



Conservation Volunteers International Program

P.O. Box 61912, Santa Barbara, California 93160 USA

www.conservationvip.org

Tel: 805.698.6915 Fax: 805.964.8612

A Non-Profit 501c3 Tax Exempt Organization CST 2089890-40

Volunteer Expedition Trip Report Machu Picchu Sanctuary, Peru June 4-16, 2010

Conservation Volunteers International Program in cooperation with REI Adventures organized and directed a volunteer expedition to the Machu Picchu Sanctuary June 4-16, 2010. The project was authorized by Sr. Jorge Zegarra, Regional Director of the National Institute of Culture (INC) in Cusco, and by Sra. Ada Castillo, Director of the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu of the National Service for Protected Area Management (SERNANP) in Cusco. Nine volunteers completed a variety of work identified by Sanctuary officials.

Volunteers performed a range of work within the Machu Picchu Sanctuary, including the maintenance of approximately two miles of the popular Putucusi Inca Trail, installation of 19 water drains, cleaning and repair of 52 steps, removal of plant growth within the trail prism, and restoration activities within the Sanctuary's Orchid Garden. Permission for planned and approved restoration work within the Sacred City of Machu Picchu was unexpectedly withdrawn by a new Regional Director of the INC in Cusco. Despite diplomatic efforts that involved the US State Department, the Mayor of Machu Picchu Pueblos and SERNANP, the INC would not honor the permit signed by the former Regional Director. With the assistance of the Regional Director of SERNANP, additional restoration projects within the Machu Picchu Sanctuary were developed for volunteers.

Volunteers were scheduled to arrive in time for guided orientation tours in Cusco and the Sacred Valley of the Inca on during the first two days of the expedition. The orientation is part of the training for volunteers in preparation for the restoration projects within the Machu Picchu Sanctuary. However, many of the volunteers experienced flight delays due to poor weather in the United States, requiring adjustments in the itinerary to focus on Cusco, rescheduling the visit to the Sacred Valley for later in the expedition. Cusco was celebrating the Corpus Cristi holiday, an important festival in Cusco that combines Catholic Church and ancient Inca ritual.



Volunteers then traveled by van and train to Machu Picchu Pueblo. Record-breaking rains earlier in 2010 had caused significant flooding within the Urubamba River valley, causing many fatalities and destroying homes, roads and sections of the railroad. After an extended travel time, volunteers arrived into Machu Picchu Pueblo (also known as Aguas Calientes).

Volunteers were provided orientation and training in tool use before beginning work on the Putucusi Trail. The Putucusi Trail was constructed by the Inca to access Putucusi Mountain, a sacred peak overlooking the Sacred City of Machu Picchu and the Urubamba River. The Putucusi Trail is popular for locals and visitors alike, easily accessible from the edge of the community.

Damage to the Putucusi Trail during weeks of torrential summer rain was extensive. Photo at right shows a SERNANP ranger evaluating a large landslide that completely destroyed the 120-foot tall central ladder, cutting off access to the summit of Putucusi Mountain.



At the base of the landslide, volunteers removed fallen trees, rock and soil to uncover this segment of original Inca trail steps.



As volunteers continued to remove debris, it became apparent that the landslide had dislodged many of the original trail steps. Working carefully with SERNANP rangers, steps were restored to the original trail location.



The entire length of the Putucusi Trail from the trailhead to the landslide (approximately two miles) received maintenance from volunteers. In addition, 19 water drain structures, such as the one below, were added to protect the trail from erosion.





SERNANP rangers guided volunteers to a newly developing orchid garden and trail within the Machu Picchu Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is home to hundreds of orchid species (Orchidaceae), creating one of the greatest concentration of orchids in the world. Construction of a new community recreation facility impacted access to the garden. Volunteers maintained trails, spread forest litter to improve habitat for orchids, and spent time learning about this remarkable plant family.

On the return from Machu Picchu, volunteers received additional presentations about Inca history and culture, including stops in the historic communities of Ollantaytambo and Pisac. A visit to a local textile cooperative allowed volunteers to learn how wool for clothing and other household items is made using traditional methods, such as natural plant and insect dyes to color the wool yarns.





After returning to Cusco, volunteers visited Sacsayhuaman, a hilltop stone fortress overlooking Cusco. The largest of the stones used in the construction of Sacsayhuaman weighs over 360 tons and stands more than 20 feet tall.

Volunteers then traveled south of Cusco to Tipon, one of the most elaborate and well-preserved examples of Inca agricultural terracing. Water still runs from Pachatusan Mountain, the "cross beam of the universe" in Quechua language. In consultation with local rangers, both Sacsayhuaman and Tipon were evaluated for future volunteer activities.

