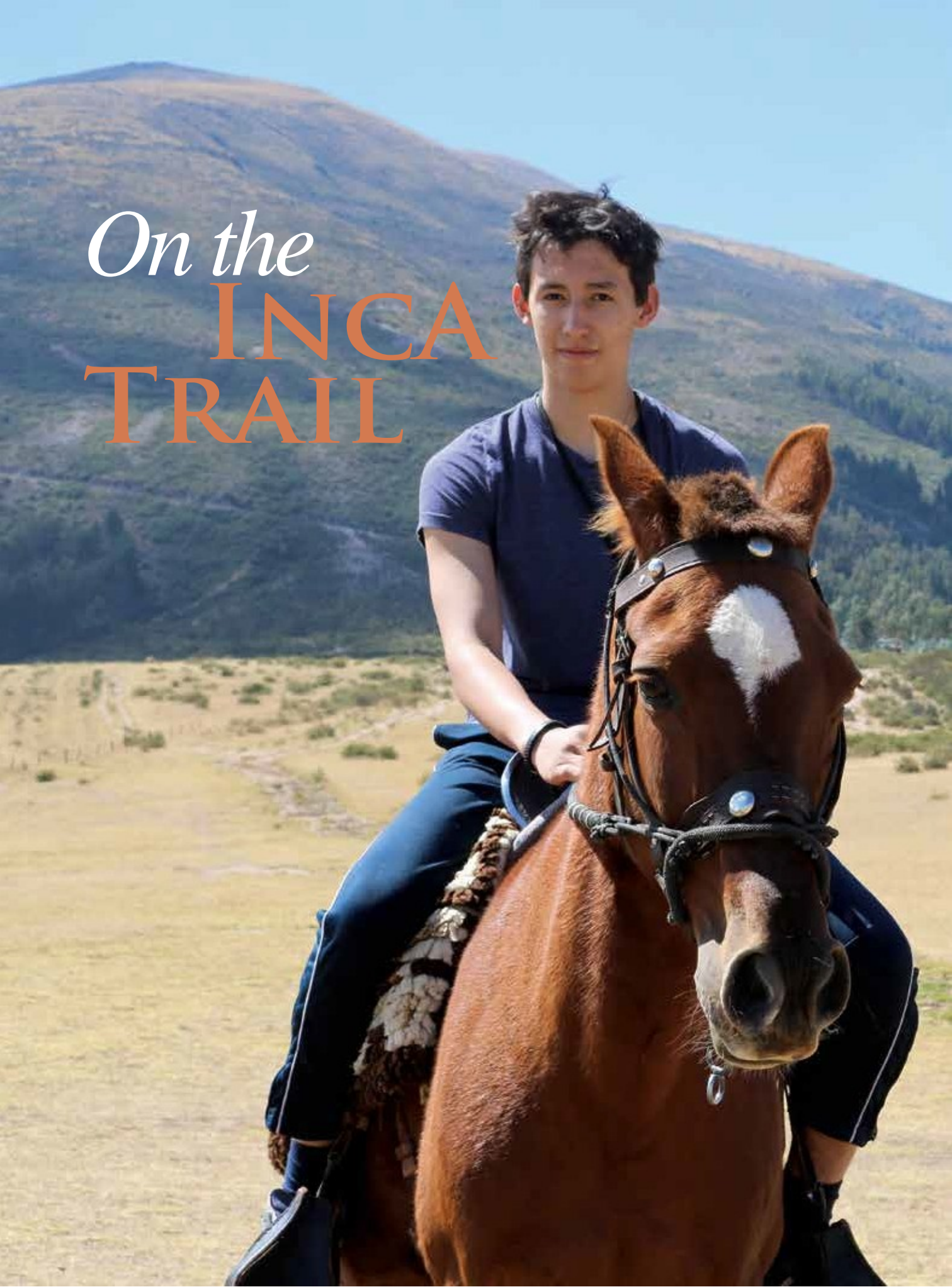


On the
**INCA
TRAIL**



PERU DIARY

A GROUP of Worth students enjoyed a trip of a lifetime in July, culminating in the four-day Inca Trail trek.

Fourteen pupils, accompanied by Mrs Maria Young and Fr Peter, took part in the Worth School Peru Expedition 2016, which incorporated time spent at the Puericultorio JAVA children's home in Ayacucho, which has long been financially supported by Worth's own Outreach Peru and, this year, St Mary's House charity. Here, in their own words, the students share their memories of a fabulous fortnight:

Day 1: Departure

We met at St Mary's on Sunday afternoon and had a thorough final kit-check with the odd last-minute call home for forgotten items. We met Debs, our expedition leader, who clearly had lots of experience of trips like this. We discussed what we hoped to get out of the expedition and how we would make this happen. We were then taken to Heathrow for our overnight flight to South America. The adventure had begun.

Day 2: Arrival in Lima

We were met at Lima airport after the long flight from the UK, via Bogotá. Our minibus took us through the slums of Callao to the comfortable district of Miraflores and our hostel. We organised a rotating daily leadership team and the first task

was to buy SIM cards for our expedition mobiles. We discovered that these were unusable, however, as you have to be a Peruvian citizen to activate them! We found a great place for dinner where we ate traditional Peruvian food.

Day 3: Lima

We were taken into central Lima and walked to the presidential palace

in the Plaza de Armas. We were fascinated to watch the changing of the guard, with the strangely exaggerated goose-step marching style and a large military band. We then had an insightful tour around Lima's Franciscan monastery, with its wealth of art and the famous catacombs. After lunch we packed before setting off in the next >





stage of our journey, to Ayacucho.

Day 4: 1st day at the children's home

Arriving at Ayacucho, it was nice to be greeted by the smiling faces of our very own Fr Alex, who had gone ahead of us, and Sister Maria Eugenia, head of the Puericultorio JAVA. This children's home was established in 1980, to house children orphaned by the civil war, and it is supported by Worth Abbey's Outreach Peru charity. Today, most of the inmates are not orphans, but are children whose parents are in prison or who have been otherwise abandoned. We were met by a crowd of excited children, plus Worthian Naomi Dring who had returned to Peru for her second volunteering stint.

We were soon put to work, scraping paint off the walls, helping in the nursery and playing outside with the children. We quickly began to get to know the children at the home and language barriers tumbled fast.

Day 5: 2nd day at the children's home

Breakfast gave us our first chance to experience the delights of quinoa porridge: a thin, cinnamon-flavoured gruel which is a breakfast staple in the Andes. The children had school today, so at 8am we went out into the fields to dig holes for fruit trees, as a donor had been found who would provide trees if suitable holes could be dug in time. The ground was rock-hard, infested with weeds and our basic

tools broke as we dug. It was a long morning. After lunch, we had a memorable talk from Wilma, the woman who runs the vocational training at the children's home and who grew up there. She was one of the children orphaned by the civil war in

the 1980s, arriving at the home all alone and traumatised by witnessing the killing of her family by terrorists. Later we headed off to the ANFASEP museum to learn more about how the civil war affected the people of Ayacucho. It was a very shocking and extremely sad experience, but we felt that we understood things a lot better after our visit.

Day 6: 3rd day at the children's home

It was another morning of hole-digging in the children's home fields, encouraged in our efforts by the resident workers. They not only dug much faster than us, but also produced an amazing Pachamanca lunch for us: the classic Andean field lunch, in which chicken and vegetables are cooked underground.

It was really delicious. We also drank a lot of chicha morada: a warm, weak sweetcorn drink. In the afternoon, once the children had come out of school, we played endless games with them and taught them various action songs.

Day 7: 4th day at the children's home

Being Saturday, there was no school so about 60 of us – children and volunteers – travelled for a couple of hours to Quinoa Pampa. We visited the famous Quinoa obelisk, a 40m high monument that commemorated the battle which gained Peruvian and South American independence from Spain. After lunch we set off for a trek up a ravine, to visit a waterfall, and we began to feel what it was going to be like to climb at altitude. One of the nuns clambered up the rocks impressively in her heels! Back at the Pampa (the open area), it was time for some playing with the children and Pete looked very impressive as he took a ride on a horse.

Day 8: 5th day at the children's home

We started off by going to Mass in town, which we found really interactive and fun. The priest was very enthusiastic and gave a long and passionate homily. Later on, back at the children's home, the boys were challenged to a game of football with the maintenance team, with the stakes being a 3L bottle of Coke. We spent the rest of the day playing various games with the children and by the end of it we were shattered. This was our last night in Ayacucho.

Day 9: departure and journey to Cusco

We spent the morning saying farewell to the children, going to visit a traditional market in Ayacucho and then had an early lunch before loading up the coach for Cusco. We set off across the altiplano, amongst amazing glaciated mountain scenery, isolated villages,

llamas and some very winding roads. By the evening, we were ready for a break in the 15-hour journey, and we stopped at Andahuaylas for a great meal in a steakhouse. We drove on through the night and arrived in Cusco at 6am.

Day 10: Day in Cusco We needed to get more acclimatised to hiking at this altitude, so we set off after breakfast for a practice session, aiming for the 'Cristo Blanco', a large statue overlooking the city from the highest peak. The ascent gave us a chance to work on our 'slow breathing' and get used to the idea of pacing the ascent of a steep slope at altitude. The views were worth it, as we sat next to the Sacsayhuaman ruins, absorbing the landscape. In the afternoon we split into groups for sightseeing and shopping. This was going to be our last evening of civilisation for a while but after dinner we all



wanted an early night in preparation for the start of the Inca trail the next day.

Day 11: To Lulluchapampa

We were joined by our guides, Judit and Rayner, for the start of our hike. Rayner spoke to us at various intervals, giving us a thorough and animated view of Incan and Peruvian history. We learned that the Incas were the kings, not an ethnic group, and that the Inca trails are survivors of the old royal messenger routes. More Inca trails and ruins are still being discovered

today. Our porter team ran ahead to set up both lunch and dinner. Amongst that first day's offerings were avocado mousse, trout, kebabs and thick hot chocolate. We camped in a little field at the edge of a very small village, surrounded by wandering farm animals.

Day 12: The Dead Woman's pass

We were dreading this day. All the blogs and guides said it was the point of 'make or break', at which plenty of people give up – and they were not wrong. It was a five-hour, pretty sheer >



OUTREACH PERU

WORTH ABBEY has been helping the people of Peru for almost 50 years. A group of monks, led by Fr Bede, first went there in 1967 in response to the call of the Second Vatican Council to support Latin America by providing human, material and financial resources.

Outreach Peru began in 1968 and is the development fund of Worth Abbey, ring fenced for projects to help the underclass of Peruvian society.

More than half the population of Peru are living in poverty. Many struggle daily to have enough to eat, they have limited access to fresh water and often there is no sewage system. Children, especially in rural areas, are often deprived of good schooling and many families do not have the skills to keep themselves healthy, let alone access to professional medical help.

Outreach Peru, though, has given hope and opportunity to many people. Its key projects include supporting a children's home in Ayacucho and working with Fe y Alegria to provide schooling in the poorest and most marginalised areas of Peru.

Fr Alex, who now runs Outreach Peru, first went there in the 1980s when the children's home at Ayacucho was no more than a soup kitchen. These days it is a home to up to 80 children, from babies up to the age of 18, with a constant turnover of residents. He insists the work Outreach Peru does has to be sustainable and he is also keen for visitors, such as the Worth School group who went there this year, to understand what life is like in Peru and the history of both the country and the charitable work carried out by Worth Abbey.

Fr Alex said: "I was very keen for the Worth expedition to have their eyes opened. They heard from a survivor of the Civil War and this was very important."





ascent, and the altitude really made things hard, but we supported each other and it was quite a moment reaching the pass. The challenge of descending was also a big one, especially for our knees, but at least we were working with gravity and going down into more oxygen-rich air.

Day 13: Over halfway

We set off early, as usual, and really enjoyed this day. We were now feeling much fitter and, although today's trail had some stiff climbs and

descents, we were taking it in our stride by now. The main feature of this day was the really stunning scenery wherever we were. Each twist in the trail or rounding of a summit brought another amazing mountain view. Highlights of the day were lunch, some decent toilets (at last!) and a triumph from the cook when he produced a 'Worth School Peru Expedition 2016' iced sponge cake for dessert.

Day 14: Machu Picchu at last

We were up at 3.30am feeling pretty pumped and after breakfast we set off for the point where you have to queue for the final section of the trail to open. Bang on 5.30, the trail opened and we were off, practically running the final 5km ascent through cliff-hanging cloud forest and

up the fearsome 'Gringo killer' steps to reach the Intipunku (the Sun Gate) in time for the sunrise over Machu Picchu. It didn't disappoint. There was such a buzz to be sitting there with such a stunning view before us, as the light changed and the sun washed over the surrounding mountains. An hour's trek brought us down to Machu Picchu itself. Rayner was brilliant at explaining the site and we took a lot of photographs. Eventually it was time to descend to Aguas Calientes and a final meal together to celebrate the success of the trail, before taking a train back to Ollantaytambo and then a bus to Cusco. We fell into bed, exhausted but very proud of ourselves.

Day 15: Last day in Cusco

We had a last morning in Cusco to buy some gifts

for family and friends and then began our journey home back to the UK. A big thank you to our staff: Debs (the expedition leader), Mrs Young (the organiser), Fr Peter (the mountain leader and probably the fittest trekker) and Fr Alex (the inspiration and the Peruvian veteran). The trip was really eye-opening, memorable and fun. It was hard work at times, but the kind of work that brings genuine rewards and we all hope that future Worth generations will have the chance to experience Peru as we did.

