



Kevin Haight says a vision he had while sitting on an Incan wall changed his life.

Gaylon Wayne Wampler/Special to the Rocky Mountain News

**A 56-year-old Boulder lawyer launches second career — as adventure guide**

# MOTIONS & JOURNEYS

By Jane A. Wampler

Special to the Rocky Mountain News

**P**ISAC, Peru — A group of red-faced, perspiring Americans are working their way up a steep stone path into the nooks of a 550-year-old Inca settlement about 20 miles outside of Cuzco.

Looking down on the Urubamba River, a silver ribbon winding 1,500 feet below, they have reason to wheeze. And their unruffled tour guide, who has yet to break a sweat, has reason to smile.

Meet Kevin Haight, a 56-year-old white-haired grandfather who scales 22,000-foot mountain peaks and leads Inca expeditions when he's not practicing law in Boulder.

Haight is living proof that you can have a vision, and live it too. On a windswept Andean mountainside — scrambling around centuries-old ruins and educating curious travelers on Inca culture — he is doing what he loves best. And when he's done he gets to go home to Colorado, his sanctuary.

At an age when some are contemplating writing their memoirs, Haight — who spent 22 years assembling a snugly secure law career — is charging headlong into a new and risky venture. He wants to

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— Kevin Haight

guide adventure travelers through the Andes in search of Incan ruins. And he's conducting himself with the enthusiasm of a 20-year-old.

Bump into him at a cocktail party and you're likely to get two business cards pressed into your hand: one that says "attorney at law" and another that says "adventure travel guide."

Haight is aware of the seemingly incongruent life he leads: a button-down, suited-up, business law attorney tromping around the Peruvian Andes 4,000 miles from home every chance he gets. Mention "alter ego" and Haight will chuckle.

"Absolutely," he says. "Every time I look out my window at the mountains out there and I've got an obnoxious attorney on the phone causing me all kinds of problems, I say, 'What am I doing this for? I ought to be in the Andes.'"

An accomplished mountaineer, Haight



Gaylon Wayne Wampler/Special to the Rocky Mountain News

A llama is silhouetted above the lost Inca city of Machu Picchu during a trip to Peru by Boulder lawyer Kevin Haight.

has scaled all 54 of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks, some more than once. Then, in 1991, he and a few Colorado friends — all admitted "lunatics" — decided they would climb the highest peak in each country of the Americas: North, Central and South.

They trained rigorously and granted themselves three-year sabbaticals from their jobs. After six months, Haight was the only permanent member of the expedition still wandering around the hemisphere. Nonetheless, he bagged 17 of the 23 peaks on the list, a feat that fell short of making the *Guinness Book of World Records*, but still a high point of his life.

At one point during the expedition, while waiting out a climb during the rainy season, Haight took a side trip to Machu Picchu in Peru. Fascinated by this lush and misty Incan outpost perched on top of a mountain, he returned to Peru again. And again. Already fluent in Spanish, he began studying Quechua, the language of the Incas.

"I spent months researching, tramping the highlands in search of little-known

sites, reading every book I could get my hands on, talking to astronomy professors, shamans, guides, and eventually local tour operators, service providers and former clients," he said.

He came home in mid-1995 determined to turn what he'd learned into a business.

This kind of painstaking preparation confirmed what his friends and business partners back in Boulder already knew about Haight.

"He's real detail-oriented and thorough," says Ron Jung, owner of the two-person law firm where Haight practices. "He's methodical and prepared."

At the same time, Haight's longtime acquaintances say that their studious and deliberate friend continues to surprise.

"The thing I find so extraordinary about Kevin is, unlike most people who just fantasize or dream about things, Kevin actually goes out and does them," says Jane Smith, who has known Haight for the past 10 years through a Boulder singles professional group. "You know, as a lawyer he could just

sit back and rest on his laurels. But I'm beginning to see that he's changed. I used to think that he'd settle down and come back and be the lawyer, but not anymore. He's more adventurer than lawyer."

Indeed, Haight leads a life rich in contradiction. Scholarly and bookish, he thrives on pushing his physical limits. An admitted "card-carrying skeptic," he is seduced by Incan spirituality. A self-possessed man, he turns passionate when speaking of South America.

"It has the longest mountain range, the world's biggest river, the world's driest desert, the world's greatest rain forest, and it has three fantastic, pre-Columbian native American cultures," he gushes.

"I've been asked why I don't move there if I love it so much. I always say that I'm very much at home in Colorado. This is where I feel comfortable. I love the four-teens, I look out my living room window and I'm looking at the Flatirons 3,000 feet

See HAIGHT on 34A

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# Lawyer's homework lets others glimpse mysteries of ancients

**HAIGHT from 33A**

above the house.

"I also like reliable running water and electricity."

Like a pair of polished loafers sharing closet space with a couple of scuffed hiking boots, Haight's two worlds are co-existing quite smoothly for now. This year he plans to spend six months in Boulder and six months in Peru. He has seven guided trips planned this year, all of which include a 3½-day trek along the Inca Trail ending at the "lost city" of Machu Picchu.

He wants his clients not only to walk up the steps and over the stone paths of the Incas, but to gain an Incan perspective of what they're seeing.

So on a recent trip to Pisac, Haight's clients walked up a nearly perpendicular terraced hillside that the Incas farmed, traced the seamless stones of an Incan wall with their fingers, and peered through an ancient window on a wall that Incan guards used as a lookout. They heard not one, but *five* possible interpretations of the emperor's name who inhabited this place and three possible purposes for this abandoned settlement.

Haight has done his homework and it shows.

"Winning a lawsuit just doesn't quite match up with seeing the

lights go on in people's eyes when they come face to face with the Incas," he says. "I like blending the physical with the intellectual stuff. Otherwise you've got couch potato tours. And then you can't experience things like they were meant to be seen."

He is fascinated with a culture that thrived without the wheel, without the written word, without money and without iron tools. He tells students in his adult education classes at the University of Colorado and Metro State College: "Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to go out and conquer an empire with at least 80 different nations in it, then govern it, administer it, provide womb-to-tomb security for everybody, keep things running smoothly and — oh — you can't use the wheel, writing, money, large-scale trade and anything but stone and bronze tools."

"That usually starts them brainstorming and thinking."

Haight was mulling thoughts like these in 1993 when a curious thing happened. Sitting on top of a reconstructed Incan wall overlooking the Urubamba Gorge, long before this rugged terrain had become familiar to him, he received a mysterious "visit."

"I'm sitting there wondering and asking a lot of questions to myself and, this may sound corny, and I

don't pretend to understand it... I received a physical sensation. Then an awareness, a knowledge, a direct insight not mediated by words."

The message, he says, could not have been simpler. It said: "There are answers."

Disappointingly, no pat "answers" appeared and the sensation dissipated. But after several years of studying and immersing himself in the South American culture, he began to change. Among the shifts he noticed: A hard-driven scientific bent began to soften and he began to tolerate — even seek out — a spiritual side to life, he said.

Now, as he looks at the sea of change that has occurred in his life over the past seven years, he is amazed.

"Seven years ago I thought I'd be working in a law office until I retired," he says. "Now I see myself leading guided tours not only around South America but also Mexico and Central Europe. It's almost as if it were predestined. But I didn't say that."

Smith, his friend, sees even bigger things on the horizon.

"When Kevin is 92 I expect to be getting post cards from him from another country," she says. "From another planet by then, I suppose."

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