

Monquecagua, Honduras Trip Report, March 2016 – Marty Howell

Statements like ‘it is better to give than to receive’ and ‘you always get more than you give’ can sound trite, but they are usually true. In Monquecagua, these truths were definitely true. I had the great fortune of joining SMA engineers Andrew Robertson (otherwise known as the man with the cool hat) and Emily Sotelo (who fell in the mud to make me feel better) on a Water Engineers for the Americas (WEFTA) trip to Monquecagua, Honduras in March 2016. WEFTA teamed with the local community and a Tennessee church group to design and begin the installation of a new water system for the community of Lenca people in the small Honduran mountain village.

Our first day at the site started with what seemed like a death march up 30% muddy slopes carrying 20-foot sticks of PVC pipe to the new tank site. After wiping the mud off, we were able to coordinate with the Spanish organization, Geólogos del Mundo, who were managing design and construction of the



30,000 gallon water storage tank. We also walked most of the proposed alignment as the community was digging the waterline trench to mark connections and check for conflicts.

On our second day on the project, the team began construction of the first rompe carga (pressure breaker) and began laying pipe (until the rain drove us off the mountain). Our third day, a beautiful, sunny day, the team laid out and installed piping to and around the tank and continued laying the main line.

Our fourth and last day on-site saw the team complete the structure for the rompe carga, lay more pipe and attempt to pressure test the pipe to the rompe carga. After realizing that the line wasn't filling and some scrambled on-site engineering, we eventually had to cut into a running line to install a throttle valve. Fortunately, the piping held and the new line filled quickly.

The local community was incredible. They were hardworking, digging several miles of waterline trench in two days and lugging 90 pound bags of sand, concrete, block and pipe up 30% grades (while certain norte americanos huffed and puffed without any load whatsoever).

They were ingenious and innovative, repairing damaged irrigation lines with a burning stick and changing the pipeline alignment to avoid an unnecessary bend. They were patient and tolerant, enduring lots of hand waving and pre-school Spanish phrases from uneducated northerners. And above all they were joyful, always smiling, joking and laughing.

