

## January 2013

This month two of us volunteers took up an invitation from Geder, our amigo from Chirikayen, to climb up to the top of the tepui which their village lies in the shadow of.

The plan was to walk up during the day, camp up on the top and go back down the next morning, it would be a hard days walking in the hot sun, carrying tents, sleeping bags food and water on our back but like always we were up for an adventure!



Leaving the foundation early in the morning we stopped off in town to pick up supplies – tins of tuna, chocolate and a lot of water – and headed to Plaza Bolivar to grab a taxi to Chirikayen. It takes about an hour and a half to get there, the taxi drivers weren't in the bargaining mood today, but after waiting a little while we managed to find someone willing to take us there for a decent price, and off we went.

Chirikayen, as always, was tranquil and welcoming; we climbed down from the taxi and greeted Geder's siblings who were sitting out in front of their house. We sat there, in the shade of a mango tree, for a while, and some of our friends from Christmas day came over to say hello again, before Geder came out of the house saying he was ready to go and handing me a bunch of bananas "para el camina"

For the first few hours the path zigzags across grassy plains

and dips in and out of the dense rainforest, our only respite from the blazing sun shining down on us as midday approaches. We reach a river for a much needed cool off, but after this point the path starts to get steeper and as the towering tepui looms closer the top seems to be getting further away.

The last couple of hours are a brutal uphill climb along a path which jaggedly zig zags its way up the side of a cliff and at times seems to disappear completely. Fortunately Geder, who informs us that he first climbed this tepui with his Uncle when he was 7, knows exactly where he's going. This part of the climb is pretty hard going at times, I'm sweating profusely, breathing hard and feeling like I'm running out of strength, but there's nowhere to stop and rest here, somehow I keep finding the energy for just a few more paces, until eventually we're at the top, celebrating our achievement by shouting into the distance at the tops of our lungs.

The view from up here is breathtaking, you can see the famous Mount Roraima and several other massive tepuis dotted across the endless green rolling hills of La Gran Sabana. The only interruptions are the clusters of lights at Chirikayen and a couple of other indigenous villages, and the massive plumes of white smoke from the fires used to fertilise the land here.

We get the tents set up and watch the sun go down eating our dinner of tuna fish and casabe, before heading to bed, exhausted from the days efforts and ready to watch the sunrise from our majestic viewpoint and get an early start for the journey back down the following morning.

As our volunteers come and go every few months we are never short of new faces here at Aldeas De Paz. This month, however, sees the arrival of a slightly more permanent one. Our brand new coordinator Cristobal Campero!

After several months searching for the right person to do the job Cristobal stood out immediately thanks to his big smile, positive attitude and wealth of experience working as a teacher. He moved to his new home at the foundation earlier and will shortly be joined by his wife and their two young children, all of whom are sure to love living as part of our extended family of workers, volunteers and horses.



35 years old and a born Venezolano, Cristobal has travelled and worked with children across Latin America, and even spent some time living in Hungary, where his wife is originally from.

Already, as 2013 gets into gear and the kids head back to school after a lengthy Christmas break the foundation is brimming with new ideas to reach out to the local community and get the children excited about learning and make the best possible use of our incredible surroundings up here on the mountain.

Already we have started work on a vegetable garden with the kids and will continue to use this and our beautiful horses to get them excited about nature and animals, as well as offering music classes and expanding on our existing activities with more English class, arts & crafts and sports!

#### HORSE UPDATE

Kaokau was in the wars again and proved to have something of a talent for getting himself into trouble. Unfortunately this time our little fighter did not pull through.

His mother Amai is missing him but has adapted well by keeping Linda in order. She is now all but recovered from her mistreatment before coming here, her coat is much thicker, ribs are now barely visible and the wound on her back has healed very well, thanks to the constant hard work and attention of our volunteers.

Newest addition to the family Linda is settling in brilliantly and becoming less timid all the time, it's still several months away yet but we are all very much looking forward to the birth of her baby.

Last of Medallon, boss of all horses here! Is getting on just fine as always and building a good relationship with new volunteer Ashley, together they will be carrying on teaching the kids about riding and caring for horses and having a great time in the process!

All our horse facilities need a general overhaul and we have completed the repair of the fences. Next week we start to build a completely new horse stable with food storage and processing area and six food dispensaries. We have already decided upon the location and are now purchasing the building materials and the necessary hardware.