

Just Another Day on the Road

18 February 2009

The day started like any other day out here. We got up, got around, had some coffee, tea and toast, and started out again, following our noses around Ecuador.



We were out in the low lying wetlands of Ecuador. We were there because we missed a turn the day before, so we needed to do a little 80 mile / 129 kilometer loop back around to where we wanted to be. It turned out to be a real blessing, like most missed turns do for us, as it allowed us to see an area of the country we would have otherwise missed – the rice growing regions.



Just Another Day on the Road



Just Another Day on the Road

We eventually made our way up onto the flat coastal plain and hooked back up with the highway we'd been looking for the day before. Along the way we saw scenes typical of this part of the world.



Copyright © 2009, Stephanie Hackney, all rights reserved.



Copyright © 2009, Stephanie Hackney, all rights reserved.

Just Another Day on the Road



Eventually we worked our way into the banana plantations.



Just Another Day on the Road

Where every roadside stand offered a bunch for \$2.00. As in \$2.00 for the entire thing, banana tree branch included.



We passed through the banana growing area and started climbing back up into the Andes. We were on a journey from the Pacific coast back up to the Sierra.



Just Another Day on the Road

We went down the usual roads with the usual bridges.



We finally ended up on the road that would carry us up over the 12,700 feet / 3,871 meters high pass. In the places it resembled a road, it had plenty of deep potholes.



Just Another Day on the Road

We drove through very heavy fog along the rest of the road and over the pass. Along the way, the road deteriorated badly. In the areas it wasn't under construction it was a rough road, with crater-like holes and a surface alternating between rutted gravel, broken asphalt and mud. In the areas it was under construction it featured many sharp, deep drops where new culverts were being installed across the road.

We finally made it over the pass and down into the first town in the Sierra. We parked at a fuel station overnight and slept well, comforted by the sounds of other trucks coming, going and parking next to us at the 10,547 feet / 3,215 meters altitude.

We awoke this morning and repeated the usual routine. Prior to departing, I did a good walk-around inspection of the truck to check things out after the rough road of the day before and everything looked OK.

Just a few miles down the road I stopped to walk around the rig again. The Fuso didn't feel right. When I got out and took a look, I saw we were listing heavily to port. The roadside area where I pulled off was not level, so I couldn't be certain of a problem. I didn't see anything obviously wrong with the Fuso, so I got back in and we motored on to the next town where we stopped for fuel.

I try to always do a detailed walk around while we take on fuel, and this time I had extra incentive. Sure enough, on the flat surface of the fuel station, we were heavily leaning left.



Copyright © 2009, Douglas Hackney, all rights reserved.

Just Another Day on the Road

I could see the pivot frame was tilted all the way over to its limits, but could not identify anything obviously wrong. My two top candidates for the cause of the problem were a broken pivot frame or a broken leaf in the left rear spring.



We knew we had a good waypoint for a place we camped on our initial trip up this road, prior to our wandering circuit of Ecuador. The waypoint was just north of the fuel station, so we drove slowly up there. Once I got the truck blocked and parked, I began the inspection.

I pulled out my overalls, a tarp, a flashlight and my pocket camera and went to work. Inspection number one turned up nothing but frustration. I couldn't see anything in the area where the pivot frame would have to be broken for it to be the cause of the problem. I went back inside the camper and spent half an hour on my laptop reviewing photos of the Fuso's construction and realized that it was almost impossible for the pivot frame to have broken in a way to make the truck lean the way it was, at least in the area of the pivot frame I was trying to inspect.

Back under the truck I went for inspection number two. This time I focused on my second candidate: a broken spring leaf. I shot photos, measured and compared distances. Much to my chagrin, since a broken spring leaf would have been simple to repair in the 3rd world, I eliminated it as a possibility.

Stumped, I pondered the options. I remembered Sherlock Holmes' advice to Doctor Watson, "After you have eliminated all other possibilities, whatever remains, no matter how unlikely, must be the truth." There was only one other possibility. Back under the truck for inspection number three. I pulled out some tools and removed the wire chase rock guard from under the chassis.

Just Another Day on the Road

This is what I found:



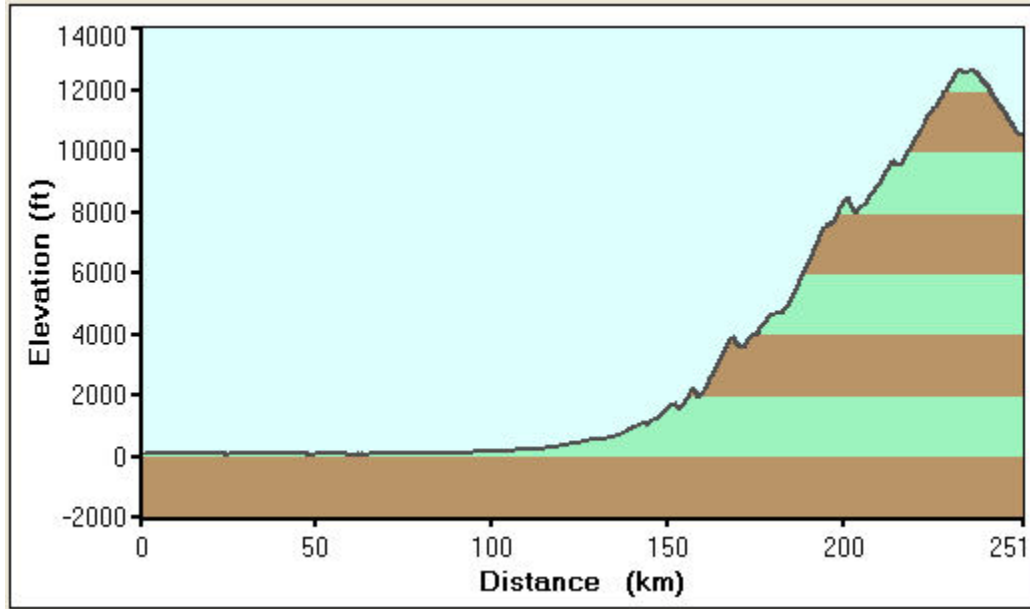
A broken frame.

Just another day on the road...

Just Another Day on the Road

We do not know where the frame broke, but assume it was on the climb over the pass.

This is the elevation profile of our drive.



And this is the mountain portion of the track.



Just Another Day on the Road

You can learn more about pivot frames here:
<http://www.hackneys.com/mitsu/index-pivot-frame.htm>

We are currently safe and sound. And, yes, we feel very, very fortunate.



Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney, along with their currently broken truck frame, are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>