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## **Exhibition Walk-Through**

### **Machu Picchu: Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas**

The traveling exhibition “Machu Picchu: Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas,” will be on display at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County from June 22 through September 7, 2003. The largest exhibition of Inca artifacts ever mounted in the United States, the exhibit transports visitors back 500 years to the height of the Inca Empire through an immersive, hands-on experience.

#### **Orientation Theater**

Visitors start their journey by entering a theater equipped with a high definition video projection, a surround-sound system and a panoramic screen. A seven-minute video provides an overview of Peruvian geography, the story of the rise and fall of the Incas, Machu Picchu in its prime, and the rediscovery of the site in 1911 by Yale University historian and explorer Hiram Bingham III. Visitors are asked to join Bingham on his search for the “lost city,” and the theater is filled with the sights and sounds of the cloud forest. The theater screen lifts to reveal Inca walls in the distance.

#### **Encountering Machu Picchu**

The visitors pass through the theater screen and find themselves transported back to Machu Picchu in 1912. A sepia toned diorama shows Bingham photographing the site, while a Peruvian member of his team unearths Inca relics. The cave contains burial artifacts that were found by Bingham 90 years ago. Nearby lie actual items that were used by Bingham, including his cameras, trunk, diary and letters. Colorful butterflies and other insects from the Peabody Museum Entomology Division that were collected during the 1912 Expedition and typical Inca objects typical found in Machu Picchu’s burial caves complete the display. A flipbook offers the visitor a chance to thumb through a selection of the Yale Peruvian Expedition photographs. Additionally, a time-line graphically explains the Inca Empire in relation to the broader context of world history.

#### **Curator’s Tour of Machu Picchu**

As the visitor enter the “Curator’s Tour” section, the lights dim and a large-scale 3-D model of Machu Picchu lights up. A six-minute video presentation informs the audience about what is known of Machu Picchu’s function based on recent

research. On-screen curators, Richard Burger and Lucy Salazar, give an overview of the site and the way it functioned in Inca times. The audience learns through this presentation that Machu Picchu was not an Inca city, as it was once believed. Instead, it was a royal retreat or country palace, which was used by the Inca king and his guests as a place where they could rest, relax, feast, hunt and engage in ritual activities related to his divine kingship. As the curators discuss each section of the site, the model illuminates and historic and recent photos appear on the screen to illustrate the discussion. At the end of the presentation, the room brightens revealing graphic panels on the historic 1931 aerial photographs of Machu Picchu made by the Shippee-Johnson Expedition and recent satellite imagery of Machu Picchu that utilize wave-lengths not accessible to the human eye.

### **The Inca Road**

Walking out of the Curator's Tour, the visitor walks back another 550 years into Machu Picchu in its glory days. Walking down a recreation of an Inca roadway, visitors see a breathtaking panoramic view of Machu Picchu. An immense highway system connected every city and administrative center in the Inca Empire. In this section, visitors view replicas of beautiful Inca masonry walls and the paved roadway. While walking towards two large Inca stone doorways that loom in front of them, the visitors learn how the Inca communicated a message of power to their subjects through their architecture. Small jewel-like cases containing precious artifacts of stone, silver and gold used by the Inca elite, occupy the center of the room. Other fine Inca objects of wood and pottery are featured in cases set in the trapezoidal niches of the Inca wall, offering a rare overview of Inca artistic production.

### **The King's House**

Visitors pass through the Gate from the Inca Road and enter the King's residence. One of the most sacred and important areas of Machu Picchu, visitors walk through a trapezoidal entrance in the front of a stone house thatched with native Peruvian ichu grass. This gives access into the Emperor's residence. The visitor finds a diorama of the King having a conversation with an administrator while being attended by a servant. All three are dressed in colorful woven costumes, and the emperor wears an elaborate headdress and jewelry replicated by traditional Peruvian craftsmen. The administrator holds a quipu, one of the knotted string objects records used to document the Inca economy and other aspects of imperial life. As the visitor walks into the space he/she triggers a soundscape featuring the natural sounds of Machu Picchu, as well as a conversation in Quechua, the language of the Incas, between the administrator and the Emperor. This section also features a rare authentic quipu, precious objects from Machu Picchu and other ancient Inca sites, miniature clothing worn by Inca gold and silver figurines, and a rare stone model of Inca architecture.

## **Daily Life**

Outside the Inca's House are a series of displays showing various aspects of daily life at Machu Picchu using artifacts found by the 1912 Expedition to Machu Picchu. The first cases feature Inca textiles, their most valued objects, and the tools used to spin and weave at Machu Picchu. The next section focuses on the production and consumption of corn beer (chicha), the crucial drink of an Inca feast and religious ceremonies. The third focuses on the production of metal objects at Machu Picchu. A recreated scene of a metalworker dramatizes how the Inca practiced their craft. Tools and metal working debris, metal artifacts and metal working tools from Machu Picchu are displayed in this area. A fourth section focuses on Inca religious beliefs and rituals, drawing on archaeological evidence for ancestor worship, rituals related to celestial observation and beliefs related to the sacred landscape. This section illustrates these themes with artifacts recovered by Bingham from Machu Picchu and others acquired in Cuzco. A short four-minute video on archaeoastronomy exposes the visitor to Inca ideas on the sky and the role these celestial concepts shaped Inca worship at Machu Picchu. A long wall of cases display evidence of other daily activities carried out at Machu Picchu, including feasting, cooking, dancing, musical presentations, and gambling. This section also presents the ceramic evidence for the multi-ethnic composition of the crafts specialists and other retainers that made up the majority of the population living at Machu Picchu. Most of these are being displayed to the public for the first time.

## **Ongoing Investigations-the High-Tech Explorer**

Leaving the world of Machu Picchu, the visitor enters into a modern laboratory setting where they learn about sophisticated methods of scientific analysis that are being used to study the Machu Picchu collections today. Examples of metal, pottery and stone artifacts that have been analyzed can be viewed and graphic panels discuss a range of the scientific findings including those related to long-distance trade, health, and ancient diet. On the laboratory desk surfaces are replicas of skulls from Machu Picchu illustrating different styles of cranial deformation, which served as markers of ethnicity, and a forensic reconstruction of the deformed skull of a young woman from Machu Picchu; the latter permits the visitor to see the face of one of the actual residents of Machu Picchu. A short video presents the perspectives of the several scientists who have studied the Machu Picchu collections.

## **Interactive Exploration**

In this section, three computer stations allow visitors to view the different parts of Machu Picchu at their own pace and according to their interests. Visitors can electronically discover artifacts, just as Bingham discovered them in his research, and various supplementary the viewer can call up material as s/he travels

through the site. A large overhead video screen allows classes or groups of visitors to follow the self-guided tours without sitting at one of the three stations.

### **Machu Picchu Epilogue**

This final section answers questions such as why Machu Picchu was abandoned and what happened to the Incas following the Spanish invasion. Post-conquest drinking vessels, a colonial Inca-style tunic and a colonial Inca-style stool (tiana) illustrate how Inca cultural traditions continued after the Spanish conquest and a graph of the demographic collapse in the Andes shows the importance that the introduction of Old World diseases had in the defeat of the Incas. The exhibit concludes by showing how intermarriage and the melding of Inca and other cultural elements resulted in the modern cultures that exist today in Peru and other Andean nations, illustrated by three black-and-white photographs of contemporary Andean ceremonies of Yawar Fiesta and Qolluriti.

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