

Story and photos by
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Galapagos



A male blue-footed booby dances on a rock June 26 on Isla Seymour Norte, a small island in the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador. The species attracts a mate by dancing in a manner that shows how bright blue the feet are. The brighter the blue, the more sardines the bird has eaten, suggesting to females that he is capable of feeding future young.

Colville Interact students earn trip of lifetime to Galapagos

Travelers live Rotary motto, 'service above self'

PUERTO AYORA, Ecuador — Islas Galapagos. The remote destination off the coast of Ecuador was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for Colville Interact students last month.

For nearly two years, the Colville High School club members, advisers and chaperons have put in time and effort to get to the islands made famous by Charles Darwin's evolutionary research, giant tortoises and blue-footed boobies.

They finally reached the islands June 24. But they had to earn their way to get there.

In addition to fundraising efforts over the last two years, there was work to be done in Ecuador, the home country of their Spanish teacher and club adviser Victoria "Vicky" Broden.

So, to earn a coveted visitor pass to the Galapagos Islands, Colville Interact put in several days of hard



Part of the Colville Interact group poses for a photograph June 25 near an endangered giant tortoise at Rancho Primicias on Isla Santa Cruz in Ecuador.

work in and around Quito, the capital city of the South American country.

But first, they had to get there...

Travel woes

Getting a group of 30 to Ecuador — and especially into the Galapagos Islands, an Ecuadorian national park — was no small feat.

But Colville Travel's Lisa Warner and Jaime Schultz

were able to pull all scheduling, financing and other details together.

The travel agency donated the staff time to make the trip happen.

Warner and Schultz remained at the ready to resolve any travel-related issues and to get the Colville entourage home.

As Interact students and chaperons headed to the southern hemisphere on

Saturday and Sunday, June 15 and 16, there were moments many felt as though they would never arrive at their destination.

The outbound travel took about 36 hours from Spokane to Phoenix to Miami to Quito, which is nestled high in the Andes Mountains.

Long layovers and flight delays prompted chaperons to look for activities to keep

students busy.

At the Spokane airport, prior to taking off June 15, students found a way to entertain themselves — and other travelers watching them.

The Colville kids busted out Spike Ball, a game they would play in a variety of locations over their two-week trip. (They would also end up teaching Ecuadorians the game.)

Landing in Phoenix, Interact members boarded the train downtown to kill time during a planned 8-hour layover.

Many found the Hard Rock Cafe for lunch; some found smaller, local eateries to sample. Tummies full, chaperons took students bowling, to movies, sight-seeing and museums to pass the time before returning to the airport for the next leg of the trip.

That evening, they all boarded a red-eye flight from Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport to Miami International Airport, where most would remain for a 13-hour layover.

Landing about 5 a.m., chaperon — and real estate agent — Scott Thompson took a couple of students

to a nearby hotel for some much-needed shuteye. But most students and the remaining chaperons found "comfy" spots on the airport floor and went to sleep.

At one time, a sea of burgundy sweatshirts covered the floor near the scheduled departure gate.

After sleep and breakfast, chaperon Karen Honeycutt organized a scavenger hunt. She divided students into four groups and challenged them to photograph a variety of items in the airport, including people's tattoos, a dog, hotdogs, artwork, the Skytrain and more.

Team 3 — comprising Devin Woodward, Waylon Kroll, Maria Schutt and Chloe Cochran — won after a tie-breaker.

Other students on the trip were Arthur Cecil, Hannah Chapman, Christopher "C.J." Chopot, Colton Eslick, Mason Floener, Makennon Floener, Marilyn Hawkens, Conner Honeycutt, Sonja Jones, Bree Knutson, Jacklyn "JRay" Kroll, Ryllie Skellenger, Charles Thompson and Samuel Anderson.

The tour group was supposed to board its

Quito-bound flight about 6 p.m., but delays slowed the departure. And even after Colville travelers were aboard their American Airlines flight, the aircraft was further delayed — leaving students anchored in their seats for nearly an additional hour before the aircraft was allowed to take off.

It was about 10 p.m. Quito time when Colville Interact was finally on the ground in Ecuador.

Arriving as a group had its advantage as Ecuadorian officials quickly acknowledged the group and sped up the immigration process.

Just past baggage claim, Rotario Quito members greeted the Colville group.

Students and chaperons — Michael and Paula Basehart, Maggie Broden, Anne Cecil, Melissa Fischer, Karen Honeycutt, Judith Kroll, Roger Harnack, Janey Howe, Jay Shepherd, and Scott Thompson — would stay with the Ecuadorian Rotarians, their “host families,” for their first six days in-country.

The longest day

It was almost midnight, Quito-time, when most of the students would crawl into a bed on their first night in Ecuador. Jet lag from the two-hour time change compounded the tiredness most were feeling.

Monday morning, June 17, came early. And it was the first day Colville Interact would live the Rotary motto, “Service Above Self,” in the foreign country.

That first full day in Ecuador was a day of service high in the Andes Mountains, in the tiny Yanacocha community.

An early start and the thin air in the high-mountain area added further to the tired feeling.

The first order of business in Yanacocha was lunch. Then it was time to work.

The diminutive indigenous residents of the small community were awed by the towering Americans.

The Colville group was stunned by the conditions in which locals lived. Homes were simple — stacked cinder blocks or bricks, few windows with glass and steel or tin roofs. They were shanties by our standards.

Homes lacked insulation, paint, flooring and even running water. A few had electricity, but that was relatively new.

Colville students were shocked to find out locals live without smartphones, wired telephones, television and the Internet.

But as Colville Interact got to work helping improve the lives of the indigent residents, they found common ground.

Together, they laughed when a tree branch was used to mix paint or a machete was used to cut plastic. Together, they made do with what they had.

There was no Walmart. There wasn't even a hardware, grocery or convenience store.

They only had the ingenuity and determination of each other, a point Interact students and chaperons brought home with them.

Quito Rotarians and businesses donated paint for Yanacochan homes.



Above, Makennon Floener, left to right, Maggie Broden and Mason Floener found the ceilings in homes a little low. At left, Conner Honeycutt, left to right, Christopher “C.J.” Chopot and Bree Knutson take a break from painting to pose for a photograph wearing clean suits.

Paints were yellow and lime green. But the locals didn't seem to mind — the paint meant sealed walls, which would provide a little additional protection from the elements and moisture.

Before painting, students moved furniture and covered the residents' scant belongings with plastic.

“The people we met had only a shack and a garden,” Hannah said.

“They were happy; they were humble.”

“They were very welcoming.”

That first day wrapped up with locals cooking a modest chicken, rice, potato and vegetable soup for the Colville Interact members who had painted the interiors of their homes.

In the Yanacocha Community Center — at about 11,400 feet elevation — tired, winded students and chaperons sat down to the fresh, steaming soup.

The soup was very fresh — just hours before, the vegetables had been growing in small gardens and the chickens running freely in the yard.

It was a humbling experience for the Colville entourage.

Six women stood over a boiling cauldron, chopped up the chicken and vegetables, and served the meal with fresh bread.

Neither the community center nor residents had enough bowls or silverware — those are luxuries to the Yanacochans. Luckily, the Colville group brought its own supplies.

While the meal was modest for Colville residents, it was an extremely bountiful dish for the residents to provide.

Dinner that first night would've fed the community for a week, locals said.

The poor mountain folk who live in the foothills (if you can call an elevation above 11,000 feet foothills) of Pichincha Volcano barely scrape by.

The locals milk small cows and sell the milk, making only a few dollars a week.

Quito Rotarians — many who live in lavish homes in the city — in recent years have stepped in to upgrade Yanacochan homes.

It's a first step in helping — and teaching — the impoverished residents how to improve their lives.

The nearby village of Nono is an example of what the effort can lead to, Quito Rotarians said, noting that community now has a restaurant, a renovated church, a town square and a growing tourism industry.



Lydia Inez Hipo curls up with her baby girl, born at home in Yanacocha late Monday night, June 17.

Yanacocha, again

Students and chaperons worked from mid-morning until dinner time June 17. But the work was only partially complete.

Colville Interact returned Tuesday, June 18, to resume the work.

Before working, the group took a few hours to enjoy the adjacent Reserva Yanacocha, an area known for having numerous varieties of hummingbirds.

Colville travelers hiked a couple miles along the mountain side's Trocha Inca (Inca Trail). Below, they could see the dense cloud forest. Above stood Pichincha Volcano.

Hiking Trocha Inca, the Colville group observed flora unlike anything in Northeast Washington.

There were ferns that stood more than 5 feet tall. There were plants sporting leaves that spanned 3 feet. And there were a variety of colorful flowers, both on the ground and hanging from trees.

The trail led to a break in the forest, and a small cave.

In the forest opening, there were about a dozen hummingbird feeders and a couple bird baths.

Hummingbirds darted here and there, stealing a sip of nectar from the feeders and nearby flowers.

Chaperon Maggie Broden tried to attract hummingbirds close to her by holding up a flower. But the birds, apparently used to visitors' tactics, opted for the ever-present feeders and bird baths.

The hikers didn't stay long as they still had work to do in the nearby community.

Colville Interact returned to the homes they had worked in the day before.

The buzz in Yanacocha on Tuesday morning, June 18, was about the birth of a new baby.

Lydia Inez had given birth at home the night before.

Only her husband, Silvio, and a neighbor were present — no doctor.

The proud parents allowed a Colville photographer to peak in and snap a quick photograph.

The opportunity for a mother-baby photo is rare in Yanacocha. Indeed, few homes have any photographs of any family members.

Despite the excitement of the new baby, residents and Interact volunteers got to work. By dusk, they had wrapped up most of the painting they had started.

A few of the residents said they would continue on their own, insisting that Colville Interact dine one last time with villagers.

Back at the community center, several of the local women opened fava bean pods and shucked corn. They also mixed up a local beverage, made from fruit that grows in the mountains.

Students arriving at the community center snacked on fresh bread.

Once everyone was present, Interact students decided to practice a tune they planned to sing the next day. The students started singing “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.”



Waylon Kroll lays on the floor of a home in Yanacocha, Ecuador, sandwiched between a bed and the wall he was charged with painting June 18.

The sound of the students singing “A-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh, a-weema-weh” brought a few of the indigent residents to a hearty laugh and a glowing smile in the rugged mountains where life is hard and opportunities to smile are a precious few.

Practice over, out came Spike Ball.

Yanacochans watched with interest as the American youth played a game they had never seen.

Even Quito Rotarian Pilar Palacio had never seen the game. She asked to join in and now plans to buy the game and return to play it with the locals.

With a cool wind picking up, the locals built a fire and served another fresh dinner — corn on the cob, fava beans and bread.

“Dinner was interesting, corn on the cob with goat cheese and some type of unfamiliar beans,” Colville Interact student Chloe said. “It wasn't bad, just quite different from anything I had normally tasted.”

“Nonetheless, it was wonderful knowing that the women had put in great effort to feed all of us.”

Students, chaperons and Yanacochans dined together one last time.

Before the evening came to a close, community leader Jose Avale offered a few words of thanks.

He told the Colville group that each and every member had become a part of the community over the two days of service there.

Avale said Colville Interact is always welcome, and that he expects someday to see the Americans again, and perhaps share another dinner.

Looking back, student Waylon said he was amazed by how the Yanacochans lived with “very minimal” comforts.

“I've never seen anything like how they lived,” he said.

“It made me appreciate how good I have it,” student Makennon added. “They were happy without anything.”

Another student, Mason, didn't find it as dramatic. He had been on the Interact trip two years ago to Colombia.

“Colombia was way, way worse,” he said.

Still, other Colville students were shocked.

JRay said she was surprised by the mountain residents' lifestyle.

“Ignorance is bliss,” she said. “The people in the Andes Mountains were good ... it's all they knew.”

The volunteer work in the mountains helped JRay understand how good she has it here in Colville, she said.

“It makes me appreciate everything we have,” she said.

The Yanacochans left their mark on adults, as well.

In returning home, chaperon Karen found herself remembering how good the mountain folk made her feel for her volunteer efforts.

“When they would talk to us, that's what struck me,” she said. “Our service work showed people who normally don't feel important, that they are important.”

Serving the homeless

After two days in a remote mountain community, many Interact students were looking forward to seeing what the city of Quito had to offer.

They looked forward to helping the homeless and to performing for the residents of Albergue San Juan de Dios, a Catholic religion-based homeless shelter and services center.

But the volunteer work at the shelter proved to be every bit as challenging as Yanacocha.

On Wednesday and Thursday, June 19 and 20, the troupe spent much of their time at Albergue San Juan de Dios.

There, they baked bread, made homemade hot chocolate, served lunch and helped with the cleaning and fluoridation of the teeth of homeless residents.

Those were just the “fun” duties.

The Colville group also scrubbed dormitories, restrooms and shower facilities.

Part of the group cleaned fish, cooked lunch and served homeless senior citizens who were often unable to feed themselves.



Sonja Jones, left, and Hannah Chapman jump for joy at being in Ecuador during a short hike in Reserva Yanacocha on June 18.



Colville Interact's Samuel Anderson feeds a homeless senior citizen June 19 at the San Juan de Dios homeless shelter in Quito, Ecuador.

About 30 elderly indigent residents live permanently in the shelter, which provides meals, medical and dental services, and social activities they would not otherwise receive.

Additionally, the center houses several refugees for up to two weeks. And on each Wednesday, street workers visit the shelter for a hot meal.

June 19 began with an introductory tour that culminated with Interact students performing a variety of Spanish and American children's tunes, including the "Baby Shark Song" and "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

The students received several rounds of applause for their performance.

After entertaining the residents and staff, students went to work.

About a half-dozen spent the rest of the morning mixing, kneading and baking bread under the direction of one of the center's bakers.

That afternoon, they also melted chocolate and mixed it with boiling milk to create "real" hot chocolate — not that powdered stuff sold in American grocery stores.

Meanwhile, the rest of the entourage took up posts in the shelter's lunchroom.

There, they served a lunch of chicken, lentils and other items to the residents and street workers who came in for a hot meal.

The street workers typically wash car windows, sell snacks and drinks, and perform for drivers.

After lunch, the volunteer work shifted to Albergue San Juan de Dios' new dental clinic. Colville students assisted dentist Fernando Zurita of Combya.

A successful Quito dentist, Zurita volunteers at the clinic.

The dental area was recently updated at a cost of \$20,000 — \$2,000 was raised by Colville Interact.

After a trip to the dentist's chair in the newly remodeled clinic, homeless residents would make their way to tables manned by Colville students.

The students would sanitize and clean any residue from the residents' teeth — or tooth, in some cases — before using fluoride-filled tooth trays on those seeking services to help improve their oral health.

A long line formed for the service.

As the wait time grew, chaperon Scott and a couple students — including his son, Charles — put together some fake sports plays, first trying American football, then trying South American "futbol." When a mock score occurred, Thompson would lead those waiting in line with a scoring celebration.

Scott also took time to hug the residents — most of which were about 2 feet shorter than him — and pose for "selfies," keeping the crowd entertained as students kept pace with their dental assistance.

A couple of street rap freestylers were also in the crowd, and it wasn't long before some Spanish rap tunes filled the air.

The clinic closed at 4 p.m. and those who had



Colville Rotarian Mike Basehart takes a front seat ahead of the rest of the Colville Interact group at the "middle of the world" monument in San Antonio, Ecuador.

been waiting were given a pass to come back to the head of the line on the next dental day.

At the close of the clinic, the students got to sample some of the bread and hot chocolate before taking time to pass it out to any remaining homeless and refugees.

Colville Interact's Makennon Floener remembers that work day fondly.

"I like how we got involved and helped them as much as we could," he said, noting that he volunteered with dental care.

"It was pretty crazy — they had only a few teeth," he said, noting it was a "good experience" to help those in need.

Helping children

Tired, most of the Colville group returned to the homes of their host families, but not all.

Seven members the fresh-baked baby bread loaves and a cauldron of steaming hot chocolate to the ASONIC Foundation.

The foundation provides residential assistance to families of cancer-stricken children being treated at Baca Ortiz Pediatric Hospital.

The director said 35 families live in the foundation house near the hospital at any given time.

The foundation is funded by groups, such as Rotary International, and the goodwill of donors, she said.

But ASONIC is in the process of launching a new dried fruit business to fund its operation.

Organizers said the goal is to raise \$1 million to purchase a more modern, larger facility to care for families and children with cancer while they are in the capital city for treatment.

With the bread and hot chocolate depleted, the last of the Colville workers headed to their host families' homes for the evening.

A party to remember

Thursday, June 20, was



Several Colville Interact students and chaperons spent part of June 20 cleaning fish, which would be cooked and served to homeless residents and street workers seeking assistance at the San Juan de Dios homeless shelter in Quito, Ecuador.

another long day at the homeless shelter.

More cleaning, more cooking, more dental help.

While much of the day drudged on, both Interact volunteers and homeless shelter staff and residents were looking forward to a shindig marking the grand opening of the dental clinic.

At that party, Colville Interact students wrapped up their Thursday dancing to Ecuadorian music, and with homeless residents and youth from a Quito Interact club.

The festivities concluded a day that started late with some students stuck in traffic.

Prior to the 2:30 p.m. grand opening celebration, Colville Interact assisted with sweeping and mopping floors, cleaning dormitories, assisting in physical therapy sessions and cooking lunch.

One work detail drew the short straw and ended up de-scaling and cleaning mullet and other fish in preparation for that night's



Colville Interact wrapped up June 22 with a stop at the Virgin of El Panecillo at night. dinner at the shelter.

"I went over to the next kitchen group to help them with their task scaling and taking out the guts of over a hundred fish," Chloe said. "The smell was horrid and stuck on all 10 of the fish workers. And was in the air for the rest of the day."

The smell of fish would soon give way to the celebration.

For the party, Colville Interact was joined by residents of the shelter, Quito Interact youth, clergy and others.

The party included a ribbon-cutting, singing, dancing, cake and a blessing of the shelter. Quito Rotarians also took time to recognized Colville students and chaperons for their service — each received a "diploma" for their work at the shelter.

The party was the highlight of the trip for student Mason Floener.

He said he greatly enjoyed sharing and dancing to Latin American music with Interact students and homeless residents in Quito.



Conner Honeycutt assists a senior resident of the San Juan de Dios homeless shelter in Quito.

History lessons

Thursday marked the end of the "service" part of the trip. Beginning Friday, June 21, Colville Interact moved on to the educational part of the trip to Quito, a city that was built by Spanish conquistadors approximately 500 years ago.

That Friday happened to also be the summer solstice. And a trip to Midalae Museo introduced Colville Interact to life in the Amazon, as well as its cultural traditions.

For several hours, the students received an in-depth, personal tour of the museum. The program included information on the tribes that inhabited the country from the Amazon to the Pacific Ocean.

A guide discussed the difference in clothing styles — which can still be seen today — instruments, plants they used and the role a shaman plays in tribal life.

Following an hour-long presentation, students were ushered to a first floor room in the three-story museum where they witnessed participated in a solstice celebration. The room included a star-shaped corn pattern on the floor, a small fire, fruits and vegetables.

An Amazonian shaman from Ecuador's rainforest region east of the Andes Mountains blessed all who entered.

A smoky incense filled the room as a religious assistant brushed visitors with palm fronds for good health, good luck and good life.

After being blessed, entrants sat on the rim of a sacred circle as tribal musicians entered the room playing traditional instruments.

"We were all asked to remove our shoes and any cell phones so that we could be cleansed," Chloe recalled. The shaman lit the fire



Colville Interact's Maria Schutt, right, puts a fluoride dental tray in the mouth of a senior citizen who resides in the San Juan de Dios homeless shelter in Quito, Ecuador.

and students were given a small token to burn and ask Mother Earth for help.

The program noted that the solstice marks a time of rebirth and rebuilding. A few students also shared their desires for the new year and thankfulness.

As the ritual ended, Colville Interact members were asked to dance in a tribal, solstice ritual.

And dance they did. Following the program, students dined on traditional Ecuadorian cuisine for lunch, then walked about a half-mile through the city to the street market.

There, students found a variety of items, including traditional attire, blankets, scarves, replicas of artifacts, T-shirts and much more.

But the items of preference seemed to be watches and sunglasses.

More to learn

Mindalae Museo opened Colville students' eyes to the rich cultural heritage to be found in Ecuador.

But on Saturday, June 22, Colville Interact got a crash lesson on pre-Columbian history as well as the religious renaissance brought to South America by Spanish conquistadors.

The students and chaperons also moved from host families to a hotel in Puenbo.

That day, walking the "street of seven churches," the Colville group explored Catholic churches that dated back to the 1500s.

Colville students and their chaperons were granted admission to the famed La Iglesia de la Compania de Jesus, a church known internationally because much of the interior is covered in gold leaf.

Construction began in 1586 and took 160 years to complete.

Tour guide, Pablo Salazar, said the amount of gold needed to coat the inside was 87 kg. At a current price of about \$1,401 per ounce, the amount of gold in the Jesuit church is valued at approximately \$1.4 million.

Normally, photographs are not allowed in the church, but an exception was made for a single photograph for Colville Interact.

After visiting that and other churches, the entourage headed to Altamira Restaurant for a lunch of shrimp and white-tipped shark.

The afternoon continued with a visit to the history-art museum of El Alabado. There, a tour guide explained how the history and culture together created today's South America.

The hike through the city's historic district ended at La Ronda, a nightlife area filled with little shops, cafes, nightclubs and an educational center.

Students took a break in the educational center to learn about beekeeping and to sample different honeys and local ice cream flavors.

The day culminated with a bus ride and stop at the Virgin of El Panecillo at night.

El Panecillo, a statue of the virgin Mary with wings stepping on a snake, was commissioned in 1976 and stands above Quito. The statute represents the triumph of good over evil.

Saturday night, the students and chaperons settled in to larger, more comfortable beds at an upscale hotel, San Jose de



Colville Interact's Ryllie Skellenger receives a hug and a diploma for her volunteer work during a ceremony June 20 at the San Juan de Dios homeless shelter in Quito, Ecuador.

Puenbo-Quito Airport.

They needed the sleep for the activities planned for Sunday, June 23.

Latitude with attitude

Teenagers and sober adults looked like drunken sailors trying to walk a straight line.

They tried to balance an egg on the head of a nail.

And they watched as water in a basin drained straight down, then spiraled clockwise, then counter-clockwise.

Nearby, stood a rock carving from Easter Island and several exhibits on South American Indian tribes.

One of the main exhibits focuses on the Waorani, which are found deep in the Amazon jungle in parts of Ecuador, Brazil and other South American countries. The Waorani shrunk the heads of their enemies until about 1970 and still live mostly unclothed in the Amazon today.

Less than a mile away, street vendors sold cooked Guinea pig on a stick.

Welcome to the "middle of the world," latitude 0 degrees, 0 minutes, 0 seconds.

Colville Interact students and chaperons learned June 23 that things are different at the equator.

Lathered up in suntan lotion, large hats and sunglasses, Colville Interact headed to Mitad Del Mundo on a fun-filled visit turned science and history lesson June 23.

The country's name is derived from the equator.

En route to the destination, tour guide Pablo Salazar provided the group with a science and history lesson.

He also cautioned them that, at about 10,000 feet, they would feel the effects of the sun's radiation, even if it was cloudy and cold.

There wasn't any snow at the site, which sits at about the equivalent elevation of Mount Rainier's glacial Camp Muir.

The group learned that the "middle of the world" actually has two places — the initial location determined during a 1736 expedition led by Charles-Marie de la Condamine, and the actual location determined by GPS in recent years.

A 128-foot monument erected from 1979-1982 was built about 240 meters (about 790 feet) south of the true equatorial line



Colville Interact's Chloe Cochran is cleansed during an Amazonian summer solstice ritual June 21 at Mindalae Museo in Quito.

in San Antonio, Ecuador, and has become a favorite tourist stop.

But at the true center of the world, Mitad Del Mundo, things get interesting.

For example, with careful movements, an egg can be balanced on the head of a nail because gravity pulls the yoke straight to the bottom.

And when you try to walk a straight line, heel-to-toe, you can feel the centrifugal pull of the Earth's rotation drawing you off the actual equatorial line. The result is that those who attempt the challenge struggle to keep their balance.

The group was fascinated by the water-basin demonstration.

On the equatorial line, water poured into the basin drained straight down. But when the basin was moved just a few feet north of the line, the water spiraled clockwise down the drain. And when the experiment was moved south of the line, vortex reversed and spiraled counter-clockwise.

In addition to the science and cultural lessons, students stopped at El Patio Restaurant in Calacali for an organic lunch featuring food produced in the vicinity.

Chef Alfredo explained the importance and local connection of the meal, urging the group to buy local food supplies whenever possible.

The day included a trip to the cloud forest for a possible glimpse of a nearby volcano. But the clouds were too thick.

The Colville group wrapped up the day's travels with a stop at the "middle of the world" tourist attraction at Ciudad Mitad del Mundo in San Antonio, Ecuador.

That night back in

Franklyn Izurieta alerted hikers to any traffic on the highway at the trailhead. He beckoned hikers aboard the warm dry bus.

As the last of the hikers boarded, Izurieta headed to Termas de Papallacta, a natural hot springs and resort in a nearby valley at the "low" elevation of 10,600 feet — about the same elevation as the summit of Western Washington's Mount Baker.

The group quickly found changing rooms, got out of cold, wet clothing and entered one of the many springs.

For about two hours, the Colville entourage soaked up the warmth of the springs before eating a lunch of rainbow trout and chicken.

After lunch, the 30-member group headed back to Puenbo to pack and prepare for the next leg of their trip, the flight to the Galapagos Islands.

Galapagos-bound

Late June 24, Colville travelers were notified their scheduled June 25 flight on Tame airline to Baltra Isla in the Galapagos Islands had been canceled.

The passengers would have to catch the next flight. But that flight was already full.

Rather than risk being delayed further, Interact adviser Broden went into action.

She rallied the troops at 4 a.m. to get to the airport before other Galapagos-bound travelers could check in.

Her tactic worked and all 30 Colville travelers were able to find a seat on the flight to Isla Baltra.

Students and chaperons arrived at Seymour Airport — the world's first "green airport" — on the island about three hours late.

The airport terminal was constructed in 2012 from recycled materials on the site of the former Seymour Island Airfield.

The airfield was used by the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. The foundations of the buildings remain, but above ground the former Air Corps station has been reclaimed by the desert island.

Prickly pear cacti standing more than 6-foot dot the sparse island. The orange-red tint to the soil gives almost the impression of being on Mars.

Traveling to the Galapagos Islands isn't as easy as hopping a flight to Hawaii.

Galapagos entry

Ecuador has stringent rules on entering, how long you can stay and where you can go. Biologists are required escorts.

Colville Interact was guided by Marlon Zavala and Camilo Lozano Cedeno. And the two biological guides wasted no time getting right into the eco-tourism activities available.

The duo quickly ushered Colville Interact onto a waiting bus, and then a ferry to cross Canal de Itabaca to Isla Santa Cruz.

The first stop — even before checking into the hotel — Rancho Primicias, home to several endangered giant tortoises.

The ranch on Isla Santa Cruz offered a relaxing area to roam and view tortoises in a semi-natural sanctuary.

You could get up close and personal, but not too close. Six feet was close enough, Zavala said.

He cautioned the group not to touch tortoises, which weigh as much as 500 or 600 pounds.

From the ranch, the group headed to a nearby lava tunnel.

The quarter-mile-long underground location is a popular tourist stop.

For the most part, the ceiling is high and there are lights guiding the way. For the most part. For a short 10-foot stretch, hikers in the tunnel have to crawl.

After the crawl, Colville Interact was directed to Puerto Ayora, a city of about 14,000 people.

That's where the group would spend two of its last

three nights in Ecuador.

The group stayed at the hotel Galapagos Islands. But check-in didn't mark the day's end.

Students noted the itinerary called for a trip to the beach. And a trip to Torguga Bay they got.

Split into two groups, Colville Interact explored the sandy beach, hiked a short trail and snorkeled in the shallow bay before returning to Hotel Galapagos.

Dinner that night at the hotel was fresh albacore.

Boobies

On Wednesday, June 26, Zavala and Cedeno arrived early at the hotel.

"We go to see boobies," Cedeno said.

It was the type of comment high-school boys and girls joked about the rest of the day — indeed, the rest of the trip.

Cedeno, of course, was referring to the Galapagos' blue-footed boobies, birds renowned for having bright blue feet.

Taking two boats, Colville Interact travelers departed Isla Santa Cruz, bound for Isla Seymour Norte.

Visitors are only allowed on the island under the watchful eyes of biological guides, and they are only allowed on a three-quarter-mile trail.

The trail leads through a desert landscape.

Among cacti, small trees and volcanic rock, critters nest and scurry about.

The June 26 visit occurred at the height of booby nesting season.

Blue-footed boobies were everywhere. There were adults trying to find mates. There were young that were already venturing out of their nesting circles. And there were eggs yet to hatch.

In the trees above, frigate birds were also in the throws of mating season. Males puffed out bright red throat pouches trying to attract mates that had yet to lay eggs.

Walking the rocky trail, hikers also took note of lava lizards and land iguanas.

Neither feared the prickly pears, and often could be viewed scrambling up and down the cacti.

The highest point on the island is only 92 feet elevation.

At the lowest point, sea level, sea lions and marine iguanas lounged around on rocks.

Puerto Villamil

With so many islands in the Galapagos to see, Colville Interact couldn't just remain on Isla Santa Cruz.

So on Thursday, June 27, the tour group boarded two boats for what would be an almost "three-hour tour," as the Gilligan's Island theme song goes. "The weather started getting rough..."

The boats' captains said the weather wasn't that bad. But some Colville landlubbers found the going rough.

Several found themselves sick.

A few, however, like Sonja and Hannah Chapman, found seats in the rear of the boat. As the vessels cut through the choppy water, several waves splashed the girls as they enjoyed the ride.

Next stop, Isla Isabela and Hotel Iguana, in the town of Puerto Villamil, the second largest city in the Galapagos.

Isla Isabela has a population of 2,200 people, most of whom live in the small town.

After check-in, the tour group took a hike through town to La Galapaguera, the island's tortoise breeding center.

Along the way, they took a boardwalk through wetlands.

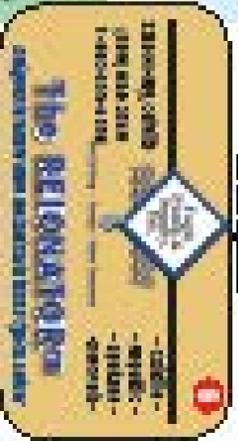
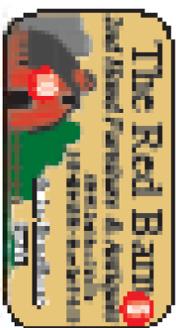
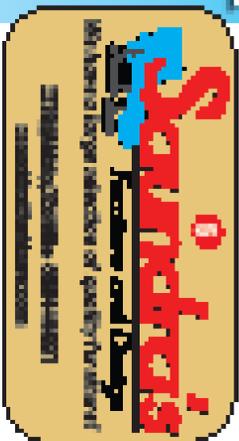
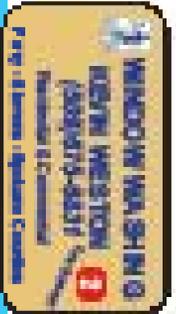
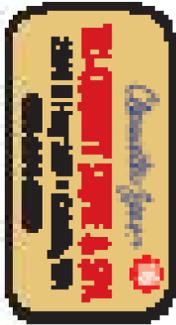
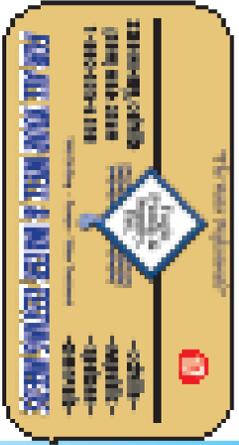
Marine iguanas found the boardwalk a great place to sun themselves, prompting hikers to cautiously step over and around them.

The boardwalk had great views of wetlands that are home to several flamingos and colorful island ducks.

At La Galapaguera, the visitors learned more about efforts to preserve the giant



A colony of marine iguanas covers rocks on Las Tintoreras Islet on June 28.



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An Amazonian tribal shaman blesses visitors to the summer solstice ceremony June 21 at Midalae Museo in Quito.

tortoise population.

The group ate lunch at a local restaurant before returning to the hotel to change into swim suits for a second round of snorkeling.

At the Concha de Perla, students and chaperons were greeted by sea lions, stingrays and a myriad of fish.

Tuckered out from hiking and snorkeling, the group wrapped up the evening dining on fresh-caught albacore, before calling it a night.

Swimming with sharks

Friday, June 28, was another day on the water.

Colville Interact two took boats to Las Tinoreras Islet, a small islet known for penguins, boobies, marine iguanas and black-tipped sharks.

The group was able to see them all.

But the short trail through the desert landscape wasn't the highlight. That day, the highlight was snorkeling with sea lions.

At least one sea lion splashed and played with students and chaperons as they snorkeled. Sharks also swam nearby. The encounters were the talk at the lunch table when students were back on dry land.

"Seeing the sea turtles and swimming with sharks was a childhood dream come true," Waylon said.

Students also talked about the expected 3-hour bumpy boat ride back to Isla Santa Cruz. Storm clouds were moving in and the wind was picking up.

The ride back, however, turned out to be a pleasant 2-hour trip as boat captains outran the approaching storm.

The return to Puerto Ayora was earlier than expected. So students and chaperons took the opportunity to explore the tourist area of the waterfront.

As expected, many of the boys — and even a few girls and adults — found T-shirt



A flamingo shows its colors as it fans its wings June 27 in Puerto Villamil, on Isla Isabela.

shops and purchased "I Love Boobies" hats and shirts.

That evening, the tour group dined at Andrea and Valerio.

Restaurant owner Valerio Repetto said 60 percent of his ingredients came from Isla Santa Cruz.

Like Chef Alfredo in Calacali, Repetto espoused the importance of eating at restaurants that use food in their vicinity.

Dinner over, the group was free to explore the city a couple more hours before turning in.

The road home

Saturday, June 29, came too soon. The day marked the end of the Galapagos visit and a return home to Colville.

But before departing the islands, Colville Interact made one more stop — at the Charles Darwin Research Station.

The hour-long visit included another look at tortoise breeding efforts.

The tour guides took time to tell the story of "Lonesome George," the last Pinta Island tortoise, and the last of his species. They detailed how mating efforts had failed and the species became extinct June 24, 2012.

The tortoise was an estimated 102 years old, a long time to be alone.

Students were also exposed to the evolutionary research of Charles Darwin, and his time in the Galapagos. After that, it was time to return home.

The return trip took Colville Interact from Puerto Ayora, to Isla Baltra, to Guillaquil, to Quito, to Miami, Phoenix and Spokane. Without lengthy layovers and flight delays, Colville Interact was back in Washington state in about 18 hours.

After returning, JRay and others had words of thanks for Vicky: "Mrs. Broden is amazing for putting all that together and giving us the chance of a lifetime."



Colville Interact's Devin Woodward, left, and Maria Schutt take a knee on a Puerto Villamil beach while sea lions nap on the benches June 27.

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Colville Interact tour members were allowed to have a single photograph taken of them inside the famed gold church of La Iglesia de la Compania de Jesus in Quito, Ecuador.

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