Here is the fountain in our base city of Cusco. Very pretty, and that Inca mask at the top is kind of creepy at night. Walking around, there are many of these kinds of symbols embedded in mountain sides and on the currency, among other places. It is fascinating to see the ancient revival in modern civilization.
Walking up a mountain and out of the tourist part of town, we see reminders that we are no longer in a world we are used to. This is a typical house, with adobe walls and a metal door. It is like walking through a living National Geographic magazine, and there is always something new to learn from a different culture.
The precursor to Machu Picchu was the terraces of Ollantaytambo, another Incan ruin site. Roam around at your leisure, but be sure not to climb on the rocks or walls, for you will surely get “the whistle.” Ruins are a lot better without people with whistles. Nonetheless, it is a remarkable sight to behold.
One morning, I woke up in our hostel in Aguas Calientes and walked out on the balcony to find the stunning marvel of the mountains greeting me. “Good morning, Bobby,” it said. An excellent day was already underway, and what a way to begin.
To stand in front of the legendary Machu Picchu was the coolest thing I have ever done. Getting there was hard enough due to the altitude effect, but to think that people actually carried giant slabs of rock without machines to this place is mind boggling. Also, it was cool to see the places in all those pictures on Wikipedia in real life.
To get to the top of one of the mountains overlooking Machu Picchu, one must first climb this beast. Four or five ladders, this being the tallest, plus about two miles of stone steps make up the Inca trail to the top of Putucusi mountain, an exhausting but well worth it hike with a unique view of Machu Picchu.
One of the best parts of the trip, other than the sights, was the exploration of cultural differences. Whether it is eye-catching clothes, guinea pig for dinner or under-age gambling (which is legal if 18) or testing positive for cocaine because you drank their common and completely normal coca leaf tea, it is all magnificent to set aside your common habits for just one week and try something new.
And of course, the people are amazing as well. I have never made friends so close so fast. On Friday, little is know about each other and by Tuesday we are sharing information about how Peruvian foods affect our gastrointestinal tracts. It was so much fun to be in a group of people with common interests doing something totally new to all of us. These are four friends I hope remain so in the long term. And oh yes, I can’t forget “PG” Professor Gertsch and Barb! You guys rock!