



A PERUVIAN ADVENTURE

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Cusco's central plaza



As with most US alpaca breeders, we have long anticipated the opportunity to visit Peru – the origination of most of the animals in our herd. We had this chance in November 2007 to travel to the world famous AlpacaFiesta held every 3 to 4 years in Arequipa – in the southern dry region of Peru. What an exciting and fulfilling adventure this was! Our trip was with sixteen other alpaca breeders who set off to Peru just after Ohio's AlpacaFest show in early November 2007. Meeting up in Miami, most of us flew down together arriving in Lima, Peru very early on a Monday morning. Little did we know what an experience lay ahead of us!

We flew from Lima to Cusco on Monday and began our adventure in earnest. Cusco was the capital of the Inca Empire and was laid out in the shape of a cougar with the nobility living at the head. Now the city has a

Quechua women and alpacas



beautiful Spanish style central plaza with a large church, many shops and restaurants and colorful flowers. Our first encounter with Quechua natives was nearby. Were these women ever surprised when this group of tourists wanted to look at the fleece on their

Local man and donkey



in a large city the country was never far away – as the photo of the man and donkey passing in front of the hotel one morning shows.

No trip to Peru could be complete without a visit to the spectacular ruins



Ruins at Machu Picchu

alpacas! In Cusco we stayed at the five star hotel El Monesterio – a 17th century monastery converted into a truly luxurious hotel. Even though we were

of Machu Picchu built by the Incas as a sacred fortress high in the Andes Mountains. A four hour train ride from Cusco through a beautiful river valley



On the way to Machu Picchu



Machu Picchu



Machu Picchu



llama michi show

brought us to a touristy village at the bottom of the mountain. Most of us managed to purchase some authentic Peruvian souvenirs in this village – colorful table cloths, T-shirts, silver and turquoise jewelry and more! All purchases accompanied by good-natured haggling between seller and buyer – part of the experience! On the return train trip the stewards and wait staff entertained us with a fashion show focused on alpaca and the story of the llama michi, the high level people who managed the alpaca herds of the Incas. At Machu Picchu we learned that the Incas

covered the ten real trails through the forest and up the mountain with as many as 250 false trails – added protection for the nobility. Commerce went up and down these mountains – fish and other foodstuffs carried to the top on the backs of men and llamas – the Inca must have had amazing heart and lung capacity to be able to traverse the very steep and heavily forested terrain.

What trip can be without its little glitches – our plan to fly from Cusco back to Lima and then on to Arequipa for the opening of the AlpacaFiesta met with a delay caused by an air-traffic control strike. The strike lasted precisely ½ hour as our pilot informed us it would. However, the delay caused us to miss our flight to Arequipa. In an effort to make lemonade from our lemons we chartered a small bus that took our group to the Pacific coast and the town of Mira Flores for a wonderful lunch in a restaurant that gave us spectacular coastline views! What a difference in culture and wealth from what we would see later in our trip!



Lanart factory

We finally arrived in Arequipa in time to see the Wasi (never shorn Suri alpacas) led into the fiesta grounds accompanied by music and dancing around blazing bonfires! This was followed by Pisco Sours (a wonderful Peruvian drink!) and roasted meats that turned out to be hearts! A little more information than we all needed!

While in Arequipa several of us had the opportunity to visit Lanart's factory. Many of you are acquainted with Lanart's owner Angelo Ponce – an astute and caring businessman who has worked for many years with Peruvians to hand make stuffed animals and gorgeous alpaca garments.

Next up was the real purpose of our trip – AlpacaFiesta 2007! Every 3 to 4 years alpaca breeders from all over Peru come to Arequipa to show off their best! About 700 animals were entered – selected from about 40,000 animals at the top ranches and coops! What a site to behold. The 2007 fiesta was managed by Renzo Morante, DVM – a well known face to many US alpaca breeders. Our group was fortunate to be Fiesta sponsors and so was permitted into the show ring to look over the shoulders of the judges – Julio Sumar, DVM (Peru), Diane Condon and Peter Kennedy (Australia) and



fleece at show



Suris at AlpacaFiesta

Susan Tellez (USA). What a treat this was to be able to see the animals up close and touch their luscious fiber! An interesting discovery was that most of the animals being shown had never been shorn (both huacaya and suri). The huacayas had fleece as long as 10-12 inches. In the dry Peruvian climate the fleece was in miraculously good condition – crimped and soft. We were told that the animals are often trimmed on the outside to take a few inches off of the fleece. This practice of never shearing the animals is being discouraged by judges such as Dr. Sumar.

The animals were penned in rather make shift accommodations and, another surprise; many were blanketed to keep the fleece as clean as possible. Some farms had nice cotton show blankets (such as the blue colors of Alianza co-op) and others were simply wrapped in a burlap bag! Many of the animals were gorgeous – just look at the head (*opening photo, page 20*) and fleece (*page 22*) of Oso. This handsome animal was the pride of his owners and one of the few animals that had a name – most were merely numbered!

Like show folk everywhere, handlers and owners alike were thrilled to win red ribbons (first place) and championships –



in the ring

junior color champion and reserve, senior color champion and reserve and supreme color champion and reserve (chosen from among the junior and senior champions).

The closing performance of the AlpacaFiesta was an amazing demonstration of horsemanship with a group of riders on the smooth gaited Peruvian Paso horse with the Pas de Deux culminating their performance. *(continued next page)*



blanketed suris



Championship judging



some huacaya winners



equestrian performance



hand sorting fleece

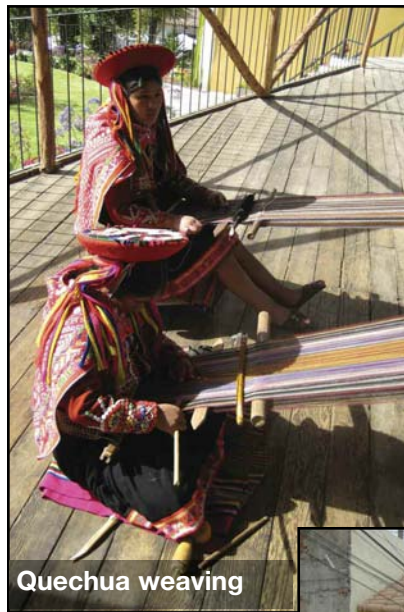


wild vicuna



local market

In Arequipa we also visited the companies Michele and Grupo Inca where we saw the traditional method of hand sorting alpaca fleece and de-hairing vicuña – a painstaking hand process even today! Demonstrations of ancient Quechua weaving were wonderful to see in contrast to the modern automated equipment. Human intervention is still required to make some of the more demanding patterns – skills still performed by Peruvian women today.



Quechua weaving

The last two days of our Peruvian adventure were spent traversing the altiplano in route to the picturesque village of Chivay followed by a tour of part of the Colca River Canyon. Our group was pretty tired when we started this part of our journey and we all expressed some concerns that perhaps we should

have ended our trip with the AlpacaFiesta, but when we started through the altiplano and began to see wild vicuna and native herds of alpaca we knew these last two days were going to be something special. Small towns and farmsteads passed by our



Picturesque Chivay

bus windows along with passing llamas and donkeys carrying fuel for cooking fires.

In the village of Chivay we walked through the marketplace – filled with scrumptious looking fruits and veggies, grains, flowers, breads and meats – some a bit unsavory to our US outlook, but a commonplace scene in South America where alpacas are more akin to cattle than to our pampered animals. We ate alpaca several times during the trip and found it to be a tasty meat, similar to very lean beef in taste and texture. Another local delicacy – that we didn't have the opportunity to try – was guinea pig – we were told this is a special treat for many in Peru.



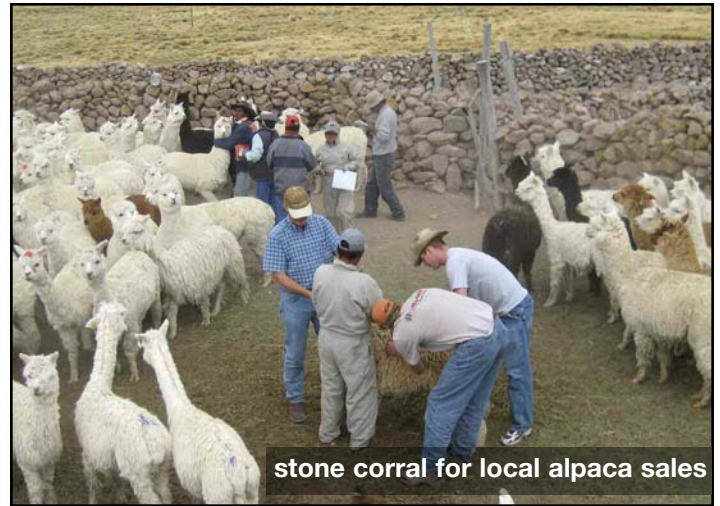
country side villages



llamas carrying fuel



Quechua marketplace



stone corral for local alpaca sales

Our last day was very busy starting out with a ride along the Colca River up to a Condor sanctuary. The scenery was some of the most amazing we had seen during the entire trip. The river is wild in some places with rapids and in other regions it slowly eddies into quiet pools with agricultural terraces running up the sides of the valleys – dating back to pre-Incan times. Today only 40% of the terraces are utilized, bearing testimony to the decrease in population of the native peoples of Peru after the conquest of the Spanish starting in the mid 16th century. Photos cannot do justice to the magnificence of both the natural and manmade wonders. At the Condor viewing area Quechua men and women sold their wares – beautiful cotton and alpaca/llama artwork and apparel – many of us brought quite a bit home!

On the long return journey from the Colca River Canyon we had a last little adventure! Along side the road was a stone corral containing a pretty good sized group of alpacas. We called to our driver to stop the bus and we got out to see

what was happening. Through our tour guide we discovered that these animals were being sold to local people for herd upgrades as well as for food! We got a look at several of these animals and found them to be pretty nice – interestingly they seemed in quite good condition – teeth and bites were good, skin looked healthy and fleeces were nice. We were told that a number of them were about 8-10 year old females that the people were buying to butcher! Because alpaca teeth stop growing at about this age the animals will not be able to forage sufficiently for food in the rocky terrain and would die anyway before long, so they are taken for food for the people.

Peru – a land of contrasts – great beauty and excruciating poverty, modern cities and villages so small and rough that they seem to still be in a far past century. A pilgrimage that any alpaca breeder should make when they have the opportunity – truly an adventure! Would we go back? In a minute we would! Perhaps we will see you there for the next AlpacaFiesta!



alpacas on the altiplano