

FLAG EXPEDITION REPORT

The Explorers Club Flag #44

**The 2008 PAITITI EXPEDITION: To the Southern Reaches of the Incan
“Road of Stone” to Find and Document the Entrances to the
Jungles Beyond**

September 2008

Province of Paucartambo, Department (State) of Cusco,
Southeastern Peru

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INTRODUCTION

Background

After a 1981 investigation of the neo-Incan site of *Vilcabamba la Vieja* in the forests to the northwest of Cusco, my explorations began in 1984 to focus upon the areas of the most remote highland and *selva alta*—high-altitude jungle (also referred to as the *montaña*)—to the northeast and north of the Incan capital. With very few exceptions (the 1985 expedition, and one of the two 1986 expeditions) these explorations, which resulted in my party’s re-discovering, discovering, and documenting various Incan sites spread over these broken territories beyond the Incan heartland, had been made with native Peruvian Paulino Mamani FI’96 as primary expedition partner. We had, on each successive venture, been brought ever further in this exploration by our following an unmapped Incan *camino de piedra*, a road of stone, that traverses the ridge of the *Cordillera de Paucartambo*, the

Paucartambo mountain range, from southeast to northwest, and continues on, beyond, ever northward.

In 1993, we carried Explorers Club Flag #61 in following the then northernmost extension of this trunk road a short distance into the cloud-forests lining the hillsides flanking the uppermost *cabeceras*, the headwaters, of the Río Timpía. In 1994 we carried Flag #152 and in '95 Flag #38 in our exploration of the high altitude jungles of *Callanga*, to which led branches of the trunk road from up in the highlands, uncovering there in the tropical forest various Incan and pre-Incan ruins. In 1999 we carried Flag #110 much farther along that same trunk road, past various stone retaining walls as far north as we could, further into those cloud-forests of the uppermost Timpía until the vast distances ahead in the increasingly more difficult river valley—its steep hillsides lined by dense *bosque de nubes*, cloud forest—necessitated our returning to the Andean highlands from whence we had descended.

From there, however, we headed northwest along the vast high plateau known as the *Meseta de Pantiacolla*, where branches of the trunk road led us to a large “8-shaped” lake which has come to be known as the *Lago de Ángel*. Astride the lake we found the remains of low ceremonial platforms and other indications of ancient Incan habitation, the furthest up to that point known to exist in that direction.

In 2004 we carried Flag #152 along a continuation of those Incan trails farther to the northwest, beyond the *Lago de Ángel*, to the outer reaches of the *Meseta*, the plateau, to find there, atop a peak now known as *Último Punto* (“furthest point”), larger and more complex ceremonial platforms that would take over as the furthest documented Incan archaeological site directly to the north of Cusco.

And in 2006, towards our overall goal of investigating all aspects and possible aspects of the *camino de piedra* and its relation to additional lost Incan sites to which it, and branches of it, might lead, we carried Flag #75 to the lower altitude jungles far to the west of *Último Punto*, where we began our trek on foot, ascending toward (as opposed to our otherwise always descending toward from the highlands) the high-altitude jungles of the Río Taperachi, an affluent of an affluent of the Urubamba far to the west, our immediate objective being that of heading off any trails that may be descending from above, determining if any Incan roads continued on westward of *Último Punto*. (During this effort we uncovered concrete evidence of the furthest tentative Incan attempts to found agricultural settlements in that direction, west of the highlands in the direction of the Río Urubamba, but without any road system in evidence.)

The 2008 Expedition

The goal of The 2008 PAITITI EXPEDITION, carrying Flag #44, began as that of following the trunk road further north, beyond 1999's *Lago de Ángel* and 2004's *Último Punto*. But in an accident while fervently performing highland frontier community service a short time before expedition time, pushing a road into a remote highland area, Paulino Mamani—who had always been indestructible regardless of difficult and dangerous conditions while on our expeditions (and who, as a matter of course, always took on the more difficult assignments himself)—suffered a badly broken leg in a landslide. And when I arrived in Calca, where Paulino had been convalescing, it became apparent that his leg had not been healing well, and his mobility—he always having been the most physically adept of any expeditionary with whom I had ever explored mountain and jungle—was extremely limited, with him being dependent upon crutches.

This unfortunate circumstance necessitated a change in immediate goal, for, without Paulino himself along as foremost pathfinder for the effort through the dense and precipitous cloud-forest and *selva alta* below, the odds would be impossibly against our being able to advance through those most difficult and broken zones with sufficient speed so as to have time to fit our exploration beyond the *Lago de Ángel* into that allotted by my schedule.

And so, rather than our seeking to attain the far northernmost reaches of the road of stone and then cut our way down into and through the cloud-forest and *selva alta* below, the goal of the 2008 PAITITI EXPEDITION became that of investigating another area of the legendary *camino de piedra*, the road of stone, through a higher altitude zone of the Paucartambo mountain range, further south of where we had previously explored—in order to there seek *entradas*, entrances, that would indicate a branch of the trail heading off from the road toward the east, opening the way to the lowlands below. For we had seen that any indications of past highland-lowland interface during the Incan epoch, the subsequent Conquest, and the early Colonial period would be valuable in the further investigation of the “Paititi” legend, that of a lost Incan realm to the east, beyond and below the Incas of Cusco and their Andean highlands.

This Flag Expedition was funded by W.L. Gore and Associates' Shipton-Tilman Grant and by a Scott Pearlman Field Award, with additional help provided by the Timmissartok Foundation.

For part of the expedition we were accompanied by an anthropologist, a biologist, and an archaeologist from the Cusco office of Peru's organization *Qhapaq Ñan/Instituto Nacional de Cultura* (INC).

Members of the 2008 expedition were as follows:

- Hermógenes Figueroa Lucana, 50 years of age, explorer, from Cusco, PERU;
- Saul César Huillca Mamani, 23 years of age, assistant and cook, from Calca,

PERU;

-Gregory Deyermenjian, FN'88, 59 years of age, expedition organizer/leader and chronicler, from Boston, USA.

Accompanying the expeditionary group by vehicle along dirt road, to the final government control outpost at *Tres Cruces de Oro*, where the on-foot expedition began, and on the return trip from the point at which the expeditionary group was met by its vehicle, as well as after having helped with planning and logistics in Cusco and in Calca, was:

-Paulino Mamani, FI'96, 45 years of age, southeast Peru's foremost explorer/trailblazer and navigator, from Calca, PERU.

Accompanying the expeditionary group from *Tres Cruces de Oro* over the course of the first portion of the expeditionary trek were:

-Irina Cuba, archaeologist, *Qhapaq Ñan*/National Institute of Culture, from Cusco, PERU;

-Álvaro Sánchez, anthropologist, *Qhapaq Ñan*/National Institute of Culture, from Cusco, PERU;

-Zulby Bustamante Orosco, biologist, *Qhapaq Ñan*/National Institute of Culture, from Cusco, PERU;

-and two of their assistants.

Accompanying the expeditionary group from a point along the Incan trail, after the group had left *Tres Cruces*, over the first portion of the expeditionary trek, was:

-Nicanor Yucra Sonqo, *arriero* (muleteer), from Accobamba, Paucartambo, PERU.

Expedition Narrative

Rather than begin via the route that we usually take at the beginning of most of our many expeditions, from Cusco southeast to Huambutio and then many hours ride north-northeast to Paucartambo, this time my party—Paulino Mamani, Saul César Huilca Mamani, Hermógenes Figueroa Lucana, and myself, in a vehicle driven by Pepe Valdivia and his son Pepe Jr.—headed north-northeast from Cusco, to the town of Pisac with its Imperial Incan ruins high above that rival those of Machu Pichu in quality and ingenuity of construction, and then turned east-northeast, over the unpaved road that has so many twists and turns that I could not help myself from becoming carsick, especially as I was seated in the back of our vehicle. But, in a shorter period of time than would have taken the more usual route, we arrived at the relatively isolated town of Paucartambo, our frequent stopping off point on our way to both the high- and lower-altitude jungles of Mameria and Callanga, as well as to the lower altitude jungles of Manu with its Petroglyphs of Pusharo and “Pyramids of Paratoari” nearer to the Río Madre de Dios. This time, though, from Paucartambo, rather than follow the truck route northwest astride the Río Paucartambo/Mapacho, to there at the village of Accobamba meet our packhorses and mule-driver to ascend on foot to the Paucartambo range for our eventual

descent through cloud-forest and *selva alta*; and rather than follow the increasingly rutted unpaved vehicle road much higher to the northeast and then more directly east to descend to the plains of *Cosñipata* and the lower-altitude jungles of Manu; we instead followed the road slightly directly northward, through continuing misty highlands, to the Peruvian government outpost at *Tres Cruces de Oro*, to a final outpost, a *Puesto de Vigilancia*, of INRENA, the national entity in charge of controlling access to restricted areas.

Here we were joined by the young *científicos*, the archaeologist, anthropologist, and biologist, as well as their helpers, from the organization *Qhapaq Ñan*. And from this high *mirador*, this high lookout point that directly overlooks the grassy and jungled plains of *Cosñipata* below to the east, we would all together head off on foot, along the more southern reaches of the Paucartambo range.

It was a good thing that the young researchers from *Qhapaq Ñan* arrived when they did, as we had been having a problem with the head official at the INRENA station, who, although we thought things had been worked out already in Cusco, was stating that he knew nothing about our arrival and plans, and that no one could enter these restricted areas, beyond, without full and official authorization in hand. When the *Qhapaq Ñan* archaeologist, anthropologist, and biologist and their retinue arrived, they as well were told that nothing was known of them, and that they did not have authorization, either, to enter. Finally, after a long discussion by radio between Irina, the archaeologist, and the chief of INRENA at some distant station, the chief relented and allowed us entry in response to Irina's entreaties and promises to fill out all necessary paperwork and reports after she returned to Cusco. (The arrangements had been made with directors of *Qhapaq Ñan* and the National Institute of Culture in Cusco, but in Peru there are so many competing or overlapping governmental agencies, with communications that are not always efficacious, such that some initial problems such as we encountered at the INRENA post are at times almost unavoidable.)

(Our starting point, *Tres Cruces de Oro*, as isolated as it is, is nonetheless known for its view which, very early on clear mornings during a certain part of the year, as the sun rises above the clouds below, it fills the sky with dazzling and radiant light rivaling the view of the morning sun as it appears from the Pacific as seen from a certain point in the east of Japan, as well as rivaling that rare view of a sun-filled sky which Paulino Mamani and I saw on a first ascent in 1986 of the legendary *Apu Catinti*, the massif much further north of where we now found ourselves and to the east of the high-altitude jungles of Mameria, from its peak that overlooks the jungled Amazonian hills and plains that stretch below for thousands of miles like an ocean, itself, to the Atlantic.)

Our journey now would take us ever to the north, northwest—occasionally northeast—and northwest again, but for much of the time further to the south of where we had explored and documented portions of the *camino de piedra* before, when on our way to Mameria and the *Meseta*, the Plateau, of Toporake (as

documented in the June 1990 Volume 68 Number 2 of The Explorers Journal) and, beyond that, to the north, to the Plateau of Pantiacolla (as documented in the Spring 2006 Volume 84 Number 1 of The Explorers Journal).

This was a portion of the seemingly endless Incan “road of stone” that was closer to the area of its absolute beginning far to the southeast, where the legend collected by the eminent Cusqueño anthropologist, the late Dr. Oscar Núñez del Prado, on his making in 1955 the first arrival by outsiders to the extant Incan community of Q´ero, has it that the culture-hero *Inkarri*, with a rod of gold, was sent out from the Lake Titicaca area to found a great city and to disseminate civilization. He was to fling the rod, and where it landed upright, there was to be his city. He flung it in a remote, harsh, and cold mountainous area, where it landed obliquely, and here he founded Q´ero, where to this day the purest Quechua language is spoken and Incan era dress and customs are most faithfully maintained in unbroken fashion. Then, from this Q´ero, located a hard horseback ride away directly east of Paucartambo and far to our own southeast, *Inkarri* continued on, northwest, then turned west directly to a fertile valley where his hurled rod landed upright, and where he founded what would become the center of the Andean world, the city of Cusco. After a span of his lifetime spent there, *Inkarri* left Cusco, returned to Q´ero, then headed north and northwest along this very road, eventually ensconcing himself far to the north, at a site within the jungles of the Pantiacolla Plateau that would be his final oasis and resting place, and which legend claims to have been the lost city of “Paititi.”

We were expecting to meet here at *Tres Cruces* with Gavino Toledo—who had been a member of my expeditions throughout the 1980’s, and whom I had not seen since then—who had had some dealings with *Qhapaq Ñan* over recent years, and with whom contact had been made and arrangements formulated for him to supply pack animals for our current expedition. But, neither he nor any animals were to be found in the mist-covered edge-of-the-highlands that is late-morning *Tres Cruces*. We decided that it would be better, nonetheless, to shoulder all our equipment and foodstuffs ourselves, and head off, maybe to meet our *arriero*, as often happens in these misty and “mystical” regions, where luck and coincidence and last-minute salvation against all logic seem to occur with more frequency than in the “northern” or urban world, further along our traverse. We would be greatly overloaded and weighed down with the equipment and provisions that would be upon our own, rather than pack animals’ backs, but it almost always seems preferable to act and move in order to make things happen (as well as in warding off the chill that instantly descends upon the stationary).

And so, we began, here, at 13° 12′ 07.4″ latitude south by 71° 37′ 26.8″ longitude west, our trek to seek *entradas* to the Paititi-related lowlands below, bidding goodbye to Paulino and Pepe and Pepe Jr.. They would return to the Cusco area by vehicle, to meet us with the vehicle at the conclusion of our trek at a set date in the future at the village of Jesús María, a small *campesino* hamlet further north along

the Río Paucartambo/Mapacho that Paulino had learned was now the furthest point reached by a newly cut-into-the-hillside dirt road.

Our two-groups-traveling-as-one set off, soon to be enveloped by the mists that waft up in waves from the lowlands to the east, and that become chilled airborne droplets when contacted by the cooler air of the highlands. It was not long before, while at a point at which two antique trails met, two horses appeared out of the mist, as well as one *campesino*. The man was Nicanor Yucra Sonqo, who had been sent by Gavino Toledo in his place, to act as *arriero* for us with Gavino's pack animals.

We were at an altitude of 3,320 meters above sea level.

Towards the end of the first day's journey from *Tres Cruces* we were surprised to see ahead of us, in these unpopulated highlands, a strange and totally atypical—to say the least—newly built structure: a completely circular rough concrete building with walls about three feet thick and with a roof made of the very durable, bamboo-like, *caña brava*, with a huge rough fireplace area in the very center of its unlit, dark and dusty interior. (Technically, this area of the Paucartambo Range lies within the borders of the Manu National Park, and so—we later learned—a few years ago the administration of the Park had had the materials somehow brought here and this structure constructed, as a shelter for whoever might need it.) Compared to setting up a tent outside—especially in that the afternoon had become very rainy and cold—this rough structure represented the lap of luxury, and we quite enjoyed the comfort and ease of staying there as a base while we did some exploring of adjacent areas.

We were able to explore off to the east, to a point in the mountain range where we were at its very easternmost edge. There was a very sudden and precipitous drop-off, where the winds coming from the east were constant and strong, and bore before them what appeared to be a perpetual *neblina*, a thick mist. We were able to discern a rough zigzagging trail that descended quite steeply, a possible *entrada* to the lowlands approaching Cosñipata. Its highland starting point was at 13° 06' 05.5" south latitude by 71° 42' 22.7" west longitude.

Nearby we found yet another trail that—at 13° 06' 05.3" by 71° 42' 23.1"—appeared to leave the highlands and drop sharply down to the northeast, in the direction of Naranjayoc down in the jungles of Callanga, as well as to the Río Tono, one of the majot rivers flowing down through the plains of Cosñipata toward the large tropical town of Pillcopata as it joins with other rivers to add its volume to the major river of the jungles of southeast Peru, the Alto Madre de Dios, known in Incan times as the *Amaru Mayu*, “The Great Serpent River.”

As our goal was exploring as much of this portion of the trunk road, the *camino de piedra*, as possible, we renewed our journey along it. The next days were spent wending our way most frequently to the northwest, along the crest of the range, with the valley of the Río Paucartambo/Mapacho far below to our left, to the southwest

and west, and the mists of the lowlands usually obscuring our views to our right, to the east.

We ascended gradually to an altitude of 3,872 meters.

We descended and then ascended, repeatedly, following the remnants of this Incan road. At times the mists to the east momentarily cleared, giving fleeting glimpses of towns and settlements far down on the plains of Cosñipata, such as that of Patria (through which we were driven many times in the past, always noting its special quality of appearing to be one vast graveyard for disabled trucks rusting away in the tropical humidity of these grasslands astride the jungles of which this area was once a part).

After a time we turned more abruptly toward the west-northwest, and at times due west, such that there were rows of grass-covered ranges to our northeast within the here-relatively-wide Paucartambo range. The trail itself was at times wedged in between a hard covering of *paña*, the impenetrably hard lichen-like “carpet plant” that covered vast areas astride it. This area was known as *Coralchayoc*.

Much of each afternoon was spent uncomfortably tramping through rain and mud, with portions of the trail under water from the torrential rains that hit us each and every afternoon. During rest breaks we foraged on small white fruits from wild shrubs along the trail, shown us by Nicanor, such as the tiny *manzanas*, berry-sized “apples,” known in Quechua as *Mistiwichinchi*.

A seemingly endless climb was that known as the *Subida Machu Cruz*, the “Ascent of the Old Cross.” On our way we began to catch glimpses, off to our east-southeast, of one of the three unique tropical peaks that were visible to the Incas of the highlands, this being the charismatic, menacing, jagged multi-peaked *Apukañaghuay*, its long, thin crest of a peak still without having been scientifically explored.

At *Machu Cruz*’s highest point we placed the small stones that we had picked up along the way and carried with us, according to local custom, adding them to the *apacheta*, the mound of stones placed there by successive generations of *campesinos* that had passed this way over the decades, meant as a sign of respect for the forces of nature in these sullen, lonely, and unpredictable heights.

Also while approaching the *apacheta* during the long slog up the *Subida Machu Cruz*, another of the three isolated *Apus* (divinities, lords, high and impressive mountain peaks) came into view 10° to our north-northeast, the mountain known as *Apu Pitama*. (The range that heads north from the peak of *Apu Pitama*, reaching all the way to the jungles of Callanga, includes within it the peak of *Llactapata*, the previously unclimbed peak famous in legend that Paulino, his brother Ignacio, a Juan from Callanga, and I had first ascended in 1995, finding widespread Incan ruins of rustic style all around its base.)

The late afternoon of the day of our ascent of *Machu Cruz* was like many others before and after, in that we were assailed by the heavy and cold rain of the *alturas*, the highlands, with an approaching nightfall and an area so boggy, wet, without *leña* (firewood) or level ground (aside from the stony, muddy, and puddle-pocked trail itself) that it was extremely difficult to settle on any one spot to make camp, each potential campsite appearing to have so much against it that it seemed that there *must* be something better further on—which meant that we usually ended up finally having to set up in darkness, kneeling in puddles that formed beneath my (me being the official tent setter-upper) knees, at a spot that might have been even worse than those we had already passed up. The evening of the ascent of *Machu Cruz* had us retreating into the tents as soon as they were up, without even an attempt made to cook a meal. (At times such as this, though, it is remarkable how delicious and satisfying can be mere chunks of cheese and bread...)

These afternoons were sort of unique for me, regarding expedition organization and leadership, in a manner that made attaining a decent campsite all the more difficult. Always, on my expeditions with Paulino, our 3- to 6-man group had formed a tight and disciplined team, with decisions made quickly and definitively. But our current group was really composed of two groups traveling together, a confederation without one definitive decision maker for the two groups as one. And so, decisions that would have been difficult even in the best of circumstances (such as with one small united group deciding if and where to make camp in the rain and impending darkness), were somewhat compounded by such a relatively large number of individuals, with each belonging primarily to either one group or the other.

But, in fact, aside from some ill-timed debates concerning campsites, all individuals and both groups got along well, and aided each other in identifying localities, landmarks, and documenting the condition and course of the *camino de piedra*. Nicanor sometimes slept in the crowded tent with Saul, Hermógenes, and myself; and like so many native peoples of these remote rural areas, he suffered from a chronic cough, exclaiming in the night “*No sé porqué de día estoy bien pero de noche estoy mal*,” “I don’t know why by day I’m okay but by night I’m sick.” The vulnerability and innocence in the timbre of his voice moved me, striking me as it did as being representative of the human condition for denizens of these remote Andean areas, a condition made rich and joyous by tradition and fiesta and family and freedom from desk jobs, but to an equal degree made tragic by the near-constant specter of injury, sickness, and early death from a multitude of possible causes.

After a time we found ourselves having traveled far enough to the north and northwest along the winding “road of stone” that we came to that portion that we had traversed in past years, finding ourselves at a particular spot known as *Inca Chaca*, “Inca Bridge,” where well-placed *khallki*, flat paving stones (as seen on the cover of the Spring 2006 Volume 84 Number 1 The Explorers Journal) lined the way. Our location here was 12° 59’ 01.6’’ latitude south by 71° 46’ 28.5’’ longitude west.

Beyond *Inca Chaca*, the peak of *Apukañaghuay* made frequent appearances 125° to our southeast. A smaller *Inka Ñan*, Incan road, soon was encountered that intersected our own trunk road, that would have arisen from the precipitously walled valley of the Río Paucartambo/Mapacho to the west after having crossed that fearsome torrent by way of the ancient and famous Incan bridge over the abyss at *Chimor*. After crossing our *camino de piedra*, that smaller trail proceeded to disappear into thicket heading roughly east-northeast. Our trunk road at this spot continued on to the north-northeast.

I noted that the area we were now traversing was unchanged from how we had found it in the 1980's, as far as being wild and unpopulated. After packing up and leaving camp we sometimes saw fresh *puma* prints in the mud beside the many puddles along the *camino de piedra*.

We passed through an area known as *Konqaq* one early morning, where we crossed paths with the only other human being we had encountered thus far, a woman named Andrea Mamani (a surname that is one of the most prevalent in these highland areas, and that has its origin in the Aymará language and lineages from the Lake Titicaca area, with the most famous published Andean native autobiography being the “Autobiografía” of Gregorio Condori Mamani), who had climbed up to this ridge from a place known as Lambranpata in the valley below to our west, in order to here in these high *alturas* look for a lost cow (a typical motif for many of the “Paititi Tales” that have *campesinos* inadvertently stumbling upon previously unknown ancient ruins while in the pursuit of a wide-ranging lost head of cattle).

Our altitude here was 3,609 meters.

Ironically, given the days of rain that we had encountered in covering the territory behind us, we began to come to many a dry lakebed. Some appeared to actually have a hole in the bottom or in a far side of the lakebed, as if all the lake's water had drained down and disappeared into it. Others of these highland lakes, such as that known as *Akiyayok*, with a view of the apparent approaches to the lowlands of the east, still held plenty of water.

At a latitude of 12° 58' 22'' we began to discern down to our west the indications that far below, in the valley of the Río Paucartambo/Mapacho, was a settlement, one that seemed to fit the location we had ascribed to Jesús María. When we had reached 12° 56' 29.6'' latitude south by 71° 48' 32.3'' longitude west, the young *científicos* from *Qhapaq Ñan* decided that they would begin from this point their return to Cusco. Everyone posed for many group photographs with our Explorers Club Flag. And after divvying up some of the supplies, our providing their helpers with a good portion of our *coca* leaves for their days to come, and taking all our own equipment from the pack animals, Hermógenes, Saul, and myself bid their party farewell. As they descended toward the Río Paucartambo/Mapacho and Jesús

María, along with their assistants, as well as with Nicanor and the two pack horses, we three shouldered all our equipment, and continued on to the north.

Soon thereafter we found the *camino* to be running momentarily from east to west, with the lowlands of Callanga, where we had found Incan, and even pre-Incan—the latter being a rarity in the lowlands—remains in 1994 and 1995, falling away from us directly to our north. The actual crest of the Paucartambo range, was now high up and away to our northeast. There were rough branches of the road that headed up to the ridge. We made our way up and to the northeast. One late afternoon, having made camp relatively far below the ridge, three young *campesino* men were seen descending toward our campsite from the direction of the ridge. Each carried a hand-scythe. When they arrived, Hermógenes handed them candy and bread. They said that they were going to cut *pasto*, fodder.

They left, heading down to the west.

Early the next morning, while Saul stayed at camp to dry out tents and equipment that had become almost sodden in the evening, so strong and persistent had been the rains from the previous day's late afternoon into the night, Hermógenes and I headed up to the ridge carrying minimal equipment, to the northeast, from whence had descended those three *campesino* lads. We were following rough branches of the trunk road. As we climbed higher toward the ridge, we saw, through increasing mist and wandering cloud, on a bluff just below us, an extensive site of ruins of stone. We noted its location, and followed the trail up further, as it turned and zigzagged northwest. We could see from here jungle-covered ranges that fell away to the high-altitude jungles of Callanga to our northeast. The branch trail itself had various signs of deliberate stonework, in the form of stones placed so as to direct rainwater away from the middle of the trail, and some low and rough retaining walls.

We climbed through a fringe of *bosque de la altura*, the moist highland forest that—with its primeval twisted black stunted trees with many fingers of a hanging-moss dripping from every branch—is found in various spots on the high ridges just above the *ceja de la selva*, the “eyebrow of the jungle,” the cloud-forest that lines the highest of the eastern edges of the Andes as that range plunges downward to become the wild labyrinth of jungle-covered hills and ravines that compose the high-altitude Amazonian jungles. The branch trail continued on to the northeast, in what appeared to be in a somewhat zigzag fashion, in the direction of Callanga or *Kallanka*. (Which *zona*, region, had been a primary coca-producing area during the *Inkanato*, the epoch of the apex of Incan expansion, and which, after the early colonial period, during which it was sometimes listed in official registers as “Atacallanga,” drifted into a remote and sleepy isolation, with its very location being for a time lost to the outside world. It was only within the 20th Century that it reemerged as an entity the location of which could be roughly included on some topographical maps, and its pre-Incan and Incan ruins eventually brought to light,

abounding with suppositions concerning their relation to a legendary refuge such as “Paititi.”)

From this far point along our journey—at 12° 55′ 30.3″ latitude south by 71° 50′ 08.3″ longitude west—we backtracked, descending to the point along the branch trail at which, just below us, we could discern through the enveloping mists the outlines of those stone ruins we had spotted not too long before. They appeared to make up an extensive archaeological site, one which, by its location here, appeared to be guarding the approaches to and from the entrances to the important *selvas*, jungles, the *montaña*, of Callanga. (And, importantly, this area was much further south of Sondor, the high tundra-like *puna*, which had, in the mid-1990’s, provided our *entrada* to Callanga to its southeast.) We descended a bit further, through a short steep hillside covered in low brush and brambles, to the site itself. It appeared to both Hermógenes and me to be of quite an idiosyncratic layout. Occupying an extensive space on a promontory, with a precipitous drop-off to the west and southwest, it covered a rolling incline of over a thousand square meters. Its highest area was to the south and east, its lower facing the north and northeast. From the very edge of the nearly 90° drop off to the southwest, to the beginning of the higher land to the east, the northern and northeastern perimeter of the site was lined by a continuous stone wall, 80 meters in length, that roughly zigzagged, like a wavy semicircle, from northwest to southeast. It was composed of many different sized boulders, some of which were quite large, and blocks of stone, all of a “rustic” rather than “fine” quality of stone, although constituting rather large and impressive structures, of indisputably Incan origin. Its lower portions appeared to function as a retaining wall for the interior of the site, with the entire wall in places attaining a height almost three meters. Behind the wall, within the site, there were at least two circular platforms of earth and stone, as well as the three-sided stone-wall remains of what might have been structures set up in *masma* style (with one of the two long sides of a rectangular structure left open, a common Incan building style in all areas of *selva alta* that we had explored in the areas of Mameria and Callanga in the 1980’s and ‘90’s, and in the jungles around the Río Taperachi in 2006, as well as in oft photographed sub-tropical areas, such as at the famous Machu Picchu).

At a distance of at least ten meters in—uphill and to the south—from the principal and long wall at the complex’s outer rim, there was, running from east to west, another straighter wall, seven meters long, composed of larger stones than the longer wall downhill of it.

This site was located at 12° 55′ 54.8″ latitude south by 71° 49′ 57.8″ longitude west, at an altitude of 3,400 meters. I did what I could in an effort to attain some decent photographs, with my small point and shoot film camera—my constant companion Nikon FM2 film camera having broken for, apparently, the last time towards the beginning of our trek—but the conditions were atrocious with nearly constant *neblina* and the grey of an overcast Andean day constantly threatening rain. So, after completing our measurements, unfurling The Explorers Club Flag #44, and

taking in one last concentrated view of this still-unnamed but now-documented remote site along this branch toward the jungles far below, we began our descent, and Hermo soon pointed out astride this branch road a few small rough pottery shards of an unmistakably Incan provenance. When we reached our campsite far below, Saul had actually succeeded in drying out sleeping bags and other equipment by discriminately exposing objects to the splashes of strong Andean sunlight that alternated with waves of enveloping Andean mists.

Our subsequent descent toward the valley of the Paucartambo/Mapacho brought us out of the somewhat bleak *alturas* and into an increasingly verdant and nearly subtropical Andean zone. We came, before too long, to the *campesino* settlers' adobe and thatch homes of the village of Jesús María, distinctively decorated by human and animal figures painted in pastel pinks and blues and greens. And there, awaiting us, just as they had been in 2006 and 2004 when we emerged from the shrub and forests and hills onto the furthest *Punto Carretera*, the furthest reach of a dirt road for vehicles, was Pepe and Pepe Jr. with vehicle. Paulino Mamani was here as well, having met up with the "Pepes" in Calca. The ride that they had had to make to reach this far down the valley, to its new furthest reach at Jesús María, had been nerve wracking, what with the newly pushed-through dirt road being so narrow, rough, broken by holes and fissures, and covered in parts by fallen logs and boulders, as it snakes its way along, hacked and bulldozed (usually in these areas by a small mini-bulldozer) out of the side of a long and steep hillside covered with forest. My question made of Pepe Jr., as to how had been their journey here, elicited from him a strongly hissed ¡*Muy feo!*, very ugly, very bad.

Here, also, at Jesús María, were our former companions from *Qhapaq Ñan*—the four *científicos* and their assistants and helpers—who had been waiting for their own vehicle, sent by the National Institute of Culture, to pick them up. Nicanor and the pack animals had already continued on, up the valley, where we would soon follow.

We gave the two female members of the *Qhapaq Ñan* group a ride with us some hours further up the valley of the Paucartambo/Mapacho, as far as the aforementioned *Puente Chimor*, where had been an incredible suspension bridge of woven fibers, stretching itself over the vertically walled canyon at least 100 meters above the roiling waters, which had been replaced within recent times by a swaying and creaky "modern" substitute of wooden planks and rusting iron cables and struts, and where there still are the magnificent and eerie remains of many extensive stone buildings that had made up this important *tambo*, Incan rest-house area for *chasqui*, royal messengers, and other official representatives of Incan administrative power. Here our *Qhapaq Ñan* guests would wait for the vehicle that was coming from Cusco to get them.

We continued on up-valley, meeting along the narrow dirt road the National Institute of Culture vehicle that was on its way to retrieve those from *Qhapaq Ñan*, and before long came to Accobamba, a small town astride the dirt road and above

the Paucartambo/Mapacho. It was here that we had exited our vehicle many times on our expeditions during the 1980's, this road not in that epoch having yet been extended much further down valley from this point, and here now we exited and began yelling from the road, toward the center of the town below us, calling Nicanor's name, for we had arranged with him that we would seek him here upon our return. It was getting cold, and so I entered the vehicle and was rummaging through my backpack looking for my coat, when I heard someone greeting me from behind. I turned and it was Gavino Toledo, who I had not seen since bidding him goodbye just after our expedition had concluded in 1989. We exchanged *abrazos* (bear hugs), and he said that I looked younger(!). Then Nicanor appeared, and we entered into the inevitable *gestionando*, negotiating over what should be the price I'd now pay for the horses and for the services of Nicanor. After the money left my hands, the mood returned to a more jovial one, we all exchanged more *abrazos*, goodbyes, and we continued on to Paucartambo, the Imperial Incan city of Cusco, and home.

Conclusion

Our investigation of the *camino de piedra*, with its myriad branches that head toward newly discovered and still undiscovered sites in the *montaña*, the high-altitude jungle, and possible connections and identifications with the "Legend of Paititi," continues. The past expedition shows us that even in the remoter edge of the highlands still lie unknown or little known sites awaiting documentation. A more definitive identification of the extensive site we reached and documented near the northeasternmost point we reached in September needs to be made, as it could have constituted a major point controlling access between highland and lowland, the eternally conflicting yet interrelated dichotomy of the Andean/Amazonian world. And our journey illustrates that there are more entrances through the *ceja de la selva* (in the 19th Century, and earlier in the 20th Century, especially, referred to as the *ceja de la montaña*), and down through the inhospitable *bosque de nubes*, the cloud-forest, than we had thought, especially leading in the direction of Callanga. The totality of the *camino de piedra*, from south and southeast to north and northwest, is becoming clearer, as far as total length, multiplicity of branches emanating from it, and the exact location of various sites (in the 1980's there were no GPS's with us). Another characteristic of this area that was quite interesting to see was that—aside from the anomalous round concrete and *caña brava* structure we stayed in for our very first night on the road—the area of the road of stone was still wild and unpopulated, as the difficult topography, land, and climate through which it passes may forever keep it.

As for our next step, the areas of Mameria and Callanga, the latter accessible via some of the *entradas*, the entrances we identified, still have more to yield to further exploration-archaeology. As well, there remains a pressing need for the exploration to its terminus of the northernmost reaches of the *camino de piedra* and the branches that head off from it to the north and northwest, beyond the *Meseta de*

***Toporake* and well into the furthest reaches of the vast *Meseta de Pantiacolla* beyond that, where the platforms of the *Lago de Ángel* and of *Último Punto*, the Incan terraces of the area around the Río Taperachi, and the retaining walls above the road as it traverses the valley of the upper Río Timpía, all still constitute the furthest Incan remains yet found directly to the north of the sacred capital of the Incas, Cusco. We must go further.**