

# COSTA RICA RAINFOREST TREK

November / December 2008



January 2009

**Thank you** so much for supporting **TEENAGE CANCER TRUST** by sponsoring my trek through the Rainforest of Costa Rica. Here's a photo journal of the trip...



Like its neighbours Panama and Nicaragua, Costa Rica straddles Central America from the Pacific to the Caribbean. Our starting point was the Pacific coast where the sun, sea and sand beguiled us into thinking this was going to be just a walk in the park....



The iguana on the beach was our first taste of the amazing flora and fauna of this lush and largely unspoilt country.



On the second day, we got ourselves into the swing of some more serious walking. Over the next week we were to climb from sea level to well over 2,000 metres. Initially we were walking along tracks passable with vehicles and through cultivated land, as we headed for the rainforest, much of which is designated as various national parks.

Gradually it dawned on us that one of the key features of the rainforest would be .....

## ..... RAIN !

In fact it the forest was so hot and steamy that we soon gave up trying to wear any waterproofs which just made everyone hot and steamy *inside* the waterproofs!

As it rained most of the time we were walking, and the air was so humid, it was impossible to get anything dry, and we all accumulated our very own bin liner of soggy stinking clothes.



The rain also had another consequence .....

## ..... MUD !

So it was pretty heavy going underfoot, and the streams we had to cross were deeper than our

boots, so most of us had that squelchy feeling on one day or another.



Most nights we slept in tents, but at the campsites there was also some sort of wooden shelter where some of us could sleep on an open veranda, or under the eaves. At times we were deep in the rainforest, and when vehicles could no longer get in, our gear was carried on horseback.



On the longest day of the trek, we left our isolated camp at 6.40am, heading along a path which we later found out is only walked by about 3 groups a year.

After the first few hours, there could be no turning back, and the only option was to carry on through the forest.



Where the path had become overgrown, the local guide used his machete to clear it.

Most of the route was uphill, but we also had steep and slippery descents into valleys to cross more rivers.



At times the path was cut deep into the hillside and with the thick forest canopy overhead, it was almost like walking through a tunnel.

We finally arrived at the next camp



at 5.40pm (by which time it was dark) – 11 hours after leaving the previous camp and with only about an hour of breaks altogether. But there was hot soup and a real sense of achievement to ward off the damp and cold of the evening.



Over the six days of walking we saw an incredible variety of plant life, and also this cultivated plant (below), which very few people I've shown the picture to can name at their first attempt....

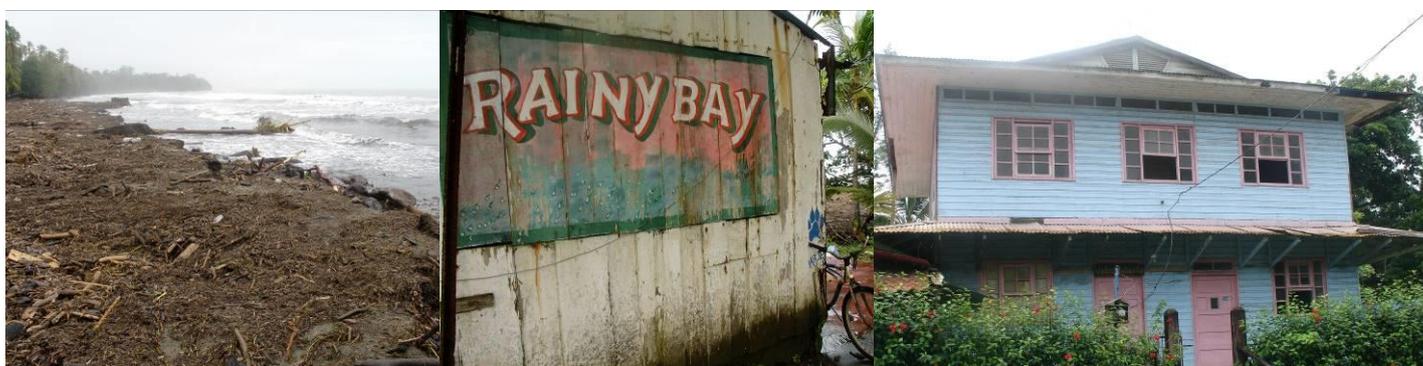


[Answer at the bottom of page 4]

Despite the noise of 30 people stomping through the forest, we also saw the odd snake, a tarantula-like spider (not my hand in the picture), a poison arrow frog and an inquisitive sloth.



We finally reached and crossed the Pan American highway – the road which links Alaska in the north to Patagonia in the south, with only one short break (in Colombia). After a night on the Caribbean side of the highway, we headed to the sea. Unlike the sunny and sandy Pacific side, the Caribbean beaches were covered in storm debris.



So in just over a week we had seen the Pacific, the Caribbean, and the stunning variety and beauty of the rainforest, albeit through the filter of exertion, exhaustion and constant steamy dampness.

As we enjoyed our end of trek dinner (following the luxury of a hot shower and putting on clean dry clothes), around the table sat a mother who had lost a teenage child to cancer, a father whose son is now in remission, a doctor who has treated teenagers with cancer, and a member of staff from TCT who decided actually to do one of these treks it is her job to persuade others to do. TCT still needs to build around 15 more specialist units in the UK to ensure that every teenager with cancer has access to one, instead of being stuck on a young children's ward or with adults who are mainly 60+ years older. TCT also funds a research professorship in adolescent oncology and a range of practical support for young people with cancer.

Your sponsorship means a lot to me, but much more to those whose lives are directly affected by teenage cancer. Thank you again for your continued support.



ANSWER TO PAGE 3 QUESTION: Coffee Beans

*NIGEL TURNER*