

About the Exhibition

Stones in the Cloud Forest

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**Left bank of the Vilcanota river, between its tributaries the Kusichaca and Aobamba rivers, in the department of Cuzco, Urubamba Province, District of Macchu Picchu
S13 7 W72 35.ⁱ**

Machu Picchu represents an exquisite interaction between humans and their environment. The site is at 2,430 metres above sea level, overlooking the Urubamba River at the end of the Sacred Valley of the Incas. It is about eight days walk from Cuzco, capital of the Inca Empire, and in a position so secluded that it remained hidden from the Spaniards and undiscovered until Hiram Bingham was led there in 1911. The Quechua name means *Old Mountain*.

The buildings represent the pinnacle of Inca architecture at the height of the Empire. Built by the Inca Pachacutec around 1440, it was inhabited until some years before the Spanish conquest in 1532. The setting, in a tropical cloud forest on the eastern slopes of the Andes, encompasses the Amazon basin with its spectacular diversity of wildlife. The walls and terraces blend seamlessly with the natural rock of the mountain.

Noteworthy Fauna: The fauna is most interesting, with the vulnerable Spectacled bear *Tremarctos ornatus* being one of the most interesting in the area.ⁱⁱ

One of the most interesting interpretations of Machu Picchu is that it was used as the residence of the mummy of the Inca Pachacutec and its accompanying attendants.ⁱⁱⁱ The functions of the buildings were both secular and sacred, with about fifty percent being devoted to religious objectives. They housed several hundred people who cultivated the surrounding terraces for food. A series of channels carved into the native granite supplied water throughout the site. It has been suggested that the irrigation system was used to carry water from a sacred spring. Other interpretations describe Machu Picchu as simply a delightful summer resort for the Incan aristocracy from Cuzco.

The function of this city situated at least 100 kilometres from the capital, Cuzco, has not been clearly established and numerous hypotheses have been formulated which are not verifiable given the absence of written documentation and sufficiently explicit written material.^{iv}

Most descriptions of Machu Picchu do little to convey the energy of the place. Pablo Neruda made a pilgrimage there in 1943 and experienced profound changes in his life. The result is the poem *Alturas de Machu Picchu* from *Canto General* written in 1950. As he plunges his hand into the earth and walks among the stones, he looks for answers to the aridity of modern life and to his sense of disconnection:

*Quién va rompiendo sílabas heladas,
idiomas negros, estandartes de oro,
bocas profundas, gritos sometidos,
en tus delgadas aguas arteriales?^v*

He finds answers in the secrets of the stones and re-establishes his links to Incan ancestors and to the Americas. His poem moves from the personal to the global in the search for understanding in the world of the twenty-first century.

Dadme el silencio, el agua, la esperanza.^{vi}

ⁱ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/274>

ⁱⁱ *ibid*

ⁱⁱⁱ www.machupicchu.perucultural.org.pe/ingles/recoculto.htm

^{iv} <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/274>

^v www.geocities.com/lospobresdelatierra3/textos/nerudaalturasdemachupicchu.html

^{vi} *ibid*