

## **Dr. Cock's Mummy Research Lab**

In our recent visit to Lima, my daughter Alana and I had the very great privilege of going with a guide for a private visit to the research facility and lab of archaeologist Dr. Guillermo Cock. They are located in a home in the Sucro residential area of Lima. We were there to learn about his and his team's excavations of mummy bundles (one or more adult and child mummies sometimes with personal effects wrapped together in thick layers of cotton which drew moisture out of the bodies).

Initially Dr. Cock explained the project, showing us images of some of the site and some of the mummies on his computer. Then Dr. Cock escorted us upstairs, where over 2200 mummies are housed. Very generously Dr. Cock said we could take photos. We could even touch some of the 500 year-old treasures, which surely belong in museums. Some were silver, some copper, some textile.

Currently Dr. Cock is working on this project with the assistance of five graduate students from North America. They come from Penn, Tulane, U.C. San Diego and a Canadian university.

The 20-acre area where they unearthed the mummies is on the outskirts of Lima in an area claimed by squatters in 1989. A highway was due to be constructed and the Peruvian Institute of Culture asked Dr. Cock to explore the site before they started. In 1999, the area was irradiated and evidence of a cemetery was found. Dr. Cock with others started exploring and after three months had discovered a large number of bundles (300 individuals) to realize they had a significant dig. After unearthing 985 mummy bundles (with sometimes up to six bodies in one bundle), they had used up their financial resources. Cameras were destroyed from dust and all the equipment was virtually useless.

In 2001, Dr. Cock then turned to the National Geographic Society, with whom he had worked before, and a cooperative effort was started. In fact, the National Geographic featured Dr. Cock's dig as the cover story in May 2002 issue of its magazine and also has a video on the subject.

What they eventually found was an almost perfect example of an Inca society that existed some 500 years ago. Low and high ranking people; old and young; male and female. Dr. Cock said, "Such a cross section would make for a perfect polling group."

Eventually they took 34,000 people from the one cemetery. There is still enough work for 25 years but funding is tight, for it takes \$15,000 and seven people to open one bundle. The work is painstaking and enlightening at the same time.

Our meeting with Dr. Cock and having him show us his lab was certainly a travel highlight, a rare travel opportunity. We can thank Mark Wheeler, regional marketing director of Abercrombie & Kent in Lima, for making this visit possible.