

What a hectic week that was!

IT'S been a busy week! It all started when I was invited to the official opening of an art display in the Palacio Prefectural, the building in which I work.

It was a wonderful exhibition of paintings by an artist called Armando Jordan, who lived in Santa Cruz during the 1930s.

His works are a good indication of life in Bolivia 70 years ago and include scenes from various celebrations, where boys climbed up slippery slopes to try to win a ham for their family.

There are also many depictions of flooded streets with wooden stepping-stones at each end allowing people to cross, and perfectly spaced to allow horse drawn carriages to pass safely.

I also got to try the local drink made from maize 'chichi', which I really didn't enjoy. Better was the Bolivian wine, made in the southern regions towards the border with Argentina.

The next day, I stumbled across my first street festival. It was the anniversary of the founding of La Paz, and every

Letter from South America

by RUSS PEARCE



street across the country bearing the city's name throws a party. There was lots of music, dancing, incredible costumes and delightful food, especially the beef kebabs!

The unfortunate thing with coming across these celebrations by accident is the lack of a camera, but I will be on the lookout for more of these parties so I can be better prepared.

Over the weekend, I journeyed four hours on a bus with two of my fellow volunteers. We were visiting the Jesuit mission towns of San Javier and Concepción.

There are restored churches adorned with gold and marvellous sculptures in several towns covering a good few hundred kilometers.

It takes five or six days to do the complete trail, but we managed to do two towns in a weekend.

The museums were fascinating, too, with traditional instruments on display and a great many mannequins, which are

used to construct floats, carried through the streets at carnival time.

We also managed to climb up the bell-tower but were warned not to touch the bells!

Apparently, they are used as a sign of impending danger, as well as a time-piece throughout the day AND night!

Sunday was the day of the national referendum and we were able to witness South American democracy in action.

There were tremendous crowds in the street and Bolivian flags waving as the country decided on the future of its oil and gas export policy.

It is compulsory to vote here, and all who did not have to account for themselves with the authorities.

On referendum day, most of the country is closed and there is no public transport. We took the opportunity to walk to a local lake where we enjoyed a refreshing swim. It was gorgeous but provoked many stares from locals curious about our white skin!

Around the lake we saw a lot of birds, too, including flocks of parakeets coming home to roost in the trees at sunset.

Bolivia is proving to be an incredible country. Everyone is friendly, incredibly patient with my now-improving Spanish, and I have no chance whatsoever of seeing everything that I wish to in this unexplored backpackers' paradise!

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT!

A collection of devotional thought starters

by Rev Dr JOEL LEWIS

IT has been wisely said:

"Correct your anger. It is only one letter away from danger."

"Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools."

(Ecclesiastes 7:9)

