Ausangate

TRANSCRIPT

kontentreal presents

Because of Ausangate, we are here, we all exist. We give him offerings and he gives us everything in return. Ausangate takes care of everything, animals and people. Thanks to Ausangate, there are plenty of animals and food, because we make offerings to him. Ausangate has always been like that. He gave us all those things. He gives us potatoes and chuño. In ancient times, the shamans gave the best offerings, k'intus to the Apus.

Ausangate
A film by Andrea Heckman and Tad Fettig

NARR
In the Andes of Southern Peru, the high mountains are considered the most powerful of the traditional deities. Ausangate is the highest and the most respected mountain worshipped from Cuzco to Lake Titicaca. From its snows, sacred waters flow past Machu Picchu to the Amazon.

Quechua people who live on the slopes of Ausangate have maintained their way of life largely unknown to the outside world and in close relationship to the mountain, much as their ancestors did before them. Ausangate, at 20,800' is a sacred peak or Apu, a powerful mountain inspiring the lives and rituals of the Quechua. Qoyllulr Rit'I, the largest pilgrimage in Peru, draws thousands of people to Ausangate each year to make offerings and in return to receive the mountain's blessings.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA,PHD.
Well, I grew up looking at Ausangate, since my childhood knowing that it is the most important peak that all the people watch for signs to find out what is going on. Is the snow too deep? Is the snow too low? We observe the relationship of the sun's direction in specific times of the year, like this. But most important it is the Apu of the Cusco region, and the owner of this entire region.

NARR
Dr. Andrea Heckman has been traveling to Ausangate for over twenty years. Each year, she returns to study the textiles, the rituals, to visit her many godchildren and the weavers, and to work as a trekking guide.

Andrea
Ausangate is a sacred Apu, it's a mountain spirit and when you're here you have no doubt that that's exactly what it is, it's so powerful. And the Quechua people who live around it, they have this relationship to it, they're connected to the wind and the thunder and you never know from year to year when you come back, what will have changed.

NARR
Theirs is a dynamic living culture in the midst of absorbing new ways that that are useful to them while preserving their traditions.

NARR
They weave their stories into cloth reinforcing their way of life. Their logic is distinctly Andean, which is quite different from ours. They keep what works for them and discard what does not.

NARR
For many people, pride in their Inca heritage, in the arts, architecture and Inca traditions is blended with modern beliefs. When Catholicism came to the Andes attempting to convert Andean beliefs to Christianity, resistance went high into the mountains and stayed there in certain practices and in the hearts of the people.
Some symbols mesh together to represent diverse ideas within one expression, such as the image of the Virgin that is both the sacred mother to the Catholics and the fertile Pachamama for the Quechua.

The land is pachamama, or great mother earth. Her fertility along with the rain and waters from the mountains brings good crops and abundant wild grasses for the llamas and alpacas. The llamas are pack animals, and in the past goods were transported in great llama caravans. The alpacas have fine hair that is used for the best yarn. Both animals provide pelts for beds, hair for clothing, blankets and ropes and dung that is dried and harvested for fuel. The people care for their animals by grazing them in high pastures during the dry season and protecting them in stone corrals at night.

NARR
The city of Cuzco was the imperial capital of the Inca Empire or Tahuantinsuyo, as it was known to them. Today it is an important center for tourism and commerce for Peru. Faced with the realities of modernization, some Quechuas feel pressured to move to cities in search of jobs and education, thus separating themselves from nature and from Ausangate. The traditional ways of the Quechua are contrary to the competitive individualism prevalent in cities, and as much as possible Quechuas attempt to maintain their own customs within the urban setting.

NARR
In Cusco, Dr. Jorge Flores Ochoa is an anthropologist at the University of San Antonio de Abad and is the director of the city's Inca Museum. He speaks of the concept of Andean reciprocity called ayni.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA
Ayni is the spirit of social relations. Ayni is the same feeling as life itself. Ayni is to give something and receive the same in return, some other time. The most accurate way to translate it is as reciprocity. Reciprocity is something fundamental to Andean relations. It is the form for survival in the Andes so that one can have access to products, to riches, to people and in the end achieve everything through ayni.

ROMAN VIZCARRA
You make ayni not only when it's convenient to you. I need to work my cornfield so I ask for ayni with all my brothers and sisters of the community and they come help me. And I will do the same thing for them. Today for me, tomorrow for you is the golden rule. But it's more than that because you are doing actually ayni with everything and constantly.

When we do ayni, we have achieved the balance. We are unrivaled in the eyes of everything. So, when we choose the three leaves, after we're greeting all the mountains and the lakes, then we share with our brothers and sisters. And then we (blow) give our breath, samay. We give the breath of life, our intention is put in the leaves and the leaves are charged and it becomes a wonderful tenderness, act of cariño, munay and I say, Halpay Kush unchis.

NARR
Often local ritualists or misayoqs such as Sebastian are called in to speak directly to the mountain on the community's behalf or for those traveling to Ausangate. In the Andes, the coca leaf is a sacred sacrament offered to the Apus as ritualists blow their breath over the leaves or burn offerings to carry the messages in smoke up to the mountain spirits.

NARR
Coca is also exchanged between people for ayni or as a gift. It is chewed and brewed into

teas to help with altitude sickness and is often consulted in readings to predict the future.

SEBASTIAN
This is to the Apu, Apu Ausangate, the apu of the highlands. This is to pachamama, the mother earth.

SEBASTIÁN
Salud. Urpichay.

JUAN VICTOR NUÑEZ DEL PRADO
Coca is the base of our ritual; no ritual exists without coca. Coca is the favorite food of the Apus. With coca, we establish our relations of ayni with the Apus and we also establish our relations of ayni between us. It is fundamental to our relationship with the sacred.

NARR
For Quechua who've gone to cities, returning is a homecoming full of excitement and anticipation. The rapid urban pace disappears as travelers return to their rural homes. Ausangate is at first a distant glacier, but grows larger and larger as the long journey continues until the enormous peaks are near, and the presence of the mountain god permeates all life.

NARR
On the way to Ausangate is the important regional center and village of Pitumarka.

Timoteo talking to weavers

NARR
Timoteo Ccarita is a former mayor of Pitumarka and organized the Mother's club to help women regain their knowledge of natural dyes and forgotten weaving techniques.

TIMOTEO
I don't remember when but one government prohibited people to weave the designs of the Incas. So the people of the countryside forgot how to make these weavings. Now we study in the museums and have found a way to weave these animals and designs in colonial textiles.

NARR
Weaving is memory, a visual language of symbols. It is identity and a sense of belonging to the community, to the ancestors and to the environment.

Girls learn how to pick up the design threads, or pallay, as young children. Later they teach their children, nieces and grandchildren in the same way that they learned from their mothers, grandmothers and aunts.

By actively wearing the symbols of lakes, animals, the sun, stars, plowed fields and flowers, the women visually reinforce their way of life and teach their children how to be a good a Quechua.

TIMOTEO
The people of the countryside don't really know how to speak Spanish or how to write, so the designs of their textiles are really their writing.
They put in much about agriculture, their beliefs, marriages, Also, they put in the textiles, their rituals to the mother earth, all this is to the Apus.

They express themselves in the weavings in a way that other people of the countryside understand. They have woven their stories inside the textiles so that they will not forget. To me it is the writing of the Incas.

Timoteo talks to old smiling woman

TIMOTEO: What are you doing?
WOMAN: I'm spinning, papa.
TIMOTEO: What material are you spinning?
WOMAN: Sheepswool, papa.

TIMOTEO
Our ancestors used natural dyes. We are recovering these dyes and colors that they used. The weavers know the plants for different colors. Sometimes we did not remember the plants for the natural dyes but now we are remembering the ancient dyes and have recovered them.

TIMOTEO
Ausangate was the greatest god or largest Apu for Pitumarka. For this reason, they weave the Apu.

NARR
Continuing beyond Pitumarka, the long and dusty road passes by many small villages until the end of the motorized travel in Tinqui, which is the most important local market for Quechuas on the northern side of Ausangate.

NARR
In the Sunday market people socialize as they exchange goods. The old exists alongside the new. They are exposed to television, roads and electricity. Small restaurants with televisions

offer a moment of fascination. But soon most are on the way back to their own villages.

In Tinqui and nearby villages, local oufitters hire their pack animals and services to outsiders who want to enter the high mountains for days of hiking and camping to get near the great Apu.

NARR
Luis Pacsi Huilca was born near Ausangate in Mahuayani. He is a head arriero who owns many pack animals and is well known throughout the region. He often works with his son Miguel.

LUIS PACSI
To see all of Ausangate on this side, we'll go up Arapa pass, down to Pucaqocha passing Yanaqocha. We're going to do a ritual in Pucaqocha.

NARR
Luis, along with his second wife, participated in the breakup of the old hacienda Lauramarka, a large colonial power that had ruled this area for many years. Land was redistributed to the local Quechua farmers, granting them legal title to their own property. Luis was the first president of the new cooperative controlled by the people after the national agrarian reform in the 1980's.

LUIS PACSI
I was the president of the cooperative when the hacienda broke up. Everything you see here was part of it. As president, I learned to drive and I had an official truck. There were 18 communities.

NARR
Luis sent his son, Miguel and his daughter, Delia, to the University of Cuzco to study tourism so they could find work. Both he and his children return often to Ausangate, to their roots.

MIGUEL PACSI
My name is Miguel Pacsi Mayu. I am very fortunate to have a father like I have. But when my mother died, then my father had another wife. It was not a good time for us. The decision was made for us to go to Cuzco to start our studies. At times, it was very hard. The things in the coutryside do not have value in the city. The city people value other things and you have to have money.

Even so, I found a way to feel happy and with thanks, I learned many things and I have much more strength in life.

The people who live here have a tremendous richness. They are not so much materialistic. People have a relationship to the gods. God is in nature and in the mountains.

Here we depend on the spirituality of the mountain. Technology is further away. To achieve perfection, to learn this, here we use our eyes and walk far. When you sit with an open heart in the natural world, you can feel the spirit of the place.

NARR
Water is life. The rains arrive in October and last until April. During the dry season the Quechuas say the pachamama has become

very thirsty. Without water no life endures. Quechuas understand this today just as the Incas did centuries ago when they channeled rivers and constructed elaborate baths and water fountains. For them, lakes are natural reservoirs guarding and containing the meltoff of the Apu.

MIGUEL PACSI
This place is called Uturungoqocha, qocha means lake. Why is this place so important? People who live near here in Ausangate believe that this is where the forces of nature are born like lightning and hail.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA
I'd like to mention the belief of the herders from the highlands known as the puna. For them Ausangate is the owner of the alpaca and llama herds. He is the one who controls the herds.

And Ausangate has a daughter that takes care of the alpacas and the llamas. This daughter allowed the llamas to come out to this world, through the water springs, the lakes and to serve the human beings. That is why he demands the Quechuas take good care of them and that animals be treated like people, not really like animals.

NARR
In the high mountains, extended social networks called ayllus are a profound concept inherited from their Inca ancestors. People living and working together sustain life by helping one another with tasks like new

roofs and caring for the animals.

JUAN NUNEZ DEL PRADO
Ayllu is another fundamental concept. Ayllu is basically family. So, our nearest immediate family is our first Ayllu, after that, it extends to our bigger ayllu of family and friends and finally into a karu Ayllu, and into the distant family and so on. I would say that they are spheres of affection.

NARR
Further up the mountain is Pacchanta, a place well known for its weavers and fine textiles. Luis, Miguel and Andrea greet locals with gifts of coca and a soccer ball for the school.

Andrea addresses the group in Spanish.

NARR
Luis addresses the community about working with guides, tourism, expeditions and trekkers who come to Ausangate. He explains about keeping the camping areas clean and the need to provide grazing for pack animals.

NARR
Allyu by allyu, community members voice opinions about how to encourage the occasional trekking groups for the good of the local economy and how it helps provide money for their families.
Luis explains that he will come back next July with more groups.

NARR
In Pacchanta, Maria Merma Gonzalo is one of the community's best weavers. Because Andrea is godmother to many of Maria's children and grandchildren, she returns annually to visit Maria. Maria's daughter Silea, like her mother, is one of the finest weavers in Pacchanta.

ANDREA
Maria lives in a community called Pacchanta. There's scattered houses and Maria's been an important person there for a long time because

she's one of the finest weavers and that's how I got to know Maria and why Maria accepted me and allowed me to live at the house and how I learned to weave, learn the designs from this area.

NARR
Highland Quechua women weave their beliefs into the textiles. The diamond patterns known as qochas represent lakes of many sizes and shapes and various colors which metaphorically express the value of water and how it is naturally stored in lakes. A zigzag or qenqo represents the rivers as they bring snowmelt from Ausangate's glaciers.

Young women learn to weave many designs and how to pick out the patterns and in these

designs they are telling their communal stories. In doing so, they help the community sustain itself and they show their personal value as a potential wife. When asked why they do this, some say, "Because it is like it has always been done." And others say, "You know because it is how the Incas did it" reinforcing their continued connection to their past.

MARIA
I sell these scarves, traditional shoulder cloths and ponchos I make along with beer and soft drinks. Yes, from early times, Ausangate has been ours. We respect him. He is our protector divinity because he is the Apu. We give thanks to him. We make offerings to him so we will stay well.

I always weave to Apu Ausangate. We weave symbols about Ausangate such as lakes, condors, little birds, ducks and llamas.
I teach my children. I teach my relatives. This is for my family and me. My house is here and they weave here in this place with me.

MARIA
We grow crops only in January, February and March. We work mostly farming and herding. Women clean, prepare the ground and remove the clumps. We work in these highlands. Men use the foot plow or chakitakhlla.

NARR
Over the centuries, Andeans have perfected freeze-drying potatoes called chuño and moraya. These potatoes will last a year or more in storage and provide nutrition for the family when there are no crops.

MARIA
We chose potatoes to make chuño, separating the smallest from the largest. First, second, third quality. We spread them on the ground for three nights and the potatoes are exposed to the cold at night. To freeze dry the moraya, we put them into water until it expels "leche" (starch) We do this first. If we keep the potatoes in cold without putting them into water it makes a lesser quality of moraya called ch'olo.

MAN'S VOICE
Papa wayru…papa wayru.

NARR
A pachamanka, an earthen oven, is constructed from stones in the field and a whole sheep is cooked at once for some special occasion when everyone feasts upon it together.

MARIA
Because of our Apu, we exist. That is the reason others come to our Apu Ausangate. They come from far away, from all over, from other countries, in order to have Ausangate improve their lives. I think he is for all of us. Ausangate is for us all, so that his sons all over the world will live. I believe that.

Andrea and Maria talking about Ausangate designs.

NARR
Pacchantan weavers have started using natural dyes again and Andrea learns that Maria has been experimenting with other designs from

Ccachin that she saw in Andrea's book, but Maria likes her own community designs better because they show that she is from Pacchanta and she continues to weave her traditional designs learned from her mother and grandmother.

Andrea and group discuss other designs.

NARR
Women's hands are never idle and everyone in the family spins yarn for weaving on drop spindles. Luis, an accomplished knitter and spinner, compares his spinning to theirs.

NARR
The journey continues from Pacchanta around Ausangate. High mountain passes are marked by stones carried there to add to rock cairns called apachetas as a thank you to the pachamama for safely crossing the mountains.

As they move farther up into the mountains, Luis and the cook, Incarno, share food with other Quechuas. Near Comerqocha they encounter Nasario, the son of Mariano Turpo, who was a well-known ritualist living near the high Campa pass.

NARR
Nasario is a pampa misayoq, and he is trained to make offerings to Ausangate. His father was an alto misayoq or the highest level of Andean ritualist known to speak directly to Ausangate on behalf of the people. Very few altomisayoqs exist today.

Nasario and Andrea discuss designs.

NASARIO
This is a path. This is sonqo, the heart. These are fields and the mother earth.

NARR
Nasario stays at his father's house because at over fifteen thousand feet, it is one of the closest places to commune with Ausangate. He offers to make a despacho for the Apu using his father's altar or shrine.

Nasario conducts the offering.

NARR
Later in the evening, Nasario will burn the offering he is making and the prayers will be carried on the smoke to Ausangate. They believe that when they feed the mountain its favorite food and gifts, the mountain will in turn answer their prayers with blessings and abundance, and they will then make more offerings to show their gratitude to Apu Ausangate.

Nasario continues the offering.

ANDREA
We've been walking for three days now, from Tinqui to Upis. And now we're here at Ausangateqocha and when we come down the other side we'll be at Uchuy FInaya and that's where my godson, Roosevelt lives. He's a remarkable young man. He was born with a spinal condition, so he walks with these little silver crutches and in this kind of terrain that's a pretty amazing feat.

Andrea meets with Roosesvelt's mother.

ANDREA
Two years ago when we came through here, I became his godmother. Being a godmother means that you promise to come back and that you're committed to help in any way.

The haircutting

NARR
Andrea and photographer Andre Lambertson became Roosevelt's godparents by participating in his first haircutting, a Quechua rite of

passage from childhood into adulthood. Family, godparents and friends all cut the child's hair together to mark the child's changed social status within their allyus and their communities.

At 14,500', Roosevelt's life is not easy but he touches the hearts of those who know him and many others who cross the high passes near his home.

Dancing

NARR
Ausangate is not only important to those who live nearest to it. Distant communities maintain a link to the mountain as well.

Dancers from as far as Bolivia, northern Chile and Lima prepare each year for the pilgrimage to Qoyllur Rit'i. Each community sends a group of dancers and supporters to represent their villages. Those who make the arduous journey ask for blessings for those who cannot. Here in Chinchero, dancers begin to shed everyday lives for the mythical characters they will portray and to gather their finest costumes and clothing for the return to Ausangate.

The ukuku characters, the bear-like creatures that link heaven and earth, prepare to stand all night in the freezing cold on the glacier of Colque Punku, which symbolizes the silver doorway between the eastern lowland jungle and the peaks of nearby Ausangate. By its nature, the pilgrimage transforms the everyday into sacred time and space.

Girls dance.

NARR
Qoyllur Rit'i culminates in a trek 3,000 feet up the mountain trail to a glacier in the Sinkara Valley where pilgrims pray for many days and nights.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA
Qoyllur Rit'i has many faces. It has several meanings. It started as a pilgrimage mostly for peasants. When I went for the first time, approximately forty-five years ago, it was almost entirely peasants, even peasants from the highest Andean plateaus or the puna. Very few went from the city of Cusco then.

(JFO cont.)
And all of them go on pilgrimage to reach the sanctuary that is located at approximately 4,500 meters high, where they worship the Christ of Qoyull Rit'i. This is an apparition that emerged in 1780 coinciding with the rebellion of Tupac Amaru.

ROMAN VIZCARRA
The feasts that are happening there in Ausangate, Qoyllur Rit'i, are important to climbing to the source of water, of life and going to the glacier to the peaks of Ausangate.
That's why the name Qoyllur Rit'i. Qoyllru, it's the star, Rit'i is snow. It's the star of the snow.

NARR
The dancers ascend, carrying their costumes, huge candles and sacred objects, stopping along the way at the twelve stations of the cross to pray.

NARR
Upon arrival pilgrims buy milagros or small pins to wear representing the miracles they have come to ask El Señor. Some buy plastic buses and trucks in hopes of being blessed with a real one. Others go up to the Virgin of Fatima shrine to construct minature stone houses and corrals to ask El Señ or de Qoyllur Rit'i for help building their own houses back home. Weavers often take a partially finished weaving to ask for help to finish it All is prayer.

NARR
Syncretism of beliefs is evident outside the church as pilgrims pray to Jesus and the Virgin along with the Apus and the Pachamama all together at the same time. The official Catholic myth tells of two young herders who were miraculously turned into stones.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA
Rocks were important in the Andean culture, they were sacred objects, the huacas (natural shrines) and nowadays, the festival, the pilgrimage has three important huacas. The huaca that is inside the temple, the one where the image of the boy is painted. The huaca that is at the exit of the temple, and that in the past was called the stone of the devil, and now is called the stone of the virgin. The Catholics have placed an image on top of that one.

ROMAN VIZCARRA
The rock that is there in Ausangate, in Qoyllur Rit'i, it's a huge meteoritic rock that was sent at that time. And that became a holy site.

NARR
Many dance groups tell the mythical stories year after year, and important among them are the ancient chuncho characters who portray the primal past and are associated with the jungle.

Such dancers as these white faced Capac Colla dancers symbolize the rich merchants from Lake Titicaca. Others are the colonial hacendados, and still others like the Capac Negros represent rich blacks as legendary characters.

The Brotherhood of Qoyllur Rit'i watches over the events and controls the festivities, the crowds and makes sure no one drinks alcohol. This is the only Andean festival where alcohol is not allowed.

The ukukus or those bear characters, some say they really depict llamas and alpacas, prepare to go to stand all night on the glacier. They speak in high falsetto voices and have the right

to ask for food or anything they want. They are the tricksters and some are the Pauluchas, or enforcers of the pilgrimage rules.

The great processions take place when all dancers and pilgrims circle from the church taking the cross with El Senor de Qoyllur Rit'i on a journey to the rock of the Virgin of Fatima and then cirlcling back to the large balcony of the church.

NARR
During these many days and nights they intentionally create chaos with the loud bands and the blasts of dynamite that echo in the valleys and call out to the Apus.

This reflects the imbalances of the outer world, the world of unjust social structures. For this period of altered time and space, rules are forgotten and the impossible is accomplished. Dancers move up and down the mountain in prayer.

Quechua life nestles into the mountain. Around the church, prayer, devotion and celebration continue throughout the night. Many dance, some rest and then in the pre-dawn cold, they head up the glacier. As they ascend, the intensity deepens.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA
And the other elements are so Andean, too. Some of them are obviously of pre-Colombian origin, like the importance of the snow, and the climbing to the snow peak.
To climb to the snow peak to do the ceremonies on the snow, the purpose of the ceremonies is showing their identification with Ausangate, the great massif, the most important of this region.

NARR
After days of laughter, sacrifice and blessings, and by standing all night on the glacier, dancers win the privilege of bringing with them a large chunk of glacial ice that is melted and drunk by all for good health. The pilgrimage is about renewal and the acknowledgement of the sacredness of water.

On Tuesday morning, the ukukus descend the glacier. After mass, many pilgrims descend to Mahuayani and return home to their villages or Cuzco. But about one thousand dancers walk on for another day and night in the moonlight over several high passes until they arrive at the place where they await the dawn together in Tayankani.

The Inca identified strongly with the sun, and as the sun rises over the distant high ridge, their decsendents drop to their knees with raised arms to welcome the sun's warmth and the peacefulness of sunrise. On this final morning, they pay respect to a renewed, once again balanced and harmonious world after the many days and nights of ritual chaos.

From atop the ridge, dancers descend symbolically forming a large cross for Ausangate to see.

JORGE FLORES OCHOA
And the descent to Tayankani is also impressive. As groups that never have seen each other in a whole year start to descend making those figures and they interwine, it seems like they were weaving. And since they go alone covering all the descent to the rhythm of Chuncho until they reach Tayankani.

NARR
Continuing their dances in respect to the mountain, the pilgirms begin their journeys to their homes, displaying their regalia for a last time until the next year.

NARR
After the annual pilgrimage to Qoyllur Rit'i, all the exhausted dancers and supporters along with the distant pilgrims and the Quechua people of the region of Ausangate, return to their lives renewed through the spirit of sacrifice, the sacred and the mountain spirit.

While change is inevitable even in Ausangate-- for the Quechua-- their connection to the mountain and the land sustains them. All is homage to Apu Ausangate. All is homage to the mountain spirit.

This film is dedicated to the people of Ausangate.

To the memory of Silea, Maria's daughter, who with her baby and unborn child, died when struck by lightning in 2004.

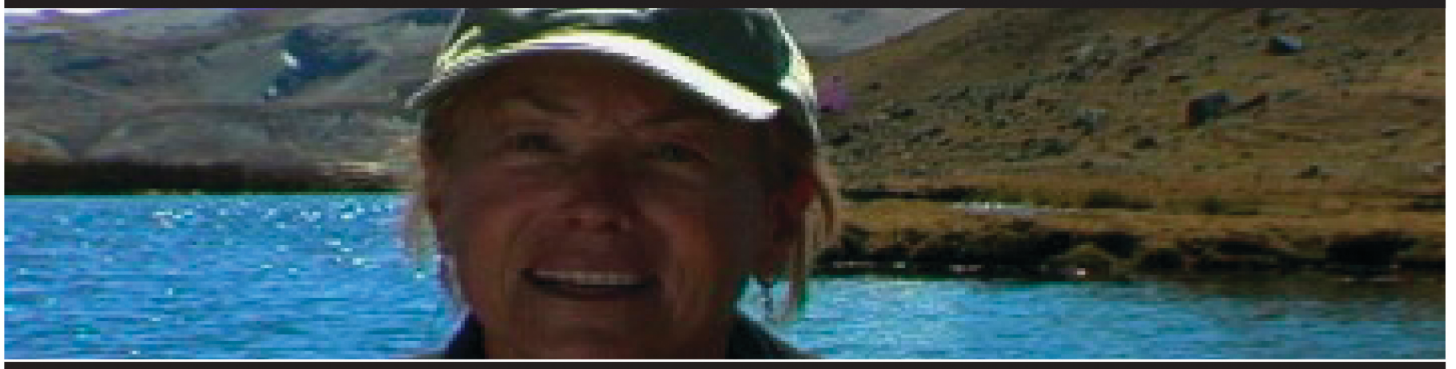
Roosevelt started school in Chilca last year, down valley from his parents who aspire for him to move to Cuzco to become a professional.

Luis' work as an outfitter continues to thrive and Miguel is one of the most popular trekking guides.

Timoteo works with more weaving groups in the Pitumarka Valley each year, retrieving lost textile traditions.

Nasario traveled to Washington DC as a consultant for the Quechua exhibit at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian.

The governments of Peru and Brazil are building a Trans-South American highway cutting through Tinqui to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.



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