

## *Ecuador 2007*

It's been a month since returning from another incredible trip with IMG. I had not planned to go on another trip so soon after returning from Kilimanjaro but after hearing Phil Ershler describe the country, the people and the climbs – it was too tempting. So somewhat on an impulse – I signed up for my second IMG trip with Phil. This trip would include sightseeing in Quito and many surrounding villages as well as attempting to climb Cotopaxi (19,338 ft) and either Chimborazo (20,700 ft) or Cayambe (19,000ft) depending on the conditions.

I was joining the group as a solo again as my husband doesn't like to climb and has a limited amount of vacation. Even though I know that he worries when I travel alone – particularly on climbing trips – he's really supportive and I know that he's proud of me.



***Every IMG trip starts and ends in the airport with a big pile of duffels***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

Most of the group met in the Miami airport at the departing gate for Quito. Once in Quito – we were met by Phil, Romulo Cardenas and Romulo's wife Patricia. We had to wait a bit for Leo McLean to come in from Argentina but were soon at the Hotel Embassy in Quito where we met the last two members of the group, Roger & Janet Binkerd who had arrived a day earlier. We spent about an hour



***The whole gang (minus Romulo – he was off somewhere getting something organized)***

***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

getting to know each other before going to bed. This was another great, diverse, group of people I felt right away that we would probably all get along great. I don't know if it's that IMG attracts a great client base – or if the type of trips they conduct tends to draw a group of somewhat like-minded people. However, one of the great things about these trips for me is just meeting and getting to know new people who I now consider new friends.



***Good IMG guides are always on top of everything - Phil Ershler & Romulo Cardenas***

***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

***Our team for Ecuador***

Guides – Phil Ershler & Romulo Cardenas  
Leo McLean – Buenos Aires Argentina  
Chris Axel & Jodi Sommerfeld – Minnetonka, MN (got engaged on an IMG trip to Kilimanjaro)  
Jim Parker – Minneapolis MN  
Jeff Paulson – Minneapolis MN  
Alfred Nyby – Culver, IN  
Robert Shannon – Mesa AZ  
Paul Pender (aka Johnny Reno) – Bryan, TX  
Roger & Janet Binkerd - Vermont. While not a climber, Janet was with us for most of the trip  
Robyn Garrison – Washington



***Jodi Sommerfeld and Chris Axel  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Alfred Nyby  
Photo Robyn Garrison***



***Leo McLean  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Jeff Paulson and Jim Parker  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Robyn Garrison***



***Roger and Janet Binkerd***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Paul Pender (aka - Johnnie Reno)***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

As luck would have it – Igor and Marina, good friends of Phil's, were visiting Ecuador at the same time. Igor guides with Phil on the IMG trips to Russia. They stayed with our group for a couple of days and it was a lot of fun to get to know them. (of course now I want to go to Russia!)



***Robert Shannon***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Igor and Marina***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

Our first morning was spent walking around the old town of Quito – visiting several cathedrals, the plaza outside of the main government buildings and up the winding roads to this large monument of the Virgin. The monument was to protect the city from the surrounding volcanos.



*Photo – Robyn Garrison*

All along the way – Romulo would provide the historical context to just about everything we saw. Whether it was the politics around the building of a church or a story about an idolized Indian revolutionary who changed his name to a Spanish name – he was a wealth of information and humor. We stopped a couple of times to sample the wonderful fruit drinks, empanadas and other Ecuador appetizers. We covered alot of ground for just one morning.



*One of the many churches in Quito*

*Photo – Robyn Garrison*



*Walking tour of Quito*

*Photo – Robyn Garrison*



***Amazing – I can't make him smile!***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

Shortly after noon – we headed out on the bus to Otavalo. Romulo's daughter Amelia Alexandra joined us on our trip to Otavalo. Amelia is nine years old and was such a great addition to our group. I don't know too many nine year olds that would hang around a bunch of adults and really seem to enjoy herself. In addition, she is battling childhood leukemia so her attitude is that much more special. She will be in my prayers for a long time to come.



***Romulo and Amelia at the Otavalo Animal Market***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

It was about a two hour drive to Otavalo. (it seemed that just about every time we had to go someplace new – it was a two hour bus ride) The road went over this pass and around the high point we stopped at a small restaurant that was known for Locra soup. Apparently, when they were building the road – an old woman would bring this potato and cheese soup to the men working on the road. It's a very tasty and FILLING soup with big chunks of cheese. (at least that was Romulo's story) After our lunch – we were good for several more hours before we had to eat again.

We got to Otavalo in the late afternoon and checked into the Otavalo hotel. This was a really quaint hotel. I think that a couple of the guys needed a lot more room – they only had 6 beds to choose from. There was no time to rest as we had lots to see. We loaded back onto the bus and headed out to more of Phil and Romulo's friends. It was a short drive to a neighboring town called Peguche and the home and workshop of a well known weaver named Jose Catecachi. This is probably not on any other tour group's itinerary. Jose's work was incredible - everything from tapestries, knitted sweaters, blankets and bags. When we arrived, Jose was out in the back dying some yarn for some creation.



***Jose – hard at work***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

He was working over a large vat with blue dye. An aunt (or some relation) also did a demonstration of how they spin the wool into yarn. She was an incredibly happy woman who thoroughly enjoyed showing us “how it’s done”.



***Stay out of her way –  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We did have to be somewhat careful – for whatever reason – there was thin wire strung all over the place – right about shoulder level. I assumed it was for drying the yarn or something. The other amazing thing was the number of guinea pigs that they had in the house where grandma and grandpa live. Guinea pig or cuoy is delicacy in Ecuador. It’s hard to imagine eating a pet.

When we left Jose’s house – it was time for more refreshments. We must have looked thirsty. We stopped at a nearby Hacienda called Pinsaqui. We toured the property and watched the sunset. We also sampled some sort of hot drink and enjoyed the atmosphere of the downstairs bar.



***Time for refreshments!  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

But by now we were getting pretty hungry (after all – it had been a couple of hours since we had eaten) so we headed back to Otavalo and had dinner at a local Italian restaurant. We had an early morning at the market planned – so off to bed.

I think a few in our group weren’t sure about heading out to the animal market so early – but it’s a must for anyone who wants to experience Ecuador’s culture.



***Otavalo Animal market  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

The market is the weekly meeting place for people to get together. They bring their live-stock to market and buy, sell and trade with each other. People would come with a sheep and possibly go home with a pig. It’s also a place to meet and spend time with each

other. The women seemed to dress up to go to market. It was divided into sections. We started in the animal section where you could see all kinds of live animals. Most were on rope type leashes. There's nothing more amazing that watching an old women with a full skirt and wrapped in a colorful shawl trying to wrestle 4 or 5 sheep along a path or an old couple trying to coax a pig up a road. But the most amazing thing was how friendly the people were.



***All dressed up for market!***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Keep on moving.....***  
***Photo - Robyn Garrison***



***Looks like lunch!***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We moved back up the road thru the rest of the “grocery store” stands of pig heads, fruits, vegetables and canned goods to the edge of the tourist section. But we had not yet had breakfast – so of course we needed to stop and eat. We ate a small café with outdoor seating looking down on the market. Phil attempted (again) to “keep it simple” by just ordering scrambled eggs and juice. Of course – we had to be complicated by mixing in a few omelets and bacon into the mix. After eating – we spent a couple of hours shopping (some of us came back with more than others) and then it was back to the hotel to pack up and head back to Quito.



***OK Gang - lets just keep it simple***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We needed to get back to Quito at a reasonable hour so that a couple of people could do a bit of crampon adjusting before the stores closed. It seems that there was something about not trying the crampons on the boots before leaving home. So once we were back in Quito – we all went different ways and either rested, shopped, or just enjoyed the city some more. Phil and Romulo had shopping to do so that we could be well fed while we were climbing. We also had to get our gear organized for the next part of the trip. We would leave whatever we didn't need at the Embassy Hotel in Quito and only take what we would need for the climbs and the days in between. We said goodbye to Igor and Marina with a nightcap of Tequila shots as they would be continuing on to other parts of Ecuador.

We were checked out of the hotel early the next morning with duffels loaded on the bus and on our way to a trek to a small inactive volcano called Pasochoa. But before we could start – we had to eat again. We stopped at this wonderful restaurant on the way called La Matilda's. This place is a hidden treasure. It's a wonderful place that sits on a hillside overlooking a beautiful valley.



It's owned by the wife of one of Phil's great friends and well known photographer – Jorge Anhalzer. We enjoyed a great breakfast, met Jorge and his son, Jorge Jr. (or Nacho for short) and checked out Jorge's Ecuador books that he's published. Many of his books include amazing photographs of the volcanoes that we would be climbing. Jorge and

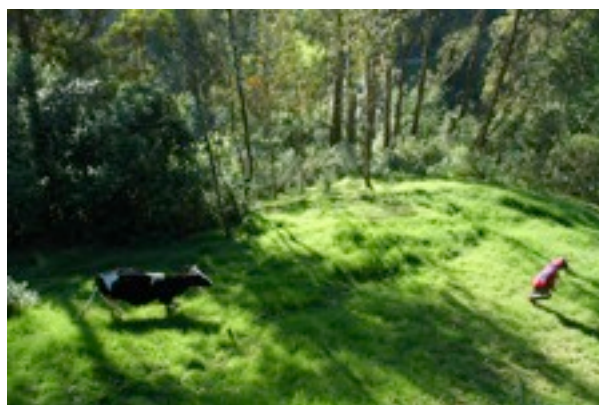
Romulo have an ultra-light that seemed to play a big part in many of their adventures. Romulo was a great story-teller and if even half of his stories are true – it's amazing the two of them are still alive.



***Just look at that view***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Breakfast at La Matilda's***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Time for milking***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***





**Phil and Jorge**  
**Photo – Bob Shannon**

After a great breakfast, we were back on the road to the trailhead of Pasochoa. Romulo's son, Camillio, joined us for the hike.



**Future IMG guide – Camillio Cardenas**  
**Photo Robyn Garrison**

Camillio is a great kid – he carried this big pack and was always tramping ahead of us – stopping to chase birds out of the bushes or to check out whatever little thing he saw along the way that caught his interest.



**Great day for a hike**  
**Photo – Robyn Garrison**

Roger's wife Janet did a shorter hike with our bus driver Morton while we hiked to the summit of Pasochoa. The hike is up through grassy fields and horse and cattle pastures.



**What a view!**  
**Photo –Robyn Garrison**

There were several barbed wire fence crossings as we made our way up the ridge to the summit. Apparently, the property we were walking on was recently purchased by a new land owner. While we were making our way up – a couple of guys' road up on horses and told us we had to pay a fee to cross the property. Romulo did everything he could to talk

them out of it – even trying to call the new owner – but to no avail. Phil finally paid the fee and we were back on our way.



***Guess we better pay the fee  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We reached the summit in good time – the last part was an easy scramble up some volcanic rock. After a short break, snack and a few photos – we were on our way down.



***Enjoying the summit  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***And Heading Down!  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

Camillio lead us pretty much the whole way down. He had so much energy that he was hard to keep up with.

After we returned to the bus – it was on to a hacienda at the base of Cotopaxi. The hacienda, called VolcanoLand, is basically still a working farm with little cubicle rooms for sleeping and the rest of the house for the guests to enjoy. It's really a beautiful setting complete with horses and llama's in the fields. They had a lot of very nice antiques and folk art in the house which made for a cozy atmosphere.



***VolcanoLand – not an amusement  
park!  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***



**Nice!**

**Photo – Robyn Garrison**

After we got settled, Phil wanted to do a run-through of the gear that we would need, check the fit of crampons and harnesses and do a refresher on knots and go thru the gear we would need on Cotopaxi.



**Just make sure the points are going down**

**Photo – Robyn Garrison**

Of course, it was all “intuitively obvious”. Once we were done, it was time to eat again.

It’s amazing that I didn’t gain 10 pounds on this trip. We had a very nice candlelit dinner to fuel up for the next day.



**Janet – off on her own adventures**

**Photo – Janet Binkard**

We woke to a somewhat overcast day with no view of Cotopaxi but that’s OK – we would have a comfortable day on the lower slopes of Cotopaxi’s glacier doing some refresher training. After breakfast of scrambled eggs and bacon, we were on our way. (I think it was in the middle of breakfast that I started feeling sick.) Janet was going to spend the day horseback riding in the hills surrounding VolcanoLand. The bus ride was over this narrow bumpy road. (the places that we took the large bus were astounding) We finally made it to the parking lot below the refuge. We started up a scree path to get to the glacier. I was really not feeling well about halfway up. It was probably a combination of the rapid altitude gain plus some kind of bug but I could barely make it up. So when everyone else went up on the glacier to train – I hung out in the refuge to try to recover. The rest of the group was gone for several hours and it sounded like they had a great time practicing everything from walking in crampons, to rope travel and using a running belay.



***Of course – it s all intuitively obvious  
Photo - Bob Shannon***

When they returned, we stored a lot of the gear in a locker at the refuge so we wouldn't have to carry it back up the next day and headed back down to the bus and VolcanoLand.

My goal was to try to keep some food and fluids down so that I could recover my strength for the climb the next night. And I thought I was doing pretty well.



***Cotopaxi  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We woke to a beautiful morning. Janet would be off on horseback again – this time to a local waterfall. This is a perfect trip to bring a non-climbing spouse or friend on since there

are so many things to do while we're off climbing. Cotopaxi was visible just over the hillside and we had a clear view the whole drive up to the parking lot. After a fairly quick hike up to the refuge – we got our things organized in the bunks and ready for the climb later that night. Phil and Romulo had lunch ready by they time we had everything set up. Food always tastes great in the mountains – no matter what it is. We had soup, cheese, salami and crackers. We also had an early dinner of pasta around 5 or so and then tried to get some sleep, which was next to impossible. Between all the bathroom runs (from drinking so much water) and anticipating getting up at 11PM, I doubt many people got much sleep.

Phil woke us up at 11 and we ate some hot cereal and had a hot drink and got ready to leave. We were on the trail by around midnight. At this point – I was feeling pretty strong, no headache, no upset stomach and feeling good. We were on rock for about an hour and then stopped to put on our crampons and started up the glacier. We stopped about an hour later to rope up and at this point I still felt pretty good – but when we came out of the break – I took about 10 steps and all of a sudden got sick. Phil gave me a few minutes to recover – but after a few more steps I got sick again – so that was it for me. He had one of the extra guides they had hired take me down. Jodi was also not feeling 100% so she came down with me. Once back in the hut – it was a miserable night – between being sick and feeling disappointed that I had to turn around so early. But that's the mountains and altitude. It just wasn't my day.



***Climb up Cotopaxi***  
***Photo – Chris Axel***

The rest of the group continued on up and I think they made the summit around 8 or 9. It sounded like it was a very challenging steep climb. They said that the exposure wasn't too bad although they did use a running belay on the return. After hearing the stories and seeing their pictures, I definitely want to go back to Ecuador and try this one again.



***Summit of Cotopaxi***  
***Photo – Bob Shannon***

Jodi and I started watching for them to come down the glacier at about 11 or so – but they apparently had some issues coming down as we didn't see them until close to 1 PM. One of the concerns about pushing it to the limit to get up a mountain is that you still need enough reserve to get back down. Jodi and I were happy to see everyone when they returned. Once everyone was back down, all the gear was packed up and we headed down to the bus.



***After a successful summit (for most anyway)***  
***Photo – Bob Shannon***

Janet and our driver, Edgar, were waiting for us in the parking lot. We would head out a different way to our next destination and a much earned rest for most of our group.

We would stay at a beautiful hacienda called La Cienega. It's a wonderful old estate that has been converted into a great place to stay. All the hacienda's that we visited were really amazing – each offering a unique atmosphere.



***Early Morning at La Cienega  
Photo - Robyn Garrison***



***Amazing Gardens of La Cienega  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

Maybe at some point in the future when I've had my fill of climbing vacations – I'll do a hacienda tour in Ecuador. The grounds were beautiful with all kinds of color. We had a little bit of rain when we arrived so it seemed to be even greener. We all cleaned up and met in the bar for a quick drink.



***Winding Down  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

Phil was received with open arms by pretty much everyone on the staff at La Cienega (just like everywhere else we went). That's one of the great things about two trips that I've done with IMG so far. They have developed great relationships with the people at the places that we stay at or visit. So we really seemed to get a lot of special attention. We didn't feel like just another bunch of gringo tourists.

We had another great dinner at La Cienega and were entertained by another Indian pan flute ensemble. It was the end to a very, very long day for most of the group and I know that they all welcomed the comfortable beds.



***Early morning on a country road  
outside of La Cienega  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

The next day brought another trip to a market in a nearby village called Saquisili. I think that I enjoyed this market even more than the one in Otavalo.



***Saquisili Indian Market***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We again started in the animal section. This was a terrific place to get great photos of the local color and culture. By now we were feeling much more relaxed with the local Indians. Of course – they were pretty enterprising as well. For a dollar, they were more than happy to have their pictures taken. The really nice thing about digital cameras is that you can show them the photos after you've taken them. There was one woman; I can't remember her name, and her beautiful daughter, Stephanie, who we saw frequently throughout the market. She was in the animal market selling her paintings and then rode on our bus over to the main market. Of course, I had to buy a couple of paintings from her.



***Saquisili Indian Market***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Do you think they'll sell them all?***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We wandered thru the fruits and vegetables with Romulo buying different fruits for us to sample. There really weren't too many other tourists in this section of the market – this was where the local go to shop. While we all stuck out like sore thumbs, I really felt like we were really experiencing Ecuador in a way that most tourists don't.



We finally made our way to the area where they sold the handmade Indian crafts. Of course, many of us made several more purchases in the hour and a half that we spent there. It's a good thing that I had lots of extra space in my duffels when I left Seattle, because I would need all of it to get everything I purchased home.

*How could I eat one of these cute couys?  
Photo – Robyn Garrison*



*Paul doesn't stand out at all!  
Photo – Robyn Garrison*



*Try some of this  
Photo – Robyn Garrison*



*OK – we've had enough shopping!!!!  
Photo – Robyn Garrison*



*Or this?  
Photo – Robyn Garrison*



That evening we headed out to another Hacienda for dinner. San Augustin is nearby Hacienda owned by another of Phil and Romulo's good friends. It was a beautiful place with a great deal of Inca archeology on site. Romulo walked us through the various structures and explained much of the history of the buildings, pointing out the Inca structures in contrast to the more recent structures.



**Romulo pointing out the Inca architectural elements**  
**Photo - Alfred Nyby**

Unfortunately, we had pretty heavy rain that evening, so there were no views of Cotopaxi in the sunset.



**To new friends – what a place**  
**Photo - Bob Shannon**



This would be a great place to spend a few days - especially if you're looking for a romantic get away. Each room is unique with fireplace that open into the main room and the bathroom. It would definitely be a great place to be pampered after a climb of Cotopaxi. We had dinner in the wonderful dining room – very nice!



**Do you believe these stories?**  
**Photo – Alfred Nyby**

Then it was time for more of Romulo's story telling. We went back to the living room while Romulo held court. Between his jungle and ultralite adventures – he's led a pretty amazing life and he loves to share his tales. It was a great evening.

We stayed a second night at La Cienega and then we were heading north to Cayambe. The reports from Chimborazo were not good so the decision was to climb Cayambe instead. We left La Cienega relatively early and started our travel north. Unfortunately, we would lose one member of our group later that day. Jim would need to head back to Minnesota for a family medical emergency. He was able to stay with us for a good part of the day before we would drop him off in Quito as we passed through it.

Our first stop of the day was at Jorge Anhalzer's home. What an amazing place. Jorge and his wife had purchased the old farm house and remodeled it into a terrific place. It's a very artistic and yet comfortable place. Of course, we had the opportunity to purchase several of his books and posters.



*I could work in this space*  
**Photo – Robyn Garrison**



*What do we do with our hands?*  
**Photo – Robyn Garrison**

The photographs in the books really provide a sense of the country and people of Ecuador. I'm not sure what Phil's percentage is – but he knows how to pull in the customers.



*High finances – Leo – you re hired!*  
**Photo – Robyn Garrison**

This was another of those stops where we really felt welcome. It's incredible the people we met that very few visitors to the country get the opportunity to meet.



**Photo – Robyn Garrison**

After we left Jorge's home, our next stop was for a "snack" at Romulo's home. Patricia and Amelia were there to welcome us with a very interesting meal of Couy, potatoes and juice. I couldn't even imagine eating a pet a few days before at the weaver's home – but now we would get to try it. The most disturbing part was the little teeth and head and paws sitting there on the platter. But it wasn't that bad – of course it tasted like roasted chicken – just with lots of little bones.



***So that s what roasted guinea pig looks like***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***I wonder why Phil wouldn t eat any of the couy?***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***



***Just can t take us anywhere!***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We dropped Jim off in Quito so that he could catch a flight home the next day and we were on our way to Cayambe. Our next stop was to drop Janet at nice hacienda named Guachala about an hour away from where the bus would leave us for the climb. We had a late lunch, changed into our climbing gear and left our extra duffels with Janet. She would spend the next couple of days on her own. She would do another visit to Otavalo market and then more horseback riding.



***Hacienda Guachala - Janet s home  
for a couple of days  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

We headed out on the road to Cayambe and were again amazed at the road we would take. Probably the most dangerous part of the trip was the bus ride on these single lane roads with the steep drop-offs as they wind up the valley into the mountains. But we got to the end of the road without incident. Romulo had arranged for a 4-wheel drive truck to take all our gear up to the hut so we had a pretty easy hour hike up to the hut – arriving just at dark. By the time we got our bunks situated, Phil and Romulo had a light dinner ready for us. We were all pretty worn out so we were in bed around 8 or so. I slept very well that night – no headache from altitude and had been able to eat and drink well over the last couple of days. So I was starting to feel pretty optimistic about my chances of making it up this mountain.



***Cayambe  
Photo – Robyn Garrison***

The next day was a relatively easy day. We would do some more practicing on the nearby glacier and get to bed early. Phil and Romulo put on a short ice climbing clinic – demonstrating different ways to go up and down the ice.



***It s easy – once you get the hang of it  
Photo - Bob Shannon***

It was great fun and great practice. I was again reminded that I really need to work on my upper body strength. I had a heck of a time getting my ice ax to plant in the hard ice. But it was great fun.



***Just walk this way***  
***Photo - Bob Shannon***

Our dinner that night was burritos. They were pretty good and certainly not something I would have thought of as mountain food. I figured we would be eating the freeze dried meals – but Phil and Romulo were pretty creative when it came to cooking for us.



***Best burritos in town!***  
***Photo - Robyn Garrison***

Jorge's son, Nacho, and couple of his friends also showed up at the hut to attempt Cayambe the next morning. They were pretty entertaining as they "attempted" to cook their dinner. They're a great bunch of teenagers.

We were all in our sleeping bags before 6 trying to sleep. 11PM came all too quickly.

But soon we were all up and ready to go. The start of this climb is about a 2 hour scramble over some rock so we started out with our helmets. After about 45 minutes, Jodi and Jeff weren't feeling great and wanted to turn around. Chris decided to go down with them and keep them company. So Jorge, one of the guides that accompanied us on both climbs, took them back down to the hut and we continued on up. I was still feeling OK – but not too strong. We roped up on the glacier and I started feeling fatigued after a short while - needing to pause for a few seconds after about every 20 steps. By the time we got to our next break I was starting to wonder if I would make it to the summit. Phil made sure I ate something which was good since I really didn't want to and then offered that if I needed to – Jorge, who had caught back up with us, could take me back down. I wanted to keep pushing and try another pitch before I gave in – So once we started again – I struggled for a bit then sort of turned on the determination and concentrated on getting into a rhythm. The food kicked in and I was able to keep a pace going for the next couple of pitches. By the time it got light, we were higher on the mountain and even though I didn't feel all that strong, I was pretty determined to make it to the summit. The last couple of pitches were the steep part and if it wasn't for Phil's tug on the rope to coax me up it probably would have taken me a lot longer than it did. Jorge had gone ahead of us and set up a fixed line up the first steep section which really helped us get up. I also got a break when we had to wait for another team to come down thru the final notch so that also helped. I really need to thank Phil, Alfred and Paul for being so patient with me the whole way up.



***Last pitch up - Finally!***  
***Photo - Robyn Garrison***



***Getting ready to go down***  
***Photo - Robyn Garrison***

At this point, both Phil and Romulo were worried about getting me down. I wasn't too worried as I'm pretty comfortable going down on snow plus the short break and food at the top gave me a bit more energy. After getting down the two steep sections, we stopped and took of several layers as it was getting pretty warm.



It was really rewarding to make it to the summit. I was able to take some pictures and managed to choke down a power bar. Nacho and his friends had waited for us to get to the summit – they had to be pretty cold as I think they waited there for a while.



***Nacho and friends – after helping  
all of us down***  
***Photo - Robyn Garrison***

Then we were off again. The snow down was great to walk in and I really didn't have any trouble getting down. We made it back down to the start of the snow without a break and before we knew it we were at the start of the rock.



**Photo - Robyn Garrison**



**Almost down – Thanks Chris for taking my pack for the last part  
Photo – Chris Axel**

Chris was there to greet us as we continued back to the hut. He helped me by carrying

my pack the last part of the descent. Once at the hut, we packed everything up and loaded it into Nacho's truck for the drive down to the bus pickup area. We did have a short wait for the bus – just enough time for a nice snooze in the sun.



**Time for a nap  
Photo - Bob Shannon**

We picked up Janet at Guachala, had a quick meal and were on our way to Papallacta. We had a couple hour drive over the Andes to a hot springs resort below Antisana, another mountain in Ecuador. The natural hot springs pools were a great end to the day. I slept so well that night – I didn't hear anyone snore!



**Pool party  
Photo – Jodi Sommerfeld**

After breakfast the next morning, we headed back to Quito for our last night at the Embassy Hotel. We had some time for a little more shopping as well as packing. Phil and Romulo took us to a great shop owned by Jorge Anhalzer's family called Folklore. We learned more about the history of Jorge's family. His dad and great Aunt immigrated to Ecuador from Hungary during WWII. His great aunt, named Olga Fisch, did a great deal for the indigenous artist in Ecuador by encouraging them to translate their culture and symbols into art – whether it be the Tiqua paintings or tapestries and rugs. Some of her works have been on display as part of the Ecuador exhibit in the United Nations.

The second floor of the shop contains and exhibit of not only Olga's artwork – but also an extensive collection of pre-Columbian and Inca artifacts that were collected by Jorge's father. His father died in 1998 in a plane crash while returning from Europe. He was a well known Ecuadorian conservationist and the President of the Darwin Foundation. I left the shop with a better appreciation for Ecuador and its history, in addition to a few more items that I would need to fit into my bags.

Our final dinner was at a very unusual restaurant in an old museum. Romulo and Patricia joined us for dinner and we enjoyed some of the best seafood I've had in a long time. Jodi and I shared a big platter of various shell fish and crustaceans.



**No way can we eat all this! – Yes way!  
Photo – Robyn Garrison**

Phil thought we would be leaving lots of food – but we took care of that! There wasn't anything left on the platter by the time we were finished. It was a great dinner and a great way to finish off our trip.





We said our goodbyes to Romulo and Patricia and headed off to bed. We had to catch taxis at about 5AM to make sure we got to the airport and checked in. Leo would be able to sleep in a bit as he was on a later flight back to Argentina.



***Adios to new friends – until next time***  
***Photo – Robyn Garrison***

The flight home was uneventful, we made it back to Miami, through customs and then pretty much scattered to catch our different flights home. Phil and I got back to Seattle around 8 or so. Then it was back to work the next morning. As usual, it's always strange to make that transition back to the "real world" after being on a trip like this. But amazingly, within a few hours, I was dealing with all the challenges that I had left behind – but my experiences in Ecuador, the beauty of the land, the people and the culture will forever be in my memory. Plus there's the added bonus of a whole new group of friends in other parts of the country and the world. I do plan to return to Ecuador at some point in the future, but now I'll be looking forward to my next adventure. Will it be Russia and Elbrus, Nepal and Island Peak, Patagonia or the dozens of other places on the list that continues to grow?