

Rob Potter Memorial Travel Award Report

The Rob Potter travel award helped pay for part of my fieldwork in Peru in July, I was very grateful for the award which enabled me to visit my country of study and some of my study sites for my PhD. During the two-week trip, we visited the Ancash District and the Chillón Valley. Ancash is home to two of the main mountain ranges in Peru, the Cordillera Negra and the Cordillera Blanca, so called because the former is unglaciated whilst the latter is formed of a number of glaciated peaks. It is thought that the Cordillera Blanca may one day look like the Cordillera Negra if glacial retreat continues at its current rate; this contrast between the two was interesting to see as the absence/presence of glaciers also affects the availability of water for irrigation and farming.

Whilst in Ancash we held a community workshop with representative from the local communities around the village of Pamporamas, Cordillera Negra, and a representative from a local NGO focused on rural development. This workshop discussed the issues surrounding water availability, and changes in this availability, as well as agricultural productivity within the highly sensitive Cordillera Negra. Following our workshop we visited a number of sites within the Cordillera Blanca, this involved visiting farming communities and seeing how agriculture is practiced today but also saw evidence for past agricultural practices in the form of relic terraces and field systems which would have been in cultivation during pre-Columbian times.

Across the two weeks we collected six sediment core sequences from lakes and peat bogs from a mixture of settings. Three of the sites were around 3000-3500m in elevation which places them in a key agricultural zone in the Andes. It is hoped these cores will provide records of changes in agricultural activity and productivity in the past. The other three cores, all from the Chillón Valley, were situated above 4000m in the puna pastoral zone, which will hopefully provide a record of camelid herding and animal husbandry activities in the past. These sequences will form the main materials for my PhD research. Whilst in the field, we also interviewed local farmers in order to discuss the present day issues effecting agriculture productivity and sustainability within the study areas. This was also an excellent opportunity to record local oral histories about changes in farming practices within living memory, to go alongside the deeper history perspective the collected core records will hopefully provide.

I also had the opportunity to attend two workshops in Ancash and Chillón hosted by the project team. The workshop in Huaraz at the Universidad Nacional Santiago Antunez de Mayolo was entitled 'Living with Climate Change', and discussed issues around climate change, glacier retreat, water management, quality, environmental change, and food production. This workshop was attended by members of the Mountain Institute, the National Institute of Investigation on Glaciers and Mountain Ecosystems, local community members, mountain guides and members of the local farming communities. The Workshop in Lima at the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, focused on food production and climate resilience; past present and future and explored how knowledge of the past can help understand the sustainability and resilience of agricultural systems in the future.

All of these amazing opportunities, especially those not directly related to samples collection, were only possible by visiting Peru and going into the local farming communities, and the information collected will really enrich my PhD thesis. I am therefore very grateful for the Rob Potter Memorial Award for helping my travel to Peru.