



The mighty Rio Apurimac



Day 1

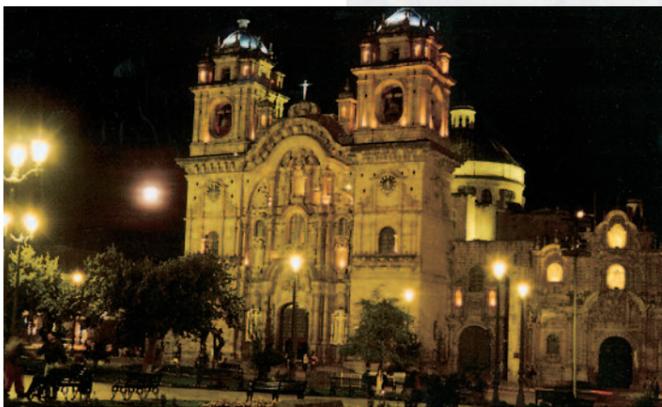
The mighty Rio Apurimac, in Quechua (the native Inca language) it means "The god who speaks", for years the river had been a barrier/border for the Incas, the upper reaches are also now claimed to be the source of the Amazon. My goal was to kayak the commercial section along with some rafts, there was a crew of five including myself, Christian on the paddle raft with Carlos a trainee guide, Eddy on the gear raft and Frank video/photo boating. We set off from Cusco, the centre of the universe for the ancient Inca culture, now the most visited city and region in South America and headed out on a four hour drive over a pass into the Apurimac valley. The road was pretty scary on the way down to the put-in of the river, countless hairpin bends, the track was only wide enough really for one truck and so when we met an oncoming vehicle, it was a tense feeling going so close to the edge of the mountain and looking at the river some 500 metres far below! So after lunch we were finally on the river, there was only one class III rapid to negotiate today, a straight line through the waves and with ample of opportunities for some great river playing. We camped on river left, though the beach was quite small I found a great place to sleep on some smooth rocks a little further upstream.

Day 2

With blue skies and the sun now up, we set off on what is the longest day on the river, a few class IIIs to negotiate, some great waves to surf and ample places to initiate ends to get myself warmed up for the first major class IV drop "Chute". We scouted on river right which provided us with a great view of the rapid. Basically, there were a couple of big holes to miss and one hole to run, a line could be seen through it and it really was a big water move. I went back to my kayak and set off, at the start middle left using the tongue between two offset holes, work middle right, clip the first big hole to the right, a little bit of left angle and get on the rooster tail to let the force of the water and the speed of the kayak punch through, finally a hard right to avoid the hole at the bottom of the rapid, the rafts came next and once everyone was together we headed around the corner to our first portage.

There was a chicken shoot on far left that was possible, it was a

one metre drop with a boof to the right required to miss the rock waiting at the bottom, then another 25 metres of paddling and finally we had to hump and dump the rafts and kayaks over some huge rocks and run the final part of the portage. We continued on our way with some more class IIIs and then it was "Space Odyssey", another class IV rapid with a huge undercut rock to avoid. The entry was nice and clean but the second drop had a huge rock in the middle with a smaller one in front of it forming a hole and then a massive pillow wave on the huge rock behind, which was nicely pushing you in the hole or throwing you left into a gnarly undercut.



In fact, this undercut has been the subject of some injuries and a fatality. At the start go middle left, cut to middle right behind a large rock, run middle at the start of the second drop work right, run a diagonal wave pushing into the middle (a place really to avoid as this is straight for the hole or if you are unlucky the pillow wave), catch the eddy before cutting behind the huge rock and working far left to miss two nasty holes at the end.

Another line nailed and more rapids ensued with names such as Campo Minado, Purgatorio, Three Marias and Zeta, all of which were class IV rapids, however all of them were read and run. We arrived at our camp on river left and with a great surf wave next to the beach; both Frank and I were freestyling until it got dark!

Day 3

Another good nights sleep and with everything packed we set off with great anticipation of the day ahead, today is the main day with the biggest

and most challenging rapids of the whole trip. A host of class IV's and obviously the major drop on the river "La Muela" or "Toothache" as it is known in English. "Tres Marias No 2" started the day off, a rapid that I personally named 'Wake Up' as the last couple of trips people have either fallen out of the raft or broken their nose! "The Goal" was next, nothing too bad and then around the corner was "El Trinche", a class IV which is full of surprises. This had three monster holes, the first going from the middle all the way to the left river bank, the second, about 15m below, went from the middle to the far right hand river bank, this was a particularly nasty hole with a big drop leading into it. A working was certainly in order if you were there! The last hole was waiting on river left, which the entire river was pushing towards. The entrance again was middle, working right to clip the first hole, then a change of angle and a hard paddle to middle left to avoid the second hole and finally work against the current to miss the last hole, phew no problems! With another set of read and run rapids following and then the major wave of the river was on us. The first part of "Sin Nombre" was a rush of punching waves and running holes, before the river split into two, on the right was a clean line but on the left was an amazing wave with a huge eddy to feed it. It was pretty difficult to get on but once there you throw all sorts of moves, I was spinning like a dream, getting great blunts and a loop was also on video. Below the river gave up its steepness for a while providing some flat



water, though the gorge we were in really made up for the flat. It was another hour before we started getting to a bunch of rocks scattered in the river, which only meant one thing, Toothache! I first scouted on river right and decided there was no line, however when scouting on river left my views had changed, there was a line but certainly a gnarly one. The start of the rapid did not look too bad, there were a couple of options, either make a cut move before yet another siphon on river left or a boof move on middle right. What I was more concerned about was the monster of a hole at the bottom of the rapid on river right, it looked as though there was little chance of being released from it, whether in or out of a kayak, terminal was a word that sprang to mind! On scouting river left the line looked runnable but the crux move was in the middle of the rapid, skirting between a hole in the middle of the river and a monster hole behind it off to the right. There was a green tongue only _m wide shooting you left and after the current flowed to river left into yet another terminal hole, the line here was to take the next green tongue that would cut from left to right between both holes and finally running the last diagonal hole before the current again took you left of a massive rock at the bottom of the rapid, the whole rapid was around 500m long!

With the line impregnated in my mind I went back to my kayak and with the video camera rolling I dropped in, my thoughts were one, nothing



but the line and the moves to make were in there, it had to be that way, at this water level nothing else could confuse or distract me! I ferried out into the middle of the river, working my way through a maze of rocks to find my first marker rock, so far so good. I saw the boof spot, ferried out of the eddy I was in, turned and started to accelerate, whoosh, my last stroke and I was airborne, boof, the great sound that comes when you

have landed on the aerated water. I was now on a slack piece of aerated water, here came the crux move, from river middle to middle left, past the hole onto the tongue and a slide down past the two holes below, a change of angle, fighting all the way as the current was trying to push me into the next hole, 6 to 8 good forward strokes and there I was on the

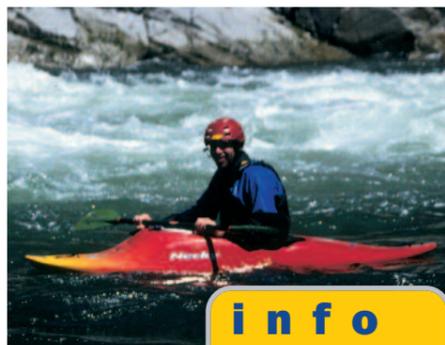
second tongue shooting me down and past the 2 terminal holes, another couple of strokes and a final deep stroke to lift the bow as I started to enter the trough, I now found myself on the pile at the top of the hole, by leaning forward and getting all the weight away from the stern I made past the last hole upright, phew! I was now working my way to the cushion wave that enabled me to skirt left of the huge rock and there I was in the eddy behind the rock. I had made it, my heart was still pumping and the

adrenaline was also right there, I had just run and nailed the line on a major class V+ rapid on one of the most amazing rivers I have paddled. As the clients portaged, one of the girls shouted out "You are completely crazy!" my reply was somewhat different to what she was expecting. Instead of the "Yep and don't forget it", I explained to her that it was all taken into consideration, the line, the holes and the what ifs. All the moves, paddle strokes and feelings were also part of the equation. She just glanced back and smiled but the expression on her face still gave me the feeling that her first statement was there. Just a little further downstream was another class V drop, appropriately called "You First!" This again was inspected due to yet another siphon that had claimed a life last season, though nowhere as near as long as the last one, this rapid was a 2m waterfall, followed by the siphon some 10m further below. So back in the eddy, I saw my boof spot and out I paddled, again some speed was required and I was then airborne, with a great landing I had time to paddle left of the siphon and our last camp on river right.

Day 4

Yet another great nights sleep and with so many smooth rocks I just laid my therm-a-rest down and listened to the soothing motions of the river. With the moon again shine into the canyon I managed to see a couple of satellites cruising high in the night sky above me, really the only evidence of man since we set off from the river put-in. It was a far more relaxed day today, we were now at one with the river and as if mother nature was making this known we saw a baby condor in the canyon and further downstream a group of green parrots kept their presence known by flying over us for a while. A couple of class III drops to warm us up and then we hit 'Babalua', which then ran into "Last Laugh", the aptly named last major rapid of the river. Babalua was nicely negotiated and 'Last Laugh' was again a great climax to the river, a two metre slide down to a hole which was easily punched and that was it, there were a couple of other rapids but nothing too stressful. We arrived at the take-out around midday, met up with our truck and headed back to Cusco. It was an amazing trip and one that will always hold a special appeal to me, I was really lucky that season, I managed to kayak (and push a gear raft a couple of times) the Rio Apurimac 14 times, ranging from the high water of May to the low waters of September, each time the river changed its character making every trip a great adventure, I even managed to run the portage a few times later on in the season. ●

Steve Brooks



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