

## Black and White

26 September 2008

If you had to choose between black and white, which would you choose?

The Cordillera Blanca (White Mountain Range) is the second highest mountain range in the world, trailing only the Himalayas, and features thirty three major peaks over 5,500 meters (18,045 ft) tall in an area 21 kilometers (13 mi) wide and 180 kilometers (112 mi) long.

People come from all over the world to climb the mountains in the Cordillera Blanca, as well as hike the trails below the peaks and view the stunning scenery.

The Cordillera Negra (Black Mountain Range) is a parallel range of mountains that is almost as tall, but due to its location blocking the warm winds from the desert and the Pacific Ocean, remains devoid of snow.

So, if you had to choose between black and white, which would you choose?

Given that you can ride directly to the Cordillera Blanca.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

Black and White

Enjoy spectacular scenery along the climb.



Black and White

Ride most of the way up the mountains.



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And find very special places once you get there.



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Plus, enjoy home cooked local foods within walking distance of the snow line.



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Or, enjoy a snack of your own while enjoying the views.



Why would anyone not proceed directly, without passing go, without collecting \$200, to the Cordillera Blanca?

Essentially everyone else does.

Why would anyone go to the Cordillera Negra first?

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Perhaps for the chance to see people doing things the traditional way.



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With the old tools.



Black and White

In the old ways.



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Or the chance to meet them, and learn from them.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

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And to look into the eyes of those who have seen so much.



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Or, perhaps for the majestic views of the Cordillera Blanca across the valley.



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After all, the Cordillera Negra is the only place you are looking across at the Cordillera Blanca and not up at it.



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The scenery is simply spectacular, even if you are a cow.



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But, for us, it wasn't any of those things.

It was the desire to see something unique.

Something that exists only in this place.



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Something that lives for 100 years, then dies.



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Something unique in the entire world.



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Something that grows only at this altitude, directly across from the snow covered peaks of the Cordillera Blanca.



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We came to see the Puya Raimondi, the largest member of the Bromeliad family.

The Puya Raimondi can reach more than 3 meters / 9.8 feet in height.



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Then, after living for 80 to 150 years, the plant sends up a flower spike 9 to 10 meters / 29.5 to 32.8 feet high. The flower stalk contains up to 20,000 flowers. After the bloom, the plant dies.



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The Puya Raimondi live a life apart from the majesty of the Cordillera Blanca.  
They live by themselves, on a quiet mountainside.



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There were hundreds of Puya Raimondi growing on the mountainside we visited, but only two people—us.



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It was a reminder that while most people seek the direct route to the obvious,



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life's best rewards are often along the lonely, un-trodden, counter-intuitive path.



We chose black.

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The Puya Raimondi are located at Latitude -9.11165433, Longitude -77.87315617. Your lonely, un-trodden, counter-intuitive path with life's best rewards may be located elsewhere.

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In this region, wheat is cut by hand using a sickle, and then threshed by livestock, whose hooves separate the stalks from the grain. The wheat is separated from the chaff by hand, by tossing it up or pouring it out from your hand and letting the wind take the chaff.

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Unless otherwise noted, all photos by Douglas Hackney.

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Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

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