

# ICF in Peru

By Christy Bergeon



The Institute for Canine Forensics (ICF) accepted an invitation to participate with Equipo Peruano de Antropologia Forense (EPAF) in a joint project to find burial sites and human remains from the victims of the political conflict in Peru between 1980 and 2000. The goal of this project is to establish the validity of using Human Remains Detection (HRD) dogs in identifying the location of buried human remains for forensic anthropology teams.

EPAF is a non-profit civil society organization based in Lima, Peru, that applies forensic anthropology to the search for forcibly disappeared persons during Peru's internal political conflict. EPAF's mission is to establish forensic anthropology techniques for investigating mass burials and violations of human rights. They would like to demonstrate that HRD dogs can find victims from human rights violations that are buried either in single graves or mass burials. If the dogs prove valuable in finding human remains, the EPAF would suggest that HRD dogs be added to the procedures being put in place by the Latin American Forensic Anthropology Association (ALAF).



The forensic goals of EPAF are to identify the human remains and determine how the victims died. This information will be used to notify the families and the Peruvian people. The families may be given the opportunity to then bury their dead. Meanwhile, EPAF is creating a database and systematically collecting ante-mortem information on the disappeared, including the clothes they wore, that will help with identification. EPAF has also developed software to record information from relatives.

**Director Jose Baraybar and Carmen Rosa Cardoza**

On November 3, 2007 3 ICF dog handlers James Davidson, Pat Lamson and Christy Bergeon participated in an exploratory trip. The ICF team met for the first time in Houston, TX with their canine partners Maya, Tucker and Ceres. James flew from California and Pat from Michigan to meet up with Christy who lives in Houston. From Houston, the teams had a direct 6 1/2 hour flight to Lima.



The team spent the first few days of their two-week trip in the coastal planes north and south of Lima. This is an arid area despite being on the Pacific Ocean. This gave the team a chance to work with EPAF and the prosecutor's office to look for ongoing civil cases involving missing persons in the coastal region.

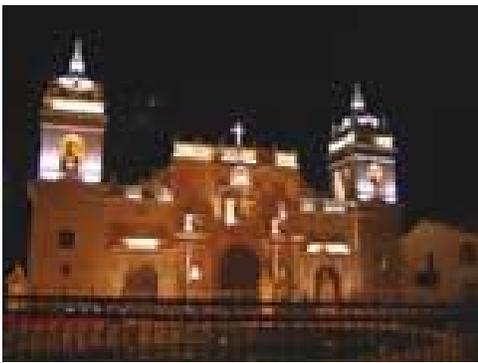
**Canines Maya, Tucker and Ceres enjoying the flight to Lima**



**James Davidson, Christy Bergeon,  
Pat Lamson and Canine Ceres**

The team then traveled to the mountain province of Huamanga and its capital city of Ayacucho. The city is located in the Andes Mountains in south-central Peru at 2750 meters (9000 feet) above sea level. The drive from Lima took around 8 hours and covered 350 miles, with most of it being on curving mountain roads. The weather was dry and hot, as this was the beginning of the Peruvian summer heat.

### **Ayacucho City of the Temples**



Ayacucho was founded in 1540 with the name San Juan de la Frontera de Huamanga. The city was re-baptized by Simon Bolivar in 1825 as Ayacucho, in homage to the battle that put an end to the Spanish domination.

The city of Ayacucho, capital of the province, is one of the most remarkable colonial urban settlements. Known as "Sevilla Peruana" for its religious festivities of Semana Santa (Holly Week) and "Ciudad de las Iglesias" (city of the churches) for its several temples and beautiful houses of European style. Beautiful

houses with ample patios and various museums constitute interesting tourist centers. It was interesting to visit its 33 colonial churches of renaissance baroque and mestizo styles, with stone fronts and insides carved in wood and covered with layers of precious metals.

The department of Ayacucho is one of the regions that were most affected by the internal armed conflict between the guerrilla organization Shining Path and the Peruvian Armed Forces. During the two decades of the conflict (1980-2000), about 70,000 people were killed or disappeared.



**Families of some of the disappeared persons meet the search team**

Our mission was to help EPAF locate up to 200 clandestine burial sites at the Peruvian Army garrison of Los Cabitos in the city of Huamanga, Department of Ayacucho. The base was the site of enforced disappearances of at least 500 persons between 1982 and 1992. Evidence already collected has confirmed the remains of 15 people found buried on the base and approximately 300 person's remains, which were burned in a crematorium constructed on the military base. The site was 17 acres in size. Using traditional techniques to recover human remains had failed in the past.

Working in 40C (104F) heat in the desert, with ground temperature even higher, our conditions were made even more difficult by the fact the army base was still operational and the Government of Peru had decided not to invest anymore time into the Los Cabitos field investigations. After working with prosecutors, who had filled lawsuits, we were granted 2 ½ hours for 3 days to conduct forensic investigations.

Areas were mapped for our canines to investigate. The cactus had been removed in these areas. All three of the dogs had alerts in the mapped area. Diggers were working the area when we had to leave.



**Mapped quadrant**



**Canine Ceres and Christy Bergeon flagging in the mapped area**



Another area of interest was on a slope above the mapped area. James and Maya were working the area with the Director of EPAF. Maya's behavior changed as she concentrated on an area where tiled rocks had accumulated. Upon further examination it was determined this torn down structure could have been used as a torture building. Pat worked Tucker in very hot conditions to verify Maya's interest.

**Excavating in the mapped area**



**View of the desert conditions on the hillside**



**Pat and Tucker working on the hillside**



**James and Maya working on hillside**

EPAF and ICF learned a number of valuable lessons on this initial investigation.

- Late spring is too hot for the dogs to work effectively. Their working time was limited to 2-3 hours per day due to the mid-day heat. The cooler season from June through September would be a better time for HRD investigations.
- EPAF supplied a vet during the two-week trip. This was invaluable because each of the dogs suffered illness or injury during the trip.

This is an on-going project between ICF and EPAF. There is the possibility of future trips to Peru to look for more of the disappeared persons.