

'Of the Hill of Potosí' (c.1605)

By Reginaldo de Lizárraga

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Chapter 100

Of the Mountain of Potosí

Returning to our province of Los Charcas, tired of treating of the more than barbarous Chiriguana people [desert dwellers of southeastern Bolivia], this province is wide and long, and yet sparsely populated and quite rugged, with bad roads; the Indians are rather better looking than those of El Collao, more robust, their faces fuller, and in their dress much better made, speaking generally; they are known by their dress, and are very rich in silver and cattle, although in cattle those of Callao have the advantage, and gold they do not lack, except that they do not want to discover it; it is known to exist in the Chayanta district, not in rivers, but in veins, but they keep it to themselves, and it does them no harm.

The Viceroy Francisco de Toledo sent from Potosí one of our friars to accompany a *yanacona* who promised to find him a mine; he went and found a poor vein, although he brought back a stone run through with filaments [*clavos*] of gold; it was taken for a thing that could not be pursued, and thus it remained. It is also commonly known that between Potosí and Porco, which is eight leagues, there are mercury mines, and it is not difficult to believe; it is just that he who knows it does not wish to reveal it, saying that after he does so they will take it away, so it stays this way for all; should this be revealed, His Majesty would greatly augment his tributes because mercury by necessity drops down, and it is not necessary to follow a vein, but rather work by open pit on the mountain, and as costs would be lower and miners more numerous, the royal fifths would have to go up; but this is already to go outside our intent; let us leave it to the accountants.

From the city of La Plata one arrives at Potosí after eighteen leagues, divided into three day-long legs [*jornadas*], in which there are five inns, and in the first leg two rivers; the first is called Cachimayo, which is to say River of Salt, after the salt that forms in some places where it runs, such that all one needs to do is toss some of that water in the designated spots and within a few days it congeals, and yields good salt, as the water is not too thick [*gruesa*], nor brackish or briny. The other is the Rio Grande [Pilcomayo], but only in summer must one ford it, and it is worthwhile to know where to ford, because if not, whoever wants to ford it will keep going all the way to the Chiriguanas. It has its stone bridges which were ordered made by the famous [viceroy] Marquis of Cañete, of happy memory, the elder; the first [was the bridge] of the Achimayo; for lack of care by the justices the river swept it away when a flood came; they are trying to make another a league and a half farther downstream which has taken longer to build

than the other two, which were made over two summers; this one has already taken more than six.

[The mountain of] Potosi is in the form of a sugar loaf;