



# Peru

*April 2015*

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*This was our first visit to Peru and it turned out to be far more interesting and beautiful than we had imagined. We had traveled in several South American countries in 2006 but we had stayed predominantly in coastal towns, although we had seen the Andes up-close during our stay in Chile.*

*Peru promised more views of the amazing Andes mountains as well as the number one tourist attraction of Machu Picchu, the last of the Inca cities which had been lost to the world for almost 400 years. With the number of travel programs that we had seen, as well as the first-hand accounts we had heard from friends who had already visited this site, we felt that we “knew” Machu Picchu and that it might be something of an anti-climax. It wasn’t!*

*On the other hand, our visit to one of the world’s highest lakes—Lake Titicaca at almost 12,000 feet—not only gave substance to grammar school Geography, but proved to have an interesting facet that we had not heard of before our trip planning. Similarly, a two day trip to the Colca Canyon (twice as deep as the Grand Canyon) not only was impressive and filled with magnificent scenery, but was probably the highlight of the entire two weeks.*

*A flight over ancient drawings in the Nazca Desert (also unknown to us before arranging this trip) was an added bonus that we arranged independently of the organized group tour.*

*In all, we were very impressed with the history and culture of Peru and enjoyed some of the finest scenery in the world; certainly at the top of any list we could compile. Peru really does have a lot to offer.*



## *Peru, April 2015*

### **Wednesday April 15**

We left home at 11:30 and drove to the airport where we were soon checked in for our 2:15 flight to Atlanta, from where we had a 6pm flight to Lima, Peru. Our 12 day tour with Gate 1 starts on Friday but we wanted to arrive a little early and get acclimatized before the hectic pace of the tour was to start.

We arrived in Lima a little before midnight (1am EDT) and found an ATM and then a taxi to our hotel near downtown. It was about a 30 minute drive through city streets with little to see at this time of night except the brightly lit casinos and discos. It was after 1am local time by the time we checked in and almost 2am before we turned out the lights.

There was an added item of interest on the way here. In Atlanta we were informed that a volcano had erupted in Ecuador and that we would need to take a slightly longer route to avoid the ash. This meant re-programming the flight route and adding more fuel, so we were delayed perhaps 20 minutes beyond our scheduled departure time. However, the new route obviously wasn't that much longer and we had some favorable winds so we landed in Lima – to a humid 70F – essentially on time.

### **Thursday April 16**

We slept well and it was almost 9am before we found our way to the restaurant for a buffet breakfast. We then got a local street map and some tips on what to see in the area from the concierge and, later in the morning, set out for a short walk in the San Isidro area where we are staying. It was nice to have this leisurely start to the vacation and we were certainly glad that we had arrived a day before the tour proper, as (if our India tour with Gate 1 was an indicator) the next 12 days would probably be much more organized and frantic.



The area around the hotel seems to be primarily a business district sandwiched between Downtown and the precinct of Miraflores on the ocean front. However, in the short walk (probably not much more than a mile) we were able to see a couple of churches (one dating to 1887) and a partially reconstructed Inca pyramid. We chose not to go into the archaeological dig area



but could see parts of the structure that must have been original, together with a fully covered slope that presumably faithfully reproduces the original finished building. Certainly we will be exposed to many more similar structures in the next twelve days but this was an interesting and unexpected start right in the middle of Peru's

largest city.

We also walked through a very pleasant park which contained an ancient olive grove that was designated a National Monument. There were also examples of the presses and tools used in the grove when it was productive. Finally, we found a restaurant a few hundred feet from the hotel where we plan to have dinner tonight. Actually there was a choice in the restaurant of an a la carte or a 29 course tasting menu. We didn't feel up to such a large sampling tonight, so we opted for the simpler, smaller version.

We had lunch in the hotel and spent the afternoon relaxing until dinner time. We walked the few hundred yards to the restaurant and were seated immediately in a medium sized room, with a clear view of the kitchen area and the dozen or so "chefs" preparing food. We selected a bottle of Spanish wine and ordered three main dishes to share. Each was presented and detailed by the very pleasant staff and, with a starter dish of olives and bread, we found that we had sufficient food. However, we still found room for a chocolate dessert to share and finished an excellent meal with espresso. The host who had taken our reservation earlier in the day as well as a lady who seemed to be the manager (or maybe the owner) stopped by our table to chat and make sure that everything was to our satisfaction. It was!



### Friday April 17

We were up about 7:15 and had ample time for a leisurely breakfast before leaving on our morning tour at 8:45.

We were driven (slowly, in this city of 10 million with no subway or rail service) through the San Isidro district and into the central downtown area. The city of Lima is divided into 43 separate districts, each with its own mayor and high level of bureaucracy, and a city-wide "super mayor" who adds another level. According to our local guide, this creates a good deal of corruption and difficulties in coordinating public services and many of these (such as the bus service) are operated privately, with little or no regulation.

However, the city has a long tradition of Inca, colonialization and republic history and a wide variety of architecture as a result. Today, the variety is not as prevalent as it might be as the city is quite frequently rocked by significant earthquakes and many older buildings have been destroyed. In addition, the Spanish conquerors had a nasty habit of replacing the Inca buildings with those of a more European style, although for quite some time they didn't know how to build to withstand the frequent tremors.

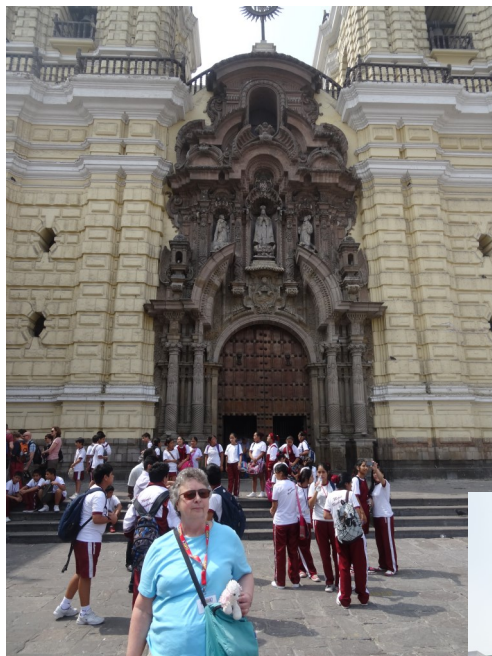


*One of a number of attractive squares in the city*



The country gained its independence in 1821 and for a while its Spanish heritage was scorned. This resulted in a prevalent French influence on architecture which is still predominant in many public buildings to this day.

Our first stop was at a Franciscan monastery which, although partly occupied by monks even today, is largely kept up as a museum. There was no photography allowed inside so our hour long visit was spent in listening to the guide and admiring the many different features of the church, its courtyard and its catacombs. There are remnants of frescoes from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and a number of huge paintings throughout as well as a magnificent refectory, which we were told was in daily use until the 1970s. It is still used by the monks on high feast days.



We spent about 20 minutes in the catacombs where there are thousands of



bones and skulls dating from the Spanish period when burial under the church was desirable and quite commonplace. Since its conversion to a museum, the bones have been “organized” in these underground displays – many in quite rigid designs to display the skeletons.

***Above and top right:***

***The San Francisco Monastery***

***Right: The Railway Station (now a library)***

***Far right: Local street with some***



Our only other stop was in the major square of the city. This is a huge European-looking plaza with a cathedral (below), the President's official residence and other civic buildings on all four sides. It is the place where independence was declared and celebrated and the site of major civic and community activities for several centuries. We were told that present-day Peru is





the oldest of the Spanish settlements in South America, so there has been a European influence here for about 500 years.



We returned to the hotel about noon and, as we had opted out of the afternoon excursion to a museum, we had the rest of the day free until our tour briefing at 6 and dinner at 7:30. We walked to a local Starbucks (!) for lunch and then relaxed in the room until six.

*Lima is the capital and the largest city of Peru. It is located in the three river valleys of the central coastal part of the country, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Together with the seaport of Callao, it forms a contiguous urban area known as the Lima Metropolitan Area. With a population of almost 10 million, Lima is the most populous metropolitan area of Peru, and the third largest city in the Americas.*

*Lima was founded by Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro on January 18, 1535, as Ciudad de los Reyes. It became the capital and most important city in the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru. Following the Peruvian War of Independence, it became the capital of the Republic of Peru. Today, around one-third of the Peruvian population lives in the metropolitan area.*

*Lima is home to one of the oldest higher learning institutions in the New World. The National University of San Marcos, founded on May 12 of 1551, during Spanish colonial regime, is the oldest continuously functioning university in the Americas.*

We had our tour briefing and learned that the next two days will be very early starts – 6am and 4am, respectively, wake-up calls for the flight to Cusco on Saturday and for the trip to Machu Picchu on Sunday. We also introduced ourselves to our



traveling companions and got a brief overview of the whole tour from our guide, Miguel. Then we left for the evening buffet dinner and entertainment. As is usual with these “local dinner and dance” that are a fixture on organized tours, the food was mediocre (although plentiful) and the dancing was interesting but would have sufficed with perhaps one half of the hour long show. The costumes were very colorful, the music was loud and the whole thing was done under very bright strobe lighting. The final set was perhaps most interesting – a dance done by men, carrying scissors and doing some spectacular acrobatics, much of which was reminiscent of Cossack dancing.

### **Saturday April 18**

We were up by six, had our cases out by 6:15 and had ample time for a light breakfast before getting the bus to the airport. From here we flew directly to Cusco (one hour flight time but arriving about 30 minutes late) and landed on the single runway which appeared to be right in the middle of the city. Cusco has a population of 500,000 and there is a lot of new construction on the outskirts of the old town. Our hotel was right in the middle of the Historic Area, next to the Temple of The Sun and only three blocks from the main square.



*One of two courtyards of the Palacio del Inka Hotel, which had been a large mansion and dates back 500 years.*

*The main lobby is shown below*



After checking in and getting our first cups of Coca tea, we walked with our guide to the main square. Here is the Cathedral which sits one side of the enormous plaza; other magnificent old buildings adorn the other sides and a green area adds color to the whole scene. In addition, today there was a major attraction on the square

on



which seemed to consist of dozens of dancing troupes, many of whom were indeed dressed just like the performers we saw last night. Whether this was simply a show or a competition we didn't find out – but the whole scene was very colorful and entertaining.



***Plaza des Armas, Cusco***

Our guide left us to find our way back to the hotel and Molly and I headed to the local Starbucks for lunch. The café was on the second floor and the climb made Molly feel a little dizzy. Cusco is at 10,000 feet above sea level (or more, depending exactly where the measurement is taken and/or who you want to believe) so any exercise beyond sitting is somewhat taxing. So, we relaxed with our coffee and then walked very slowly back to the hotel.

Here the receptionist tried several restaurants before getting us a dinner reservation at the Inka Grill – back on the main square. We asked about getting a taxi but were told that they could not take us right into the square so we would perhaps have as far to walk as the distance from the hotel. So, we planned on a very early start and a very leisurely pace. There had been a few drops of rain as we walked back this afternoon so we are hoping that it clears before dinner time.

Our first impressions of Cusco are very favorable. The architecture, some dating back over 500 years, is magnificent and the historical area – in fact, the whole city – is surrounded by green hills that climb perhaps another 1000 to 2000 feet above street level. Not that there is a level street! Cusco is on a slope no matter where you go. This adds to its charm as well as to its demand on the lungs!

We spent a few hours simply resting in the hotel before our walk to dinner. The meal was good (I had alpaca, which tasted somewhat like pork and tougher than beef) and the service was excellent. So far we have been very impressed with the pleasantness and level of service in all restaurant and hotel facilities. Following the meal we walked slowly back to the hotel and were in bed before 9:30.

### Sunday April 19

Today was our day to visit Machu Picchu, probably the most famous Inca site and one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites.

The day started with our 4am wake-up call, a quick breakfast and on to the first bus of the day by 4:40. We left Cusco and climbed to an elevation over 12,000 feet before descending quite rapidly into the Sacred Valley which is predominantly below 7000 feet. Obviously it was still dark when we left Cusco but the sky was beginning to brighten in the East as we overlooked the valley. The valley is named after its river (the Urubamba) and the name is very appropriate for the highly agricultural nature of the region. The land is so fertile and the climate sufficiently wet and warm that crops are grown here on a year round basis. Certainly, in April at the end of the rainy season, the fields were very green; the corn crop had been harvested and the yield of potatoes, carrots and green vegetables was well advanced.

The **Sacred Valley of the Incas** or the **Urubamba Valley** is a valley in the Andes of Peru, close to the Inca capital of Cusco and the ancient city of Machu Picchu. According to recent research it encompasses the heartland of the Inca Empire. The valley is generally understood to include everything between Calca and Lamay, Pisac, and Ollantaytambo. The valley was formed by the Urubamba River, also known as Willkanuta River (Aymara, "house of the sun") or Willkamayu (Quechua). The latter, in Quechua, the still spoken *lingua franca* of the Inca Empire, means the *sacred river*. It is fed by numerous rivers which descend through adjoining valleys and gorges, and contains numerous archaeological remains and villages. The valley was appreciated by the Incas due to its special geographical and climatic qualities. It was one of the empire's main points for the extraction of natural wealth, and one of the most important areas for maize production in Peru northwards from Pisac. The early Incas may have come from Wimpillay, as their mummies had been discovered there. Large scale maize production started around 1400 as Inca urban agriculture-based on varieties bred in Moray, either a governmental crop lab<sup>[4]</sup> or a seedling nursery of the Incas.

After a little over 1 ½ hours (by which time it was fully light) we arrived at the town of Ollayta from where we would take the train to Machu Picchu. Our group had elected the Vista dome version (a mid-level between the Excursion train and the Hiram Bingham deluxe) and we were soon boarded on the two car, quite comfortable train and on our way for another 1 ½ hours.





The weather now was quite clear at ground level but the surrounding mountains were shrouded in mist and cloud.



However, as we slowly made our way down the valley we were running alongside a river that seemed to be in full flood and provided some magnificent rapids. This river is a major tributary of the Amazon and one of only a few in Peru that finds its way to the Atlantic Ocean. The Continental Divide for South America (unlike in North America) is very close to the west coast and most rainfall and snow melt in Peru ends up in the Pacific Ocean.

We were fed a light breakfast on the train and saw the start of the main Inca Trail leading to Machu Picchu. As one might expect there are dozens of trails in this part of South America that owe their origins to the Incas (and even pre-Inca times) but the one we ran alongside for a while is the trail that we hear about most. It is a very popular way to reach Machu Picchu (for the fit) and can be done in 3-5 days on a well-marked path which goes up and down in elevation between about 6000 feet and over 13,000 feet. The Peruvian government regulates the movement along the trail, prescribing not only the total numbers but the required ratio of "Sherpa" to walker. Camp sites with varying degrees of amenities are provided along the route and 300 to 500 intrepid hikers follow the 26 mile trail on any given day. The total distance also lends itself well to a marathon – which apparently is also available!



The station in the "city of Machu Picchu" is at an elevation of a little over 6000 feet so to reach the site itself we had almost 2000 feet further to climb. This was accomplished in a 30 passenger bus which climbed the switchback dirt road in under 30 minutes and took us right to the site entrance.



*The final road to Machu Picchu*



### *Our First Glimpses of Machu Picchu*

The weather had cleared considerably by now and it was relatively warm (upper 60s) but there was still considerable mist hanging to the higher elevations. The views of the Inca city, however, were perfectly clear and the wisps of cloud just added to the magical appearance. As we said, this is certainly the most famous of the Inca cities (named after the “Old Mountain” nearby) but the How, Why and When of its building and abandonment have been the subject of conjecture since it was re-discovered by Hiram Bingham just over a hundred years ago. Actually, even that “fact” is probably incorrect as he was taken to the site by local farmers who had been living there for some years, almost certainly taking advantage of the well-established terraces that had been there for centuries.

*Machu Picchu is a 15th-century Inca site located 7,970 ft above sea level. It is located in the Cusco Region and is situated on a mountain ridge above the Sacred Valley which is 50 miles northwest of Cusco and through which the Urubamba River flows. Most archaeologists believe that Machu Picchu was built as an estate for the Inca emperor Pachacuti (1438–1472). Often mistakenly referred to as the “Lost City of the Incas”, it is the most familiar icon of Inca civilization.*

*The Incas built the estate around 1450, but abandoned it a century later at the time of the Spanish Conquest. Although known locally, it was not known to the Spanish during the colonial period and remained unknown to the outside world before being brought to international attention in 1911 by the American historian Hiram Bingham. Since then, Machu Picchu has become the largest tourist attraction in South America.<sup>1</sup> Most of the outlying buildings have been reconstructed in order to give tourists a better idea of what the structures originally looked like and restoration work continues to this day.*

*Machu Picchu was declared a Peruvian Historical Sanctuary in 1981 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. In 2007, Machu Picchu was voted one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in a worldwide Internet poll.*

*Machu Picchu was built in the classical Inca style, with polished dry-stone walls. Its three primary structures are the Inti Watana, the Temple of the Sun, and the Room of the Three Windows. These are located in what is known by archaeologists as the Sacred District of Machu Picchu.*

*Machu Picchu is vulnerable to threats. While natural phenomena like earthquakes and weather systems can play havoc with access, the site also suffers from the pressures of many tourists.*





How many centuries is one of the unanswered questions, although our guide was convinced that the city was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, probably around 1430. The Quechua peoples (incorrectly named the Incas – only the King was Inca) had inhabited this region for several centuries and others (pre-Incas) before them. During that time they had built many cities and become very powerful in Peru and other parts of the region and it is thought that Machu Picchu is just one (the last?) of those built as more and more territory was acquired and settled.

As with most civilizations, power led to in-fighting and the need for more power as demonstrated in goods and the grandeur of their settlements. Hence, it is felt that Machu Picchu was built to satisfy the needs of the King and was occupied only by a









*Above: Quite a hike to the Highest Point of the main site*



*Above right: The Temple of the Sun*



*Right: The river valley*

few hundred nobles once it was habituated. To get to that point, however, several thousand craftsmen and laborers must have been employed to build this massive terraced facility. The natural resources were at hand – the granite rock from the mountains themselves – and water for irrigation and drinking was abundant at this elevation. In fact, a very complex and well-engineered aqueduct and channeling system was built not only to supply water but to facilitate its runoff so that the buildings would not be undermined or washed away.

The terraces, temple and dwellings were built with this granite using no mortar and incorporating large rocks into the structures as necessary. The finish on the walls (all built at a slight angle as was the Inca custom) ranged from rough stone (as in the dry stone walls of England) to highly polished and regular stones of various dimensions but generally about 18 by 24 inches. The degree of finishing was a reflection of the “seniority” of the inhabitant or the importance of the structure in the astrological or religious significance.

That leads to the other question of “Why” in Machu Picchu. We were shown many examples of structures (temples, sundials, orientation stones, etc) which suggested a sophisticated knowledge of the seasons, the stars and geology and of their importance in the daily and ceremonial life of the Quechua. As just one example, the Temple of the Sun contains a window that projects a beam of light directly on to a specific stone on the Winter Solstice (remember, this is the Southern hemisphere) in much the same way as other structures from many ancient civilizations around the world.

“How” this huge site was built is also a subject of great debate. It is assumed that the builders had little help from strong beasts (the llama is predominant here), did not know of the wheel and had relatively simple tools made from hematite rock



found in the area. So, as with Stonehenge, the pyramids and many South and Central American structures of similar complexity, the question remains one for scholarly theses and, indeed, the Machu Picchu continues today as a vast archaeological site which may provide the answers to future generations of tourists such as those enjoying the beautiful view today.

But why was Machu Picchu abandoned and left to the wilderness for almost 400 years? Again, a number of theories have been proposed (wars, over-population, disease) but the one that seems most logical is related to the conquering of Peru by the Spanish. This began in 1532 and by 1533 they had conquered many cities in the country, including nearby Cusco. The conquerors (as, sadly, with most colonization through the ages) were determined to establish their culture and religion on the locals and had been successful in this endeavor to this point. It is theorized that the Inca King in Machu Picchu was not about to let this happen to his city, so he organized the complete abandonment and headed further along the Sacred Valley – away from the advancing Spanish. The process took a number of years but – presumably as a result of its remote location – the city was never found by the Spanish and it soon became part of the wilderness. It remained “The Lost City of the Incas” (although probably miss-named) until 1911.



So, today we can see what a civilization of 600 years ago was able to build, we can learn some of the reasons for its location and use and we can marvel and wonder as to the “truth”. Or, we can simply admire the site for what it is..... a wonderful terraced formation set among beautiful green mountains in one of the most recognizable and mystical places on earth.

We retraced our route back to Cusco by bus, train and bus and arrived back at the hotel soon after 7:30. We had a quick clean-up and walked to an Italian restaurant a few blocks from the hotel for another enjoyable evening meal. We retired about 10pm and slept soundly!



## Monday April 20

We had no planned activity this morning so we had a late breakfast, caught up on our reading and journals sitting in the courtyard of the hotel and later went for a short walk in the town before meeting the group for our afternoon tour of Cusco at 2pm.

Our first stop was right across the street from the hotel at the Monastery of Santo Domingo. The church and monastery were built on the site of an Inca Temple and much of the temple was destroyed in the building of the Christian site. In listening to our guide, the new rulers from Spain were not only set on conversion of the natives but also were keen to find any treasures that the Incas might have had. They found that precious metals had been used as keying agents in the granite walls and destroyed many of the temples in order to find it. In addition, the gold and silver ornaments which the Incas used as offerings and which were placed in the niches within the temple were also melted down. Finally, the trapezoidal doorways were chipped away to allow doors to be put in the new construction.



*The courtyard of the monastery today and the precise stonework and trapezoidal windows of the Inca temple*



*The Spanish monastery on top of the Inca temple*

As a result, much of the Inca construction materials and methods were lost and only recently has a determined effort been made to unearth and restore the temples – or

at least preserve some of the ruins for posterity. Since virtually all Christian churches were built on the sites of former temples (as another means towards conversion) many examples of superb design, engineering and building have been lost.

We then went a short distance to the main square to visit the Cathedral of Cusco. This was the first built in Peru by the Spanish settlers and contains a







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***The main square, the cathedral and Christ the Redeemer on the hillside***

simple cross, brought from Spain and now placed where the first Christian service was held in the 1530s. Inside the cathedral (very ornate in many aspects and containing many statues and paintings) were a number of examples of ways in which, according to our guide, the Span-



iards tried to make the natives more comfortable with their new religion. Such things as darker faces on many of the early Christian figures (which would have been white in Europe), a black Jesus on the Cross, widespread use of gold and silver (the sun and the moon to the Incas) and symbols for the mountains and animals near and dear to their hearts.

While much of this could be convincing and may well have been part of the conversion process, it suggests that the Spanish knew a lot about the Incas and their culture/religion before they began the conversion. This contrasts greatly with the practice of destroying everything Inca that we had seen earlier and it was a little difficult for me to accept that such pains were taken to make the Andeans feel “at home” in a church. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the extremes. Nevertheless, it was interesting to see the first cathedral of Peru (indeed of all of South America) and to stand in the place where Roman Catholic influence took over.

Our final stop was at a “factory” (read “shop”) where we were told how to differentiate between real and fake baby alpaca wool – and of course encouraged to take home a sample or two! On the way up to this high point above the city, however, we stopped briefly at a huge site containing what we were told were pre-Inca structures. Here were some enormous stones (much like the base of Easter Island statues) once again arranged in terraces. Little is known about their origin and even less about the way they were built but a systematic archeological dig is proceeding. The whole area has been declared a National Park, which is causing a good deal of controversy as residences have stood on this hillside for generations and debate continues as to their fate or how further building can be contained.



We then returned to the hotel for a couple of hours before joining the group for dinner and a show at a local restaurant. This was a buffet meal (better than the one in Lima) and was accompanied by Peruvian music played by a quartet. From time to time four dancers appeared and performed local dances. The whole thing lasted only about 75 minutes and was a more pleasant experience than the one we had paid extra for in Lima.

## **Tuesday April 21**

Today we had a long (10 hour) drive to Puno on Lake Titicaca. We left the hotel in Cusco at 7:30 and soon after we left the city we started a steady climb; not switchback nor very steep but a long, gradual increase in elevation. The road was generally in good condition but there were some areas of construction which slowed us down as it was just a two lane road all the way.

I had imagined the drive to the Lake as being essentially on a ridge with perhaps a valley to the right side (west) and the snow-capped Andes to the left. For the first 2-3 hours there were indeed glimpses of the highest peaks (with snow) but they were in the distance across a wide valley or perhaps beyond much smaller hills. To the right it was generally farmland and both sides of the road were very green. The latter half of the journey was essentially across a very wide valley (5-10 miles?) and the hills were green and lush to the tops – maybe 1000-2000 feet above the road.

Interestingly, as we drove this long stretch towards Puno, the impressions were of the Scottish Highlands, the Lake District of England (exactly the same colors) and even parts of the Yorkshire Dales with dry stone walls in some areas. The difference, of

course, was that the road we were on was not at sea level or a few hundred feet but ranged from 12,000 to 15,000 feet. In addition, the distances across the valleys and the heights of the hills were different – perhaps by a factor of three. Most of the land was farmed (wheat and quinoa) with some cattle and sheep roaming in areas; closer to Puno, these were replaced by llama and alpaca. There were a few small villages – generally set back from the road – and we passed through two towns with significant population, the second of which had a quarter million inhabitants.



*On the road to Puno:*  
*Scenery reminiscent of Britain*

This latter city had sprung up in recent years and was fundamentally a black market and narcotics town set up on the main routes from Columbia to Bolivia (which was not far away as the crow flies). There had been some mining here and some still existed but, if we understood our guide correctly, the commerce was less than totally above board. He didn't seem to regard this as corruption (in the same sense that the word had been used for the politics in Lima) but rather a way of life to take advantage of the traffic route in a remote location.



Along the way we stopped at a school that Gate 1 had adopted and met about 20 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders who attended this facility from as much as an hour away (walking). When one looked at the terrain – a narrow valley surrounded by 2000 feet high hills – it seemed a lot to ask of young kids to do every day. However, according to one child, when he wasn't in school he was “working” so perhaps the walk to and from and the time in school was a pleasant break. He probably didn't appreciate it but attending this school was probably his best (only) chance to break from these very poor surroundings.



We also visited a site on the border between Cusco and Puno “provinces” which had been a major Inca and indeed pre-Inca



settlement. There were some Inca walls still standing as well as a few pre-Inca columns (see picture on left) which we were told had been a part of a major temple. In addition to the buildings the settlement had

been a major agricultural region and we saw evidence of huge granaries and vegetable storage houses. Apparently in Inca times (and maybe even before the 12<sup>th</sup> century) there had been a network of these major settlements joined by Inca trails such that transport – even of fish from the ocean- was relatively rapid and supplied the needs of the rulers as well as the peasant population.





And so, after ten hours on the road, we caught our first glimpse of Lake Titicaca as we descended through the city of Puno. Memories of grammar school 3<sup>rd</sup> Form Geography came flooding back after 60 years just at the sound of this most famous lake, the largest fresh water lake in South America and certainly the biggest in the world at this elevation of almost 13,000 feet. Not that I can remember anything of that geography lesson (I failed Geography!) but the name simply conjures up unclear but magical memories.

Our hotel was literally on the lake side with a view of the city across an inlet on one side and a clear shot across the lake on the other (towards Bolivia). We checked in, relaxed and cleaned up and then had dinner in the hotel restaurant, both of us opting for the local lake trout.

### Wednesday April 22



After breakfast we walked a couple of hundred yards to take a boat into Lake Titicaca to visit a series of floating islands. Lake Titicaca is 103 miles north-south and about 40 miles east-west, 60% of it being in Peru, the rest part of Bolivia. Clearly on our short trip today we weren't going to see much of the lake (claimed to be the largest fresh water lake in the world but probably disputed by Superior and others; however, certainly the highest for its size) and indeed we spent the whole 2 hours in an inlet close to Puno.

The main attraction here, apart from simply being on this famous lake, is the floating islands built from reed and providing homes for a few thousand people. There are between 80 and 90 such islands, although an exact count is difficult as occasionally they split and may later re-join.

In any event, each is built and owned by an extended family, apart from a few communal islands providing schools, churches, social and sports gathering places. (Oddly enough, there are no Catholic churches on these islands but there are Seventh Day Adventists and Mormon churches since these faiths decided to reach out to the community.

The islands are tethered to the lake bed by anchor lines that may stretch quite some distance as the islands may be in 60 feet of water but the anchor points are less than ten feet deep.





