

Trip Report, Argentina-Bolivia Border (provinces of Salta and Jujuy

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The purpose of this trip was to gather additional information for the Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) team that visited Argentina last June (2003). During that visit little information about this border was provided to the team. APHIS wanted to verify that border control was effective and that there was no informal traffic of live birds and eggs from the border.

Two Argentine provinces, Salta and Jujuy, limit with Bolivia. There are two crossing points in Salta, Salvador Mazza and Aguas Blancas, and one in Jujuy, La Quiaca, although there are several informal crossing points. There is a river, Bermejo, along ¼ of the border in Salta (Picture), but even this river is easily waded during the dry season. The border in Salta is in a tropical area (the first day of the visit the temperature reached over 114 F), while La Quiaca sits on a high altitude plateau (11,000 feet above sea level) and is extremely dry. There is a creek along the border but it does not represent a barrier (Picture).



Border between Argentina and Bolivia at La Quiaca (left) and Aguas Blancas

The visit originated in Buenos Aires, where Pablo Kálnay, Area 2 Ag Scientist, met with Drs. Ricardo Caferata (Federal traffic and borders), Cora Espinoza (Animal health –birds) and Lorna Aluffi-Oates (International relations) and flew to the city of Salta, where they met Dr. Fabian Martinez Almudevar (Salta, regional supervisor). The group left from the city of Salta to Tartagal, where they met the local SENASA staff. The visit continued in Salvador Mazza, then Aguas Blancas (after meeting the Oran office staff) and finally La Quiaca.

The border control points are manned by three different entities, Gendarmeria Nacional (the border police), Customs, and SENASA. The two control points in Salta have scanners for organic material (shared between SENASA and customs), both scanners seemed to be working properly and the technicians were proficient in their operation. The scanners are used during heavy traffic, if not the custom officers inspect the bags manually.



La Quiaca in Jujuy did not have a scanner and all inspections were done by customs officers and SENASA technicians. There is heavy local traffic between the towns at both sides of the border (transito vecinal fronterizo, or neighboring border traffic). Local people, most of them native populations, carry their own food supply (this is a strong cultural habit), so the most common organic item intercepted at the border were small amounts of local food staples (corn, potatoes and other tubers, cured dried meat –charqui- faba beans and some greens). There were a few events of people carrying eggs, on plain sight.



Confiscated organic items being sprayed at La Quiaca

All interceptions were confiscated, immediately sprayed with methylene blue or a similar solution to denaturalize them, and later incinerated. Records of interceptions for two years were available at the local offices (older records were filed at regional offices). Records were consistent and strongly seasonal (flowers around All Saints Day, honeycombs from wild bees during the spring, or rainy season, fresh seasonal produce). Most of the items were food for personal consumption. SENASA technicians mentioned

that local people seemed indifferent to the fact that their food supplies were confiscated over and over again and kept carrying them, almost candidly, all the way to the control points. The authorities mentioned that they changed the option of telling the carrier to turn back and leave the intercepted items at home because they would just give them to somebody else who in turn would try to cross the border with them. There were two events of interceptions in La Quiaca (for the last two years) listed under “birds” which were checked with the official minutes of the interception and turned out to be small amounts (less than 3 or 4 pounds total) of chicken. There were some smuggling events intercepted by Gendarmeria that included eggs (people carrying 8-12 dozens on foot), these eggs were intended to be sold locally. There were no interceptions of live birds for any of the three crossing points on record, or any other live animals (illegal crossing is actually quite common and easy, although the local officials were confident that most of the smuggling was under check). There is no live bird market at any of the three locations. Local groceries had labeled chicken from Salta and Entre Rios (the largest producer of birds in Argentina).

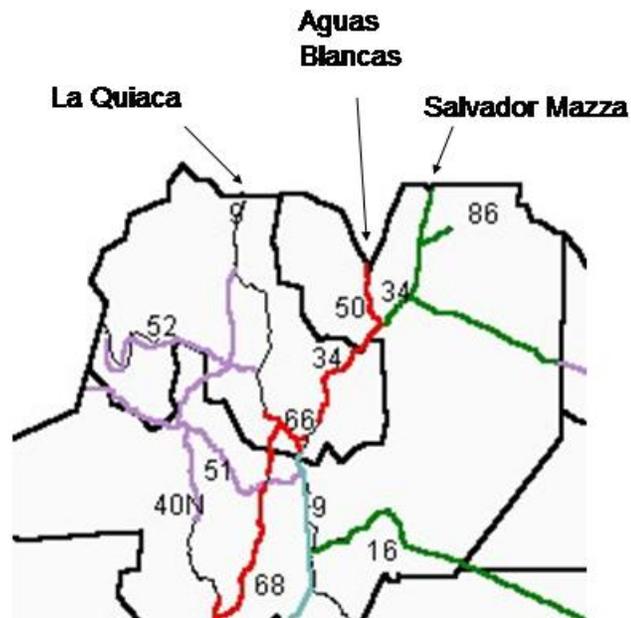
Traffic was evident in one direction, from Argentina to Bolivia. Bolivians have been buying supplies, cereals, and durable goods in Argentina since the economic collapse of December of 2001, where the Argentine peso ratio to the Bolivian peso went from 1 to 8 to 1 to 3. Before this change there were shopping tours routinely coming from several different Argentine provinces to take advantage of cheaper imports (usually manufacture goods such as perfumes, liquor, tennis shoes, etc). These tours have almost

disappeared, with the exception of bargain hunters for handcrafted local textiles. The only fresh produce entering from Bolivia through any of the three points was bananas.



People carrying loads of different goods from Argentina to Bolivia

After the border checkpoint there are several more control points manned by Gendarmeria, many of them with SENASA presence since the last FMD outbreak. At each checkpoint the vehicles are stopped and controlled, passenger buses are subject to a cargo area inspection and the passengers have to walk through the control point and board the bus at the other side, after it has been inspected. There are no international bus lines, all vehicles depart from the Argentine side. Newer, air-conditioned units have reduced the chance of local people of carrying small live animals with them since the bus drivers will not allow them to board. The newer units are those with longer routes while the local buses are still old. All three border posts have only one road (route 34 from Salvador Mazza, route 50 from Aguas Blancas and route 9 from La Quiaca) with no alternative roads that move inland.



The control points are hard to avoid, unless the interested party has a well equipped 4X4, which is unlikely for petty smuggling. There are three control points after leaving Salvador Mazza, two after Aguas Blancas (one in common with Mazza) and two after La Quiaca (these two in Jujuy do not have SENASA technicians since the emergency area due to the FMD outbreak was in Salta, only the one in La Quiaca had SENASA's personnel). All the border checkpoints had two sprayers to treat the vehicles, one with an iodine solution (10%) and the second one with a pyrethroid (the latter to prevent cotton ball weevil entry), four of the checkpoints in Salta also had a high pressure sprayer to wash trucks during the initial stages of the sanitary emergency and sanitary carpets with sodium carbonate (the sanitary carpets had since been removed). SENASA technicians at these checkpoints had records of animal movement at the post and records

of confiscation at the regional offices (two records due to lack of documentation). All records were for cattle movement, there were no birds movement on record.



Truck being sprayed and spraying equipment at two different sites

Backyard birds were fairly common near Mazza and Aguas Blancas, but rare near La Quiaca. Farm houses through the whole area were few and far between. Backyard flocks are intended for local consumption. There were some street vendors with brown eggs. It was not possible to determine the origin of those eggs. Street vendors were not cooperative because of the authority-type look of the team (local vendors do not pay any taxes and are usually involved with petty smuggling, so they were probably afraid of a bust). Local roads were in acceptable condition, but not enough to allow egg transport in the cargo space of a bus or small truck.



Street vendors at Salvador Mazza, some with eggs and produce