Master Thesis Proposal

Information Visualization Engine
(ive)

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Mar 26, 2004

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# Table of Contents

1 **Introduction:** ................................................................................................................. 3  
1.1 Introduction of the Problem: ......................................................................................... 3  
1.2 Motivation: .................................................................................................................... 3  
1.3 Solving the Problem: ..................................................................................................... 4  
1.4 Result Summary: ............................................................................................................ 4  

2 **Background Research:** ................................................................................................. 5  
2.1 Value Bars ..................................................................................................................... 5  
2.2 Information visualization using 3D interactive animation .............................................. 5  
2.3 TileBars .......................................................................................................................... 6  
2.4 Cone Trees ...................................................................................................................... 6  
2.5 The Perspective Wall ...................................................................................................... 6  
2.6 Generalized Fisheye Views ............................................................................................ 7  
2.7 SemNet .......................................................................................................................... 8  
2.8 Database Navigation ...................................................................................................... 9  
2.9 The Information Visualizer ............................................................................................ 9  
2.10 InfoCrystal .................................................................................................................... 10  

3 **Information Visualization Engine (iVE):** ................................................................. 11  
3.1 iVE, a User-Friendly Approach to Low-level Information Visualization: ..... 11  
3.2 Approach Reasoning: .................................................................................................... 12  
3.3 A Better Approach: ........................................................................................................ 12  
3.4 Software Setup: ............................................................................................................. 12  
3.5 Software Architecture: .................................................................................................. 13  
3.6 Program Discussion: ...................................................................................................... 15  
3.7 Salient Modules: ............................................................................................................ 15  
3.8 Time and Space Analysis: ............................................................................................ 18  
3.9 Inputs Used: .................................................................................................................. 19  
3.10 Results and Results Comparison: ................................................................................ 19  
3.11 Resulting Figures .......................................................................................................... 21  

4 **Conclusions and Future Research:** ............................................................................. 34  
4.1 Accomplishment: ........................................................................................................... 34  
4.2 Problems Faced and Solutions: .................................................................................... 34  
4.3 Drawbacks: .................................................................................................................... 34  
4.4 Improving: ..................................................................................................................... 34  
4.5 Impact of Research: ...................................................................................................... 35  

5 **Appendix:** .................................................................................................................. 36  
5.1 Visualizations: Figures 7 through 16 ............................................................................ 36  

6 **References:** ................................................................................................................ 66
Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>iVE Tutorial</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Overall Result of Typical Search Engine</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Overall Results of iVE</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Least Relevant iVE Result and corresponding URL</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Median Relevant iVE Result and corresponding URL</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Most Relevant iVE Result and corresponding URL</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>gorptravel.gorp.com</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><a href="http://www.activejourneys.com/tripset/latin_america/peru/">www.activejourneys.com/tripset/latin_america/peru/</a></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><a href="http://www.adventure-life.com">www.adventure-life.com</a></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><a href="http://www.allcheapfares.com">www.allcheapfares.com</a></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gorustic.com/cuso.htm">www.gorustic.com/cuso.htm</a></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><a href="http://www.jakekirby.com/pages/Peru/MacchuPicchuMain.html">www.jakekirby.com/pages/Peru/MacchuPicchuMain.html</a></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mtsobek.com">www.mtsobek.com</a></td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><a href="http://www.planeta.com/planeta/98/0898.html">www.planeta.com/planeta/98/0898.html</a></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><a href="http://www.planeta.com/planeta/98/0898picchu2.html">www.planeta.com/planeta/98/0898picchu2.html</a></td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><a href="http://www.unnu.com/newhomewritings/traver/peru/incatrail">www.unnu.com/newhomewritings/traver/peru/incatrail</a></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1 Introduction:

1.1 Introduction of the Problem:

Information visualization is the concept of shifting the interpretation of information from the cognitive domain to the perceptual domain. It is similar in idea to the phrase "a picture is worth a thousand words".

Information visualization can occur in the many phases of the information retrieval process. To generalize, the visualizations of the information retrieval process can be thought of in the following three steps:

1. The information space itself can be visualized. For example, if a user has a set of digitized journals on his/her personal computer, the information space could be graphically visualized as a set of books on a bookshelf.

2. Navigating through this information space can be visualized. For example, this could be done by the user selecting journals with a mouse or by the user submitting a search term to a virtual librarian.

3. The selection of the information unit can be visualized. For example this could be done by the user clicking on one of the papers from a list produced by the virtual librarian.

However a problem exists: How does a user know which papers are the most relevant?

1.2 Motivation:

As stated in the previous section, information visualization can be implemented during many phases of the information retrieval process. The focus of this thesis is in applying information visualization at the point where a user has a collection of information units (i.e. collection of papers) and wishes to determine which information units are the most relevant. Currently, the only way to determine which information units are most relevant is to analyze each information unit. This can be very time consuming especially if these information units are documents downloaded from the World Wide Web (WWW). Therefore, by shifting the interpretation of information to the perceptual domain a user can save a significant amount of time when searching for relevant information.
1.3 Solving the Problem:

The goal of this thesis, in terms of image processing and neural networks, is to create a feature vector visualization to be inputted into the human neural network. The 'feature vector visualization' created will be a graphical image of an information unit and will give the user the means of quickly determining relevancy. The application developed to create this feature vector visualization is called the Information Visualization Engine (iVE, pronounced "ivy"). This feature vector visualization will be based off a basic understanding of human psychology/physiology and the concept of good GUI design.

1.4 Result Summary:

Since this thesis is on visualization, the results are images. The information units used for these visualizations resulted from a search using a typical WWW search engine. In Chapter 3, the visualizations created by a typical search engine are compared to the visualizations created by iVE. Samplings of what iVE has considered the most relevant, mean relevant, and least relevant information units are also shown in Chapter 3. The rest of the information unit visualizations resulting from iVE (and their corresponding URL documents) are contained in the Appendix.
2 Background Research:

The following is a list of relevant papers and a synopsis of their content:

2.1 Value Bars

*An information visualization and navigation tool of multi-attribute listings, Richard Chimera*

A Value Bar displays information in the form of a long thin vertical bar. This bar is sectioned, with each section corresponding to some unit of information (i.e. a file, a document, …). The height/size of each section represents a weight with respect to some attribute.

For example, if a user had a list of files and was interested in the size attribute of the file, this tool would create a long thin vertical bar next to the list of files. The size/height of each section that makes up this thin vertical bar would represent the *length attribute weight* for the corresponding file.

2.2 *Information visualization using 3D interactive animation*

*George G. Robertson, Stuart K. Card, and Jock D. Mackinlay*

Information visualization is the concept of creating visual objects to more easily retrieve and assimilate information, thereby shifting the interpretation of information to the perceptual domain. The whole process of *initially retrieving the information* to *attaining the specific information* was discussed. The four main areas to accomplishing this goal (on a computer) were:

1. **Create a large workspace**: create more screen space by using a concept of rooms and a denser screen space by using animation and 3D.

2. **Offload work to agents**: querying/searching using search agents, organizing using clustering agents, and interacting using interactive objects.

3. **Maximize real-time interaction rates**: rapid interaction using a cognitive coprocessor scheduler and governor to tune the system for the human perceptual system.

4. **Visually abstract information to speed pattern detection**: information visualizations using concepts of hierarchical structure (i.e. cone tree), linear structure (i.e. perspective wall), continuous data (i.e. data sculpture), and spatial data (i.e. office floor plan).
2.3 TileBars

*Visualization of terms distribution information in full-length document access, Marti A. Hearst*

The TileBar is a horizontal bar containing tiles that is used to show the features of a document. The shade, location, and size of these tiles represent the frequency of the desired search string. The overall length of this bar represents the relative length of the document. The TileBar is specifically designed for text documents and focuses on items such as term frequency, term distribution, and subtopic boundaries.

2.4 Cone Trees

*Animated 3D visualizations of hierarchical information, George G. Robertson, Jock D. Mackinlay, and Stuart K. Card*

The Cone Tree is a visualization tool that presents large information spaces in a picture-like manner. The idea is to take advantage of the human perceptual system for recognizing patterns in the data.

Cone Trees represent hierarchical information in the form of a root node that has leaf nodes. Leaf nodes with the same root node form a ring, resulting in an overall shape of a cone. In addition, each leaf node in the ring may have its own ring of leaf nodes. The Cone Tree uses colors, shading, the third dimension, and movement (i.e. rotating the tree) to shift some of the cognitive load to the human perceptual system. This design also allows more data to be displayed on a two dimensional monitor.

2.5 The Perspective Wall

*Detail and context smoothly integrated, Jock D. Mackinlay, George G. Robertson, and Stuart K. Card*

The Perspective Wall efficiently deals with large information spaces. It takes into account the biological characteristics of the human eye. There is a region of the eye that perceives details and is in focus while the surrounding area is unfocused and has low resolution.

One can imagine the Perspective Wall as a scroll of paper that is stretched over the face of a box. The section of paper on the face of the box is in focus. The remaining sections on each side of the box fade off to focal points in the backdrop. By using a mouse or some other device, different parts of the scroll can be positioned on to the face of the box. This scrolling action is done in a smooth and consistent fashion so that object constancy remains intact.
Some linear feature of the information is used to organize the information on the wall. For example, a set of documents with timestamps/dates could be organized so that the oldest documents are on the far left end of the wall and the most current documents are on the far right end of the wall.

Another reason for this design was the limited space on a computer monitor. By having the less focused left and right sides of the wall fade off into the distance, a large amount of information can be displayed. Information objects also remain in context with the rest of the information space. The vertical direction can be used to display hierarchical information.

### 2.6 Generalized Fisheye Views

*George W. Furnas*

‘Fisheye Views’ is a viewing strategy dealing with large information spaces. The concept is to show the closest area (i.e. area of interest) of the information space in great detail while at the same time keeping a sense of its relation to the whole global information space.

This Fisheye View occurs naturally to humans. Examples of this natural occurrence are:

- Newspaper articles focus on many local stories where the only 'distant stories' are the ones of greater importance.

- In the management domain, people know with some detail who are their immediate section heads and managers but very little of other departments.

Since these Fisheye Views are naturally occurring it seemed appropriate to apply this idea to large information spaces. To formalize this concept a "Degree of Interest" function was created, which is based on "a priori" importance and distance. The resultant of this function would determine the most interesting points that would need to be displayed.

The results of the Fisheye View were successful when compared to a flat view of an information space. One example cited involved viewing source code. When compared to a flat view the Fisheye View was more informative. In the Fisheye View superfluous lines of code were removed, resulting in significant contextual information. Only the significant 'while', 'if', and 'switch' statements of the algorithm surrounding the source code lines were shown.
2.7 SemNet

*Three-dimensional graphic representations of large knowledge bases, Kim M. Fairchild, Steven E. Poltrock, George W. Furnas*

SemNet is a 3 dimensional graphical user interface designed to help people interact with large information spaces. It is hypothesized that three items must be recognized for a user to comprehend an information space:

1. Identities of individual elements in the knowledge base.
2. Relative position of an element within a network context.
3. Explicit relationships between elements.

SemNet uses a 3 dimensional directed graph to visually represent a knowledge base. SemNet positions the knowledge elements of a knowledge base using mapping functions (i.e. heuristics, multidimensional scaling) specific to the knowledge base and connects these elements using colored arcs. It is also possible for knowledge elements to be positioned by the user if the user has information not contained in the knowledge base. The result is a grouping of knowledge elements with arcs between them. SemNet also uses a "generalized fisheye view" when there are too many arcs and knowledge elements to be comprehensible.

To navigate through the knowledge base five methods were studied.

1. Relative movement: as a helicopter navigating through a landscape.
2. Absolute movement: having an overall map of the knowledge base.
3. Teleportation: immediately being able to go back to a position in the knowledge base previously visited.
4. Hyperspace movement: moving between knowledge elements by a certain attribute.
5. Moving in space: moving the knowledge base as a whole rather than navigating through it.

Debugging the knowledge base was performed by tracing a query through the arcs and knowledge elements to verify their relation.
2.8  Database Navigation

*An office environment for the professional, Robert Spence, Mark Apperly*

Professional people spend much of their time working with information. The two main tasks dealing with information handling are:


2. Retrieval of the information item.

A proposed computer system design, called "Office of the Professional", was researched with the goal to help the professional in information handling. The design of the "Office of the Professional" took into account the following human factors:

1. Lack of enthusiasm to learn a complex language.

2. Appearance of their personal office.

3. Limitations set by human memory.

4. Highly developed spatial memory in humans.

5. Highly developed "search by visual scan" in humans.

A system consisting of virtual office objects was created. Besides obvious objects such as a calculator and an in-basket, a complex index system was developed. This index system (e.g. an index system for a set of journals) consisted of a bifocal display.

The bifocal display was divided into *a section of focus* in the middle of the display surrounded by a section of less focus. The overall idea is similar to the "Generalized Fisheye View" where the items of interest are more detailed than the surrounding items. Higher zoom capabilities were also available depending on the type of information space that was being navigated. A point and touch system for selecting the information items was also studied since this was the most intuitive form of selecting items.

2.9  The Information Visualizer

*A 3D user interface for information retrieval, J. D. Mackinlay, G. G. Robertson, S. K. Card*

The Information Visualizer is a user interface that addresses the overall process of acquiring relevant information. In addition to the main goal of information retrieval, the cost of information from secondary storage to immediate use was also taken into account.
The three main components of the Information Visualizer are:

1. **3D/Rooms**: These rooms accommodate 'Locality of Reference' and clustering, resulting in larger and denser immediate information storage.

2. **The Cognitive Coprocessor**: An animated user interface architecture. This user interface creates an animated view of the virtual information world and handles items related to human physiology and psychology (i.e. perceptual processing time constant, immediate response time constant, object constancy…).

3. **Information Visualizations**: *Structure-oriented browsers* for using different sets of information; Cone Trees for hierarchical information and the Perspective Wall for linear information.

### 2.10 InfoCrystal

*A visual tool for information retrieval and management, Anselm Spoerri*

The InfoCrystal is an information visualization tool that attempts to show the connection between different concepts in an information space. The InfoCrystal is based on the concept of Venn Diagrams and uses shaped objects, colors, and location of objects to represent the information space.

For example, assume there are four documents and three concepts of interest. Let us also assume only one of the documents contains all three concepts. The InfoCrystal would have an external shape of a triangle with each vertex representing a different concept. Inside the triangular would be four geometric shapes (i.e. circle, square, rectangle, pentagon) corresponding to the four documents. The geometric shape representing the document containing all three concepts would be mapped to the center of the triangular. The other geometric shapes would be pulled toward one vertex or the other depending on how much of each concept it contained.

In connection to a Venn diagram, the center of the InfoCrystal would correspond to the area where all three (concept) circles intersect.
3 Information Visualization Engine (iVE):

3.1 iVE, a User-Friendly Approach to Low-level Information Visualization:

iVE is a user-friendly approach to low-level information visualization. The following paragraphs will explain what is meant by low-level and the use of the term user-friendly. Also for clarity, the following paragraph includes an example of information visualization with regards to information retrieval on the World Wide Web (WWW).

Information visualization can be applied to any or all of the phases of the information retrieval process. First, the environment used for information retrieval can be visualized. In our example of the WWW this equates to what you see in your standard desktop environment. Second, the body of data that you wish to extract information can be visualized. In our WWW example this phase is not really visualized, it is just understood that a user can access a large nebulous body of data. Third, navigating through this information space can be visualized. This could possibly be thought of as the search GUI (Graphical User Interface) of the web browser. Finally, the display of the information units themselves can be visualized. In our WWW example this is the list of URLs that appear on the browser after the search has been completed. This final set of URLs, this resultant collection of ‘information units’ from which a user selects, is what is meant by low-level.

User-friendly relates to the following features of good GUI design:

- Intuitive and natural.

- Easy for anyone to start using.

- Designed to contain cognitive information upon further analysis.

- Pertinent use of color.

- Good feedback.

- Informative tutorial.
3.2 Approach Reasoning:

The readings of the papers in "Chapter 2: Background Research" revealed that there was minimal low-level information visualization. The ones that did exist appeared to be lacking in the number of features they captured or were domain specific:


These low-level information visualizations also appeared to ignore a user-friendly GUI approach.

It is also the intent of this thesis to not take the person completely out of the processing loop. The only way to easily use the feature vector visualization across the vast array of domains is to use the human neural network as part of the process.

3.3 A Better Approach:

The approach of iVE is better because of the following reasons:

- It can be applied to any domain.
- It is easy to interpret.
- It shifts interpretation from the cognitive domain to the perceptual domain.
- It is intuitive.
- It has the potential to contain significant cognitive information.

3.4 Software Setup:

The experimental setup is a Personal Computer system running with a Windows Operating System (Windows 98 or higher) that is connected to the Internet. The software must also be run in a directory that contains a Windows Explorer executable.
3.5 **Software Architecture:**

The architecture of the software is very flat. In addition, there are no 'separate threads of execution'. The sequential flow of the architecture is shown in the following diagram:
SOFTWARE FLOW

Query and search the WWW for potentially relevant information units

Collect the information units for feature extraction

Extract features for each information unit

Create/represent the features of the information units in a visualization

Present the visualizations in a user-friendly GUI for the user to access the relevant information units
3.6 Program Discussion:

iVE was written in PERL because of its built in features for extracting URL documents and its ability to pattern-match. Perl also works relatively well on a Microsoft Windows platform. In addition Perl/Tk provided the utilities for creating GUls.

As shown in the previous diagram, the process flow of the software is sequential. When the application is first executed, a GUI appears ready to accept search terms. Once the search terms are entered and the Search button is selected, a user agent (a built-in Perl object) connects to a search engine on the WWW. The user agent then submits the search terms to the search engine and retrieves the resultant URL pages. The URL pages are then stored in a data structure on the local computer.

Using Perl's pattern matching utilities, search words in each URL page are tagged. A visualization is then created using these tagged words in combination with other features of the document. The visualization is based on the following four features:

1. **search phrases:**
   This feature is the total number of search phrases in the URL document. To be counted as a search phrase all words of the search phrase must exist within a certain neighborhood.

2. **search words:**
   This feature is the sum total of each of search word in the document.

3. **links:**
   This feature is the total number of relevant WWW links in the document. To be counted as a relevant link, at least one of the search words must be in the link.

4. **words:**
   This feature is total number of all words in the document.

3.7 Salient Modules:

The modules of interest are "analysis_num_phrases" and "another_gui". The "analysis_num_phrases" module extracts the phrases from each document and the "another_gui" module creates the low-level information visualization.
"analysis num phrases" Module

In determining a phrase, a technique similar to convolution in image processing was used. Each document can be thought of as a 1-Dimensional image, and each word in the document can be thought of as a pixel (i.e. word pixel). The algorithm is shown below and is followed by a narrative example:

```perl
##Declaring arrays.
@phrase_arr;
@prime_arr = (1, 3, 5, 7, 17);

## The $phrase_determiner is a sum of unique prime numbers
## corresponding to the number words in the $search_words
## string (i.e. search query), the prime numbers have been chosen so that the
## sum is unique. Words that don't match the
## search words have a value of '0'.
##
## $phrase_determiner = 0;
for($i = 0; $i <= $NUMBER_OF_SEARCH_WORDS; $i++)
{
    $phrase_determiner += $prime_arr[$i];
}

## Putting each word of the URL document into its own array location.
@separated_words = ();
@separated_words = split /s+\//, $DOCUMENT;

## Main loop for going through all the words in @separated_words
## and trying to find matches to the search words
for($i=0; $i <= $num_separated_words; $i = $i + 1)
{
    $test_word = $separated_words[$i];
    ## matching $test_word to one of the search words,
    ## if match, put the corresponding
    ## prime number in the phrase_arr.
    for($j = 0; $j <= $SPLITTING_OUT_SEARCH_WORDS_num_search_words; $j++)
    {
        if ( $test_word =~ m/$search_words_arr[$j]/i )
        {
            $phrase_arr[$i] = $prime_arr[$j];
        }
    }
}
```
### DETERMINING THE NUMBER OF PHRASES

```php
$num_phrases = 0;
$neighborhood = $SPLITTING_OUT_SEARCH_WORDS_num_search_words + 3;
```

```php
for($i=0; $i <= $num_separated_words; $i = $i + 1)
{
    $phrase_sum = 0;
    if($phrase_arr[$i] != 0)
    {
        for($k = $i; $k <= ($neighborhood + $i); $k = $k + 1)
        {
            $phrase_sum += $phrase_arr[$k];
        }
        if($phrase_sum == $phrase_determiner)
        {
            ++$phrase_count_hash{$address};
        }
    }
} #for $i <= $num_separated_words
```
neighborhood of words (num_search_words + 3) the same search word will never be repeated more than 3 times (a reasonable property for the written word).

"another gui" Module

Since the purpose of this thesis was to provide a user-friendly approach to low-level information visualization, considerable thought went into the resultant image. A combination of concepts was applied when designing the low-level iVE visualization: the biological/psychological qualities of people and the features of 'good' GUI design.

First, from the biological/psychological point of view, the human eye is very good at detecting shapes. Therefore, the shape of a circle was used as an overall high-level determination of relevancy.

Second, the following attributes of good GUI design were applied:

- The overall colors should be neutral and easy on the eyes; therefore an overall color of gray is applied to the GUI/visualization.

- Colors should be used sparingly and only to cue important items. Therefore the only colors used are for the "feature indicator scale dots".

- Labels should be used in addition to colors since not all people are able to distinguish between colors. Labels are used with the "feature indicator scale dots".

- The user should be given feedback. This is accomplished by DOS shell window (activated when the search GUI is executed) that reports the status of processing. Feedback is concept of letting the user know what is happening.

- Labels should be meaningful.

- The user should be given an informative tutorial. iVE supplies a GUI tutorial.

Also incorporated (my assumption) is the idea of a priority-clocking scheme. The most important feature/attribute is at the 12 o'clock spoke position. Features of less importance are on succeeding clockwise spokes (3 o'clock, 6 o'clock, and 9 o'clock). See Figure 1 iVE Tutorial for further details.

3.8 Time and Space Analysis:
As stated in the 'Software Architecture' section, the software is very flat and sequential resulting in a polynomial time complexity of \( O(n) \). The approximate space of this algorithm is 2MB.

3.9 Inputs Used:

The input can be any search word or search phrase the user desires. In this case the phrase "macchu picchu hiking" was entered into the search GUI (because of personal interest).

3.10 Results and Results Comparison:

The results and comparison of results are shown in the following figures. The figures should be viewed in 3 groupings and is elaborated below.

Grouping 1:

*Figure 1  iVE Tutorial:*

In order to understand the results of the visualization of iVE the user will need to read the short tutorial shown in Figure 1, which is supplied by the iVE GUI.

Grouping 2:

*Figure 2 and Figure 3, Comparison of the overall results of the typical Search Engine and iVE, respectively:*

In examining Figure 2 (the results of a typical search engine), the observer can see there is very little perceptual information; just some coloring and underlining. Also all the cognitive information is in the form of little text snippets from the corresponding URL document. Reading the text snippets can be time consuming, and it usually reveals little of what is in the actual corresponding URL document. In general, to determine which document is the most relevant, a 'open and read' technique must be employed.

On the other hand, in Figure 3 there is quite a bit of perceptual information. The perceptual information is quite evident; look for the result that has the most dots on or near the outer circle. There is also significant cognitive information upon further examination. The cognitive information can be drawn by examining 'which type' of dot
is closest to the outer circle (each dot representing a different attribute of the document as stated in the Figure 1 iVE Tutorial).

**Grouping 3:**

*Figures 4 through 6, Least, Median, and Most Relevant iVE Results and their corresponding URL documents, respectively:*

The next set of figures shows what iVE considers the *least relevant* URL document (Figure 4), the *median relevant* URL document (Figure 5), and the *most relevant* URL documents (Figure 6). There is some subjectivity on exactly which of *most relevant* documents is the most relevant, but there is definitely an objective difference between the *least relevant* documents and the *most relevant* documents.

The rest of the information unit visualizations resulting from iVE (and their corresponding URL documents) are contained in the Appendix.
3.11 Resulting Figures

Figure 1  iVE Tutorial

**PURPOSE:**
The purpose of this application is to collect documents from the Internet (based on you search words) and create an image that will inform you which documents are the most relevant.

**HOW TO USE:**
To use this application you must first be connected to the Internet and a copy of Internet Explorer must be in the same directory as this executable. Once connected, type in your search words and click on the SEARCH button. An associated DOS window (which automatically iconizes itself when the application starts) can be opened to view documents as they are coming in from the Internet. Warnings and errors will also appear in the DOS window if things are not operating properly. Once the document search is complete, another gui will come up containing a column of buttons and a corresponding image to the right of the button.
To view the desired website/document just click on the button.

**INTERPRETING THE IMAGE:**

The image is composed of a circle with four spokes, each spoke being a scale for a parameter. The parameters are listed below.

12 o'clock spoke: relative number of phrases
   (phrase = a group of search words).
3 o'clock spoke: relative number of search words.
6 o'clock spoke: relative number of related links.
9 o'clock spoke: relative number of words.

‘relative’ meaning between the documents that were retrieved.

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<th>most of each parameter</th>
<th>in-between</th>
<th>least of each parameter</th>
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Figure 2 Overall Result of Typical Search Engine

Adventure Life Peru Tour Specialists!
Experience Machu Picchu with Adventure Life. See our site for our unique trip style, then join one of our fixed departures or let us design your perfect tour. See our specials page too!
www.adventure-life.com

Machu Picchu Hiking
AltaVista offers.com - experts in travel to Peru, offering airfare, hotels and great Machu Picchu deals.
www.altaavistafares.com

Hike the Inca Trail
Hike along the Inca Trail to the ancient stone citadel of Machu Picchu with Mountain Travel Sobek.
www.mountain.com

Machu Picchu Hiking Adventure
Gorilla Travel.com is your travel agency for active vacations that match your level of adventure. Contact our travel experts today to start planning your perfect Machu Picchu hiking adventure.
gorilla-travel.com

AltaVista found 352 results about

Cusco, Macchu Picchu
...These were the first of many Inca settlements we passed along the way. Hiking to Machu Picchu presents the opportunity to see many Inca settlements, and gives some perspective for how widespread...
www.teashed.org/cusco.html • Refreshed in past 48 hours
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Cusco, Peru, Inca Trail, Hiking, Machu Picchu, Colonial, Cusco,
www.sacredisland.com
Cusco, Peru, Inca Trail, Hiking, Machu Picchu, Colonial, Cusco, www.sacredisland.com...Usually known as the gateway to Machu Picchu, Cusco is more important than any single Inca ruin...
www.gorustic.com/cusco.html
More pages from www.gorustic.com

Machu Picchu, Peru, Inca Trail, Aguas Calientes, Hotels, Traveling
Andes, Andean
...in a few days to go straight to Machu Picchu and the nearby hot spring town of Aguas Calientes...even gone with, and we made it to Machu Picchu the third morning, one day earlier than normal...
www.gorustic.com/peru_medellin.html • Refreshed in past 48 hours

Peru 2001 - The Inca Trail and Machu Picchu
...lost city of Machu Picchu (rediscovered by an American...only item I lost. The cursed stick of machu picchu began as a merely grotesque hiking stick. Sure, everyone else got the practical...
www.urn.com/newhome/firstings/travel/peru/inca.html

Inca Trails of Cusco, Peru, Hiking
Active Journeys Toronto Ontario specializes in worldwide international active...to Machu Picchu. Peru Hiking At its height, the Incas...to Machu Picchu & Machu Picchu 7 Free days at Machu Picchu.
www.activejourneys.com/trips/latin_america/inca_trail.html
Machu Picchu Revisited/Planeta.com

One Trail, Many Paths Machu Picchu Revisited by Steve Rinder August 1999 Hiking the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu remains one of the most impressive and challenging trails in the Americas. Many have...

www.planeta.com/planeta/990808/machu.html
More pages from www.planeta.com

Machu Picchu Trip 2001

Inca (Inca Trail) Hiking the 2 day hiking trip to Machu Picchu due to time constraints. We noted down our route in yellow... or Intipunku at the beginning of the Machu Picchu runs.
www.jakekirby.com/pages/Peru/MachuPicchuMain.html

Meredith's Travel Blog

Read journal entries and view selected images of Kolby's pilgrimages around... Feed your dreams... 6 Days In Machu Picchu | July 27, 2003 | ... amazing travel experience yet. Hiking the Inca Trail...
www.katunna.net/pilgrims_progress/meredith/journal15.shtml
More pages from www.katunna.net

searchuk.co.uk - Ecuador info

... enjoy Galapagos, Ecuador, Machu Picchu, Cusco and Peru trips on the Web site: Hiking in Ecuador... Updated 13-10...
www.searchuk.co.uk/TravelRegions/South_America/Ecuador
More pages from www.searchuk.co.uk

Extend Your Search About

Search the Yellow Pages for machu picchu hiking with SMARTpages.com
Find people fast with the Free White Pages Directory from SMARTpages.com

Comparison Shop with Yahoo Shopping

Result Pages: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Next>>
Figure 3 Overall Results of iVE
Figure 4  Least Relevant iVE Result and corresponding URL.
Note from Melissa, Cuzco, Peru. May, 2000

While staying in Cuzco, Peru, heart of the former Inca Empire, I saw again an acquaintance I had made camping in the mountains of northern Bolivia, and English fellow named Charlie Burns. Cool and easygoing, Charlie was a DJ back home and now and then shot into record shops to pick up tracks of world music he would later use in his mixing. One night while eating a cheap chicken dinner off the main square I left Charlie to run to the toilet (at my hotel), and returned to find that he had made friends with a splendid French guy named Gregoire Dey. Gregoire was the end of a six month trip he had taken beginning with business school in Mexico and working his way down to the Andes. His girlfriend back in France was the woman of his dreams and he was eager to get back to her and propose. Charlie and I agreed to hurry up and hike the Inca Trail the day after next with him.

The next day we went to Pisac, a nearby ruined Inca city only 45 minutes public bus ride from Cuzco and there I saw what remains as the best "modern" Native American architecture of my life. The buildings there had spectacular lines and angles in blocks of polished stone with joints so tight a razor blade could not fit between the pieces even after 500 years of wear and tear.

That evening back in Cuzco I left my companions and went up alone to the huge ruin of Sacsayhuaman, fifteen hard uphill minutes from the main plaza. Modern interpreters of the Incas' capitol speculate that the whole city of Cuzco as seen from the air is in the shape of a giant jaguar or puma. The head of this puma is the hilltop building complex of Sacsayhuaman which some speculate was a theological university of the ruling Inca shaman class. At the heart of Sacsayhuaman's '16-wheeler truck sized stone "campus" lies a circle of rocks speculated to be the base of a larger round observatory referred to as "the eye of the puma." Some more new-age oriented archaeologists attribute the Incas' ability to construct huge cities in plans of birds and animals (actually one can find examples of many cultures doing this for the last 3000 years in South America - the Nazca Lines for example) to their highest priests having achieved the ability to make their consciousness leave...
and soar far above their physical bodies. Some believe that "the eye of the Puma" was the maximum observatory from where priests kept an eye on the whole of the empire (stretching from Chile to Ecuador) and beyond (since there is a tale of some shamans having foreseen the European military developments and subsequent invasion of the Americas).

Like other evenings I hiked up to the "eye of the puma" and sat and cleared my mind, letting the mental knots unravel as the last rays of the sun died red on the jagged horizon. Like the other times I had done this I ended up napping, laying down, legs still crossed, head out of the wind scrubbing the hilltop, mind relaxed. This evening I was surprised by a group of three people, two girls (one of the girls named Melissa) and a guy guiding them on an informal tour peeking over the edge of the wall and spotting me - "Who is that?"

I introduced myself and accompanied them down the hill to old town Cuzco. We made a date to meet up for some drinks later - I will bring my boys Greg and Charlie along.

I told Greigoire and Charlie about the rendezvous as we walked to have our dinner of guinea pig and chicha we had ordered the night before. The restaurant was at the end of a long sketchy passage winding through the back of an old house off one of the less-touristy streets in the colonial old city. Guine pig, or "cuy" is a local favorite in all of the Andes. It is easy to maintain, a silent houseguest usually penned in with chicken wire behind the couch in most houses and flats, and fed on cheap wild grasses sold on every street corner by Indians for this purpose. Chicha is an alcoholic drink made from corn chewed up in the mouths of those preparing it and spat into a large jug for fermentation, the human saliva acting as some sort of catalyst in the process. This was served to each of us in a huge glass with a mashed up banana inside, the overall taste of it sweet and creamy.

After eating we all bought matching huge conical felt hats (supposedly used by rural farmers in regions of Peru I did not see) and strutted our stuff into the main plaza where we met up with the threesome from the "eye of the puma." We went out to some bars, danced and long after my two companions returned to their hotels I was still up until 5 AM where I had only enough time to shower and pack before we were all to meet up for our train through the mountains to the kilometer stop where we would begin the four-day Inca trail trek.

Leaving the girls I made a loose commitment to meet up with Melissa in Aguas Calientes at the end of the Inca trail on the off chance that we finished one day early and arrived there when she was still around (she was not doing the trek but had plans in a few days to go straight to Machu Picchu and the nearby hot spring town of Aguas Calientes).

The weather on the trail was horrendous, fast moving cold rainstorms made it difficult at times to even see where we were going on the steep up and down stairways winding over the high mountains (all of this way above 9000 feet), we were soaked. Greigoire was perhaps the fastest hiker I have ever gone with, and we made it to Machu Picchu the third morning, one day earlier than normal.

Arriving in Aguas Calientes and checking at the desk of the first place listed in the Lonely Planet guide I was delighted to find the following note:

"Tuesday 10ish
Jason
Felicitationes!! I'm staying at the "IMASUMAC" hostel on the main street. We arrived late last night as on Sunday I was brutally ill and had to go to the hospital.

Anyhow, I hope you're feeling reborn after re-pacing the steps of the Inca Gods, and taking in all the mind-blowing beauty of this fascinating region - oh, excuse the cheese please.

Ummm, if you do make it in 4 days I will be truly impressed as on Sunday we were both dying with splitting headaches, and gurgely bellies. I can't imagine hardcore hiking. Hope to see you, we will probably leave on the afternoon train on Wednesday as we have an early Thursday flight to catch in Cuzco.

(map to hostel) its just a few doors away from Chez Maggie Restaurant. Rm 9.
Well if we don't cross paths have a great stay and keep in Touch

Melissa"
Figure 6  Most Relevant iVE Result and corresponding URL.

Cusco, Peru - Three flights and twelve hours after leaving the U.S., I stepped off the plane into the heart of what was the Inca Empire. Evidence of their culture is readily apparent from the air as the plane descends into a landscape of valleys and hillsides terraced for farming over 600 years ago.

The main plaza of Cusco, The Plaza De Armas, contains churches and cathedrals built by the Spanish upon the foundations of Inca temples

The Spanish, who destroyed virtually every facet of the Inca culture, found their stone work too valuable to destroy because it was so good.

After a few days to get my bearings in Cusco I headed out for a 4 day trek to the Inca Trail to Macchu Picchu. I joined up with 7 other people on a tour organized by one of the many agencies offering a guided hike of the Inca Trail.

Our group consisted of a guide, three porters, four people from Quebec, Canada; a couple from Leeds, England; an expatriate Englishman, who's been travelling the globe; and me the lone American.

The name of the tour agency I used is United Mice. They had the best recommendations from the many trip reports completed by members of the South American Explorers Club, who have hiked the Inca Trail. Mario, our guide, spoke decent English and was able to provide great information about Macchu Picchu and the many features of the trail along the way.
After about one hour we passed the ruins of Patallaqta, an Inca agricultural community. The terracing and fields they built over 500 years ago, are still in use today. These were the first of many Inca settlements we passed along the way.

Hiking to Machu Picchu presents the opportunity to see many Inca settlements and gives some perspective for how widespread the Inca culture was.

After a moderate hike of about five hours through river valleys surrounded by the snow capped peaks of the Andes, we reached the village of Wayllabamba. Here we camped for the night.

**DAY 2**

This is the most difficult day on the trail. The hike starts off uphill, and keeps going that way until you cross Dead Woman's Pass 3-4 hours later. This pass is at 13,000 ft (4,200M), and is the highest point on the trail.

Then comes a knee jarring descent down the first portion of the trail that follows the original Inca roadway. After dropping about 1,200 ft. We faced a short, but steep climb, up a stairway to the ruins of Runkuracay. This was our camp for the night.
DAY 3

Once again, the day starts by heading uphill. This time we hike past the Yanacocha lakes to the Abra De Runkurakay Pass at 13,120-Ft. (4,000M). A gentle descent brought us down to the ruins of Sayacmarca. Built on the end of a ridge above the valleys with a stunning view, this ruin is believed to have been another military checkpoint. It is also has a series of ritual baths fed by aqueducts carved into the rock.

The trail continues along descending steeply to about 11,000-Ft. (3,400M). Then it levels off, and begins a gentle climb back up to the third, and final pass at 13,120-Ft. (4,000M). Along the way it crosses through a tunnel that was enlarged by the Incas. The trail follows the same steps carved out over 500 years ago. After crossing the third pass the route drops away towards the ruins of Phuyupatamarca. These ruins consist primarily of a series of ritual bathing pools (still working!)

We continued on the trail, which descends into the high jungle. Just after 4pm we arrived at the settlement of Winay Wayna. This was camp for the night, and the end of our longest day on the trail. It borders on the gate of the Macchu Picchu Sanctuary, and is a 45 minute walk from the city itself. Winay Wayna was a bit of a shock after hiking into more remote areas for the previous 3 days. It supports a "rustic" hotel, police outpost, and an ugly array of antennas and high tension wires. This disappointment was offset somewhat by the availability of cold drinks, and a lukewarm shower.
DAY 4 - Macchu Picchu

We were roused from our sleeping bags at the hideous hour of 4am for the final hike to Macchu Picchu. The early start is to watch the sun rise over the ruins. After having our tickets stamped at the entrance station by guards listening to some 1960's disco (what a way to enter an ancient city!), we walked the final stretch to the Inti Puku, or Sun Gate above Macchu Picchu.

There was a stampede of hikers along this section, as it was light outside, and people were running to get to the Sun Gate before the sunrise. No need to run here, Macchu Picchu is on the end of a ridge in a valley. The sun didn't hit the city until after 7am. I spent a good 45 minutes at the sun gate with about 100 other people waiting for the sunrise.

The Sun Gate was built with a notch that focuses the sunlight into a window in the Temple Of The Sun during the Winter (Remember this is South America) Solstice of June 21st. This temple window is at least one half mile away from the Sun Gate. This characteristic is common in many Inca Temples and demonstrates their ability to track the seasons and dates.

After watching the sunrise on Macchu Picchu (worth the wait!), we walked the final ten minutes to the city, checked our packs at a luggage check, and toured the ruins with our guide. Here was a big payoff for the hike. If you hike the Inca Trail you will arrive at least 2 hours before the hordes of visitors who come for the day from Cusco. Macchu Picchu is an amazing place. The surroundings of a high jungle ridge surrounded by knife-edged Andean Peaks is spectacular. No pictures, or words can really capture the feel of this ancient city.

The stonework is amazing. Many stones are cut so precisely, that even today, you can't slip a razor blade into the joint between stones.
After touring the ruins with our guide, I did the steep climb up Huyana Picchu Mountain. "Hiking" up here requires negotiating a very steep trail right on the side of the mountain. There are cables and ladders in place to make the climb a little easier. Many ruins are still being uncovered up here. The views of Macchu Picchu are also breathtaking.

After taking in the great views of Macchu Picchu, I came down a recently excavated Inca Staircase that was steeper than many rock climbs I've done.

We hiked out of Macchu Picchu to the town of Aguas Calientes for lunch and the train / bus trip back to Cusco.

On the way back we made a stop on a deserted road, when people appeared from nowhere selling bracelets, belts, etc... It is amazing that in South America there is always someone, somewhere ready to sell you something.
4 Conclusions and Future Research:

4.1 Accomplishment:

In the domain of the written word, it appears iVE has accomplished the task of document relevancy through information visualization. iVE is quick to interpret, and it gives the user meaningful cognitive information. Through the perceptual information of iVE’s visualization, a user is able to quickly select and view just the most relevant documents.

4.2 Problems Faced and Solutions:

The following two difficulties were encountered:

1. One problem encountered is URLs do not have a standard URL format: some URLs end in a '/', some do not, some start with 'www.', some do not ... By analyzing the valid URLs that did not appear in the visualization, it was apparent how the URL differed from what was already being 'pattern-matched'. To compensate, another pattern was added for matching (though there are probably more variations).

2. Learning, discovering the capabilities, and implementing Perl's user-agent was somewhat of a challenge since usage examples were unclear. By trial and error and adjusting the attributes, the user-agent was successfully implemented.

4.3 Drawbacks:

A drawback to iVE is that it has only been tested in the domain of the written word. iVE should theoretically work in any domain, however further testing needs to prove this out. A challenge exists in finding meaningful features to extract for the other domains.

4.4 Improving:

The iVE visualization can be studied further from a psychological point of view for enhancing its perceptual attributes. The visualizations could also be made expandable and collapsible. For example, an attribute dot could be selected to bring up another visualization of the same format that breaks down the selected attribute into sub-attributes. In addition, an immediate change could be made to list the most relevant
visualization first and the least relevant last. Also further study could be done in testing iVE in other domains and making it more universal.

4.5 Impact of Research:

The impact of this research is that iVE can significantly reduce the time a user spends searching for relevant information. There could also be the side effect that the overall shape of the iVE visualization could reveal other qualities/groupings (just like molecules with certain shapes having certain properties).
5 Appendix:

5.1 Visualizations: Figures 7 through 16
Figure 7 gorptravel.gorp.com
At its height, the Inca Empire had an extensive network of roads running the length and breadth of the Andes. These stone-paved trails connected the highland valleys with the coast. After the Conquest, some of these paths were used as roads and continue to this function to this day. The modern Pan-American Highway and the routes leading eastward into the Andes are good examples.

In the highlands, some of these trails are in their original condition and used by local people to reach their fields. Others have been forgotten and reclaimed by the jungle.

The Inca Trail is one of the world’s most popular treks. This 4-day walk goes from the highlands of 4,200m (13,800 ft) through the cloud forest before arriving at Machu Picchu (2,400m or 7,900 ft). Hidden under the dense foliage of a highland jungle, forgotten by the Inca themselves, Machu Picchu escaped the Conquistadors and eluded treasure hunters until Hiram Bingham brought “The Lost City of the Incas” to the world’s attention in 1911. Further exploration uncovered an ancient highway, a royal road that connected Machu Picchu to Cusco, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the Americas.

Climb to striking views of the high Andes and dense jungle. Finally, after crossing the high passes, we’ll arrive at Intipuccha (Sun Gate) for the first view of Machu Picchu spread below us. This is a site that will remain etched in your memory forever.

Guided Dates: Fridays March to November
Cost: US$975/US$1490
Single Supplement: US$350 for single tent
Grade: Moderate
Length: 8 days/7 nights with optional extension
Included: Accommodation, breakfasts, most meals, luggage transfer, guide, support
Starts: Lima
Ends: Lima
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<th>Itinerary</th>
<th>Miles</th>
<th>Accom.</th>
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<td>Lima</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transfer to Cusco, stay in area</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Cusco</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cusco to Q'eros</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Q'eros (camp)</td>
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<td>Free day at Machu Picchu, return to Cusco</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>End of tour</td>
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*Prices subject to change at anytime. Last modified: Thu Apr 22, 2000*
Figure 9  www.adventure-life.com
We're here to answer any questions that you might have as planning your trip. Our first-hand knowledge of Latin America and our experiences to share that wonderful place means that we can answer nearly any question that you might have regarding our destinations. We specialize in Peru tours, Galapagos cruises, Ecuador trips, Machu Picchu, the Inca Trail, Amazon lodges, Chile tours, Costa Rica adventure, Belize tours, the rain of Tule, and Oaxacalan tours. Please contact us with any travel questions - we're here to help you have the experience of a lifetime!

**Adventure Life News**

**Tskita Jungle Lodge and the Aspinalls**

The Aspinall family has long been a force for environmental education and protection in Costa Rica. John Aspinall is president of Costa Rica Outdoors, an inbound travel agency specializing in expeditions. William Aspinall ran the Manu Wildlife Reserve for over 20 years and now manages the family-owned Aspinall Hamanasi Lodge and Forest reserve, an important South American rainforest reserve. Maryanne Aspinall has been an active member of many voluntary and conservation organizations in Costa Rica and helped the Tskita Foundation and Tskita Jungle Lodge and biological reserve.

Continue Story >>

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The Galapagos Islands lie 600 miles off the coast of Ecuador. On a Galapagos cruise you'll encounter a remarkable variety of wildlife, from giant tortoises to blue-footed boobies. When you're not surveying the unique and geographically discretionary Galapagos Islands themselves, take some time to explore the waters, accompanied by playful sea lions and penguins. Our assortment of Galapagos yacht means that there's a style to suit every traveler's tastes.

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Your Peru adventure still complete without a visit to historical Machu Picchu. If you're ready for the challenge, hike the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, following in the footsteps of the ancients. Our varied Machu Picchu tour options will let you construct your Peru vacation to suit your interests. With more time, visit the Nazca Lines, Lake Titicaca, or the Amazon rain forest. A stay at one of our Amazon jungle lodges is a great way to see the wildlife and experience conservation at its best.

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An Ecuador vacation takes you through a land of ancient cultures, colorful markets, historic haciendas, volcanic landscapes, and diverse Amazon rainforests. Take some time during your Ecuador adventure to explore the colonial architecture of Quito, and schedule a visit to the Equator for a different experience. The geographic diversity packed into this relatively small country makes Ecuador a perfect destination for nature lovers. Your trip to Ecuador will be an unforgettable wildlife odyssey if you've added a Galapagos Island tour.

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When you travel to Chile you enter a land of extremes. In the far north of this slender country is the Atacama Desert, the driest desert in the world. As the southern end of Chile runs through snowy peaks and vast glaciers of Patagonia. A true Chile adventure takes in all these sights, as well as the lakes and snow-capped peaks of Patagonia. Chile adventure travel offers hiking and cruises in unparalleled scenery, so it's a wonderful destination if you're looking for an active South American tour.

**Argentina Trips** [click here]>>

An Argentina tour takes you through a spectacular variety of scenery, from vast, sculpted peaks of Patagonia. Travel to Argentina offers opportunities for both outdoor adventure and cultural discovery. From the gaucho to the gorges of Patagonia, the people of Argentina are a proud and passionate lot. A South America tour isn't complete without taking in this fascinating country.

**Bolivia Trips** [click here]>>

Bolivia travel is for adventure looking to be immersed in indigenous culture and get off the beaten path. From the Andes to Amazon jungle tours, you'll experience the rugged and remote during your Bolivia vacation. The only landlocked country in South America, Bolivia is one of the most intriguing destinations on the continent.
Antarctica trips <a>click here »</a>

Although the most isolated continent, Antarctica is far from barren and lifeless. On an Antarctica cruise you'll likely see great whales, millions of seals, and nesting colonies of Penguins, among other wildlife. One Antarctica cruise ships vary in size and style, so you're sure to find one that's right for you. Join us on a trip to Antarctica to explore the last undiscovered continent on earth!

Patagonia trips <a>click here »</a>

The name Patagonia stirs the souls of adventurers. A Patagonia trip is a chance to see the end of the world, where you'll find amazing-colored glaciers and towering granite spires. Whether you're trekking in Chile's Torres del Paine National Park, sailing the waters around the Southern island of Chile, or visiting the famous Perito Moreno Glacier in Argentina's Patagonia, your Patagonia adventure will be memorable.

Belize Trips <a>click here »</a>

The attractions of a Belize vacation are as varied as they are many: white sand beaches, lush rainforest, coral reef teeming with life, limestone tubulures and spectacular caves, whale-watching in the reef, - a multiport adventurer's haven! A Belize trip can mean relaxing on the beach, kayaking for a few serene days, or sampling all the activity that Belize has to offer.

Costa Rica Trips <a>click here »</a>

Travel to Costa Rica puts you in the heart of an ecosystem unique. Costa Rica vacations are ideally suited for multiport adventurers. Crash into the canopy and explore the jungle of Costa Rica before heading to the beach or visiting an active volcano. Plan your Costa Rica tour to include horseback riding, whitewater rafting, surfing, or searching for giant leatherback turtles.

Guatemala Trips <a>click here »</a>

For most travelers, the thought of Guatemala vacation brings to mind the ancient Mayan ruins of Tikal. Indeed, a Guatemala tour is complete without a journey to the sprouting jungle-covered metropolis. But there is so much more Guatemala adventure in store! The picturesque volcanoes lighthouses of Guatemala are home to thriving indigenous populations and their rich culture. Intricate regional weddings, bustling markets, and sturdy colonial cities are just some of the gems to discover on your Guatemala vacation.
Figure 10  www.allcheapfares.com
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Cusco Reflections

The first place I went to after leaving Bolivia was the famed city of Cusco in the middle-range Andes. Usually known as the gateway to Machu Picchu, Cusco is more important than any single Inca ruin in its own right. Capitol of an empire which stretched from Columbia to northern Chile. This empire was an aggressive collector of taxes for public works projects and believed in a greater spiritual and Public Relations significance of the Capitol as the center of the Imperial universe – Cusco is an amazing collection of mind-blowing Inca architectural “Native American modern art”, cool museums, and beautiful winding Spanish colonial streets. I spent almost three weeks there visiting local ruin complexes that were more impressive than Machu Picchu (like Pisaq, soaking up the strong local Quechua culture (modern-day Incas), and dipping my big toe into the sketchy all-night party scene. Just near the downtown, only a half hour up some beautifully steep walking-only streets (practically cobblestone stairs) I could reach the glorious Inca ruins of Sacsaywaman. This mysterious building at the top of Cusco city most likely served as the main Imperial Inca spiritual university. The whole city of Cusco is laid out like a giant Puma when looked at from the air. The Sacsaywaman structure is the Puma’s head. The first level is made of stones standing on end which are for the most part the size of giant Semi trucks (also known as 18 wheelers). And get this - the stones are fitted together using everything but a straight line or a 90-degree angle. There are even some stones that boast 15+ surfaces in contact with their neighboring stones. Most amazingly each of these joins use no mortar and are so exact that a knife blade cannot be inserted between the stones (even after 500 years of settling that included several major earthquakes). Each level of the building as you go up uses smaller stones. At the forth level there is a building that is at the eye of the Puma. It is thought that this evidently round tower (at least evidently round at the base which is restored) was either a water reservoir or was a room used for astral projection (out-of-body travel). Many New-Agers believe that it was this use of astral projection that allowed the Incas to construct these large animal-like city plans that could only be
projection and allowed the Incas to construct these huge animal-like city-plans that could only be appreciated from a sky-high view over the city the human body could never know.

Who knows?

In any case this was a great place to try meditating at sundown (which usually resulted in me taking a mental-knot-loosening nap) with a spectacular view of Cusco. Two times I was awakened from my nap by a pleasant surprise that resulted in meeting new friends.

In the city itself many buildings were an amalgam of Inca architecture and subsequent Spanish Conquistador construction. Amusingly, just at the turn of the 19th century a huge earthquake rocked the city and most everything built after Inca times was destroyed. That means many buildings [like one big Church over the "Navel of the Inca Empire" Building] that were Inca underneath with a completely Spanish exterior were exposed for what they were in this one moment of the earthquake. What happened is that most parts built by the Spanish collapsed and revealed the majestic and wonderous Inca stonework underneath. This stonework withstood the earthquake's destructive force because it was intentionally made by the Inca's to withstand earthquakes. Professional guides in Cusco like to make the following joke as they show you around the city and come across one of the many half-Inca half-Spanish walls: they say, pointing first to the Inca stonework then to the crude Spanish stonework above it "this is the work of incas and THIS is the work of INCompetents."
La Camina Inca (Inca Trail)

Karla and I took the 2 day hiking trip to Machu Picchu due to time constraints. I've noted down our route in yellow. We took a train from Cuzco to KM 104 or Intipata. There we climbed to the ruins of Winaywayna and stayed the night. At 4:30am we awoke to catch the morning sunrise through the "Sun Gate" or Intipucchu at the beginning to the Machu Picchu ruins.
Figure 13  www.mtsobek.com
El Planeta Platica

Eco Travels in the Americas

El Planeta Platica (The Earth Speaks):
Eco Travels in the Americas
ISSN 1090-0395
Volume 5, Number 3
Building the Perfect Trail
August 1998

This special issue of Planeta looks at path building - both literally and figuratively. How do you build a tourist path? What type of road does ecotourism construct?

In terms of nature tourism, there exists a great irony: People want to experience nature by hiking and cycling and for this they need a path, but everything gets trod under by travelers. But how do we create such trails?

I titled this issue of Planeta "Building the Perfect Trail" in a manner that is tongue-in-cheek. Trails alter the geography of the terrain and impact travelers as well as communities. Is there a perfect trail? And if so, how would we begin to define sustainability?

The Royal Road - or Camino Real - stretched from Mexico City to Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was used for a few centuries. Now it exists on highway markers, in the same stretch of nostalgia we see Route 66 promoted in the southwestern United States. How long do we expect trails to last? Such questions are the focal point of
Building the Perfect Trail Index

FEATURES

- Reflections on "Green Ratings" - Arnie Leach and Beatrice Blake
  The authors of *The New Key to Costa Rica* have pioneered the use of rating the "eco" in the hotels listed in their guidebook. Does it work? They explain the process - and its limitations.

- King of Trails - Protecting Machu Picchu - Ulf Carlson
  Both the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu National Park are about to be loved to death by all the visitors. What can be done? The author offers some practical suggestions.

- One Trail, Many Paths: Machu Picchu Revisited - Steve Rindler
  Hiking the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu remains one of the most impressive and challenging treks in the Americas.

- Enlace Verde - Quiet Newcomer
  Residents of Monteverde, Costa Rica are forging a new initiative to provide biological corridors, or "stepping stones" of natural habitats between the larger protected areas.

- Ecuador Exchange: Matthew Oriterman Interviews Andy Drum
  A scholar discusses the path taken by the promoters of ecotourism in Ecuador with the founder of Tropic Ecological Adventures and the Amazon representative of the Ecuadorean Ecotourism Association.

- Canaima Update - Christopher J. Sharpe
  Follow-up to an article that appeared in *Planeta* last year, this article explains how the Pemon are protesting a bill that, if passed, "would" permit mining within protected areas, including Venezuela's Canaima National Park.

- Huallpa Pilgrimage: The Snapshifting of Tourism - Ken Fernberg
  "Huallpa de Jiminez" are words that produce a light bulb over the head of any Mexican. "Hongos," they say, and "Maria Sabina."

- Biking in Cauca's Northern Sierra - Carlos E. Cormejo
  A journey to India on two wheels.

- Adventure Travel in Montevideo - Sonia Ortiz
  A background to conservation and travel in the "Parque Nacional Cumbres de Monterrey" with directions to Petroto Pedroando.

- A Cross-Continent, 70-Mile Trek - Charles Shirley
  Take a walk on part of the "Camino de Cruces," one of the most important, yet unknown, trails in the hemisphere.

- Nature Guides in Honduras - Jon Kohl
  Last June I was offered a job by the Philadelphia-based RARE Center for Tropical Conservation training nature guides to promote wildlife conservation on the North Coast of Honduras.

Travel Guides
- Oaxaca Territory - Anthony Wright
  Original travelogue about adventures on and off Mexican highways.

- Mexican Volcanic Park and Rico Trenchera National Park - Bruce Whipperman
  This volcano, born only in 1943, now boasts paved roads that encourage the adventurous to explore the pine-tufted backcountry of this sylvan, Parque de los volcanes, just a few hours drive northwest of Uruapan.

- A Practical Guide to Santa Rosa de Copan, Honduras - Warren Post
  Nestled in the mountains of western Honduras, Santa Rosa de Copan offers a agreeable change from tourist traps and sordid cities.

- Serra do Mar (Brazil) - Rick Goodman
  The Serra do Mar, commonly known as the Mata Atlantica, or Atlantic Rainforest, runs parallel to the Atlantic coast in southeast Brazil and includes some of the country's highest summits.

- Crocodiles of Belize - Les Beletsky
  Remnants of the age when reptiles ruled the world, today's crocodilians (alligators, caimans, and crocodiles), when seen in the wild, generally inspire awe, respect, a bit of fear, and a great deal of curiosity.

- Tropical Toucans - Les Beletsky
  The shape, brilliant coloring, and tropical opulence make toucans one of the most popular "poster animals" for the tropical forests of the Americas and one of the most interesting birds in the Americas.

Environmental Features
- Colombian Sierra de la Macarena - Robert Mylde
  The Macarena is the convergence point of six major ecological and geological forces and has been called a biological hot spot. And this biological hot house is on fire.

- Chile's Native Forest Crisis - Jimmy Langman/Defensores del Bosque Chileno
  Chile's forests have more than 50 species of trees of which 95 percent are endemic, and 30 are listed as endangered, vulnerable or rare.

- After the Wars: Protecting Central America's Environment - John Burnett
  Peacekeeping brings new investments to the region, and conservationists worry that environmental laws may not be respected.

- The Kuna Kingdom - Megan Epler Wood
  A continuing series of adventures in which the author describes a series of personal journeys in search of true ecotourism in the Americas.

Bridges and Borders - Editorial
- Editorial - Ron Matter
  Environmental stories are tomorrow's political and economic features. The division between "environmental journalism" and any other journalism tends to blur when you look at a story over time.

Español/Spanish
- Ecos y Comunidades: Una Vision del Turismo en la Naturaleza - Antonio Sanchez Escobal
  La relación del turismo con la naturaleza dentro del campo ecoturístico es muy particular, pues en todo momento nos encontramos pasando por la casa de una de las más importantes relaciones sano-ecológicamente para conocer el entorno cultural.

- Conceptual and Perspectives of Ecotourism in Mexico - Arturo Cárdenas Sanabria
  El autor analiza el complejo ecoturismo en México. También ofrece información de las comunidades de las áreas protegidas y su contribución para el futuro del ecoturismo.
You Can Search This Website

Other websites focusing on trail building

- Kudos to the fine webmasters and hosts of the following sites:
  - Guiding the Way - Pat Tierney
  - Trail Planning Documents
  - HikeNet Virtual Trails
  - East Coast Trail Association (Canada)
  - Trail Center (California)

South America Close-Up

- Ecuador - Tourism Concern
  - Investigation into how ecotourism affects Ecuadorian communities
- Outside/Inside - All He Surveys - John Ryle
  - Profile of Douglas Tompkins, "56-year-old clothing magnate turned eco-crat. Chile's richest gango, the man who bought a rainforest."

- Outside/Inside - Private Tour - John Ryle
  - Practical advice for travelers to Patagonia Park.

Book Reviews

The Eco Travels website is now an Associate of Amazon.com. Check out the reviews and bibliographies and purchase your books online. Sales help support this website.

- Back Home in Indiana: Reviews of The Alchemist and The Story of B - Ron Mader
- Road Notebook
- August 1998 Reviews

History and Mythology of the Aztecs: The Codex Chimalpopoca | The Story of B | The Alchemist | Diving and Snorkeling Guide to Puerto and Honduras Bay Islands

Recipes/Recetas

The return of our popular "La Olla Latinoamericana" cooking column by Melissa Briggs - a doctoral student in sociology and world-class chef.

- Huitlacoche and Squash Blossoms

Planeta's Environmental News
Extra Features - Available only on Planeta.com

- Exploring the Mundo Maya
- Directory of Spanish Language Schools
- Exploring the Amazon
- Sustainable Development in the Americas
- Exploring Ecotourism
- Artículos sobre ecoturismo - Jorge Chavez de la Pena

Upcoming Topics for 1998:

November: Storytelling, Exploring Ecuador and Peru

I'd also like to take this opportunity to extend my gratitude to the following individuals for their encouragement and cooperation that provided direct or indirect inspiration in the creation of this and several issues of El Planeta: Patrick Martin, Atlas, Seltzer, Kathleen, Teresa, Dan, Brooke, Ted, Burke, Alan Charko, Jim, Crabtree (DVS), Susan G Cherry, Mario Guadron, Sarah Hiltz, Bill Winstead, Clay Hinkle, Oige Lee, Yveta Lesk, Patricia Mathis (Staff), Al Melvin, NASA, Nels Sankburg, George Thomas.

Music That Helped Put This Issue Together: Dave Matthews Band - Before these crowded streets, Peru Independence Day - Audioslave.
One Trail, Many Paths
Macchu Picchu Revisted
by Steve Rinder

August 1999

Hiking the Inca Trail to Macchu Picchu remains one of the most impressive and challenging treks in the Americas. Many have achieved great success (some with even more assistance) in walking in the footsteps of modern tourists and ancient priests alike, reaching its dramatic entrance Gate of the Sun, and all will recall the young lad who runs a straight course between the zig zag road down the final mountain, waving his arm in a grand gesture, yelling “goodbye” each time the bus passes. But somewhere between the MMY8 trailhead and the grand “goodbye” was created a journey that would leave that ancient stone way and lead us to paths less traveled.

On that, my first effort to accomplish its mystery, I had established expectations born of adventure and commerce (I was evaluating the tour operator for a travel network in Canada), Carlos Nodred and his INNERPERU company, Lima and Cusco) came highly recommended. Our guide, Wilbur, and his father, Max, would accompany the 6 of us, including our. Matthew, age 19, along with an equal number of porters to traverse the route revealing the secrets of the Inca.

The first indication that our journey would not be a traditional experiencing of the well travelled path came when night fell after the first day of gentle uphill descent (the second day was a thriller at almost 14,000 ft, and there forward the trail offers magnificent vistas with ice mountains which claim and honor every area still at nearly 14,000 ft). In the glow of kerosene lanterns, we feasted on porcine fare and in discussion of cultural uniqueness of the fellow travelers. We discovered that Max, who also cooks for us, was 85 and had been a guide on the trail many times in his life. Matthew was proud to hear that he was the youngest person to have hiked the trail with Max in all of those years. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship, and a passport to a new adventure. Everytime Max would run (literally) by us on the trail to help set up camp ahead for the night, he would pull Matthew up and swing him around and laugh heartily, bringing the same response. Max spoke no English
Matthew spoke little Spanish. Laughter and hugs spoke for them both. Max was a family man and Matthew became adopted.

The goodwill turned to trust very quickly and that night as we warmed to coca tea with Wilbur as translator, we listened to stories of ancient and sacred traditions of the Quechua people, hinting at the mystery and majesty of the Andean legacy. We would come to experience ritual ceremony in the ruins, guided by Max, a keeper of the light, descendent of the ancient brotherhood. The honor of the experience haunts me to this day.

In the sweeping shadow of a condor on the wing, we met our sacred valleys of the Inca and one by one, the temples of the priests greeted our energy, and Max and Matthew followed hugs with hearty laughter along the way. At the end of the journey, we said our adios, gracias, and Matthew was presented with a traditional cap of intricate beadwork and colorful tassels. It was obviously very old, made for a child, and came from Max’s village in the mountains down south. A family heirloom for the newest son.

The days of the trip far surpassed any expectations I could have had, and I have returned, guided by INNERPERU and Wilbur, and I remain eager to repeat the trail at any time. But the adventure wasn’t over when the train from Aguas Calientes hugged the roaring Urubamba River back to Cusco. The next day, Wilbur greeted us at our hotel with an invitation for three of us to come to dinner at his home. Max’s home.

We were met at 7:00 P.M. by Wilbur and hopped a cab to the far end of Cusco. We were taken to a street in a neighborhood that perched itself on the side of the mountain.

No sidewalks or streetlights, we followed our friend past light from windows in the adobe structures. We were greeted along the way by smiles and interest. This neighborhood was not commonly visited by Anglos, especially a very young one. But they all seemed to know we were coming and we felt quite celebrity in the response. At the top of the hill was Max’s home. Wilbur took us into the living room space where the table had been set for 4 of us. Max greeted all with a grand hug and a hearty laugh. We met his wife, and Wilbur’s sister and several cousins. By the time the next door neighbors and friends had arrived, it was a houseful.

Dirt floor, a single naked lightbulb, a rough wood table and two benches, it was time for us to eat. We had brought some wine, and it was served to us. The meal was traditional and delicious, including meat which was an additional expense for our hosts. We ate dinner, and they all watched us, smiling. It was a bit awkward, but Max finally had a glass of wine with us and Wilbur’s cousin was amicably into having some potatoes. Matthew made a funny face in response to a unique flavor of something and Max roared with laughter. We relaxed into the warmth of the family, together - and spent a few unforgettable hours in the company of genuine and generous friends. At the end of that evening of very little talking and very much laughing, we said final goodbyes at the front door.

No surprise, Max hugged all of us. Matthew quietly presented Max with his favorite Swiss army knife. Max got tears in his eyes, and with one final hug, we were sent on our way by a gathering of neighbors and friends. We left that home with a new definition of family, of friendship, of sharing and sacrifice (it really was Matt’s favorite knife), and of putting oneself out into the world. Who could have guessed that the trail to Machu Picchu would end in the humble kitchen of a guy named Max.

The perfect trail is not made of well-worn stones, or of the cleared way through the forest; for those are just the roadmaps to adventure. The perfect trail is made of friendship, wisdom, legacy, and hearty laughter.

One trail, many paths.

Steve Binder is an ecotourism consultant, based in Canada. He previously wrote Saving Panama’s Wildlife on Isla de la Loma for the May 1995 issue of Planeta. He can be reached by e-mail at steve.binder@dan.terrapin.com.

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Home | About | Articles | Books | Central America | Ecology | Headlines
Learn Spanish | Mexico | Travel | Site Map | South America | World Travel | Updates

57
If I had any expectations of anything in Peru, it was of
the Inca Trail - the hiking path which follows the
original trail taken by the Incas from Cusco to the
formerly lost city of Machu Picchu (rediscovered by
an American explorer in the 1900's). Just about every
backpacker in Peru does the hike, which spans 4
days and 50 km and has the reputation of being
pretty brutal and absolutely essential to experience.
The more up-scale traveler usually takes the train,
which accomplishes the trip in about 2.5 hours and
has beautiful scenery in its own right, but really isn't
even close.

Still, while I heard about it from a few people ahead
during and heard others express their worries about
their capacity to handle it, I didn't really give it
much thought ahead of time. The 2nd day was supposed to be tough - 5
hours of uphill hiking, going up 1200 meters, and then down for another 3
hours. The rest wasn't supposed to be all that difficult... for me, though. I
just sorta figured it the level of difficulty, since it didn't take any particularly
advanced skills, was something that I could manage by will power and being
just barely in decent shape. Even when I'm in the greatest of shape, my
will power can take me a long long way towards getting where I want to go,
so I wasn't all that worried and figured I'd just go and deal with it as it
unfolded before me. It was somewhat similar, I guess to the experience of
leaving for any trip - its never real till I do and forever spend too
much time planning and wondering about it until I'm already on the way.
And the day came with some of the similar feelings
that I usually have when going on a trip. I woke up early and got ready with that air of
expectation of something new and exciting. We waited outside the hostel for an hour before we
were picked up - the last ones of course. Seth and
Lee were already on the bus and we joined them.
The company we went with was JCI's Adventures, who was recommended
by the South American Explorer's Club, and we shopped around quite a bit,
so we felt like we were in pretty good hands. We stopped for breakfast
along the way and at that stopped I bought the hiking stick soon to be
known as the Cursed Stick of Machu Picchu, and really the one thing that I
dataiended to be wasn’t the most amount of time and suffering with and got most
attached to - and of course, the only one who had it.

The cursed stick of machu picchu began as a
manly grotesque hiking stick, Sure, everyone else
got the practical straight wooden sticks, but I
wanted something with character and I was
definitely willing to sacrifice some substance and
practicality for it. The stick was topped with a
grotesque face made out of real teeth and hair,
ending in a curved goat’s horn, which gave my hand
blister the very first day. Again, not the most
practical hiking stick in the world, but oh, to imagine
walking with that thing in Griffith Park back home!
Seth said it looked evil and cursed, and somehow
that was supposed to be a reason to reject it,
though for me it just made the package all that
much sweeter.

Anyhow, we met most of our
group over breakfast, a
remarkably great bunch
(almost all of them couples
damn ft) I would've loved to have gotten to know
better if it wasn't for my condition (more on that
later). There were a doctor and a lawyer from
Maryland - a white male doctor and black female
lawyer - both of them remarkably healthy and
beautiful. It's very rare to find mixed-race couples
like this when traveling... I only saw 2 black travelers
in Peru, and the other was Swiss. I don't think it's particularly the lack of
money for African-Americans as much as it is a cultural thing, just not much
thought for traveling... and it's a pretty damn materialistic culture.

Aside from the Maryland couple, there was a nice young Australian couple -
friendly and funny. A gorgeous Dutch couple - both of them solid and very
handsome. Another less fit Dutch couple (one was half-Polynesian and spoke
Spanish) whose lack of fitness I would end up being very grateful for.
Then, joining us the first night, there was also a couple of San Francisco
(the guy originally from LA) who already started out a few days from a
separate location and were pretty hardcore backpackers. You can tell they
were from SF in a second, their style was so obvious. And lastly, aside from
our little group, there was a middle-aged woman from Barcelona who was
just an absolute sweetheart of a man. We would speak together in a loose
combination of Spanish, French and English, which was exhausting but fun.
Our group was comprised of Lee, Seth, Lee and me.
The hike started out innocently enough in a pretty valley and being that almost everyone in our group was young and limber, they took a pretty damn fast pace from the start. We stopped a couple of hours later and I finally got to put down that pack and get some rest. It's not as if I couldn't keep up the pace, but it was pretty damn hard for me. So when we started off again, for another 2.5 hours or so, I took my time and just enjoyed the hike along. The trail really was beautiful and the leisurely walk was definitely my favorite part of the hike itself. I stopped off at this one spot a little bit off the road and let everyone pass me by, it was a little grass clearing with a good view and I dug for my pot and had a little smoke before getting back on the trail.

By the time I got to camp, just about at nightfall, almost everyone was already there. I had a tent with me. My throat was kinda bothering me, but I thought it meant I just needed to be drinking some more. As dinner came and went, though, I started feeling somewhat feverish and my throat was really hurting. I was coming down with something and this was the absolute worse time to come down with anything! The next day was the famous 2nd day of the hike which was supposed to be extremely difficult, and oh was it ever - 5 hours of uphill and 5 hours of break-down down-down-down. I went to sleep before anyone else cause I didn't feel well and I was hoping this would fix me up.

7.17.01 - (Inca Trail)

I woke up 3 times at night with toilet issues... another bad sign... I was told that people would definitely be talking about their toilet habits during the trip, but I just didn't think it would be me. I was really feeling like sh*t! I woke up at 5am and was so uncomfortable that I couldn't sleep anymore. I was feverish and all my muscles were aching and I felt incredibly dry and dizzy and awful. I hadn't been sick like that in a long time. Doctor Rob gave me some pills for the diarrhea, which got rid of it and diagnosed me as sick with the flu. Not malaria or yellow fever or something exotic like that, but just a god damn bad flu. On a day like this I would normally spend the entire day in bed sleeping and watching videos. Instead I only just started the easiest part of a very difficult camping trip. It would be much easier to go back then ahead for my body. Still, I felt like I couldn't go back and had to keep going - that this was my shot at the Inca Trail. So I did...

Even if I hadn't been sick I would've hired a porter to carry my backpack for day 2, as did most people, so at least I didn't have to carry my backpack... Still, I started, cursed sick of machu picchu in hand, huffing and puffing up the hill, feeling like absolute crap and although I knew that I would eventually finish the day, no matter how hard, the task ahead seemed impossible. The rest of the group went far ahead of me real quick and I walked very slowly up the relatively steep path behind them. The guide gave me a bottle of coca tea and told me to take my time and that he'll be somewhere behind me all the way. It was early morning, the worst time of the day to be sick. I walked like a zombie for an hour or
so, not covering all that much ground. I wished hard that I wasn't there and then eventually I stopped wishing and stopped thinking and just tried breathing. The first few hours really were both physically and emotionally one of the toughest things I've ever done. My memory of them is actually pretty hazy, since I was in such a heavy state of mind most of the time.

I forgot to mention that we weren't the only group on the trail. About 10 other small groups of about 10-15 persons were also on the same route as we and as people kept relative paces, I got to meet other people on the way - in my case it was the other stargazers. About an hour and a half up I ran into the ultra Dutch couple from our group resting. The guy was actually carrying his backpack, which was slowing him up. His girlfriend, how had just had a hard time on the easy hike the day before, was in really bad shape and the hike seemed almost as difficult for her as it was for me. Well, not quite, actually, because I remembered they consciously offered to wait for me and keep me company, probably because I looked so miserable out there by myself, and maybe cause they also wanted the company. In the beginning I thought that I should leave couples to themselves so they can enjoy each other's company, but soon enough I found that most couples were more than happy to spend time with a 3rd person, since as travelers they've spent so much time together than usual and needed something or somebody new to talk about or to...

The trail was psychologically much more bearable with fellow stargazers. Then, again, it also started getting physically more difficult, becoming steeper and steeper as we walked up for about 3.5 hours on an incline staircase. At least it wasn't raining anymore and I was feeling a little bit better. We made our way up very slowly, talking very little and stopping for small rests about every 2 minutes and long rests every half hour. We ate a lot of chocolate bars and trail mix. The plan was to avoid stopping for lunch in the middle of the day, but instead to do all 8-9 hours at once and then break for the day earlier, so we focused on snacks, a lot of snacks. Snacking was also an excuse to stop for a little bit longer each time, so I was all for it...

I don't think we actually passed anyone, though plenty of other people, including other stargazers would pass us... not some nice folks, as we got up higher and started seeing the view of the valley below us, things really did begin to pay off more and more in terms of the inspiration involved. Still, I remember running into our guide after an hour and a half of those damn stairs and finding out that we still had an hour and a half to go before they were over and having something inside me completely deflate. Those stairs were fucking endless for those 3 hours plus! Then again, there was definitely a special kind of joy when they were over and I could look down and thought I couldn't be anywhere near to where we started off from, I could see enough of the trail stretching below me to feel pretty damn proud of making it this far. It's this pride that was the real point of the hike for me, I think. Not the scenery, which was beautiful, but instead the completion of the act itself as a personal challenge of physical and mental endurance. I think that had I been well, this probably wouldn't have been the case as much.

We could see that top from where we were, but it was much further than we thought. The Dutch couple stayed behind and rested much longer than we, so I took a quick shot and saw the sky on the mountains was pretty damn close. It didn't feel like being on the roof of the world like I did back in the Fjords, but that's because no matter what mountain you've been on in a mountain range, there's always another one in the distance that's even higher, so you never really feel like you've reached the ultimate top.

The Dutch soon caught up to me and we struggled for another hour and a half up to the end of the path. We were so tired by then and the air so thin, that it became a matter of pure struggle of mind and body. I rested every 30 seconds or so. So even though it looked so close, it took us a damn long time to get up there. When I finally got up the head of the Dutch I just let myself collapse on the ground for a few minutes.
before getting up. The view was unbelievable... awe-inspiring, magnificent, unique, and yet I was so sick that I felt that I was only seeing a small part of it. We took some pictures. One part of me felt the pride of making it and wanted to revel in it, but the larger part of me just wanted to be left alone with a tent, a sleeping bag, and a fever.

I got my backpack from the porter that it up, who was just a teenage girl. Those porters, locals, were just unbelievable. They would run up and down the mountain carrying heavy backpacks and supplies, while the rest of us, unused to the altitude, huffed and puffed with our daypacks or less far behind them. I had to use a porter for the next 2 days as well, cause I just couldn’t carry my bag anymore. In fact, those next 2 days of downhill with the backpack were just about as difficult as the last 3 before then going up.

The Dutch couple was having a very difficult time with the downhill, which was basically more steps in the mountain that pretty soon just began killing your knees and in my case, my hip, which I expected to be my worst problem before I ended up with the flu. I’m generally really good at walking down steps and downhill in general, plus I was desperate to just get the hell out of there. I climbed down fast, jogging/slogging down the path when I could, trying cross-over patterns, jumping from step to step to keep from going back to the top and losing the damn thing kept going and going and going. I slowed down and rested a lot and had a lot of trouble walking. I could feel my fever coming back and it was dizzy. My head, which was in a haze all day, was getting worse.

I saw a blond with a Jansport daypack ahead walking in front of a guy with an old school steel-framed backpack and I knew right away they were midwesterners. It seemed that he was carrying the heavy stuff, while she walked on ahead. I caught up with him and we started talking. Kenny, a Jew from Minneapolis with typical Jewish issues, did most of the talking since I wasn’t all that able to participate. I liked him a lot, and later I’d get to spend a lot more time with him and his wife, Dina. They were my age and recently married. This was their honeymoon of a sort. She was an art history girl and he was a musician and an aspiring geographer. He yapped on and on and on as we went down together and it really helped pass the time and I didn’t mind at all hearing about his life.

When I finally got down to camp it seemed that Beth and Ed had already hooked up, like I expected them to a few days before. I insisted that we switch tents and found myself in a sleeping bag in a tent with Lee. I had taken a Vicodin or something for the pain and some sort of cold medicine and then also had a small cup of Cuban Rum with Lee and Hedaglo (the Spanish guy) and talked about movies in 3 languages. It was really great and I was feeling a lot better and was in a real good mood. The clouds started rolling up the mountain and we went outside to see it. I’ve never seen anything like it. Eventually, it just covered us and we were in that part of the mountain covered by clouds, while the snow-capped peaks a little above us remained visible. It’s those sort of scenes that I think really make the Andes so worthwhile to visit. Pretty soon, though, I started feeling the nighttime sickness again and crashed.
7.18.01 - (Inca Trail)

I slept for like 10 hours and expected to feel much better since I felt so good the morning before, but woke up feeling even worse. For me, the 3rd day, which was almost entirely downhill, was the hardest day and to be honest I don't remember very much of it.

I woke up feeling much worse than the day before and I knew it was going to be bad. I got another bottle of coca tea and someone to carry my bag for the day. The guy carrying my bag went alone with me and while everyone else stopped with the guide to check out ruins and stuff like that I just ran ahead. And I do mean, ran, cause it was downhill and I was feeling like so much shit and even with the dizziness and the fever I wanted to just get it over with as soon as possible. So I ran down for the next 2 hours with the porter behind me. I got to where we were going to lunch and collapsed and passed out/slept for a couple of hours until everyone else came and lunch was ready. I couldn't eat and went back to sleep. Then they packed up and I got up and ran down for another 8 hours. I found my tent and unrolled my sleeping bag. I don't remember the rest. I slept for something like 14 hours.

7.19.01 - (Macchu Picchu - Aguas Caliente)

I slept for a long long time (12 hours or so) and woke up feeling better than the day before but still far from normal. It was something like Sun and this was the day - a 2-hour hike to the Sun Gate - the highlight of the Inca Trail. The Inca Trail ends at the Sun Gate, which pretty much functions as the entrance to the city/ruins of Macchu Picchu, another 15-20 minute hike below. All the famous photos of Macchu Picchu are taken there - the city carved into the mountainside with peaks surrounding it and the mist rolling up towards it. At the summer equinox, the sun shines right through the Sun Gate and onto an altar in Macchu Picchu and that's supposed to be the ideal time to see it, but hey, I don't think anyone was particularly disappointed... except maybe me, a little. But I'm a difficult one and really all I wanted was just a warm comfortable bed, hot tea, and if it wouldn't trouble god too much, a TV with anything in English on.

Not that I would get all of these, but when they're on your mind with the force that my body demanded them that, it's hard to look beyond them. We ate breakfast and set out. Once again, I had a porter carry my backpack, since I was too weak to do it myself. I set out determined to watch the sunrise over Macchu Picchu and experience what people come to the Inca Trail to experience. The sun was coming up and I kept a fast pace. Kath was walking with his video camera and I heard him say to the camera (pointing at himself) right before getting to the sun gate something like "Egypt, Zimbabwe, China, Turkey and finally the culmination of it all, here in Macchu Picchu... etc." He's an actor and has a good voice for these sorta overdramatic gestures, and it really was grand and a part of me tried to shake off the desire to just get the hell out of there and wanted to experience the thrill of it all.
When I got to the top I found my entire group gathered together watching the sunrise. They all seemed very emotional and I felt like, to them, it really was the once-in-a-lifetime type of experience that made the Inca Trail the most popular highlight of South American travel. It's funny to realize that I actually felt more like I was on their floor than the actual view of Machu Picchu below. I was too sick to fully enjoy the beauty of it all, as I have been all along, but the look on those faces instantly hit me hard. I was extremely jealous that I was jealous very strongly. I sat down and rested for 15 minutes and stood at the valley below and felt like complete and utter shit. I decided that I was going to actually skip Machu Picchu itself and make my way to Agua Caliente, the nearby town for a bed I had needed to be in. The whole point of the trail is Machu Picchu, I guess, but for me, as I knew it would be, it was definitely about the trail there and not the ruins themselves.

I went down alone with my porter and it took me a long time to do it cause I had to stop so often to catch my breath. Once down I found out the buses wasn't leaving for another hour. I sat down in the shade and said hi to the different people I've met on the train who were passing me by. God damn it, I was here... so damn close. I decided that I'm going give the actual ruins a shot. And it was hard, but bearable. There's not much to say about the ruins that you can't get in a book or video. The one cool part was climbing up (against the rules) into the actual sun temple which Seth wanted to film for his video. Did I already mention that Seth and Lee were officially there to construct lesson plans for school classes?

As is the normal case with ruins, it wasn't too long before I was kinda bored, and besides, I was getting worse again. We left and took the bus to Agua Caliente where Lee and Seth had a room reservation they canceled. I decided that I just couldn't go on and would stay back alone and get a simple private room with a hot shower. My fever was just blazing and I barely managed to get out of lunch (being unable to eat) and with the porter's help, get up the hill to my room before I passed out... that was at about 3pm. I woke up in a pool of sweat in the middle of the night, still wearing my clothes (?). My fever finally broke after about 10 hours of sleep and I felt much more clearheaded. I couldn't fall asleep so I read more of the extremely fascinating story of the Conquest of the Incas. I read for about 4 hours and then went to sleep again. I felt like I could sleep forever and ever - in other words, I was finally allowed to experience the flu in the normal way.
7.20.01 - (Agues Calieneta)

Man, I woke up and I knew that this would be it. That I'd made it over that hump. That it was only going to be better and better from here. I was getting well, the fever broke, I felt a million times better... and, oh yeah of course it'd be the first day AFTER the Inca Trail... sweet irony and you what, I was feeling so damn good I could laugh at it and did it.

I found a nice place than usual for breakfast and talked to 4 very nice Canadian women, each of whom reminded me of Nicole's aunt or kinda her mother in some way... it just felt like they were somehow part of the extended family... I had another experience like that in Arequipa with an older Swedish woman. Anyhow, it was great chatting with them. They were all recently retired NGO workers, who have been everywhere, since they'd go on a trip together every year for the last 20 years or so and Real nice bunch.

I had to kill an entire day. That was the price of spending another night here and the notion of today. The train wouldn't leave till almost 5 and I had nothing to do till then. The town was named after its hot springs which the Incas themselves used. I heard that they were filthy and lame and not worth going to so I decided to skip it. Thought I'd just spend the day reading, since there was absolutely nothing else in the damn town and even the internet cost something ridiculous like 14/h... well, maybe it doesn't seem that ridiculous now, but it did then from that financial perspective... nothing to do... I really wasn't looking forward to this, but it was a hell of a lot better than lying in bed with a terrible flu, so hey...

Lucky for me, who do I see pass by, but my man from Minneapolis, Kenny. Man, was I glad to see him. He and Dana decided to stick around there for an extra day for some reason, I can't remember why and now like me we were stuck with basically the day to kill like me. We ended up 2 different restraints for almost all of it just talking. Really liked these two lads - an artist and musician and really down to earth - what more can you ask for? Ha, the Spanish guy came by. I guess he stayed a night to go the baths. He said they were actually great, and since we've already spent the day doing everything but, we figured we'd check it out. And it was kinda stinky (because of the sulfur) and looked a little dirty, but it was still a whole lot of fun, especially in the tub. People drank beer all around us. It was a nice little scene until the Sulfur began making me dizzy like they said it would.

We got on that train and left. The train trip started at daylight and it was pretty damn beautiful. Later we had to switch to a bus. By the time we got to Cusco I was just dying to get to a bathroom so I wished those 2 a very quick farewell and ran the hell of the bus before anyone else did. Little did I expect to run into those 2 again, and so glad I did... we really clicked together. Went back to the hotel and found out Ev was staying with Beth (as expected) so I got my own room for the night and just read the night away... the book was getting damn good... the Spanish conquest of the Incas was just so damn interesting!

(continue to Cusco notes)
6 References:


