

News of the arts

Canadian expertise penetrates Peruvian jungle

A team of tough, machete-swinging Canadian engineers are blazing new trails through the jungles of Peru to build vital telecommunications links between the country's long Pacific coast and the interior.

Expansion of Peru's phone system, ENTEL-Peru, is one of 20 projects sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in that country, worth about \$40 million in all.

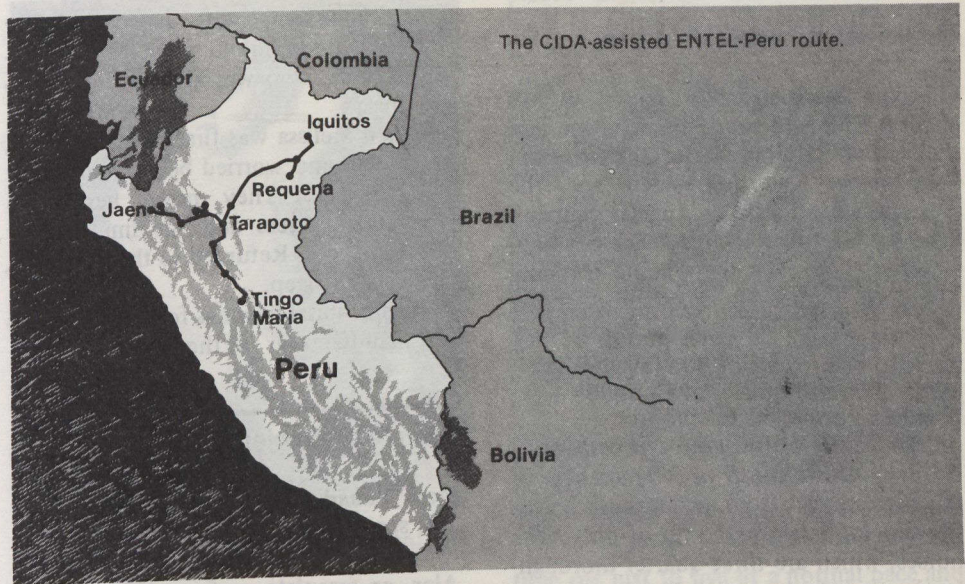
The team is locating sites for microwave towers to span the Andes. Paths have to be cut through dense under-brush populated by snakes, mosquitos and ants, and the work is hot and the humidity high.

Project takes time

The Andes Mountains, approximately 200 miles wide, occupy about 27 per cent of Peru's land area. They are the principal barrier to transportation and communications links between the coast and the interior, which has great potential for agricultural and forestry development.

The team, all employees of Bell Canada International (BCI), now under its third contract with CIDA in Peru, is led by John Tatlock of Montreal.

The first phase of the project was general telecommunications planning for a national telephone network covering all of Peru except Lima. In 1974 the second two-year phase extended the previous work and called for design of outside plants for installation of switching equip-



John Tatlock buys eggs in the jungle.

ment in several northern cities.

The current phase began in November 1976 and could be finished this November. It includes design of a rural telecommunications network leading into jungle areas in the North and East. ENTEL-Peru had about 55,000 lines while the expansion plan called for an additional 60,000 lines by 1979. About 30,000 new lines have been added thus far.

Vital to development

"The phone links to the interior are vital to the safety and health of the people," says Mr. Tatlock. "There are not enough doctors, and locating one in the rural areas in a hurry is difficult without communications.

"We saw a good example of it. We were having lunch in a village when a Peruvian man walked in, saw that we had been travelling, and asked if we had seen a doctor. His little boy was dying, he said. In fact, we knew there was a doctor less than 15 kilometres away, since we had given him a lift in one of our jeeps."

Mr. Tatlock is optimistic about development of the interior once phone links are installed and especially when roads are built. Transportation is now largely by mule trail or by rivers which wind their way to the Amazon.

The long-term plan is to prevent the drift to coastal cities like Lima and to get people to work the land. "There is plenty of land in the valleys that would be good for stock-raising. A typical Alberta rancher would love the place," Mr. Tatlock said.

"Although the job is tough and challenging, it is rewarding," he said. "You don't get time to become bored."

CIDA-funded telecommunications projects

CIDA is currently funding 19 telecommunications projects having a budgetary value of \$138 million. Five projects in Asia are worth a total of \$66 million; four in francophone Africa, \$48 million; seven in Commonwealth Africa, \$17.6 million; two in the Caribbean, \$5.2 million; and one in Latin America, the Peru project, worth \$82,000.

The communications systems are used for general education, teaching family planning, health care, improved farming, and other practices that contribute to self-help.

India recently used a satellite for an educational television experiment that linked some 2.5 million people in 5,000 villages to teach family planning and boost farm production.

The Ivory Coast has an ambitious national educational television program which is aimed at benefiting 974,000 students by 1980. Canada has contributed \$6 million in grants and \$2.5 million in loans to cover technical assistance and the cost of equipment and documents.

Among other examples are assistance to educational radio broadcasting in Tanzania and expansion of the telephone system in Antigua.