Flag Expedition Report  
Submitted February 12, 2010  

The People and Community, Lake Atitlan and Antigua, Guatemala, 2010  
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Title:  
The People and Community, Lake Atitlan and Antigua, Guatemala, 2010.  

Destination:  
Villages surrounding Lake Atitlan, Guatemala including Panajechel, San Antonio Polopo, San Jose Chacaya., Concepcion, and Chukmuk.  

Lago de Atitlan (Lake Atitlan):  
14 degrees, 38 minutes North; 91 degrees, 10 minutes West  

Panajechel:  
Elevation:  5,167 feet  
14.73579 degrees North; 91.15898 degrees West  

San Antonio Polopo  
14.69120 degrees North; 91.11688 degrees West  

San Jose Chacaya  
Elevation:  7153 feet  
14.77029 degrees North; 91.21424 degrees West  

Concepcion  
Elevation:  6,775 feet  
14o 47’ 5” North; 91o 47’ 48” West  

Chukmuk  
Elevation:  5,174 feet  
14.633 degrees North, 91.233 West  

Antigua  
Elevation:  5,030 feet  
140o 33’ 40” North, 90o 44’ 3” West  

Flag:  #52  

Dates of Expedition:  
January 1-10, 2010
**Sponsorship:**
DoCare, International
Rocky Vista University, Parker, Colorado

**Explorer Club Members Participating:**
Joyce M. Johnson (FN ’03)
James A. Calderwood, Jr. (SM ’04)

**Purpose:**
The purpose of this expedition was to identify, investigate and document the cultural differences in daily life in several communities around Lake Atitlan and in Antigua, Guatemala. A PowerPoint presentation (including accompanying narrative) appropriate for middle school students is being developed.

**The Expedition:**
The “base camp” was at Panajachel, located on the northeast shore of the lake. It is the largest and probably best known of the Lake Atitlan communities.

In addition to Panajachel, the expedition included four other lake villages: San Antonio Polopo, San Jose Chacaya, Concepcion and Chukmuk. Antigua, a larger community was also included for comparison.

**Panajachel.** Panajachel is the largest of the lake communities, with a population of about 11,000 people. Geographically, Panajachel is flat and fairly spread out, which makes it different from the other communities that are built into the sides of the old volcanic hills and mountains. About two thirds of the population are indigenous, primarily the Kaqchikel. Though some speak Spanish, many of the indigenous only speak their traditional Mayan languages.
Of all the lake communities, Panajachel has the most outside influence. Tourists are common since most visitors to the lake region go through Panajachel. As a result, it is also a center for tourist products, with Avenue Santandar being almost exclusively lined with shops and restaurants for foreign visitors. The town also has a smaller market for the local population where fruits, vegetables, meats and household items are sold. Panajachel can be reached by road, with many local buses transporting workers to and from Antigua. The lake is used for transport from Panajachel to many of the other lake communities.

San Antonio Polopo. San Antonio Polopo is another Kaqchikel community, with more than 90% of the population indigenous. Their ancient dialects are spoken, with very few speaking Spanish. Both the women and men wear traditional dress daily, most are hand woven. The women’s huipiles (blousens) are bright cotton in a blue and aqua woven pattern, and to the casual observer look essentially the same. However, the details of the stripe-like pattern and embroidered details differ. The specific pattern is handed down from mother to daughter, and reflects much about the social status of the woman who wears it. The women’s skirts (enredo, refajo, corte) are a piece of cotton fabric wrapped around the waist, fastened with a handwoven strip of colorful cloth. The men wear a pullover woven cotton shirt and a black (or dark brown) and white patterned wool apron over woven cotton breeches. Most of the cloth is hand woven by the women, often on a backstrap loom. If larger looms are used, the men may help because of the extra strength needed.

The village is built along side of an old volcanic mountain, and appears to have many fewer than the reported 9,000 residents, though population density is high. Homes, generally one or two rooms, are primarily built of adobe or concrete blocks, sometimes with a plaster coating. Homes
are built close together, linked with a long twisty semi-paved path, that is primarily accessible by foot.

San Antonio Polopo has a water supply – the village “leased” several streams and thus has access to this water. The streams start high in the mountains and get their water from condensation from the clouds around the mountain tops. Most pictures of the lake region show the volcanoes with a ring of clouds – these clouds condense and produce the water.

Because San Antonio Polopo is only 9 km from Panajachel (and can be reached by boat on the lake or by road road) it has a number of outside visitors. The village is known for its blue patterned pottery; weavers also sell their textiles. Nevertheless, it retains its ancient traditions.

**San Jose Chacaya.** San Jose Chacaya is built far above the lake, high up in the mountains, and quite isolated from the communities below. It can be reached by a newly paved road, much constructed by hand and carefully built of brick. The relative affluence of the community is due to agriculture and exquisitely terraced farms. The agriculture is amazing – the vertical mountainsides have been carefully terraced over the years, with hand made rock fencing to support the terraces. Much of the land is irrigated with complex water systems; the crops are green and healthy. Onions, cabbage, and pole beans are common crops during the winter months. The corn from last season dries in the fields until harvest in late winter. To add to the community’s economy, some of the women are participating in group and communal micro-financing to raise chickens and develop other local businesses.
San Jose Chacaya is a progressive community. Though still essentially a subsistence farming economy, residents do have higher incomes than some of the other lake communities. San Jose Chacaya has an ambulance (though it was empty with no supplies; not even a bed for patients.) Some residents are even able to afford some medical and dental care.

**Concepcion.** Concepcion is an agrarian village. The village and surrounding agricultural region have a population of 6,000; 48% male and 52% female. 98% of the community is indigenous. The “urban” part of the town consists of a string of perhaps a dozen concrete and adobe small buildings that house family businesses near the town center. These include sales of agricultural chemicals, and basic food and clothing supplies. The Church becomes the architectural focal point of the village, and from whence the name Concepcion originated. The church, Church of the Immaculate Conception, was constructed in the early 1600’s; the church bell and other stonework is dated 1621.

Concepcion is interesting in that it is only a few kilometers from the town of Solala. Yet, it is a small agricultural village. The town plaza is on a mesa, and the fields are nearby, mostly at lower elevations. It seems far more isolated than it really is.

**Chukmuk.** Chukmuk is a new village near Santiago Atitlan, built after Hurricane Stan destroyed another nearby community, Panabaj, in 2005. The hurricane and subsequent mudslides killed 500 in Panabaj, and left nearly everyone else homeless and without any possessions. Relocation efforts resulted in the development of Chukmuk. Groups from around the world are contributing. Rebuilding continues, with many NGOs (non governmental organizations) and other charities helping local residents rebuild their community. To date, about 500 homes have
been built; another 500 are planned. The new homes are concrete block structures with corrugated metal roofs.

With the NGO support, there are some urban and public health efforts going into Chukmuk development. For example, an Italian group built and furnished a new clinic, though the community is still waiting for someone to staff it. A group from the University of Pennsylvania came to study the drinking water and they found that the water from the two wells is high in hydrogen sulfide. Work continues to find a reliable source of drinking water - efforts may be made to purify the lake water.

The road between Chuckmuk and Santiago Atitlan has recently been paved. Coffee farming lines the roads between the two communities. Coffee, often grown using organic practices, is a main cash crop for the area.

**Antigua.** Antigua is an old and historic town that was founded in the 1540’s. It was the Guatemalan capital until 1773 when it was destroyed by an earthquake, and the capital moved to Guatemala City where it is today. Antigua is listed in many historic registries: Monument of the Americas, National Monument of Guatemala, UNESCO Colonial Cultural Heritage of America. In 1969 the preservation of the city was mandated by law. Today, its cobblestone streets and architecture are protected. It is a picturesque town, surrounded by three volcanoes.

Antigua itself has a population of 27,000; the urban area expands beyond this, and the total metropolitan area population is much larger. The population includes indigenous, Ladino and foreigners. There are many foreigners there – as tourists, language school students, and
businessmen managing small restaurants and shops. It is an interesting town, a combination of historic buildings and post-earthquake ruins, all preserved and appreciated by tourists. It has a very different atmosphere from the small indigenous villages around the lake. However, the indigenous culture is still apparent there.

Summary and Conclusions

The expedition was interesting because of the contrasts between communities; communities which seem like they should be very similar. Most of the residents around the lake are indigenous. The Kaqchiquel live on the north and northeast perimeter of the lake and the Tz’utujils are on the south, southeast, and west. Antigua is a mix of indigenous, Ladino and foreigners.

The primary results of the expedition are documented in the associated Power Point presentation with written narration.
The People and Community: Lake Atitlan and Antigua, Guatemala

Joyce Johnson (FN’03)
James Calderwood (SM ’04)
January 2010
Overview

- Where is Guatemala and Lake Atitlan?
- The Lake Atitlan region
- The People
  - Language
  - Dress
  - Food and Agriculture
  - Drinking Water
- The Community
  - Housing
  - Communication
  - Transportation
  - Energy
Volcanoes –
Lake Atitlan and Antigua

Pre-history and today
Lake Atitlan

The Lake

Today
The People
Language

Mayan Languages
Spanish
Clothing
Men’s Clothing
Clothing
Weaving and Sewing
Clothing
Food
Growing Food
Irrigation

Many crops benefit from irrigation systems
Food in the Market
Food in the Market

Milk is sterilized so it doesn’t need refrigeration
Part II: People and Community
Lake Atitlan and Antigua, Guatemala

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January 2010
Fishing
Cooking Preparation

Wood, electricity and gas are used for cooking.
Many sources of drinking water
Drinking Water

Storage tanks –
Shared by community
Some houses and some communities share an outdoor faucet and sink, often connected to a well.
The Community
Housing

Most houses are made of adobe or concrete blocks, sometimes without windows.
Housing

Houses are close together in villages
Housing

Houses are scattered among the fields
Communication

- Few people have computers
- Internet cafes are in larger towns
Communication

- Few homes have phones
- Some people use public phones
- Others buy cell phone minutes
Transportation
Transportation

Few families can afford a car
Walking is common
Transportation

Many villages are built into the hillside
There is little space or need for paved roads
Transportation

The lake is a major transportation mode
Energy

Many homes don’t have electricity
Candles are a common source of light
Most work is done by hand. This girl is cutting wood to use for cooking.
Energy

Cutting logs for wood. Even this heavy work is done by hand and with animals. There are few machines.