

Altiplano  
September 21

We arrived in Bolivia at 1:00 am, after a full 18 hour day of driving the mountains. Note to self, ‘ do not look for a hotel in La Paz at 2:00 a.m.’ However, we lucked out with a very nice place in the city centre. The bad news was that we had 5 hours to sleep before hitting the road again.

We support a ministry in Oruro, about 3 hours drive up hill from La Paz. ‘Up hill’ is normally not significant, but La Paz, Bolivia sits at 12,000 feet. It is beyond comprehension how people survive in the altiplano. I have often thought it would be a good set for a Mars landing test...red earth, rocks and zero vegetation for as far as you can see.

The Altiplano stretches flat for hundreds of kilometers with mountains poking up in the distance. It looks a little like parts of Alberta, but without the oxygen and oil. You see many anxious dogs as trees are dozens of miles apart. It is beyond dry with steady winds 24/7. I have confirmed that there is a nose bleed section on planet earth. It is *cold* here. Most mornings are close to zero Celcius (32 F) even though summer starts this week.



The people give new meaning to ‘dirt poor’; they live in dirt, adobe houses, scratch in dirt all day to produce small black potatoes.



We ate in several small village homes and experienced extreme generosity in their poverty. We were somehow special so they prepared feast of greens, onions, 3 or 4 types of potatoes with chicken (I hope). They dug holes lined with stones in the property and started a fire, dumped in the potatoes, covered them with greens, then buried everything in dirt. Back to this dirt thing...

Surface water is nasty and scarce. Naturally occurring minerals pollute the water. Uncontrolled mining operations have totally poisoned the water in vast areas. Other NGOs are working widely developing safe water sources in many villages around Oruro.

The Quechua people who inhabit this moonscape are generally uneducated, disenfranchised and discriminated against. Women are little more than beasts of burden and widely abused. The literacy workers we support are men and women who travel to these villages and teach literacy from Biblically based material. They are transforming lives. They have a team of doctors and dentists providing services where they are non-existent. We have many stories on file of battered women who were helpless because they could not even recognize road signs in order to escape. Women & men standing up in meetings to demonstrate their R&R’s was powerful. This is something we take so for granted in Canada.



Thanks for your prayers and interest

Phil

[Return to Travelogues](#) 

[Ministry info](#) 