

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **On to Mexico City**

MEXICO – After one week in Mexico we are not presuming to tell our readers the history of Mexico, where to go or what to see but we hope that we can make our impressions of this vast and wonderful country interesting. The great possibilities of the future of Mexico is ever before the tourist wherever one travels outside the cities. Orange groves, grapefruit, sugar cane, corn, coffee, bananas, and flowers of every variety, grow in profusion on the land after leaving Monterrey and traveling south.

Water is not a problem in the tropics, for even after the rainy season, we were told by our host at Tamazunchale (Thomas and Charlie), it rains at least every three weeks enough to give the ground a good soaking. The natives claim that that is the reason their “oranges and grapefruit are so much sweeter than these grown by irrigation in the States.” It will be of interest to note here that the water supply for the picturesque little tropical town of Tamazunchale was developed and installed a few years ago by the Rockefeller Foundation of the United States.

After two days of continual rain we drove into the usual fog as we motored over the section between Tamazunchale and Jacala. Tourists are advised to make the drive between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and that is what we did, but it was one of “those unusual days,” for on part of the road even the white line was barely visible. The route offers the most spectacular view of the entire Pan American Highway, we were assured, although we were not privileged to enjoy it.

Between Chapulhuacan and Jacala there are many small Indian villages and literally hundreds of primitive Indian huts clinging to the sides of the mountains. It is an impressive sight to look down from elevations over 1,000 feet and see below the thatched roofs and bamboo and reed construction of the native dwellings. There are seldom any windows and if there is an opening there is no way of closing it. It is not cold at any season of the year so it is not necessary to have a fire except to cook. Most of the little children wear as few clothes as possible and many of the tiny little boys were completely naked.

It was amazing to us to see the loads of cane, wood and all other supply which the primitive Indians can carry on their backs to market, returning to their homes with an equal load of needed supplies. The highway is continually a byway for them and their tiny native burros.

Mexico does not have compulsory education yet because of lack of schools and the money with which to build more schools. In Tamazunchale we visited a native school directly back of our hotel. The building was of concrete and tile built around a patio with the interior walls reaching to the height of about two feet, the rest completely open to the roof. On the street side light was admitted through thin tile placed together in diamond shapes the length of the building.

We enjoyed seeing a dozen little girls in identical plaid dresses, their hair neatly combed and shoes on their feet, march down the hill in front of the Hotel San Antonio on their way to school. Our hostess told us that they were the children of some of the Indians we had seen in the mountains, who were being cared for and sent to school by a missionary and his wife, who were, incidentally, the only other Americans in Tamazunchale in addition to the hotel operators. The dresses we had admired were made and donated by a group of women in Mexico City who were interested in the children's welfare.

Luncheon time found us at Zimapan, another picturesque old town, dating from 1522. It is a former mining town, in a rich mineral district which was discovered shortly after the Conquest. Its old building and tree shaded streets and small plaza seem little changed through the years. We visited the old church there where we admired much of the old wood carving, particularly on the doors. It was built in the sixteenth century and its massive towers and baroque entrance was most worthy of note.

Following luncheon at Posada del Rey, a restored old convent building, we continued on to Mexico City.