

It's All a Matter of Altitude: Andes Adventure

by Robert C. Huck, *Oklahoma Alpha '00*

dr. James J. Sluss, *Oklahoma Alpha '86*, his wife Julie, and son Tyler joined me—a Tau Beta Pi District 9 Director—in June for a hike through the Andes in South America. I arrived in Peru on June 5 to settle into Peruvian life and resolve any last-minute trip details. The Sluss family arrived in Cuzco on June 8.

After meeting with Erika, our tour guide, we took a city tour around Cuzco, a trip to Pisac and the local artisan market, then a trip to Ollantaytambo and the Sacred Valley, followed by a short hike up to the unfinished Temple of the Sun. All was in place for the six-day trek from Soraypampa to Machu Picchu.

to school. The teacher spends his weekdays living in half of the school building and his weekends living at home in Urubamba. He walks back and forth to Urubamba because there are no roads in the valley.

The next day we said goodbye to our mule team and, after meeting with our porters, joined the traditional Inca Trail. We camped at Huayllabamba where there were



The Temple of the Sun



Ollantaytambo and the Sacred Valley

The trek covered approximately 40 miles and ranged from a high of 16,255 feet ASL (4,955 meters) at the Inca-Chiriaska to a low of 8,118 feet ASL (2,474 m) at Machu Picchu.

After arriving by van at Soraypampa, we left on foot with a team of mules and a cook. We camped the first night near Quera Machay at 15,000 feet (4,572 m). That night and the next morning we heard and saw six avalanches on Salkantay, which stands at 20,565 feet (6,268 m).

In the morning we hiked to the Inca-Chiriaska (which translates to *the place where the Inca cools down*) at 16,255 feet (4,955 m). This is a knife-edge pass, dropping quickly on both sides. The trail led us through a herd of llamas.

That night we camped by a small school near Pampacahuana. The school has seven students ranging from six-to-nine years of age, all coming from the houses in the valley. Some of the children walk for more than an hour to get



The Inca-Chiriaska at 16,255 feet



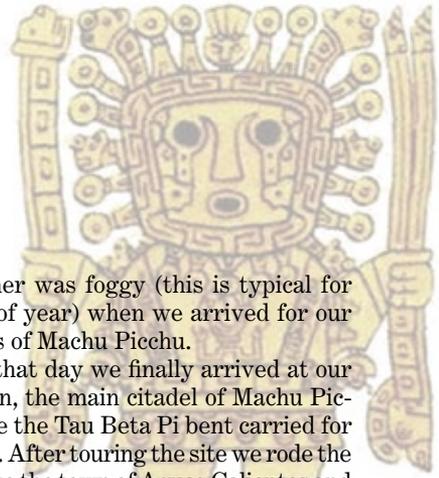
Veronica

spectacular sunset views of the surrounding mountains. The view of Veronica at 18,860 feet (5,748 m) at sunset is incredible.

The next day we passed through the checkpoint on our way to Warmiwañusqa (which translates to *Dead Woman Pass*) at 13,775 feet (4,198 m) and then to our campsite near Pacamayo.

The fifth day was long and the only day it rained on the trail. After lunch the fun began. We hiked down more than 3,000 rock steps on our way to Wiñay Wayna and our last camp before Machu Picchu. Because the weather had not cooperated the previous day, we decided to forego an attempt to be at the Intipunku (Sun Gate) for sunrise and started late. This turned out to be a wise decision because

The Citadel of Machu Picchu



Machu Picchu

the weather was foggy (this is typical for this time of year) when we arrived for our first views of Machu Picchu.

Later that day we finally arrived at our destination, the main citadel of Machu Picchu (notice the Tau Beta Pi bent carried for good luck). After touring the site we rode the bus down to the town of Aguas Calientes and a well deserved hot shower at a hotel.



The next morning we took the 5:30 a.m. bus back to Machu Picchu, wishing for a spectacular sunrise. We were not disappointed. The sunrise over the Intihuatana (*Hitching Post of the Sun*) was spectacular! In the photo below,



The Intihuatana

Tyler is standing in the astronomers stand and receiving a message, his eyes aglow from the sun rising over the mountain and grazing the top of the Intihuatana.



We then hurried off to climb Wayna Picchu to get a better view of Machu Picchu. The trail descending the backside of Wayna Picchu led us to the Grand Cavern and the Temple of the Moon, which were equally spectacular.



Tyler and Bob atop Wayna Picchu.

An evening train ride returned us to Cuzco, and the Sluss family departed the following day for the U.S.A. I remained in Peru until July 2 visiting Puno, sailing on Lake Titicaca, and exploring the Uros Islands, Amantani Island, and Taquile Island. I also trekked to Choquequirao, known as the *Cradle of Gold*, a three-day 60 km trek not for the weak.



PHOTOS BY R.C. HUCK

Machu Picchu

(Quechua: Machu Picchu, "Old mountain") is

situated on a mountain ridge above the Urubamba Valley in Peru, which is 80 km (50 mi.) northwest of Cuzco. Often referred to as The Lost City of the Incas, Machu Picchu is probably the most familiar symbol of the Inca Empire.

It was built about the year 1450, but abandoned a hundred years later at the time of the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire. Forgotten for centuries, the site was brought to worldwide attention in 1911 by Hiram Bingham, an American historian. Since then, Machu Picchu has become an important tourist attraction. It has recently come to light that the site may have been discovered and raided some years previously, in 1867 by a German businessman, Augusto Berns. It was declared a Peruvian historical sanctuary in 1981 and a UNESCO world heritage site in 1983. It is also one of the new Seven Wonders of the World.



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