Chain of mountains in South America, extending along the whole length of the W coast. The longest mountain range in the world, they stretch for 8900km (5500mi). At their widest they are c.800km (500mi) across. There are more than 50 peaks over 6700m (22,000ft) high. They contain many active volcanoes, including Cotopaxi in Ecuador. Earthquakes are common, and cities such as Lima, Valparaíso, and Callao have been severely damaged. The highest peak is Aconcagua, rising 6960m (22,834ft) in Argentina. Lake Titicaca, the world’s highest lake at 3810m (12,500ft), lies in the Andes on the Peru-Bolivia border.

Far south in Tierra del Fuego, the mountains run east and west, then turn north between Argentina and Chile. The westernmost of the mountains run into the sea, lining the coast of S Chile with islands. In the Patagonian Andes are high, glacier-fed lakes in both Argentina and Chile.

The highest range of the Andes is on the central and northern Argentine-Chilean border; Aconcagua (22,835 ft/6,960 m; highest mountain of the Western Hemisphere) and Tupuncato are there. Between the peaks is Uspallata Pass, the route of the former Transandine Railway, with the Christ of the Andes. Other major peaks such as Llullaillaco flank the main range, and in N Chile sub-Andean ranges enclose the high, cold Atacama Desert.

The central Andes broaden out in Bolivia and Peru in multiple ranges (c.400 mi/640 km wide) with high plateau country (the altiplano) and many high intermontane valleys, where the great civilization of the Inca had its home. High in the mountains on the Peru-Bolivia border is Lake Titicaca. In Bolivia are the notable volcanoes, Illimani and Illampú, and in S Peru is El Misti. The western or coastal range in Peru has lofty peaks (notably Huascarán) and is crossed by the highest railroad of the Andes (from La Oroya to Lima).

The ranges approach each other again in Ecuador, where the N Andes begin. Between two volcanic cordilleras (including the cloud-capped Chimborazo and Cotopaxi) are rich intermontane basins. In
Colombia the Andes divide again, the western range running between the coast and the Cauca River, the central between the Cauca and the Magdalena rivers, and the eastern running north parallel to the Magdalena River, then stretching out on the coast into Venezuela. The Andes continue in some of the islands of the West Indies, and in Panama N Andean spurs connect with the mountains of Central America and thus with the Sierra Madre and the Rocky Mts.

People and Economy

The plateaus and valleys of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia have been peopled since remote times and saw the rise of not only the Inca and the Chibcha but some of the earliest native civilizations in the Western Hemisphere. Today the Quechua and Aymara tribes are the main indigenous inhabitants of the Andes. Agriculture was the basis of these cultures (the native llama and alpaca were domesticated later), and the lands there are still tilled mainly for subsistence crops. Because of a scarcity of water, however, agriculture is difficult. Tobacco, cotton, and coffee are grown and exported. Copper, silver, tin, iron, and gold are mined, and petroleum has been found. Pack trails are the most efficient means of communication in the Andes. Although there is some rail passage through the mountains, the inhabitants of the Andes do not depend on trains for the maintenance of their economy. Certain Andean areas have developed a tourist trade.

Bibliography

See Ogilvie, A. G., Geography of the Central Andes (1922);  
C. Arthaud; F. Hébert-Stevens, The Andes: Roof of America (tr. 1956);  
James, P. E., Latin America (1969, repr. 1988);  
Kazami, T., The Andes (1972);  
Pitcher, W. S., Magmatism at a Plate Edge: The Peruvian Andes (1985);  
Murphy, D., Eight Feet in the Andes (1986);  
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA