

Arts Center, September 9
through February 18

The 1,000 jewel-encrusted treasures by Peter Carl Fabergé sparkle like new. Admission: \$14.50. Tel: 302-777-1600

HAWAII

Hilo

Hilo Farmers Market, downtown on Front Street, year-round
Some 50 merchants crowd the market every Wednesday and Saturday. Their fare: every tropical flower and fruit under the sun. Free. Tel: 808-961-5797

ILLINOIS

Chicago

"Skyscrapers: The New Millennium," The Art Institute of Chicago, through January 15

Skyscrapers are reaching ever higher to match lofty human aspirations. See drawings and models of this vital architectural form. Admission: \$8. Tel: 312-443-3600

"Star Wars: The Magic of Myth," The Field Museum, through January 7

Original artwork, props, models, and costumes from the *Star Wars* films. This exhibition looks at how the saga combines elements of classical mythology with popular culture to create a modern-day classic about the struggle between good and evil. Admission: \$13. Tel: 312-922-9410

MAINE

Portland

"N.C. Wyeth: Precious Time," Portland Museum of Art, through October 15

In public, N.C. Wyeth was a famous ▶

CULTURAL ICON: ANDEAN LLAMAS

Beast of burden, sacrificial lamb, and source of food and clothing,

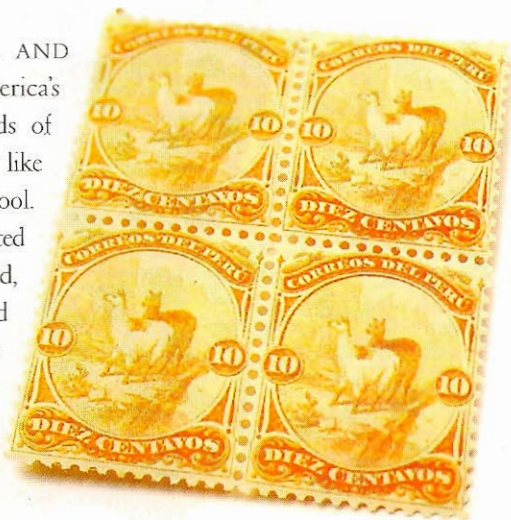
the enduring and endearing llama of the Andes is as eternal as the towering peaks and mile-high valleys it calls home. These gentle and serene "ships of the Andes" sail smoothly atop their rocky world. | By Lisa Fann

HIGH ON THE SLOPES AND plateaus of South America's Andes Mountains, herds of llamas meander around looking like long-necked, leggy tufts of wool. Residents of the longest uninterrupted mountain chain in the world, llamas are particularly well-suited to their harsh environment with high-capacity lungs and designer blood platelets that are specially adapted to an oxygen-poor atmosphere. Their three-chambered stomachs squeeze nutrition out of the scrubbiest Andean grass, and for half the year they eat virtually nothing. In their high tolerance for thirst, llamas resemble their humped camelid cousins, although unlike camels llamas do not store water. Good-natured and sure-footed, llamas carry 80-pound loads 15–20 miles a day on trail-friendly padded feet.

With all these selling points, it's hardly surprising that llamas have long been called the "ships of the Andes." The primary means of Andean transportation until the early 20th century, especially in Chile, Bolivia, and Peru, llamas have only recently been replaced by four-wheeled beasts of burden. But even with this horsepowered competition, many llamas are still employed by the campesinos (field workers) because of the animals' low-maintenance lifestyle.

The history of llama-human cooperation is a long one—nearly 5,000 years by some estimates—and the gentle and stoic llama is intertwined with Andean culture. Domestication of the llama came in conjunction with genetic engineering performed by ancient Peruvians. Starting with the wild guanaco, these early geneticists used centuries of selective breeding to cultivate three distinct animals: guanacos (still found in the wild), llamas (not found in the wild and primarily used as a pack animal), and smaller, heavy-coated alpacas (prized for their long, silky wool).

When Spanish explorers arrived in South America, they found 300,000 llamas employed in Incan silver mines. Llama breeding played an important role in the ▶



Cousin of the camel, the llama has forever put its stamp on South American culture.

TRAVEL NEWS

illustrator, but his private paintings reveal his lifelong reverence for nature. This exhibition presents this private world. Admission: \$6.

Tel: 207-773-ARTS

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MISSOURI

St. Louis

"Wonderland," Saint Louis Art Museum, through September 24

Step into a collection of sensory wonders. Light, liquid, sound, and smell intermingle magically.

Free. Tel: 314-721-0072

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NEW YORK

New York City

"Fighting Dinosaurs: New Discoveries From Mongolia," American Museum of Natural History, through October 29;
"Mongolia Observed: Photographs Present and Past," through September

See those ornery fighting dinosaurs in an exciting new format. The photo exhibit puts recent finds in context. Admission: \$15. Tel: 212-769-5200

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"New York Now 2000: Contemporary Work in Photography," The Museum of the City of New York, through October 15

Lovers of New York City will enjoy the work of 41 photographers who see the metropolis from a dazzling array of perspectives. Closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission: \$7.

Tel: 212-534-1672

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Ninth Annual Power of Herbs Weekend, New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx, September 23-24

This high-powered workshop ►

On Location

local economy, and Incan armies used thousands of llamas in pack trains where the animals served as both a means of transport and source of meat. An early Spanish chronicler wrote, "These sheep [llamas] are among the most excellent creatures that God has created, and the most useful. It would seem that the Divine Majesty took care to create these animals, that the people of this country might be able to live and sustain themselves..." Another narrator writing in 1580 was not so effusive: "These sheep have long neckes like camells ... tom moone [was] riding uppon one of these sheep [and] the sheep turned his mouth toward moone and spued full in his face a very lothsom stincking vomyte." Because llamas reserve spitting as a last line of defense, Moone no doubt had deeply offended the animal.

As the Spanish chronicler suggests, llamas have always served as more than just agile pack animals. They also provide meat, eaten fresh or dried as *charqui* (where the English language gets the word *jerky*); hides; wool for textiles; fat for candles; and dried dung for fuel. Their wool, which can vary from white to brown to black, has hollow shafts much like hair, making it very lightweight and softer and warmer than sheep's wool.

The protective outer coat consists of long, coarse hairs, while the insulating under-

coat is short and crimped. Andeans braided ropes and rugs from the wool, and Peruvian weavers used a backstrap loom to craft a coarse cloth for the common people's clothing. The nobility, however, demanded the finer wool of the alpaca and the vicuña, a relative of the llama.

But the role of llamas ranges far beyond the simply serviceable. Depictions of llamas can be found on ancient pottery, in petroglyphs, and in textiles. In ancient times, llamas were commonly used in religious ceremonies and sometimes worshiped as gods. On the first day of the lunar month in Huayaca Pata in Cuzco, priests sacrificed 100 white llamas to the gods. In other places, priests directed the course of politics or military action after reading the blood vessels in the lungs of a sacrificed white llama. And as a sort of 19th-century scapegoat, black llamas were used by the Aymara Indians to relieve them of the plague. A llama, loaded with the clothes of plague-stricken people, was set loose in the mountains with the hope that it would take the plague with it.

Prized for their placid dispositions, ease of care, and strong protective instincts, llamas are used to guard herds of sheep that they seem to regard as somewhat dim but likeable children. Ever vigilant and inquisitive, llamas have been known to attack and sometimes kill coyotes and other predators.

Today, there are 7 million llamas in South America, and these intelligent animals have been exported to many other parts of the world, where they carry supplies to remote locations and make it easier for recreationists to sample the wild beauty of natural areas. How appropriate—llamas are truly ambassadors of goodwill from the people of the Andes. /END/ **Lisa Fann**, HEMISPHERES' articles editor, also reserves spitting as a last line of defense. *She has a fenced-in back yard but no llama ... yet.*

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