

Colombia 29.12.08 – 21.1.09

We arrived in Colombia at Bogota airport and spent a day waiting for a connecting flight to Santa Marta. Almost anyone in Ecuador we had talked to about our plans to go to Colombia had warned us. Colombians are not trustworthy, they do not only rob you but kill you at the same time; have a bad character etc. There were so many prejudices that we tended to believe some of them. At the airport and around we had a completely different impression. People were very friendly, relaxed, helping us along and not at all threatening. In Santa Marta this impression continued. And when we went on the Tour to the Ciudad Perdida we were blessed with six other participants coming from Bogota. Two of them spoke German very well. So we learned more about Colombians and found our first impression supported by the new experience. This did not change until the end of our time in Colombia, but we are aware that the patterns of power and violence in the Colombian society are very subtle and not easily detected. Our friend in Medellin explained that the whole city there is directed by the paramilitaries that demand a kind of security tax from every street vender and shop.

We stayed over the New Year in Taganga, a small fishermen's village with tourism near Santa Marta and went on a 6 day tour to the Ciudad Perdida (lost city) in the Tyrona National Park. It was well organized and very worthwhile even though we had to fight a lot with loads of mud on the paths created by continuous Mule travel that turns the soil into workable material for construction but not for walking.

We enjoyed the company of 6 Colombians from Bogota, all involved in interesting jobs concerning social and political change and of four excellent guides. We just had to carry personal things, no sleeping bag, no hammock, no food or cooking facility. This was all up to our guides.



*The **fumigations** in Colombia against the cultivation of Coca bushes is done with a strong herbicide since about 40 years. It is the chemical Glyphosat. It is sprayed from large distances from airplanes. It kills not only Coca, it indiscriminantly kills all plantlife and sickens or endangeres all animal and human life. A study said that it should only be used on the ground sprayed by individual people directly on the plants. Miguel, our cook and guide on a tour to the Ciudad Perdida lives here for more than 30 years as a farmer and said that the fumigations killed even his great (30m high) Avocado trees. It took 20 years until he could plant again. I learned that the Plan Colombia has it determined in the contract between Colombia and the US that only Monsanto's Roundup can be used. Roundup is Glyphosat. So a huge part of the money given by the US government for the Plan Colombia is redirected to the US multinational for poisoning Colombia! The rest is spent for weapons of US production etc. The question emerges if the whole Plan is only a coverup for subsidies for US industry, accepting useless and widespread and lasting poisoning and killing of Virgin jungle, animals and people for cooperate profit??*

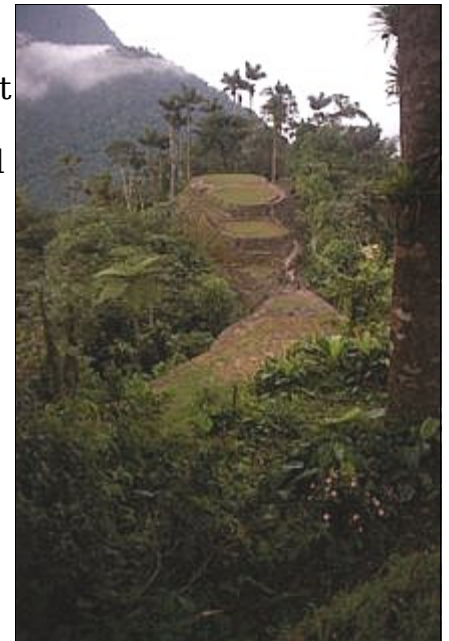
They told us stories of the area of the fumigations, of coca, of the indigenous and that they think about closing (or limiting) the access to the Ciudad Perdida. For the three tribes that live there it is a sacred place and mindless tourism is for them some kind of spiritual pollution. Anually they do rituals to purify the site.

In recent years tourist agencies started offering a helicopter service to the Ciudad Perdida. It saves the tourists three days climbing up steep mountains in frequent rain and slippery mud, and three days down. The landing site is the biggest platform of the town and the most

sacred site for the indigenous communities. We saw



how the nearby forest is affected by the landings of the helicopters, as we saw broken branches and disturbed forest cover due to the high winds a landing causes. I see it as an insult and dishonoring the site and would be happy if it ended. It seems right to take an difficult climb, like a pilgrimage to enter.



When we returned to Taganga and then flew to Medellin we were exhausted

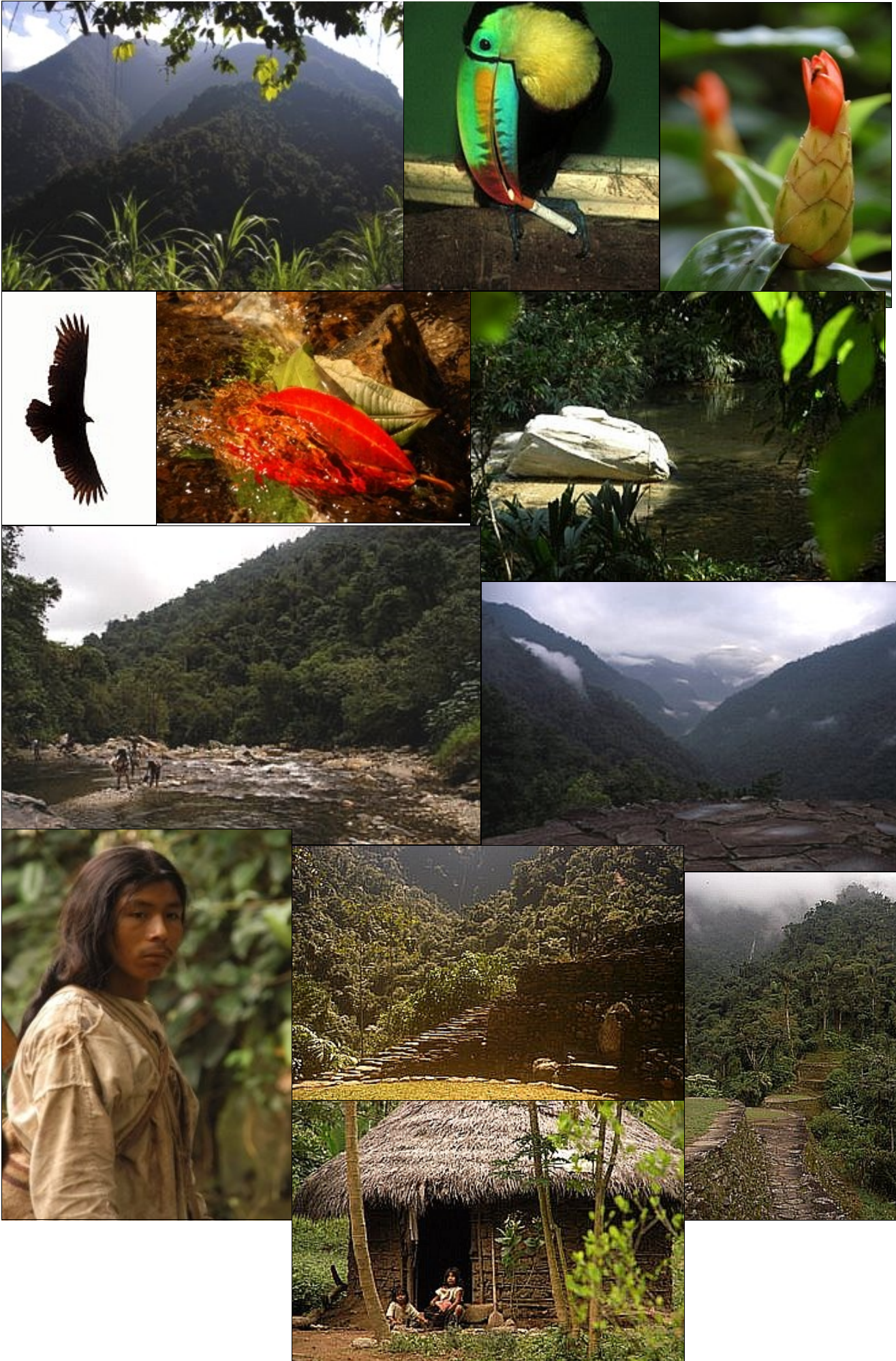
and happy and

understood, why other hikers before us had entered "duro, pero vale la pena" (hard but worthwhile) into the guestbook.

We took some days to recover.



Text 1: Impressions from the Tour to the Ciudad Perdida



Llamada de la Montana (Call of the mountain)

It was the third annual international community and ecovillage gathering in an ecovillage in Colombia. The venue was the Ecovillage of Atlantida in the South of Colombia. The only transport is a 4x4 or a mototaxi, which is a motorcycle which takes one person. We went the about 15km from the main road to Atlantida without helmet over many lethal potholes and 4 km down a very muddy and slippery road just after a strong rain that had soaked the clayroad.



This time the Mountain Call had attracted around 150 people from many South-American countries, but also some from other parts of the world, like us from Germany, some from New Zealand, Denmark ... The atmosphere was relaxed and very friendly. Even much more than in similar gatherings in Europe I had a family feeling. There were some hands on experiences like making a green roof, a herb spiral, a raised bed, and information like consensus decision making etc. On a panel a lot of ecovillages presented themselves with their experience. Always there was plenty of time left for informal meetings and conversations which have a high priority here in Latin America. A program full of scheduled events like we use to have it in ZEGG would be unthinkable here. There is much, much less planned and much more space for the unforeseeable.

I liked and enjoyed this a lot. To have more free time they did not include ecovillage presentations in their schedule, which was a surprise for me.

Colombians seem very involved and interested to learn more and seem to feel the urgency of the time we are in with climate change (which is felt strongly here), economic crisis and accelerating speed of developments in life. The economic crisis does not seem to hit so hard here, where there still is a lot of subsistence farming.

It felt really good to be with many people who are very aware of what is happening in the world. We enjoyed being there in nature with all this enthusiasm to change lifestyles and to learn more. We felt a lot of openness and a kind of being relaxed in the midst of all the urgency that I would like to take this with me. It seems as if many people live more in the "here and now" that I am used to in Europe.



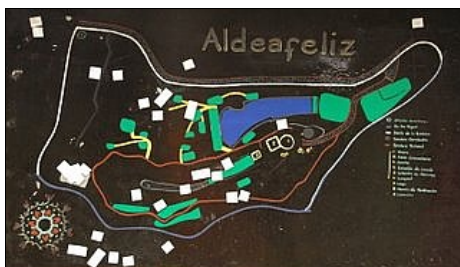
After the meeting we were invited to participate in a "Temazcal" a Colombian sweatlodge. The ritual is very similar to the ones we know. As it had rained a lot the firewood was wet and it took a long time till the stones were heated. I think we entered the lodge around 23h and left it again at 3 in the morning. We sang lots of different songs, made beautiful prayers and it was very hot! The founder of Atlantida is a wonderful dancechief as well and learned a lot from Indigenas in Ecuador, Columbia and others. Next morning after a few hours of sleep we went on a tour to an indigenous market in the town of Silvia on 2400m in the mountains.



Workshops:

we gave a two day workshop of Forum with 25 participants of different ecovillages in Atlantida. Again I was impressed with how easy it was to introduce and do Forum and how fertile the ground already was on which this new seed fell and how fast it started to grow. A lot of groundwork had already been done and Forum seems just like a tool to combine and use this knowledge comprehensively. In many statements that I would have liked to record as they were phantastic conclusions of what is the essence of Forum and personal healing and growth.

Forum Workshop in Aldeafeliz (happy village)



With another long night in a rumbling and freezing bus we arrived in Aldeafeliz which is the name of another ecovillage near Bogota. There we had another moving workshop with 20 participants.



It went very well and we had lots of interested and interesting people to participate. It seems that all people we meet (also in Atlantida before) have involved themselves in one or more kinds of deep spiritual training (funny enough a nun sits herself next to me in the airport as I write this). This kind of preparation makes

Forum much easier. People are used to take the responsibility of their lives back to themselves and ideas like transparent people and that our best protection is our biggest inner opening, that I love for so long, are nothing far fetched.

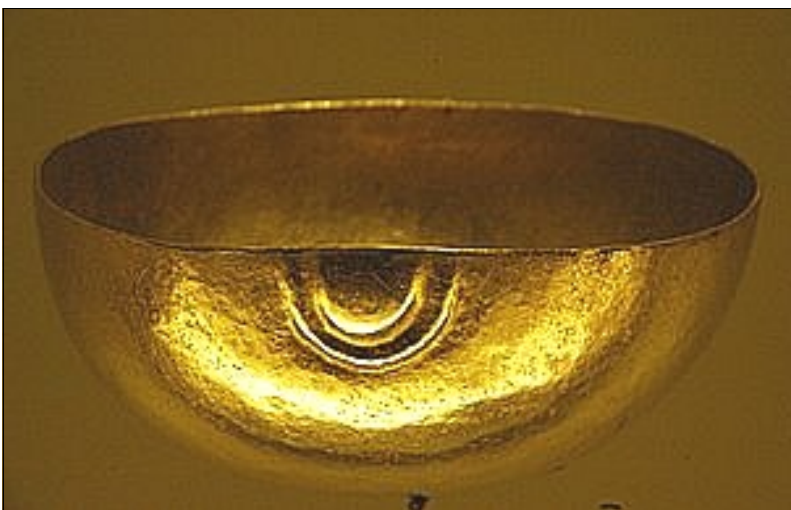
We offered the workshops for donations which worked fine. So we received some financial support for our trip besides that we found new friends and trained our Spanish.



Bogota

In Bogota we found a town with a lot of beauty and culture. One cultural treasure certainly is the Museo de Oro. In the Gold museum many gold artefacts of Colombian prehispanic history are exhibited. But only a tiny fragment of what the Spanish conquerors had stolen, melted and shipped to Europe, laying a base for its richness. For example was the trading system based on bartering so the Indigenas

bartered one kg gold for one kg salt and so on. The museum offered also a lot of cultural background and parts of the wisdom of the different tribes.



What the **current** teaches me:
 A river in the jungle, about 15 to 20m wide with big rocks in it that part the current in three strong flows. I go for a swim and start fighting the current. I cannot make it. As I move a little bit to its rim, I am carried upriver towards one of the rocks. I learn to play with it and move in eights up and down the river carried by the currents with little effort.
 If my viewpoint is fixed on the current and that I want to go upstream, I will have to fight. Fight nature. If I can change and widen the perspective only a little I become aware of the counter current.
 Permaculture thinking - in life.

Poverty:

two perspectives:

a. from outside; my projected imagination of what someone is lacking. This is only possible in the direct comparison.

b. from inside; as soon as I enter the world of money and see through TV or strangers coming by what I do not have and start to believe that I need it, too.



Within a self-sufficient society – like the one in many indigenous societies in the jungle – one has all one needs for a living. Building material which regrows by itself, clay, wood, stones, and



palmleaves for roofing; food to collect and plant, which grows easily and fast, fruits, chicken and pigs, which replace what years before was hunted, fish in the river, and ever flowing freshwater. The climate around the equator is uniformly warm so I do not need warmth from clothing or houses or fires. Clothing is made from plants and bark of trees and needs time to work, glue, to glue wood like fence

posts is there as a sap of a tree that is called “raton”, ropes are lianas. Everything is disposable and degradable. The only thing that might lack is salt, even though often ashes were used for this.

Only the view to the outside, to the “other” creates comparison and the feeling of scarcity, poverty. Clearly this can only apply for a still functioning indigenous society.

I believe **garbage** is a cultural problem, a problem of our oil based culture. Before the use of fossil fuels detrimental materials did not exist. All that was used and needed came from nature, was organic and degradable – or metal. The behaviour of indigenous societies is understandable and logical. Organic materials (including human feces) can be deposited anywhere, and best around the house, where they produce a healthy and fertile ground to grow food on.





Indigenous societies did not know garbage before they came in contact with us. Garbage is a modern problem. Incredible if we see the amounts of non degradable materials that we produced and dumped in that little time. Only the borrowed energy of fossile fules made it possible for us to produce chemicals, poisons and garbage that cannot be degraded by nature. So, something is wrong with our products, isn't it? Garbage is a problem of our "civilization" not more!

In the global North or South we may need some mashines or other industrilized materials due to the cold and a winter where nothing grows. We do need to preserve food for winter in various ways. But at the tropics not. Maybe living in the north made us so tight, so worrrysome, because there are long times of scarcity.