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ALEJANDRO FOGEL'S

THE INCAS ROAD

EL CAMINO DE LOS INCAS

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LAST TAMBO IN MENDOZA



ICWA FELLOW ALEJANDRO FOGEL IS AN ARTIST EXPLORING THE INCAS ROAD

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, The Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

Cover: Tambo Tambillitos

THE INCAS ROAD

LAST TAMBO IN MENDOZA



*"I have
seen with
my own
eyes that
most of
the towns,
tambos
and set-
tlements
of the
indians
are
deserted
and
burned..."*

Cristóbal Vaca de
Castro
King Charles'
Emissary to Peru,
Tambo
Ordinances of
1543

I

have
been sitting
here in this
mountain
wilderness
for a few
hours and,
despite all the beauty
of the landscape and
the huge emotion of
being here at one of
the very last tambos
of the Incan empire, I
can't take away my

eyes from the word
"Carmela" scratched
into one of the rocks
making up what's
left of the ruined
tambo wall.

Who is Carmela?

Sometimes in my
obsessive artist's
mind, I can't stop
playing obsessive
games. Carmela was
here. The word
Carmela is here.
Somebody painted
the word "Carmela"
on the stone of the
destroyed tambo
wall.

Carmela and her
lover had a picnic on
a wonderful Sunday
morning, maybe
sitting at the same
spot I am sitting at
right now. They
brought meat and a

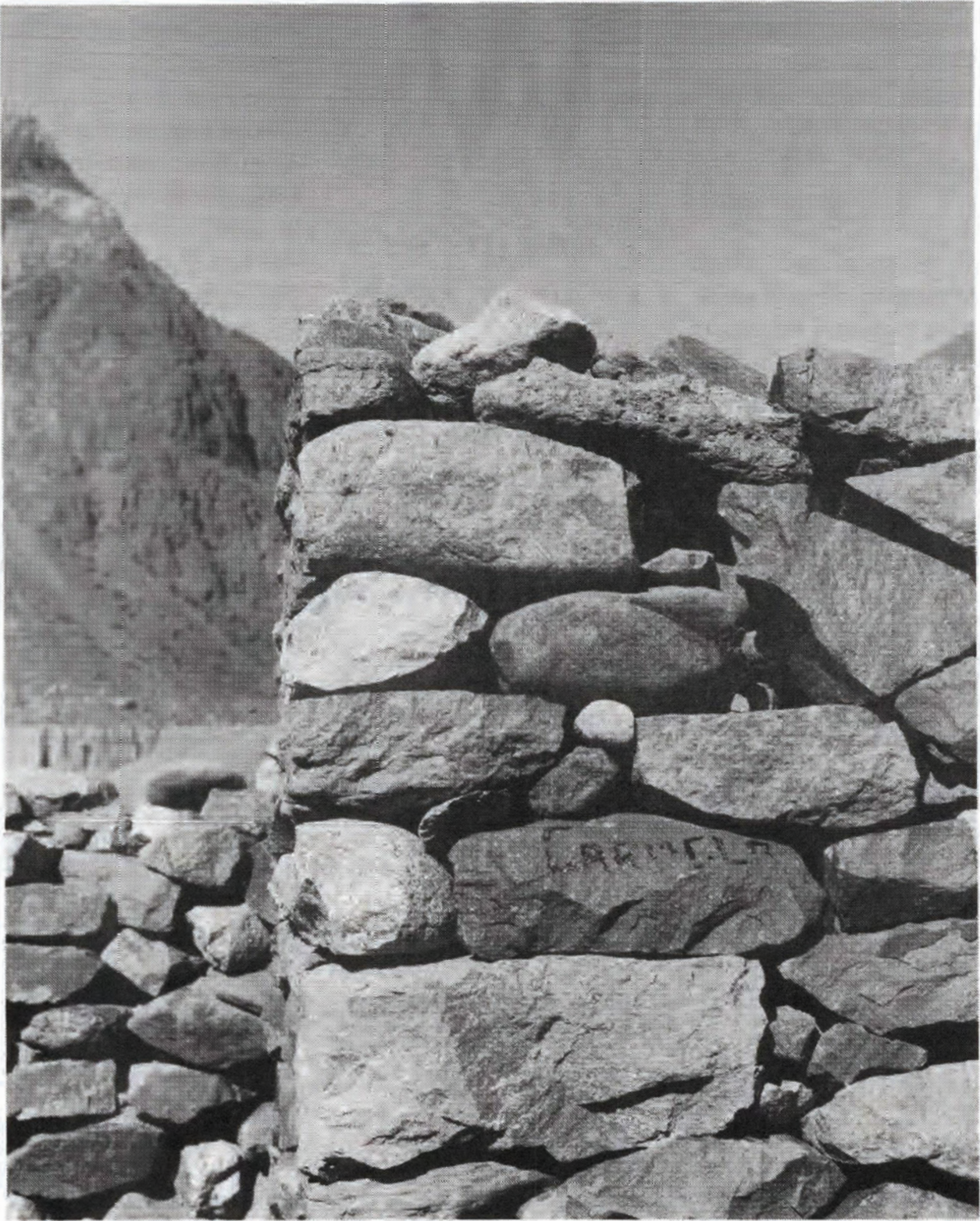
salad and, with some
of the stones that are
piled up here, they
improvised a grill to
make an asado.
Carmela, Carmela.
After they ate
Carmela's lover put
the garbage on a few
pages of Los Andes
newspaper, made it
into a soccer ball, and
tossing it into the
spotless landscape,
felt like Maradona for
a couple of minutes.
The game ended
when some of the
garbage started to fall
out.

Carmela, Carmela.

CA
RM,

ela, rme,
zooming in and out
with my camcorder,
adjusting the focus of
the Nikon.

Then, they had mate.



Tambo wall with "Carmela" painted on one of the stones.

Carmela's lover wanted to immortalize his love for Carmela. He brought a small can of tar from work. He chose the best stone and with a stick, in between mates that Carmela, full of love, was pouring for him, he wrote in big print the word CARMELA. And then they headed back for Mendoza.

I am still sitting here, obsessed. My wife Shelley Berc and archaeologist Roberto Bárcena are talking near the car, a few yards away. I can't hear what they are saying. I am here with *Carmela*, who is stealing the beauty of the tambo.

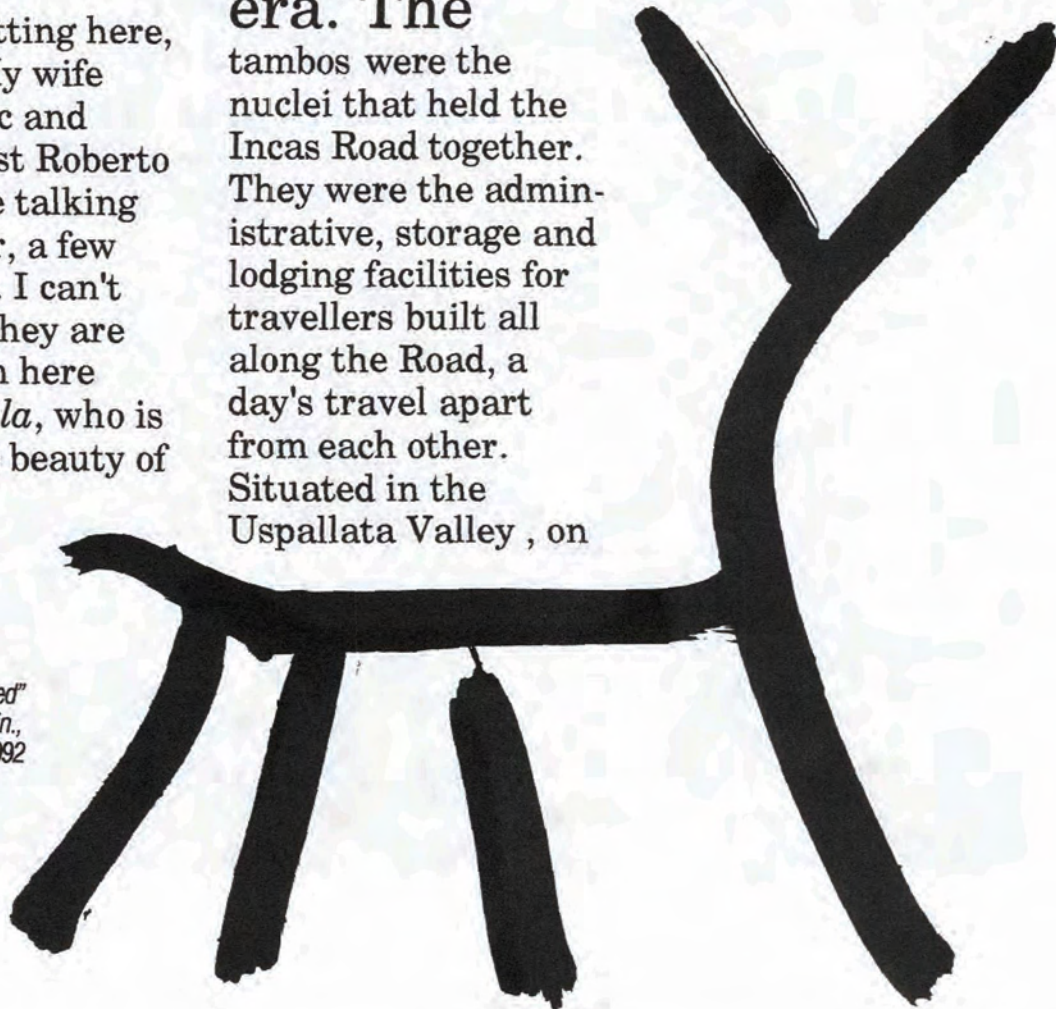
W

e are in Tam-
billitos, one
of the
typical
tambos of
the Incaic
era. The

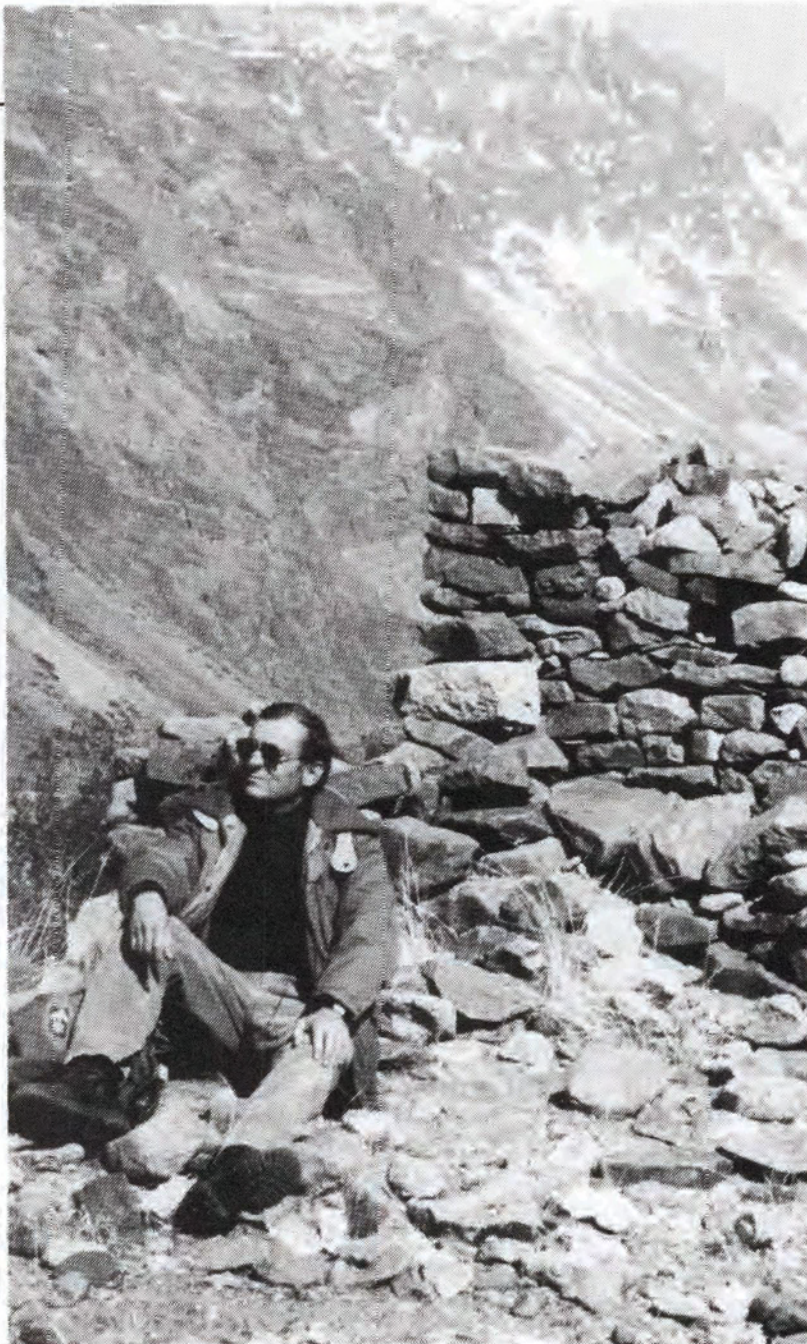
tambos were the nuclei that held the Incas Road together. They were the administrative, storage and lodging facilities for travellers built all along the Road, a day's travel apart from each other. Situated in the Uspallata Valley , on

a stream, Tambillitos has a special significance. It is the last tambo in Argentina, located at the last mountain pass to the east across the Andes to Chile. For thousands of years, this pass was the only way people of this region could go across the mountains and reach the Pacific Ocean and contact inhabitants on the

"Untitled"
ink on paper, 8x14 in.,
1992



other side of the Andes. In the XV century the Incas controlled this area and the old aboriginal paths became part of the Incas Road, the same road I am walking right now. The landscape hasn't changed from that time to this-- the same nine hundred foot high hills on each side of the Quebrada, the same reddish earth, the same purple-brown, turquoise, quartz-white and blood red stones that cover it, that at one time were the steadying rocks of the Incas Road. No trees, only wild scraggly bushes full of thorns. The sky is immensely blue, sharp as fine crystal cut by the powerful, snowy Andes.



Professor Roberto Barcena

I took a walk alone along this portion of the Road. Although it felt as if my head was full of sound, the only sound I could hear was my footsteps and the brutal wind. I was trying to get a

sense of what they felt like, the peoples who lived here hundreds, thousands of years ago, who lived their lives in the rhythms and shadows of these Andes. Its no new discovery that



Incas Road at Tambillos

we modern city
people, are out of
touch with nature.
But it shocked me

just how horrible
this 'out of touchness'
feels up here. It's as
if I am missing
something deeply
important that can't
penetrate my 'good to
30 below zero' down
jacket, something
that my state of the
art video camera
cannot record or even
track.

I just mumbled the

word 'Carajo' under
my breath; it seems
to be the first verbal
response that came
directly from my
heart since I got up
here. 'Carajo'-- It's
hard to translate. If
we were on network
TV you wouldn't be
able to hear it
anyhow. A guy sitting
at a powerful elec-
tronic editing desk
would press a couple

of keys and that's it. Carajo would disappear and you wouldn't be able to hear it. Paradoxically that's what happened to the original inhabitants of this land, the Tawantinsuyu when the conquistadores came. It took more than an editing device to silence their voices, their cries, but the same decision. Suppress it.

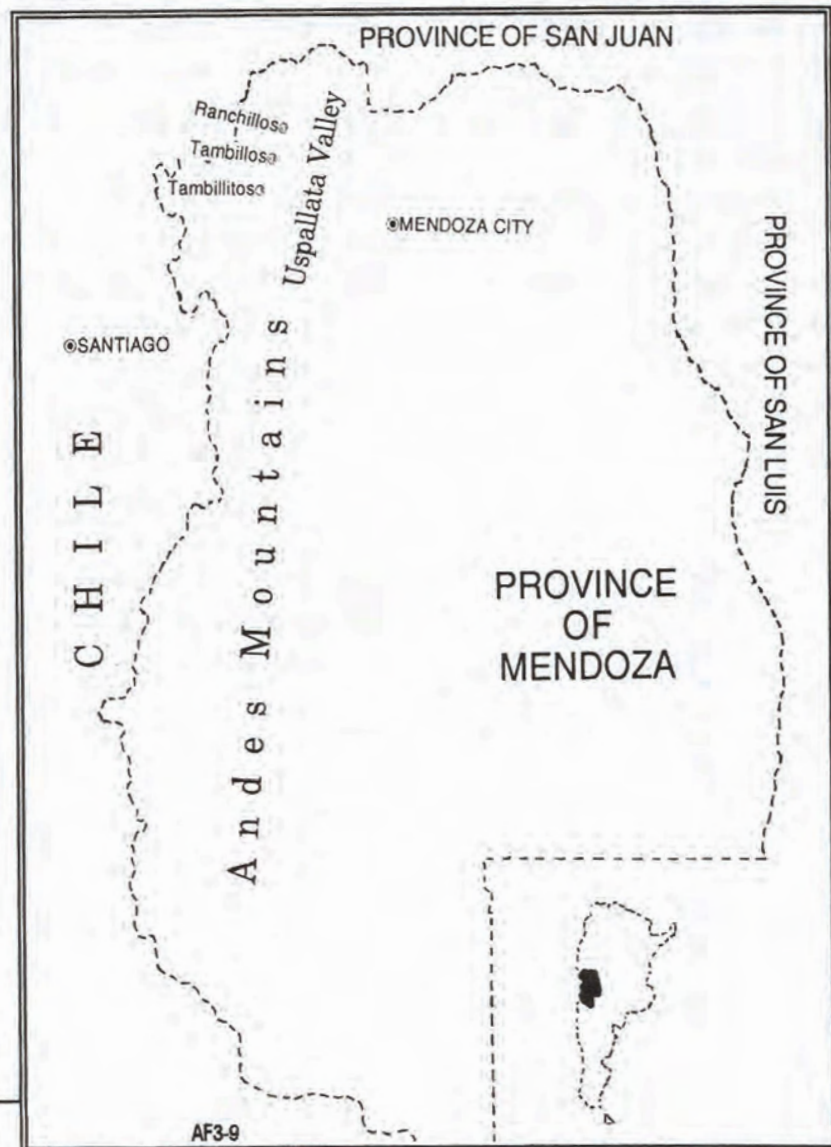
to our Latin American pre-European past, became our expert guide. He had a couple of weeks off from teaching, due to winter vacations, and he left the excavations he is conducting on the old city of Mendoza in charge of an aide, to be with us.

He is in his forties,

tall and lean, with a Cuyo accent. He started to excavate this area in the 1970's, trying to protect the tambos from depredation and destruction. He talks about a new law with hope and passion. The Municipality that controls this mountain area, has declared it a natural and cultural land-

P

rofessor Roberto Bárcena from the University of Cuyo, an archaeologist who is battling to preserve the remaining tambos as standing testimonies



mark, opening the door to effective protection. For Barcena the only way to stop the depredation is to close off the tambos and allow visitors only when it is possible to control them. He also thinks that enclosing the tambos and marking them will add some status to the sites, and will make people think that behind the wire there is something important and valuable. The problem of ignorance of ones' heritage in this part of South America, Barcena says, starts at school where history begins with the Spaniards and

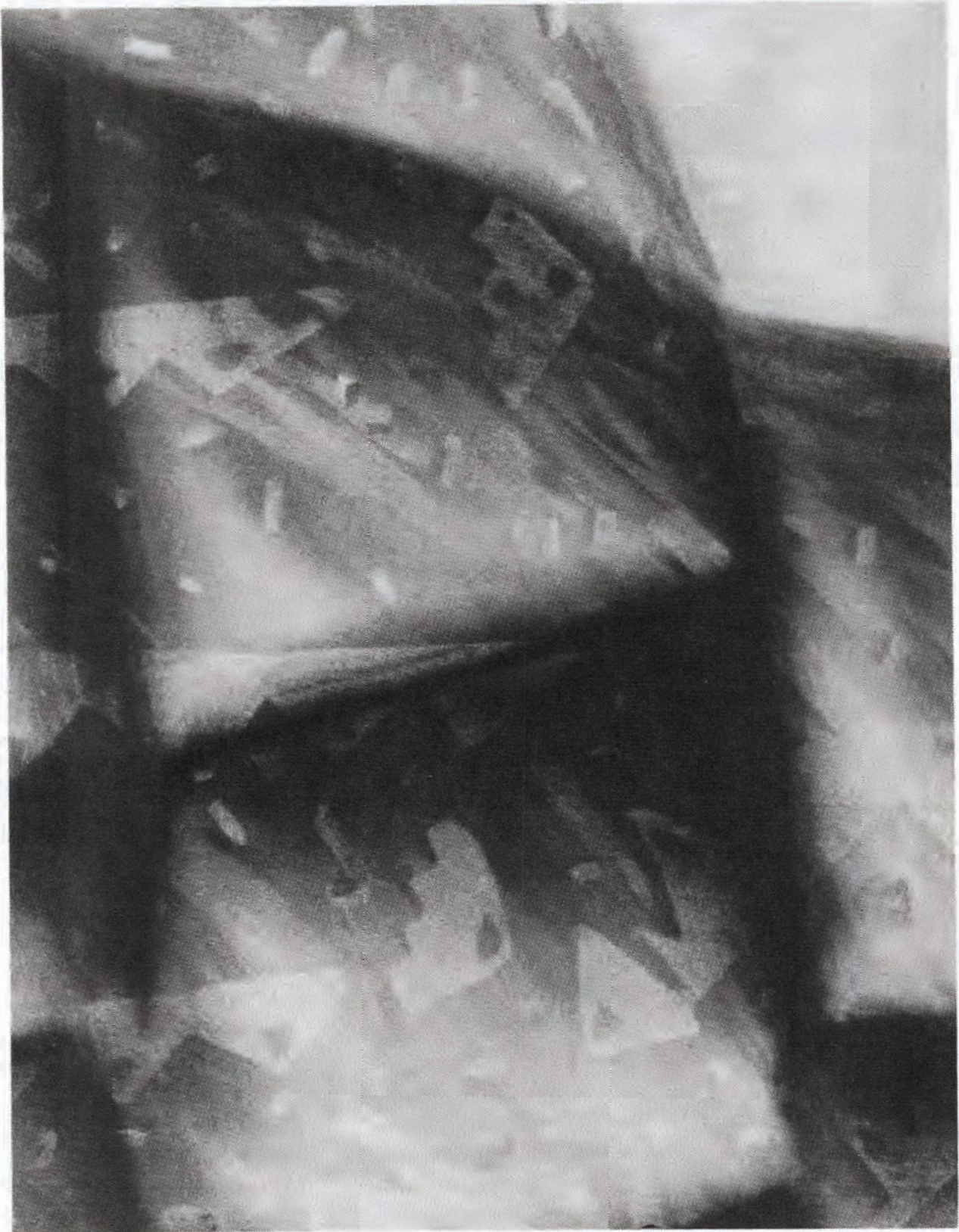
there is almost nothing taught about the aboriginal cultures. He is about to finish enclosing the tambo Tambillos with a fence. I personally don't like the idea of interfering with the landscape, creating a jail of sticks and wire all around the perimeter of the tambo. It makes me feel oppressed--like looking at an animal in a zoo. I couldn't even "see" the tambo. But it seems there is no other way to save it by now. I asked the \$64,000 dollar question . Why don't you create a big open area around the tambo so it won't feel so asphyxiating. The answer was: money. The economy in Argentina is in such bad shape and the inflation in dollars so

huge, that they can barely afford what they have done which was mostly financed by private contributions and from Barcena and his associates' own pockets. Archaeological protection and restoration of indigenous sites have never been high on the government's priority list.

L

ast year,
Shelley and
I were some
of the last
people to
walk among
the wonders

of the monolithic
alignments in
Carnac, France, in
just the way that the
people who
worshipped them
thousands of years



"Wall", oil on canvas, 30x20in., 1992



Driving on The Incas Road . Highway 7, Province of Mendoza.

ago walked through them. Soon after, visitors to the site had to be satisfied

with observing them from a glassed-in concrete building constructed by the mayor's office for the 'protection' of the monuments, causing one of the most abominable interference in archaeological landscape and spirit ever. The alignments at Carnac are spread over 3 kilometers and include 2,792 stand-

ing stones from 3 to 18 feet tall, put together somewhere between 4,500 and 2,000 BC. We interviewed Anne-Elizabeth Riskine, curator of the Carnac Museum of Prehistory who opposed the closings. She said that there was no reason to close off the area to pedestrians, because

there was no possibility of depredation, since the monoliths are so big and heavy that there is no way they could be moved and people walking around them can't do anything to the terrain since the soil is so strong. The truth is that the Mayor's office at Carnac wanted to charge 5 franc fee per visitor and closing off the area was the easiest way to do it. Despite nearly total objection from the people of Carnac as well as from the experts in the field, the mayor is well connected in national government affairs and nothing could be done to stop

his preservation plan. While the Carnac closing is awful and unnecessary, the conditions at Argentina's tambos make closing a must. These two cases bring up many questions about archaeological preservation--when is preservation of sites in the physical sense an abomination to their preservation in the metaphysical or historical sense? When is it necessary to destroy their environmental context in order to preserve the physical ruin? And

when can we think ahead and find a way to preserve both the thing and its meanings?

T

here is no way to know exactly how many tambos there were at the time of the Spanish invasion, 500 years ago. The



"Untitled"
ink on paper, 8x14 in.,
1992

presumptions is that about 2,000 were in place throughout the 40,000 kilometer Incas Road. The tambos were planned and constructed differently depending on their location. In the regions far from Cuzco they were built by local peoples supervised by the Incas engineers. The tambos of the region of Mendoza were built by the Diaguita people, very strong in the Cuyo region and Chile, with help from the local Huarpes. The services provided by the tambos included food

and accomodation for armies and, in the case of Tambillos, the production of ceramics. They were used to keep llamas and guanacos and they all have a strategic military importance. (Even now, there is a major Argentinian army base nearby.) Tambillitos was created to protect the road to Chile and the tambo of Tambillos to maintain the dominance of the people of the nearby Uspallata.



"Untitled"
ink on paper, 8x14 in.,
1992

T

he chasquis or runners, members of an extensive network capable of running a

message at a pace of 25 kilometers an hour, made the tambos their rest stops and relay stations. The chasqui network, which in some regions ran 24 hours a day, also had small huts in between tambos where they waited for messages. There is a famous story about the Inca kings having fresh salt water fish in landlocked Cuzco, brought by chasquis in a couple of days, running across the Andes from the Pacific ocean, hundred of miles

away. Since the Incas didn't have a formal alphabet the way we know it, they carried their kingdom's messages orally or by quipus. The quipus were a mnemonic system of strings and knots of various colors and sizes spaced at different distances on a line that could relate everything from grain accounts to laws to news of the empire. Only trained people were able to read them.



Guaman Poma de Ayala (1545?-1620?): "Incan Accountant and Treasurer"
In the drawing the character is using a quipus.

I

t is cold and dark. We are at Ranchillos, another tambo on The Incas

Road. I can see a fire in the distance. I am

pouring a mate for Shelley from the thermos to keep warm. I wanted to wait at the site until dark to get a sense of it at night. We are sitting on our Renault, watching the stars blink in the pitch black, cloudless sky. The Incas road is that very straight fine line glowing from moonlight that

runs to the north and south. For the last five hundred years, the white man has tried to hide and dismiss the advanced culture and lives of aboriginal peoples in this land. I can see better in the dark. 'Progress' was the word commonly used by the Creole as they buried the native culture. 'Progress'

was also the word the Incas used when they imposed their style and designs on the Diaguita people and the Huarpes. Incas from the locals' point of view: those guys from Cuzco who came and taught us how to follow the Empire rules. Keep your shapes but use our design. Upon the orders of the Incan Empire, the Diaguitas from the Norte Chico Chileno went across the Andes into the

Uspallata Valley and built tambos with the help of the Huarpes in the XV century. In 1551 when the first Spaniards invaded Cuyo and in 1561 when they established Mendoza City, they used the same word, 'progress' to justify the Huarpes slavery and later, their extinction. We are driving back to Mendoza City on the highway 7, once the Incas Road. We pass by the protected curve that Barcena

and his group successfully lobbied the authorities to create just before they were going to destroy the tambo Tambillitos in order to build a highway with a straighter line. Paradoxically, when the road was being paved, the workers lived in the tambo. Layer through layer, from Diaguita ceramic to cans of Coke, the tambo's destiny is still being written.☉

Glossary

Tambo: Spanish. From quechua: Tampus. Administrative, storage and lodging facilities built along The Incas Road.

Asado: Spanish. Barbecue.

Carajo: Spanish. Shit!

Chasqui: Quechua. Runner, messenger.

Cuyo: Mapuche. Country of sand. Argentine region that includes the provinces of Mendoza, San Juan and San Luis.

Cuzco: Quechua. The navel of the world. Capital of the Inca Empire. (Peru)

Maradona, Diego: Argentinian top soccer player.

Mate: Spanish. Herbal tea. Drunk in a traditional gourd with a metal straw.

Norte Chico Chileno: Spanish. Northern Chilean region.

Quipus: Quechua. Mnemonic system of strings and knots.

Tawantinsuyu: Quechua. The Inca Empire or "land of the four quarters".



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