



## Cocaine routes for the Western hemisphere

Cocaine starts with coca bushes, hardy green plants which will produce four to six crops of leaves per year on almost any tropical hillside. Yet coca plantations are concentrated in half a dozen jungle valleys in Peru and Bolivia. In those countries it can be grown legally, since for centuries the local Indian peasants have chewed the leaves to relieve the pain of hunger, exhaustion and hopelessness.

In Bolivia, for example, 6,000 of the 25,000 acres planted with coca supplies the local chewing market. The remainder of the coca leaves are concentrated in nearby primitive "kitchens" into a damp greenish "cocaine paste" or a dry powder "base" which can be more readily transported than the bulky leaves.

Only a small proportion of this concentrate is refined into pure white cocaine powder in the coca-growing countries and smuggled directly or through neighboring countries to North American and European markets. 70 to 90 percent of the crude cocaine is smuggled by land, sea or air to refining laboratories located near Colombia's major industrial cities. The basic land route follows the Panamerican Highway north from Bolivia and Peru through Ecuador to Colombia. The drug is ferreted across borders in small quantities under the skirts of thousands of peasant women, or in bulk on fishing boats or trucks loaded with 700 bags of cement which no customs officer would want to unload for inspection. In Colombia's

cities, the industrial chemicals needed for removing impurities can be obtained.

The international cocaine cartel centralizes its activities in Colombia in order to enforce strict control over the world market. Much more cocaine enters Colombia than goes out. The difference is far greater than would be accounted for by losses in processing, Colombian cocaine consumption, or smuggling. Hence, it seems that Dope, Inc. maintains warehouses with buffer stocks and decides exactly how much goes out to the coke markets in order to keep prices from falling.

From Colombia about 100 tons per year of the deadly commodity are dispatched into the United States over a plethora of routes. Light planes take off from 1,500 landing strips scattered around the country and head for a comparable number of unpoliced landing sites in the Southern states. Panama serves as a major transshipment point to canal traffic, to Mexico, and to Central America for export via United Brands' "great white fleet" of banana boats.