

RAFTS AND RUINS

COOPERATIVE EFFORTS TO SAVE THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF THE COTAHUASI VALLEY

Marc Goddard and Justin Jennings

Marc Goddard is an adventure travel consultant and co-owner of Bio Bio Expeditions, an international rafting and trekking company. Justin Jennings is a visiting scholar at the University of California–Santa Barbara and a research associate at the Cotser Archaeological Institute.

As the owner-operator of a U.S.-based international adventure travel company called Bio Bio Expeditions, Marc has spent the last 15 years exploring the world's most exciting and remote whitewater rivers. In his work, he combines his passion for introducing people to the natural beauty and cultures of distant lands with the adrenaline rush that he gets by plunging down a wild river. In the initial years of his business, there were only a handful of other companies running the same rivers. Over the past five to ten years, however, there has been an explosion in the adventure travel business. Some of the same river canyons that were considered too perilous to run in the 1980s, or too remote to exploit commercially, are now seeing hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors a year. These visitors are a grave threat to the fragile eco-systems of these rivers and to the archaeological sites that often are huddled around them. Marc recognizes the potential damage that can be done inadvertently by rafters and he is seeking ways to mitigate the impact of his trips on archaeological sites.

As an archaeologist working out of the University of California–Santa Barbara, Justin has spent the last six years working in the Cotahuasi Valley of Peru to reconstruct the culture history of the area through both survey and excavation. Although the valley is difficult to reach (it is a bone-jarring 11-hour bus ride from the city of Arequipa), more and more tourists have come into the valley each year to trek, whitewater raft, and visit archaeological sites. Inhabitants of the valley, often without state or local government funding or guidance, have reacted to the increasing influx of tourists by building new hotels, providing local tour guides, and sprucing up archaeological sites. As a perceived expert on both ancient ruins and Western tastes, Justin is often asked about what can be done to attract people into the valley to visit archaeological sites. He is trying to work with local authorities and adventure guides to find ways to enjoy the valley's ruins without destroying them.

Marc and Justin met through the pages of *Outside Magazine*, where one of Marc's expeditions down the Cotahuasi River was featured in the December 2001 issue. The article described not only the thrill of running the river's Class IV and Class V

rapids (Figure 1), but also the wonder of visiting pristine remains of prehispanic villages and agricultural terraces. Justin wrote a letter to the editor, which appeared in the following issue, that raised concerns about the protection of the sites that Marc and his team encountered along the river. Marc later

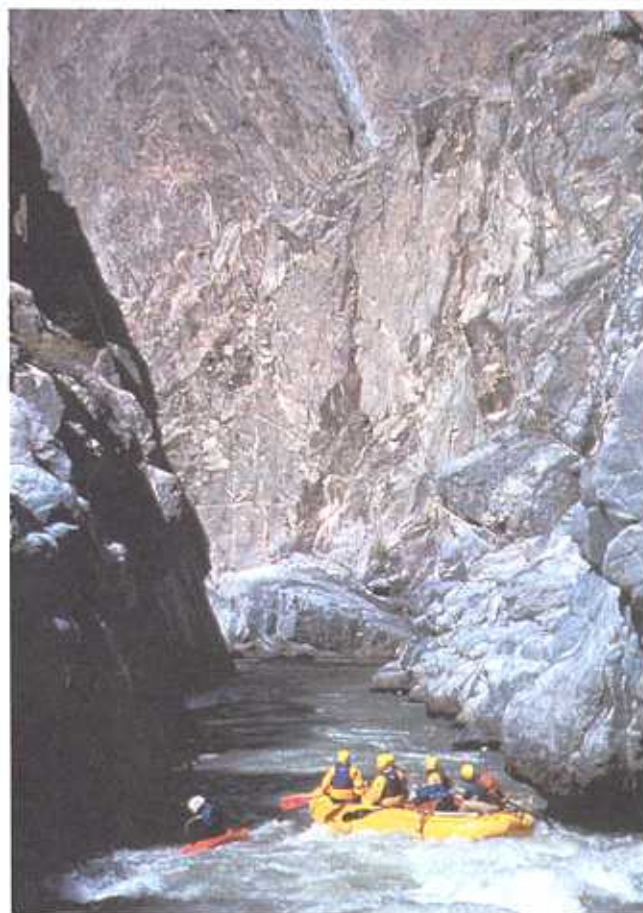


Figure 1: A 14-foot self-bailing paddle boat negotiates a Class 4 rapid on the Cotahuasi River.

emailed Justin about the archaeology of the valley, a rapport was struck, and their collaboration began.

Finding Solutions for Endangered River Systems

The potential damage to the Cotahuasi River and its environs by rafting and adventure tourism could be enormous. One example of a beautiful Peruvian river that has suffered from the rapid increase in tourism is the Apurimac River—just over 100 km away from Cotahuasi. Located within a day's drive of the tourist mecca of Cusco, Peruvian and international river companies have popped up over the last ten years, with each trying to outdo the other by slashing prices. A foreign tourist can now find a three-day trip on this river for as little as \$150. While such prices make it barely possible for the companies to survive, everything and everyone involved suffers as well. The Apurimac's river corridor has only a few camping spots and the infusion of tourists have turned these places into a littered mess. Since there is no requirement to remove human waste, anyone wandering beyond the main camp area encounters gardens of toilet paper and trash. Most organic waste is dumped into the Apurimac, a low-volume river that does not carry enough water to dilute the amount of waste put into it. Luckily, there are few ruins located within the Apurimac's river corridor. In other remote areas in Peru where archaeological sites are more plentiful, people have caused considerable damage to sites by climbing over structure walls, exploring tombs, and collecting "souvenirs" to bring home.

There are ways to mitigate the impact of adventure tourists on river systems. Five million people visit the Grand Canyon and over 40,000 rafters float through the canyon each year. These visitors are held to strict regulations intended to protect both the park's fragile desert ecosystem and its archaeological sites. For example, all food preparation tables must have a tarp placed underneath to catch any food scraps; all human waste must be carried out; fires, when permitted, have to be made only in firepans; and no artifacts can be collected from any historic or prehistoric sites. Although the many visitors to the Grand Canyon adversely affect the park's natural and cultural resources, the National Parks Service (NPS) has successfully minimized the consequence of these visits by implementing these policies. Moreover, the NPS is continually doing impact studies in the canyon to guide policies and requirements for the future.

The government of Peru, of course, does not have the resources of the United States to regulate tourism. Nonetheless, the Peruvian government and tour operators are starting to recognize that the success of the adventure travel industry relies on the quality of the experience their guests have. Just this year, the Peruvian government announced that it will enforce a new set of more strict regulations for the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu—too many tourists with too little regard for



Figure 2: With campsites on the Cotahuasi River few and far between, putting tents up on prehispanic terraces is sometimes the only option.

their impact have strewn litter and caused deforestation and erosion across a wide area.

Protecting the Cotahuasi River

In the more remote areas of Peru, the impetus for the protection of the natural and cultural resources of whitewater rivers must come from guides, local authorities, and archaeologists. These groups need to find a way to promote and run these rivers without trashing them. Bio Bio Expeditions commercially pioneered the descent of the Cotahuasi River in 2001 and now runs two trips each year. The number of rafting companies offering trips to the valley, however, is already expanding, and the river's environment is imperiled.

Some of the measures to protect the Cotahuasi River are easy and cheap to implement and Bio Bio Expeditions has already taken these measures. Marc has been very emphatic with his clients in Cotahuasi to "take only pictures, leave only footprints." His groups do not build any fires on the terraces and he asks his clients not to hang their gear from the walls of prehispanic or historic structures (Figure 2). Other measures, however, are more expensive. Marc's groups pack out all of their trash, and this year he will begin to pack out all human waste. To carry all of this garbage and waste down the river, Marc may need to have another raft. When this raft needs to be carried over a 14-mile rough hike to the put-in, the costs are hardly trivial (Figure 3).

To find more ways to protect the archaeological treasures of the valley, Marc has invited Justin to join him in his next trip



Figure 3: A burro train navigates the 14-mile portage around Sipta Falls on the Cotahuasi River.

down the Cotahuasi River this summer. The challenge in the next few years will be to create a cooperative environment in which the other companies that are advertising this trip will voluntarily follow the same guidelines that Marc and Justin are trying to develop. Without a set of commonly followed guidelines in place, there could be a "race to the bottom" in Cotahuasi like the one that occurred on the Apurimac—a race in which there were no winners.

As adventure tourism expands, previously isolated regions are welcoming increasing numbers of tourists. Governments, especially in the developing world, are ill-equipped to manage far-off archaeological sites and hesitate to take any action that might curb the flow of tourists. Far too often, archaeologists curse the influx of tourists and are leery of adventure guides and their goals. This adversarial relationship is counterproductive and threatens to marginalize archaeologists in important local-level debates about the development of tourism. For Marc, adventure travel has been a wonderful way to operate a business while exploring the world and doing something that he loves. He wants to introduce people to remote regions and rich cultures in a responsible, conscientious way. Archaeologists are in a position to help people like Marc protect these sites. Marc, Justin, owners of the other rafting companies, and local authorities all have the same goal; they want to ensure that beautiful river canyons like Cotahuasi will be enjoyed for generations to come. Working together, it may be possible to do just that. □



Figure 3: The Swarthout Site at the end of Phase I of the Stabilization Plan (November 2002).

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cubic yards) will be sufficient to support native grasses. It is anticipated that this will be the most costly aspect of the entire project. The OPRHP region will be supplying the materials and labor once again.

The final phase will occur several days after the new topsoil has been allowed to settle. It is anticipated that a native grass species can be reintroduced with little effort. The success of the native grasses will not be apparent until 2005 or 2006, however. Continuous stewardship through regular monitoring will need to occur at the site, and it is recommended that a post-stabilization site visit be made by DEC and OPRHP after the third season in 2006. At that time, the conditions at the site will be reevaluated to determine if our efforts have been successful.

The Swarthout Site has potential to yield archaeological data that can be used to address research questions relating to the origin, development, and eventual disappearance of the Jefferson County Iroquois. This cooperative effort between agencies, and the desire to protect the site, has proven that we can ensure its long-term survival. □

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