

Salinas

14 August 2008

The hunter-gatherer bent down to the bubbling spring. The water was clear like the other springs he knew. The water was warm like some other springs he knew.

He cupped his hand into the water and tasted it, then quickly spit it out.

This water didn't taste like the other springs he knew.

From that day, many millennia ago, humans have been at the bubbling spring.



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They routed the water down small channels.



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And where it spilled over, it created walls and cascades of white.



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But where it didn't spill, where it gathered in pools,



it evaporated,



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and left behind a crust,



a crust of salt.



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So the humans carefully routed the water into segmented pools.



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Dozens of pools.



Salinas

Hundreds of pools.



Salinas

Thousands of pools.



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Each of the 5,740 pools is precisely fed by a small rivulet.



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The water flow is controlled by dams of rocks.



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Or a single pebble.



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Each pool is owned and worked by an individual or family.



Who work together to break up the crust,



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scrape up the salt,



and gather it into piles



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of the three grades of salt produced.



Once the piles are formed,



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the salt is bagged and hand carried along the narrow ridges between the pools and up the steep slopes,



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where it is weighed and stored for distribution.



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Most of the finished product is distributed by truck, but some is distributed the old fashioned way.



It is the way it is today.

It is the way it has been for many thousands of years.

It is the way of the Salinas.

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The bubbling spring and salt pools (pocitos) are part of the Salinas (salt mines) located in the Inca's Sacred Valley near Maras, Peru at S13.30400 W72.15407, altitude 10,033 feet / 3,058 meters. Each salt pool yields about 150 kilos / 331 pounds of unrefined salt per month.

The 260 salt miners are part of a cooperative and most live in the nearby towns of Maras and Pinchinjoto. They commute to and from work like most people.



All photos by Douglas Hackney.



Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>