

South American Letter

Nearly three miles above the sea in that part of the Peruvian Andes so often styled "The Roof of the World" is located one of the great natural wonders of the Universe.

To the inhabitants of La Fundicion and Cerro de Pasco, it is a well known place. To the outside world it is quite unheard of. Even the educated people of Peru know little or nothing concerning this peculiar and remarkable work of nature.

The "Rock Forest" as it is called comprises a territory of approximately eighteen miles length by six to eight miles width. It borders the western side of a wide-stretching, level, grass-covered pampa, a distance of perhaps eighteen miles almost due south of La Fundicion, or twenty-seven miles from Cerro de Pasco.

On clear days it is easily visible to the unaided eye from the former place. It is also in plain view from the trains on the Cerro de Pasco railroad. At a distance it bears a striking resemblance to a gray barren forest as it looks in winter when the leaves are off the trees. It is from this fact that it derives its name.

As one draws nearer it loses much of this characteristic quality and discloses its true nature. It is not a forest of petrified trees as the name might suggest. Perhaps at no time in the World's history did trees of any kind exist in the vicinity. Certain, none exist there now. It is located hundreds of feet above the highest timberline.

Roughly it consists of a series of parallel ridges on which the rock formations are located. The valleys between are grassy and often swampy and treacherous.

No competent geologist has been known to visit the region and explain the origin and character of these peculiar formations. The rock has a limestone composition. Scattered thruout are fine grains of a pure quartz sand that sparkles in the sun like diamonds. The strata from which these formations have been developed no doubt, belongs to a very early period of the world's history, to a time when this present high altitude did not exist, and the process of elevation was just in its beginning. This may have been in the Cambrian or early Silurian periods.

The formations as we see them today owe much of their shape to the con-

tinued heating of waves from a lake that existed at the base of these ridges in very recent geological time. Abundant evidence of wave action in the shaping of these strange and grotesque forms is found thruout the forest. Of course, allowance must be made for erosion by atmospheric agencies which has continued thruout the ages and is going on at the present time. But these alone would scarcely produce the pedestal and statue like effects in a rock whose texture is quite consistent thruout. Frequently it is possible to trace over a wide area the same strata by the relative positions of the huge blocks in the formations.

As one rides thru this region, this place of wonders, where the forces of nature seem to have been at play shaping mighty and grotesque figures that man might come and marvel at, he is struck with a peculiar feeling of abandon and admiration, and thrills chase each other thru his system.

Great monoliths fifty to a hundred feet high are built up block upon block in as regular and systematic a manner as tho done by the hand of man. On every side there are instances of this. The Gate-way to the "Rock Forest" is a notable example.

On the other hand what are perhaps more interesting even than those are figures like the "Turtle," "Snail Rock," "The King" and others, that seem to portray nature in its happier moods when it chose to shape the interesting and artistic rather than the permanent and substantial.

"The Turtle Rock" and "the Snail Rock" are typical examples of these. It requires little imagination on the part of the visitor to discover these names. The resemblance is indeed very marked. The former especially is a most remarkable piece of nature's handiwork. Its position is high above all the other rocks of the vicinity. When viewed from a different angle it loses its turtle like shape and stands up like a huge wall. This is also true of the Snail Rock which at most is only four feet thick. The position of the latter is very interesting. It rests on the edge of a wide pampa. Its head is pointed toward the high ridge with its many strange shapes and forms, to the right. And when one remembers that this pampa was once the bottom of a lake and the ridge was dry land the idea at once suggests itself, of a huge prehistoric snail leaving its waters for a sunning on the rocks. But unlike the proverbial snail of nursery rhymes its progress was so slow that it never arrived at its destination. It was changed to stone on the way.

Of natural arches there are many thruout this Andean Garden of the Gods. To the amateur photographer who has the time and the energy to climb about over difficult places, no end of interesting views are to be had, and especially when these arches are employed as a framework for the picture.

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