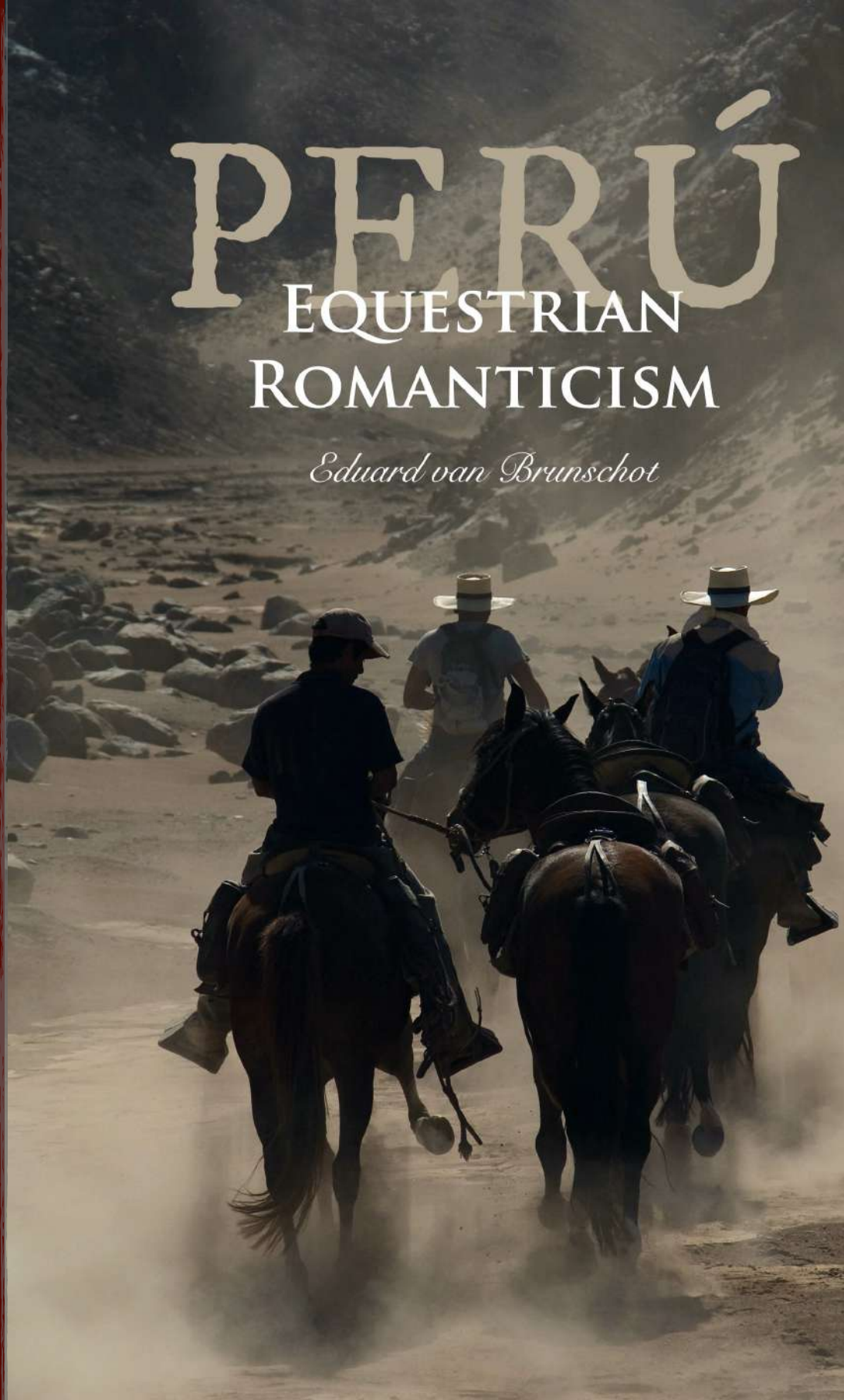
PERÚ

Equestrian Romanticism

Eduard van Brunschot



PEROL CHICO

"Solo para los amigos"

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Introduction

I always wanted to write my story about Peru; its beautiful people, the horses and equitation, our travels on horseback and many other subjects that involves my life and experiences here. There is so much I would like to write about, but I have always delayed the idea because a little voice inside me kept saying 'who wants to know?'. Also writing is certainly not one of my talents. Anyhow, I finally decided to give it a go, if only for some good friends and perhaps for those who want to ride with us and learn more about our country, our horses and what makes Perol Chico tick as a company. I tried to keep the content less about 'me' and more about Peru, but a short introduction of myself and my relationship with Peru seems inevitable.

I was born in Peru, with my mother Peruvian and my father, Dutch. Our family left Peru for Holland when I was only 5 years old, so I spend most of my younger days on flat Dutch soil. I was educated with old-fashioned Dutch values and traditions.
In general the Dutch prefer to live in a controlled and perfect state of well-being and order. They plan everything, work hard, safe their money and behave and act soberly and down to earth. Chaos makes them confused, nervous and uncomfortable.

I returned to Peru in 1982, after I finished my studies in Holland. As a young man I was always dreaming about my country of birth but I had no idea what to expect. Well, it was like waking up in a surrealist world somewhere outside our hemisphere. Nothing in this country was boring. It was here that I discovered chaos in its purest form.
I felt totally in love with the country and its people.

The next year I visited Peru again and then again. Obsessed with the country, I managed to get myself a job in Lima as a textile buying agent for a Dutch international trading company. It was 1985 and at that time Peru was deeply affected by a terrorist group called 'Sendero Luminoso' (the Shining Path); a revolutionary organisation espousing Marxism-Leinism-Maoism and responsible for the killing of between 50 to 70.000 Peruvians.

On every street-corner in Lima I saw young and nervous soldiers with machine guns in their hands. There were car bombs and other violent terrorist attacks everywhere in the country. There were power blackouts almost daily and people waited in long lines just to buy their basic needs in the shops. There was hyperinflation, food shortages and mass unemployment.

It was also the time of *"el toque de queda"*, a curfew established by the government to keep people in their houses. It was forbidden for individuals to be on the streets or in public places after midnight, and soldiers were allowed to shoot - and so they did - without warning. Crazy times.

My job as a textile buying agent allowed me to travel and visit many textile factories around the country. Every day was an adventure and I loved it. Apart from two car bombs that exploded nearby my apartment in Lima, and a bullet flying just over my head, nothing really bad happened to me during the three years I worked in Peru. Unfortunately I had to return to Holland, but I will never forget all the wonderful and brave people I met in those days.

On September 12, 1992, Abimael Guzman, the chief of the Shining Path guerrillas, was captured and imprisoned. In the 18 months after his arrest, 3,600 Shining Path guerrillas turned themselves in or were captured, and political violence decreased rapidly.

In 1996 Peru had somewhat recovered from terrorism and economic chaos. I decided to buy a piece of farmland in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, a beautiful valley between Cusco and Machu Picchu. Instead of growing crops I constructed stables and bought myself some beautiful Peruvian horses to explore the mountains. Travelling on horseback high in the Andes became my passion and before long I had set up an equestrian travel business. I became the pioneer of equestrian tourism in Peru. Sometimes in life you have to just let things happen.

The first years were not easy as tourism had just started to pick up in Peru, but soon our rides were discovered and promoted by the South American Explorers Club and important specialised equestrian travel agencies abroad. Horse magazines and guidebooks started to write about our rides and National Geographic included them on their list of the 'Top 10 horseback rides in the world'.
Throughout the years I have had the privilege to introduce and promote the Peruvian Paso horse and our beautiful country to hundreds of horse lovers from all over the world.

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"Solo para los amigos"

Traditions and Cultural Identity

Peru is a highly diverse country, with 11 eco-regions and 84 of the 117 life zones that exist in the world. It has an enormous range of landscapes due to its geographical conditions, which in turn give it a great diversity of natural resources. Three main regions can be identified in its territory, by dividing the country according to altitudes: Coast, Mountains and Jungle (Costa, Sierra and Selva).

Peru is divided into 25 regions, including the constitutional province of El Callao, where its main port is located. Lima is a city founded by the Spanish in 1535, which became the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru. After independence in 1821, it became the capital of the Republic of Peru. Lima is home to almost a third of Peru's total population, with a total of two-thirds of the country's population living in the coastal region.

Peruvians love to eat well and in general enjoy all the fine pleasures of life. We love our Pisco, our Peruvian Paso horses and our national soccer team. We love our family, our music and we love to celebrate.

During my first years in Peru I couldn't understand why so many Peruvians were always late. To be honest, it sometimes really annoyed me. I gradually learnt and accepted that 'time' is a less relevant concept in Peru. It also made me realise that people from western cultures are far too obsessed with 'time'. They are always in a hurry (time is money) and nobody has time to spare. Every moment or activity in the western world must be planned and scheduled to the very exact minute. At least, it seems that way. Thank God we are still not too obsessed with 'time' in Peru. So if Peruvians are a bit late for an appointment, just call it 'Peruvian time' and keep smiling.

Other forms of typical behaviour are more difficult to get used to, but I don't think they should be categorised as being exclusively part of the Peruvian culture. It is more about what can be expected in many countries in the developing world, from refusing to use the direction indicators when driving a car, to the exhausting mentality of bureaucracy and corruption.

Peruvian people are in general warm and friendly and they love to hug and be less formal once they know you. When a friend introduces you to a woman during a social event, you are supposed to give her a kiss on her cheek; not a handshake.
Male or female friends hug when greeting each other and one soon learns that there is nothing wrong with that - it breaks the ice so to speak. There are many things that westerners could learn from the 'Peruvian culture'; of that I am sure.

In such a big country as Peru, with so many influences from various ethnic groups and different regional traditions, one can hardly speak of a well-defined 'Peruvian culture'. Peruvians are struggling to accept their cultural identity, with discrimination based on race, gender or physical appearances as the greatest barrier to overcome.

Discrimination is also practiced by some who feel marginalised in society. In the Sierra for example, some people are still claiming a

direct Inca ancestry and identify very strongly with the Incas of the past. They blame their misery not only on the Spaniards but on all foreigners that came to their land. In their eyes the great Incas created a perfect society, where everybody was happy and well fed. Unfortunately they overlook the cruel killings and the use of absolute and violent repression by the Inca rulers to control and enslave the vast majority of ordinary people. Private property was unknown during Inca times and farmers could only keep one third of their crop (*Garcilaso de la Vega, Los Comentarios Reales de los Incas, 1613*). Those who did not agree were simply eliminated. The ruling and relatively small Inca elite claimed to be direct descendants of the sun god Inti, who gave them the divine power to do whatever they pleased with their subjects, including the practice of human sacrifices.

In Peru there is still a long way to go before there is acceptance of all citizens as 'Peruvians' regardless of physical appearance, social or cultural background, or other stupidities invented to cause division. The Incas left an incredible legacy, but they represent the past. And the Spanish rulers were driven out a long time ago. What is left is what we are now; a wonderful multi-cultural mix of warm and beautiful people who love their country.
Sometimes it is better to live in the present, dream of the future and get over the past.

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Riding through the Land of the Incas

It is not only our excellent horses that make our rides high in the Peruvian Andes stand out. It is the overall experience and the special moments during the journey. Equestrian travel is not about the destiny nor the distance covered – it is about the journey itself. To quote Miguel Cervantes in Don Quijote: *"El camino es siempre mejor que la posada."* (the road is always better than the inn).

Cusco and the Sacred Valley were once the cradle of the most advanced and sophisticated civilisation and the largest empire in pre-Colombian America. In the early 16th Century, it was possibly one of the largest empires in the world.

From 1438 until 1533, the Inca Empire was made up of a large part of Western South America, centered on the Andean Mountains. At its largest point, the territory was a consolidation of Peru, large parts of modern-day Ecuador, Western and South Central Bolivia, Northwest Argentina, North and Central Chile and a small fraction of Southwest Colombia. Some of the most notable elements of the Empire were the monumental architecture (especially stonework), the extensive road network known as the Qhapaq Ñan, finely woven textiles, the use of knotted strings for record keeping and communication, and agricultural innovation in difficult environments.

The Inca Empire eventually fell in 1532, after it was already wracked with civil war involving Atahualpa and his half-brother Huascar.
For five years, Atahualpa and Huascar had been fighting for control of the Incan Empire. Following the death in 1527 of their father Huayna Capac, these two men grappled to become his heir, with Atahualpa dominating in the north where he had been involved in military expansion, and Huascar more powerful in the south. The War of the Two Brothers broke out in earnest in 1529 and only came to an end in 1532 with the victory of Atahualpa, just before his encounter with Francisco Pizarro.

Pizarro's conquest of the Incan empire is one of the most extraordinary achievements in military history. In the morning of November 16th (1532), 168 Spanish soldiers, including 62 on horseback, faced off against the huge Inca empire at Cajamarca, in western South America. Although vastly out-numbered, the Spaniards launched a surprise attack on the Inca emperor, Atahualpa, who was surrounded by about 80 000 Inca soldiers.

On meeting Atahualpa's forces on that fateful day, Pizarro prepared the ground well. He kept his men and horses in hiding to maximise shock value, and used politics and the Emperor's confidence to draw him into an ambush.
The Spanish charged into the crowd on horseback, equipped with weapons and steel armour that were far superior to those of the Incas. The massacre went on for hours until some 7.000 Incas lay dead. Yet through it all, the Spaniards could not reach Atahualpa. He was held aloft on a litter by his subjects, and as they were killed, more rushed in as replacements. Finally the Spaniards toppled Atahualpa's litter with their horses, and the one-sided battle was over.

There are many versions of what actually happened on that fateful day. Early historical accounts were written by Spanish soldiers in their chronicles, as the Incas had no written language. New insights based on historical studies reveal some interesting alternative theories.

In one of the Spanish chronicles it is mentioned that Atahualpa and his servants arrived very late that day to meet the Spaniards at the plaza of Cajamarca and that Atahualpa's eyes were very red. He had been celebrating with his army the victory over his brother and, in all his arrogance, gave little importance to the small group of bearded men and their strange animals (horses were unknown to the Incas).

One of the new theories suggests that Atahualpa, who had been celebrating for several days, might have been completely 'stoned' on that fatal day. Once the Spaniards captured Atahualpa, the enormous Inca army and its generals, who were camping outside the city,

became confused. They decided not to attack and risk the death of their Inca God. I guess we'll never known the real story.
Pizarro and his troops were later joined by tribes who hoped the Spaniards would liberate them from the Incas; amongst them the Canari tribe from what is today Ecuador.

I highly recommend reading Kim McQuarrie's book "The Last Days of the Incas", a powerful account of the Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire. Another good book is "History of the Conquest of Peru by W.H.Prescott".

The presence of the Spanish during colonial times has left its footprint in todays Andean landscape and daily life, such as the innumerable churches, colonial architecture and the folklore and traditions still practiced. Travelling on horseback through the Land of the Incas has the great advantage of being able to visit places off the beaten path and submerge oneself in the local culture, friendly people and the rich history of Peru. Allow me to introduce just a handful of marvellous places we visit during our multi-day rides.

The salt mines of Maras.

One of the must-see sites are the salt pans of Maras. Salinas de Maras is located at an elevation of 3.380 m, along the slopes of Qaqawiñay mountain in the Urumbamba Valley, 46km outside of Cusco. This salt mine is a complex network of nearly 3.000 salt pans; shallow pools that are filled by a hyper- saline underground spring. These salt pans are believed to have been developed in pre-Inca times (pre-1430 AD)

and today are active and hand-harvested by local families during the dry season (May to November). The naturally pink salt gets its beautiful hue from trace elements in the spring water, including calcium, magnesium, silicon, and potassium.
Geologically speaking, Salinas de Maras lies above the Maras Formation in the Cusco region of the Andes. The source of the spring water is believed to be from a deep halite deposit within the Maras Formation, dating back to 110 million years ago. Geologists believe that an ocean once covered much of central Peru. During the Andean orogeny (mountain building event), these ocean waters were trapped inland, and through evaporation, formed halite deposits that are now the source of the hyper saline spring water, and salt.

Maras

With the arrival of the Spaniards, the settlement at Maras became of greater political, economical and strategical importance, resulting in the founding of the 'Villa of San Fransico de Asis' (now Maras) in

1556, by captain Pedro de Ortiz de Orue. He was born in the village of Getafe near Madrid, and was married to an Inca princess named Maria Tupac Usca, daughter of Manco Inca and granddaughter of Atahualpa. He ordered the construction of the 'Templo de San Fransico de Maras', a beautiful church that has recently been restored by the National Institute of Culture. It is one of the ten oldest churches in South America.
During restoration work, specialists found old mural paintings and an underground crypt. One of the mural paintings shows beautiful and very special geometric Inca designs, that resemble modern art. In the church are very valuable religious paintings from the *Cuzco School*, an

art style in the Americas with strong influences of European art styles and techniques such as *Mannerism,* also known as *Late Renaissance.* Where *High Renaissance* art emphasises proportion, balance, and ideal beauty (think of Michelangelo), Mannerism exaggerates such qualities, often resulting in compositions that are asymmetrical or unnaturally elegant.

The village of Maras is also famous for its festivals and historical houses with beautiful carved stone door lintels. Some lintels are

carved with religious jesuit symbols, and others with coats of arms representing the Spanish aristocratic family ties of the owners. One of the houses belonged to an Inca nobleman, the Inca Tupac Sinchi Roca, who was granted some power but was merely used as a puppet ruler by the Spaniards. It was constructed in the early 18th century and on its facade has a quite particular coat of arms. It shows two lions aside of a royal crown and a rainbow. The stone carving artist must have had quite a fantasy because there are no lions in Peru!

The cold air storage houses at Cheqoc

About 1 mile from the village of Maras, along one of the Inca roads, we find the amazing site of Cheqoc, a complex of store houses constructed by the
Incas. The store houses are located on the slope of a mountain, at a place where the cool winds from the glacial ice atop the nearby Vilcanota mountain range are more prominent. Each building consist of a string of mud-baked deposits to store and refrigerate what was probably fresh produce. A system of small wind tunnels placed under the deposits, combined with a channeled system of cold mountain spring water, provides a constant cold air-flow circulation inside the open store houses - a typical example of genius Inca engineering. Near the site are beautifully built terraces indicating that the site might have been linked with local agricultural activities. As Cheqoc is still under investigation and only partly excavated, there is no official report on what actual products were stored there, and for what purpose.

Cusco

"This city is the greatest and the finest ever seen in this country or anywhere in the Indies... We can assure your Majesty that it is so beautiful and has such fine buildings that it would be remarkable even in Spain."

- Francisco Pizarro

The Incas established their capital at Cusco in the 12th century. The Inca
expansion was rapid, taking less than three hundreds years. The surrounding land, like much of the Andes range, was inhabited by numerous tribes, some often at war with each other. The Incas moved out from Cusco conquering and absorbing as they went, until they eventually imposed their social organisation across the breadth of the mountains and into the coastal desert. They called their empire the Tawantinsuyu, often translated an “The Land of the Four Quarters’.

Modern Cusco is now one of Peru’s most important regional centres with small industries, a university, museums and hotels set around the hub of historical Inca streets, palaces and temples.

General sites of interest include: the Cathedral, Qorikancha (Sun Temple), Sacsayhuaman, Q’enko, Tambomachay, Puca Pucara, La

Companìa Jesuit Church, La Merced Convent, San Francisco Convent, Inka Museum, Pre-Columbian Art Museum and the Centre for Traditional Textiles.
A list of recommended restaurants in Cusco includes Pachapapa restaurant in the San Blas district, La Cicciolina and MAP Cafe in the Pre-Colombian Art Museum. Chocolate-lovers should stop off in the Choco Museo for free sampling!

Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu is a 15th-century Inca site located on a ridge between the Huayna Picchu and Machu Picchu mountains in Peru. It is 7.970 feet (2.430 meters) above sea level on the eastern slope of the Andes and overlooks the Urubamba River far below. The site's excellent preservation, the quality of its architecture, and the breathtaking mountain vista it occupies has made Machu Picchu one of the most famous archaeological sites in the world today.
Machu Picchu covers 80.000 acres (32.500 hectares), with terraced fields on the edge of the site once used for growing crops like maize and potatoes. In 1911, explorer Hiram Bingham III, a professor at Yale University, visited the site and published its existence for the first time. He found it covered with vegetation, much of which has now been removed. The buildings were made without mortar (typical of the Inca), with their granite stones quarried and precisely cut.

When Bingham discovered the site he was actually searching for Vilcabamba, the last capital of the Inca before their final defeat at the hands of the Spanish in 1572. He found Machu Picchu largely intact, having apparently never been visited by the Spanish conquistadors. In fact, the only reference to the site at all in Spanish documents is a mention of the word "Picchu" in a document from from 1568, with the text implying that it belonged to the Inca emperor.

Machu Picchu is believed to have been built by Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui, the ninth ruler of the Inca, in the mid-1400s. As an empire builder, Pachacuti initiated a series of conquests that would eventually

see the Inca grow into a South American realm that stretched from Ecuador to Chile.

Many archaeologists believe that Machu Picchu was constructed as a type of royal estate, with the presence of elite residences in the northeast sector of the site backing this idea. It would have been used by the emperor and his family as a temporary respite, with the site supporting a small number of year-round caretakers. There are also other examples of Inca royal estates known in Peru.

Machu Picchu has a number of structures that enhanced the spiritual significance of the site. One of them, the “Temple of the Sun,” or Torreón, has an elliptical design similar to a sun temple found at the Inca capital of Cusco. It is located near where the Inca emperor is believed to have resided at Machu Picchu. A rock inside the temple could have served as an altar. During the June solstice the rising sun shines directly into one of the temple’s windows, and this indicates an alignment between the window, rock and solstice sun.

Beneath the temple lies a cave, naturally formed, which the explorer Bingham referred to as a “royal mausoleum,” although there’s little evidence that it was used as such. A boulder carved into a stairway lies near the cave entrance and the underground chamber likely served a religious function of some form.

In the 16th century the Spanish appeared in South America, bringing plagues afflicting the Inca along with military campaigns waged by conquistadors. In 1572, with the fall of the last Incan capital, their line of rulers came to end. Machu Picchu, a royal estate once visited by great emperors, fell into ruin.
Today, the site is on the United Nations' list of World Heritage sites.

High altitude rides

Regardless of their fitness level, many horses may not perform the same at high altitudes as they would at sea level. According to studies high altitude seems to affect horses somewhat less than humans. Altitude begins to take its toll on horses above 5.000 feet (1.524m) and is prominent above 7.000 feet (2.143m). At high altitude the air pressure is lower and there are fewer molecules of oxygen present in the air. For every 1.000 feet (305m) above sea level that you travel, the amount of oxygen in the air decreases by approximately 3%. That means that at 7.000 feet there is 20% less oxygen molecules available per breath! Therefore, the horse's body must make adjustments to compensate for the difference.

The most obvious way for the horse to compensate is by increasing its respiration rate, or taking more breaths per minute. As the respiration rate increases so does the heart rate in order to pump oxygenated blood throughout the body. The body also responds and starts to generate more red blood cells and capillaries to assist in oxygen transportation. This takes somewhere between 4 to 7 days. After that "acclimation" period, a horse at high altitude may have up to 50% more red blood cells than a horse at sea level. In order to protect vital organs such as the brain and heart, the body also shifts blood flow. As a result, more blood flows to the brain, heart, and lungs and less flows to the other organs in the body such as the digestive organs. The negatives of this protection mechanism are headaches (caused by a sharp increase in the amount of blood flowing through the cranial arteries) and digestive upset (caused by the decrease in blood supply to the digestive organs). But perhaps the largest concern for horses at altitude is dehydration due to the dry air and increased respiration rates. In fact, above 6.000 feet the body exhales and sweats nearly twice as much moisture as it would at sea level.

While our horses live continuously at high altitude (9.200ft./2.800m) they are adjusted to these conditions but it can still be stressful to them when traveling to higher altitudes. On some of our multi-day

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rides, like our 11-day Sacred Valley ride, we reach altitudes of 14.270 ft/4.300m plus! I have learned that on those rides we need to allow our horses two or three days of acclimation time before asking them to perform at their best. I was always surprised to see our horses more fit during the last days of our long rides than on the first days, but it makes all sense knowing what it takes for a horse to get up those high mountains. For our rides high in the Peruvian Andes we have selected horses that have stamina and a more than average temperament level, meaning with a more excitable demeanour. They perform better on long distance rides at high altitude as they will give that little extra when the ride gets though. A less experienced rider should not start with a horse high in temperament as safety is paramount - even if they appreciate more of a go-getter. For all our rides we require at least intermediate riding skill level from participants.

As a riding leader it is very important to match the right mount to each rider and I always take my time to do so. Not only riding skills are important but also a riders' personality, as this should be compatible, especially if the horse is very sensitive. This explains why some horses react different under different riders.

The Peruvian Paso horse

Because of its isolation for almost 500 years, the Peruvian Paso horse has evolved as one of the purest breeds in the world and as a unique entity in the horse kingdom. The existence of this breed has been called *"the greatest triumph of genetic selection ever achieved by a group of breeders."* Thanks to its unique, inborn, four beat lateral gait, the Peruvian Paso horse is undoubtedly the smoothest riding horse in the world.

Origin

The modern Peruvian horse descends from horses introduced into Peru by the Spanish in the sixteenth-century. The Spanish Conquistadors brought with them both Hacks (amblers) and Chargers (trotters) of the same breed to the New World, and as recorded in the Archives of the Indios, the Spanish horse, the 'classic' Andalusian, was a breed consisting of Galician (Celtic) horses of the North, Sorraia, and Barb (or Berber horse) of the area that is known today as Morocco, Algeria, Tunis and Libya.

The Barb was one of Islam's greatest legacies to Christian Spain. The armies of Musa Ibn Musayr crossed the Straights of Gibraltar in spring of the year 711 atop this agile animal defeating King Roderick and conquering a large part of the Iberian peninsula, where they would remain until their expulsion eight centuries later. Musá ibn Nusayr was the governor of Northern Africa under the caliph of that period, and it was he who ordered Tariq Ibn Nusayr to make the initial surge into Spain. The Moorish occupation of Spain ended with the islamic ruler Boabdil, who's real name was Abu'Abd Allah, who was defeated at the final siege of Granada by the armies of the King Fernando and Isabel, the 'Catholic Kings', on January 2, 1492.

The blend of the two cultures gave the flourishing civilisation of this period and had a widening impact on Spanish culture. The Muslim rule of Medieval Iberia (modern-day Spain) has heavily influenced Spain's language, intellectual culture, and architecture.

The blend of cultures can also been seen in the cross breeding of the Barb from North Africa with the Iberian horse. The result was the classic Andalusian, refined in the grasslands around Córdoba to become one of the most beautiful horses of all time.

"The Arab contribution to human progress—astronomy, mathematics, cosmology, the variety and magnificent wealth of architectural form—is a remarkable legacy of a people who entered the land as conquerors and became peaceful masters. From the establishment of the first mosque in Cordova in 785 until the time of their expulsion by the Catholic kings in 1492, the Moors dominated the intellectual life of the area and had a profound impact on European civilisation, which assimilated many of their ideas." (Titus Burckhardt, Moorish culture in Spain').

Experts agree that the first major shipment of horses to the New World was in 1493 on Columbus's second voyage. Francisco Pizarro and his 168 men who captured the Inca Atahualpa, brought 62 horses with them. To these were added the 84 animals brought by Diego de Almagro after the imprisonment of Atahualpa, and the horses

belonging to the armies of Sebastian de Benalcazar and Hernando de Soto. These horses were the original ancestors of the Peruvian horse. It is interesting to note that during the last 500 years of Spanish history, successive Royal Edicts for its breeding brought about substantial differences in the present day Andalusian horse and that which accompanied the Spanish Conquistadores. Particularly during the reign of Phillip II, the Spanish horses were cross-bred with German and Danish horses, resulting in significant changes in their basic characteristics.

In Peru, the 'original' Andalusian horse brought by the Spaniards has kept most of the characteristics that made the Andalusian so valuable during the conquest of South America. No outside blood has been introduced into the Peruvian breed, as there was no need to cross with other breeds to produce taller, heavier or faster horses, as was the case in other countries such as Mexico, Argentina or the United States.

The Peruvian Horse is a "hot blood"; a purebred Spanish horse that was selectively bred for the amble after reaching the shores of Peru. The Peruvian horse was mainly developed to satisfy the need for a smooth and comfortable ride when overseeing plantations and travelling from one settlement to another. It was the only method of transportation that linked the valleys, provinces and villages of the coast as well as those from the sierra. This explains some of its virtues such as stamina and resistance.

Selective breeding coupled with such factors as climate and forage, served to modify succeeding generations and create a new breed, which possess characteristics different from those of any other horse in the world. Peruvian Paso horses come in all basic solid colours as well as greys and roans. The average height of the Peruvian is between 14 and 15.3 hands (1.42 - 1.54 m) and the weight is commonly between 900 and 1.100 pounds - about the same as Morgans and Arabians.

The Paso Llano

The trademark of this breed is a special, inherited, and completely natural four beat lateral gait called “Paso Llano” (a contraction of Paso Castellano).

The two basic gaits found in horses are the trot and the amble. The trot entails a diagonal movement in which the front and back legs on opposite sides move together, in a two-beat gait. This is the type of gait used by the majority of horses dedicated to sports, recreation and ranching. On the other hand the amble is a lateral movement, where the legs on the same side move together in a two-beat movement. The amble is the origin of the Paso Llano of Peruvian horses. The Paso llano is a four-beat gait because instead of moving the legs at the same time, the horse moves first his hind leg and then the front leg. In this manner the amble is broken in two parts. The Paso Llano is therefore a broken gait, and consists of permanent, harmonic, and rhythmic steps with which the animal makes a gentle and pleasant alternating movement. It is a quick advance in which the horse’s centre of gravity stays almost immobile, producing a very smooth ride.

The Paso Llano is executed with a distinctive action in the front legs, called *"termino";* a graceful, flowing movement in which the forelegs are rolled towards the outside as the horse strides forward, much like the arm motion of a swimmer. Termino is a spectacular and beautiful natural action. It is not a wing or paddle, and originates in the shoulder giving the horse the ability to swing the leg forward with minimum vertical force back. Both the gait and the flashy leg action are naturally passed on to the offspring.

Until the 17th century, the majority of the world's horses were naturally gaited. Nearly all travelling was done on horseback, and horses with natural gaits were considerably more comfortable to ride than trotters, which were called "boneshakers". Trotters were better suited for pulling carts and carriages for long distances, and for horse racing. As these uses for horses eclipsed travel riding, the number of trotters grew. The Peruvian Paso remains one of the very few breeds that not only retained its natural gait, but was also celebrated for it.

Peru's National Pride

A major principle with Peruvian breeders is that great Peruvian horses are born - not trained. Training is designed to bring out the animal's inherent ability but not modify it artificially.
To help insure retention of completely natural action and gait, no horse is allowed in the show ring with shoes or with hooves longer than 4 inches. All Peruvian breeders use basically the same training methods and equipment so that no advantage is gained through artificial devices or aids.

Today's Peruvian Paso horse is the result of 400-plus years of highly selective breeding. The breed is said to combine qualities that may be considered "contradictory" : very high-spirited - though easy to handle while loose and relaxed in movement, sparkling, brilliant action in the forelegs - yet extremely smooth and sure-footed, and a refined

appearance - yet very powerful. This has been accomplished due to the intelligence, love, and devotion of innumerable breeders (many anonymous). Their arduous and silent work has made the Peruvian Paso horse one of the country's greatest treasures and a unifying source for its people.

Since its founding in 1947 the National Association of Peruvian Paso Horse Breeders and Owners organises competitions to reward and stimulate the reproduction of the horse as well as to maintain its special characteristics. In this manner it protects and defends the continuity of the breed as required of it by its statutes and the Peruvian Government. The national competition, which is held in Mamacona, is without a doubt one of the most exciting annual national events for Paso horse lovers.

Peruvian Paso vs Paso Fino

Because of the shared word Paso, a close relationship between the Peruvian Paso and the Paso Fino breed is incorrectly assumed, and many people confuse the two breeds.
Although they both have common ancestors in the Old World breeds, they came to the New World with different groups of settlers and were bred in entirely separate environments for different purposes. "Paso" simply means "step" in Spanish, and does not imply a common breed or origin.

The Paso Fino breed was developed in and around the Caribbean and Central and South America, while the Peruvian horse was born entirely within the borders of the country after which it was named. The Peruvian horse is somewhat larger, deeper in the body and wider. Both breeds have high head carriage and front leg lift, are smooth to ride and exhibit the same basic four- beat lateral footfall, but this is executed differently in each breed.

The gait of the Paso Fino resembles the action of a sewing machine, due to the rapid up-and-down leg movement that produces comparatively little forward motion. By contrast, the rear legs drive the

Peruvian Paso's movement, with great reach under the body as well as reaching of the front. This action results in long strides with relatively little effort - an essential attribute for long distance travel. In addition, the Peruvian Paso is bred for its distinctive "termino" as discussed earlier. This action is sometimes mistaken by those unfamiliar with the breed for "paddling" or "winging" - a sign of a conformation fault. However this is not the case, as the Paso's hooves return squarely to the ground rather than toeing in or out. The sideways circular movement of the front legs therefore allows the horse to overstep with its hind legs, and prolongs the time that the foreleg stays off the ground, resulting in more uniform (isochronal) timing and equal (isometric) strides, without vertical impact.

In summary, Peruvian Paso and Paso Fino horses have entirely different conformation and movement, and participate in separate shows with different tack. They are essentially two totally different breeds of horse, and never the twain shall meet! In the Peruvian horse scene there are more and more voices suggesting a change from the the name "Peruvian Paso horse" into "Peruvian horse' in order to avoid confusion with the Paso Fino horse.

Peruvian tack

Peruvian riding tack, as well as that used by horsemen throughout the American continent, has its origin in fifteenth century Europe. Equestrian portraits by European classical painters like Vasquez, Titian and Van Dyck show saddles bearing close resemblance to the modern Peruvian saddle.

When the Spanish Conquistadors arrived in America, they brought with them their European riding equipment. This was modified over the years in accordance with the uses to which the horses were put, and the availability of certain materials. In Mexico for example, horses were used extensively in ranching operations, and the use of the lasso resulted in the development of a saddle with a horn on the pommel.

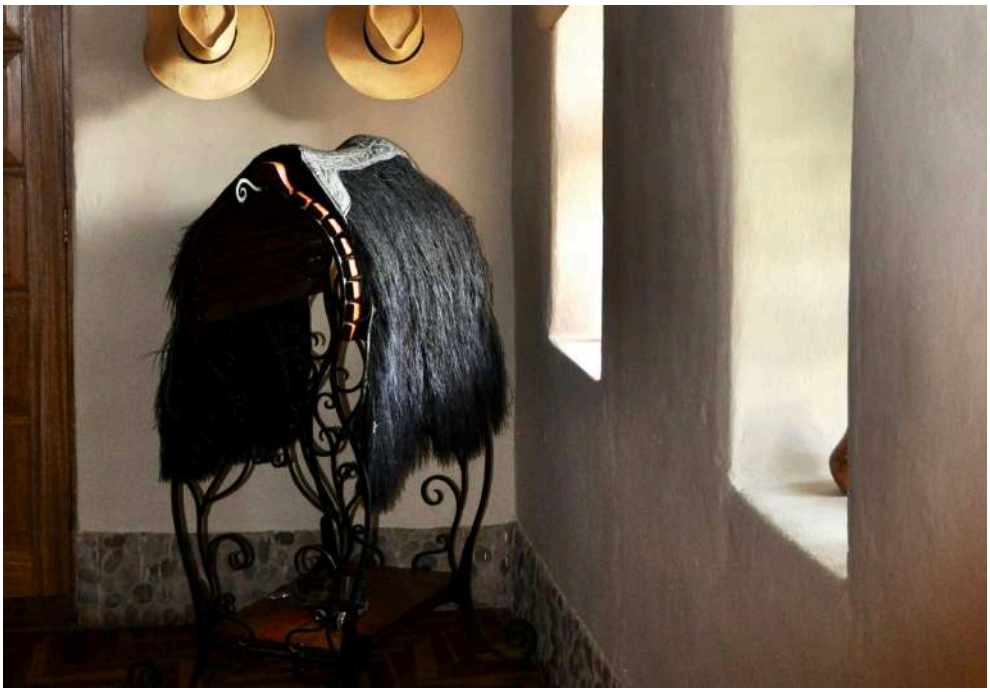
In Peru the need was to essentially maintain the features of a comfortable and secure saddle, as horses were mainly used for transportation. This gave rise to the montura de cajon or box saddle, thus named because the rider sits "boxed in" between the pommel and cantle. Peruvian tack consists of the saddle, its accessories (cinch, stirrups, crupper and breeching) and braided headgear.

Saddle

The saddle consists of a wooden frame (saddle tree) with a moderately high pommel and cantle. The tree is covered with tight-fitting pieces of rawhide, with the cinch, stirrups, crupper, breeching buckles and straps attached to the frame. To make the saddle more comfortable and protect the rider's legs from rubbing against the buckles and straps, leather skirts are usually placed over the saddle tree and around the pommel and cantle. These skirts are often embossed with the beautiful designs for which Peruvian leather artisans have become famous. Work saddles that do not have skirts use a leather pad (*pellonera*) as a seat cushion. The pellonera can also be used for added comfort over saddles with skirts. To give saddles a better appearance, the pommel and cantle are sometimes covered with fine leather. More ornate saddles have rivets of nickel or silver on the borders of the pommel and cantle and along the edges of the skirts.

The *carona* is a thick leather pad that goes under the saddle and over the blanket, and is decorated with the same motifs as the saddle skirt. Besides enhancing the appearance of the saddle, it also protects the back of the horse from the weight of the rider and shields the saddle from the horse's sweat.

To compliment Peruvian show tack, and as a sign of wealth and good taste, a "el *pellon Sampedrano*" is sometimes used. The pellon Sampedrano is a type of tapestry used as a pad over the saddle, and is described by Verne R. Albright in "The Peruvian Paso and His Classic Equitation" as being *"composed of thousands of hand tied spit braids made from black dyed wool and inserted into a rug type backing. The underside is lined with fine kid leather and usually contains pockets."* The pockets were used to keep valuable belongings in bygone times when horses were the principal method of transportation. The pellon itself could also be used as bedding when long journeys required the rider to dismount and rest.



One of the peculiarities of Peruvian tack is the use of the breechings called the *"guarnición"*. Much has been written about the origin and purpose of the guarnición, but it most likely derived from a harness first used to prevent the saddle from slipping forward when riding over rough terrain. Over time, the utilitarian purpose of this harness gave way to an ornamental use and the guarnición became a traditional part of Peruvian tack. It consists of long leather straps (*retrancas*) that encircle the rear of the horse and are attached to buckles on each side of the saddle. They are further secured by two lateral straps (*caídas*) attached to the base of the tail cover.

The "*floron*" or tail cover is an elongated piece of leather fixed to the back of the saddle by a large, ornate buckle. The term floron, meaning "big flower" in Spanish, is probably derived from the round shape of the middle section of the tailpiece, traditionally embossed with floral designs. More recently however, the creativity of leather artisans has given rise to a variety of designs that include linear motifs, horses, seal of arms and other fanciful leather work. As a general rule, the guarnición should have the same embossed patterns as the rest of the tack.

Finally, a crupper is always used in conjunction with the Peruvian saddle. The crupper is attached to the same buckle that holds the tailpiece, and both crupper and tailpiece are held together by a short leather strap called a *cruzeta*.

Stirrups

The Peruvian stirrup has also undergone changes over time. The stirrups introduced by the Conquistadors were of two types: conventional triangular shapes and those shaped in the form of slippers and originally made of iron or copper. Because of the ready availability of silver and gold in Peru, these valuable metals were often used in place of iron and copper. Later the stirrups were made of wood and adorned with intricate carvings and ornamental nickel or silver pieces.

The typical Peruvian stirrup of today has the shape of a truncated pyramid with a toe hole in one of its faces. On the upper end, the stirrup has a metal cover in the shape of a bell (*campaña*) and a ring to which the stirrup strap is attached. The corners of the stirrup are usually covered with metal pieces (*punteras*). Rare exotic and native hard woods are sometimes used in the crafting of stirrups, but the most commonly used woods are olive and "*algarobbo*" (a variety of mesquite abundant in the coastal area of Peru).

Photos next page:
Antique restored stirrups. Pyramid shape. Date unknown but probably made for a wealthy 'hacendado' (landowner). Made from a single block of hollowed-out orange wood. Each stirrup is covered with silver sheets, embossed, chased and richly adorned with foliages and floral decoration.
They represent a remarkable example of the ability of the Peruvian craftsmen, able to combine technical mastery derived from Inca culture, with European-style adornment.
Wood, leather and silver. Private collection.

Headgear

In Peru the headgear is called *jato* and consists of three pieces: the halter with its shank, the headstall and reins, and the eye cover and strap. The jato is crafted according to its purpose: working headgear is very plainly made and usually does not have metal decorations, whereas show headgear is finely made and adorned with metal pieces to give it a formal and elegant appearance.

The headgear is made of braided strands of goat, deer or calf rawhide. The more strands used in the braiding, the finer the end product. Fine headgear is one in which twenty or more strands of leather per inch are used, making each strand one-twentieth of an inch (or less) wide. The braiding style is dependent on the skill of the artisan, and the number of metal pieces (rings and hardware) can vary from very few to one hundred or more. Of the three pieces of the jato, it is perhaps the eye cover (*tapaojos*) that calls for the most attention. This is a very typical element of Peruvian headgear, and is mainly used in the first stages of training. It serves the same purpose as conventional blinders, and is easily moved down to cover the horse's eyes, permitting one to saddle or mount a nervous horse with great ease. It can also be used to keep a horse in place without having to tether it.

Complementing the headgear, a "*bozalillo*" (small bosal) is often used during bit training because it keeps the mouth of the horse closed when pressure is applied via the bit. The bosal is a very important tack piece during the breaking in and early training of the Peruvian horse. It consists of a noseband held in place by the headstall, and the reins are attached to the top of the noseband. The bosal is also made of braided rawhide but is not as finely crafted or adorned as the headstall.

The Peruvian bosal differs from the Mexican bosal or hackamore in that pressure is applied to the nose rather than to the chin of the horse. When properly used, it trains a horse to respond to the slightest pressure from the reins, thus making it possible to use a mild bit. The

Peruvian bit (*freno* or *bocado*) is indeed well known for it "soft touch", and has a straight bar with a short curb or spade. Originally Peruvian bits were made of forged and burnished steel, handsomely inlaid with silver decorations, but modern bits are now made of non-rusting materials such as nickel or stainless steel.

The making of Peruvian tack is an art form passed from generation to generation within a family. This tradition has fortunately been kept alive for centuries, but only a small number of artisans remain dedicated to the profession today.

Conformation - Form follows function.

This simple phrase may sound like a cliche, but it helps to understand the conformation of the Peruvian Paso horse. Essentially it means that the exterior design (form) should reflect the most important activities (functions) of the horse. Before discussing the 'design', one must understand what the most important function or purpose is, and why.

Let me start by distinguishing the equestrian and cultural preferences of Peruvian horsemen. Their national horse is a reflection of Peruvian culture, and this is not always understood by equestrians from Western countries. One needs to think 'outside the box' and with an open mind. Try see through the eyes of a Peruvian horseman in order to understand and appreciate the Peruvian Paso.

I have already mentioned that Peruvians have a different concept of 'time', and consequently speed is not the most important characteristic sought after in the Peruvian Paso. A brisk and lively horse is appreciated, but of more importance is a smooth and comfortable riding experience over long distances. Like any other horse breed, the Peruvian Paso loves a fast gallop, but it is not specifically bred for speed. It was also not intended to compete with other breeds in particular disciplines of sport or cattle ranch activities.

Peru is a country where agriculture activities have always prevailed, and covering long distances over varied terrain was a necessity. Like the Arab, the Peruvian Paso was bred as a light saddle horse for travelling.

Peruvian horsemen see horses more through the eyes of an artist; appreciating refined elegance, smoothness, harmonic and fluent movements ('poetry in motion'), and athletic skills. The mystical and internal beauty of our horses, which we call 'brio', is also highly appreciated. Brio comes from the heart and can be translated as 'the willingness to please', which is different to excitement or nervous behaviour. One could say that the Peruvian horse is an artistic expression of our equestrian soul; a masterpiece, and a reflection of

our cultural and equestrian preferences. Some even say it is Peru's best kept secret.

I remember riding a Peruvian Paso horse for the very first time. It was many years ago but it is still fresh in my mind. She was a small breeding mare named Ullujaya, and she showed me her attributes and what she was all about. I could not believe the amazing ride she gave me, the power she had in every stride, her arrogance, and her brio. I refused to dismount at the end because I wanted to carry on riding. They had to take me off the horse almost by force!

The main function of the Peruvian horse is called 'pisos', comprising its harmonic, fluent and almost stylistic movements, and ability to execute the perfect four beat lateral gait. The idea is for the horse to cover as much ground as possible in the most effective, economical way; that is with the least possible steps, and minimal effort and vertical impact for the horse and rider. To achieve this the horse should be able to take long strides and deliver strong impulsion or driving force from its hind legs and hind quarters (the motor). It is because of its natural 4-beat lateral gait and conformation that the Peruvian Paso is able to take those long strides and reach far under its body mass. A 'trotting' horse or horse that moves in diagonals is unable to do this because its front leg on one side is in the way. In a normal walk our horses are also faster and use less steps than most other breeds, because of their long strides.

When our horse moves in its lateral gait the driving force comes more from the 'pull' rather than the 'push'. The hind legs reach far under the body mass and the horse basically pulls itself forward. Sometimes a horse needs more 'push' power, which explains why the Peruvian Paso reverts to diagonal movements when it needs to climb with energy up a steep mountain trail. On the flat, however, it prefers to move in its natural lateral gait. Once in their lateral gait most horses will start to collect themselves. They control their speed, maintain their energy level and their movements become more and more smooth. Those are the moments Peruvian horsemen enjoy the most, when the horse is naturally doing his 'thing' without any interference from the rider.

Pisos is the essence of our breed and the core purpose of all breeding programs in Peru. It is this extra, exquisite gait and smooth movement - the Paso Llano, that makes our horse stand out from all other breeds.

Now that I have explained what Peruvians look for in a horse and what the main function of our breed is, I will briefly discuss the 'design' of the Peruvian Paso.

Our horses are not very big and there is a good reason for that. Some Westerners might find them small in comparison to other breeds, but they are certainly not the size of a pony (although I have found the English call all horses ponies) ! With an average height of somewhere between 14 to 15.2 hands, our horses may look small at first glance, but once you mount them they are transformed by their arrogance and presence, making them seem bigger and more impressive.
Peruvians prefer the size of their national horse, because bigger horses are less smooth. The centre of gravity of the horse should be low to the ground in order to deliver a smooth ride (imagine being on top of the mast of a ship where you will most certainly get seasick from the motion).
The smaller size also makes the Peruvian Paso more agile and very suited to handling difficult obstacles on rough terrain. Smaller horses have less weight to carry and their smaller hooves make them very surefooted on rocky, mountainous terrain. When discussing horse size I always emphasise to our clients that bigger horses are not per definition 'better'. Unfortunately humans are getting taller and more obese, (or should I say bigger....), and we might have to think about breeding our horse half a size up in the future!

Conformation refers to the shape or proportionate dimension of an animal. For the Peruvian Paso, it is the correct shape and proportions established by generations of breeders and horse experts over almost 500 years, that will allow and help the horse to perform its main function at its best. Form should always follow function - at least that is the idea. However, humans make mistakes and the 'technical

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design' we have in mind is sometimes contradictory to the goals we want to achieve, or it may simply go against the law of nature. Striving for perfection in any part of our life is a recipe for failure, as it can never be attained. The best we can achieve is excellence, but never perfection.

There are many examples where breeders and so called 'experts' took the wrong path. One only has to look at some dog breeds that now have serious health problems because of flawed breeding decisions, to witness this.

Most mistakes are made when breeding decisions are based on aesthetics, fashionable trends or pure commercial motivation, which of course have nothing to do with the principles of good and ethical breeding. It is therefore important to keep this conversation topic going, and to be open minded regarding opinions and suggestions from fellow horsemen, without losing oneself in the clouds of vanity or other ego issues.
In any event, the present consensus regarding good conformation for our breed can be described as follows (with permission to quote the article of our friend Raul Risso, a long time breeder and well-respected judge of Peruvian Paso horses):

"We need horses that are able to stand plumb and decisively under their body mass*. They must have a rather short muscular loin area, a long inclined croup and proper correlative ANGULATIONS beginning at the stifle, to the hock, (slightly sickled), continuing at the pastern, (medium to short and not too flexible or squishy) with the hoof following the axis of the angle of the pastern *not coon footed).

When viewed from the rear or the front, the horse's limbs should be perpendicular to the ground. Whether standing or in movement, the hoofs in the rear should touch the ground closer together than the hoofs in the front, with the footprints forming the figure of a trapezoid. This last quality provides our breed with more IMPULSION from behind. PPH that are rectangular in their footfall have less power

and, when in motion; "waddle like a duck". Such horses, generally speaking, reach far under their body mass while in gait but lack the DRIVE that the rear end described above provides. When viewed from the side, a horse's profile must show a front end with rather sloped shoulder blades (allowing looseness) with legs that are VERTICAL to the ground.
Individuals that stay "close to the ground" with deep bodies that provide a lower center of gravity give our breed of horse the ability to move in a GLIDING MODE.

Long, lean, arched at the top and bottom elevated, firm necks (avoiding fallen crests) with correct insertions of the head and neck into the withers permit NATURAL COLLECTION. This last trait makes training much easier as the horse requires little assistance from tack devices or the rider's ability in order to travel elegantly with the head up. Proper angulations, deep bodies, and elevated necks as described above are conformation traits that allow the Peruvian Paso Horse to propel itself elegantly in a natural manner.

The basic requirements of a good Peruvian Horse along with CONFORMATION (the main subject I wanted to deal with at this time) are PISOS and BRIO with GENTLE DISPOSITION. As with other traits, brio is inheritable. An unruly horse does not have brio, is not a desirable individual and CULLING should be considered out of kindness to the animal as well as the human. Not all people are kind people. It is not different with horses and dangerous individuals should be eliminated.

In as far as gait, there is one "rule of thumb" that I learned from the old master breeder Jorge Juan Pinillos. He used to say and repeat: "Pisos mas Pisos = Pisos". This is very true as Pisos are recessive to Paso, a Paso is recessive to an Ambler, and an Ambler is recessive to a Trotter.
I have written before sustaining that "Pisos" is the most important characteristic in the breeding of the PPH. I have not changed that a bit, because Pisos IDENTIFY our breed and make a Peruvian different

than any other gaited breeds, be it the ancestrally related Paso Fino, Mangalarga Marchador or the Tennessee Walker, Islandic or others. Conformation, brio and pisos all complement each other. I am quoting from an article I wrote back in 1984 "no horse has an excellent gait if it is not strong enough, or lacks the temperament or character to sustain the paso llano over a lengthy distance"."

Raul's article is of course only one representation of the theory of correct conformation and good breeding guidelines. There are many other fine details that could be added, and even interesting contradictions and differing points of view between the experts regarding what the correct conformation is, but for now I will leave that up to others to discuss!

Equitation

There are two ways one can ride a horse; as a passenger or as a rider. Every beginner in the art of riding starts as a passenger. He or she holds on to the saddle, clamps their legs around the horse and prays they will not fall off. For a horse this feels like carrying a heavy sack of potatoes on his back. An easy-going horse without much fire will allow this 'dead weight' on his back and do his job, but usually without a spark of happiness.

And then there is the rider. A good rider is an extension of their horse; they are able to communicate with their mount using very subtle body aids. Their hands are soft, hips flexible, and their straight and balanced seat is secure but relaxed. They can understand the messages sent by the horse and interpret the signs of excitement, discomfort or boredom. They know how and when to encourage their horse and when to slow down or rest, because the wellbeing of the horse is always on their mind. A good rider is not a burden to their horse but a partner and a friend.
Only when a passenger becomes a rider will they discover the poetry of riding.

The art of riding horses is also called equitation. Horse riding is by definition not natural to the horse - it is something humans invented. To make this unnatural task easier for the horse, we have to use effective methods to stay in balance with the horse and ride our horse in the best bio-mechanical way possible. We need to train the horse in the most constructive way to become stronger, refine his balance and improve his suppleness. The result is a better moving, happier horse that is easier and nicer to ride. These are the principles of equitation.

Peruvian Classical Equitation

When Charles Darwin visited South America in the mid-nineteenth century during his voyage of scientific exploration on the H.M.S Beagle, he observed the Peruvian horse-trainers or *chalanes* as follows:

"(There) a horse is not considered perfectly broken till he can be brought up standing in the midst of his full speed on any particular spot: for instance on a cloak thrown on the ground: or until he will charge a wall, and rearing scrape the surface with his hoofs. I have seen an animal bounding with spirit, yet reined merely by a forefinger and thumb; then taken at full gallop across a courtyard, and then made to wheel around the post of a veranda with great speed, but at so a distance that the rider with outstretched arm all the while, kept one finger rubbing the post; then making a deci-volt in the air, with the other arm outstretched in a like manner, he wheeled around with astonishing force in the opposite direction."

This ancient practice - the old Spanish school of riding - is embodied today in a Peruvian demonstration called the "*enfrenadura"*, in which the turns and figures must still be ridden within the confines of a small circle inscribed on the ground.
Classical Peruvian equitation is a Peruvian interpretation of classical horsemanship. It was adapted to the specific breed characteristics of the Peruvian Paso, such as the four beat lateral gait, and cultural riding preferences (like a smooth ride and comfort preferred over competitive riding at racing speed). In classical horsemanship the horse is considered a partner rather than a subordinate, and training is based on kindness, reward and the fine use of aids. These principles have remained valid to this day and were first put in writing by the Greek general and philosopher Xenophon and rediscovered during the Renaissance.
Classical riding has developed over the centuries, with the contribution of many significant historical riding masters such as Federico Grisone (1507-1570), Cesare Fiaschi (1523-1558) and Antoine Pluvinel (1555-1620) amongst others. What did not become established was discarded. Established knowledge was recognised, passed on and developed further.

The goal of classical riding is for the horse to be able to carry the rider without the loss of natural movement.

To be able to do this the horse needs to carry themselves in a healthy posture or frame. This means that the horse needs to have a neutral back (not dropped) that is relaxed and flexible. In classical riding, the horse is encouraged to move and engage impulsion from "back (the haunches) to front (soft contact in the hand)" in order to improve efficiency and performance.

The gentle training of young horses, combined with patience, are typical elements in Peruvian equitation. Patience in particular is one of the strongest virtues of Peruvian horsemen.
Most Peruvian horses will never see a bit before they reach the age of 3 to 4 years, as time is taken to do it right. Even today, no artificial training methods are used in Peru, and a horse that is not naturally well-gaited or does not have the desired breed characteristics and conformation is simply not used for breeding.

The training of the Peruvian Paso horse might be different to the training methods used in other breeds, but the seat does not differ from the classic principles of effective riding on the flat. This is commonly known as riding with a '*deep, straight and balanced seat*'.

Collection

Collection is a critical element in Classical Peruvian equitation. Through collection one can obtain a better and more fluent execution of the four-beat lateral gait as a result of increased impulsion from the hind legs and balance of the horse.

To understand what collection is all about and why we bother to collect a horse, we first need to understand the mechanics of the movement and body structure of the horse. This is quite a complicated and technical subject, but I will try to keep it simple.

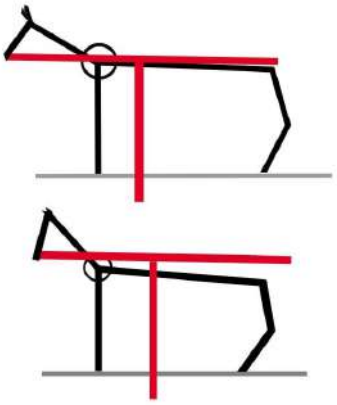
Horse riding is by definition unnatural to the horse. A horse intended as a mount must first be trained to carry the rider's weight in a proper way. For the “green” horse to carry the rider's weight, it first needs to grow up and be physically able to carry weight on its back. For the Peruvian Paso horse this is usually when it is 3 years or older. The weight of a rider puts quite some pressure on the spine of a young horse.

The horse's back is an emotional filter. An upset, tense, angry, frightened horse tends to tense its back muscles and hollow its back. The first time a young horse feels weight on its back it will also be tense, and feel a certain degree of discomfort which it will try to avoid as best possible by hollowing its back.
Another reason (some would say the most important) that a horse becomes tense and "hollows" is because its balance is upset. So before anything else, the horse must learn not to fear having a saddle and rider on its back.
This way it can relax and not tense its back muscles, which need to be relaxed in order for the horse to counteract the sagging of the spine that the rider’s weight creates. The horse learns to make its back round in order to support the weight, as it is much easier for the horse to carry weight when the back is round and arched instead of hollow.

If one looks at the weight distribution of a horse standing relaxed and in a natural way, one can observe that the horse carries more weight on its forehand (the front half of its body) than on its hind legs. Simple laws of physics teach us that if the horse were to bring its neck down it would increase the amount of weight on its forehand. If the neck is held higher then more weight is distributed to the hind legs. It is very important to understand this. A horse that is lying down and wants to stand will first lift up its neck to shift weight to the hind legs.

The laws of physics prove that an object is most stable and balanced if its gravity is in its centre and when the balance is equally divided on individual supports; in this case, the horse's legs. The body of the horse is supported with four legs forming a rectangle. The centre of gravity of a horse standing relaxed and in a natural way is not in the centre of this rectangle which the legs are supporting - it is further forward, approximately where the horse's heart is.

The idea of classical equitation and collection is to influence and change the centre of gravity by bringing it further towards the rear, from in front of the rider's leg to just behind the rider's leg. We want to bring the horse into an "artificial balance" because that will help it gain more stability. The horse becomes manoeuvrable, better able to balance the rider on its back, and at the same time distributes the weight equally on all four legs, thus preventing the premature overuse (injury) of the front legs.



Another very important advantage that can be achieved by moving the horse's centre of gravity further toward the rear, is if we imagine that the 'motor' of the horse is at the back. Its hindquarters provide the impulsion (the energy that is created in the hindquarters to move the horse forward), and not the forelegs. With a more equal distribution of the weight on all four legs, the 'motor' works much more efficiently and effectively. So what must one do to move the horse's centre of gravity backwards? In classical equitation this is achieved by bringing the horse's neck up, through intelligent training methods and horsemanship. While this may sound simple in theory, the reality is not so easy. Collection is much more than merely bringing the horse's neck up, and is based on the physical and mental relaxation of the horse and the absence of using force.

The concept of collecting a horse is to bring together 'both ends of the horse' for the purpose of lifting and lightening the forehand and to achieve optimal impulsion from the hind quarters. Collection also means to collect and store the necessary energy for the upcoming task, which will give the horse the needed level of power to generate impulsion. It is like the energy stored in a battery; it's there but the output energy is restrained to a maximum level so it lasts longer.

Collection lets the horse perform tasks with greater ease and beauty. It 'loads' the hind legs, as if the horse was running uphill; like a speed boat lifts up the bow when the motor at the back provides power.
In order to achieve collection and good impulsion, one must first have energy. Without this, (if the horse is tired, lazy or just bored) one cannot reach the level of true collection. Some people confuse a relaxed walk and the stretching of the neck downwards with

collection, but that is a necessary stage (in which the horse is relaxed, loosening up its muscles and rounding its back), before reaching the next and most important stage of true collection, with more (controlled) energy, more impulsion and a better weight distribution.

True collection is a complicated concept that is hard to describe with just a few words, especially to those who are unfamiliar with classical riding principles. On our rides we had modern 'western style' riders who were used to riding their Quarter horses with loose reins and a low neck set at all times. One of them tried to convince me that it was a more 'natural way' of riding. With respect, horse riding is not natural to the horse anyway, and the Quarter horse was originally bred for a completely different function and with a totally different conformation in mind to the Peruvian Paso horse. Working with cattle close to the ground or racing over quarter mile courses is a different ball game entirely, to covering long distances in the most effective way and with minimum effort.

Why we should ride more

Before 1969, the Peruvian Paso horse was a plantation workhorse and a traveller's horse, with constant selection pressure based on reliability, strength, usefulness, and comfort. This unique selection environment attained a balance between athleticism, strength, and a luxurious ride. A happy medium was found between reliability and comfort.

During the 1969 Agrarian Reform in Peru, instituted by the government of general Juan Velasco Alvarado, large agricultural plantations were confiscated at gunpoint. The seized land was distributed to landless individuals or agricultural cooperatives, major breeding operations were broken up and breeding stock was lost. The land reform destroyed not only large-scale horse breeding operations, but took away the function of the Peruvian Paso as a working horse, in addition to its critical selection environment. Many major land owners and breeders had no alternative other than to kill or free their horses, or give them to their workers who could not take care of them. It was almost the end of the Peruvian Paso horse, but thanks to the heroic efforts of some of those breeders and aficionados, the breed survived.

During and after the 1970's in Peru, horses were predominantly bred with the show-ring in mind, giving preference to adornments such as collection, lift and termino. Even today, the show circuit is the predominant breeding selection environment, and “a smooth ride and a flashy presentation” are the primary criteria. Success here heavily influences which horses and bloodlines are favoured, selected, promoted, and bred. As a result, breeding has been concentrated around only a segment of the already small genetic pool available. On the other hand considerable improvements have been made on a more uniform genetic makeup and format of the breed.

The discussion within Peru about the future of the Peruvian Paso is in my opinion intrinsically connected with and part of a global problem in the horse world. The days when extensive land travel was done on horseback, and the horse was first and foremost used as a working animal, are long gone. More and more people moved to urban areas and soulless motorised vehicles replaced the use of horses. Our noble and loyal travel companion became redundant and 'equestrian romanticism' went out the window.

Put simply, for whatever reason one can think of, people don't ride horses as much as they did in the "old days". This new reality poses a serious danger to the continuity and preservation of any horse breed,

as breeders loose sight of that fine and delicate line that should never be crossed. This is the line between illusion and reality; between what works for the mind but fails when put into practice. It is when breeders start to confuse muscle mass with obesity, temperament and resistance to fatigue with excitement and hysteric behaviour, refinement with fragility, self-carriage with forced collection, and ease of movement with over-bending at the joints, to name but a few examples. The perception of the eye can be delusive for those who do not ride.

As for the Peruvian horse breed, it is for me and many others the best all-round trail horse 'par excellence', and it is our obligation to be all the more careful to preserve this God-given equestrian treasure. The Peruvian Paso remains a superb horse for travelling and covering long distances, unbeatable by any other breed in what is the "ultimate riding experience", and displaying immense endurance and heart. We should ride again to understand and appreciate the essence of our breed and to see its real beauty, as all the rest is illusory.

Perol Chico cannot change the course of the world but we can still dream, work hard and recreate a more contemporary version of the 'equestrian travel' experience, bringing with it a revival of equestrian romanticism.

Equestrian Travel

People often think that equestrian travel is about travelling on horseback over a very long period - sometimes months - and covering hundreds of miles on a single journey. But this is not necessarily the definition of equestrian travel.

Equestrian travel is not about how far, how fast or even 'how' you get there The true spirit of equestrian travel should not be any goal, other than to ride.

CuChullaine O'Reilly, founder of the Long Riders Guild, describes equestrian travel as follows:

"What none of the equestrian magazines and horse whisperers are ever going to tell you is that travel on horseback brings with it a special kind of wisdom, helps you see through the world's pretensions, and opens you up to the adventure of self-conquest. Equestrian travel is not merely about covering vast amounts of mileage. It is the journey you and your horse take together to reach the borders of an otherwise invisible place. It is a journey you see from the top of that altar of freedom, your saddle. It is an antidote to the world's obsession with speed because the three-mile-per-hour pace of your horse forces you to slow down your body, which in turn results in the opening of your spirit. Thus an equestrian journey does not merely transport you along the physical road stretching ahead, more importantly it allows you to ride on the secret trail traced deep inside your soul."

Travel on horseback is one of the most authentic, culturally and spiritually enriching experiences.
Moreover, having a horse as a travel companion adds something very special to a journey. The horse is a living symbol and teacher of unconditional friendship, loyalty, trust, honesty and zest for life. It is always eager to go, and willing to carry us on his back, even if the terrain is difficult and full of obstacles. The nature of the horse is to always move on, without any specific purpose other than to eat and survive; without overthinking why, where, when and for how long;

without the fear of getting lost. It is his natural instinct, an unexplainable inner voice, that tells him to roam the world, explore new places and to feel free.

For us humans there is no better travel companion, nor a better life coach, than the horse.

Travelling on horseback enables us to see the world with more perspective, and provides a perfect escape from the madding crowd. It opens our mind and unlocks unimaginable doors, allowing us to discover life beyond our 'comfort' zone, in all its hidden and unvarnished beauty. But most importantly, being and travelling with horses helps us find and recover our true and joyful nature, and with it, the essence of our humanity.

Traditional vs. Contemporary Equestrian Travel

In the 'old days' people would travel on horseback for weeks; sometimes months. During these long journeys there was often an insufficient quantity or quality of forage to be found, and so the horses were fed with whatever was available. Sometimes there was only grain, carrying the risk of colic, and sometimes not even that. Horses may have suffered injuries along the route, with no vet in the vicinity to examine them or medicines to cure them. Travellers had to carry on with a lame horse, in the middle of nowhere, to try find a place for shelter and recovery. Those long journeys may sound very adventurous and exciting to some of us, but the reality was often far from that. Horse and rider suffered.

The risk of accidents especially in unknown mountain terrain is considerably high as the terrain is always full of surprises. When I started my riding business I explored new routes deep and high in the Andes all by myself. Just me and my horse. In retrospect that was pretty stupid ('loco' in Spanish) and irresponsible. When you can't oversee the trails ahead, mountain trails with steep drops can without warning suddenly become so narrow that there is not even enough

space to turn your horse and go back. I learned to never explore high mountain trails alone again, but always with a fellow rider who can help when things go really bad.

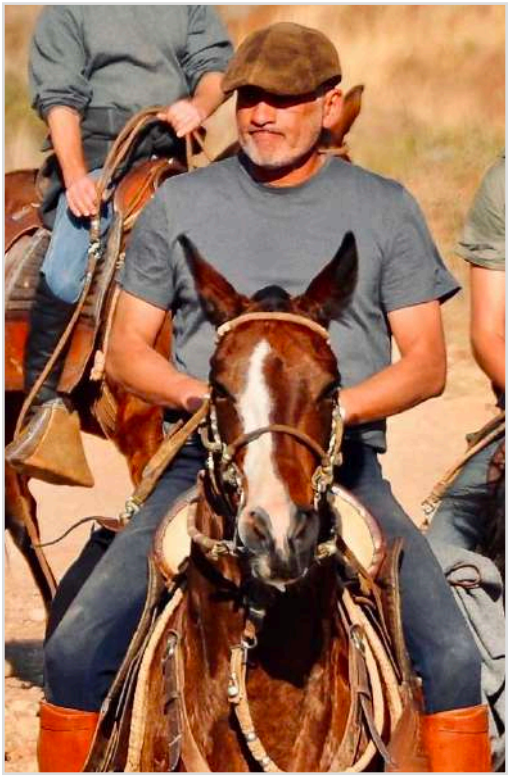
Equestrian travel in the old days was full of danger, hardship and struggle. With our modern views on ethics, morals and animal welfare it would certainly not win a prize in the category 'responsible travel'. But back then there was simply no other way.

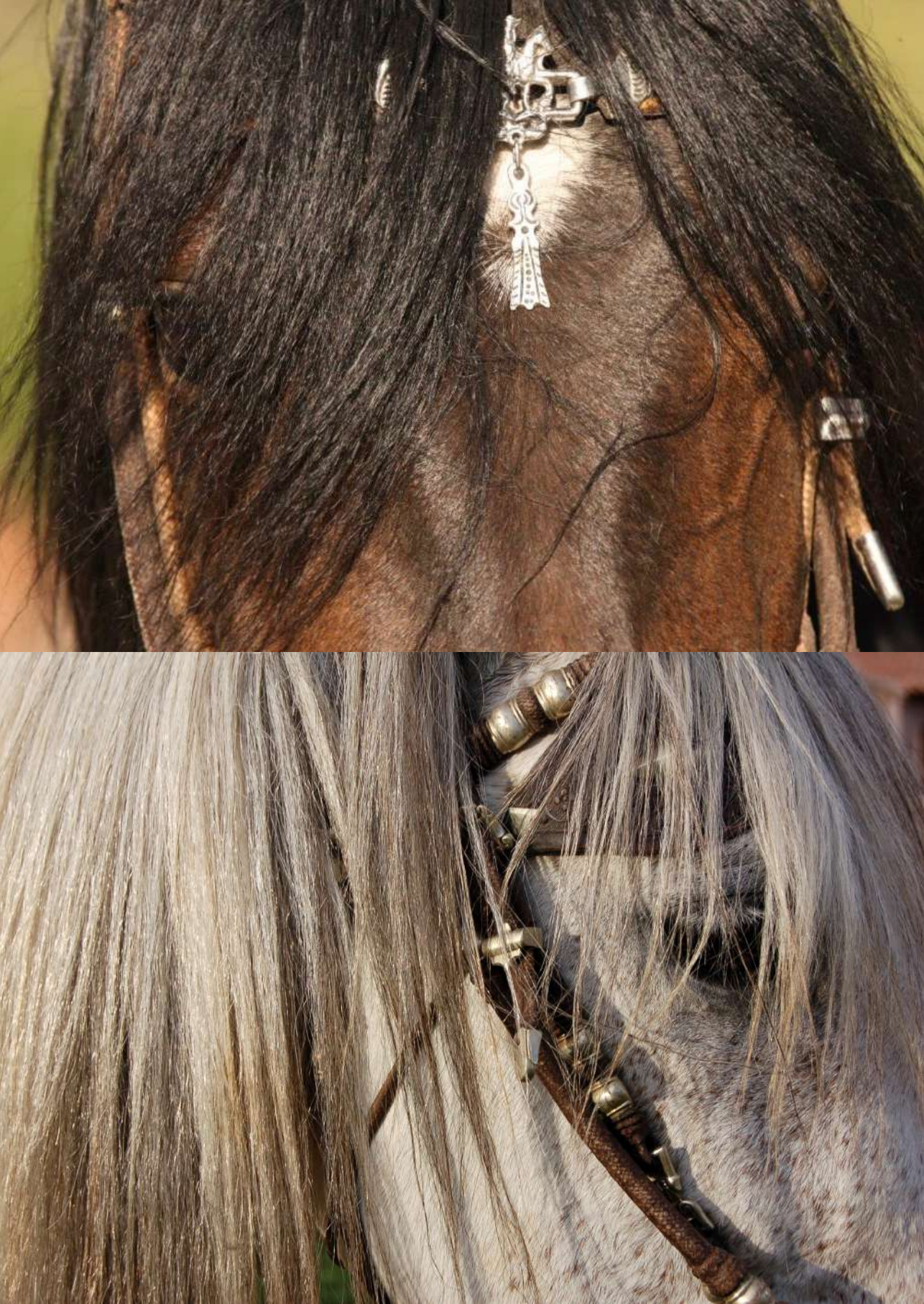
I consider 'contemporary equestrian travel' as a reinvention of the old and traditional way, but in a more pleasant, more enjoyable and above all in a more responsible way, for both horse and rider. With good logistics and a support team, traditional equestrian travel can be done differently and without unnecessary suffering - like using a 4x4 support vehicle that can drop food, water and whatever is needed along the journey. Equestrian journeys can be done without even sacrificing the simple joys in life: a delicious and refreshing Pisco Sour after a long days ride, a nice lunch prepared by Maria around mid day, or a nice hot shower and soft bed at the end of a riding day, while our grooms take care of your horse at the spot you have left it for the night. Why not? It provides more jobs and income for the local economy.

Today most equestrians or avid trail riders are hardworking people with busy lives. They don't have time to spend weeks or months on horseback, nor the time to get a horse or themselves physically fit to do so. So we shorten the time of the journey to make equestrian travel more accessible, more enjoyable and suitable for more people, while still covering a considerable distance. We carefully choose and plan the most interesting routes off the beaten track and with breath-taking scenery, avoiding boring busy roads or trails that are too dangerous to ride. This contemporary approach to traditional equestrian travel has proved to satisfy a tremendous need and sparked a growing interest worldwide amongst equestrians, both young and old. Times have changed, and so did traditional equestrian travel, but its true spirit is still very much alive.

"In this complex, competitive, digital, stressful and crazy world, the horse has a major role to play in helping us disconnect, relax and rediscover the bond we have with nature, and what really matters."

Eduard van Brunschot





Photos:

Perol Chico's exploratory expeditions. Coastal desert.

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"Solo para los amigos"