

Vanessa Lea, Social Anthropology - Fieldwork, Ecuador

Thanks to the support Pembroke College gave to me I was able to finance a research trip to Ecuador. Following on from a previous successful and collaborative experience as a volunteer at the Kapawi Ecolodge & Reserve in the Amazon rainforest, I returned to conduct the fieldwork necessary for my dissertation as part of the Archaeology and Anthropology trips. Considering that the idea behind Kapawi's creation was to find a way to protect the Achuar people's ancestral lands, I planned to study how those affected by community-owned initiatives in Ecuador are using tourism as a platform to give themselves a voice and seek representation. I am also interested in how indigenous leaders make enormous decisions on behalf of their communities when confronted with lucrative propositions from oil companies and international investors.

During the time I spent with the Achuar various international investors offering much promise visited their reserve. Furthermore, various papers were signed following meetings in the jungle that I was able to attend. In my dissertation I will question how the rumour mill regarding prospective changes in the near future create a new discourse surrounding hope, desire, aspirations and goal setting amongst the Achuar in the Kapawi catchment area. Furthermore, during the following weeks the Amazon was catapulted to top national news as Yasuni ITT collapsed due to a lack of funding. This was President Correa's project to protect a part of the Yasuni reserve from oil exploitation, but he has now confirmed that oil will be indeed be extracted from Yasuni. Though this does not directly affect the Achuar territory it does pose a certain threat to the future of their land. It also continues to influence their desire to turn to eco-tourism as an alternative to oil and as the only alternative to oil.

This was a very important time to be in Ecuador and I am thankful to college for supporting my research visit as it enabled me to engage in the participant observation essential for anthropological fieldwork in the country that first inspired my desire to study social anthropology.