Vicuna from Peru

By Vanderbilt Center for Latin American Studies

Peru is a country on the western coast of South America that touches the Pacific Ocean. There is a large mountain range called the Andes Mountains that runs through Peru. In fact, the Andes Mountains is the largest mountain chain the world and runs through seven countries. In the Andes Mountains in Peru, there lives an animal called the vicuna. Vicunas are so important to the Peruvians that the vicunas are the national animal of Peru. Their image often appears on clothing and decorations in Peru, such as on the textile below.
Vicunas are shy and easily startled. They can run up to 30 miles per hour. They are usually five feet tall and weigh less than 150 pounds. In order to survive in the high Andes Mountains, vicunas have large hearts. Their fur is very fine, warm, and fragile and is very expensive. Because vicunas are the national animal of Peru, there are special laws protecting them from people who want to destroy their environment and take their fur.