

Machu Picchu, Ancient City of Peru

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Early morning in Machu Picchu, Peru, August 25, 2007. Photo by: Pedro Szekely, Creative Commons.

Machu Picchu is tucked away in the mountains near the city of Cuzco, Peru. Peru is in South America. The Inca built Machu Picchu before they were wiped out by Spanish invaders in 1572. For hundreds of years, only peasants living in the region knew it existed. Then, American archaeologist Hiram Bingham stumbled upon it in 1911. An archaeologist is a

scientist who studies ancient cultures. Machu Picchu stretches over 5 miles. It has more than 3,000 stone steps that link its many different levels. Today, hundreds of thousands of people visit Machu Picchu every year.

An Inca treasure



The Inca people built Machu Picchu. They controlled all of western South America in the 1400s and part of the 1500s. Machu Picchu was abandoned about 100 years after it was built. This happened around the time the Spanish arrived in Peru in 1526. However, there is no evidence that the Spanish ever attacked or even reached Machu Picchu. Some experts think the people who lived there left to escape an outbreak of smallpox, a terrible disease.

Many archaeologists now believe that Machu Picchu was a royal home. They think Inca kings and other important people lived there. Others believe it might have been a prison, a trading post, or a place where new kings were crowned.

Bingham's discovery captures the world's interest

In the summer of 1911, American archaeologist Hiram Bingham arrived in Peru with a small team of explorers. A farmer who lived nearby told them about some ruins that were located at the top of a nearby mountain. The farmer called the mountain Machu Picchu. This name means "old peak." On July 24, Bingham climbed to the mountain's ridge in cold and drizzly weather. A small group of peasants showed him the rest of the way. Led by an 11-year-old boy, Bingham saw the entrance to Machu Picchu for the first time.

The excited Bingham spread the word about his discovery. He wrote a book about Machu Picchu called "The Lost City of the Incas." This best-selling work made many people want to see Machu Picchu for themselves. He also took artifacts from Machu Picchu to Yale University to be examined. This move started a dispute over who owned the artifacts that lasted nearly 100 years. Finally, the Peruvian government went to court to get the items back. Then, Yale agreed to return them to where they were found.

Bingham is credited with making Machu Picchu known to the world. The highway used by tour buses to reach it is named after him. But he might not have been the first outsider to visit it. Christian priests, called missionaries, and other explorers may have reached Machu Picchu during the 1800s and early 1900s but did not talk about what they found there.



A construction masterpiece

Machu Picchu is in the middle of a tropical mountain forest. It stands on the eastern slopes of the Peruvian Andes. Its walls, terraces, stairways and ramps blend into the mountains around it. The site has beautiful stone walls, terraced fields for farming and a water irrigation system. These show that the Inca people were great architects, engineers and farmers.

The city includes a farming zone, a neighborhood where people lived, and a royal district. One of Machu Picchu's most famous buildings is the Temple of the Sun. Another is the Intihuatana stone. This sculpted granite rock is believed to have worked as a clock or as a calendar.



Machu Picchu is Peru's most visited site. It is also home to several endangered species. Increased tourism and the growth of nearby towns have hurt Machu Picchu. As a result, Peru's government has taken steps to protect the site from damage to the mountains and the soil.

Quiz

- 1 Which of these selections from the article BEST supports the idea that the Inca were expert builders?
- (A) Machu Picchu stretches over 5 miles. It has more than 3,000 stone steps that link its many different levels.
 - (B) The Inca people built Machu Picchu. They controlled all of western South America in the 1400s and part of the 1500s.
 - (C) Its walls, terraces, stairways and ramps blend into the mountains around it. The site has beautiful stone walls, terraced fields for farming and a water irrigation system.
 - (D) The city includes a farming zone, a neighborhood where people lived, and a royal district. One of Machu Picchu's most famous buildings is the Temple of the Sun. Another is the Intihuatana stone.
- 2 Select the paragraph from the section "Bingham's discovery captures the world's interest" that MOST suggests Hiram Bingham was not the first to discover Machu Picchu.
- 3 Read this paragraph from the section "An Inca treasure."

Many archaeologists now believe that Machu Picchu was a royal home. They think Inca kings and other important people lived there. Others believe it might have been a prison, a trading post, or a place where new kings were crowned.

How does this paragraph contribute to the development of the article?

- (A) It gives an overview of some of the construction techniques used to create this incredibly complex site.
- (B) It suggests that we still have a lot to learn about Machu Picchu by listing some of the things that might have happened there.
- (C) It demonstrates the importance of this location to the Inca people and the Spanish invaders.
- (D) It describes many of the different buildings that were present at Machu Picchu before it was abandoned by the Incas.

- 4 Read the concluding paragraph of the article.

Machu Picchu is Peru's most visited site. It is also home to several endangered species. Increased tourism and the growth of nearby towns have hurt Machu Picchu. As a result, Peru's government has taken steps to protect the site from damage to the mountains and the soil.

How does this paragraph MOST contribute to the article?

- (A) It provides information about how Machu Picchu provides a home for several endangered species.
- (B) It explains how nearby towns feel about increased tourism to Machu Picchu.
- (C) It suggests that the discovery of Machu Picchu has been completely positive for land and government of Peru.
- (D) It describes the unintended consequences of Machu Picchu becoming a famous place and the government's response.