Report: AMT International Trip to Caisa Maloka, Jan 2023





Introduction:

During 2022, we secured funding from Lankelly Chase to strengthen our International strand of work at The Anne Matthews Trust (AMT). We organised two trips to visit our sister organisation CAISA Maloka "The Center for Action, Social Investigation and Agroecology" in Los Alpes, a small campesino community in the Valle de Cauca region of Colombia. The first trip took place in October 2022, and was also a part of our Capacity Building stream of work, focussing on organisational development workshops, and has been reported on separately. This report covers the second trip, 2 weeks in January 2023, which was more focussed on building the relationship between CAISA Maloka in Colombia, and the AMT in Wales.

What were the Aims?

Before we left, we met as a team. We agreed on the following shared aims:

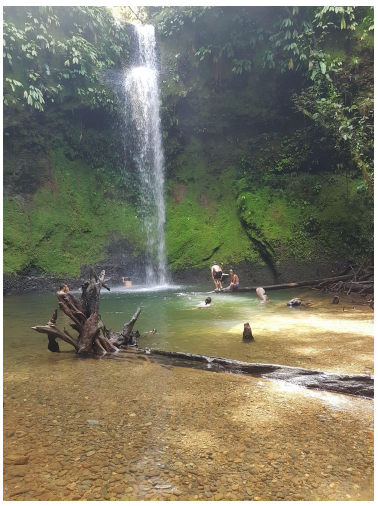
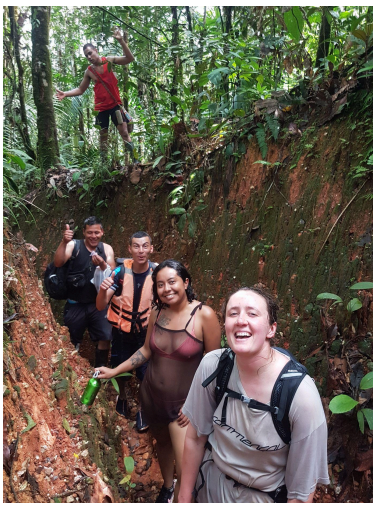
- ★ To listen
- ★ To build relationships
- ★ To learn new skills and to share skills that we have that they want to learn
- ★ To document the project in Caisa Maloka
- ★ To take some donated equipment, eg. camera equipment, a laptop
- ★ To have fun together - to go on residential with both teams, to fall in love with the jungle and remember why we need to protect it
- ★ To participate in the physical work on the farm - tending the coffee, building the education centre
- ★ To read, rest, dream, think creatively together with each other in our team




Telling the collective story of CAISA Maloka, Participatory Video Workshops

What were the Principles?

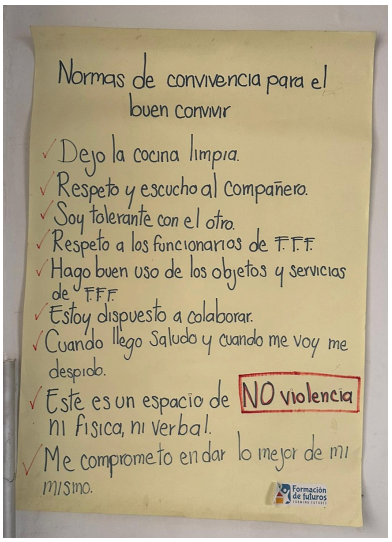
- ★ It's a listening trip; less taking things there, but receiving, honing in, learning
- ★ It's an opportunity to learn how other people work, what are the tools they use, what their priorities are
- ★ It's about getting in touch with the people there, building relationships
- ★ It's about finding out what things we can feed into the bridge that we have between AMT & Cais Maloka
- ★ We will go being ready to get called out, on power dynamics, class, etc, and be open to feedback about how we are received
- ★ We will be ready for a reversal of roles: people from global north doing cooking / cleaning / childcare so other folks can meet and talk


Team residential in San Cipriano

Who participated?

- ★ The primary team was the Anne Matthews Trust on the ground team: Maria, Javier & Lita, and of course, Malkum too
- ★ Our hosts were the CAISA Maloka team, an intergenerational team of local campesino people who have lived and grown up in the area, and who run the farm day to day; David, Duvier, Eduardo, Agustina, Sharon, Mega, Jhon and Julian
- ★ While we were there, CAISA Maloka also hosted two friends from the UK, Jeno & Hannah, to practise hosting volunteers from the UK, so there were 3 'Gringos' including Lita
- ★ An organisation called Tierra Magia arrived during our stay and were leading the latest stay in bioconstruction. This team was very different to the Los Alpes community, due to being mostly from the city, and differences in race or class backgrounds.
- ★ We also met other people organising in the local area, we formally visited two organisations; Hip Hop Pena and Fundación Formación de Futuras, and activists and organisers doing work in Aguablanca neighbourhood in Cali.






Photos from trip to Cali: Poster from Fondacion de Futuras, The Anti-Monument & meeting Hip Hop Pena

What Happened?:



Week 1: We arrived to a community planning meeting, we attended an introduction to natural fertilisers workshop, we were taken on a bird observation tour, we conducted some workshops and sessions in participatory video making, we harvested coffee, and we supported a while-team residential to the jungle of San Cipriano

Week 2: We processed coffee, we participated in the bioconstruction of the new education centre, conducted outreach in Los Alpes, including attending a local organising meeting, and hosting a BBQ for the community. We ended the week with a trip to visit community organisations in Cali who may be able to benefit from the space.

We also cooked and ate three meals together every day, and shared bi-lingual check-ins and check-outs every day to help to bond the group and share reflections. We found moments for reflection, to explore the beautiful local nature and to dance and relax together.

The first two weeks were so successful, that Lita, Jeno & Hannah decided to stay an extra week to continue volunteering at CAISA Maloka and with the bioconstruction project after Maria & Javi departed. This meant coinciding with a residential that the CAISA Maloka team hosted for several community and activist organisations who are organising in the Aguablanca area of Cali, to build relationships with the space and find ways to support and nourish each others' work. The workshop was inspired by Guadua (bamboo) who organise rhizomatically below ground, support each other physically above ground, and store water for their whole biosphere which they release in hard times. This was an amazing opportunity to learn, share games, share food and learn more about the local context.







Bioconstruction: Mixing the mezcla and applying it with Tierra Magia

Key Outcomes:

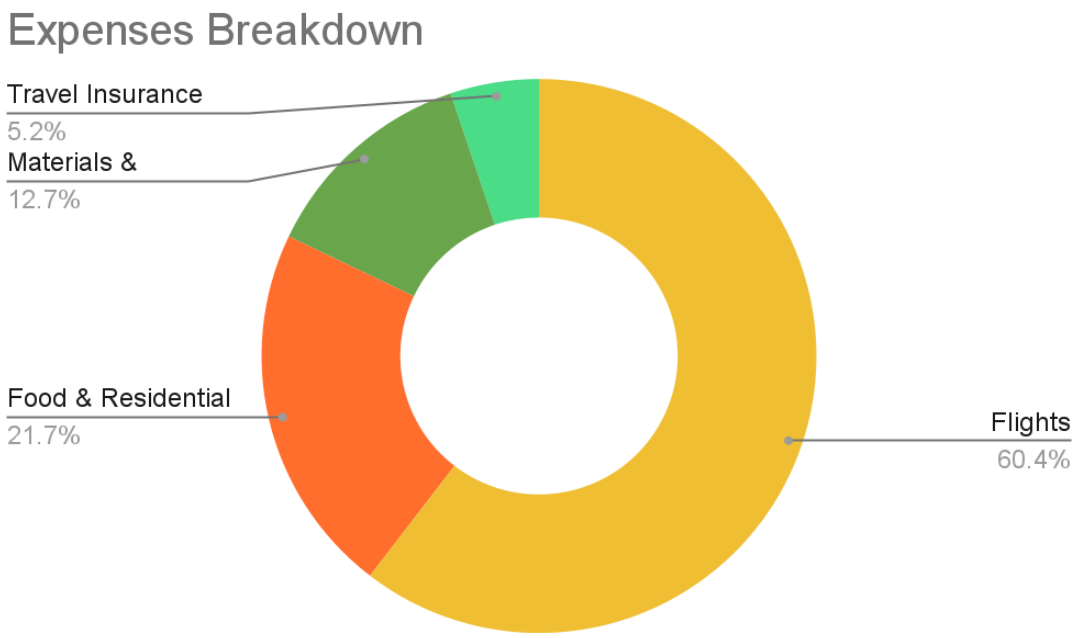
- ★ Deepened relationships between the teams
- ★ Building relationships with organisations in Cali who could benefit from Caisa Maloka once it is ready to accommodate them
- ★ Supported the team to move and rebuild the community veg patch
- ★ Provided natural fertiliser and harvested up to 20,000 coffee plants
- ★ Made significant progress on the bioconstruction project of the education centre
- ★ Community outreach in Los Alpes, including visiting the community and hosting a meeting and a bbq for the local residents
- ★ Raised awareness about CAISA Maloka, the context in Los Alpes and Cali, through a thorough documentation on our social media channels, you can link to those here on Instagram or Facebook
- ★ All of the key learning listed below, which will continue to fuel and improve our work in the UK




Moving the community veg patch & filming interviews in Los Alpes

Spending Breakdown:

The total expenditure for this trip was **£5811.61**



Key Learning:

The learning was different for all of us, as some of us of course were arriving with a lot more knowledge of the local context, however here is a list of some of the things learned by each of us:

- ★ Improved knowledge of the local flora and fauna and seeing the healing of the land over time
- ★ Deepening of thought about our concept of reparations, and what that could/should look like at the grassroots level, between people rather than NGOs or nation states
- ★ The current threats facing the community and biodiversity at Los Alpes
- ★ Witnessing, participating in, and hearing about the campesino way of life
- ★ Agroecological methods, eg. the creation and application of 'Bokashi,' a natural fertiliser applied to maximise bacterial and mycorrhizal health of the soil
- ★ Techniques of bioconstruction / sustainable building; eg. Bahareque; mixing and applying adobe to a Guadua (bamboo) structure
- ★ Important conversations about roles and power dynamics within the local team, working out a structure that is fair and just and decolonial
- ★ Reflections about power dynamics of class, and how that influences at the local level
- ★ Reflections about ownership and stewardship of land, the legal frameworks, how to do it in a way that is just, and in the context
- ★ Language exchange




Duvier & Jeno processing coffee at CAISA Maloka & Los Alpes mural

Next Steps:

We hope that the building of the relationships between the two organisations will continue over the coming months and years, here are some plans that are in the works:

- ★ Editing and sharing the video footage that we made together while we were there
- ★ Hosting an information night at the Braich Goch
- ★ A visit from Johann Balanta (aka Zankara), a hip-hop artist who was one of the building team, and also a member of Hip Hop Pena plans to visit the Braich Goch in the summer
- ★ Fundraising for further trips in the future, to CAISA Maloka and to bridge relationships with other like-minded projects internationally, for example Sisters of Africa (+ orgs in Somalia / Jamaica?)
- ★ Exploring the option of creating a social enterprise where we can sell coffee from CAISA Maloka directly, to give them a fair price for their work, generate unrestricted income for the AMT, and sell the freshest, most ecologically friendly and delicious coffee to residents of mid-Wales.




Community organisers residential, Hannah & Sharon resting after building the new veg patch,

Appendix 1:

(WORK IN PROGRESS) AMT Team Reflections on Reparations 'From the Bottom Up'

Notes taken at a meeting between the Anne Matthews Trust and Hip Hop Pena, a hip-hop education organisation based in Cali, Colombia.

These notes are still a WORK IN PROGRESS because we hope that these reflections will continue to evolve and inform our International stream of work at the AMT, and can be shared with other like-minded organisations who can benefit from the research and process that we are on.



Meeting between AMT & Hip Hop Pena, January 2023

What is the difference between philanthropy and reparations?
Philanthropy is based on the Capitalist / neoliberal concept of the 'trickle down effect,' whereby competition, growth and maximal profit is encouraged, in order for those who can to generate income, and then disperse to those who are in need. This model may have good intentions, but it feeds an ingrained dynamic of who has power and who doesn't.

Reparations is about repairing; the relationships, the land, the living beings, the landscapes, that have been impacted by generations of injustice, colonialism, extraction, exploitation, appropriation and genocide that has been enacted by the nations that we now call the Global North, on the people, plants, animals and the environment of the lands we now call the Global South.

Often reparations is something discussed in reference to financial compensation, usually at the level of the Nation State, eg. Nations who profited from slavery at the expense of other nations paying back a sum of money to compensate for the damage caused. But we aren't in a position to wait for this, and nor do we trust the nation states of the global north to have this on their agenda.

In the global north there is a crisis of hope, there are resources but people are atomised, they don't know what to do, they feel impotent and powerless. In the global south there is so much to do, the social movements are stronger and the crisis is evident, but there are no resources. But things are changing, Hip Hop Pena were surprised to have these conversations with people from the global north. How can we build a global anti colonial movement from the grassroots that isn't taken over by institutions? With these moments, building trust and understanding and realising that behind closed doors in many small groups we are all having similar conversations.

Here are some reflections about Grassroots Reparations, noted down during our conversation with Hip Hop Pena, at the end of our two weeks together in Colombia. It is with these principles and understandings that we wish to undertake work locally and internationally at the Anne Matthews Trust:

1. It is about two directions, exchange. Not magnanimous giving, nor taking without consent or recognition, but always acting on the principle of reciprocity, and acknowledging explicitly what is being received as well as given.
2. Besides money, the exchange might be of learning, of languages, of tactics, of stories, or crucially, we found, of hope.
3. Reparations is not looking for relief from guilt, or for recognition or for heroic public acts. It might be quiet and behind the scenes because it is about justice, not about ego.
4. It is about relearning that we are humans, and everything that being human entails, emotions, imperfections, mistakes, limitations, love, fear, anger, sadness, and the essential need for relationship and enjoyment of life.
5. It is about having a wider understanding of the debts being repaid, they are not just financial; they are cultural, spiritual, intergenerational, energetic
6. It is about having a 'radical' agenda: in the traditional meaning of the word 'from the roots,' so finding deep, systemic level solutions rather than temporary or tokenistic acts. Also radical in the sense that acting with a reparations agenda is to act in a way that does not recreate systems of oppression. It has to be critical and actively decolonial, dismantling the power dynamics of colonialism, rather than inadvertently recreating them. We want our reparative action to be anti-capitalist, anti-imperial, anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and in support of our fellow living beings both in the human and more than human world.
7. It is about acknowledging historic violence and its contemporary impacts. Understanding that the people in the room right now may not have been directly involved, but that the benefits for some from colonialism, and the detrimental effects are still massively impactful today.
8. It is about not trying to do things the way we would in the global north. Learning that our core beliefs; for example about time, economics, science, or justice, may not be fundamental everywhere.
9. It is about trusting local knowledge and decision making. We can offer to share our ideas, but not think that our local ways will be automatically applicable in other contexts. We can offer to share money, but not assume that we know best how it should be spent.

10. It is about building relationships based on equity; not patronism or so-called 'equality' which doesn't take into account all starting from different starting points.
11. It will require different understandings of economics. Spending time and money on healing soil, healing relationships doesn't have a financial profit, but we have to reprioritise according to our own agenda.
12. It takes '*conscientisation*', the act of critically reflecting and educating ourselves and each other from our lived experiences, rather than from received or mainstream ways of thinking. Deconstructing the dreams that capitalism has sold us.
13. It has to be concerned with healing outside of the human experience - with the land, the rivers, the flora and fauna, fixing the soil; repairing more than human relationships after 500 years of exploitation.
14. It requires building long-term relationships. Working together to build trust and understanding across geographies, identities, languages, differences in age, class, race and experience. Meeting each other gives us hope, and hope is our power.



Saying bye to San Cipriano