

In this rural part of the country, the women remain largely at home in the village while the men climb up into the hills to tend their coffee plants. Their objective is to get to their fincas, or farm plots, by the shortest way possible and the trails show it. Their paths are rocky, rutted boot tracks that struggle straight up the mountainsides. They present no problem for the sturdy Hondurans, who are unfamiliar with the concept of a broad, smooth, 10 percent grade, but these trails obviously would not appeal to elderly bird-watchers from New York.

The forest surrounding Montana Santa Bárbara near El Dorado, Honduras



During his monthlong sabbatical in Honduras, Jack found that El Dorado's better-off landowners were generally agreeable to having WTA-standard trails built through their holdings in the cloud forests, but between the clouds and the visitor center in the village lie the coffee fincas. For the small farmers, connecting trails would mean the loss of crops. As Jack said, "I had to listen to them. I wasn't about to cut through their crop land just to get my 10 percent grade. We had to work around that and find a compromise."

A general lack of materials presented further challenges. The Honduran government provided Pulaskis, grub hoes, shovels and McLeods but no nails or rebar. Steps and turnpikes had to be wood-staked in place. There is good mineral soil, but the limestone rock is not as durable as Cascade granite.

Labor, on the other hand, came more readily. Jack worked with 5 Peace Corps volunteers and 15 local residents, and across the board, everyone worked hard. With an intimate understanding of local trees, the Hondurans knew which timber would serve best in each situation. The Westerners brought great project direction skills. Together, they built swales and water bars, steps and drainage. The Westerners were continually amazed at how much the locals could accomplish just with their machetes, and by their staggering endurance. Some days, the team would complete 600 feet of trail in only eight hours.

Jack found that several of the workers, like Pablo, showed real promise for work in the eco-

tourism field. Pablo could find his way through the thickest jungle and identify birds by their calls alone. He always knew where the birds were and how to get where he was going. With his help, the trail was designed to reach sites with good potential for wildlife spotting

and to allow its hikers to see spectacularly tall trees and enjoy impressive views. Pablo is now training as a guide and will probably lead bird watching expeditions when this project is completed. Others, too, began to catch on to the tourist-friendly trail standards. With a bit more training, they could form a cadre of a good trail maintenance crew.

When I first heard about this ecotourism project, I admit to being suspicious. Was building trails to suit foreigners' tastes an imposition of North American desires upon a small Central American community? All too often these kinds of projects are implemented from the outside, and local residents may or may not be consulted. However, according to Alicia, it was the community's idea to start this ecotourism project in the first place, and she and Jack were there to listen, learn and help. Jack's earnestness and the enthusiastic response of the local Hondurans both point to a comfortable and positive cooperative effort.

If you still have a hankering to do this kind of work, talk to Jack. You can find him on a Grand Ridge work party or call him at (206) 236-0806.♦



Tips for Ecotourists

Ecotourists strive to appreciate, nurture and enhance—not exploit—the countries and cultures they visit. Here are six tips.

Travel in a spirit of humility, with a genuine desire to meet and talk with the local people. Acquaint yourself with local customs and respect them.

Listen and observe, rather than merely hearing and seeing. Ask questions and seek to understand, not to convert.

Realize that people in the country you visit often have time concepts, thought patterns and cultural preconceptions different from your own. Not inferior, just different.

Remember that you are a guest. Do not ask for or expect special treatment.

Spend wisely. Shop at local establishments and pay fair prices rather than seeking out bargains.

Be aware of the effect you inevitably have as a visitor, and reflect daily on your experiences.

—adapted from tips by travel journalist Don George, www.geoex.com/recce

Peace Corps volunteer Alicia Ward with Jack Simonson

Backcountry

The Gear Closet » **Read, scan, shop!**



2011 HOLIDAY Gift Guide

The very coolest gear for all of the outdoor enthusiasts on your shopping list

Summer's blooms have gone to seed, the larches' needles have blown off in the wind, and snow is just around the corner. Yep, it's time to start thinking about your loved ones, and maybe a little about yourself, as the holiday season approaches. WTA's gear team has spent hours consulting elves, in-laws, your loved ones and your favorite gear companies to generate a broad list of holiday season gift picks. From stocking stuffers to pure gear bling, our 2011 Holiday Gift Guide gives you a cheat sheet for all the best gear out there.



Keep 'em toasty with Sherpa head gear and Mountain Hardwear Gloves.



Better Than Coal

These useful items make great stocking stuffers and small gifts.

Help keep their noggins warm on chilly hiking days with a **Sherpa Adventure Hat**. Hand-knit using 100 percent lambswool and lined with cozy Polarfleece, these stylish hats not only make great gifts, they also support the local home knitters of Nepal where they're made. Available in a variety of styles and colors. \$25

Mountain Hardwear Bandito Fingerless Gloves provide for supreme dexterity, while the convertible mitt quickly adds warmth and protection from the elements. When using your fingers is critical to the success of your mission, this glove-mitt combo is the answer. \$45

No more broken fingernails from coaxing out the tools in your multitool. Forward Action Spring Technology make opening the **Gerber Crucial F.A.S.T. Multitool** easy. With a bottle

opener, Phillips screwdriver, standard screwdriver and wire cutter, this is a handy tool for camp or home. \$50

Exped Shrink Bags are an amazing storage solution. These watertight, compressible, come in a variety of sizes from 20 to 80 liters. They are specifically shaped to fit better in a pack, so they keep your goods dry without creating extra bulk. \$32 - \$39

Drop some natural protection from the sun into their stocking with **Beyond Coastal Face Stick and Lip Balm**. The Facestick sunscreen offers non-mineral UVA/UVB, water- and sweat-resistant protection in a clean-hands applicator, while the Active Lip Balm keeps lips hydrated and provides SPF 15 sun protection in a variety of natural flavors. \$3 - \$7