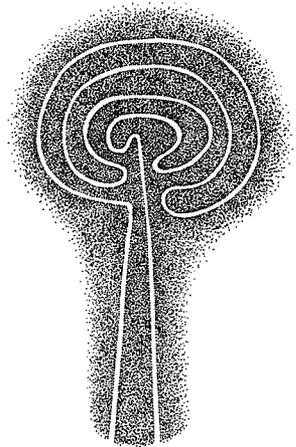


The World's Largest Labyrinths

Jill K.H. Geoffrion

A four-mile long labyrinth pathway is one of the many ancient geoglyphs that were scratched into Nazca (Nasca) Plain in southern Peru between 200 BCE and 500 CE.¹ A three-circuit labyrinth-like looping line that was included in Kern's extensive work on labyrinths has also been identified.² Unfortunately, due to concerns about permanently damaging the UNESCO World-Heritage site, it is difficult to obtain permission to walk on most of the plain, including its labyrinths.³



*The three-circuit Nazca labyrinth
line drawing by Jeff Saward*

The Nazca Lines are difficult to appreciate from the ground because of their incredible size. Perspective can be gained by considering the image below. In view are the highway that runs through the Nazca plain as well as a tour bus and a couple of cars that have stopped to look at the lines from an observation tower that was installed so that people wouldn't continue to destroy the lines by walking or driving across them. Lines on both sides of the road are visible. Many are straight and others create immense and recognizable shapes, such as the hand on the right side and the tree on the left. Better views are possible from the air.

*Overview with
the highway
going through it*

*Photo: Jill
Geoffrion*



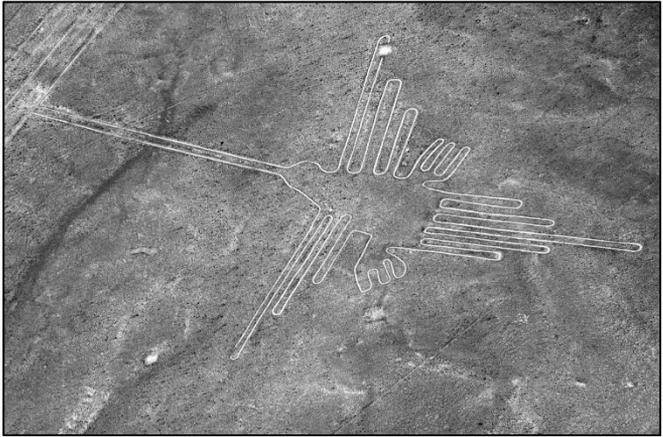
Many of the lines on the Nazca plain were created by removing four to six inches of reddish gravel (iron oxide-coated pebbles) and exposing the light-colored clay below. Due to the extreme arid nature of the plateau the lines have been preserved for centuries. Scholars are unsure of the original purposes of these lines. The large amount of shattered pottery along some of their borders suggests that they may have served as part of rituals involving water.⁴

On the standard fly-over of this thirty-seven mile long and one mile wide plain, pilots focus on the famous animal geoglyphs.⁵ Many of these figures, such as the hummingbirds, have lines that double back on themselves, a classic characteristic of labyrinths. Some, but not all, have identifiable centers.

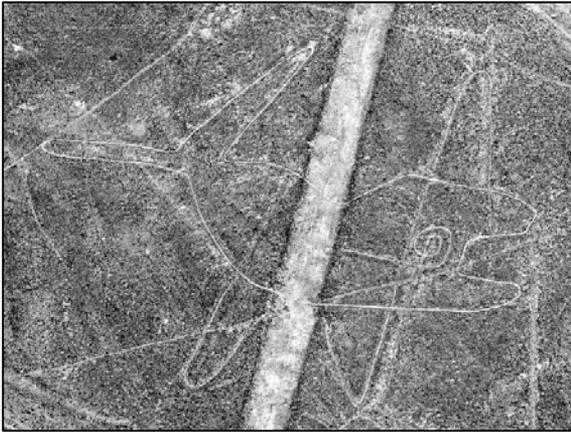
Right: the Hummingbird

Photos: Jill Geoffrion

Below: Monkey with Spiral Tail



Spirals are incorporated into a number of the figures, including the massive tail of the monkey and the eye of the whale. Spirals are found in non-animal geoglyphs as well. For example, there is a large spiral passageway in the four-mile long labyrinth that Saunders and Ruggles describe as a pathway that was designed to be walked.



Left: Whale with spiral eye

Photos: Jill Geoffrion

Below: Animal in foreground, circles in back



The call to learn more about the largest labyrinths on our planet awaits the answer of interested scholars. Specifically, the locations, dimensions and specific features of all labyrinths on the Nazca Plains need to be identified. The relationship of the original purposes and uses of these lines as they relate to labyrinth figures is also of interest. Finally, exploration of the relationship of water, both underground and rituals involving water, to these labyrinths may help in gaining further understanding of why these labyrinths exist.

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Notes:

1. See Saunders, Nicholas J. & Clive Ruggles. (2012). "Desert labyrinth; lines, landscape and meaning at Nazca, Peru" *Antiquity*, 86, 1126-1140.
2. "A small labyrinthine symbol is preserved among the famous lines and animals scratched onto the ground of Nazca Plain in Peru... While not a true labyrinth, the design is certainly one of the labyrinth family, although the simple looping, concentric pathway could have been constructed without knowledge of the labyrinth." See Kern, Hermann. (2000). *Through the Labyrinth. Designs and Meanings over 5,000 Years*. New York: Prestel, 302. On page 303 the illustration, drawn from Schuster, 1998 is entitled, "The labyrinth pattern on the Nazca Plain, Peru."
3. See Hall, Stephen S. (2010). "Spirits in the Sand: the ancient Nasca lines of Peru shed their secrets" *National Geographic*, 217 (3), 56. Hall discusses the importance of actually walking the geoglyphs to gain understanding of them.
4. See Aveni, Anthony F. "Solving the Mystery of the Nasca Lines" *Archaeology*, May/June 2000, 53:3, 26-36.
5. If you are able to visit the Nazca Lines, I would highly suggest bringing a map with specific locations and figures (labyrinths) that you would like the pilot to fly over.

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*Sand Labyrinth, Martyrs' Bay, Iona
Photograph by Jeff Seward, June 2015*

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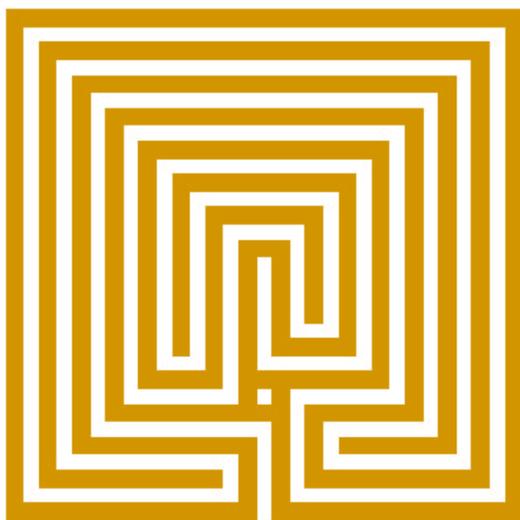
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Santa Sinforosa, Tossicia, Italy - photo by Jeff Saward

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*Focusing on
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in Spirituality
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Established 2007
Published Annually

Produced by & © Labyrinthos 2015