

SIPAPU SERVICE TRIP REPORT

Trip Dates: June 5-12, 2010

Attendees: Paula Givan, THOTH Peru, Jennifer Schofield, SIPAPU Committee Member, Bonnie Glass-Coffin, SIPAPU Committee Member

Chronology of Trip

Sat. June 5th, arrival at Puerto Maldonado airport. Met by Paula. In afternoon, orientation with Paula about her role/activities with THOTH Peru representative over last 18 months. Shadowed Paula as she visited radio station to radio upriver to caretaker at RLP...gained good understanding of the intricacies and time she must spend coordinating movement up and down river to get his provisions. Visit to local market to get provisions. Evening rest at CasaQuinta hotel.

Sun. June 6th, morning departure via Puerto Maldonado with Víctor Bolívar on rented peque-peque. Good discussions with Paula on the way about the challenges of managing BOTH La Torre and RLP...and more about the intricacies of her role. Paula discussed one anecdote with us about illegal logging operation that was threatening a corner of the RLP land that she had to deal with on an emergency basis while trying to keep things running at La Torre. Hers is MORE than 3 full time jobs...don't know how she has been able to do it all. Afternoon arrival at Inotawa eco-lodge, 20 minutes down river from THOTH land. Brief ceremony on the trail heading up to the lodge and deep connection felt with the trees who stand watch over this area of the rainforest. Dinner and evening rest.

Mon. June 7th, morning visit to land. Brief ceremony on the land. Use of florida water and other waters not recommended...tends to attract wasps and other stinging creatures. Smoking tobacco is much more in keeping with local tradition and with eco-system needs. Structure welcomed us in absence of caretaker. Structure is full of wasps, termites, probably has venomous snakes per Víctor. It needs a new roof, yet otherwise quite solid looking. Tearing it down will be difficult because of the animal life that has taken up residence there. Also, concern is that when it is torn down, the still usable lumber may "disappear" as neighbors help themselves to the wood. Finally, the structure gives a good presence on the land and indicates that it is in

use, which is helpful since there is not a caretaker in residence at the moment. Walked the land with Paula, Victor and Jennifer to identify trees, to familiarize ourselves with trail system, and to learn about the incredible diversity of medicinal and food plants on the property. Victor was a wealth of information about natural plant remedies, including plant that is used as an antidote for pit viper venom. Drank water from paca plant. The forest provides all that is needed for survival...we just need to learn of its bounty from those who live and work here. Late afternoon return to Inotawa Eco-lodge.

Tues. June 8th, breakfast with Ramon deLucci, proprietor of Inotawa lodge. Good overview about the politics and "players" who are living and working in this section of the rainforest. Good discussion also about development that is happening on the Tres Chimbadas lake, discussion of who the neighbors are and what their attitudes are about rainforest conservation, about Ramon's role in awakening a consciousness about conservation and collaboration among river neighbors, about the challenges of joint ownership that Posadas Amazonas has faced, and much more...Afternoon visit to the land to host meeting with neighbors. No one showed up. Visited a couple of properties adjacent to the land to see if neighbors were home...no one there. Visited health post, school, and the compound where Rolando Suico and family have their compound. Looked fairly overgrown. There was evidence of a new structure that stands to one side that Ramon had commented the Suico family was building to accommodate tourists who wanted to participate in "residential" tourism program. This also looked fairly overgrown. Afternoon return to Inotawa Eco-lodge.

Wed. June 9th, visit to Tres Chimbadas lake. Impressed with the state of the trail and accommodations for visitors that Inotawa, Posadas Amazonas, Explorers Inn, and one other eco-lodge went together to fund. There are good steps up from the river's edge. The trail is WIDE. There are bathrooms. There is a welcome station and sign. There is substantial investment of time, money and continued presence on the land to keep these trails clean. Did ceremony on the lake and made offerings. The giant river otters responded positively, coming directly towards our catamaran from across the lake and playing with the catamaran, showing us how they enjoy their food, basking on exposed logs in the sun, even playing at the side of the boat, for almost half an hour. What a blessing! Felt like a real emergence happening HERE, NOW! Late afternoon return to Inotawa to discuss the day, have dinner, and rest.

Thur. June 10th, early morning visit to the land to make the Corazon del Curandero sign, to walk the land one more time, to make a final decision about the structure (not advisable to tear down at this time for reasons mentioned above), to harvest oranges from the property, to walk the trails again to collect forest medicine for Bonnie's knee, to make and offer the group despacho, and to say goodbye for now to this beautiful place. It is amazing how fast the plants grow. Took a picture of a tree that Karen had planted last year on service trip...it had grown more than 3 feet in a year. There is need for constant attention and PRESENCE on this land! Late afternoon departure (with sign in place) for Inotawa lodge. Final dinner and rest.

Fri. June 11th, early morning departure downriver to Puerto Maldonado. Discussion with Paula and Jennifer about insights gained on the trip and coordination of recommendations for next steps (these are listed in separate section below). Saw several dragas (gold mining boats that use mercury to congeal gold, polluting air with fumes as they do). Afternoon and evening in Puerto Maldonado. Said goodbye to Paula. Rest at CasaQuinta.

Sat. June 12th, early morning departure via StarPeru for Lima.

The Land

Structure of the land will change immeasurably when the bridge at Puerto Maldonado is completed in the next 4 months. This is the last "unfinished" piece of the Southern Inter-oceanic highway...which will run within a few km of the La Torre land and within 50 km of the RLP land. There is already considerable drug trafficking up and down completed sections of the road near RLP, according to Paula. The land we visited at La Torre clearly needs constant human presence, both energetically and logistically. Paths were overgrown, wasps and other stingy things had taken over structure, oranges were rotting on the ground. After we had spent some days on the land, it felt better. Energetically there was a sense of "ayni" in just our BEING present on the land that all of us felt.

The Community

As Paula had mentioned, the kind of "community" that exists on the river is much different than we often think of when envisioning this term. First of all, it is very "itinerant" with many folks who have small/mid sized farms and/or cattle tending to live in Puerto Maldonado except when they come up river to harvest and take crops downriver. Second of all, as Ramon was able to share with us, the population is made up of migrants to the area. The "oldest" and most established

families (like the Suícos who live near the THOTH land, and possibly even many of the “comunidad indígena” of Infierno) are descended from rubber tappers who migrated in to work as wage laborers during the rubber boom of the mid to late 1800's. More recently, families have been migrating from the highlands of Peru to work Brazil nut harvests, to homestead, to farm, to raise cattle, to engage in illegal extraction activities such as gold mining or hardwood extraction, to build eco-lodges and get involved in eco-tourism (Ramon deLucci's family is an example). Victor Bolivar (our boatman) is also an example of someone who migrated from the highlands (Quillabamba, near Cusco) just 14 years ago to work the Brazil nut harvest. While not indigenous (either in terms of blood lines or in terms of his relationship to this land) he had clearly developed a sense of place and relationship with the rainforest in the years that he has been there as evidenced by his amazing knowledge of the medicinal and food plants adjacent to the paths we walked together. The first day, he must have pointed out more than 50 useful plants in the forest, including those that could serve as a poultice to reduce swelling in arthritic knees (which Bonnie experienced first hand when he gathered resin from various trees and applied this poultice to her knee on the last day of our visit). He also told us about a plant that is an antidote to pit-viper venom. When Bonnie asked how he knew of this plant he simply said, “well, my brother was bit on 3 separate occasions by venomous snakes and he didn't die. Only the first time did he even go to a health clinic...the second and third times, he just relied on the anti-venom. That's how I know it works.” So, even though Victor is by no means indigenous, the wealth of his knowledge has grown exponentially and experientially with his on-going relationship with the forest. Our presence on the land brought out that knowledge in ways that allowed him to take pride in this knowledge and to recognize the value of his skill set. He came out of his shell as we talked and walked together over the days we were on the land together. He expressed interest in developing his own vocation as a curandero. He engaged in lively conversation about love vrs. fear based approaches to healing in the Amazon and asked many questions about just what the “corazon del curandero” means and does. His joy and increasing awareness of the value of his knowledge is apparent on the videos and in the pictures we took over our time together.

One of the goals of our trip was to “connect with community.” Although the neighbors we had hoped to visit (including the caretaker) were unavailable to us during our stay, we did have a very helpful conversation with Ramon deLucci, who is the proprietor of Inotawa Eco-lodge. He is one of the founders of AMTUSET and explained that when he arrived in the region about 14

years ago to build the lodge, he became interested in interacting with neighbors above and below the area where Inotawa was built to resolve issues common to all.

One of the main issues he engaged neighbors around was that of rainforest conservation, which is his passion. One thing he noticed when he arrived was that many migrants to the region had no concept of conservation...throwing their trash outside their compounds, claiming “protected” trees w/i reserves and buffer zones as “guardadito” (saved) to be illegally cut down when an unanticipated expense would arise (like uniforms for school or medicines for someone in the family who falls ill)...he decided to begin conversations with these neighbors about how to use eco-tourism as an approach that would provide alternatives to more illegal extractive economies.

This was the beginning of AMTUSET. But, in the beginning of the organization, folks began bickering about who could become members of the organization (and who could, therefore, sign concession requests). At first, there was the suggestion that only those who LIVED on the river should be named as partners in AMTUSET. But, as most neighbors live in Puerto Maldonado and only come to their property to harvest tree crops, they needed other criteria. It was decided that those who held titled land could participate. However, there was a split between those who had lived for more than a generation on the river and more recent migrants. The former did not generally have titled property because inheritance customs were such that the parents (who were titled) had passed land on to children, without changing titles. By contrast, those who had lived on the land for less than a generation, generally coming from the mountains, did have title to their land, and had a hard time understanding why everyone would/should not. So, the two groups fought about the importance of actually being able to produce a title as requisite to being named a partner in AMTUSET.

As a result of this disagreement, AMTUSET split into two groups...the recent immigrants formed their own association, led by a Sr. Caceres, and called “Asociación de Moradores de La Torre.” For many years, AMTUSET (which was mainly made up of folks who’ve lived on the river for more than a generation) and this new association (of mainly highland migrants) fought. Recently, they have begun to mend fences and settle differences, in part, due to SOCCER, which Ramon and Rolando Suico helped to organize. They worked to clear the local soccer field so that folks wouldn’t have to go downriver to Puerto Maldonado to play, and organized tournaments. As a result of this, people from the two groups are beginning to come together and speak again.

One of the areas of common interest has been around the access to the Tres Chimbadas Lake, as Ramon explained to us. The buffer zone (around the lake itself) is not open to concession requests. However, areas a bit farther away are. At one point, he (as proprietor of Inotawa) and several other lodge owners (including Posadas Amazonas, which is jointly owned by the native community of Infierno and foreign owned Rainforest Expeditions) decided to jointly ask for a concession that would give access to the lake on one side. He was unhappy to find that after they did the preliminary paperwork and the studies necessary to request the concession, that the Infierno community simply did an end run around the rest of the lodge owners and asked for the concession themselves. This, together with the rather unscrupulous ways that employees of the Posadas Amazonas (Ramon speaks from first hand knowledge since he used to work as a guide for that organization) have of spending their year end bonuses on chain-saws to illegally cut down trees and on mining activities, makes him skeptical of the model that Amanda Stronza developed with Posadas Amazonas for joint ownership is sufficient to really create an attitude of conservation among stakeholders in eco-tourism ventures. It would be good to have a conversation with Amanda about this...and her recent e-mail reply to my inquiry suggests that she is very interest in engaging in conversations with us around the best way to involve local community/neighbors in Sipapu). Clear in Ramon's conversation with us was the undertone of competition between lodges, as well as the need for solutions that folks can buy into that will privilege conservation and tourism over entrepreneurial extractive activities like mining and logging (some ideas about how to encourage this culture of conservation are listed below). However, even eco-lodges are not always "clean," as is witnessed by the "turf" wars happening around Tres Chimbadas lake.

Currently, the Mayor of Puerto Maldonado, whose last name is Bocangel, has facilitated his own ability to get a concession on the far side of the lake for construction of a mammoth eco-lodge. He is also doing everything in his power to shut down access from the side of the lake where joint access is still possible (this is the access we used). His lodge is on the side of the lake that is supposed to be "off limits" to visitors because of the habitat requirements of the giant river otters, yet his political power in the region (and the fact that his office has to give the approval for paperwork to gain concession rights before it moves forward to regional and national level offices) has complicated relationships around the lake. Furthermore, there is an "outside influence" from Lima who is in the process of trying to obtain access to the lake from the soon-to-be-completed trans-oceanic highway...which is even MORE sensitive in terms of habitat

destruction than is the Bocangel lodge...Ramon is very frustrated with the politics around lake access, to be sure.

What DID become clear from this conversation with Ramon, though, is his amazing skill set in organizing local community members and in negotiating sticky political situations. As his passion is conservation and education he would be a good ally and a good asset to THOTH as we move forward in this region. He continues to try to bring AMTUSET members together for projects that include installation of water catchment systems, discussions about electrification options, and discussions about installing sat-phone and internet uplinks (which do not currently exist in the area). All of these would support sustainable, community based-eco-tourism as well as protecting the forest by keeping folks from cutting down trees when they need money for emergency situations. He is also a facilitator for discussions about fostering residential tourism options for many local families so that they can have an alternative to cutting down tree giants (even Brazil Nut and Ironwood) in times of trouble as they host tourists looking for a cultural experience as well as an ecological one.

Finally, in the discussions with Ramon, it was clear that practical expediency is what rules the day on this part of the river. Even other eco-tourism lodge proprietors engage in illegal gold mining on the river and he knows of at least 3 portable sawmills that have been set up by folks who claim to be practicing "eco-conservation." What matters is getting enough income to put food on the table and most folks look at short-term rather than long-term solutions because they are expedient and practical. For them to look at long term solutions favorably, there has to be pay-off in the short-run as well. Also, folks have to be stakeholders in the process of conservation, which only occurs when they are involved in decision making. Ramon's actions have done much to create a sense of stakeholdership among neighbors and one way to continue building partnerships among neighbors would be to encourage more tourism (especially residential tourism or "turismo vivencial") in the area. Currently, only about 7% of folks who visit Cusco take the 37 minute flight from Cusco to Puerto Maldonado.

Ramon feels that putting in a satellite uplink so that internet and sat-phone communication between folks here and each other as well as the outside world would both help build partnerships and would encourage more tourists to come to the region. The question he poses is key: what steps will encourage more folks to come this way and to engage in activities that contribute to conservation rather than destruction of the rainforest? With the completion of the

highway looming (the bridge over Madre de Dios river at Puerto Maldonado is the only part of the trans-oceanic highway that is yet to be completed and it is only about 4-5 months from being finished) finding ways to get folks to the region who have the right ethics is even more important than ever. Residential/cultural tourism is one option. Another is eco-tourism that utilizes knowledge of local elders like Víctor (who learned his plant lore from an indigenous medicine man when he was participating in the Brazil nut harvest many years ago). As more people show up who are interested in the wealth of plant and animal lore, in the traditions that local residents know and use, in the stories of their lives as they have interacted with the river and the forest, more local folks will see the value of this knowledge and will gain access to dollars that will keep them from cutting down the forest.

The Construction

Local materials for building are readily available and folks like Ramon have used these materials to build beautiful structures. Best structures seem to be those that have good airflow w/only half-height walls and open space rather than windows btn inside and out. However, if windows and screens are not used, it should be expected that animals will share space with humans. (Jennifer and I had some personal experience with this in our room at Inotawa lodge...animal(s) definitely “bigger than a breadbox” sharing quarters with us during the night). One thing I noticed with structures is that they are raised off the forest floor to help keep bugs n humans separate. Another thing I noticed is that kitchens tend to be separated from living quarters (at least in larger structures). After our experience with night-prowling animals in our room, I can see why :-). Yet another thing to keep in mind is that if there are no humans caring for the structures, they quickly can get overrun by critters...including poisonous snakes. Clearing the undergrowth is an on-going task and areas that have been cleared for human habitation and then have grown back in are notoriously dangerous places to tread...one more reason to raise the floors. In the case of the current building, a new roof and raised floor would be a good first step and would make more sense than tearing down what is currently there. OR if tear down of current structure is viewed as preferable, it makes sense to do tear-down and building at the same time so the land does not appear abandoned and so that the usable lumber does not disappear to neighbor compounds as it lies on the ground...even the compost pits that the last service trip dug have disappeared since last summer...

THOTH Role

Throughout the journey, we discussed how best to interact with community, land, and professionals as a Heart of the Healer Community. And this dipped into discussions on the role of the THOTH Peru representative, the manager of THOTH Peru, and those who come to visit or stay on the land as emissaries of THOTH, or El Corazon Del Curandero. Essentially, the footprint is the key to representation and influence. How do THOTH emissaries interact with community, land, and professionals who will help build the ceremonial and residential space there? As Earth Stewards, as those who identify with SIPAPU as a dream, a vision, and a reality, how do we best interact with What IS there on the river, there on the land? From our one-week service trip, from the discussions with Paula and Ramon, their stories, and our own experience of setting space for neighbors who are elsewhere, the answer is "carefully, prayerfully." Core Group Pioneers who attend the land and the community by presenting themselves for a time at La Torre, whether they stay at Inotawa while the La Torre structure is being modified, need much prayer, readiness, and support. Every THOTH member can assist with setting the energetics for the transformational work that is sure to occur while encountering la selva so immediately. As an organization, we have a name and a mission, a network of luminous strands, and those who live at La Torre will be wrapped safely in this field. And we progress with plans for building on the land AS A RELATIONSHIP with the community, the land, and the creatures and plants living on it. Thank you everyone connected with this for the work you have done, space you have created and held, and for intelligence and love you bring to every soul who shows up to BE the dream. May these words structure the reality we simultaneously dream. A HO!

Submitted by Bonnie Glass-Coffin and Jennifer Schofield, with input from Paula Givan, Ramon deLucci and Victor Bolivar