

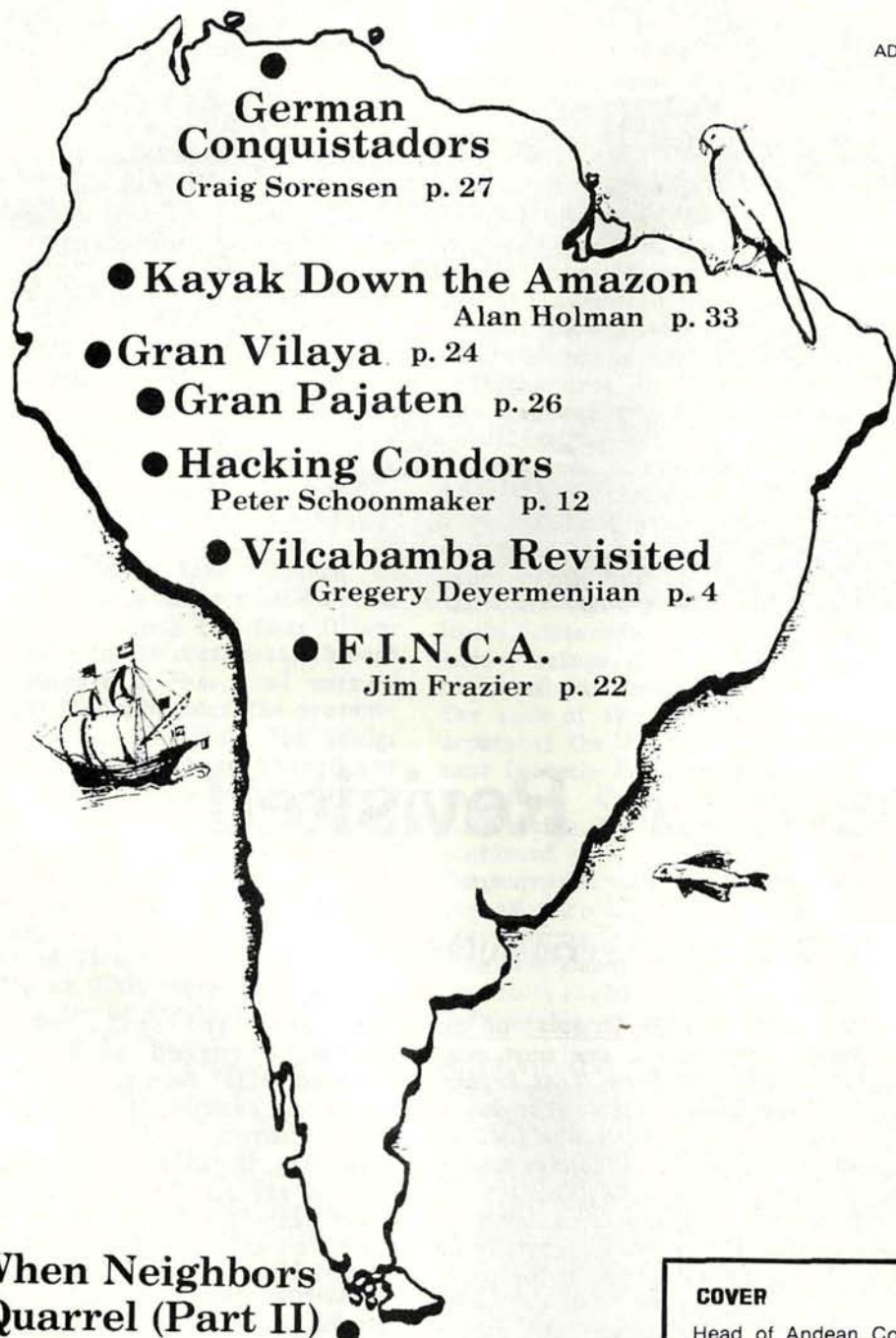
NUMBER 12 SOUTH AMERICAN EXPLORER



# SOUTH AMERICAN EXPLORER

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#### COVER

Head of Andean Condor from "Nouveau recueil de planches coloriees d'Oiseaux" by C.J. Temminck and Baron M. Laugier, 1820-39. A fairly accurate rendition, though the beak is less sinuous than illustrated.

## When Neighbors Quarrel (Part II)

Kevin Healey p. 16



# Vilcabamba Revisited

By Gregory Deyermenjian

I have always had a fascination for little-known and long forgotten places. Such a place is Vilcabamba, often referred to as the 'Lost City' or 'Last Refuge' of the Incas.

When Hiram Bingham discovered Machu Picchu in 1911 many believed this magnificent and mysterious ruin to be Vilcabamba where the last remnant of the Incan Empire found refuge from the Spaniards. This belief, still common, is propagated by Peruvian travel posters which proclaim: 'At this mountain top citadel, the very last Inca raised his eyes to the sun and disappeared forever.' However, as Gene Savoy's exciting Antisuyo: The Search for the Lost Cities of the Amazon and John Hemming's definitively detailed

and researched The Conquest of the Incas, have shown, one must conclude that the Incan 'Last Refuge' of Vilcabamba lies elsewhere.

Actually, 'Vilcabamba' refers not only to the legendary city (and to the town of 'Vilcabamba the New,' founded by Spaniards in the late 16th century), but to an entire region of Peru northwest of Cuzco and beyond Machu Picchu. Geographical features make Vilcabamba a sort of 'inland island' cut off from the rest of the country: bordered by the Urubamba River on the east, the high peaks of the Cordillera Vilcabamba on the southeast, the Apurimac River to the south and west, and to the north by the Cosireni and Alto Urubamba Rivers where dense forest falls away to the Amazon Basin.

This was, and still is, an extremely rugged country of forested hills, deep gorges, snowy peaks and swamps. Flat land is rare — narrow trails twist and turn along the hillsides overlooking the rivers. Well above 2,000 meters in altitude, the air seems 'thin' to outsiders, the nights uncomfortably cold.

As the history of this region gradually came to light, so did the ruins of the city of Vilcabamba. New information available this century adds the following chapter to the history of the conquest.

ABOVE: The Yurac Rumi ['white rock'] near Vitcos was sacred to the Inca. PHOTO by Edward Ranney from Monuments of the Incas, by John Hemming and Edward Ranney.

**H**aving captured and executed the Inca Atahualpa, the Spanish conquistadores under Francisco Pizarro entered the sacred city of Cuzco in late 1533 and installed the native prince Manco as Inca. It took two years for Manco to rebel against the Spaniards. In the 'Great Rebellion' of 1536 his forces laid siege to Cuzco and even threatened Pizarro's distant new city of Lima. Manco set up headquarters during the first year of his rebellion at Calca, in the Yucay Valley north of Cuzco. He then moved to the massive fortifications of Ollantaytambo just northwest of this valley. Manco soon realized, however, that proximity to Cuzco made Ollantaytambo vulnerable to the Spanish cavalry. In mid-1537 he sought out a less accessible refuge. After an unsuccessful attempt to reach a fortress known as Urocoto, thought to lie far to the southeast in the forests east of Lake Titicaca, he led his forces in retreat over the Incan road which ran from Ollantaytambo to the northwest, through the Panticolla Pass, and emerged at the Urubamba near the present-day town of Chaulay. The bridge of Chuquichaca here formed the principle entrance into the Vilcabamba region. Manco's force crossed the bridge and followed the road westward along the Vitcos (now known as the Vilcabamba) River, stopping at the fortified town of Vitcos. Vitcos occupied a ridge at 2,850 meters overlooking the valley of the Vitcos River and the town of Pucyura — the very center of the 'inland island' of historical Vilcabamba.

Manco considered this place secure and inaccessible. But when native forces neglected to fully destroy the bridge of Chuquichaca, the conquistador Rodrigo Orgoñez pursued the Inca all the way to Vitcos. Although the pursuit of

\* While Manco led the life of a fugitive, his half-brother Paullu was hailed as the new Inca by the Spaniards in Cuzco. Throughout Manco's present and future privations and struggles against Spanish power, Paullu would steadfastly support the cause of his half-brother's enemy, even leading the Spaniards' native auxiliaries into battle against his Incan brethren.

the rebellious Inca took on the intensity of a 'quest,' the greedy Spaniards paused to plunder, and Manco disappeared into deep forests.\*

Manco regrouped when the invaders left Vitcos and set out again to find a secure stronghold in Chachapoyas, over 150 km to the northwest. Remote Chachapoyas possessed a well-fortified site known as Cuelap. But Manco soon changed his mind. Heading back towards Vilcabamba, he took the time to instigate rebellion, attack various Spaniards and revenge himself upon tribes which had collaborated with the Europeans. These acts, together with renewed uprisings in the Lake Titicaca area in 1539, signalled the beginning of Manco's 'Second Rebellion.'

Spaniards in Peru had long been embroiled in their own civil wars, but by 1539 their military successes had put an end to native hopes of pushing the Christians to the sea. Manco returned to Vilcabamba, determined to find a more secure refuge there. To this end he moved his headquarters to the far side of the watershed which separates the Vitcos Valley to the east from the Pampaconas Valley to the west. Crossing the nearly 3,500m-high pass of Colpacasa, he continued down the valley of the Pampaconas-Concevidayoc River and beyond into the deep forests to the west-north-west. Here, in an area now known as Espiritu Pampa, Manco established his 'Last Refuge,' his city of Vilcabamba.

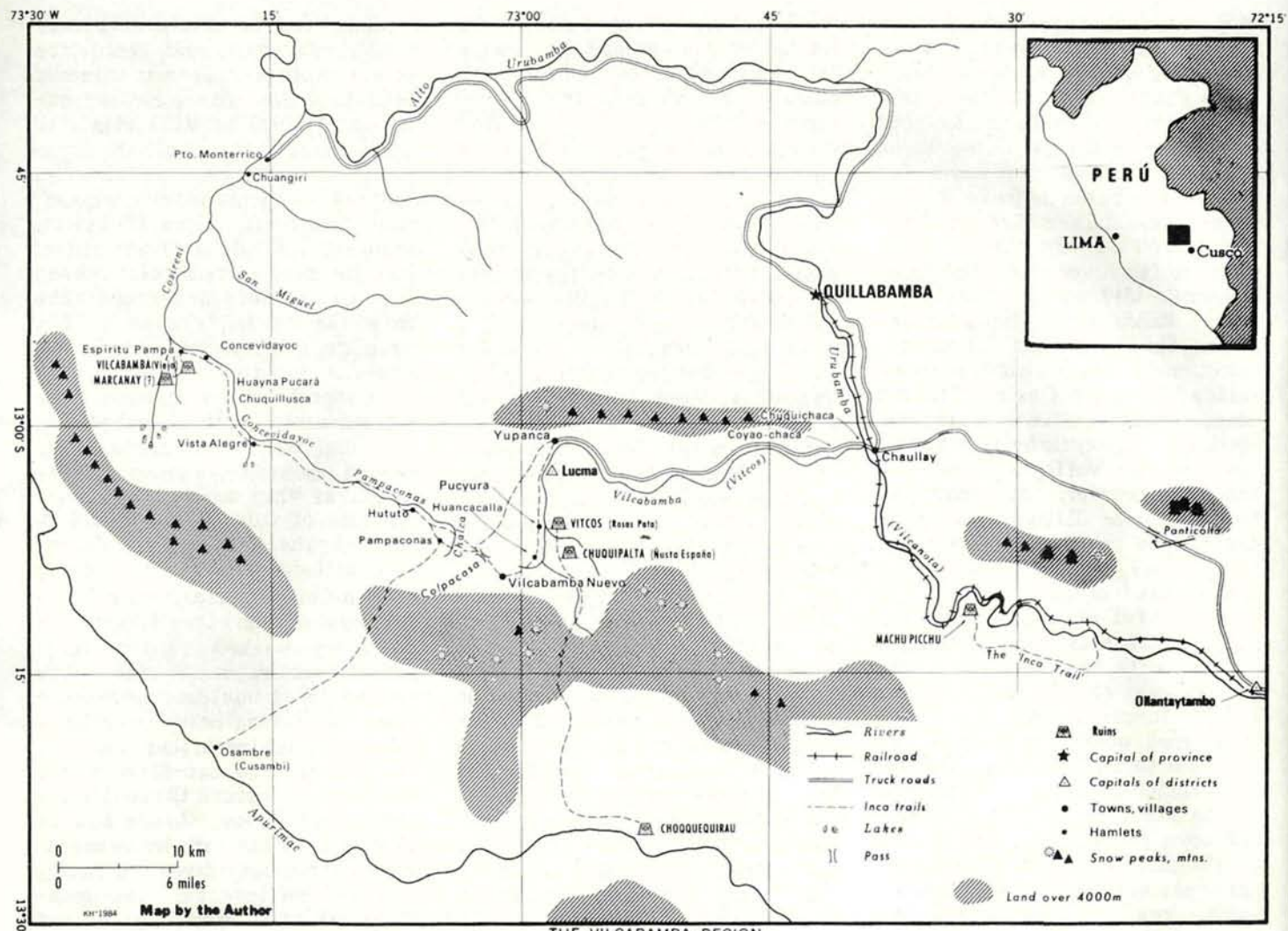
Some form of settlement, perhaps even a commercial center for jungle produce, may have already existed here. Manco now transformed it totally. At 1,340m (far below that of any other Incan city), he built his capital city, replete with palaces, temples, stone dwellings, streets, canals, bridges, fountains and squares. Spanish-style roofing tiles atop some of its buildings show that this was an Incan city partly built after contact with the European invader.

In April 1539 a Spanish force under Gonzalo Pizarro reached Vitcos, but the harsh topography forced them to abandon their horses as they marched west over the pass of Colpacasa and on down through the Concevidayoc Valley. On a hillside traverse at a place called Chuquillusca, some 22 km southeast of the city of Vilcabamba, they walked into a trap: native warriors on the hills above rolled great boulders down upon them, inflicting heavy casualties. Only by climbing higher were the Spanish able to out-flank their attackers, capture Chuquillusca and defeat Manco. Manco barely escaped with his life by swimming across the Concevidayoc and hiding in the deep forests. The Spaniards captured Manco's wife and various Incan nobles. They then pressed on to the city of Vilcabamba, which they probably occupied briefly.

The Spaniards' invasion cost them dearly, but civil strife continued. When the Spaniards

RUINS engulfed by the roots of a giant tree.





THE VILCABAMBA REGION

left Vilcabamba, Manco Inca returned to his city and set about organizing his state. Now and then he conducted raids across the border into Spanish-occupied Peru. Once he even set out for refuge in Quito to the far north but pulled back when he found the route overrun with armed Spaniards and hostile tribes.

In 1542, supporters of Pizarro defeated Diego de Almagro. Seven members of the Almagrist faction took refuge at Vitcos with Manco, who was partial to Almagro. Manco welcomed this opportunity to have Spanish soldiers instruct his warriors in the use of European weapons. For a while, in 1544, he even considered emerging from Vilcabamba if he could receive certain concessions from the new viceroy. It never happened.

Manco's Almagrist guest plotted a surprise attack. Hoping to gain pardons from royal authorities, they suddenly fell upon the Inca

in the main square of Vitcos while he was playing a game of quoits (similar to 'horseshoes'). They stabbed him. Manco died three days later. His embalmed body was taken to the city of Vilcabamba to sit with the mummies of other Incas.

None of Manco's murderers escaped alive from Vilcabamba. But Manco had been an uncommonly able and respected leader. He combined noble birth and administrative ability with innovation, skill and courage in military matters. His death was a serious blow to the rebel state.

Under Manco's son, Sayri-Tupac, a period of isolationism set in. Raids against Spaniards ceased and the newly-learned fighting methods were forgotten. Spanish influence was rejected in favor of traditional Incan ways.

Until 1548 the Spaniards were too busy warring amongst themselves to attend to the 'Vilcabam-

ba problem.' With the royalist ascendancy, however, this changed. A tamed Inca now became an obsession of the Spanish. The knew that as long as there was an independent native ruler with his own relatively inaccessible autonomous state, they would never be able to consolidate their power. The Spaniards once again hoped to lure the Inca out of Vilcabamba. Sayri-Tupac was offered estates in the Cuzco area and puppet rulership. Negotiations continued sporadically, interrupted only in 1555 when some rebellious settlers joined the Indian holdouts in their enclave and instigated raids into Spanish-occupied Peru.

Two years later, Sayri-Tupac did emerge. He accepted an estate in the sacred valley of the Yucay just north of Cuzco. But the 'royal fringe' — an important symbol of Inca power — remained in Vilcabamba with militant com-

manders. With Sayri-Tupac's departure, his older half-brother, Titu-Cusi, became official ruler of the Vilcabamba state. With Sayri-Tupac's death in 1560, Titu-Cusi became Inca.

Here now was a native ruler who had witnessed his father's murder by Spaniards 16 years earlier. With his formal investiture, raids upon Spanish settlements and caravans increased for a while. But Titu-Cusi did not wish to provoke a large-scale invasion of Vilcabamba, well aware that his small state numbering but a few thousand subjects would suffer greatly from any major attack. For their part, the Spaniards wished to avoid yet another costly expedition into the jungle, having failed in two previous forays. Negotiations followed. Titu-Cusi held out hope that he might at some point emerge peacefully or accept Christian missionaries. Negotiations led to concessions. By 1569 both Titu Cusi and his son accepted baptism. Two priests, Friars Marcos Garcia and Diego Ortiz, were granted permission to preach within Vilcabamba Province. Garcia even built one church in Pucyura and Ortiz another at Huarancalla.

Nominally a Christian, Titu-Cusi remained head of the Incan religion. A principle site of this religion, the city of Vilcabamba contained sacred stones and temples, including what Christian chroniclers like to refer to as the 'University of Idolatries.' Spanish friars implored the Inca for permission to visit his city of Vilcabamba, and in early 1570, at the height of the rainy season, he allowed them to accompany him on a wet and muddy journey. The friars, however, found themselves frustrated at being restricted to the outskirts of the city. Additionally, they had to endure what Spanish chroniclers termed assaults on their chastity by native women, urged on by native priests wishing to discredit the Christians. The friars soon walked back to Pucyura, but not until Titu-Cusi had narrated his 'Relacion' to them. This document, containing much historical information about Vilcabamba and its inhabitants, survives today.

In righteous wrath, the friars now turned their attention to

another important religious site, the shrine of Chuquipalta situated just south of Vitcos on top of a huge carved white rock ('yurac-rumi' in Quechua). Leading some young Christian natives there, the friars burned and exorcised the site. Although a heinous crime by Incan standards, deserving the death penalty, Titu-Cusi merely expelled Garcia while allowing the more popular Ortiz to stay at Huarancalla.

A cagey Titu-Cusi kept the Spanish authorities pacified by appearing to pay homage. At the same time he barred Spanish traders and made sure that no news of mineral wealth within Vilcabamba reached the outside.

In May 1571, while visiting the site of his father's death at Vitcos, Titu-Cusi fell ill following a night of fencing and heavy drinking. He died the next morning. Incan captains blamed Father Ortiz for his death. The priest was forced to say a Mass, and when this failed to bring the Inca back to life, he was tortured and killed.

The state of Vilcabamba once again closed its borders and withdrew in sullen isolation. Its inhabitants destroyed churches and other reminders of Christian influence. Spanish envoys across the Apurimac and Urubamba Rivers knew nothing of the death of Titu-Cusi. The new Viceroy, Francisco de Toledo, was becoming impatient. He insisted the Inca emerge and contemplated military action to bring this about. In March 1572 native commanders killed a prominent Spanish envoy bearing a letter from the Viceroy. This was the last straw. On April 14 1572, Viceroy Toledo declared war.

A Spanish force took the bridge at Chuquichaca. The main attack force of 250 Spaniards and 1500 native auxiliaries commanded by Martin Hurtado de Arbieta entered Inca territory. At Coyao-chaca, a native force ambushed the Spaniards who, with superior arms, especially arquebuses, beat off the attack. To cut off the Inca's escape routes, Arbieta sent one detachment of armed Spaniards across the Apurimac by way of the Incan bridge at Cusambi (now

Osambre) in the southwest corner of Vilcabamba. Another force occupied the bridge. Arbieta's main invasion force pursued the fleeing natives toward the city of Vilcabamba.

Crossing Colpacasa Pass the Spaniards occupied the town of Pampaconas at 3,000m. Here the harsh terrain, the altitude and an outbreak of measles forced them to rest for 13 days before pushing down the rugged valley of the Pampaconas-turned-Concevidayoc River.

Unbeknownst to the Spaniards, Indians waited with large boulders at Huayna Pucara, a fort blocking their westward way. Learning this from a traitorous Incan captain, the Spaniards climbed up the steep and thickly vegetated slopes and outflanked the native defenders. The next day the Spanish force headed northwest, past the undefended 'old fort' of Machu Pucara and on to Marcanay, where they found abandoned food. On June 24th, forced to leave their horses behind because of the thickness of the forest, the Spaniards finally entered the city of Vilcabamba on foot. They found it burned and abandoned — the new Inca, Tupac-Amaru, gone.

One of Arbieta's captains, Martin Garcia de Loyola, ranged far to the north in hot pursuit. Using information from captive Indians, the Spaniards took down the Urubamba in rafts. Deep in the jungle they finally came upon Tupac Amaru himself.

Retracing their way back through the city of Vilcabamba, the Pampacnoas and the Vitcos Valley, the main body of Spaniards paused at the bridge at Chuquichaca. Here, in honor of their triumph, they founded the town of San Francisco de la Victoria de Vilcabamba. Near Marcanay, they dug up the remains of Padre Ortiz and reburied them under the altar of the new town's church. (This town was relocated in 1586 to a place southeast of Colpacasa Pass. It is now known as 'Vilcabamba Nuevo.')

On September 21st, the last 'Vilcabamba King,' Tupac Amaru, was led into Cuzco by a chain of gold around his neck. Three days later, on September 24th, he was executed in the main square of

Cuzco. His death, the occupation of the Vilcabamba province, and the dispersal and humbling of the remaining Incan nobility, put an end to any hopes of a resurgent Vilcabamba state.

The Spaniards now set about exploiting Vilcabamba Province, treating its inhabitants as slaves for the production of sugar, coca and silver. The new governor had the bridge of Chuquichaca patrolled to prevent anyone escaping.

But by the mid-17th century the area had become unprofitable. The population, decimated by war and abuse, drifted away. Soon only two villages remained, one at Lucma just north of the site of Vitcos and another at Vilcabamba Nueva. The province fell into a state of sleepy and isolated neglect. The city of Vilcabamba, its location never recorded, became legend.

More than 200 years passed. Out of Hiram Bingham's journeys in 1911, during which he discovered Machu Picchu, Vitcos and the white rock at Chuquipalta, sprung the belief that Machu Picchu was the city of Vilcabamba. Bingham crossed Colpacasa Pass and plunged into the unmapped Espiritu Pampa area where he actually succeeded in finding some Incan sites. But the vast majority of the ruins remained hidden, covered by dense

forest.

Not until the expeditions of 1964 and 1965 did Gene Savoy definitively identify the Espiritu Pampa ruins as Vilcabamba, the Inca's last refuge. And in 1966, Mark Howell and Tony Morrison found evidence of a fire at Espiritu Pampa, thus confirming reports in historical records of the burning of the city.

Last year I traveled to Peru eager to visit and photograph this forgotten region -- especially the lost city of Vilcabamba. My party entered at Chaulay, at a point where once stood the bridge of Chuquichaca. We bumped by truck down a recently-cut dirt road which leads west and runs approximately parallel to the eastward-flowing river once called the Vitcos, but now known as the Vilcabamba. We spashed through small streams flowing across the road.

Darkness fell hours before we arrived in the pouring rain at the road's end. Here, at 500 m, was the small town of Yupanca -- 20 to 30 stick dwellings with thatch and corrugated tin roofs. We accepted a gracious offer to spend the night on a packed dirt floor sheltered from the rain.

The next morning we hired mules and a driver and headed south, following the course of the river

to Lucma, the district capital, a town of well-made stucco and adobe houses which dates back to the 16th century.

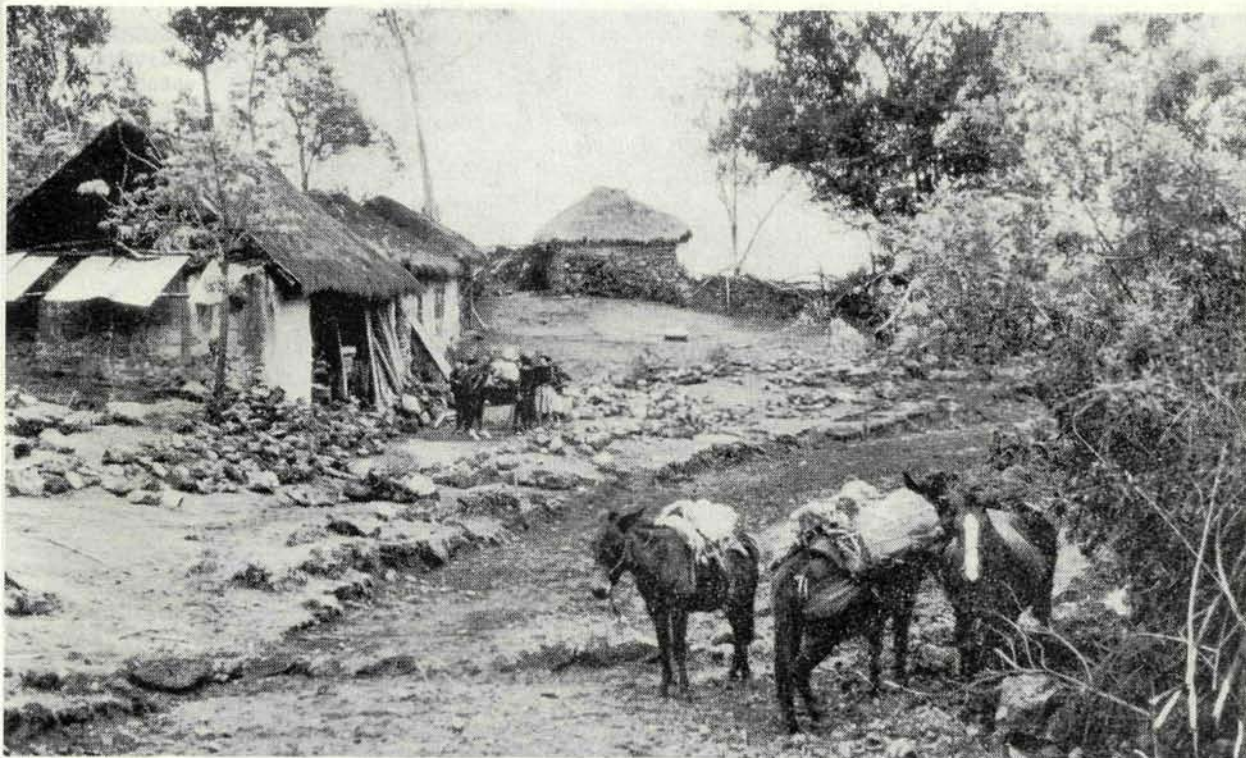
We continued over a narrow and dusty trail up to the white-washed stucco town of Pucyura at 2,650 m. Here the Inca once billeted his troops. It is the last government checkpoint, and we presented our papers from the Instituto Nacional de Cultura granting us permission to enter the Vilcabamba region, then continued southward through a pleasantly wooded terrain where wispy eucalyptus trees lined the road. By late morning we arrived at the small town of Huancacalla and set up camp in a small field.

That afternoon an Indian boy guided us across the Vilcabamba River over a bridge of rough logs, sticks, dirt and living vegetation. On the other side we climbed through high grass and thick bushes.

Mist swirled around us as we slogged up to an area of scrub grass where we found a large boulder. A scooped-out seat appeared to be carved into it, giving it a 'throne-like' appearance. Smooth-sided granite blocks lay scattered beyond. Crude, crumbling stone walls encircled the site, and in the very midst of it all stood a huge boulder as large as a house. Moss covered a portion of its surface but the

THE RUINS of Vilcabamba Viejo, the "Last Refuge," overgrown by forest.





PACK  
mules  
rest near  
homes  
along the  
trail to  
Haunca-  
calle.

rest — perfectly smooth, dark and shiny-wet — had various carved seats, steps and niches. On one of its broad sides we observed geometrical designs and 'pegs' in bas-relief and steep, narrow steps apparently going nowhere.

Doubtless, this was Yurac-Rumi ('white rock'), the heart of the sacred Incan shrine of Chuquipalta, desecrated by Ortiz and Garcia in 1570. It is now known as Nusta Espana. Records indicate that Chuquipalta lay above a spring overlooking a pool. Incan priests discerned apparitions in the murky water. We found no pool but could hear water bubble noisily through the smooth and angular grooves carved into granite. The mists swirled around us — an eerie and imposing site.

Climbing northwest we came to a broad expanse known as Rosas Pata. Before us, partly swathed in cloud, lay the ruined Inca fortress town of Vitcos.

The stonework here is rougher than that found at Cuzco, but impressive nonetheless. Gigantic slabs of granite formed lintels over large well-fitted blocks. Doorways exuded an aura of ponderousness and power. Walls in various stages of ruin rambled for hundreds of meters in different directions, some undulating along the tops of massive earthworks

over the tumbled edifices below.

A maze of ruined walls and structures opened out onto a broad field, possibly where Manco Inca was murdered by his Spanish guests as he played that fateful game of quoits. It is easy to conjure up a vision of the insidious deed amidst these melancholy surroundings. And there, far down the western ridge of this site, we could see the town of Pucyura where yet another Inca, Titu Cusi, died in 1571 after a night of drinking.

We left the next morning, climbing steadily to the west — a strenuous effort. As we emerged onto a sort of plateau, the town of Vilcabamba Nuevo lay before us, looking like an enchanted village. Low clouds and mists hovered just above the thatch roofs of its darkly weathered stone homes. An eerie, early afternoon darkness contrasted with the bright glare reflecting off snow-covered peaks. We walked past the bell tower of a ruined church, encountering no one save for three silent young boys.

Leaving Vilcabamba the New behind, we crossed the Colpacasa Pass. The cold rain froze our hands and faces while underneath our rain gear we sweated from exertion. Atop the pass stood a small shrine — an adobe hut housing paper flowers, an altar

and a Santa Rosa de Lima doll. We rested here.

As we descended, the climate changed and a refreshing warm breeze welcomed us. We wound down through fog, shrubs and low trees. Through the mud we occasionally glimpsed remnants of Incan highway stonework. Hills, rocks, vegetation, above and below, sparkled in the crystalline air.

Our slow but steady decline through the increasingly subtropical area took us across the Chalcha River and along the many rapids of the Pampaconas. High hills covered with lush vegetation rose steeply on either side. Prior to Bingham's 1911-12 expeditions over Colpacasa Pass, none of this area appeared on maps. Towards evening we climbed a slight rise above the left bank of the Pampaconas River and came to a gently rolling field of scrub grass. We kicked aside the cow dung and made camp.

We were told that this place, consisting of a single thatched hut, was known both as Hututo and Pampaconas. But the Pampaconas where the Spanish envoy met Titucusi in 1565 and where the invading Spanish forces converged in 1572 had been described as a good-sized town. It appears that we must have passed to the north of Pampaconas, closer to the



ASSORTED carved stone building materials at ruins of Vilcabamba.

river, and that we now found ourselves to the northwest — probably in Hututo.

Above us to the north a brilliant sunset cast a magical yellow glow over the lush hills. Though the evening grew uncomfortably cold, some Indians from the surrounding area appeared at our campsite with a battery-powered record player and entertained us with Quechua music and dancing.

The next morning we set off west-north-west, traveling through dense forest over a narrow trail which snaked along the sides of the hills. Occasionally, remnants of Incan trail provided stone steps through this swampy, highland jungle. At times the river receded far below us, obscured by trees. Several times we pressed against the hill to let campesinos pass us on the narrow trail. Leading mules laden with bags of coffee beans, they greeted us with 'Buenos dias, Viracocha.' (The Incan creator-god, known as Viracocha, is described as light complexioned, thus the term's use in greeting gringos.)

Crossing a particularly narrow and shaky stick-and-dirt bridge over a tributary of the Pampaconas, we emerged on a dry,

boulder-strewn flood plain. A small river flowed through the middle of this sea of boulders and joined the Pampaconas. Our guide called it the Rio Sootsootsingkana. It formed a lazy lagoon before flowing off as the Concevidayoc. It was here, in late afternoon, that we set up camp.

The next day, we left the plain below, traveling northward, ascending and descending the high jungle trails on our way through the rugged area of Chuquillusca and Huayna Pucara. We passed through an area where Machu Pucara must have been in the 16th century. At length we came upon a dwelling, identified both as San Martín and Concevidayoc. Within this area of inner Vilcabamba, more and more signs of recent human habitation appeared — burnt grass and forest, wooden fences, banana plants, citrus trees and coffee bushes. We were now within 'striking distance' of Espiritu Pampa.

In near-darkness and rain our party inched laboriously along until at last we stumbled, together with our animals, down one final steep slope of loose wet rocks and mud. Chilled and numb with exhaustion, we had reached Espiritu Pampa where we sprawled on the porch of the single

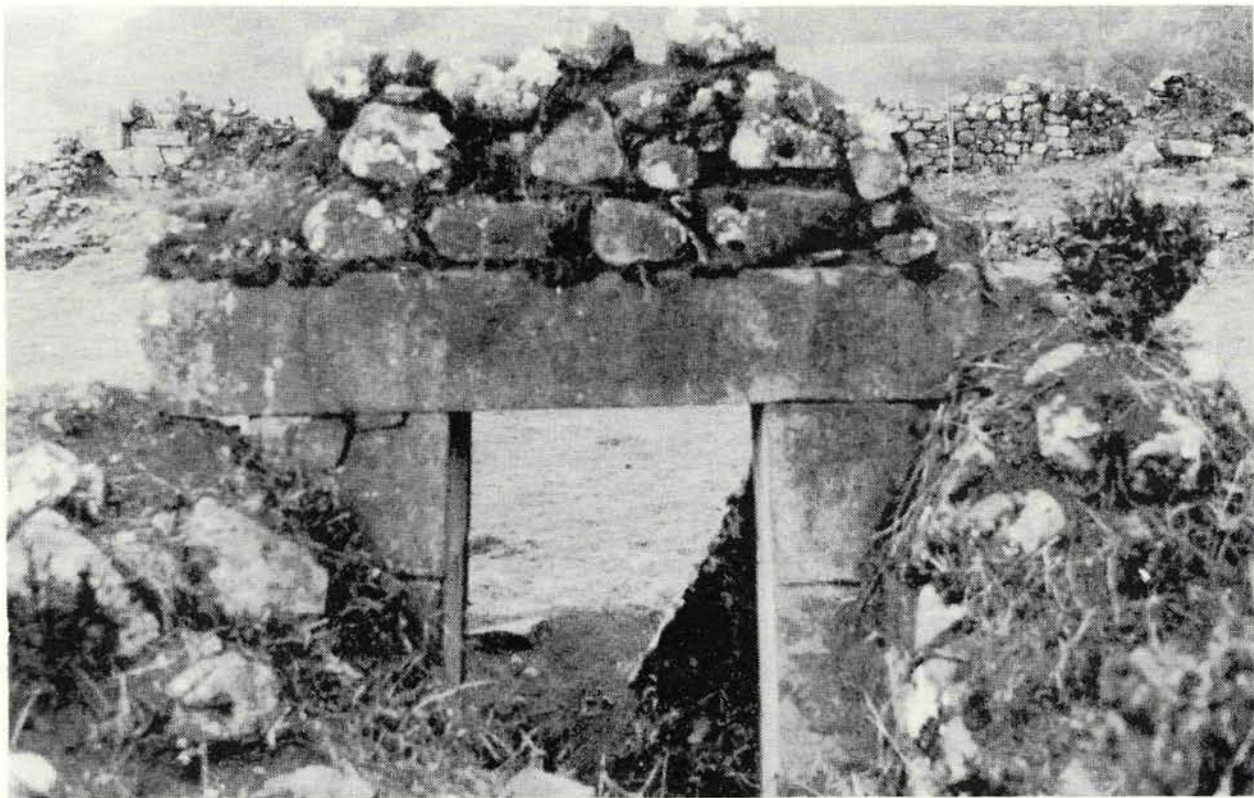
thatched hut that exists there.

It rained on our first day at Espiritu Pampa. At mid-morning our guide, together with some local Indians, left to cut a path to the ruins. In the early afternoon we set off for the ruined city. We headed south through thick forest, past patches of cleared forest and immense stumps. At one point our guide scrambled away to return with a campesino, a sort of 'guardian of the ruins.'

A mass of thick vegetation covered everything. We might have walked through the Inca city without seeing it, but the guardian repeatedly directed our attention to stone walls, rectangular rooms with doorways topped by mammoth lintels, streets and pathways. The stonework appeared somewhat cruder than at Vitcos and considerably more so than at Cuzco. Vilcabamba was obviously hastily constructed as a refuge. All the structures lacked roofs — the thatch having long ago rotted or burned away. Roots of gigantic trees enveloped some of the walls. Above, the jungle canopy blocked out the sun. The city seemed to spread out endlessly.

I was unable to distinguish any of the levels of the city described by Savoy. Some slabs of rock of various sizes and shapes,

THE RUINS  
of Vitcos  
at Rosas  
Pata.



leaning against one inside wall, were perhaps the 'building accessories' Savoy mentioned. Some thick walls had rectangular niches, while others contained those mysterious man-sized niches that one also sees at Colcampata, the palace of Inca Manco Capac in Cuzco, and Machu Picchu. Pushing further into this jungle metropolis we came across large boulders placed square in the middle of what was once a street. Our guide told us these comprised the 'tomb of Manco Inca.' Strange feelings of awe for that dark and moldering site followed us back that night to Espiritu Pampa.

That night when we returned from the ruins, our mule driver announced he had had enough. He would go no further. He considered the bridges up north too rickety for his mules. We could only persuade him to go as far as the first bridge. Just as the Inca Tupac Amaru fled to his refuge of Vilcabamba, so we too found it necessary to beat a hasty retreat. Without mules, it promised to be rough going. We set off early the next morning, eager to make as much time as possible. The first bridge was dangerous indeed, but not much more so than the others. Still, the mule driver refused to recon-

sider, so we loaded our backpacks and set out. Soon even the usually 'superhuman' Peruvians in our party seemed exhausted and were slipping on the path.

Over the next few days we continued in a northeasterly direction, following the Cosireni River and crossing its tributary, the San Miguel. After passing through the largely Indian town of Chuangiri we made our way through numerous small hamlets until we finally struggled into the dusty settlement of Monterrico, a frontier town-connected by a dirt road to Quillabamba, the capital of the province. A dusty thoroughfare ran through town, lined by cafes, houses and shops with flat roofs of corrugated tin. Inside, dim electric light bulbs hung suspended over pounded dirt floors.

In Monterrico we boarded a large truck loaded with bales of coffee, beans, bananas and animal hides, and began the long, bumpy ride to Quillabamba. From there we took the train to Cuzco.

On this return trip to Cuzco, the 'navel' of the Inca Empire, I savored the contentment that comes with fulfilling a dream. That fascination of mine for little-known and long-forgotten places — well, I had been to Vilcabamba! ■



ABOVE: Gregory Deyermenjian at Vilcabamba. The author is presently planning an expedition to "Psititi," a mysterious city thought to be the ultimate Inca retreat.