

## Summary of Rotary Bridges to Prosperity Trip to Nicaragua April 26 – May 1, 2017

I would like to thank Norm Arnold (our team leader) for the opportunity to be a part of this outstanding group. Norm is a member of the Rotary Club of Alamogordo, New Mexico and the primary organizer of this trip as well as the main "driving force" behind its success. I would also be remiss if I failed to thank the entire Bridges to Prosperity organization for doing what they do, and for doing it so well.

<http://bridgestoprosperty.org/> B2P has a vision of a world where poverty caused by rural isolation no longer exists. Their programs provide access to healthcare, education and markets by teaching communities how to build footbridges over impassable rivers, in partnership with organizations and professionals. They prove the value of their work through a commitment to the community and its bridge that lasts long after the opening celebration. B2P was founded by a Rotarian, and it is my understanding that Rotary Clubs have worked together closely with them for more than 15 years – and still going strong. Rotary Clubs support bridges through generous grants and individual donations, as well as volunteering on B2P bridge build sites. B2P also partners with various businesses and Civil Engineering students in Universities around the US, who also volunteer their time and help the in-country local staff do much of the physical labor to build the bridges.

Members of this trip's Rotary team included: Norm Arnold (Alamogordo RC), Robyn Long (B2P), Ken Bingman (Newport News RC), Jean Gindreau (Los Alamos RC) and Doug Borrett & Carey Beamesderfer (West El Paso RC). Each member of the team contributed their own money to cover their travel expenses, as well as room and board for the 6 day trip. Team members also brought along donated shirts, caps, toys and related items that fit into their suitcase for the local school children in the bridge communities.

Special thanks goes to Robyn Long (Bridges to Prosperity staff grant writer), who also took the lead in organizing and coordinating the trip.

### The Trip:

This trip began on Wednesday, April 26, 2017, at the El Paso airport, where Doug & Carey met Norm and Jean, then boarded our flight to Managua, Nicaragua, via Houston. We arrived in Managua shortly after 8:00pm and were taken by bus to the Globales Camino Real hotel for the night.



Robyn & Ken flew from Virginia and met us at the hotel. (see pictures on the next page)



Globales Camino Real hotel



Doug, Jean, Norm, Robyn, Ken  
(Carey took the picture)

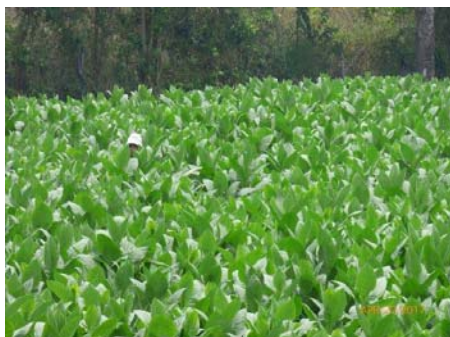
Nicaragua was settled as a Spanish colony from Panama in the early 16th century. Independence from Spain was declared in 1821 and the country became an independent republic in 1838. Britain occupied the Caribbean Coast in the first half of the 19th century, but gradually ceded control of the region in subsequent decades. Violent opposition to governmental manipulation and corruption spread to all classes by 1978 and resulted in a short-lived civil war that brought the Marxist Sandinista guerrillas to power in 1979. Nicaraguan aid to leftist rebels in El Salvador prompted the US to sponsor anti-Sandinista contra guerrillas through much of the 1980s. After losing free and fair elections in 1990, 1996, and 2001, former Sandinista President Daniel ORTEGA Saavedra was elected president in 2006 and reelected in 2011. The 2008 municipal elections, 2010 regional elections, 2011 presidential election, 2012 municipal elections, and 2013 regional elections were marred by widespread irregularities. Nicaragua's infrastructure and economy - hard hit by the earlier civil war and by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 - are slowly being rebuilt, but democratic institutions have been weakened under the ORTEGA administration. (Above info from the CIA World Fact Book)



Flag of Nicaragua



Nicaraguan Currency – Cordoba



← Nicaragua's Tobacco is Quickly Becoming the 'Holy Grail' for Cigar Makers. We visit a tobacco plantation, and a cigar factory later in the week.



**Thursday, April 27** – After breakfast, ‘Hector’ our driver has us board the van to head for Arenales, our first bridge site. On the way we stop and pick-up Alex (the B2P in-country Program Manager).



Alex was born and raised in Brisbane, Australia and lived in Sydney prior to moving to Nicaragua to join B2P as a Bridge Corps Fellow. From the time he turned 18 he's had a passion for traveling and exploring different cultures, and will jump at the opportunity to broaden these experiences. Between trips, he attended the University of Queensland and completed a year overseas exchange to Purdue University in Indiana, graduating with a degree in Civil Engineering. He worked for three years in the engineering and construction industry prior making the decision to steer his career towards another one his passions, community development. Alex was involved with Red Cross Youth Outreach and Engineers Without Borders in Australia, bolstering his passion for development, before joining B2P as a Bridge Corps Fellow, and ultimately the Nicaragua Program Manager. (From the B2P website)

Around 11:00am we arrive at the Arenales bridge site and meet with the community leaders who give us a tour of a nearby tobacco field and drying house, before taking us to meet several classrooms of primary school children and their teachers at San Pedro de Arenales. (The Arenales bridge spans the Esteli river.)



Arenales Bridge Entrance



Our group with Community Leaders



Longest Footbridge in Nicaragua



Tobacco Barn & Field



Plowing the field



Drying the tobacco



It was a real “joy” to visit these kids and their teachers.  
(Opportunities like this is why I love being a Rotarian.)



We left lots of donations for the kids (Baseballs, t-shirts, caps, school supplies, etc.)



← Each teacher and community leader was given a Rotary pin.



Several of the kids led us back across the bridge as we departed from the Arenales site.

*Lunch was in the small town of Condega. We ate at Pollo Express.*



In the afternoon we visited another bridge site – Mato Palo (a 45 minute drive from Condego). The spirit of the community was alive and well at this site. They greeted us with smiles and applause as Alex told them who we are and why we were here. (Another awesome reason to become a Rotarian)



Mato Palo Community



Gift of a Poem to Rotarian Guests



Mato Palo Bridge (Looks Good!)



Crossing the bridge



Carey (in yellow) on the bridge



→ Thank you ←  
 “Bridges to Prosperity”  
 & “Rotary”



From here we drove to the town of Esteli for two nights at the Hotel Campina. Dinner in Esteli.



Campina Hotel



Dinner in Esteli at Vuela Vuela



Breakfast at the Campina

**Friday, April 28** – After breakfast we were on our way to the Monte Verde bridge site. We spent the morning meeting the bridge team leaders, gathering supplies, shoveling sand and gravel, and mixing concrete for the tower bases. This was our first opportunity to “get our hands dirty,” and volunteer our time to help build the bridge. We worked hard, humbled by the heat and humidity, and enjoyed every minute of it.



Monte Verde Bridge Site



Rotarians at Work (Checking things out)



Meeting with Community Leaders



Doug loading 100lb bags of concrete



----- Work in Progress -----

The local leaders treated us to an organized lunch on site prepared by our female host and cook - Fatima.



After lunch we drove across the river (literally) to meet the community leaders and members, and to host a **piñata** party for the kids. According to Wikipedia, a **piñata** is a container often made of papier-mâché, pottery or cloth; it is decorated, and filled with small toys or candy, or both, and then broken as part of a ceremony or celebration. In our case, we filled it with candy.



Filling the **piñata** with candy



(Note: The **piñata** is on the left on both pictures.)



Setting up the **piñata**



The **FUN** begins



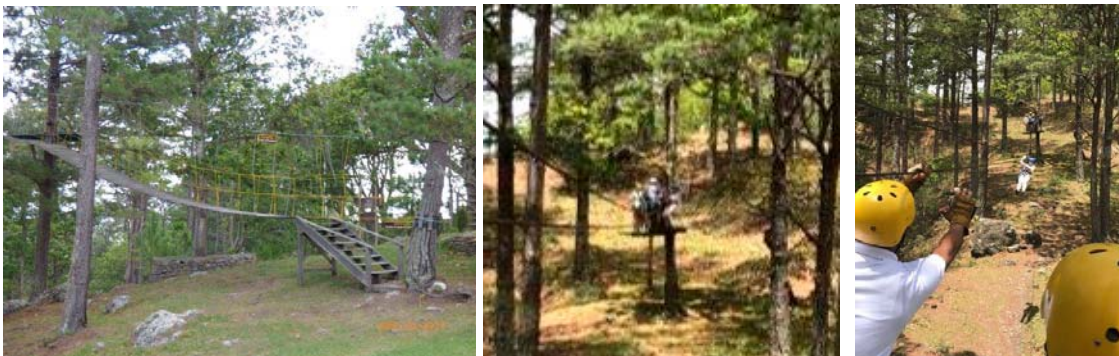
Candy scramble in progress

Several of the community kids were blind-folded and used the stick to try and break-open the **piñata**. It finally broke after about 30 minutes and the scramble began. Meeting and interacting with the community was the highlight of the day, but most of all – it was FUN for everyone.

Our next stop was the Papito Gomez cigar factory for a tour and some shopping.



**Saturday, April 29** – We left the Hotel Campina at 9:00am headed for our scheduled La Brellera zipline canopy tour. La Brellera offers nine platforms connected by eight cables and two hanging bridges, allowing participants to 'zip' from tree to tree. The distances (and speed) vary between the different ziplines. This was certainly a thrilling experience, both for Jean who had never zip-lined before, and for the rest of us who had experienced the thrill of zip-lining on other courses.





Later that morning we visited a nearby church and museum, after which we stopped at a local black pottery merchant's home and workshop.



Entrance to Black Pottery Cooperative

Preparing the clay

Pottery making demonstration



Inside the shop

One of the friends of the potter

Hi there! What's your name?

The balance of the afternoon was spent sightseeing (church, café, park, grocery store, etc.)



Church

Café'

Park

Grocery Store

We were experiencing the culture and highlights of the city of Esteli.

We arrived at the Selva Negra coffee plantation, in Metagalpa, late in the day. The Selva Negra Ec lodge <http://www.selvanegra.com/en/> is a full-service ec lodge, organic farm, and bird-friendly coffee estate in the Highlands of Northern Nicaragua. They have a chapel and a reception hall for weddings; and there are numerous hiking trails on the grounds, in addition to the rooms for guests and lodging for employees and field staff. Cool place!



Guest Check-in & Lobby



Grounds



Carey's Cabin



Entrance to the Chapel



Inside the Chapel



One of many flowers on the grounds

**Sunday, April 30** - We woke to the sound of the “howling monkeys.” After a light breakfast we took a hike through the rain forest. Norm, Jean, Doug and Carey began the hike early, and Robyn & Ken followed basically the same trails a little later in the morning.



Hiking in Selva Negra is a lot more than walking in the woods. You hike into virgin cloud rain forest where you experience nature at its purest, the sights and sounds of the forest amazed us. (See trail map on the next page.) We didn't have time to hike all the trails, but we did walk close to 2 miles.



**GOCE LA EXPERIENCE  
NATURALEZA! NATURE!**

**SENDEROS TRAILS**

- |                          |                 |  |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--|
| <b>Facil Easy</b>        | ●               |  |
| 01 Playitas              | 250m ~ 10 mins  |  |
| 02 Pilas                 | 551m ~ 20 mins  |  |
| 03 Cody                  | 654m ~ 15 mins  |  |
| <b>Medio Medium</b>      | ■               |  |
| 04 Atajo                 | 449m ~ 20 mins  |  |
| 05 Romantico             | 1300m ~ 30 mins |  |
| 06 Canal                 | 623m ~ 45 mins  |  |
| 07 Bavaria               | 616m ~ 45 mins  |  |
| <b>Dificil Difficult</b> | ◆               |  |
| 08 Fuente Juventud       | 990m ~ 60 mins  |  |
| 09 Pavas                 | 1300m ~ 60 mins |  |
| 10 Peter & Helen         | 1100m ~ 90 mins |  |
| 11 Quetzal               | 1600m ~ 90 mins |  |
| 12 Mosquitia             | 1500m ~ 60 mins |  |

**CAMINE ENTRE WALK BETWEEN  
6AM & 4PM!**

Por favor camine con cuidado.  
*Be careful and stay on the trails.*

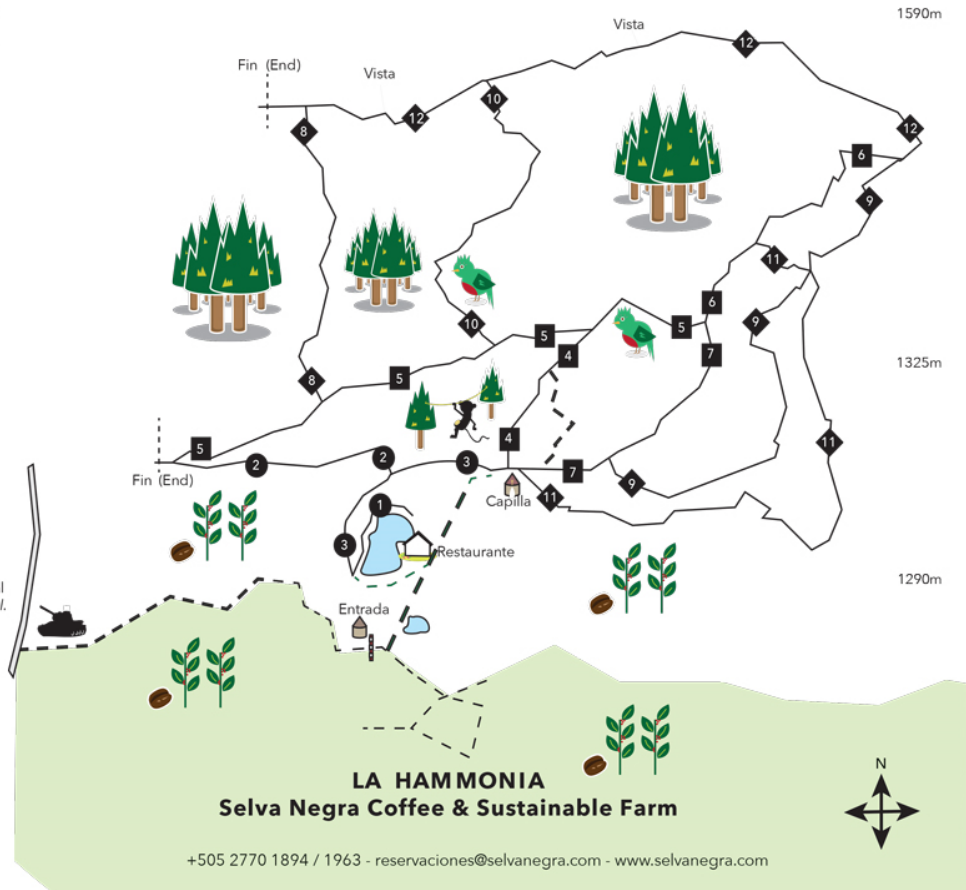
- ! Camine con linterna y celular  
*Bring a flashlight and a phone*
- Hotel (505) 2770 1894 / 1963

Posible punto para ver Quetzal  
*Good sighting spot for Quetzal.*

Posible punto para ver monos congo.  
*Possible sighting spot for howler monkey.*

Selva Virgen  
*Virgin Forest*

Café bajo Sombra  
*Shade Grown Coffee*



At 10:00am we began the van tour of the coffee plantation. Coffee plants are everywhere, and all the roads are lined with yucca trees. Housing is provided for employees and field workers, and the owner lives on the farm.



Roads are lined with Yucca trees



Coffee Beans



Flowers of the coffee plant

They also raise many other vegetables on this eco-friendly, sustainable farm. Their Sustainable Philosophy is a simple one; treat each other and our planet thinking of the future, and their sustainable model is based on empowerment of the employees. They have a wide variety of activities that take place simultaneously, but each activity is operated independently for the benefit of the overall experience. Tourism is a beneficiary of the system not the driving force. They consider sustainability financially, environmentally and how it affects the people in their society. A simple lesson that we all can learn from.



Homes for the employees and field workers



Cutting grass with a machete

We were thrilled to have the opportunity to see a sloth in one of the acacia trees on the plantation.



Large sloth sleeping in an acacia tree



Field of acacia trees

After this tour we were on our way back to Managua and the Camino Real hotel. We arrived in time to spend a couple hours at the pool before dinner. We went to bed early due to a 4:30am wake-up call to catch the shuttle to the airport. As we said our good-byes we were all looking forward to another incredible journey with a Bridges to Prosperity team; perhaps to Rwanda and/or Panama.

**Summary:** I offer my thanks and congratulations to our team leaders Norm Arnold and Robyn Long for the outstanding effort they have put in, and continue to put into this and similar B2P missions. Their dedication to Bridges to Prosperity and its reach around the world is truly a reflection of their personal values and Rotary commitment. They have inspired me, once again, to invest my time and talent to meet the ongoing challenges of this and possibly future missions. Lastly, this is a team effort and being part of this team has been both an honor and a privilege. We've all made new friends, learned a lot about Nicaragua, and achieved a camaraderie that is rare in today's world. Also, this was another opportunity for all of us to prove that Rotary's motto - Service Above Self - are not just words on a paper. Keep up the good work.

**Carey D. Beamesderfer**  
Rotary Club of West El Paso  
B2P Nicaragua Trip Team Member – April 2017