



By: *Catriona M. Munro*, TA Editor in Chief

A Journey to the Centre of the Earth?



It seems unusual to name a country after an imaginary geographical feature, but offer me a reason why not?

Little Latin American Ecuador not only boasts a lilting, sing song, Spanish accent - great if you're studying campesino drug smuggling patois, but more to the point, you're at the centre of the earth!

A rather giant sundial tower near the capital, Quito, suitably called the Mitad del Mundo (Centre of the Earth) encapsulates Ecuador's second most famous phenomenon. After the Galapagos, of course, with their blue-throated finches, giant turtles and all the magnificent fauna.

In 1936, when Europe kicked off some pretty serious skirmishes and dark days, followed shortly by a number of other participants, Ecuador instead focused on building the Mitad del Mundo, and showcasing its topological boasts.

Centre of the earth

To discover more about the centre of the earth, you have to scramble up some scrubland to a house on the hill above the monument. You will be greeted by a gold-toothed indigenous Indian of Indian descent.

His first move is to test your faculties - a taut thin wire is strung along the road of his house, loaded with cables, satellites and swing chairs just at average gringo neck level. Beware a garotting!



To discover more about the centre of the earth, you have to scramble up some scrubland

The indigent inhabits the house, and has a splendid exhibition which offers complex instructions on the art of shrinking heads. Well, I suppose humanity has been spending several centuries preoccupied with kicking balls around.,,

The indigent then snaps his fingers to summon his henchmen, who will perform a series of conjuring tricks to amaze you with the peculiarities of the Equator. Trick number one is the simple balancing of an egg on a small platform, but at the pointed end of it. Harder than you'd think, and performed with some showmanship.

Coriolis Effect

The next performance is the "Coriolis Effect". Apparently this was made famous by an episode of the Simpsons which was set in Australia, where the US Embassy had helpfully installed a device in the family's hotel bathroom that ensured the water "drained the American way" to suit the family.

The allegation is that the water drains counter clockwise in the northern hemisphere but clockwise in the southern hemisphere. The henchmen fill the tub with water, then remove a plug. The tub, which is placed exactly on the Equator, is drained and no vortex is created! The water drains directly into the ground!

They then move the refilled tub to a few metres and surprise surprise! A vortex is created in accordance with the direction they are occupying!

In fact, the locals fill the tubs with leaves and sticks, which they swirl around manually and with some vigour, in order to ensure the direction of the vortex is clear and obvious to gullible tourists.

A "fun fact" is that a team of French explorers discovered the Equator in 1736. The team took measurements to prove that the world is not

perfectly round, but bulges at the Equator.