



6000 kilometers across the Andes...

Colombia, Ecuador, Peru

Qhapaq Ñan

Bolivia, Argentina, Chile

THE GRAND ROUTE OF THE INCAS

BY MEGAN SON AND LAURENT GRANIER



PRESENTATION

A journey never before seen

Following the Cordillera of the Andes from north to south, a journey of over eighteen months in six different countries, covering 6000 kilometers on foot between 800 and 5000 meters in altitude: this is the crazy idea of an unusual couple that leaves in search of the legendary route of the Incas, Qhapaq Ñan. From Quito, Ecuador, passing through Cusco, Peru to Aconcagua, Argentina, it is the first time that this archeological treasure has been walked and documented in its entirety!

An incredible human adventure

Megan and Laurent undertake this voyage on foot (at the time of the Incas, the Grand Route was known for only being accessible by foot) with no outside logistics, no tent or food supplies. In addition to harsh conditions and dangerous situations, their journey is full of surprises. Relying on their passion, their endurance and the help of the Andean communities whom they meet along the road, the efforts of our two adventurers are not without rewards: breathtaking landscapes, incredible ecosystems, majestic archeological sites, and unforgettable encounters.

An exhilarating quest

Following the Grand Route of the Incas is not as easy as it may sound: entire sections have been erased over time, and have been forgotten by local populations. To find and reconstruct the puzzle of this epic route, Megan and Laurent research information from both local inhabitants and specialists. Much more than a physical achievement or a trip across the continent, their project is motivated by the need to preserve the Qhapaq Ñan, of a sincere desire to discover and better understand a region through its exceptional archeological, natural and cultural heritage.



QHAPAQ ÑAN - A MYTHIC ROUTE FORGOTTEN BY MAN

Imagine stone paving up to 20 meters wide, dressed steps climbing heights of over 4500m, walkways over water and suspension bridges spanning raging rivers. Envision the Inca himself, seated on a litter lined with feathers and plated with gold and silver, being carried by more than 80 lords, the road before him being swept and adorned with petals...Or visualize single runners, chasquis, carrying messages on knotted strings called quipus at lightening speed in relay from one end of the empire to the other...



The Qhapaq Ñan is a mythic route of the Andes and on the arrival of the Conquistadors, traveled the entire length of the cordillera on more than 6000 kilometers. The backbone of a circulatory system of roads that covered more than 40,000 km which reached both the Pacific coast and the Amazon, the Qhapaq Ñan connected populated areas, administrative centers, agricultural and mining zones as well as important ceremonial centers. This "Royal Road" allowed the unification of this immense, heterogeneous empire across a savagely beautiful but unforgiving geographical area, making it one of the most well organized political systems of power and administration in the world.





QHAPAQ NAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY



It is incredible that in this day and age one can still discover such a gem. The Grand Route of the Incas is synonymous with archeological treasures: Ingapirca in Ecuador, Cusco and the Sacred Valley in Peru, or Quilmes in Argentina. This route travels across the fragile ecosystems found in South America: the Peruvian Yungas, the Marañon Dry Forest, the Chilean Mattoral and the Chilean Winter Rain Forest. And despite modern frontiers, the "Royal Road" is a powerful connecting force between the Andean communities, many of whom live in isolated, remote regions. After years of oppression, this road has the potential to become a symbol of unity to rehabilitate and reinforce cultural identity.

For more than 500 years, due to lack of awareness, this treasure has slowly been sliding into oblivion as it succumbs to the effects of erosion and the construction of modern infrastructure. Yet, the Qhapaq Ñan is also the name of a vast project launched by UNESCO that aims to inscribe this fragile route, encompassing its entire archeological, natural and cultural heritage, on its World Heritage List.

THE ITINERARY

COLOMBIA

- El Angel National Reserve

ECUADOR

- Lake Mojanda
- Quito
- Cuenca

PERU

- Cajamarca
- Cordillera Blanca
- Cusco
- Lake Titicaca

CHILE

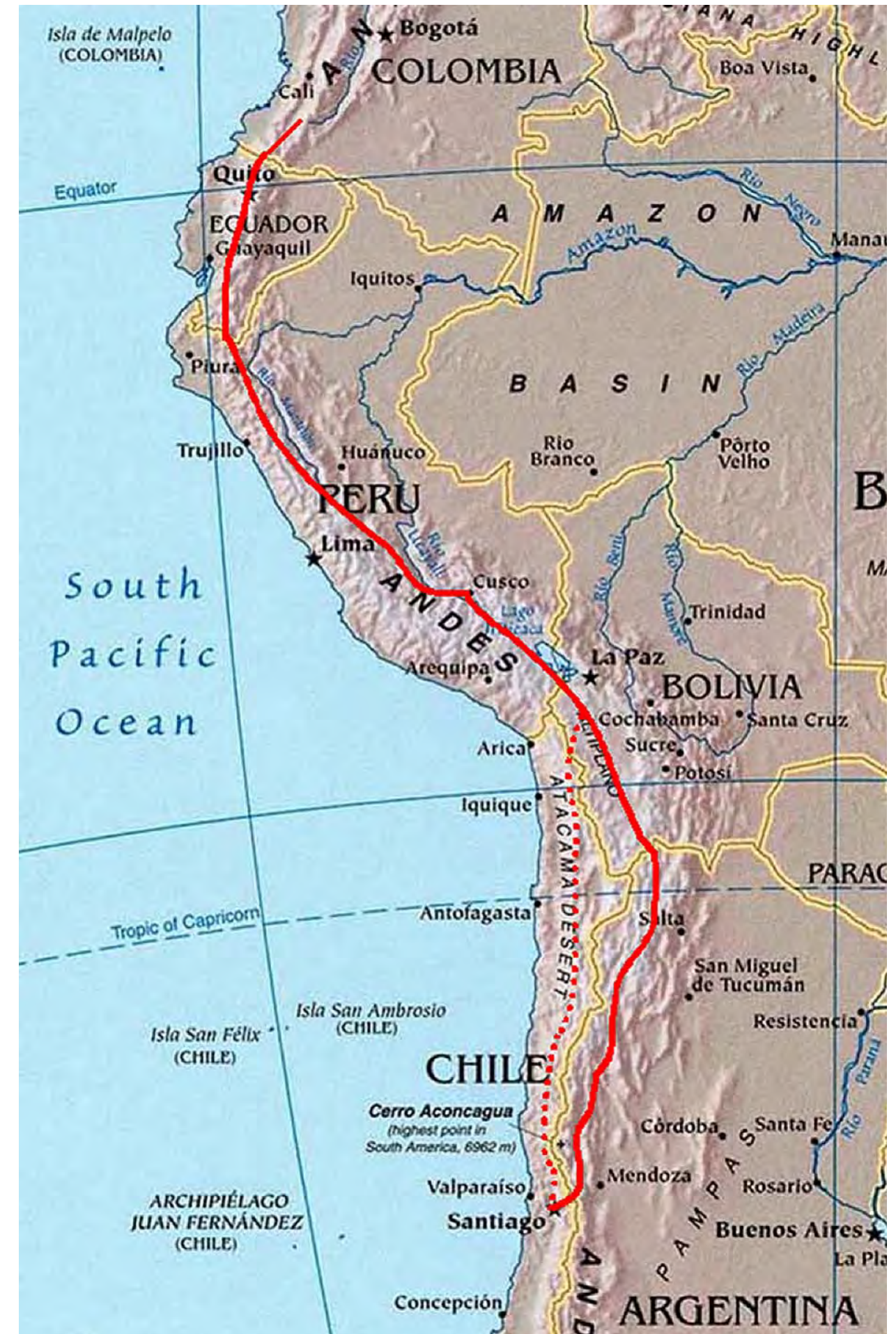
- Atacama Desert

BOLIVIA

- Tiwanaco
- Salar of Uyuni
- Canyons of Tupiza

ARGENTINA

- Altiplano
- Calchaquis Valley
- Talampaya National Park
- Mt. Aconcagua





THE CHARACTERS

An unusual couple

Megan Son is American-Korean ; Laurent Granier is French. She was raised in the metropolis of Seoul; he, in the Parisian suburbs. But the lure of open spaces quickly brought these two urbanites to wider horizons. Their common bond: a taste for adventure and their desire to share it together. Megan writes for different magazines in the United States, Europe and Asia. Laurent dedicates himself to photography and to recording radio series. Together, they have published several illustrated books about their journeys. However, they also recognize a need to engage themselves: in their eyes this is key in their approach of being modern-day travelers. Each of their journeys incorporates a willingness to not only discover, but to better understand and document the reality of people's lives in certain countries, their difficulties and the issues they confront.

A new challenge

Megan and Laurent know the smell of travel well. From Alaska to Japan to the Maya world; from the rivers of the United States to those of India, they have continuously brought back images and stories from the far reaches of the world. They have followed the routes of the Alaskan pioneers and traveled up the Missouri in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark in the American West. But this is the first time they have departed for such a long journey alone as a couple. In deciding to follow the Grand Route of the Incas, they know they will need to push their limits to complete such a long and trying journey.





THE ENCOUNTERS

Daily encounters on the road

Traveling on foot facilitates meetings, above all when there is no other choice but to rely on communities for dry shelter, to re-supply or to find the road. During their journey, Megan and Laurent become closer to the Andean people. They are invited to sleep in their homes, in their storage rooms, in their kitchens or in their common areas. For 18 months, they share the basic daily life of those who live in the Andes. The town and villages that dot the route provide the occasion for day to day exchanges or to join in the celebrations during festivals. Still used today, the Qhapaq Ñan itself also creates opportunities to meet people: farmers on their way to market to sell their wares, relatives on their way to visit family, or children walking to school all accompany our couple as they continue their travels.





The specialists

Megan and Laurent also make the effort to meet the specialists who have been working on the Qhapaq Ñan: archeologists, biologists, or advocates for the rights of Andean people who have shared their knowledge as well as their thoughts on the perils and potential of this mighty road. In Bolivia, Megan and Laurent participate in field research to search for the road which has not yet been documented there. In following the footsteps of Ricardo, Basilio, Susan or Antonio, and in sharing their passion, their fights and their daily lives, our two travelers create friendships with those involved in the preservation of the Royal Road. It is thanks to them they are better able to understand the hopes and struggles of the Andean people.



SYNOPSIS

The sleeping giant - Ecuador

Our two adventurers leave in search of the Qhapaq Ñan, the Grand Route of the Incas in the National Park El Angel, the northernmost point of the Inca Empire. Between a local historian, a biologist, a fire-blowing shaman, a wood-craftsman and an archeologist who specializes in the Qhapaq Ñan, they slowly come into contact with those who can direct them on their quest. Megan and Laurent try to procure two llamas, the traditional domesticated animal of the Andes, to ease their heavy load of supplies. After several disappointments, they manage to buy two young bucks. With their new companions by their side, they have no idea what surprises the future will bring.

The hardship begins... - North Peru

No one said it would be easy: the sheer size of the Andes is daunting and the distance great. The llamas can not keep up. Releasing them in Cajas National Park, Megan and Laurent continue on foot: no tent, no sleeping bags, and no stove. They are completely dependent on the hospitality of the communities they meet. After ringing in the New Year burning puppets with a tiny community, they spend several uncomfortable nights exposed to the elements. During the day, they suffer through freezing hail and blistering heat. Their hardships continue, and they are almost lynched, suspected of working for a nearby mine that is responsible for polluting an essential element to life: water.

The potential - Central Peru

But not all encounters with local people are fraught with danger. Basilio, a local NGO worker, joins them on what has been described as the best-preserved section of the road, and that is home to a community-based project of sustainable development linked to the conservation of culture and environment. Basilio introduces them to the many communities who live along the route, some of whom walk with them and share the oral histories and legends associated with the road. Yet, further along the road, a household is brutally attacked and their herd of animals stolen, proving once again how precarious life in the Andes can be...





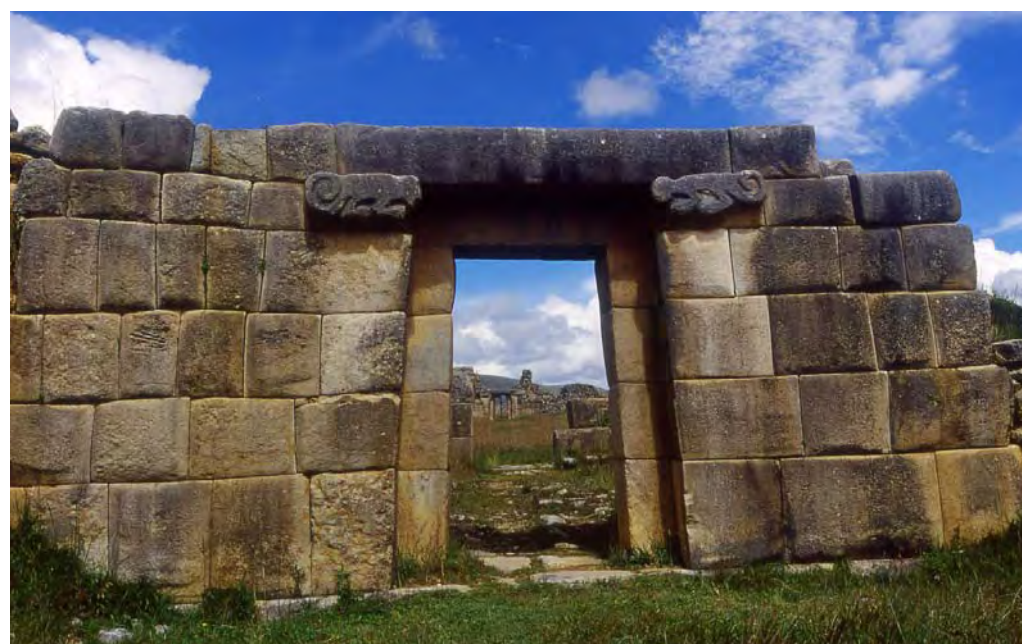
To the heart of the Empire - South Peru

Huanuco Pampa, once an important administrative center for the Incas, remains today one of the largest Inca sites outside of Cusco, but unfortunately damaged by vandalism. Megan and Laurent cross into the heart of the Empire, in the company of a population that values and is proud of its heritage. School children gleefully take them around the Inca constructions in their town; an old woman deplores the pollution that has invaded the lake on which she lives; and adolescents speak of the Andean "cosmovision" and the importance of preserving sites close to their communities. Our two travelers continue on the road to finally reach Cusco, the capital of Tawantinsuyo.

The Vast South - Bolivia, Chile, Argentina

Leaving the mountains for the Altiplano, the couple skirt Lake Titicaca, travel through the mysterious site of Tiwanaco and cross the surreal salt flats of Uyuni. Yet the harsh environment of this high desert persists, as they walk along the exposed, flat plateau in search of a road that teases them of its existence. The going is difficult: frigid nights, sweltering days and an almost nonexistent water supply. They are finally rewarded: the road stretches straight to the horizon, 6000km from where they began.





TREATMENT

The dream to explore

The aim of this film is to share an adventure which everyone dreams of: to take off and explore, on foot, the mythical route of a legendary civilization that exists in the mysterious mountains of a far off land. Who has not dreamt of exploring, uncovering an untamed region, meeting the people who live there and comparing themselves against the grand explorers of the past? Megan and Laurent, in all humility, have realized this dream. They have undertaken a grand exploration and have filmed it to share their experiences with us.

Discovery and awareness

It was in learning of the risks that put the Qhapaq Ñan in danger that Megan and Laurent decided to document it. They wanted to see for themselves the issues that surround the road today, meet the people in the field involved in fighting for its preservation and restoration, and bring to the public an awareness of this epic route and the need to protect it. The road is a port of entry to not only the great Inca civilization of the past but also the contemporary Andean world. At times seen in its entire ancient splendor, at others a victim of time, the Royal Road is the film's third protagonist.

The heart of the journey

The film, Qhapaq Ñan, plunges us into the core of this great journey by following our two adventurers through the wide range of their daily life. We follow their adventure from their personal perspective that they filmed themselves. The hand-held camera allows us to share up close their joys and their battles. This treatment gives us an intimate view of the journey and of the spontaneous meetings that add to the magic.



True secondary characters

Handing over the voice to the people that are directly involved in the road is an essential aspect of the manner in which Megan and Laurent approached this film. By traveling the Grand Route of the Incas, they wanted to understand the points of view and the hopes and dreams directly from the mouths of the people who live on this road. Our two travelers not only communicated with women who speak solely Quechua but also spent time with archeology experts. Dispersed between the scenes of adventure, these interview sequences are filmed "in the field" or in more fixed settings.

One couple - two complementary perspectives

Megan and Laurent are partners in adventure and in life. However, they do not have the same personalities and they experience the adventure in different ways. The camera reveals the give and take between their two perspectives as they film in turn. With each their own style and individual character, the camera opens up their thoughts to us and helps us discover the key moments of their quest.

Effects and narration

We follow Megan and Laurent's itinerary using 3-dimensional maps. They pinpoint specific geographical locations so we can better trace their location in the adventure and their progress. Megan and Laurent's narration gives us additional information. It complements the spontaneous reactions in the film, and recalls the meetings and the emotions that marked their journey.



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