

GLOBETROTTER

An enchanting, exhausting trek to the Incas' lost city



Delaware native Claire Bushey is traveling around the world on her own.

Nine days ago I finished hiking the 27-mile Inca Trail in the Peruvian Andes. I no longer stink, thanks to the hot shower at my hostel, a luxury unavailable on the trail.

I decided to hike the *Camino del Inca* long before I realized what was involved. (This is how I start most of my projects.)

The trail winds through mountains and cloud forest, sometimes following the original stone road built by the Incas, the indigenous people who ruled an empire stretching from Colombia to Chile before losing it to the Spanish conquistadors 500 years ago.

It ends at Machu Picchu, the "Lost City of the Incas" discovered in 1911 by American explorer Hiram Bingham. The site, abandoned by the Incas for unknown reasons, contains temples and a sundial, causing experts to speculate it functioned pri-

marily as a religious center.

The trail's highest point, "Dead Woman's Pass" in English, reaches 13,000 feet. That's almost half the height of Mount Everest. But I figured plenty of fat and sweaty tourists hike the trail each year, so I could too, right?

Actually, no. The five other hikers in my tour group were decidedly fitter than I; there was even a personal trainer from New Zealand who carried his backpack all four days.

I, being an idiot, also carried my pack for the majority of the trip because I was too cheap to hire a porter. Tour companies hire these men to carry camping equipment, a service also available to the feeble ... for a price.

The mountains we walked on the first day were green with eucalyptus trees and the hallucinogenic San Pedro cactus.



AP file

The ruins of Machu Picchu in the Peruvian Andes.

Snowy peaks framed the horizon beyond the Río Urubamba. I was enchanted.

On day two I was concerned less with scenery and more with breathing. The path

See HIKE — G6

