



A Virtual Visit to Machu Picchu is Minutes Away at CSUH

By Cheryl Koehler

High up in the Andean cloud forest, a light wind whistles through the thin air at 8,000 feet. It rushes up steep brushy slopes and winds through the ruined streets of Machu Picchu, bringing a whisper of relief from the dense heat of the tropical Urubamba River Valley below.

The lofty granite terraces of Machu Picchu can be reached only by a three-day trek up the old Inca Trail, or by train from the ancient city of Cusco, Peru, but through June 6, one can make a quick, easy and free virtual visit just over the hill at Cal State Hayward (CSUH). There, a mere footstep through the entry of the C.E. Smith Museum of Anthropology in Meiklejohn Hall brings one into a virtual reality experience of Machu Picchu.

"Each nook and cranny of the ruins has been photographed, so the virtual reality is complete," said Sylvia Medeiros, Arts Marketing Coordinator at CSUH. "You can pick up the artifacts, turn them around, and even excavate them from the shafts."

The idea of the exhibit came about in 1994 when CSUH Archeology Professor Dr. George Miller was a visiting professor at Yale University. There he studied bones, artifacts, notes and old photographs gathered by Yale Professor Hiram Bingham, the Indiana Jones-style archeologist, who "rediscovered" the lost city of Machu Picchu in 1911.

Six years and several trips to Peru later, Miller and Terry Smith of the CSUH New Media Services laboratory put together more than 6,000 photographs of their own with over 1,000 of Bingham's photographs to make the panoramic virtual reality tour.

They give the visitor the impression of exploring alongside Bingham on his first excavations of the brush-covered ruins, walking pathways between Machu Picchu's carefully constructed

stone walls, cultivated terraces and intricate spring water conduit system. One sees the Inca's carved stone intihuatana that precisely indicated the solstices, and learns about life in the sacred city, where the departed were sent into the afterlife in shaft tombs stocked with food, pottery, herbs, woven blankets and still-living servants.

Built by the Incas between 1460 and 1470, Machu Picchu seems to have been a spiritual retreat inhabited mostly by women. By the time Spanish Conquistador Francisco Pizarro took Cusco in 1532, the mountain top city may already have been deserted, ravaged by European-introduced diseases.

In two small rooms on either side of the virtual reality exhibit, CSUH anthropology students and staff have constructed a larger exhibition illuminating a much wider span than the brief 100 years of the powerful Inca Empire. These displays show the remarkable continuity in Andean rituals and traditions found even in the contemporary society.

"We're standing in 4,000 years of Andean cultural history," said Exhibitions Coordinator Kathleen O'Brien, as she examined the ancient woven cotton and llama wool artifacts from the uni-

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versity's permanent collection. She explained how a pouch, made of both Andean camelid wool and Amazonian feathers, demonstrates the astonishing range of the ancient trade routes that knitted together the vast Inca Empire.

In the modern-era displays one sees pieces almost identical to the pre-Colombian artifacts—sling braids that are made and used by men to this day—a stillborn llama is woven into a piece used in modern rituals.

The exhibit's opening reception is on Friday, Feb. 21 from 4 to 7 p.m., with regular visiting hours weekdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. beginning Feb. 24 and running through June 6. Admission is free.



Photo by Cheryl Koehler

Student Lucretia Whitener assembles a mock shaft tomb.