

The Lost City of the Incas



Can you find Peru in your atlas? Look for the Andes Mountains. This is a wild and beautiful place. It is hard to travel in the Andes. There are not many roads.

High in the Andes is Ma-chu Pi-cchu. It is far from any town. No car can reach it. In the days when the Incas ruled Peru, Machu Picchu was a royal summer palace for the Inca ruler.

Who were the Incas? Look at your atlas again. The Incas ruled all along the western edge of South America. Can you find that? The Incas became powerful in the early 1200s AD, but no one now knows why.

The steep mountains of the Andes made farming hard for the Incas. To make level ground for growing food they cut huge steps in the hillside called terraces. You can see them in the picture. The Incas did beautiful weaving; they made beautiful pottery; they worked in metal but they had no wheeled carts or waggons to help them travel or carry things. For a long time it was thought that they had no writing. They used knotted cords to do maths. It may be that these were also a form of writing.

The Spanish came to Peru in the 1500s. They destroyed the Inca way of life. They fought and killed the Incas.



The city of Machu Picchu was built by Inca engineers. The Incas used stones to build Machu Picchu. They did not stick them together with cement. Yet the walls are strong because the stones fit together so well. Even a thin piece of paper cannot be pushed between the stones.



People forgot where Machu Picchu was. Hundreds of years passed. Then an American explorer Hiram Bingham (1875-1956) went to Peru. You can see him in the picture, standing on a jungle bridge with his guide below. He talked to local people. He asked about ruins. He went to look at any ruins he was told about. He wanted to find out about the old Incas. On 24th July 1911 he found Machu Picchu. It was a ruin and covered with plants that had grown up over it.

Hiram Bingham climbed up the mountain in a drizzle of rain for two hours. Only two of his party went with him. The others thought there would be nothing to see. At last he reached a hut where some people were living high up on the mountain. They were pleased to see an explorer. They knew about the ruins. They sent a lad to show him where they were.

Hiram Bingham was amazed by what he saw. There were ruined houses built of beautiful stonework. There were great terraces. It took his breath away. He came back again and again and took many photos.

Machu Picchu is now one of the world's most famous ancient ruins. Many people from all over the world make the difficult trip to see it.

