

Date: December 3, 2003

Location: Lima, Peru

Subject: Update #14 – Andean Adventures – *El Camino Inca* in Peru

Dear Friends and Family,

December is already here and it's hard to believe that I'll be heading home in about 3 weeks. By the time I got to this update, I was supposed to be done with school but somehow, I still have one final paper to get done in these next three weeks before I head back home.

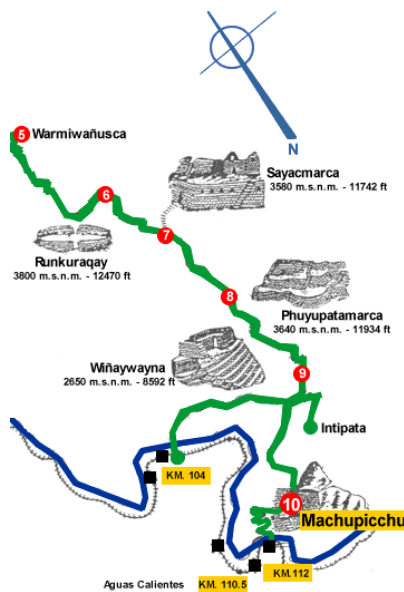


<left> Anyway, starting with a random picture... Ten days ago, yours truly ceased to be a teen and joined the ranks of all the old people that I know. =) I knew something was suspicious when those flames kept burning and sparking really high... un-blow-outable silly candles. =P Anyway, had a small little birthday barbeque with some friends and family at home. Nice change to not get creamed just for getting old. =D

<right> This past weekend was my long-delayed trip to Peru. It had originally been planned that my family and I would meet up in Peru weeks/months ago, but I ended up going to see them because it was just easier that way.

**CAMINO INCA A MACHUPICCHU**

Machupicchu (Cusco-Peru) 2400 m.s.n.m. 7872 ft



(see Update #8). Anyway, on Thursday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, I hopped on a plane to Lima and arrived there early Friday morning (more like midnight). Spent the night sleeping on a marble bench-like thing around a small little garden inside the airport and woke up 3 hours later to discover other travelers who chose to do the same! =D From there, flew out to Cuzco, the capital of the Inca civilization to see what there was to see.

<left> I opted for the 2-day Inca Trail to Machu Picchu for several reasons. I didn't have time for the 4-day trail and I possibly didn't want to hike for 4 days right before I would head south to camp and hike for about 3-4 days at the end of the world. =) Anyway, you can see the route that we took from KM 104 to Winaywayna and on to Machu Picchu.



I arrived in Cuzco early in the morning and spent the first day wandering around seeing the old architecture of the city. Lots of sights to see.



<left> The Cathedral of Cuzco is one of the many fancy churches left over from the days of the Spanish *conquistadores* who came and replaced the Inca civilization. Most of these churches have become tourist attractions charging entrance fees to see the many works of art and architecture within. No pictures allowed because postcards are sold at the end of the tour. What's become of all these places? =(

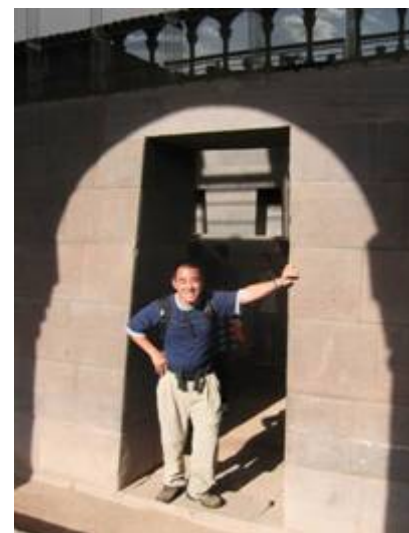
After some sight-seeing, I returned to my hostel around 3-4PM and promptly passed out until about 7AM the next morning. I think an entire week of staying up all night finishing up 4 final papers totaling about 40 pages and the flights pretty much wiped me out. =) The next day, I spent the morning looking around some more and doing some haggling at the artisan markets before starting on a local area tour.

<right> The *Iglesia and Convento de Santo Domingo* were constructed over *Qorikancha*, the "Site of Gold", one of the temples of the Inca civilization. All over the city are remnants from Inca times as colonial buildings were built right on top of Incan foundations.



<left> Inside *Qorikancha*, one can see the precision of Incan architecture. This particular series of windows were built perfectly level so that one can see right through the three rooms.

<right> Three different periods of architecture are present in this photo. The Inca temple with the trapezoidal doorway framed by the shadow of colonial columns and arches... with modern day glass panels in the background to protect the museum location. After a brief tour of the city, we ended up seeing some of the local ruins around Cuzco.





<left> I was a bit disappointed with what I saw at *Saqsaywaman* after my previous experiences with Aztec and Mayan ruins in Mexico. Perhaps it wasn't so spectacular because only about 20% of the original constructions remain after the Spanish destroyed and covered up what was once the Inca "House of the Sun".

If you ever get a chance and are interested in the ruins of ancient civilizations, I'd recommend the Aztec ruins at *Tenochtitlan* over these ruins here around Cuzco though.



<right> At the end of the day, I was pressured into taking a photo of some local girls dressed up in traditional clothes. As I had read in my *Lonely Planet*, they dress up, have you

take a picture and take a tip for their "services" as "models". So, since I paid about 60 cents for this picture, enjoy! =D



<left> These taxis reminded me of cheap versions of the three Mini Coopers in the movie *The Italian Job*. Korean Daewoo Tico's are all over the place as taxis and I happened to see these

three in line that were white, red and blue. =>



<right> The next day, I woke up around 5AM to catch the 6AM train that headed up to Machu Picchu. Since I was hiking the 2-day trail, I got off with the rest of my group at KM 104 to begin the trek.



<left> The entrance to the *Camino Inca* at KM 104 was a bridge that would lead into the Andean mountain range for

the next two days of hiking through the wilderness. I think I was starting to enjoy this a lot more than Cuzco and the Inca ruins around it. Maybe it's because God's creations are always so much more spectacular than any creation of any ancient civilization of man. =)



<left> Our expedition consisted of 2 guides and 13 tourists. (Basically, a bunch of different groups got tossed together and we'd split up again that evening). We took a group photo at the first site of

*Chachabamba* and got to know each other as the day progressed and we hiked our way towards *Winaywayna*, where we would spend the night.



<right> After a few hours of trekking almost entirely uphill, we finally caught glimpse of the ruins of *Winaywayna*.

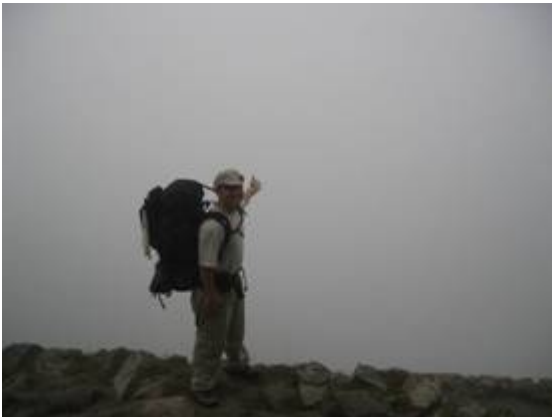
<left> The *Winaywayna* plant after which the site is named. Most of the original Inca names were lost after the Spanish came and destroyed everything.



<right> The ruins of *Winaywayna* from above. Talk about an exhausting climb up hundreds of stairs right after a long 3-4 hour hike from KM 104. Right by the site was a campsite where we stayed in a cabin with



bunkbeds for the evening. The 4-day hikers stayed in tents. Haha, too bad for them. =P



<left> After waking up at 4AM to begin our next day, we arrived at the majestic ruins of Machu Picchu. Amazing, ain't it? Oh the beautiful grey cloud of fog that covered all.



<left> Actually, this is what we saw when we got to the Sun Gate, or *Inti Punku*. It's a lot more majestic in person than in pictures... but the view from above was truly amazing and rewarding after all the hiking of the day before and of that morning. You can see the ruins of Machu Picchu in the middle surrounded by mountains everywhere. The peak to the right is *Huayna Picchu*, or little peak (Machu Picchu means older or bigger peak) which we would climb later that day.

<right> Looking towards the urban sector of Machu Picchu from the agricultural terraces as the fog moves in and out.



After a tour of the main ruins of Machu Picchu, several of us opted to hike up *Huayna Picchu* to get the other view of Machu Picchu. However, we decided to take the route around the backside to the Temple of the Moon and then up to the peak.



Wow. Big mistake. The Temple of the Moon is at a lower altitude than Machu Picchu. We ended up hiking downhill asking the entire way, "Why are we going downhill when *Huayna Picchu* is going to be even farther up??"

<left>After finally arriving at the disappointing Temple of the Moon, we proceeded to take the trail up the backside to *Huayna Picchu*. After much pain and suffering, we nearly reached the top when we encountered the following in the trail. We climbed up this scary, creaky, slippery, wooden ladder to discover very narrow stone steps and a metal rope to hang onto the side of the cliff. Somehow, we managed to get up it alive and only after we made it up, did I notice the following sign.



<left> It wasn't really a sign but some text painted on the side of a rock at the top of the narrow steps. If you can't read it, it says, "NO SIGA PELIGRO" and is followed by a little skull face. Basically, it translates to "DON'T CONTINUE DANGER" and the skull is universal. => Apparently, we weren't supposed to take the trail but the sign was only posted at the top of the trail and not at the bottom. Close call. Phew! =>

<right> The view from above was spectacular and you could see all the mountains and valleys around Machu Picchu.



<left> At the end of our Machu Picchu and Inca Trail experience, I enjoyed a nice cold refreshing *Inca Kola*. It's a local Peruvian soda that tastes

like... bubble gum said someone. I couldn't quite place the taste. It's sweet and not too carbonated though. => After cleaning up and resting that evening, I flew back to Lima to spend the day exploring the city.



<right> The *Palacio de Gobierno* is where Lima's president lives and works. Like the White House, but not like the *Moneda* (in Chile) or the



*Casa Rosada* (in Argentina)

where the president only works in the government building. Hmm... the only government building I'm missing is the Bolivian one... oh well. Don't wish to be going there these days. =>

<left> The changing of the guard at the *Palacio de Gobierno*. Get those legs up! =P



<left> The *Iglesia de San Francisco* is one of Lima's many old churches. Lima and Cuzco have way to many churches and museums to visit in a day or two.

<right> Inside the catacombs



of the church, the skeletal remains of the thousands of people who were once buried in the caverns underneath the church can be viewed. As the LP says, it wasn't a place for the weak-hearted as there were hundreds and thousands of bones arranged. Thankfully for some of you, you can hardly make out the concentric circles of skulls and bones in the picture.



<left> In Cuzco, I found out about some local dishes that I thought I'd try before I left Peru. One of these dishes was the *cuy chactado* which is fried guinea pig. I wandered around Lima looking for a restaurant that served this dish and finally found one. Hmm. Guinea pig just doesn't have that much meat on it... lots of skin and bones. Chewy, too. Doesn't taste like chicken or beef though. Anyone want a fried paw for lunch? =P

My other quest to find alpaca for dinner failed. Apparently, I should have eaten it in Cuzco. Doh! The alpaca eludes me again! (Once before in Northern Chile... Update #8?)

<right> One museum that interested me was the Gold and Weapons museum. =) It was one of the most expensive museums I've been to with an entrance of 30 Peruvian Sols. With an exchange rate of about 3.4 sols to the dollar, that was almost \$10!! The Gold part of the museum had thousands of gold artifacts from old Peruvian cultures in an underground vault that looked pretty impressive. But the weapons of the world part of the museum had rooms full of guns and swords and stuff... haha, cool stuff. =P





<left> Lima's Pacific Coast and lighthouse with the Peruvian flag waving in the breeze. Overcast skies hid the sunset from me! Missed it again! Doh! =)

Anyway, that pretty much wraps up this last update. Heading back to Santiago to finish up that last final paper before beginning my last and final journey to the end of the world.

Hope this update has found you well and that you'll keep me in your prayers as I finish up my study abroad experience and prepare to come home!

- Dan