The Royal Road of the Incas

This trip was truly the stuff of dreams. For eight months in 2000 I explored the spine of the Andes, following an ancient track which can still be traced for more than 1,500 miles between Quito and Cusco. It was one of the first wonders of the New World – the 'M1' of the Inca empire. Spiralling up mountainsides and plunging through gorges, it boasted masonry causeways, rope bridges and ledges cut from solid rock. The Incas never knew the wheel, but messengers would sprint in relays carrying the Inca's proclamations or fetching royal treats such as fish. Amazingly, I found much of the road intact and still used by local people with their caravans of llamas.

The trip was full of surprises – volcanic eruptions, floods, a military coup and an attack by armed vigilantes – but sustained by the native Andean potato I reached my goal, the extraordinary half-Inca, half-Spanish city of Cusco. On the way I called in on the greatest Inca achievement of them all, the dizzying Machu Picchu, probably the most brilliantly conceived fortress the world has ever known.

As usual I was making recordings, some of which were later on BBC Radio 4. It gave me an excuse to meet and pester people who are surviving in the high Andes against almost impossible odds.

I also took lots of photographs, and I've put the best of them into a show called *The Royal Road of the Incas* which also includes some terrific Peruvian music. Let me know if you'd like to make a booking for this; I think you'd enjoy it.

The slide/sound show *The Royal Road of the Incas* lasts an hour, and includes stereo recordings and slides using a twin-projector dissolve system. My fee for this talk is £425 plus travelling expenses.

If you'd like to make a booking please get in touch. My address is 9 Culverwell Gardens, Winchester, Hants SO23 9JG; telephone 01962 863965; fax 01722 504594; e-mail john@pilk.net.

Details of this and other talks and books are on www.pilk.net.