



John Collinson's Blog

Days 1-6

Day 1, Dec. 24th – Today I arrived at the Mendoza airport, and got picked up and taken to lunch at a small local sandwich shop. I then proceeded to try and speak a little Spanish, which failed. I let Carlos do the talking. This being my first trip to another country, I am completely amazed at how differently another culture and the different people are. The people are awesome, totally accepting me at our first meeting. Carlos then drove me to Penetentes, a sort of base up in the mountains, about 150 kilometers away from Mendoza. I was given the keys to the apartment of Fernando Grajales, a close friend of Willie's. I spent this afternoon running and climbing up a rocky ridge of a local peak, about 11,000ft. Before today I had not met any of the people I was interacting with, but they made me feel right at home. That night I had the pleasure of finally meeting Fernando as I slept on his couch.

Day 2, Dec. 25th – I woke up this morning to the sounds of birds chirping, and sunlight streaming into the window. Fernando offered me breakfast, a shower, and whatever else I needed, then headed to work. I spent the whole morning sleeping off jetlag, and just resting. At about 3 Fernando and I headed back down to Mendoza where I met his mother, and felt right at home again with her. We then drove to the airport to pick up Willie, it was nice to see a familiar face. That night we went to dinner at a pretty fancy restaurant, playing Boche Ball and drinking Coca-Cola until 2 in the morning.

Day 3, Dec. 26th – Waking up bright eyed and bushy tailed, Willie and I headed out on the town for some breakfast and shopping. We ate a classic little café, and had coffee, orange juice, and pastries, it was all delicious. We planned out the trip and all the food we will need. Following breakfast, at about noon we headed to the supermarket to buy the food for the trip. I thought it was pretty cool to see the similarities and differences between Argentinean and American supermarkets. For lunch we went to another little street corner sandwich shop. While eating at these sorts of places I really get the chance to see how people interact with each other, its so much different than in the US. Here at the sandwich shop Willie befriended a stray dog, and I had the largest, possibly best sandwich I've ever had, nowhere in the US do they put actual steaks in the sandwich. After a bouldering session on Fernando's climbing wall, we headed out to a little all you can eat meat pub, which was run by a 9-year-old girl. The meat was so amazing, real Argentinean steak, and then later I got to have a taste of the blood sausage, which is just clotted blood in a sausage tube, it was..... Interesting.

Day 4, Dec. 27th – Sleeping in a little bit this morning was good, catch a couple more z's before heading to the same café for some more breakfast today. We then went to Martin's house, and I was surprised to notice razor wire on the roofs, and barred windows, so Willie explained the robberies that occur frequently around here. We then packed up some gear, and made sure the tents were working properly. Willie had a meeting with an old friend, so we met for lunch, and then came back to Fernando's house, where we had another bouldering session, and Willie gave me some helpful tips on technique.

Day 5, Dec. 28th – Today we woke up at 7:00, and drove down about two hours to go climbing. After picking up some of Willie's and Fernando's amigos, we loaded up and finished the on pavement drive. We hit the dirt road, and began what was to be an hour journey, but after about 20 minutes, we came to a rolling stop. Blown hose. We repaired the hose and did a couple other small fixes, and drove on. We came up on a river, and halfway across, we stop again, out of gas, we work on the car for about 15 minutes, because the gas gauge still reads $\frac{1}{4}$ tank. When a man and his kids pull up in a small jeep, we ask to borrow some gas. Fernando siphoned about 3 litres of gas, and we hit the road again. We couldn't go to the planned climb because of the car problems, so instead we went to a dome with multiple routes. We climbed for about 7 hours, on 7 different routes, many of them too difficult for me to finish. After we finish climbing, we hike to the car, and its out of gas again. We start it downhill pushing it, jump in, and roll away downhill. When we hit a flat section of road, the car stops and we pile out to push again, and a man pulls up, and gives us a little tow, so then we jump in, and rally off down the dirt road, leaning out of the windows yelling at people and cars to get off the road, everyone gets out of the way, looking at us, bewildered. After we reach pavement, we get more gas, and everything runs smoothly again, but what an adventure. I have come to realize that the days spent down here are very long, the kind of days when at night, that morning seems like it was yesterday, so I guess the trip so far is a success.

Day 6, Dec. 29th – today was a restful day, mostly running around town picking up last minute items, last minute packing, and grabbing perishable food items. At 6 o'clock we went to the airport to pick up Willie's client, Charlotte. Back at her hotel, we unload her gear, and she is set, up in her room. I go back outside, to where Willie was waiting, and there is a big commotion. I ask some attendants where Willie is, and they inform me that he has dropped his keys in the gutter, a two foot deep trench gushing with water. After a search and rescue session, we retire and Willie begins to call a lock and key joint. I then notice a man standing with a key ring in his hand. He had our keys, they got attached to the clients baggage, and fell off in the hotel lobby. Afterwards, at dinner, we went to a local restaurant, very classic, rustic, with grapes hanging from overhead. We ate a meal of the most delicious pork, steak ribs, ham, and cow diaphragm that I could ever imagine, it was very good, and tomorrow we drive to Penitentes, the beginning of the journey!!