

THE GREAT INCA ROAD

“The Inca built roads everywhere to unite the villages of the world. The road is a rope that binds communities and allows us to live as one family.”

~Panfilio Sulca

The Inca were a native people of South America that lived over five hundred years ago. The Inca called their empire Tawantinsuyu which in Quechua, their local language, meant four suyus (regions). The four suyus were Chinchaysuyu, Antisuyu, Collasuyu, and Contisuyu. The last ruler, or Sapa Inca, ruled over two million square kilometers of land, all connected by the great road, the “Qhapaq Nan”. This road later became called the great Inca road. Sentence needed here...For example: This great road became known as the Great Incan Road. The Inca followed the religion of father sun (Inti). The Spanish conquered the Inca in 1532, destroying much of their history. The Inca built cities, terraces, aqueducts, storehouses, an empire, and it was all linked by Great Inca Road. As Panfilio Sulca said, “The Inca built roads everywhere to unite the villages of the world. The road is a rope that binds communities and allows us to live as one family.” The Inca road was built with such skill many parts still last today, nearly five hundred years later.

The Inca Road was made in two parts: the Coastal Road and the Royal Road. The Coastal Road ran two thousand five hundred miles along the coast while the Royal Road ran through the mountains sometimes in the form of cut out stairs for three thousand two hundred fifty miles. All together, the road was twenty five thousand miles long; enough to circle the Earth. Much of the road was built on older roads, but the Inca still did a lot of road building. The Royal Road went as high as twelve thousand feet above sea level. Some places like Machu Picchu, “Old mountain” in Quechua, were so high up that the workers chewed cocoa leaves to help with the altitude sickness. Sometimes walls ran along the road to prevent civilians from trampling the growing terraces (All the Inca buildings used no mortar so during earthquakes the stones bounced but did not crumble.). As Francisco Xerez said, “The road to Chincha passed through many villages...it was paved and bounded on each side by a wall.” Near the capital, Cusco, the road was large and paved with flagstones while in other places it was beaten dirt or grass. Two to three parallel roads were to be found in busy places. Often water channels ran beside or under the roads to prevent

flooding of the roads. In high places there would be rock piles (*apachetas*) where people would place rock to leave their weariness and thank *Pachamama* or Mother earth.

The Inca used boats, baskets (*oroya*), and, most famously, suspension rope bridges to cross rivers. “We found bridges like nets over a very large and powerful river...which was a marvelous thing to see” said Francisco Xerez. The bridges stretched across gaps of up to forty five meters in width and two hundred feet in height. Only one suspension bridge still remains today: the Q'eswachaka bridge which crosses a twenty eight meter span. The two villages on either side come together each year to repair the bridge. They weave grasses into thick ropes and use the old bridge to carry one end across. Then the leaders of each group make the handrail and meet in the center. After the three days of building the two villages have a celebration.

Inca measurements were based on human body part and time. The following list includes a few measurements:

- Rokima = a finger's length
- Kapa = 20 cm
- Khococ = 45 cm
- Rikara = 1.62 m
- Thatki = one pace
- Tupu = 6,000 thatki
- Larger distances measured in the time taken to travel

Cieza de Leon stated; “For it was their custom, when they traveled anywhere in this great realm, to go with great pomp and to be served with great luxury, as was their custom. It is said that, except when it was necessary for their service, they did not travel more than four leagues [~20km] a day. And so that their would be sufficient provisions for their people, at the end of each four leagues there were lodgings and storehouses with a great abundance of the things that could be had in this land; and even if it was uninhabited there had to be these lodgings and storehouses.” The road was of such grandor that the common peasant could not walk the road without permission from a higher official and either way, there were tolls at bridges. Only soldiers, nobility, llama caravans, and relay messengers (*chaski*) were allowed to go anywhere they pleased. The *chaski* carried everything from messages to fresh fish for the emperor. There were about two thousand *chaski wasi* or *cnozas tampu* (rest houses), one every two miles.. Because the Inca had no written language the *chaski* would have to tell the next *chaski* the message. The runners averaged six and a half minutes per mile so a message could travel one hundred fifty to two hundred fifty miles a day.

The Inca built storehouses (*colca*) along their roads. They were built of flagstones and had thatched roofs. The *colcas* were built with window and air passages under the walls to circulate the air and keep food fresh.

Hundreds of these store houses were built together. It is marvellous that the Inca did so much in a span of only about a hundred years. The Inca certainly had some of the greatest engineers in the ancient world.

“The whole road is of one design...made by hand and breaking through mountains chains and hillsides...it is one of the greatest constructions that the world has ever seen.”

~Miguel de Estete

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OUTLINE

I Quote

II The road in general

1 Length

2 Hight

3 Coastal and Royal road

III Use

1 Messengers

2 Trade

3 Easy access to everywhere

IV Building

1 Store houses

2 Tampu

3 Bridges

V Quote