

31 July 2008

I went down to the market and sat down on the curb.

I asked around about who was holding but no one was talking. The girls were chatting and Jose thought I was horning in on his potential action.



So I wandered around until I found my usual contacts.



El Ojo

But all they had to say was, “El ojo.”

I thought they meant Consuelo.



El Ojo

But she just gave me the thumb, the wave off, so I walked on, staying cool.



I went to ask Maria, but she was uptight. Something was up.



El Ojo

“Who was El ojo?” I thought.

Then it hit me, “I’ll ask Lucia, she’s always been reliable.”

But she just shook her head and took another lick.



El Ojo

I was stumped. I was out. I was scoreless.

I wandered through the market wishing the 50 different types of potatoes were 50 kilos instead.

I needed a chew.



El Ojo

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw her.

I knew I'd found "el ojo," I knew I'd found "the eye."



El Ojo

“El Ojo” is a work of fiction. None of these ladies, as far as I know, have anything to do with growing, distributing, or marketing coca leaves.

Coca leaves are chewed by Peruvians for energy and to relieve the effects of altitude sickness. They are dried on sidewalks and sold in the local markets. Coca candy and tea are widely consumed by all segments of society and are packaged and sold at retail in major supermarkets.

We have only tried coca candy and tea, both of which were very effective in relieving the effects of altitude sickness.

Attributes of coca tea claimed by the manufacturer include:

Restorative and energetic	Excellent for diet
Digestive	Anti-diarrheic action
Acts against fatigue and altitude sickness	Relieves tiredness of voice
Regulates the metabolism of carbohydrate	

The market is in Chivay, Peru, altitude 11,940 feet / 3,639 meters.

“El Ojo” is dedicated to Koose, who inquired about the coca chewing local ladies of Peru.

All photos by Douglas Hackney



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>