



Conservation Volunteers International Program

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Volunteer Expedition Trip Report Machu Picchu Sanctuary, Peru November 10-19, 2010

Conservation Volunteers International Program in cooperation with REI Adventures organized and directed a volunteer expedition to the Machu Picchu Sanctuary November 10-19, 2010. The project was authorized by Sra. Ada Castillo, Director of the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu of the National Service for Protected Area Management (SERNANP) in Cusco. Seven volunteers completed a variety of work identified by SERNANP. The Ministry of Culture did not request assistance during this volunteer expedition.

SERNANP requested that volunteers complete a variety of work within the Machu Picchu Sanctuary. Accomplishments included maintenance of boundary markers, maintenance of approximately two miles of the popular Putucusi Inca Trail, installation or maintenance of 36 water drains, removal of plant growth within the trail prism, restoration activities within the Sanctuary's Orchid Garden, and evaluation of needed trail repairs along a section of the Royal Inca Trail.

Volunteers began the expedition with guided orientation tours of Cusco and Sacsayhuaman historic sites. Sacsayhuaman is a hilltop stone fortress overlooking Cusco. The largest of the stones used in the construction of Sacsayhuaman weigh over 360 tons and stand more than 20 feet tall. Volunteers also visited a textile cooperative where participants learned how alpaca and other fibers are prepared for weaving into traditional clothing and household items. Orientation tours are part of the training for volunteers in preparation for the restoration projects within the Machu Picchu Sanctuary.



Volunteers then traveled south of Cusco to visit the Tipon Archaeological site. Here volunteers observed restoration activities, and learned how the Inca experimented with a variety of plants in much the same way modern universities have agricultural experiment stations.



The following day, volunteers traveled by van and train from Cusco through the Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu Pueblo (also known as Aguas Calientes). Upon arrival into Machu Picchu Pueblo, volunteers received training in the proper use of tools and methods to work safely. SERNANP asked volunteers to continue maintenance work on the Putucusi Trail. This historic trail, originally constructed by the Inca, allows access to the top of Putucusi Mountain, providing a commanding view of the Sacred City of Machu Picchu.



PUTUCUSI TRAIL BEFORE CLEARING



PUTUCUSI TRAIL AFTER CLEARING

Volunteers cleared the trail of plants and other debris, maintained or installed water drains, and repaired the stretch of trail between Machu Picchu Pueblo and a large landslide that had destroyed a 120 foot tall ladder leading to the upper reaches of the trail.



PUTUCUSI TRAIL BEFORE CLEARING



PUTUCUSI TRAIL AFTER CLEARING

Rapid development in the community of Machu Picchu Pueblo occasionally spills over into the Sanctuary. Volunteers were asked to restore a natural area where rangers had previously removed an illegal structure. Restoration included naturalizing the site and planting native trees. Rangers had grown these trees in a native plant nursery near Chachabamba, an historic site volunteers would later have the opportunity to visit.



CHACHABAMBA NATIVE PLANT NURSURY

To prevent unauthorized development or other illegal activities with the Sanctuary, SERNANP installed concrete boundary markers along the perimeter of Machu Picchu Pueblo. The forest growth quickly covers the markers, making it difficult for residents to avoid encroachment into the Sanctuary. Volunteers were asked to clear, clean and paint boundary markers to protect the Sanctuary. The rangers were unable to maintain the markers because of insufficient funds to purchase supplies; volunteers purchased the required materials and accomplished this important assignment.



A variety of trail maintenance was accomplished along the Putucusi Trail and the Orchid Garden Nature Trail. Below, volunteers correct poor drainage that was destroying a segment of the Orchid Garden Nature Trail by installing a rock water bar. The Sanctuary is home to hundreds of orchid species (Orchidaceae), creating one of the greatest concentration of orchids in the world. Volunteers worked within the Orchid Garden, spreading forest litter to improve habitat for orchids, repairing trails and learning about this remarkable plant family.



On a scheduled rest day, volunteers were offered the opportunity to accompany a SERNANP ranger on a section of the Royal Inca Trail from Km 104 (Chachabamba) into the Sacred City of Machu Picchu at the Intipunko Sun Gate. Volunteers arose in time to ride the early morning train from Machu Picchu Pueblo to Km 104. This well-traveled short segment of the Inca Trail provides a popular one-day hike for those choosing not to hike the classic 3-4 day backpacking trip. During the hike, trail conditions and needed repairs were discussed with the ranger. To effectively work on this section of trail, future volunteer groups would need to camp near the work sites.



Volunteers also enjoyed two days of guided exploration within the Sacred City of Machu Picchu, as well as time for self-discovery and visits to the Inca Bridge or Huayna Picchu. Conservation VIP also supported volunteers from the Santa Barbara County Search and Rescue Team providing training to Sanctuary Rangers and Municipal Police.



On the return from Machu Picchu Sanctuary, volunteers were provided a guided tour of the historic Ollantaytambo village, before stopping at the open market in Pisac Village.

