

A review of the past achievements in Ecuador

Ecuador Maquipucuna Community Project;

2001

Planted 1000 trees to provide a sustainable thatch resource for local communities.

The Quest project ended in 2001, however the Maquipucuna Foundation continues to be dedicated to the conservation of Ecuador's biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources.

2000

Constructed extension for local community run lodge and constructed 2 interpretive trails. (Approx 15 km)

1999

Second Quest Project site established in Maquipucuna, Ecuador due to success of Peru Children's Project. 800 indigenous trees planted to initiate reforestation programme Construction of botanic garden



Ecuadorian Amazon Project- Yachana;

2009

The last ever team of volunteers to work at Yachana in the Ecuadorian Amazon spent every morning working on maintaining many of the projects that Quest begun here, from agricultural work to artisan craft and turismo, then in the afternoons they were working to build a raised greenhouse to protect crops from flood and insect damage. They were also involved in teaching English lessons at the local school twice a week, developing lesson plans and games.

Our project was to fabricate 2 large wooden beds for agricultural purposes, and build walls and a roof to the pre-existing structure in the form of netting. Dimensions for the beds were 20 meters x 80 centimetres. Upon arrival the plans changed a bit in that only one bed was to be built elevated from the ground while the other was built into the ground within the structure. The wooden beds allow them to prevent excess moisture in the vegetable gardens caused by continuous rain in the jungle, additionally it allows them to control permanently the soil quality and improve techniques for plague control. The nets will further enhance their ability to prevent insects from accessing their crops.

Every day from 7:00 to 10:00, volunteers join the Yachana students' work of maintenance of the different projects: agricultural work, animal husbandry, artisan craft and turismo. The volunteers were divided into groups of two working in each area with Yachana students and rotated areas every two days.

Even with such a small group there was a good amount of standing around due to lack of tools or basic work to do. To help offset this each group of two was assigned a class to teach English twice a week. Each group taught the same class each week and was probably the most satisfying part of the project phase. It really gave them a sense of responsibility, having to develop lessons and games, and helped form a better bond with the students.

Some days we did not have our wood ready for the project. So Arturo took the group out and showed them how to reforest plantain trees. He taught them the life cycle of the tree, how it produces offspring and how to replant them.

2008

On the Yachana project in the Ecuadorian Amazon volunteers were involved in a wide range of projects from construction to conservation and Black Earth research. Despite many setbacks the group managed to complete the construction of a traditional thatched building, aside of this they worked at the local primary school giving English lessons. One of the most exciting projects this year was the Black Earth research project, by mixing charcoal with the soil over 5 years crop production can be hugely increased (by up to 880%) It is hoped that this research will persuade local farmers to use this method, rather than destructive slash and burn farming techniques.

2007

Volunteers sponsored over 1000 acres of Amazon rainforest

2006

The Yachana group was divided into 2 and each spent alternate days working on a selection of projects, the main ones of which included..

1. Model farm work. This included planting and digging "plantabandas" for maracuja, bananas, plantain, white onions, cucumber and clearing fallow coffee plantation land in order to use the remnants of invasive species to fertilise the depleted soil and plant white and red beans.
2. Garden work which involved planting medicinal and decorative plants for both the technical college and lodge.
3. Telapia fish pools for yachana which will provide an income for the college as the students rear telapia and then sell the products to the lodge. Involved clearing out the pond (4x12m) and remove debris and mud in order to improve the water quality to be able to rear fish, then subsequent treatment with "Kal" or lime to kill off bacterial remnants.

4. Constructing path signs and "protected area" signs for the reserve and setting up these signs at either end of the road, and key poaching entrances or hunting trails running through reserve.

5. Constructing steps for Biological research station out of chonta. ~200m from river bank to research station.

6. Bombillas. one afternoon session with Yachana high school students soldering LED flashlight bulbs into torches for initiation of micro-enterprise. Will bring example back to QOS office as potential market for initiating LED light use for volunteers.

Also introduction to water purification scheme for Napo schools involving activated carbon, silver and porous filter to kill off 99% of germs, bacteria and fungi. example of other micro-enterprise for Yachana students, which will benefit school children throughout the region.

7. English teaching in Mondaña school.

8. 1 volunteer working in Yachana kitchen and on alternate Saturdays in Mondaña health Centre as volunteers, reduced after 2 weeks as was felt students could be used more productively on construction work.

9. Greenhouse work involved, making the current greenhouse higher to maximise photosynthesis and prevent plants from being burned by the sun, next week the construction and covering with plastic will begin by highschool students.

10. Butterfly house maintenance and planting to start micro-enterprise for Yachana high school funding and other sustainable and profitable enterprises for local communities.

11. Pineapple plots dug out and planted to expand cultivated area of model farm.

12. "Ferrocarril" railway tracks to transport freight from river to Yachana school (saturdays combined with local students in "Minga"). Work involved clearing the "track" and digging a drainage ditch under the future path of the railway.

13. Brown freshwater algae pond by the model farm has been dug out and cleared out in order to create a fresh water pool to grow algae to feed livestock in the model farm, first pool completed in week 2 by QOS volunteers. Pools 2 and 3 started in week 3.

14. Have set up a www.realtravel.com blog site for yachana2006, this will be useful for both Yachana and Quest marketing.

15. English lessons in groups with YACHANA students

2005

Constructed a footbridge to help restore an ancient trading route and rebuilt and repainted a primary school.

2004

Development of community run medicinal garden.

2003

Constructed a water system and chocolate factory as alternative income generating project.

2002

Constructed a research centre.

2001

Constructing a simple wooden path to a chicken coop located above the technical college. Volunteers worked alongside a couple of technical college students to construct the path. Constructing a small thatched building (choaza), using traditional techniques, on a mirador above the main dining room. This was considered the main project for the team. This project had some major setbacks, which included problems with the staff involved another was that the toquilla (thatching material) that we brought to the site was rotten by the time we could use it, and hence this entire process had to be started again - cutting and especially carrying the leaves was one of the hardest parts of the process, and this frustrated volunteers greatly. Nonetheless, the volunteers enjoyed the experience of using these traditional techniques to create an often seen construction.

Based in a finca of 2 hectares, upriver in Guacamayos; volunteers have been clearing the ground into rows. In the rows will be planted soya, and between these Ahuano; an endangered species of tree – it has a very fine wood, that is commercially viable. The trees have been grown at the technical college, and volunteers have helped transport the saplings upriver in canoe, dug the holes, and planted the trees.

There are a couple of fincas (plantations) located around the technical college. Along with students from the college, volunteers have been clearing the fields for the planting of rice, soya and chonta palm.

Volunteers have been helping with a research project, led enthusiastically by a Brit called Rob Nivison, called the black earth project.

The project is studying a pre-Columbian technique, re-discovered in the Brazilian Amazon which involves mixing charcoal in with the soil to dramatically increase the yield of crops grown there. As an alternative to slash and burn agriculture, the carbon locks nutrients in the soil, preventing run-off, and initial experiments show that after 5 years it can increase the yield by 880%. Volunteers are particularly enjoying this project, as it is run enthusiastically and explained well with relevance to rainforest conservation. A large portion of the work currently involves finding dead wood to make charcoal furnaces, and mixing the charcoal in with the soil.

In the last week, this project was taken to Loreto, where a local school through a deal with the mayor of Loreto, are interested in trialling the process for a school kitchen garden. It's key contacts and trials like this, that will guarantee the success of the Black Earth Proposal, and hence volunteers have been keen to help out over there. This trip to Loreto also came at a key time in the last week, where volunteers were running low on energy and enthusiasm - a great break from the lodge and an easily applicable concept, lead enthusiastically, was perfect.

The community is keen to involve us in various Mingas, or community collaboration towards a certain project. These are scheduled every Saturday morning, and have involved more work on the conservation and agriculture projects as detailed above. There are also Mingas organized during the week as well, that we have been involved in – specifically in the construction of a new covered games pitch situated in Mondaña, which will house a volleyball and basketball court. Although it was great to be involved with the community directly, volunteers were aware that the village had already got several games pitches, but no flushing toilets, that made mingas seems rather misdirected.

Santa Lucia Project Ecuador;

2004

Santa Lucia Community Ecolodge wins international awards for facilities. Other achievements included;

- Created extensive banana, coffee and sugar cane plantations (2 hectares each)
- Constructed a sugar extraction facility
- Constructed bird viewing tower
- Development of around 30km of interpretive trails
- Constructed a footbridge to help restore an ancient trading route
- Planted approx 1000 bamboo plants, to help provide sustainable construction material for the local communities
- Assisted in construction of various other facilities for tourists which in turn led to the lodge becoming an internationally recognised and award-winning eco- lodge.



After careful consideration with the local community and Rainforest Concern, it was decided that after four years and nearly £100,000 worth of investment that the formal project would cease. Quest Overseas still sends individual volunteers and small amounts of funding to continue small but essential projects.

2003

Created a sustainable community owned plantations and constructed a bird viewing tower, created viewing points and forest trails.

2002

Created sustainable community owned plantations

2001

Quest begins support of cloud forest project in Santa Lucia planting nearly 2000 native trees.