

Figure 1. Construction of experimental raised fields in the Community of Bermeo, Bolivia (1992). (Photograph courtesy Clark Erickson, University of Pennsylvania Museum.)

in both the Southern Andes and the headwaters of the Amazon River employed sophisticated agricultural techniques that were sometimes even more productive and efficient than those practiced by peasant farmers in these two areas today.

In the Lake Titicaca region of southern Peru and northern Bolivia, archaeologists have found the remnants of an ancient agricultural technique called "raised field agriculture." In simple terms, the technique involved raising small plots of land above ground level by excavating shallow canals around the plots. Earth from the excavations was piled on the plots in order to raise them. The result was a lattice-work of plots and canals. The plots were renewed and the canals kept flowing by piling mud from the canals on the plots. This technique was effective because, among other reasons, it allowed the plots to be used constantly, kept them fertile over time, and helped retain heat, which