



*“A product of social mechanisms for the regulation and balance between resources and population. The drawings contain symbolic information for successive generations to observe, recognise and memorise.”*

W. H. Isbell, *Prehistoric Ground Drawings of Peru*, Intersciencia, 1978.

THE interpretation of the Nazca Display contained in the quotation given above, presupposes that between 1000 B.C. and A.D. 100 (the generally accepted dates for the creation of Nazca), the country that is now Peru supported a team of highly skilled technicians, artists and administrators together with a back-up force of “engravers” and general labourers. The intricate detail within the Display implies that it was a very long term project and that its work force was needed for a great number of years. But, Isbell’s inferred idea that Nazca resulted from a mass communal effort may not be correct. Such enterprises generally rely on enormous numbers of people who undertake an enormous number of simple, menial, repetitive tasks. Nazca is neither simple nor repetitive. And, if, as Isbell supposes, the Display was designed for future generations, why is it that the creators of Nazca did not leave instructions as to how the Display was to be used?

Some of the minor markings at Nazca can be seen from the ground, but most of the display elements are too big to be comprehended from so close a range.

When the Display was found in 1941 by Dr Paul Kosok, it seemed as if it could only be seen properly from the air. Quite how the Display could be “observed, recognised and memorised” by contemporaries was a mystery and this mystery produced all manner of wild hypotheses.

The pictograms within the Display were explained variously as totem or clan markings left by work gangs – a sort of “Kilroy was here” – or, since many of the pictograms were situated at the extremities of major lines, early commentators suggested that they might be boundary markers.

It is still possible to make out a case for either of these explanations for the pictograms but, in the Pampa San José area, where I have been conducting my research, neither of them seem satisfactory. In this area, the basis of the Display is a number of lines which have been proved to be astronomically orientated. At the end of each line is a pictogram which suggests an identification, if the lines were used for prediction purposes (calendric or astrological). I believe that these major lines form the basic pattern within which all the other

elements within the display are integrated. I do not think that the pictograms were separate, independent, coincidental creations. The key to the Nazca Display may lie in the very fact that observation had to take place from a point above ground level. For the Pampa de San José site, the answer to how the Display was created and how the Display was observed may await discovery in the foothills which surround the eastern and northern borders of the Pampa.

So that I could see the Display, as it would have appeared to an observer stationed in the foothills, a series of aerial photographs were taken using a specially developed method of oblique photography. There does not seem to be one specific vantage point from which the whole of the Display could be seen and I believe that the various elements in the Display were designed to be viewed from different points. The San José Display appears to be designed as a 3D picture on a flat plane. Certain pictograms cannot be seen from the hills, but Maria Reiche, who has spent her life studying Nazca, says that the Monkey Pictogram represents the constellation which Europeans call Ursa