

UCLA student stuns archaeological world

By Eleanore Fahey

UCLA student Reinaldo Cholfi was scanning aerial photographs of a region near Machu Picchu, Peru, last spring, searching for signs of earthquake activity. What he found is shaking up the archaeological world.

Cholfi talked about his findings during a joint meeting of the Archaeological Society and the Geography Club Oct. 15.

During a slide presentation, he pointed out several straight lines in the rugged, mountaineous terrain.

"They could have been faults. But you could actually see rectangular features," Cholfi said.

He was convinced the lines were manmade. In September, he went to Peru to find out.

Joined by his friend, Octavio Fernandez, an archaeologist with the Peruvian National Cultural Institute, the two hiked a snake-and bug-infested jungle to the area that Cholfi had identified from the photographs.

They found a carefully cut stone wall eight feet high and six feet wide that stretches for more than 1,000 feet.

Cholfi said that the wall was built by the ancient Incas to ter-

race the earth to prevent soil and water runoff.

They also found the remains of three rooms, although Cholfi isn't certain if they are walls or foundations. "I wouldn't be surprised if there are more rooms than we found."

"It may represent an agricultural site that served Machu Picchu," he said. Machu Picchu lies a few miles away from the region Cholfi was investigating, and is the subject of speculation among archaeologists. Some believe Machu Picchu was self sustaining.

Cholfi said that he has discovered evidence to prove that the site may have agriculturally supported Machu Picchu, an ancient Incan religious center. "Now we know where they could have supported the city and maintained the economy."

The Andes climatic regime is dominated by southeast trade winds and the Humboldt ocean current, Cholfi explained.

At night clouds come down and protect the area from frost, acting like a solar blanket to moderate conditions.

"It was a natural

greenhouse," he said.

They found several mortars for grinding grain, including an unusual double one. Cholfi said they are significant because they indicate a permanent settlement.

He and Fernandez named the terrace Maranpampa, a combination of Quecha words meaning mortar and plain.

Cholfi is not the only person to have found sites in the area. But no one has found a larger one, he said.

Maranpampa is about twice the size of Machu Picchu, which is about five square miles, and he said he is certain there are other ancient communities along the valley.

Because Cholfi and Fernandez only spent a full day there, they were unable to explore the entire site and assess its archeological significance. The mosquitos and snakes drove them out.

Cholfi said that Maranpampa "should be in the same time frame as Machu Picchu," about 1500 A.D.. Pot shards that he unearthed may confirm this speculation as soon as chemical tests identify the era when the relics were used.

He suspects that mapping the site will take a few years, and



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Reinaldo Cholfi

then he predicts "a hard, careful, slow, systematic excavation." In the meantime, he will work on some articles for academic publications.

Continuing his field work, Cholfi will return to Maranpampa next summer. Cholfi, who is

working toward his master's degree in archaeology and architecture at UCLA, received his B.A. in geography last year.

The Archaeological Society meets every Wednesday at noon in the Kinsey Commons room.