

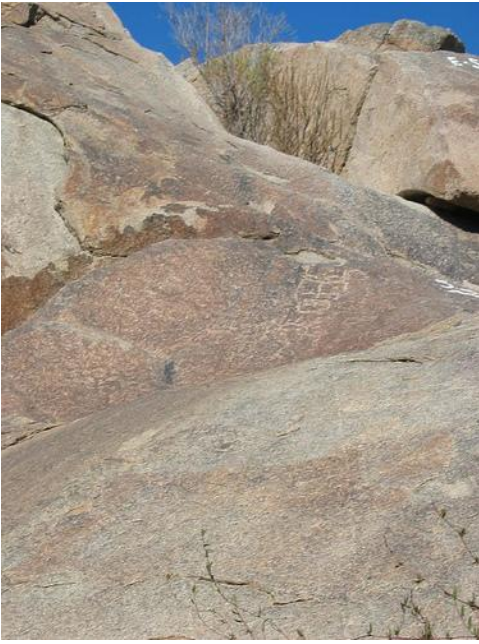
Wednesday June 20, 2007

Woke up at 8:00 again today and got our carb-filled breakfast (lemon bread). Ximena met up with us in Dan's room and told us we might be able to get in to see the museum tonight after 6:00. So in the meantime, we decided to visit El Monumento Arqueológico Valle del Encanto (Valle del Llmari), which is an archaeological and cultural site of the Molle people. It was about a two-hour drive, but we decided to stop at an outdoor market in this small town called Ovilla. There were hundreds of stands with every sort of fruit/seasoning imaginable. We walked through, sampling the new and interesting fruits of Chile before coming across this grape vendor. He had about thirty different types of grapes and he was so nice. The five of us chipped in and bought one kilo of the juiciest and most delicate grapes. We washed them off, ate until our hearts were content, then continued on our way to the archaeological site.

Off the highway, we turned on to a muddy dirt road that led to the site. –Note—always have toilet paper with you. You never know when you're going to need it. Anyhow, the weather in La Serena when we left was in the 40s or 50s and rainy. The site was in a valley up in the mountains and when we got there, it was in the upper 60s or 70s and sunny! It was great to finally wear short sleeves! We climbed on the rocks there and saw quite a few pictographs and petroglyphs. We also saw tacita piedras (little cup rocks) that were used to grind grains, metal, and dyes.



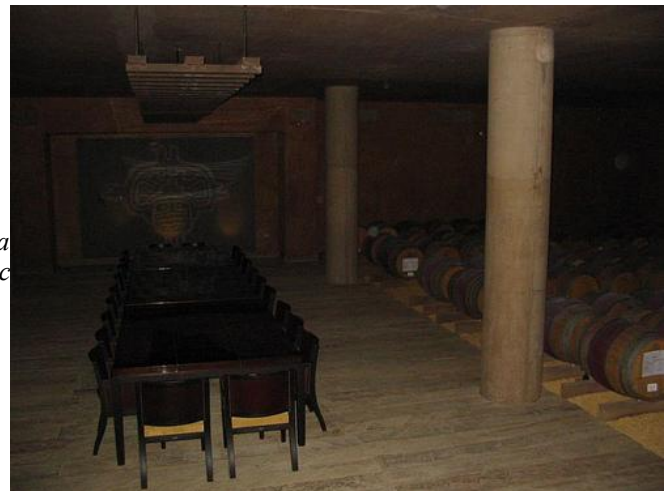
Us climbing around at Valle del Encanto



By the time we were done hiking through the desert, we were pretty hungry. On the way back to the town though, we came across a winery where we got a tour and saw where and how the wine was made.



Winery



at Va
very c

Winery conference room/ storage area

By this time, we were SO VERY HUNGRY that we stopped at a restaurant on the side of the road. I had cazuela, which is a soup with a big chunk of chicken (can be beef or fish too), a huge potato, and a chunk of this pumpkin/squash thing (sometimes it is corn). It was good, and very filling. One of the girls got dehydrated during our trip and wasn't in too good of shape. So Ximena decided to take her to the Clinic to get her checked out. Mario and Ximena stayed with her while the rest of us went back to the hotel to turn in for the night. Speaking of which... ¡Buenos Noches!

Thursday June 21, 2007

8:00 wake up call again. Breakfast was the same, except for chocolate and lemon swirled bread this time and peach juice. Ximena said she would be here at 9:30, but by 11:00 she still hadn't shown. Chileans aren't very punctual. Their perception of time is more on a sliding scale than Americans'. So I sat out on the balcony for an hour just watching the waves come in. Then I started to take a walk on the beach and she showed up.

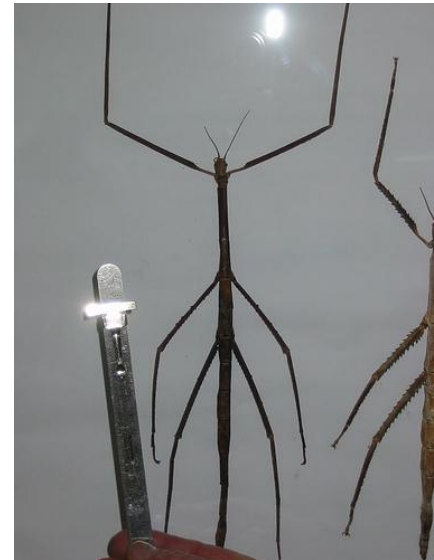
She told us we were going to go to Vicuña and site see a bit. On the way we were going to stop at Las Rojas, which is an archaeological site where they found mastodon remains, but someone bought the land and wouldn't let us in to see them. It was a nice, little town and everyone else was really friendly. The main highlight was this little dog that ran back and forth on the roof of this house and barked at us. It was so cute!



We continued on to Vicuña, disappointed that we didn't get to see any mastodon bones. Once in Vicuña, we visited a museum where they had spectacular displays of rare insects from Peru and Brazil with beautiful butterflies in one room. In the next room, they had minerals, shells, and fossils from all over South America. The last room consisted of more shells and stuffed animals...sort of creepy.



Vibrant blue butterflies



REALLY large bug. That's a six inch ruler next to it!

After the museum, we shopped around for a bit and found a place to eat that didn't solely serve beef, chicken, or fish. I had a cheese empanada (think deep-fried cheese quesadilla) and a Chilean pizza. They were both delicious and I don't know how I ate it all. With our bellies full, we shopped some more before heading off for a surprise. Dan took us to the Pisco Sour factory. It was closed for renovation, but they let us into the museum (which was also the wine cellar). The smell was OVERPOWERING. I think I got rather drunk off the fumes! Following the tour, they gave us a pisco tasting of all the different kinds of pisco they made. Quite satisfied, we started to drive back so we could meet the museum curator. On the ride back, we stopped at this dam to take pictures of the sunset. At the top of the dam there was a cool wind, musical, sculpture thing that made eerie sounds as the wind moved across the strings.



We finally got back to La Serena and took a tour of the much anticipated museum. The curator showed us their exhibits and told us their importance in Inca history. Along with Inca artifacts, there were pre-Inca, Molle, and Easter Island artifacts.



Inca pot at the museum. Decoration possibly a depiction of Hailey's Comet

Ximena took us to her parents' house and we met and drank pisco with them before going back to the hotel to just sit and talk. We're going to actually work in the museum tomorrow. Yay! Goodnight all!