

INCAN ROADS AND BRIDGES

The Incas built one of the ancient world's best transportation systems. They built roads and bridges to keep the empire together. The transportation system allowed them to have fast communication between villages and cities. They also used it to move food and other supplies. The roads also allowed military troops to move faster.

The Incan roads stretched for more than 10,000 miles. The Incas had two major roads. The Royal Road was 3,250 miles long. It went from the northern border of the empire through Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia into Argentina and Chile.

The other major road, the coastal highway, was 2,520 miles long. It ran from the village of Tumbes in the north, through the desert, then into Chile.

Several other roads ran between the two major ones. The standard width of the roads was 24 feet. They were narrower only when natural barriers were in the way. The roads included side walls to keep out sand drifts and to mark the road. There were also markers along the road to tell the distance to the next village.

Incan workers provided the labor to build the roads as part of the "labor tax" they paid to the government. Government engineers directed the workers.

The roads belonged to the government. No one could use the road without special permission. The Incas did not use wheeled vehicles on their roads. The travelers and messengers walked to their destinations. The Incas used llamas to carry goods on the roads. They built rest houses called *tampus* about every 12 to 20 miles along the roads. In addition to providing a place to rest, most *tampus* also had food available.

The Incas built causeways to elevate the roads in swampy areas. They also built amazing bridges, which they called *chacas*. The hanging bridges are the most famous of the Incan *chacas*. One Incan bridge was over 250 feet long. Built in 1350, it lasted until 1690.

The Incas used the fibers of the maguëy plant to weave the cable for the bridges. The main cables were from four to five feet thick. Incan workers had to replace the cables about every two years.

The Incas also built pontoon bridges made of reed boats tied together. Another type of Incan bridge had a basket hung from a cable stretched between two stone towers. Travelers got into the basket, and a workman then pulled along the cable to the other side.

Name _____

Date _____

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. How many miles of Incan roads were there?

2. What was the longest Incan road called?

3. What was the name of the other major Incan road?

4. How wide were most Incan roads?

5. What kind of walls did the roads have? Why?

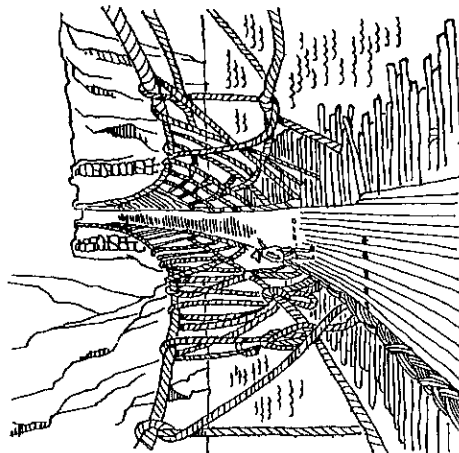
6. What were Incan rest houses called?

7. What was a *chaca*?

8. What plant fibers did the Incas weave together to make cables for their bridges?

9. Of what were pontoon bridge boats made?

10. Describe another type of Incan bridge.



The Apurimac Chaca, the hanging bridge over the Apurimac River in Peru, was one of the most famous of the Incan *chacas*. It is known as The Bridge of San Luis Rey in literature.

THE INCA AND HIS GOVERNMENT

Inca was the title of the ruler of the Incan empire. At first, the word "Inca" meant the children of the sun god Inti. It later became the title of the ruler. Today, we also use Inca to mean the people of the tribe.

The ancient Incas believed their ruler was a descendant of the gods. They worshiped him as both a god and a ruler, and he had absolute power.

The Inca had many wives. His main wife was his queen. Her title was *coya*. The Inca's sister could also be his *coya*. The Inca might have over 100 children. The oldest son of the Inca did not automatically become the next ruler; instead, a council of nobles chose the most promising son of the *coya*. At times the selection of the new Inca led to fighting among the supporters of various sons.

A *borla*, or Incan crown, was worn by the Inca. It had a fringe of brightly colored cords. Gold tubes decorated the end of each cord. The Inca wore garments of the finest wool. Each of his garments was worn only once. The Inca ate and drank only from gold plates and goblets.

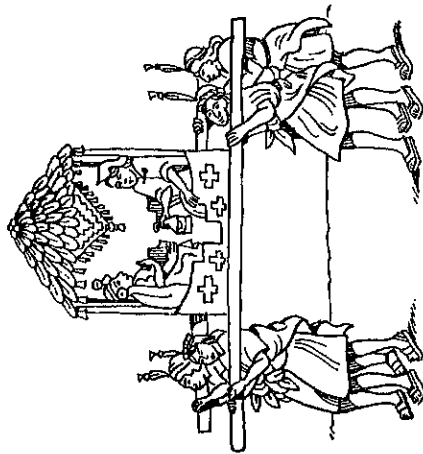
Servants carried the Inca on a platform and chair made of gold since he didn't walk great distances. The chair, called a litter, had a canopy of gold and jewels to protect the Inca from rain and the rays of the Sun.

Each Inca had a new palace built. The walls of the Inca's palace were decorated with gold. The Inca's throne was also gold.

The empire had a 30-day period of mourning after the death of the Inca. Priests mummified the Inca's body. Many of the Inca's servants volunteered to die, because they believed that they would then be able to continue to serve the Inca. The old palace became a shrine for the previous Inca. They put the Inca's mummified body into the shrine, and the people then worshiped the mummies of the Incas.

The Incas had an efficient government. The rulers, priests, and generals all came from the noble class. Most were relatives of the Inca. The Inca used the road and bridge system to help him govern. Messengers and soldiers were able to move quickly throughout the empire.

All Incan men gave the government physical labor. This was the *mita*, or service tax. The government built the great palaces, public buildings, and roads with this labor.



The Inca and his main wife, the *coya*, were carried in a golden litter by servants.

Name _____

Date _____

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What was the title of the ruler of the Incan empire?
2. Why did the people worship their ruler?
3. What was the title of the Incan queen?
4. How was a new ruler chosen?
5. What was the royal crown called? Describe it.
6. How did the ruler travel?
7. What did each new ruler have? Why?
8. How were dead rulers remembered?
9. What was the name of the Incan capital?
10. What was a *mita*?