

Volunteers from Santa Barbara help restore Machu Picchu

Group's members
also reach out to
local communities
they visit

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Two months ago, Richard Tobin and nine other Santa Barbarans became the first volunteer group in history to help restore the sacred grounds of Machu Picchu in Peru. He will be making a return trip to the site in April and is looking for more volunteers.

Mr. Tobin is a member of the Conservation Volunteers International Program, a Santa Barbara-based nonprofit organization that sponsors "working vacations" for residents interested in preserving some of the world's most prestigious heritage sites. They were some of the first foreigners to help restore the site since Yale archaeologist Hiram Bingham rediscovered the lost world in 1911.

The group spent two weeks in Machu Picchu in November, helping to restore the site by removing moss and vegetation from rocks and planting trees in the area.

"The holy site is managed by Peruvian Institute of Culture and Natural Resources, but they are only given a \$30,000 budget for the entire year," Mr. Tobin explained. "You cannot properly manage a park half the size of Yosemite on \$30,000, so our service is needed more than ever."

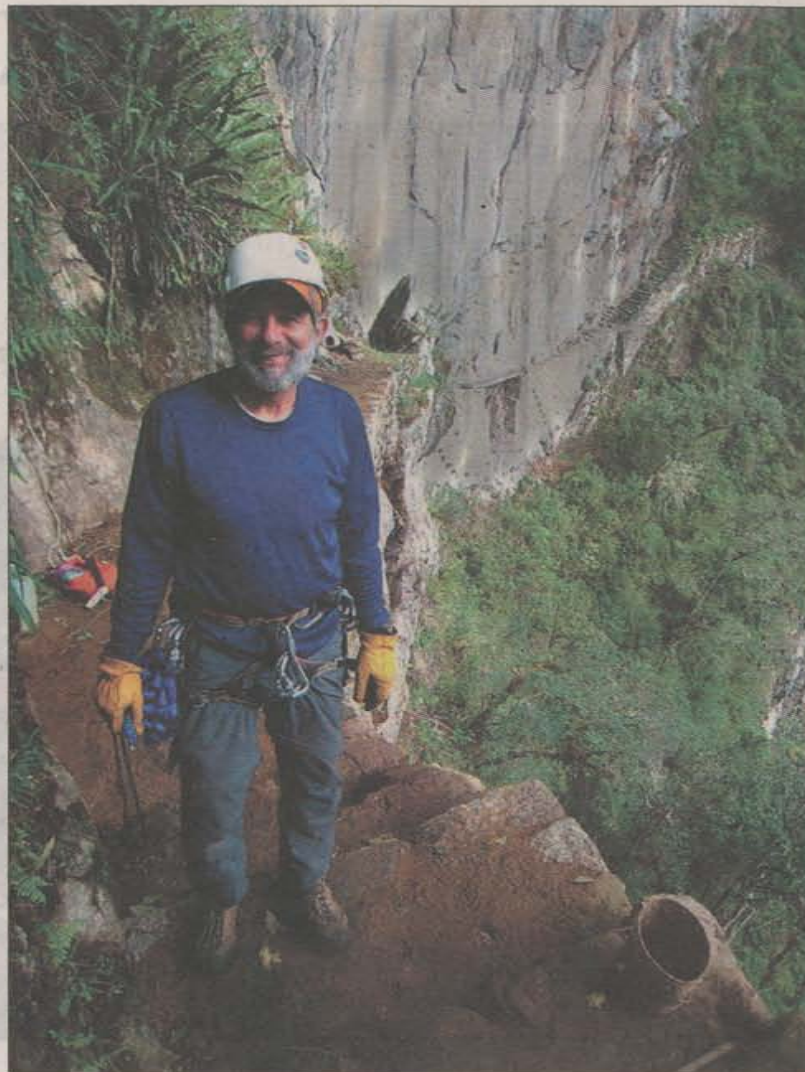


PHOTO COURTESY CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

Rick Stein of the Santa Barbara County Search and Rescue team taught a vertical rock rescue course for Peruvian emergency services personnel. The course was sponsored by CMC Rescue, a Goleta-based rescue and mountain-climbing equipment company. Mr. Stein was traveling with a local nonprofit group called Conservation Volunteers International Program.

In fact, the condition of the trails up to the holy site had become so worn and mismanaged that the government had begun to limit use of the site to 500 visitors per day. Mr. Tobin and his group helped to improve the park's trails by creating more stable and clearly marked paths for hikers.

The group also looks to reach out to the local community.

"Too often, we see that local communities are passed over by the tourism industry — we try to involve them because if they do not see the benefits (of) these heritage sites economically, then they will not care about preservation," said Mr. Tobin.

One of the ways that the group reached out to local officials was through a rock climbing and rescue seminar, run by Rick Stein of the Santa Barbara Search and Rescue team and sponsored by CMC Rescue, a Goleta-based rescue and mountain-climbing equipment company.

"We brought together Park Rangers and officials from the Machu Picchu township and we not only taught them these rescue techniques, but we taught them to collaborate and work together," Mr. Tobin said. "It's hard to believe, but these guys had never worked together before and we helped foster that relationship."

These "working vacations" may seem like hard work, but the group accepts any and all takers.

"The average age of our volunteers at Machu Picchu was 60," Mr. Tobin said proudly.

"People come from all different backgrounds; there is no experience or level of expertise necessary — we provide all the training that you could need."

The average cost of a two week trip is about \$3,700 per person, which covers airfare, food, lodging, tours and other accommodations. Mr. Tobin pointed out, however, that the cost of the trip is tax deductible.