

“Between the Lines”

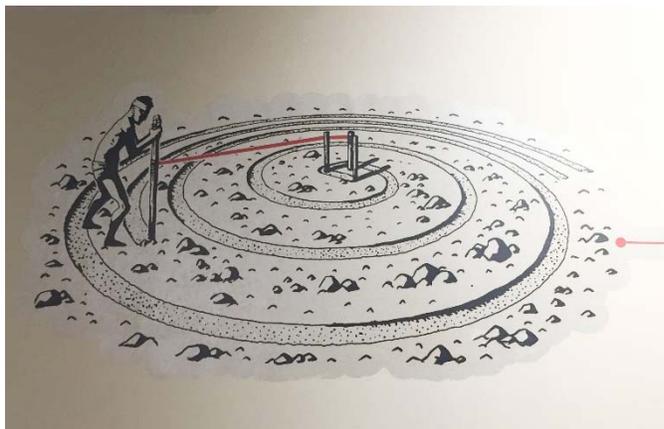
Text & Photos by Bruce Hamilton, AIA



The ancient inhabitants of Nazca removed the reddish stones. This way, they created furrows where stone contrast with the lightest ground shade.

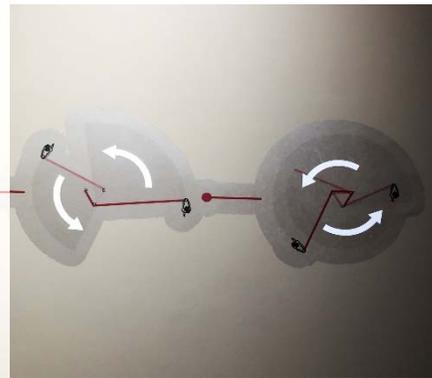
grouped together and archaeologists believe they were made around 200 BC with most of the geoglyphs coming later. With some geoglyphs reaching 1,000 feet in size, the Nazca Lines were not fully discovered until the start of air travel in Peru about 90 years ago.

Inca ruins, the Amazon Jungle and fascinating tribal customs are the top reasons why Peru ranks among the world’s great centers of ancient civilizations. Located in the Peruvian coastal plain some 400 km south of Lima, Peru is home to the Nazca Lines, a collection of geometrical patterns or geoglyphs etched into stone surfaces under the desert sand thousands of years ago. The geoglyphs include various geometric forms like triangles, spirals and trapezoids as well as intricately designed fauna such as a spider, condor, monkey and lizard. According to our tour guide, the latter, which are technically called biomorphs, are largely



The Nazcas used wooden stakes that were joined by a rope. This technique allowed them to repeat the process.

By far the best way to capture the impact of the Nazca Lines (designated a UNESCO



Heritage Site) was for our tour group to board a small propeller plane on June 24 of this year. During

our flight to the Peruvian coastal plain, we were given a sheet that listed what images to look for and in what order. Once we could make out the 165-foot hummingbird, we had a better idea of how to recognize the patterns. The next image though, was surprising.

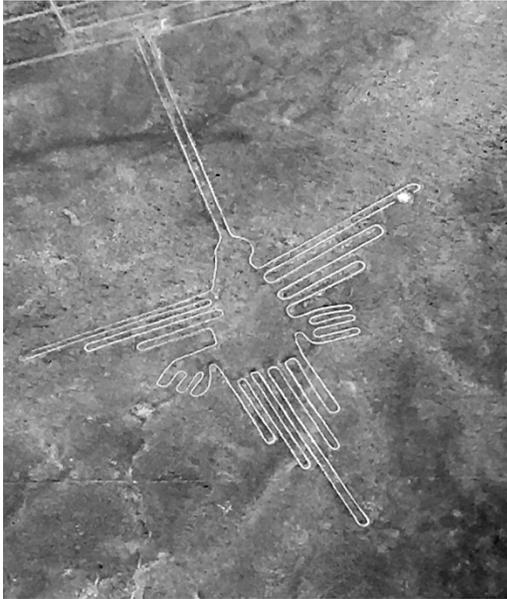
“Do you see that?” I asked
“I do,” Molly said. “What do they call that?”
I looked down at the sheet and read, “An Astronaut.”

“Why would they draw an astronaut thousands of years ago?” Molly replied.

With a strangely shaped head and giant round eyes, the 130-foot tall geoglyph etched into the hillside looked like a confounded alien waving



Our Transportation to View the Nazca Lines



Hummingbird...the most famous geoglyph drawn by ancient Peruvians in the desert of Nazca

at our plane. This immediately added another twist: How did these giant patterns appeared in the sand without modern instrumentation?

After seeing the astronaut, we were more determined than ever to see the rest of the geoglyphs and they came in rapid succession during our 30-minute flight. We marveled at the 360-foot-long monkey with the spiral tail, the absolutely gorgeous 450-foot-long condor and the creepy 150-foot-tall spider. Our plane visited more than a dozen different geoglyphs. The size and scope made it hard to imagine how an ancient civilization might have crafted such works. The Nazca culture created these geoglyphs over centuries so it wasn't like they had their own "SketchUp" program drafting these out in a single lifetime.

records. According to our local tour group leader, one idea is that they are linked to the heavens with some lines representing constellations in the night sky. Another idea is that the lines played a role in pilgrimage, with one walking across them to reach a sacred place such as Cahuachi and its adobe pyramids. Yet another idea is that the lines are connected with the water, something vital to life yet hard to find in the desert and may have played a part in water-based rituals.

The purpose of the Nazca Lines continues to elude researchers and remains a matter of conjecture. The ancient Nazca culture was prehistoric, they left no written



Creepy 150-Foot-Tall Spider

All of these theories have their doubters, but most researchers believe the Nazca Lines in some



Nazca Lines Illustration Guide

way involve water and rituals. Our local tour guide commented that his favorite Nazca observation comes from an online documentary Ancient Aliens Debunked: if you asked an ancient Nazcan what they believe about the world and how it worked, they'd likely say something like: "we take hallucinogenic substances and cut off a

lot of heads in hopes that the monkey spirit would bless us with a good crop this year.” In the end, it might just be as simple as that.

After viewing the last image, the small plane headed back to the dusty airfield. Like a rusty old roller coaster, the slow-moving plane rattled, shook and we felt every slight change in altitude to a somewhat rough landing. Judging by one of our tour group’s hand movements during the descent, Molly had suddenly become Catholic.

Whether made by the landing gears of alien spacecrafts, a homage to the gods, a sacred pathway meant for worship or simply a means to make sources of precious water for the Nazca people, the lines, figures and animals that are etched upon the barren Peruvian desert continued to inspire our tour group after our return flight to the airport. It reminded our group that there are forces we will never be able to understand within this universe. As one member of our group commented, “life would be a lot less interesting if there were no mysteries to unravel.”