

Nazca Lines: Paintings In The Desert

Sep 16, 2012 By **Arati Rao**



1. Make a prediction: What is this article about?
2. Skim the article, looking at pictures and subheadings. What questions come to mind? Write them down.
3. As you read, put a check next to areas that answer your questions.

If you have flown from Lima to Arequipa in the South American country of Peru, low above the ground, you might have seen Nazca. Or should we say, the Nazca lines – beautiful drawings known as geoglyphs that span the desert south west of Peru.

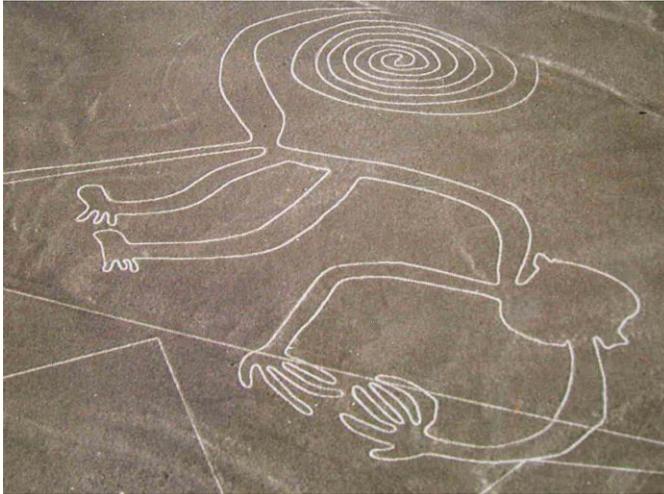
The snake, the lizard, the spider, a flower, a man and 18 bird shapes, including the hummingbird and the condor. There are about 50 of these figures ranging in size from 25 meters to 275 meters long, and confined to a small corner of the desert.

Declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1994, these drawings were produced over a period of a thousand years. Now, the Nazca are under threat as squatters have taken over large stretches of the region. They are poor and homeless people from nearby towns, and have resisted all attempts to evict them.

What are geoglyphs?

The interesting thing about geoglyphs – defined as large signs drawn on the ground and artificial in origin – is that they don't mean anything when seen from the ground. You could be standing right on them and the pictures won't be apparent at all. It is when you see them from above, from high up, that the designs reveal themselves -- straight lines and figures that are perfectly proportioned.

How were they constructed?



The Nazca lines are thought to have been made by the Nazca Indians who lived in this region of Peru between 300 BC and 800 AD. They created the interesting patterns by scraping away the desert's dark iron-oxide pebbles to reveal the white soil underneath. The limestone in the underlying white layer has since hardened, preserving the designs

amazingly well.

If the design called for a circle, then a rope wrapped around a handheld stick was tied to a center pole and slowly unwound to etch a spiral. Again rocks were cleared to reveal light earth below. It is thought that these lines were used in rituals by farmers, but that is only one theory. Another is that those Nazca lines were related to worship of mountain deities.

Are there geoglyphs elsewhere?



Researchers have found what they believe are 2000 year old patterns in the Middle Eastern desert from Syria to Saudi Arabia. The circular patterns were first observed by Royal Air Force pilots in 1920. In fact, not all are circles. In Saudi Arabia, some are rectangular, some are circular with spokes pointing in the line of sunrise-sunset. In Jordan

and Syria, in contrast, the circular wheels have several spokes and don't seem connected to any astronomy.

These enigmatic lines have inspired all kind of theories of ancient flights and aliens in spacecrafts!