

Hiram Bingham, (Born Nov. 19, 1875,—died June 6, 1956)

By Susan Selk

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As a boy, Hiram Bingham learned how to climb mountains from his father who was a missionary. He did not know it at the time, but this skill would become very important to Hiram when he started to explore. Hiram Bingham did not start out as an explorer, he was not an archeologist; he was a history professor and a writer, who was interested in South America and its history. He also believed that visiting the places he was teaching and writing about made him a better teacher and writer. He travelled throughout South America to do research for the classes he was teaching and the books he was writing.

In 1909 Hiram Bingham was in Peru doing research on a biography he was writing about a South American liberator named Simón Bolívar. A local man convinced him to visit some ruins. At the time, some people believed these ruins were the legendary lost city of the Incas called Vilcabamba. Bingham visited the ruins, but did not believe that they were from an ancient Incan city. He did find the idea of looking for lost cities waiting to be found very exciting though.

Two years later, in 1911, Bingham returned to Peru, to climb the Andes Mountains to look for Vilcabamba, the lost city of the Incas. On July 24th, just a few days after starting his expedition, Bingham and his group climbed a 2,000 foot tall slope of a mountain and came upon an abandoned stone city, left in ruins. No one had ever recorded that the city even existed. Bingham had discovered what we now call Machu Picchu. That was more than 100 years

ago. Today as many as 700,000 people visit the ruins at Machu Picchu each year.

Machu Picchu was his most famous discovery, but Bingham also found several other Incan ruins. He was certain that more important discoveries were not far away, so he left Machu Picchu after only a few hours of exploring to look for more ruins. During his 1911 expedition, Bingham also found the ruins of an Incan capital called Vitcos, and the jungle city of Espiritu Pampa. Many people today believe that the jungle city of Espiritu Pampa was Vilcabamba, the place where the Incan king fought his final battle against the Spanish invaders. It was a difficult journey climbing dangerous mountains but Hiram never gave up.

In 1912, Hiram Bingham returned to Peru one more time. During this expedition, he found the ruins of a mysterious town now called Llactapata. It is just two miles from Machu Picchu but even today no one is sure why it existed.

Today, all these ancient ruins are being studied by archeologists from all over the world. By studying these ruins, people get a chance to see and learn about ancient history.

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