

## CENTRAL AMERICAN TOUR

It was mid-day when our trailer caravan reached the Guatemalan border. The customs checked the trailers, cars, and the people then sent us on our way. The next day we traveled a rough, dusty road which was in bad condition; when the dust didn't fly one could see the scenery. On the side of the road one might see drunk Indians sleeping it off after drinking sugar-cane whiskey, also one would see the Indians carrying loads near their own weight by using a strap for leverage. The natives have a good idea by planting various plants together which make a living fence when grown. Beside the tall fences you notice a thick growth of heavy underbrush on each side of the road.

We entered Guatemala City by a street having the houses of the wealthy people; these were beautiful houses. Downtown we drove around the main plaza where official buildings were located. We drove back and stayed at the city's football stadium where we were to stay for seven days.

The next day we hired a guide and went to see Lake Atitlan up in the mountains. When we reached the lake we rented two cottages which were very pleasant. A quick description of the lake is that the water is a deep blue surrounded by towering volcanoes. The next day we traveled on so we could reach Chichicastenago before noon. About seven miles out of the village you see hundreds of men traveling with heavy loads going to the market. Finally Quiche is reached and we visit the Indian market - coffins, tropical fruits, food, dinnerware and primitive made pottery all displayed together. As it is Sunday the Indians are burning incense in small tin holders. One of the party inquired about the worship and found that the Catholics could worship until a certain time, then the Indians took over the church and worshiped their gods.

The next day our tour was downtown, first to see the national capital. From the outside one recognizes the fine construction which was of a green mineral substance. Looking closer one can see where bullets have hit during the revolutions. The interior of the building is beautiful, little tile fountains with crystal clear water flowing in them; also beautiful murals done by young artists of the county. The National Council Chamber, where the council meets like our own congress, is upstairs. The inside is made of precious woods of Latin America. Our next visit was to a cloth manufacturer where the entire weaving is done on hand looms. We passed the national prison which holds about 3000 prisoners and is generally filled because when one national party is in power the other goes to prison.

The next day while waiting around at the trailer I met a young Guatemalan boy who asked me in Spanish to come to his house and visit his mother. We reached his house and first went through a door in an archway, then down a narrow passage which opened into a patio. Around the patio were rooms opening into the patio. First the boy introduced me to his mother, then we went into the livingroom which had a davenport, two chairs, and in the corner the Christmas Nativity scene. The boy was very hospitable, offered me a seven-up drink.

Antigua has an atmosphere of an old Spanish town. An earthquake destroyed most of the city and the capital was moved to Guatemala City. We visited a nunery which was in partial destruction and then on to a hotel for lunch where we were serenaded by a marimba band which played mellow tones.

The next day we entered El Salvador; the roads of this country are paved and are in good condition. We went thru the small town of Santa Ana and soon after leaving the city saw smoke rising from the top of a volcano.

We now enter San Salvador, a modern up-to-date town with wide avenues. We traveled ten miles out of town to Lake Llopongo, a resort with cafes around the edge and every Sunday there are lake cruises.

We drove back to Santa Ana and went through a coffee plantation. This plantation was a little town with church and all. The coffee is the best in the world, is shade grown on the mountain side. We saw the peons picking the coffee and taking it by truck to the mill. In the mill we saw the process of making coffee. We then visited the plantation owner at his home. He is a retired general and entertains with a traveling circus, he plays the drums in the band.

The next day we went into the city to brouse around. It is unsafe to stay out after dark in the city. We stopped for ice cream in a cafe like might be found in Paris. Then we went back to the lake to swim in its warm water.

On the way to Nicaragua we passed through a corner of Honduras. This part of the country is dry and barren with scattered thatched huts. We traveled on a good dirt road and stopped on the side of the road to bed down for the night. We heard music and investigated to find a native hut with the inhabitants playing a home made violin and goitar, also a home made tune. The next day we passed a goat cart, a small cart pulled by two goats.

When we entered Nicaragua we were met by the American Ambassador. We had learned that we were the first trailers to invade this region. The next day we reached the paved road to Managua; we were met by a police escort and taken downtown to the plaza and up to the top of a hill overlooking Lake Managua. The city saw that we were furnished with electricity, running water etc. We were parked near a swank eating place where they had very good food. While at Managua we took a tour to the Pacific Ocean and went swimming. The beach has sand dollars and other sea shells scattered all over it. The sea bed is level and to get in water up to your shoulders you have to wade out about two hundred feet.

We visited a sugar cane plantation which was owned by Presidente Samoza, the leader of Nicaragua. He first showed us how the cane was transported by ox carts drawn by ~~mules~~ <sup>oxen</sup> and then processed. I heard he had been beaten in an election but didn't want to get out of pwer so he stayed in.

That night we went to a party at the Ambassador's mansion. Members of the government were being entertained and the people of the caravan were all invited to attend. The next night we were invited to a party where free beer and Nicaraguan cheese was served.

The next day we flew to Panama for two days. On the trip we went over Lake Nicaragua which is supposed to be the only fresh water lake with sharks in it. We reached Tocuman Airport at night and the lights of Panama were beautiful. We drove to the El Panama Hotel, a very modern hotel. The ground floor has glass windows but the upper floors have no glass. The rooms are one room deep and have modern furniture. The first night we were there they were electing "Miss Panama" and I have never seen so many beautiful girls in one place. At night the outdoor cafe is lit up with colored lights, a beautiful sight. Next day we crossed the canal and it was most interesting to see the boats go through the locks.

We flew to San Jose, Costa Rica, and during the day saw the rich agricultural regions from the the air. We checked in at a hotel and then went out to discover the town. Of all the capitals, San Jose was the cleanest, with no excess dirt or scraps around. We ate at a very continental restaurant. Next day we hired a cab and saw the adjoining area. We saw ox carts gaily colored in pastel paints; we went to the markets and of all the markets in Central America these were the cleanest. The next morning we boarded the plane and headed for Managua and that night we had a big meal to celebrate the climax of our trip.

On the road back to Guatamala one of the trailers couldn't make it up the hill and an ox team was hitched to the car and car and trailer were pulled to the top.

I was supposed to pick up my passport in Mexico City but it didn't arrive and I went through two borders illegally.

Before we reached the Mexican border we met two Americans who were working for the B.F. Goodrich Co. They said that one of the big wheels in the Guatamala Government had flown to Moscow, also that the government was very shakey and that there was a move on toward a communist radio broadcasting station in Guatamala.