

Catmacra, Argentina

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It's amazing what can happen while trying to work in another country. I was in Argentina, part of a group of volunteers who were trying to form a network of environmental educators in the country. One of our very talented and experienced Volunteers, Laura Lee Lienk, would often come to our area and do a workshop for teachers. Then, we would follow up with the same teachers and do other workshops.

One of the most interesting workshops I was involved in was in a rural area. I never realized what we would have to think about – like how the teachers would actually get to the school for the workshop. The bus only went up and down that road certain times, not coinciding with our schedule. Somehow they made it, though. In at least one case the mayor of the village brought the teachers in his own vehicle.

It turned out that the Governor of our province was to stop and see the workshop. Everyone was excited and we set up mini demonstrations outside to show him the effects of burning the hillsides which causes erosion – and many demonstrations. In the meantime, the agency I worked for, The Provincial Agency for Science and Technology, worked on getting posters together, hoping to be able to talk to him about other issues affecting the province while he was there to see the workshop.

Finally the Governor came. I think the teachers were very excited to show the demonstrations we set up and to talk about them. The Governor didn't give much time to our agency officials and their poster sessions, but we definitely had some happy teachers that day!!

Argentina was the first place I had espresso drinks (I'm from the East and a family of instant coffee drinkers, so I loved this new discovery). They had what was called a Cortato and a Cortada, one was espresso with a little milk foam and the other was milk with a little bit of espresso. It was pretty expensive to have those drinks and amazing how long we could make one last. They tasted so good to me. Barbecued meats were another wonderful food in Argentina. They didn't use sauces like we do – they didn't need to, the meat was fabulous.

The real drink that defines Argentina and some of the nearby countries is Yerba Mate. You usually have a cup (mate) of wood, metal, horn or whatever and a silver straw that is enclosed on the bottom and had holes in it. The tea is filled about $\frac{3}{4}$ to the top and the straw inserted into the tea. One person is the server. He or she pours hot water out of a teakettle or thermos, passes the mate to the person beside her, the person sips the hot liquid until it makes a slurping sound, passes it back, the cup is refilled and given to the next person, and so on. You aren't supposed to touch or fiddle with the straw. I don't like mate without something else in it – sugar, mint, or other country herbs were the best. Other volunteers learned to drink mate "amargo" (bitter). Whenever I drank it in the rural parts of the province, they would pour hot water over the end of the straw between each use, and then wipe it with a sometimes not real clean rag. However, I liked that better than the other times I drank it, when the straw wasn't cleaned at all. More than once, the cup was passed around a circle a couple of times and someone would announce that they had a bad sore throat.

A nice memory I have is standing on the roof of the house where I rented a room and watched white egrets fly in to roost in the trees of the square. My favorite tree was palo borracho – the “drunk stick” tree, which has a big round bulge near the bottom of the trunk.