that he is still seeking a health worker. Pometales is only 8km from the Sacred Valley carretera, overrunning with tourist wealth, but is far away from Ministry of Health decision-makers in Lima, or even Cusco. The region lacks the finance to pay even for a part time worker. We calculate that the monthly cost of a part time nurse would be no more than a one-way ticket on the luxury train trundling past (a mere \$356 one way on the Belmond Hiram Bingham Service to Machu Picchu).

I felt more than a twinge of sadness as I remembered the optimism with which we were greeted back in 2003: petals in our hair as we arrived, cheers as the blue health centre plaque was unveiled. We say our goodnights, Ralph and I roll out our sleepmats on the health centre floor and Victor mentions he will return in the morning, when we can talk again.

At 7.30am, we're surprised to see a smiling group of Pometales ladies and gentlemen. Julia sprinkles petals over our heads and presents a bunch of wild flowers to us both. Speeches are made: how pleased they are to see Sarita and her compañero Rapha, how grateful the community still are for this building: the project for better health which has been started and which they all hope *will* yet be completed. Nothing has changed in the optimism from 12 years ago.

But things are improving. In 2012, [Ayni Wasi](#) was founded, a US NGO promoting health in the underserved areas of the Sacred Valley. Local 'promotores' (community health workers) are trained and educate their community using posters, demonstrations and home visits: including how to prevent diarrhoea, wound care, reducing malnutrition. A first aid kit plus instructions on hand washing are supplemented by accepted traditional herbal remedies: creams to help sore feet, an antiseptic herbal lotion for cuts and pains. 'Fiches' document babies' vaccinations, health problems, or education provided. In Pometales, Julia does a round of house visits once a week, voluntarily (in return for a package of non-perishable food), in order to try to improve health in her community. Julia was trained by a 'docente', a promotora educated to train other promotoras, and with enough experience, Julia may go on to be a docente who trains others.

Ayni Wasi is working with 18 promotores in 13 Andean communities, monitoring the number of visits, treatments administered and the incidences of diarrhoea, pneumonia, malnutrition, and vaccines: indicators recognized by the WHO, Peruvian Ministry of Health, as well as the communities as areas of need. But it is difficult. Currently, health promotores are elected by their community. With work in fields and a family to feed and care for, some don't have time to fulfil

their duties, but do not want to decline the nomination by their community. A few of the ladies have no more than a few years' schooling: it can be challenging even counting respirations or comprehending entries in a recording sheet. Community members initially may be sceptical if their fellow community member is sufficiently qualified to provide health care, an acceptance which is needed for the programme to be sustainable.

Ayni Wasi has gladly taken on these challenges and works closely with the promotores, continually adapting teaching methods and materials to empower them to educate their community. On a recent proficiency test, the 15 promotores scored an average of 90% - an already successful result which Ayni Wasi is still working to improve. Over time, Ayni Wasi has heard from promotores that the community trust, if initially lacking, soon increases once the members understand how the promotores can help and the useful information which they convey.

In the Sunday morning community meeting in Pometales, it was already clear to see the community trust in their promotora, Julia, and her immense pride to be part of the programme. However, Ayni Wasi is a program to *complement* existing health services. The promotores spread health awareness and check on the health of their community members. Where more advanced care is required, they encourage or escort residents to attend the nearest medical clinic. Community members in Pometales, despite their enthusiasm for Julia's work, feel that a trained medical staff member is necessary for the area, closer than Huaracundo.

The new asphalt on the carretera is creating change in Pometales: disruptions to irrigation, machines inhabiting what used to be the school green, half of Victor's house flattened to make room for the expansion. Ironically, the health centre is playing its role: the kitchen is currently used by the road workers, to make large-scale lunches until the road is complete. However, this may pay back - perhaps more traffic moving past may in turn provide more mobility to the hospital, helping those closer to the road. Or it may make a more convincing case to have a part time staff member, with an easier access road to work. Perhaps tourism and income opportunities will be created along a flatter road route straight from Cusco to Machu Picchu.

Before we cycle off, flowers attached to our handlebar bags, Victor and his wife Sabrina mention again how grateful they are for the 'obras of the Scottish Groupo', that their door is always open to welcome any of us in. Victor smiles. The next 12 years is likely to bring more change than the last. I only hope their optimism can be followed through this time.

I've set up a fundraising page with Global Giving (since the charity operate through them for online donations) if anyone would like to donate:

<https://www.globalgiving.org/fundraisers/health-in-pometales/>

Pometales, Sunday 11th of October 2015

BEG MEMBERS EVENTS

North Etrick Ridge

The North Etrick Ridge is a walk with stunning views of the Borders Region to the east and also of the Grey mare's Tail and Loch Skeen.

It is not an easy walk to access as it needs cars at both ends. It is also not easy, at least for the first mile or two as it is all up hill, but the effort is really rewarded by the outstanding scenery it reveals to the walker.

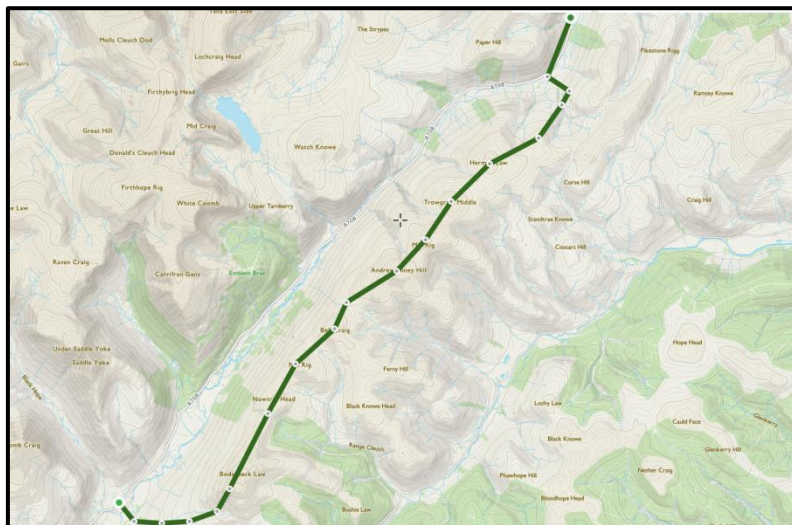
On the day of the walk, in October, the forecast was to be showers, sometimes heavy from the west. On the way there and throughout the previous night it had rained persistently and heavily and at least a couple of the potential walkers phoned to ask if it was going ahead. My answer was yes! The forecast for mid-morning onwards was good.

So we all met at Chapelhope, where there is a place to pull cars off the road and arranged people into the cars that were proceeding to Bodesbeck. By the time we reached there the rain had relented and we were cheered up by this but nonetheless donned all the wet weather gear as the clouds around were rather foreboding.

We set off with some enthusiasm and soon I had made a wrong turn around the farm buildings, so we had to backtrack a little and take the correct path. Some embarrassment for me I'm afraid. Next was a burn in spate to be forded. Most of us used the water gate for crossing the torrent. The funniest part of that was David carrying his dog over and trying to hold on to the wires at the same time. With a little juggling and help from others he made it without taking a dip. The walk upwards now started in earnest and underfoot conditions were very wet and muddy at points. The going was fine at the start as we had a farm track to follow but when we took to the hill proper the ground was bumpy and sodden with difficulty seeing foot placement due to the long grass and subsequently heather. The dog was funny to watch at this point as he is a dachshund and resembled a caterpillar as he curled his body up to ascend over the clumps of grass and heather. He is full of energy though and soon he and the accompanying crowd made it to the top of the first hill; Bodesbeck Law.

From then on the going is much easier. Jim McPherson will not let me off now, saying that it is flat on the top, as there are some gentle ups and downs on the ridge. Never the less it is at the point of cresting Bodesbeck Law that you can start to take in the extent of the views all the way across to the Eildons and beyond. We dandered along the path sometimes on the north side sometimes on the south, depending on the nature of the terrain at that point. As we progressed there were a couple of showers, but nothing significant and that allowed us to take shelter on the south side of the ridge to have a quick break and something to eat and drink. Eventually we reached Andrewhinney Hill where the view into Loch Skeen can

Route of the walk



be seen. At this point we were looking down on the top of the Grey mare's Tail and it was a spectacular sight.



The Grey mare's Tail with loch Skeen beyond. Clouds just resting on Lochcraig Head. White Coomb is to the left.

A couple of tops have then to be negotiated and although we had planned to go on around yet another, we took a short cut down off Herman Law and through Muchra Farm and on to the road. As we descended, after taking in the views of Loch of the Lowes and St. Mary's loch beyond, there was some rain at last and it was a very heavy downpour for a few minutes. This did not however spoil what had been an excellent ridge walk, enjoyed by all who attended.

(Ron Sutherland)

Banff Mountain Film Festival

Towards the end of January we met up in Edinburgh to attend The Banff Mountain Film Festival. The show started on a Saturday afternoon so we decided to meet up beforehand for a spot of pre-fun brunch. Spoon café on the Bridges was the chosen Howf where a generous Full English was devoured with glee by the 7 of us. It was a nice opportunity to socialize before the theatre as there wouldn't be much time to blather during the films. After Brunch we headed over the road to The Festival Theatre where we were treated to 3 hours worth of amazingly high quality films inspired by the great outdoors. The films included a crazy weekend scaling Mexico's highest peak before skiing back down it; a poignant story about Britain's first female Mountain Guide looking back on her life; and a group of kayakers training in preparation to canoe down Niagara falls! When the lights went up everyone had been very impressed with the diverse range of films and a quick chatter of favourites and highlights was exchanged before we went our separate ways. Fun Times! We shall be going to the Ocean festival in September, details to follow.

(Ross Purves)

Future events:

June - On the 21st (Midsummer's Day) we shall be meeting up and doing a circular walk from Abbotsford house. This walk is roughly 6 miles and should take a couple of hours to complete. We will be meeting at 7pm at Abbotsford house car park.

August – The 14th will be our annual day at the beach in Coldingham.

September – On the 14th we will be going to the Ocean Film Festival at Edinburgh’s Festival Theatre - <http://www.oceanfilmfestival.co.uk/films> . Tickets cost £15. If you would like to come along then please email Ross on pur100582@live.co.uk who is organising group tickets.

September continued – Following on from the great success of the 2014 Ben Nevis hike and 2015 walk up Scafell Pike (etc..!), on the weekend of 17th/18th September we are planning to go to The Arrochar Alps and walk The Cobbler – not a Munro but a good Corbett. The walk will start on the Saturday morning and take most of the day. You are invited to come and join us on the Saturday night also where we will be staying over in the area for a time of good cheer. We will be in touch nearer the time with accommodation advice. Alternatively, you are welcome to join us for the hike only; it is within driving distance from the Borders for a one-day trip.
<http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/lochlomond/the-cobbler.shtml>

Also, for information, from the 4th to the 10th September 2016 the Scottish Borders Walking Festival takes place, this year based at Coldstream: <http://www.borderswalking.com/walks/>

December - Our Christmas night out will be on the (2nd or 9th) of December this year. Venue to be confirmed nearer the time.

You will receive invitations by email to each event as and when it approaches – but, mark them in your diaries! Please feel free to invite any friends who are unaffiliated with BEG to come along. We do, however, encourage anyone who has attended 3 or more events to become a Member of BEG. Check e-mails and the BEG website www.borders-exploration-group.org.uk for more details.