

# A German accent in Bolivia

## - How did that get there?

### Letter from South America

by *RUSS PEARCE*



**I**T HAS been another busy week of exploring the Santa Cruz region.

By getting to know the area so well, I am now able to talk confidently to any English-speaking tourists who come into the office. There are quite a few of them around at the moment, from the UK, America, Japan, Germany and Belgium.

Although it is good to chat to them in English, it's not helping with my Spanish. Even so, I am quite happy with my progress with the language.

On Thursday, all six of us from the volunteer house took a couple of taxis to the town of Samaipata. It is only 100 km, but the journey still took two-and-a-half hours.

At first, the roads were good, but from halfway it deteriorated into a concrete track, and eventually degenerated at times to a mix of huge cobbles and even bigger potholes. It certainly made for an interesting ride, and at times it was definitely white knuckle!

We stayed in Samaipata for three nights and enjoyed several different restaurants serving local cuisine and also German dishes. I had the local fish which was delicious. The apple strudle for dessert was delightful. We also found our way into the aptly named Mosquito Bar. It was very strange to hear the owner of the bar speaking Spanish with a very heavy German accent.

A good time was had by all, especially when he let the girls loose on his massive collection of CDs,

which filled one wall entirely.

On Friday, we relaxed by a series of waterfalls. All three were very picturesque and we were able to swim in the pools underneath each of them. The water was initially very cold, but it was a hot day and once the initial shock passed, it was lovely.

With the sun shining all day, we took maximum opportunity to catch some rays. It is really hard to believe it is winter here!

On Saturday, we all regretted our late night in the Mosquito bar as we had booked an excursion with a local guide starting at 9am. It began with a breathtaking one-hour drive up a mountain track. It was possibly the worst road I have ever been on and at times we were inches from the sheer drop at the edge.

Once we were out of the jeep, we were soon deep within the cloudforest. Our destination was the area of giant ferns. These plants grow half a centimetre in a good year and have taken several hundred years to reach their current height.

It was quite a strange experience as the ground was quite marshy, almost like peat, and we slipped and slid our way along at times. There were several small falls and lots of muddy trousers!

After a few hours we climbed out of the trees and to the summit, where the views were quite outstanding. The foothills of

the Andes were in clear view and they make the Brecon Beacons seem like a small hill!

On Sunday, we returned to Santa Cruz via the pre-Inca ruins of El Fuerte. They represent one of the most important archaeological sites in Bolivia, but in my opinion not one of the most interesting.

The rock is only 160m by 50m and it was a very cold, blustery wind which greeted us as we climbed to the top. On the rock are several carvings, including two parallel tracks which some people think was a UFO launch pad! Most of it is better viewed from inside the small museum at Samaipata and I don't really recommend a visit unless you are seriously into archaeology!

Back in Santa Cruz, life quickly returned back to normal. Two more volunteers have joined the household, so it is now bursting at the seams with eight of us.

Over the next few weeks, some of them will gradually depart, which will be a sad event as we have all become good friends now. Still, it will soon be my turn to leave too, so I'd best start looking into my next trip so I have more to write about again next week!

*I have managed to get my on-line diary up to date now and photos can be seen at [www.rruss.com/travel](http://www.rruss.com/travel) and following the Bolivia link.*