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IN MEXICO

The Journey Continues

Finding Lost Civilizations - Part 2





The Journey Continues
Finding Lost Civilizations
Part 2

By
Alexander Kerekes

Published
Carmel, California

The Journey Continues - Finding Lost Civilizations

Part 2

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Author's Note: While trekking through the State of Nayarit, Mexico, my primary purpose was to discover petroglyphs and signs of ancient civilizations. Many of the artifacts illustrated in my books were shown to me by local natives who shared their stories. Surprisingly, many objects were observed still laying on the ground in areas where villages and life existed many years before. I did not conduct excavations of archaeological sites or tombs as this is a prohibited activity in Mexico.



Preface

Each time my father and I visited Mexico we had no plan or idea where our journey would take us. And each time we left we never made plans to return. We simply followed a path in our lives that revealed itself with each step we took forward. In 2008 I published *Finding Lost Civilizations* and thought that was the end of my journey. But in 2009 and 2010 my father and I returned to Mexico and found ourselves on a road to discovery that we had never experienced before. We met many wonderful local people who shared stories, legends of ancient times, and lost treasures. I was often taken to locations where no one other than the original inhabitants had set foot. And even today I sometimes ask myself, “Did this really happen?” Many people have said, “Write another book.”

Consequently, I decided to publish a sequel, *The Journey Continues - Finding Lost Civilizations, Part 2*. As with my first book, many people have asked me, “Is this story true?” “Did you actually find a treasure?” And so again I will say, “Yes, it is mostly true.” So, close your eyes and let your imagination illuminate a path behind my footsteps as I follow the thread of lost civilizations. And then judge for yourself. The journey continues.

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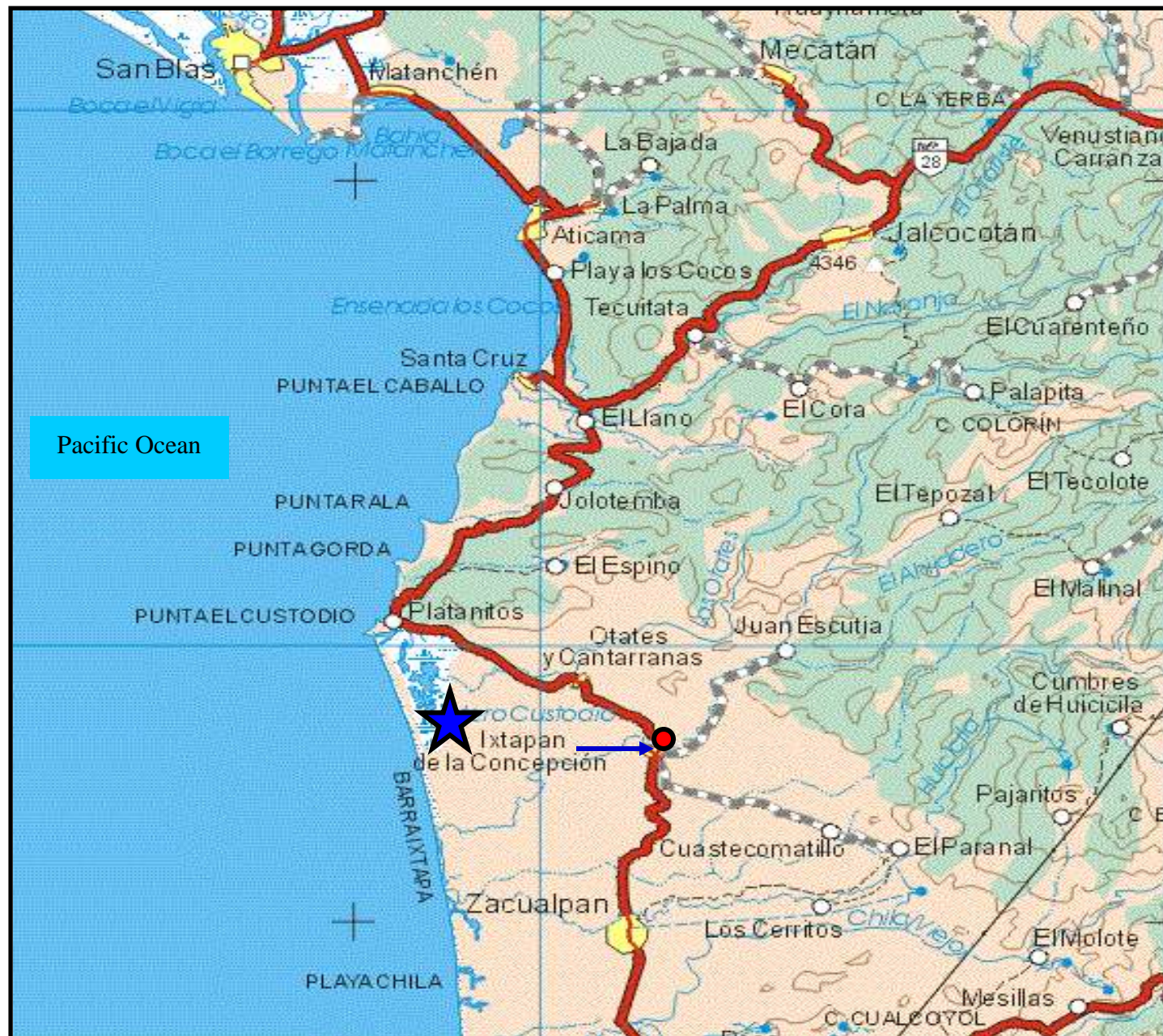
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The Journey Continues

Finding Lost Civilization - Part 2





Chapter 1

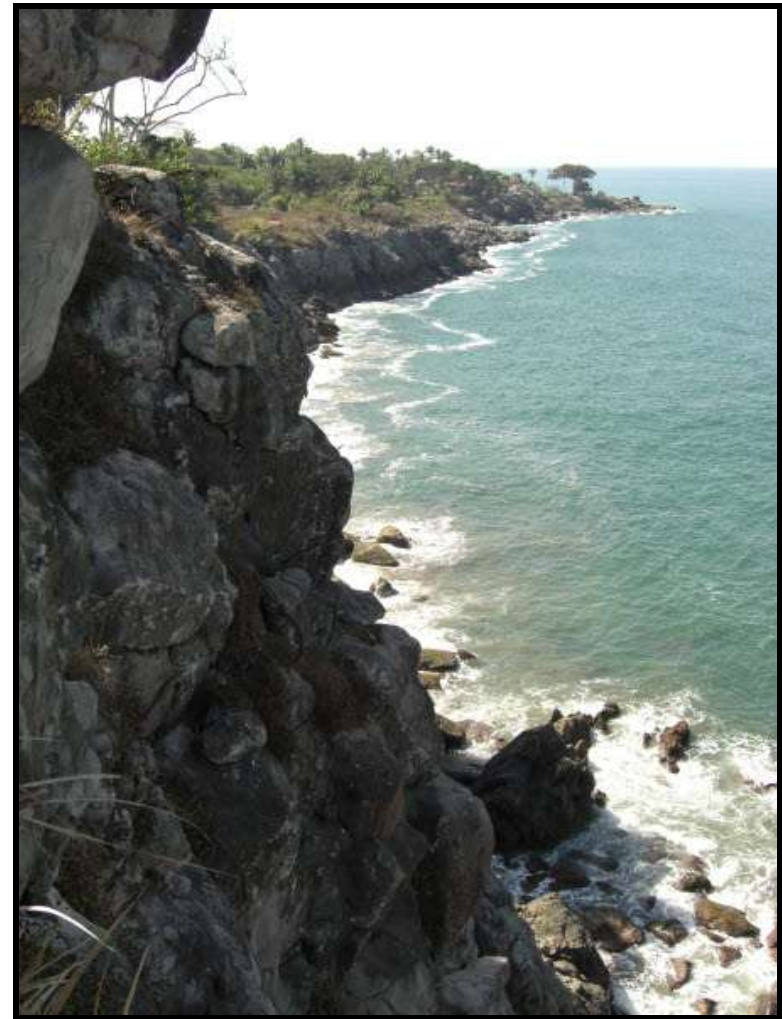
The Forgotten Souls of Ixtapa De La Concepcion

While at the La Penita market a lady named Deb Drew approached me and said she was building a pool at her house. She invited my father and me to join her and her husband to sift through the dirt during the excavation. On the day of the excavation I spoke with the Mexican backhoe operator, who told me he had been driving a backhoe for more than 20 years and that his home garden held many remnants of old civilizations he had dug up during excavations. He said he did not believe we would find any ancient artifacts in La Penita. I then asked him which area contained the most relics. He thought for a while and said that the area most fertile and filled with ancient

artifacts was in a small town called Ixtapa De La Concepcion. By chance, I had planned a trip the next day to the fishing village of Platanitos and would be passing through Ixtapa.

The following day I drove to the village of Ixtapa. It had only one small, dusty main street, and as I entered I saw a man walking down the road. I introduced myself and explained that I was writing about the history of the region and asked him if he knew of any ancient Indian sites or symbols that were engraved into large boulders in the area. He said there were ancient sites and petroglyphs in the area, but he did not know their exact locations. However, he said he knew a man who did and volunteered to walk me to his house. I followed this man through town and we eventually arrived at a brick building that was painted yellow. I immediately felt that this person was certainly an artifact collector who was knowledgeable of the ancient sites in this area. Hanging over his doorway and across the front of the house were the skulls of very large rams—something like a

medicine man would have over his hut or tepee. Unfortunately, the local historian was not home. But the helpful local man, Jose, agreed to let the historian, Donicia, know that I would return later in the day. My father and I and several friends then went to the fishing village of Platanitos to visit the lookout point from where we saw migrating whales. Later, we ate some wonderful shrimp and fish in a fisherman's palapa by the ocean. It was a wonderful and special day.



Platanitos Lookout Point

On the way home I drove to Donicia's house and saw several people sitting in the backyard. Two other men arrived later and I introduced myself. After explaining my interest in the archeology of the area, Donicia and his friend Manuel agreed to show me some ancient sites the following day. They also volunteered to take me directly to a site a short distance away. I agreed and we drove to Manuel's home, a small adobe and brick house behind the town cemetery.



From there we followed an old path up a hill. I saw a large excavation to the left and learned that this was a very old mine the Spaniards had excavated hundreds of years before. The tunnels, I was told, stretched for several kilometers and once yielded silver. We continued along the trail, traveling to the backside of the hill and then to an elevated pasture atop another hill. There I immediately noticed a large boulder several hundred feet ahead that had some sort of petroglyph art. Walking toward the boulder, I came upon a tomb excavation and observed tomb markers strewn on the ground alongside a depression in the earth. Manuel told me someone had excavated the tomb to a depth of about one foot and then stopped. He pointed to another hill where he said many tomb markers were still standing vertically over ancient graves. This was exciting; I had seen many such tomb markers but most were lying on the ground, having been either knocked down or moved from their original location.

I then walked to the petroglyph boulder and immediately noticed a cat-like figure pecked into the stone; Manuel referred to this as a coyote. There was another animal next to it, but I could not discern what it was.



Adjacent to the coyote boulder was another boulder that had interconnecting Spirals and the outline of a person resembling an alien!



These two different petroglyph designs were produced using separate styles. The cat-like figure was pecked into the boulder, whereas the Spirals and alien were etched into the stone.

Continuing to survey the pasture, I saw many pieces of pottery and obsidian on the ground. I also saw several other tombs and one large boulder that had a large Spiral.



The east side of the pasture was the backside of the hill. Manuel told me that many tomb markers in that area were lying on the ground, but they belonged to French soldiers. I found this very exciting because there indeed had been a period in Mexico's history when the French invaded Mexico and installed an emperor. He was referred to as Maximilian I, Emperor of Mexico. He was born Ferdinand *Maximilian* Joseph and was a member of Austria's Imperial Habsburg-Lorraine family. With the backing of Napoleon III of France and a group of Mexican monarchists, he was proclaimed Emperor of Mexico. His reign did not last and in 1867 he was captured and executed by the Mexican forces of Benito Juarez.

The thought of French Foreign Legionnaires buried in the vicinity of this long-forgotten hill was intriguing. While climbing down the hill towards the French graves I saw a reflection and walked over to see what it was.

To my utter surprise I saw the handle of a small sword. I scraped away the dirt and Mother Earth opened her treasures to me. I had found an old military sword! Was it one of the items buried with a French Foreign Legionnaire? Did he die fighting with his last breath, sword in hand, for a glory that means nothing today? Who was he, what was his name? I resolved to return to that spot and give homage to these lost souls buried on this lonely hill and forgotten in time.



Later, as we walked off the hill we met another fellow along the trail; this man mentioned that the grave markers were actually German. This I found interesting because when Maximilian was defeated, his Imperial Army also had several legions of Austrian and Belgian volunteers.

As we walked back to Manuel's house he pointed out a rise in the distance toward the ocean and said there was a pyramid on the top of that hill, which he called San Ignacio. As I gazed at the hill the crest did appear to be pyramid-shaped and we both agreed that we would explore it someday.

Manuel later invited me into his backyard, where he pointed out many artifacts that were laid out on a concrete platform. Everything had been found in the hills and pasture we had just explored. There was an ancient stone head to a battle-ax, a stone ax, various corn-grinding platforms and stone grinders, several small clay

heads from ancient figures, and many other implements whose use I could not identify.



Manuel's Treasures



War Club - Battle-Ax

Returning home to Los Ayala I swam in the ocean and watched the sunset from the water. I then floated on my back and saw the half-moon appear behind a red and blue horizon. Closing my eyes, I floated into the inner reaches of my mind, suspended in time, space, and water. It was truly a wonderful day of discovery.



After our explorations my father and I always returned for a refreshing swim in the ocean and to Nayarit Sunsets

Chapter 2

The Temple of San Ignacio

My friends John and Bill and I rose early in the morning in order to arrive at Manuel's house at 6:00 A.M. Our plan was to climb Cerro San Ignacio, which is located in Ixtapa De La Concepcion, about four miles north of Zacualpan, in search of a pyramid, petroglyph markings, and an ancient temple. Manuel said they all existed at the peak of San Ignacio. However, being accustomed to the local culture I was certain we would not leave Manuel's house with Germanic precision at the appointed hour.

As expected, when we arrived, Manuel had just woken up and was scratching himself as I entered his humble abode. His wife, Maria Del Rosario Rivera Bautista, was stoking the fire of

her cooking hearth, much the same as was done hundreds of years before. After we entered we all sat at the kitchen table and were provided with a cup of coffee, a fat tortilla and beans for breakfast.



Maria's Stove





Maria - I will always remember her pleasant disposition, smile, and laugh



Breakfast at Manuel's - Tortilla, Beans, Hot Chili, and Instant Coffee

During breakfast and some conversation, Manuel suggested that we drive to San Ignacio in his small Toyota pickup truck, as the road was rough and isolated, which would leave my Suburban at risk to potential thieves. However, he had no gas in his truck and asked that I fill it with the fuel from my spare five-gallon container, which was loaded on top of the Suburban. I laughed inwardly because I knew beforehand that more likely than not, my emergency gas would be used to fill a Mexican vehicle instead of my own.

After we filled up Manuel's truck, his starter would not work so we pushed the truck until it started. Once underway, our route took us north from Ixtapa toward San Blas. About four miles from Ixtapa, the south face of San Ignacio revealed itself. From this vantage point, the top of the small mountain certainly crested in a manner that let a viewer visualize a pyramid.

However, the culture of West Mexico was not known for building grand pyramids like those of the Maya or the Aztec. Rather, their pyramids were somewhat circular and not grand in scale; in fact I saw such a mound in a field not far from San Ignacio. As we approached San Ignacio from its side, the small mountain took on the shape of a head, which let a viewer visualize the profile of a nose, a chin, and the top of a head.

After passing San Ignacio we turned west and headed up a dirt path until we came upon a small and muddy stream that was about twenty feet wide.

Across the bank at the water's edge a wire gate had been strung across the property line. Manuel entered the stream and drove his truck right up to the gate while his friend jumped from the cargo bed of the truck, over the cab, and onto the hood to unlatch the gate. At that moment the truck stalled in the middle of the

stream. Manuel tried for about five minutes to start the truck, but the starter would not engage. He then released the truck's hood latch, took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his pants, and stepped out into the stream.

At that moment I looked at Manuel and said, "Sometimes, life is hard." With a big smile he said, "But it's beautiful." I was struck by the power and inspiration of this statement. Yes, life truly is beautiful.

By the grace of the ancients and a power unseen, Manuel was able to start his truck and we made our way to the base of San Ignacio. As we began our ascent Manuel pointed out several large circular stone formations lying on the ground. I noticed many of these along the way and initially thought they were evidence of some sort of a structure at the top of the hill. We continued our climb until we reached a flat area under a sheer wall of basalt stone. We examined this wall; I was surprised to see that

the basalt had formed in a manner that resembled hundreds of circular columns all stuck together and rising from the ground to form a cliff face.



Persevering, we continued to climb and reached a second ledge that also featured similar basalt formations. As we inspected these formations Manuel pointed out a series of

steps that had been cut into the basalt, which appeared to lead into a cave. I climbed the steps and at the top noticed that there seemed to be a natural fissure into the basalt wall. I looked closer and saw that a cut had been made into the fissure, which was about 4 feet wide, 10 feet high, and about 5 feet into the basalt wall. There were no petroglyphs or other markings to indicate who had carved out the steps or the indentation into the basalt wall.

We continued our ascent until we reached the summit, which was a flat area that measured approximately 30 by 40 feet. Unfortunately, all the stones and boulders were completely covered with brush and vines, and it was not possible to determine the layout of the boulders, petroglyphs, or stone columns strewn about the hill. There was certainly no sign of the pyramid we had envisioned.



As Manuel and his friend began clearing the brush with their machetes, John, Bill, and I started searching among the boulders. One of the first things we noticed was a large boulder with simple slash marks in a fan pattern. They were clearly man-made. Along the southeast corner of the hill Manuel pointed out one small and two large vertical columns on the ground and said they formed the entrance to a temple. I looked down at these columns from the crest of the hill and noted that the layout and the characteristic of the ground around them indicated that they had been part of an entranceway. I went down for a closer look and immediately noticed that one column had horizontal lines etched into the stone. Looking up, I saw another shorter column that appeared as if it once formed the top piece of a rectangular entranceway. We began to pull back the vines and undergrowth and found many boulders with petroglyph markings. However, they all appeared to be either horizontal or vertical etching into the stone.



Vertical Column



Entrance Pillar



Sun Ray Marks

One stone appeared to have vertical lines in a fan shape that seemed to represent the sun's rays. Then I noticed that the entranceway faced the direction of the sunrise. This was significant, as most Mesoamerican cultures practiced some form of sun worship. Although these columns and markings were a strong indication that the ancients had used this site, I was still looking for a significant petroglyph that would further verify our observations.

I felt a great sense of joy and excitement when I heard John yell out that he had found a Spiral!





Examining this petroglyph, I noticed that it was carved into a large stone column that had been toppled over. Then I found another toppled column adjacent to the Spiral and noticed several symbols etched into the stone. To my great surprise I clearly saw a sun, but then to my greater surprise I saw the name “Artur” etched into the stone. That made me ponder how we often find ourselves at a crossroads where the past and present meet. A thousand years from now Artur’s name will be considered a symbol of ancient man. But today it was graffiti!



It appeared that at one time, many columns had been erected vertically around the summit, perhaps something akin to a smaller scale of the columns found at Stonehenge, England. I wondered what would have toppled these stones. This area is in an earthquake zone and several tremors over the centuries certainly could have toppled the columns. I also noticed that much of the mountain was used to grow some sort of cattle hay and was subdivided into farming parcels. Many substantial ancient sites have been plowed and furrowed by succeeding cultures; this site clearly suffered a similar fate. In addition, the earth around the Spiral column had been excavated. Two days later I met a fellow from the nearby town of Otates who claimed to be a protector of ancient sites. But then he mentioned he had access to 60 clay bowls, plates, and figures from several excavated tombs. When he heard I had visited San Ignacio he became very inquisitive; my impression was that he was involved in some excavations atop San Ignacio.



Fallen Columns - San Ignacio

Before we left the hilltop Manuel said that during the dry season when the summit is cleared of vegetation, many of the boulders are exposed and reveal petroglyph symbols of snakes and birds. And indeed we found a nesting area among the boulders that contained two large eggs laid by a bird that Manuel described as large and colorful and similar to a parrot.



Vines Covering Petroglyphs



Bird Eggs on San Ignacio

I felt a sense of joy during the descent because I was probably the first “gringo” to have visited this site since the dawn of mankind. Although we did not find a pyramid we certainly discovered strong evidence that the crest of San Ignacio had once been an ancient worship site. I also felt a great sense of kinship and gratitude to Manuel and to all the wonderful, gracious, and common people of the land who I had met along my journey as I followed the thread of lost civilizations. Whenever I think of Manuel I remember an old quote that said something to the effect that “Common people are the best in the world—that is the reason the Lord made so many of them.”



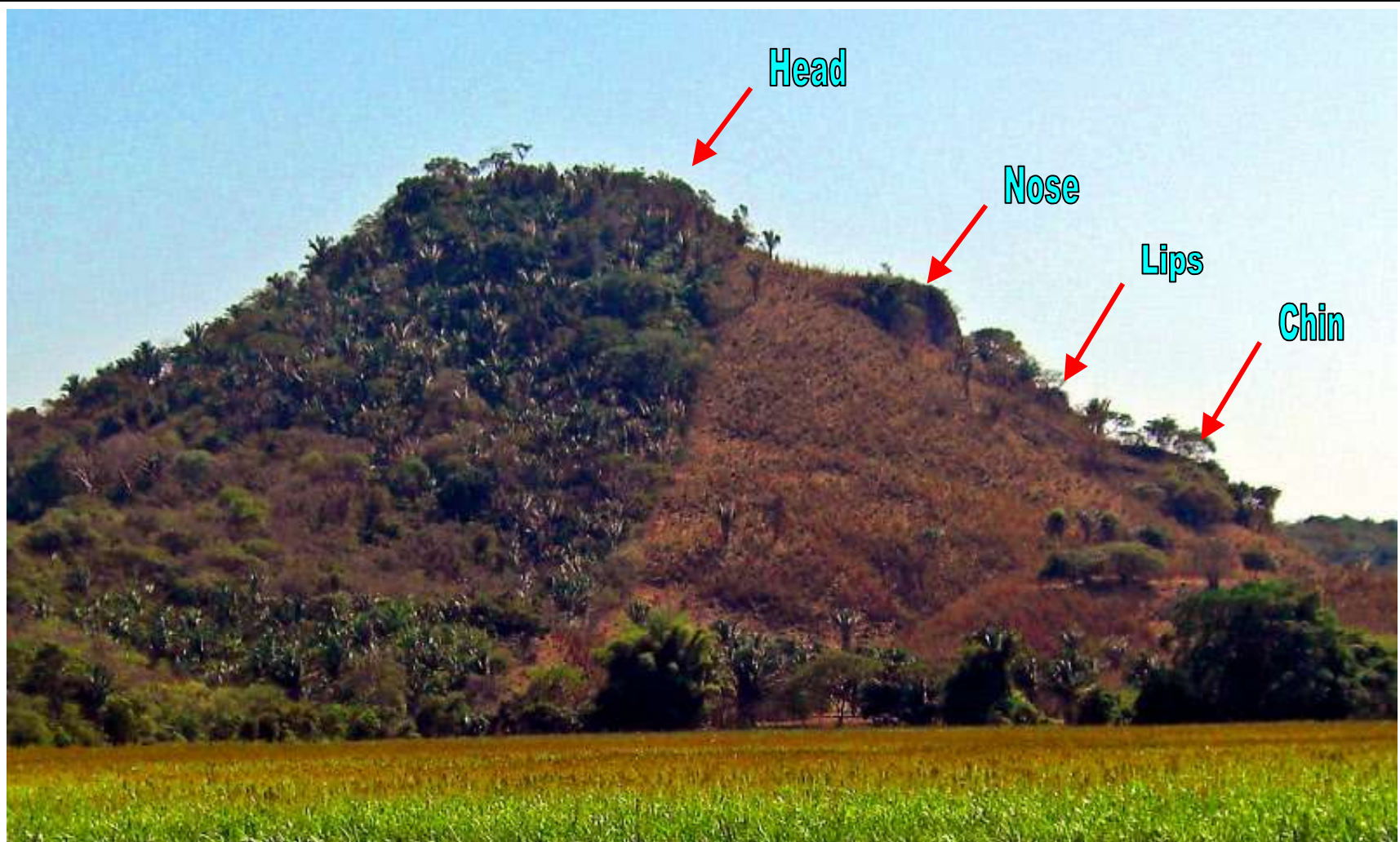


**Circular and square Spiral
found on San Ignacio. The
square Spiral is at the foot
of a column. See the flat
bottom surface.**





Alex, "Sometimes, Life Is Hard." - Manuel, "But It's Beautiful."



Cerro San Ignacio



View To The East From San Ignacio - The Village of Otates Is In The Background

Chapter 3

Returning To San Pedro De Lagunillas

I felt a sense of relief and contentment upon entering the town of San Pedro De Lagunillas. It had been a long journey from my home in California and arriving at a place of beauty, familiarity, and friends was a happy moment. The journey has many hazards and reaching a port of safe haven and beauty is always a cause for celebration.

When I saw my friend Rafael we greeted each other heartily and settled down over a cool, refreshing drink. We talked of the past, of old friends and new events. Later, my good friend Don Pedro came over and we warmly greeted each other. We then began talking about the meaning of ancient petroglyph symbols left



San Pedro De Lagunillas

by the original inhabitants of the region when he mentioned that an ancient marker had recently been rediscovered nearby. He described the petroglyph and then made a drawing of the object. The petroglyph was an X-shaped design with circles at the end of each point. This symbol was found on a flat rock about three feet in diameter and was lying on the ground near a sugar cane field. Don Pedro asked me what I thought the symbol meant and suggested that it might represent the cardinal

points of the compass. I then asked if he had a compass and if we could go out to the petroglyph to test this theory. Don Pedro thought it was a good idea and we decided we would soon visit the site.

Several days later I went to Don Pedro's house where he retrieved a compass. My friend Rafael, Don Pedro, and I then drove to the east side of San Pedro's Laguna and onto a dirt road that entered the vast sugar cane fields. We followed this road for about a mile when we came upon another road that forked to the left. We got out of the vehicle and searched for the marker. The area was very overgrown and Don Pedro was unsure of its location. As we searched I noticed a large, flat boulder that seemed to have some vegetation growing in a depression. I lifted the vegetation, which revealed an ancient grinding bowl that had been carved into the stone by the ancients. I knew then we were near the petroglyph.





The Ancients Used These Bowls To Crush And Grind Corn, Wheat And Other Foods

As I looked about the earthen path we were following I saw that the ground was littered with pottery fragments and pieces of obsidian. Don Pedro told me that nearby was an area the locals referred to as, “La Puerto De Monos,” which loosely translates as “the door or entry of ancient statues.” It had been named this because of all the ancient Indian artifacts that

had been found in an area located at the edge of the Laguna.

As we continued to search I found a mound of small boulders overgrown with wild grass and had a sensing that we had arrived. As I pushed back a tuft of grass with my walking stick the petroglyph revealed itself.. It was a beautiful design.



After clearing away the overgrown grass Don Pedro used his compass to orient us and then placed his left foot adjacent to North circle and then his right foot onto the South circle. The alignment was exact! As we left we had a great laugh after I called him, “El Espantapájaros,” which means the scarecrow.

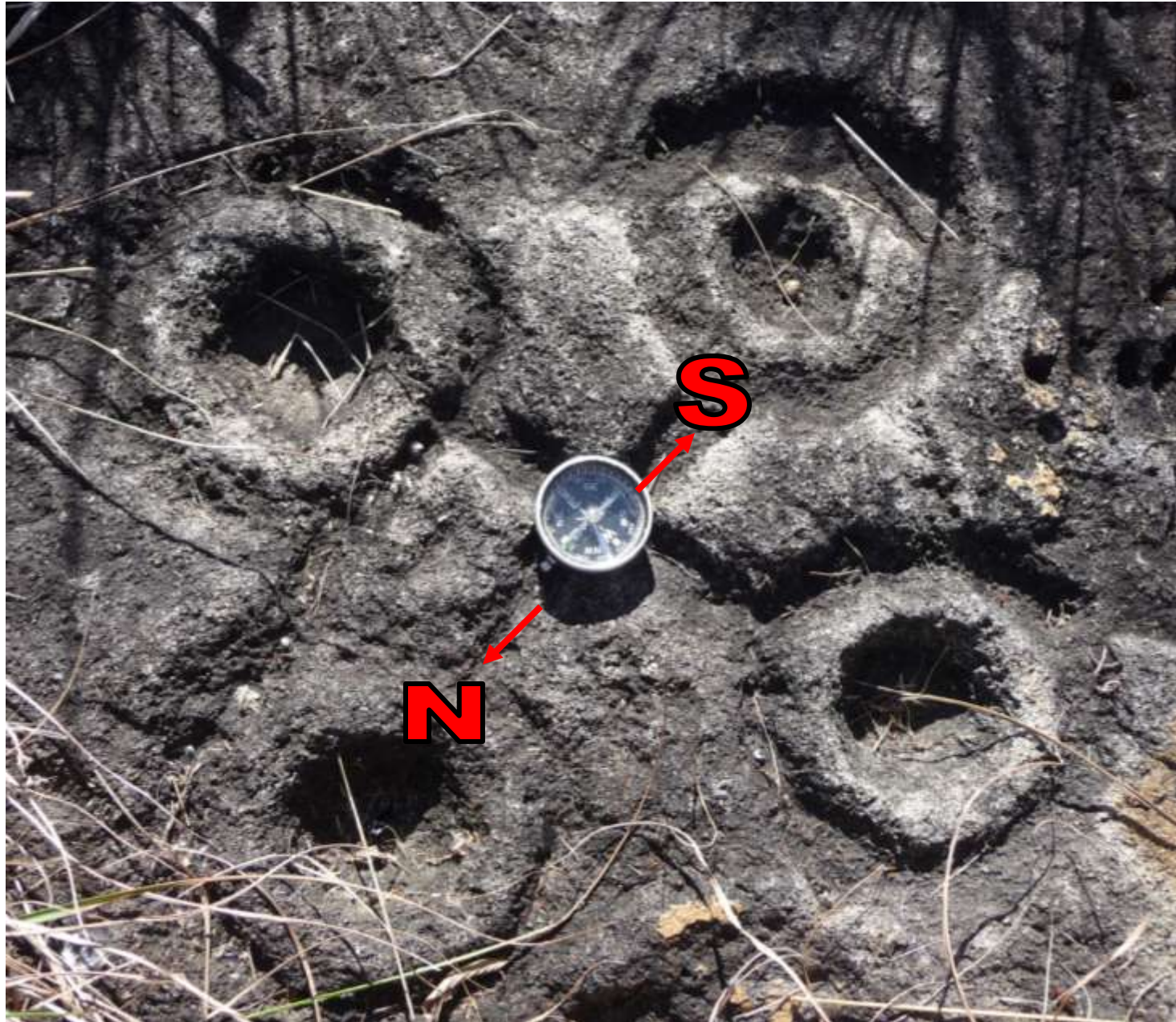


Don Pedro - El Espantapájaros

We then put the compass on the groove of the straight-line channel connecting the circles. There was a slight deviation as a compass actually orients itself to magnetic North. This indicated that the North cardinal point of the petroglyph was actually oriented to true North. Amazing!



The Cardinal Points





Evidence of ancient man abounds in the fields of San Pedro. Upper left are the remnants of a structure. Above is an ancient grinding bowl. To the left is a stone that has been chipped to form a cutting instrument. The edges were very sharp.



Cerro Grande, San Pedro De Lagunillas

Chapter 4

Bandit Treasures

My father and I never set out to find a treasure or to excavate a tomb. We had no great plan as to what we were going to do.

Primarily, what propelled us forward in our journey was our own curiosity and a desire to learn. After that, it was simply a combination of fate, chance, luck, karma, or the guiding hand of an unseen force revealing itself through the very nature of the adventures we experienced. In a very sublime manner each quest took us to another experience, to another level of understanding, or to another desire to learn and to seek.

Influences from our own youth might have also

been another element in the mix. As a young boy I was always enthralled by tales and legends of lost treasures, buried gold, caves, pirates, and mysteries of the past. And, to this day, I am still excited by these things.

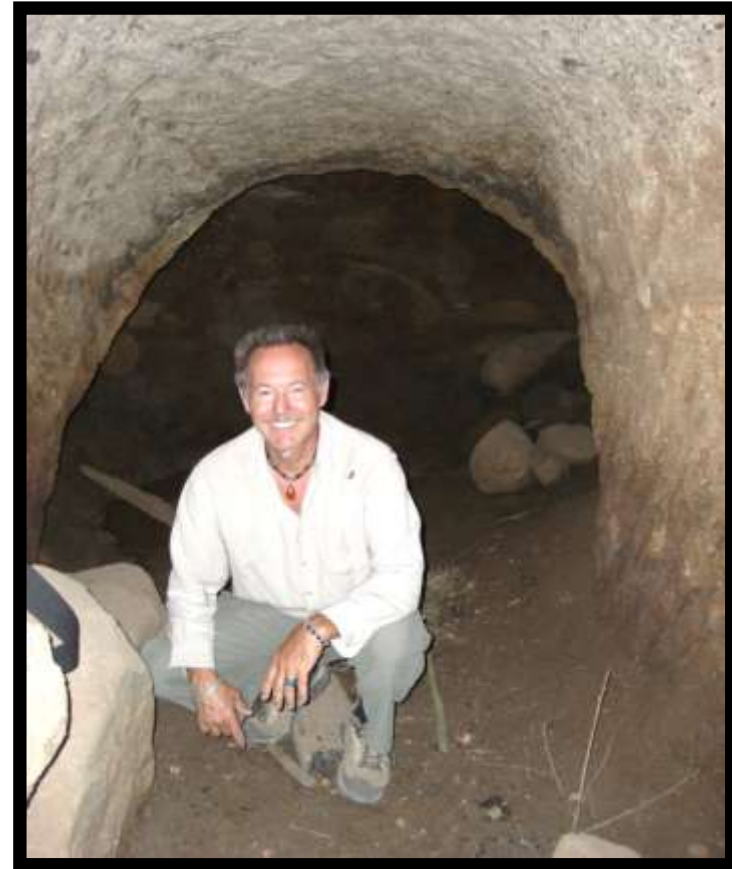
The following is my story of finding a treasure in a cave near the town of San Pedro De Lagunillas.

My old friend Don Pedro was one of the few local people whom I met who was genuinely interested in the history of his village. He often recounted to me his frustration that there was so little recorded or available about the local region. I often showed him photographs of ancient petroglyphs I had encountered and provided him with old and outdated books I found in the United States about the history of ancient West Mexico. Strangely, most of this information was developed by American and foreign anthropologists who visited Mexico. My Spanish is limited and Pedro spoke no

English. My good friend Rafael would occasionally translate, but he was not interested in the history of the region and his translations were meager and occasionally inaccurate. I remember sometimes sitting for hours listening to what Don Pedro was trying to explain. Most of the time I guessed at what he said.

I recall that for several years Don Pedro told me stories about an ancient Indian cave that was used as a hideaway by bandits many years ago. When I asked him where the cave was he would point toward the mountains and say, “Over there.” He agreed several times to take me to the cave, but we never got around to it. Then, one day I was visiting Rafael who mentioned he had seen the bandit cave. I was surprised; Rafael was not an explorer and did not like trekking in the mountains. “Where is it?” I asked. “Over there,” he said pointing toward the mountains. Then to my surprise he said, “It is just a short 15 minute walk up the trail from the house.”

I gathered up my father, Don Pedro, Rafael, and his girlfriend, Yolanda, for a walk to the mysterious cave.



Indian Tomb Or Bandit Cave - Or Both?

We followed a path from Rafael's place, which pointed directly to a mountain range north of San Pedro De Lagunillas. We then came to a fork in the road and turned left onto a path below a hill. Walking this path I noticed that it was very ancient; as the earth had been worn down to such an extent that in some sections the path cut through the hill, which created sheer walls to our left and right.

As we came to the cave I saw that the entrance had been excavated with a large backhoe. The teeth marks from the backhoe were clearly visible. I then entered the cave and discovered that about 30 feet into the cave there was some sort of circular chamber. The top of the chamber seemed to be a shaft going upward. To the right and left of this chamber I saw passageways that were mostly collapsed. Leaving the cave, I walked and along the right side of the entrance following the hillside for about 40 feet when I discovered the natural

entrance. It was difficult to spot because trees, shrubs, and other vegetation obscured it. I then returned to the main cave entrance and scouted the left side of the entrance. About 15 feet



away I found another natural entrance. This entrance was also obscured by vegetation. Had it not been for the backhoe excavation, the main entrance would have also been obscured from the path.

When I questioned Don Pedro about the circular chamber and the shaft leading upward, he confirmed that there was an entrance to the cave from the top of the hill. Using my rudimentary Spanish I asked Don Pedro some basic questions. He would provide long and detailed responses. I now realize that at the time I did not understand most of what Don Pedro was trying to explain.

My conclusion when I first saw the cave was that its top entrance was actually the entrance to an ancient tomb belonging to what is often referred to in West Mexico as the “shaft tomb culture.” This refers to deep shafts that were dug to their burial chambers. A section in

Chapter 11, Petroglyph Log, is devoted to these tombs.



Central chamber inside the cave. The floor is wet most likely from the rains that entered via the top entrance. To the right is a partially collapsed tunnel that led to another entrance.

After we left the cave and returned to Rafael's home I was convinced that what I had seen was an excavated old tomb. Although Don Pedro mentioned that one of the locals had found a treasure in that cave, I simply put that aside as folklore until I returned to that cave one year later.

Here is what happened.

A year after visiting that cave I returned to San Pedro and met Don Pedro at Rafael's home. Over several beers Don Pedro recounted how, many years ago the top entrance of the cave had a large, notched log that descended into the cave. However, because many people were fearful of ghosts and evil spirits, no one would enter the cave and the log eventually rotted away. Then several years ago a local found the cave's partially collapsed main entrance. Using a backhoe he dug into the side of the hill and excavated the collapsed entrance. Upon reaching the main circular chamber a cache of

gold and silver was found. Don Pedro could not say how much was found except to say that it was, "Mucho Dinero!"

The following day I took a stroll to the cave. At the cave entrance I encountered a local rancher and asked him about the cave. He looked down at me from his mule-horse and with a gleam in his eyes he rubbed his thumb and forefinger together and said, "Mucho Dinero!"

He then laughed and rode away.

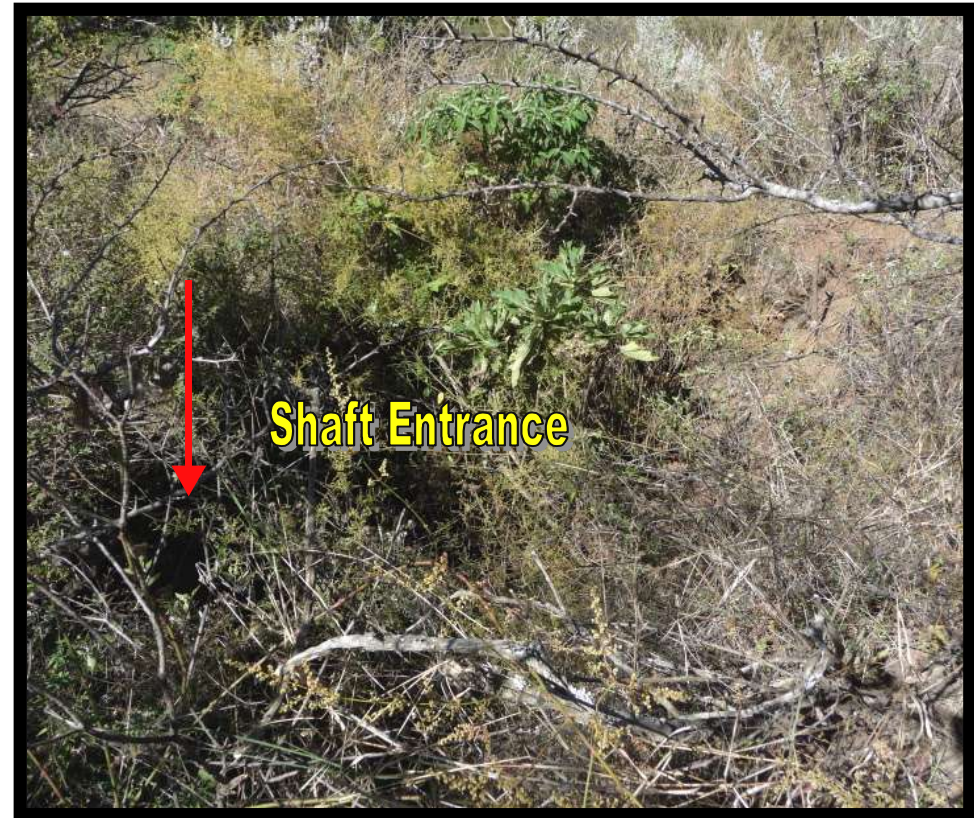
I then decided to rethink my notion about the cave being an old shaft tomb. I decided to return the following day with a rope, a flashlight, my camera, and gloves. I would return alone and try to find the top entrance to the cave. Although, I do not know why, I sensed I would find something.





**When I asked about the cave he said,
"Mucho Dinero"**

The next day I set out on my quest without revealing my intentions to anyone. When I arrived at the cave I looked at the entrance from the path and then to the top of the hill. Mentally, I gauged where I thought the top of the shaft was located. I then continued to follow the path and came across a depression that had been turned into a water catchment basin for livestock. I climbed the fence, walked over to the catchment basin, and then turned right, where I followed the animal path to the crest of the hill. The view from the top was beautiful; it overlooked San Pedro's lake and across to a mountain called Cerro Grande. I searched the hilltop for about an hour and could not find the cave's entrance shaft. Also, there were areas I decided not to search because of overgrown and dry, thorn bushes. I finally gave up and started following a livestock trail back to the catchments basin. Then I noticed a dark area next to the path. My eyes gradually adjusted to that spot, and suddenly I realized I had found the entrance!



While following the cattle path I noticed a dark spot. I inspected the area and found the top entrance to the cave. It was completely surrounded by low, thick vegetation. I now understood why the cave's entrance had been undiscovered for many years and how it could have been used as a secret hideaway.

After finding the entrance and inspecting the area I decided to try to rappel to the bottom. Adjacent to the entrance was some sort of small tree or thick brush trunk that I estimated would hold my weight. In retrospect I have to say that attempting to enter the cave was very risky and I should not have done it without any help. But, risk, curiosity, and adventure fuels the human spirit.

I tied the rope around the small tree trunk, put on my gloves, turned on my small flashlight, put it in my mouth and started to slowly edge my way into the cave.

As I started my slow descent I remembered two other instances in Mexico where I had found hidden treasures. In one instance I was sailing my 40-foot sloop in the Sea of Cortez and dropped anchor in a very small hillside cove, which could accommodate only one boat. The following morning I noticed a small cave entrance at the base of the hill. I rowed over in

my dingy and stepped out to look at the cave. The entrance was only about three to four feet high, but I could see that it had once been inhabited; the walls were scorched from a campfire. Entering the cave I reached inside to grab a handhold and felt a ledge on interior wall. After I entered I ran my hand along this edge and felt some sort of cloth sack. I pulled it from the ledge and saw that it was a small burlap sack with something heavy inside. I crawled back out and emptied the contents onto the sand. The bag was filled with old Mexican coins. During my time at the Sea of Cortez I encountered many local fishermen who were eking out a subsistence living from the sea. My thought at the time was that I had found a fisherman's life savings. Thanking the heavens for the good life I had I returned the coins to the ledge. Later, I learned that these coins were probably very valuable. But, I have never had any regrets about returning the coins.

Bringing my attention back to the situation at hand – descending into the cave – I refocused on details of the present moment. My story of finding a lost gold mine on the island of San Francisco in the Sea of Cortez will have to be recounted later.

The top entrance was very dry, and earth and stones started falling and crumbling under my foot. Slowly, I continued my descent, all the while looking around the circumference of the entrance. I wanted to see if there was any evidence that the cave was entered from the top. As I lowered myself to about 10 feet down I noticed there was an indentation in the cave wall where my right foot had settled. I lowered myself several more feet, placed a small penlight into my mouth, and pushed back from the wall. To my great elation and surprise I saw a small tunnel or recess that was approximately two feet in width and height. Wedged tightly into this opening I saw what appeared to be a piece of brown leather. I eased myself toward

this object and ran my hand around its edges. It was a saddlebag! The amazing thing is that I found this saddlebag by pure luck and chance. The way that small opening was designed, the saddlebag blended in with the color and contour of the cave walls. It would never have been seen or found except for the fact that my foot stepped into the opening. One chance in a million.

After inspecting the opening I tugged at the right corner of the saddlebag's flap and then on its left edge. It moved slightly. I continued pulling each edge, one at a time, ever so slowly. The saddlebag was heavy; it obviously contained something.

A great sense of excitement had overtaken me and time stood still. I felt no pain from the tightening rope around my body and all sense of worry, fear, or trepidation left me. I was completely focused on the saddlebag.

I recalled several instances in Vietnam where I was in combat and my survival instincts had taken over. We have all heard of incidents where people have momentarily displayed superhuman strength or speed. Once, when I was being fired upon, everything seemed to have gone into slow motion. I could truly see bullets that were being fired at me. What was actually occurring was that all my senses were working at superhuman speed. I attribute this to a form of survival instinct that the body has a capability of producing.

In the cave I kept tugging at the saddlebag until it was half way out of the crevice. I then stopped and considered my options for bringing it to the surface. I was unsure of the strength of the bush or small tree I was anchored to; I was also unsure of the weight of the saddlebag. Considering these factors I decided to pull the saddlebag free from the recess and let it fall to the bottom of the shaft. I then tugged the saddlebag three more times and

let it fall to the bottom of the shaft, where it landed with a thud.

I then pulled myself back to the top of the shaft and looked around to see if anyone was in the area. It was clear, so I rolled up my rope, brushed the dirt around the area to cover my tracks, and rearranged the foliage so as to maintain the secret.

When I walked off the hill I looked up and down the path near the cave's entrance to make sure no campasino was passing by on his horse or mule. The area was deserted and I went into the cave. Lying on the ground at the bottom of the shaft entrance was the saddlebag. My heart was pounding, my excitement was beyond any description. There was no doubt I had found a bandit's treasure. But, what did it contain? Gold, currency, silver, precious stones, weapons? The bag was heavy and I was glad I had not tried to carry it to the top. I worked my way back to the entrance of the

cave and with shaking hands began to untie the leather straps securing the saddlebag pouches. The right pouch held three cloth bags. I pulled one out, pried apart the drawstring and emptied the contents into my left hand. Tumbling out of the pouch, through my fingers, and onto the ground was nothing but sand! At first I was perplexed, but then I started to laugh. There is no honor and trust amongst true thieves. And a true secret is never a secret if two people share it. Perhaps, one of the highwaymen came back to claim his share from his compatriots. And to add insult to his theft he left the saddlebag in its hiding place and filled it with sand.

However, at the bottom of the saddlebag I did find several loose coins. Amongst the coins I found a Spanish coin dated, 1796. Along its edge I noticed an indentation and recalled that during those times one way to determine if a coin was truly silver was to bite its edge. Silver is a soft metal and would give way to grinding teeth.



I then untied the straps to the saddlebag's left pouch. Pulling back the flap I was again surprised by what I had found and sat down to contemplate my next course of action.

Scanning the dirt path I saw that it was still deserted. I then hid the saddlebag and walked up and down the trail and looked out at the surrounding fields of sugar cane and farmlands. I could see no one and only heard the soft whisper of a light wind blowing through the fields under the watchful eye of Cerro Grande. I closed my eyes as I had often done when standing before grand vistas and let my mind travel within. I felt warm and happy. This was truly a wonderful place. It was a place where life flourished, where food was plentiful, and for a brief period of man's existence there was much happiness. But as in many things in life that moment was fleeting and now there is none to speak or sing of the wonders that once blessed San Pedro De Lagunillas. And the

people here today can barely recall what happened a hundred years ago.



San Pedro De Lagunillas once had two large lakes. Now only one exists. Overlooking the lake is Cerro Grande. An ancient and lost civilization once inhabited this area. The shaft entrance is located in this immediate vicinity.

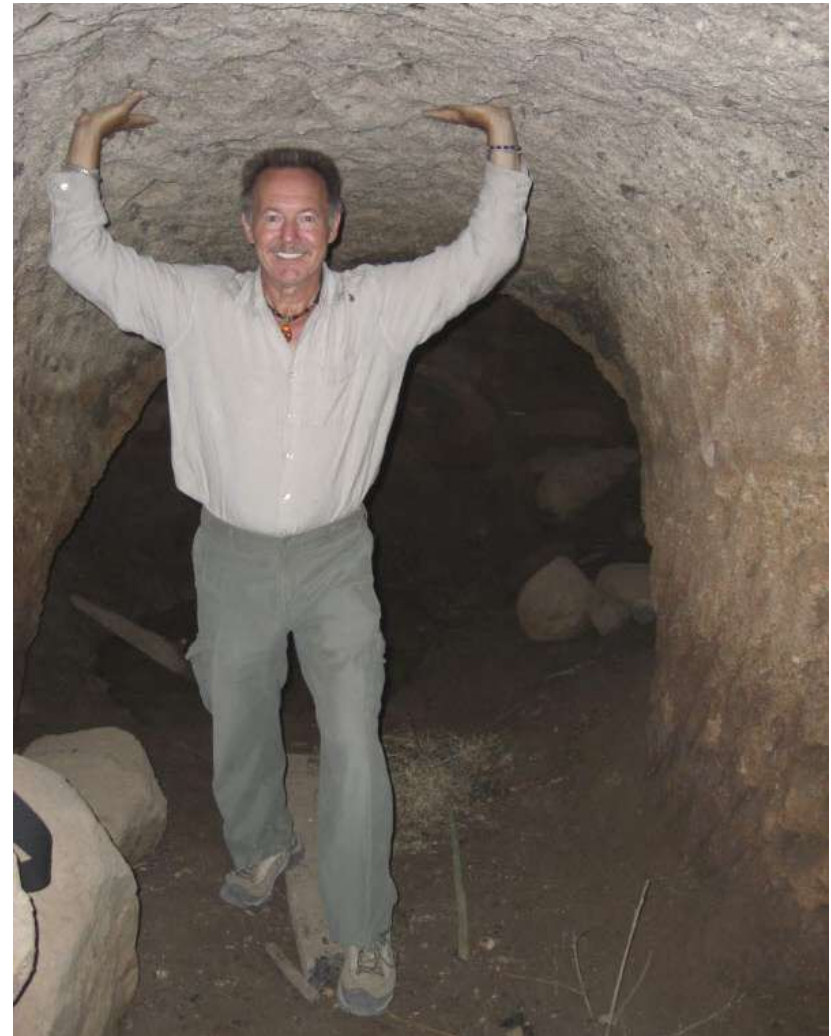
Many have met an untimely demise for less than what I had found. I decided to tell no one about my discovery. A true secret, if it is to remain that, must not be shared until the right moment.

And so now that I am home and safe, I can share some of my story with you.

Many people have asked, “What was in the left pouch?” - “Where are the contents?” - “How much was it worth?”

Remember, my story is not about finding lost treasures or excavating ancient tombs. I am nothing more than an accidental, storytelling tourist, on a path less traveled.

I had no plan and I never knew what lay ahead as I took a step forward. You must have no preconception, but simply follow the thread of lost civilizations.



Bandit Cave

Chapter 5

Maria's Story

Her name was Maria Bautista and she lived in the small pueblo of Ixtapa De La Concepcion. The last time I saw her we hugged and she laughed as we waved goodbye to each other. Via Con Dios – Go With God, were her last words to me. Her husband Manuel and I had become good friends the year before as we trekked around the hills of Ixtapa following the thread of lost civilizations.

It was one year later as my good friends John and Doreen Berg and I walked on a dirt and dusty road towards Manuel's house. On this journey we brought several bags of clothing and shoes for Maria and Manuel and we felt a sense of happiness and excitement in anticipation of seeing our friends again. Marie

and Manuel were the salt of this earth. They were the poor folk, ordinary folk, people of the earth, surviving day by day. And they were doing it with dignity, resilience and an open heart.



Maria & Alex - Happy Times

As we approached the house I noticed a chain and padlock wrapped around the front door. I

came closer and looked into the front porch area and a sense of abandonment overcame me. I entered a corral adjacent to the back yard and saw that the immediate area around the house was overgrown with jungle growth and the house looked deserted. There was an aura of foreboding around the house and I felt a great sense of trepidation. Something was wrong.

We then walked back down the road and saw a small and withered old lady standing in her front yard. I went up to her and introduced myself. I then asked her, “Where are Maria and Manuel?” “Maria es muerta - Maria is dead,” she replied.

I stood there in stunned silence. There is death all around us, but when it strikes near you, it is always a shock. We expect death in far away places or that it visits others and do not contemplate that we are all standing at death’s door.



“Where is Manuel,” I asked. “I don’t know,” she said. I then asked the old lady if Maria had died of an accident or illness. Apparently, it was an illness that quickly came upon Maria and she had passed away about four months ago. As we talked I learned that Maria’s sister lived in Ixtapa and that she ran a small grocery store. The old woman then called her granddaughter over and instructed her to show us where the store was. Enroute to the store I saw an old man sitting along the roadway and

asked him if he knew Manuel and if he knew where he lived. The old man told me that he knew Manuel and that he now lived in the pueblo of Isidro. Strangely, I could not recollect Manuel's last name and asked the old man if he knew Manuel's family name. Yes, his last name is, "Pada Del Hierro."



Finding the store, we introduced ourselves to Maria's sister, Isavoa Rives Bautista and her

husband, Manuel Delgado Gonsalez, and provided them our condolences. I learned that an illness had quickly come upon Maria and that when she passed away the family had not told Maria's mother that her daughter had died.

We had to speak in hushed tones as the old mother, who was blind and weak of heart, still lived in Isavoa's and Manuel's home, which was attached to the grocery store. Apparently, they feared that news of the death of her daughter would cause her to die of a broken heart.

We explained that we had brought some cloths for Maria and Manuel and that we wanted to give them to Isavoa to distribute to the family. Before we left, Isavoa and Manuel told us that their house was always open to us and although it was a humble dwelling, we were always welcome. As we left Ixtapa a quote from Proust came to mind: "We say that the hour of death cannot be forecast, but when we say this we imagine that hour as placed in an obscure and distant future. It never occurs to us that it has any connection with the day already begun or that death could arrive this same afternoon, this afternoon which is so certain and which has every hour filled in advance."



Maria's Kitchen



Rest In Peace

Chapter 6

In Search of Manuel

Even in death there can be humor and laughter – let me explain. Although we did not know Manuel's address I knew that Isidro was a small pueblo and that we could find him by simply asking around. As I entered the pueblo I saw a small vegetable stand and asked the young woman tending the stand if she knew where Manuel Pada Del Hierro lived. She thought for a while and said she was not familiar with the name. I then saw a man on the front porch of his home. He also said that he did not know anyone called Pada Del Hierro. I continued to search and asked several other people to no avail. Strange, I thought. People in small pueblos normally know each other and nothing occurs without someone knowing about it. I recalled that as we entered town I

saw four old men sitting around a table playing dominos. Their collective age probably represented 300 years of pueblo history. I drove over to them and introduced myself as a friend of Manuel Pada Del Hierro. They spoke with each other and I could see they were in deep thought. One man said, "There are two Manuel's in this pueblo, but neither has a last name of Pada Del Hierro." I then added that his wife's name was Maria and that she had died about four months ago in the pueblo of Ixtapa. The four wise men consulted each other and shook their head in agreement that the Manuel I was looking for did in fact live in the village, but that his last name was not Pada Del Hierro. One old man stood up from the table and offered me a seat and then said that he would go over to Manuel's house and search for him. I offered to drive him there and so the old man and I drove through cobblestone and dirt roads to a small dirt and brick house. The old man walked in and was followed out by another man who greeted me. He said that Manuel was

not home, but that he would relay a message to him for me. We agreed that I would meet Manuel the following day at two in the afternoon.

Curiously, I asked him if Manuel's last name was Pada Del Hierro. The man laughed heartily and said no, that Manuel's last name was actually, Avila-Ruise. And it was at this moment that I had to laugh. The old man in Ixtapa had provided me with one of Manuel's nicknames. Pada Del Hierro was the equivalent of calling someone "Lead-Foot". The literal translation was foot of iron. I can imagine the people I spoke with wondering about this Gringo asking them if they knew a lead-footed man called Manuel! No one thought me crazy – instead they all helped. And in the end it was I who enjoyed a great laugh.

Later, I remembered that Manuel was once a taxi driver – a fast one!



Manuel – Pada Del Ferro

My Friend, My Guide, An Explorer



Chapter 7

The Witching Moment

The following day, John, Doreen, and I set out for Isidro in search of Manuel. As I exited the vehicle I saw Manuel standing by his truck down the road. When I saw him I yelled out, “Manuel.” With outstretched hands he yelled back, “La Mummia.” I had to chuckle to myself because that is how I had introduced my father, who was 84, and I to Manuel – the two Mummies!

We walked over to Manuel, embraced him warmly and provided our condolences to him, which he warmly accepted. I talked briefly about the circumstances and I could see the loneliness in his eyes as he told me that he and Maria were married for twenty-five years. He said the memory was still painful and he could

not live alone in the house that he and Maria shared. There is wisdom in an old Mexican proverb that says, “The house does not rest upon the ground, but upon a woman.”

As we stood there Manuel introduced me to his friend Enrique and our conversation eventually drifted over to our passion of searching for signs of lost civilizations. Enrique invited us into his backyard where he proudly displayed his fighting rooster and told us of his unique talent to find water, gold, and silver. He produced a twisted coil of copper shaped into a V design and directed that I lay my silver ring and bracelet onto the ground. He then placed his elbows close to his chest and clasped the V shaped coil so that the V pointed skyward. As he started walking towards the silver ring and bracelet the copper wire started to move downward until it pointed straight down onto the ground where the rings lay. When he passed over the silver objects the V point started to rise back up and pointed skyward. To

say the least, I was amazed. I had heard about such events, but always discounted those tales as a form of trickery.

Enrique urged me to try to see if I had the ability, gift, energy or power to use the copper coil. Out of curiosity I grasped the coil in the same manner that Enrique had and started walking toward the rings. As I neared the silver objects I felt a force pulling the V point of the copper coil downwards towards the rings. I was not sure if I was somehow subconsciously manipulating the copper coil or that some form of gift or energy existed with me.

I tried a second and third time and each time the downward pull and force of the coil was stronger than the first time. It was as if I was harnessing an unknown energy within myself. I am still amazed by these events as I tell this story.



**Manuel Stats Walking With Me As I Hold
The Copper Coil**



The Coil Begins To Start Pointing Downward As I Approach The Rings On The Ground

After I tried the copper coil, Enrique produced two brass rods that were L shaped. The short section of the L shaped rods were inserted into

a hollow tub so that they could swing freely when held in the hands. He was about four feet away from the silver on the ground and as he started walking towards the objects the brass rods started swinging from the left to the right. As he came closer the rods started spinning. When he actually stood over the rings the brass rods were furiously spinning in a full circle.

I then tried the brass rods and they also began to immediately move and rotate as I neared the rings.

I can say one thing for sure. I am still very surprised and fascinated by what occurred and unsure if I posses any special talent, energy, or gift!





**Brass Rods Starting To Move As I Walk Towards
The Rings On The Ground**

Chapter 8

Secret Passages Of Hacienda La Condesa

This is a story of old Haciendas, legends, tales, hidden passageways, and discovery.

I am not sure when or how the desire - or my curiosity - to visit the town of Amado Nervo came about. Perhaps, it was during many of my discussions with local people in San Pedro De Lagunillas, who talked of ancient tombs and signs of lost civilizations. So, one day (not knowing what to expect) I found myself on an ancient cobblestone road driving to Amado Nervo. As I entered this small village of less than a thousand people, I followed the main road, which led to the town plaza. I circled the plaza a short distance until I found a place to

park under a large, shady tree. Leaving the car I noticed that the town square consisted of a very old church, an ancient square-type building, a plaza area, and directly to my front a structure, that contained a brick and iron perimeter with a courtyard.

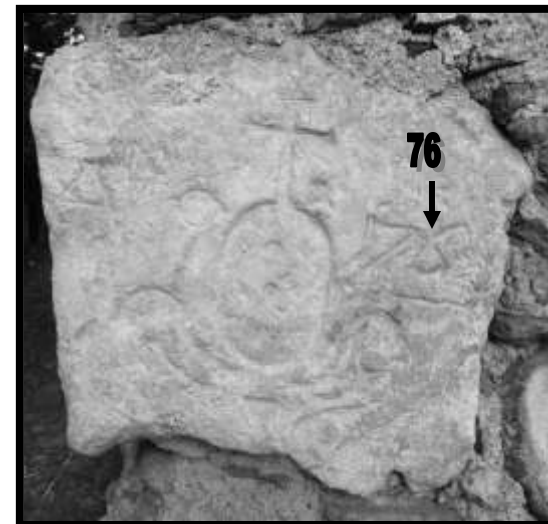


Corner of Town Plaza

Approaching the gate to this courtyard, I saw a plaque and realized that what I was looking at was a very old Hacienda that predated any other structure in the village. This was truly a very exciting find. There are no guidebooks or literature available for the ordinary person to learn the history or significance of this place. What I was looking at was a time capsule, decaying and lost in history. Who were these people, how did they live, and what became of them?



The plaque read, “Hacienda la Condesa – Familia – Espinosa-Vargas.” I could tell that the plaque was not ancient and followed the Hacienda’s outer wall in search of the original cornerstone, which would have an inscription indicating when the building was constructed. At the southeast corner I found an ancient stone with an inscription showing that the Hacienda had been built in 1776.



Following the west wall I found another ancient stone marker in the wall: this featured an image of a cross and an inscription above it that I could not discern.



While walking the perimeter I met a local who greeted me. Using my basic Spanish I found out that his name was Eduardo and that he had been born, raised, and lived all his life in this village. With much friendliness he began share with me the history of the Hacienda as we walked its perimeter.

Although Eduardo told me many stories, one of the ones that most fascinated me was his tale about the Hacienda's secret passageway to the Hacienda Miravalles, which was actually located towards the town of Compostela, a distance of more than ten miles. Nevertheless, I did not discount this legend; many legends actually have an element of truth. In fact, many Haciendas do have secret passageways and escape routes for times of attack or siege. Eduardo later showed me a tree where he said that the Hacienda owners hanged peasants who did not work hard enough or were lazy. I also believed that the hanging tree legend had an element of truth.



Hanging Tree At The Hacienda

“Hacienda” is a Spanish word for “estate.” The Hacienda was a system of large land-holdings, and mark of status. Haciendas originated from land grants, mostly made to conquistadors. In Mexico the Hacienda system can be considered to have its origin in 1529 when the Spanish crown granted to explorer Hernan Cortés land

that included all of the present state of Morelos. Significantly, Cortés was also granted an encomienda, which included all the Native Americans then living on the land and the power of life and death over every soul in his domain. Some Haciendas were plantations, mines, or even business factories. Many Haciendas combined these productive activities. During this period hundreds of thousands of natives, who were essentially slaves, died under this system. In Spanish America, the owner of a Hacienda was called the hacendado or patrón. Aside from the small circle at the top of the *Hacienda* society, the remainder were peones, campesinos, (peasants), or mounted ranch hands called vaqueros or gauchos. The peones worked land that belonged to the patrón. The campesinos worked small holdings, and owed a portion to the patrón. This system of land holdings and inequity was one of the primary causes of the Mexican Revolution; the system was officially abolished in 1917.

As Eduardo continued to explain the history of the Hacienda, another fellow joined us. His name was Antonio and he was the Hacienda's caretaker. He seemed friendly and I asked if it was possible to enter the Hacienda to take some photographs. He readily agreed and unlocked the main entrance. Antonio said he would return within an hour and that I could freely wander through the Hacienda.

It was truly fascinating. The Hacienda was abandoned and in a state of disrepair; it held a mixture of old and new furnishings that ran the gamut of the Hacienda's history. I felt as if I had entered a time capsule.





Interior courtyard to the Hacienda Condesa, Amado Nervo - El Conde, Nayarit, Mexico.





In one room there were several pottery pieces that were native and pre-Hispanic. Dark areas on the upper-left vessel appear to be oxidation, the result of being buried. This indicates that the piece might have been recovered from a tomb.





One room was a bar/cantina. It was dusty and looked as if no one had been there for many years.



One of the walls at the bar - El Casco

Each room had its charm, its history, a story to tell, but had been lost in time. The thing that fascinated me was that during my treks through the State of Nayarit I had found many more such places laying in obscurity, unknown and crumbling away. Time marches on. And in each of these places I felt like I had made a new discovery and marveled at the idea that not many more would follow in my footsteps to behold the wonders that had been revealed to me.

As I walked through the Hacienda I began to wonder where the secret passage would be hidden. I took note of all the rooms and tried to determine which location would be the most suitable. After some consideration I came to the conclusion that many attacks or assaults on fortified positions often occur with an element of surprise. I remembered that in Vietnam when I was an infantry paratrooper, dusk and dawn were periods when we had to be the most vigilant against attack. Where, I wondered,

would the Hacienda's patron and/or his family be situated during those periods? And what would be the most convenient and safest place to meet before making an escape? After touring the Hacienda I believed I had found a location where I would build a secret passageway. Then I began my search. looking for false walls, secret trapdoors, hidden levers, or any anomaly, that might indicate a secret entrance. I could not find anything. Then I had an idea. In my backpack I had a cigar I'd purchased at the La Penita market. They were being sold as Cuban "Cohiba" cigars, but in fact they were rolled with good Mexican tobacco leaves. I lit the cigar and deeply inhaled the smoke. Then I started walking around to strategic points while exhaling. Each time I watched the drift of the smoke. After several minutes I noticed that in one particular section of the room the smoke would drifted over to a specific spot. I went over to this section and started feeling, pushing, and pounding with my hands. I could not discern anything. Then I walked outside

and found a thick wooden club and wrapped a cloth around it. I then used the club to pound against the wall and ground where the smoke seemed to drift. After several tries I heard it! A low, muffled, hollow sound. The entrance was too thick and solid to hear the distinction if pounded by flesh. A heavy wooden club, however, made the difference. So, now I knew the spot. My next step would be to try to figure out what angle of movement or process actually released the entranceway. Often these secret passage openings were like jigsaw puzzles so as to prevent accidental discovery. In addition to serving as escape passages they were also used as hiding places and sometimes served as vaults containing many valuables. While trying to figure out this mystery I heard footsteps along the corridor and stepped out to greet Antonio.

That evening I lay awake wondering what was in the passage and where it led to? I knew that one day, I would return.

A year later, after researching the Hacienda system, viewing aerial maps and the layout of the Hacienda La Condesa and its outbuilding, *I found the exit passage.*

During my research I learned that a Dona Ana de la Parra from Madrid, Spain, married a Don Francisco Delgadillo and immigrated to Mexico in 1585. Their son, Pedro Davalos Bracamonte married Maria Ulibarri and on 22 January 1645, in the City of Compostela, Neuva Galicia, she gave birth to Alfonso Davalos Bracamonte. In 1690, the King of Spain, Carlos II, gave title to Alfonso Davalos Bracamonte as the Count of Miravelles. The Count was a knight of the Order of Santiago, Chancellor to the tribunal of the Order of the Holy Cross in Mexico, and in 1697 was appointed by the King of Spain as the Patron of the Missions in Baja California. There is much history regarding the Count and his successors and mention is made that in the 17th century a prosperous Hacienda was built in the

Miravelles area. For me, the most interesting bit of historical fact was that the fourth (IV) Count of Miravelles married a descendant of Moctezuma II, ruler of the Aztec Empire during the time of the conquest by Cortés.

The idea of finding a secret passage in the Hacienda was very exciting. However, what truly propelled me was the journey to rediscover and learn about a small piece of lost history, one that continues to spiral into nothingness. My journey with La Condesa in Amado Nervo - El Conde reminded me of an important quote about historians and the preservation of history: “A historian ought to be exact, sincere, and impartial: free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affection; and faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history, the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future.”

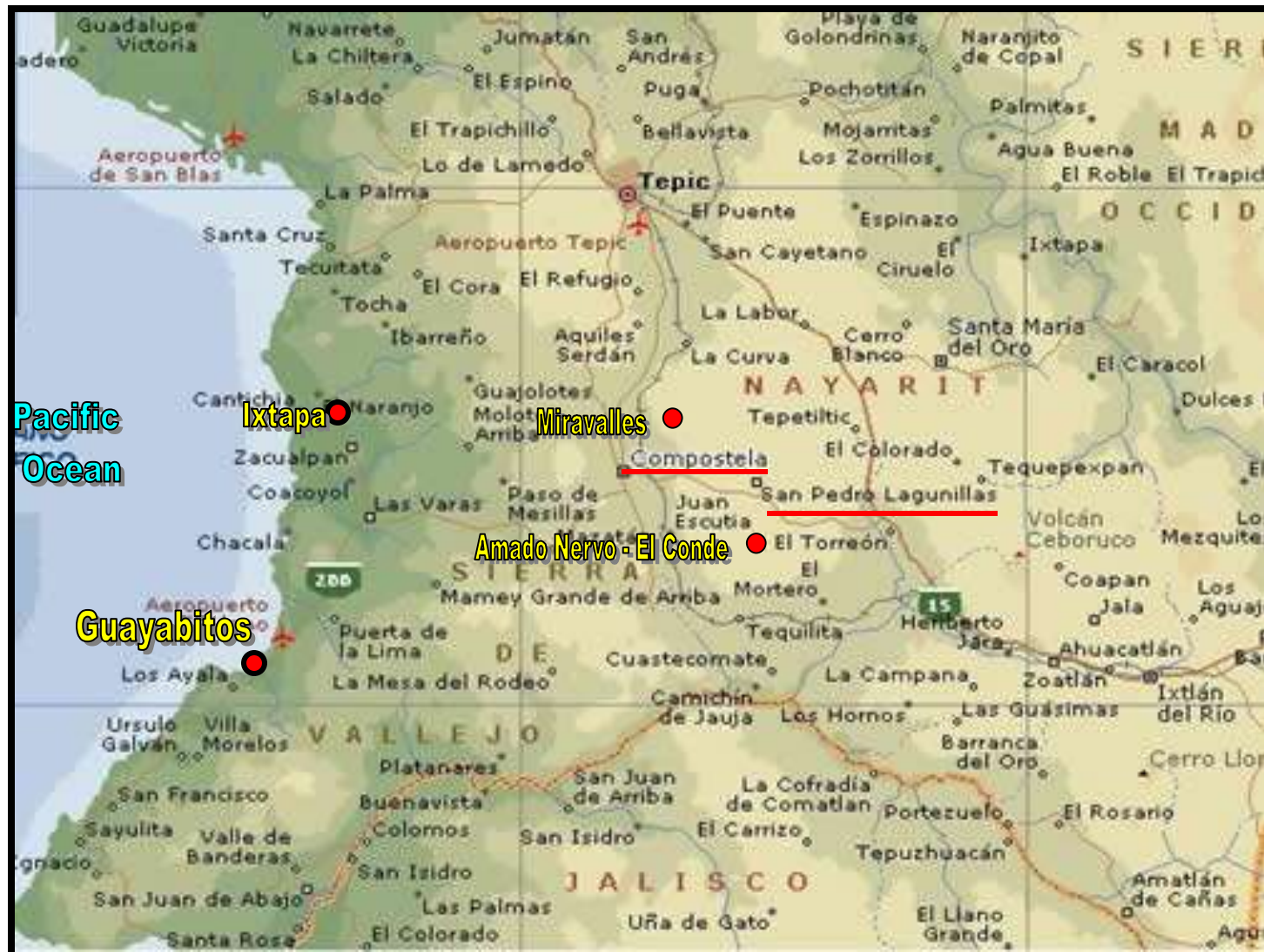
As I have mentioned in my first book, I am not

an archeologist documenting history. Rather, I am a storytelling, accidental tourist on a path less traveled. And it gives me great pleasure to share some of the things I have seen and encountered. It is the journey and not the destination that carries me on as I feel the thread of lost civilizations pulling me forward.

And I hope you have enjoyed this road to discovery as much as I have.



Amado Nervo - Also Known As El Conde



Chapter 9

My Mother and The Jaguar

I have never shared the full circumstance of the following story with anyone, until today.

The moon was at its zenith as I closed my eyes and began to chew a peyote button, which had been given to me by the Jaguar. When I lifted my head the sun was rising and I was crying. In that small cosmic moment within the deepest reaches of my sub-conscious I had traveled several lifetimes. Here is what happened.

About four weeks previously I was on the way to the sacred worship site of Alta Vista when I encountered three Huichol Indians returning from their pilgrimage.

As we all stopped to make way for each other along the narrow road, I glanced at the cargo bed of their small pick-up truck. I saw a deer antler and noticed there were many items best describe as ceremonial objects.

During our conversation I learned that they had just completed a ceremony. And when I asked, they freely showed me their peyote, which they had ingested during their vision quest. To the Huichols peyote visions are considered good luck and are dispensed to those deemed worthy by the gods. The Huichols also believe peyote opens the mind to a new way of experiencing the world; that is why they were more than happy to show me their ceremonial objects and peyote. Before departing they prayed and then purified me with burning sage.

We agreed to meet again during the next full moon.



He called himself "The Jaguar"



A film of my encounter with the
Jaguar is on my web site:
storiesbyalex.com



Sage Purification Ceremony



**Ceremonial Implements - Feather, Antlers, Drum, Rattle, Conch Shell, Peyote
The Jaguar was a Shaman**

One month after meeting the Jaguar I returned to Alta Vista, which is also traditionally known as “Chacalan” by the local people. It is still frequented as a holy place where Indian natives and Christians continue to come to worship their deities.

When I met the Jaguar we warmly embraced and were genuinely happy to see each other. I was the only outsider among this group of natives, but was accepted without hesitation. By noon the sweat lodge had been completed and six of us entered, accompanied by the Jaguar. I am not exactly sure what was said, except to say that an intermingling of Spanish and Indian words and chants began the ceremony. The rattle, the drum, the antlers, the feather, the conch shell, and the peyote were all used. Surprisingly, there was a congruence to everything that was happening. The chants, the singing, the rhythm, and my acceptance within the group all seemed to fit naturally.



The Ceremonial Lodge



I drank from the bitter cup that was passed around. Then, I chewed the peyote.

As the rhythm of the beating drum and the chant of the Jaguar filled the room I began traveling within the universe of my mind.

While the visions unfolded before my mind's eye I knew that I was a participant, but I was also an observer. And as the scenes unfolded within my consciousness I felt my emotions as well as those within my dream.

The vision I saw was the melding of past and present into one journey:

Transported back in time I am browsing through a yard sale. I pull a book from a stack, turn it over, and see the words "Babi Yar." I stare at the cover, transfixed and again am transported back into time. I remember sitting with my mother several

years earlier when she became very emotional and said with a shaky voice, "We were forced to watch. They lined up women, children, men, and shot them." Almost crying she walked out of the room. I remembered hearing her say, "Babi Yar."

My hands trembling, I slowly open the book and read the introduction. "Anatoly Kuznetsov's documentary novel complete, as published in Russian. Here is the first extensive account of that terrible time from 1941 to 1943 in which the Germans systematically murdered some 200,000 people, beginning with the barbaric massacre of 50,000 Jews at the ravine on the outskirts of Kiev known as Babi Yar."

I am now in Kiev, the Ukraine and German troops are occupying the city. Everyone, men, women, children, the infirm, the old, and the young, are required to work to support the war effort. My mother is 17 and

she is sitting in a movie theater during the middle of the day. All of a sudden there is a loud commotion, screaming and yelling as Ukrainian Polizei and German Gestapo rush in and herd everyone outside. Everyone in the theater is taken to a train, loaded in cattle cars, and shipped as forced labor to Berlin, Germany.

I am crying, I am cold, I am afraid, I see horror, I feel pain. My world is coming to an end.

My mind returns to Kuznetsovs' book. I remember page 211. It says, "The Arbeitskarte (labor card) was introduced on March 1, and soon became more important than a passport. It was stamped at the bearer's place of work each week. Documents were checked on the streets, and those who had no Arbeitskarte or who had

not kept the stamps up to date were seized on the spot for deportation to Germany."

Everything is happening at once. I am myself, I am reading, I am watching, I am participating, I am my mother's emotion.

I continue to read passages from girls' letters, which were cut out by censors and later discovered in German files:

...If anyone lagged, paused or moved to one side, the police opened fire. The father of two children jumped off the moving train on the way from Kiev. The Polizei stopped the train, overtook the man, shot him in the back and killed him. We were taken to the toilet under armed guard, and anyone who tried to escape was shot. We are slaves, and they do what they like with us. There is no food. Nor is there any hope of ever coming home.

...As we walked by, people looked at us as

though we were animals. Even the children held their nose and spat.

...They treat us like animals, dear Mama.... I don't think I'll ever get home.

I regress further and now I am a young boy and my mother is telling me a story. She says she was a city girl and was not used to waking up at four in the morning, cleaning manure from stables, and working in the hot fields of a farm. She says that ever since she was forced to work as a farm laborer in Germany she disliked being around farms.

Then I am talking to my father. He is telling me that my mother did not say much to him about her time as a forced laborer, except that the farmer was a mean, hard-working slave driver.

I am reading Kuznetsovs' book again. It says,

“Others told of being taken to special market, where their prospective German master, the Bauern (farmers), walked up and down the line, inspected teeth, felt muscles, made their selections and paid out five to fifteen marks for each man or woman. Work on the farms lasted from dawn to dusk. And one could be beaten or killed for the slightest infraction, because slaves cost next to nothing, not nearly as much as a cow or horse: the livestock lived ten times better than the slave.”

I see that my mother is a prisoner. She is not allowed to speak with or contact anyone. She is disappeared. I see my grandfather and my grandmother frantically searching. For a year they search. They agonize not knowing whether their daughter is dead or one of the disappeared from Kiev. I am living the emotions of that year and I feel frantic.



Picture of Mother taken on 23 January 1943 - About 100 days before her Labor Camp photo



Mother's Labor Camp Photograph - Taken in Berlin on 7 May 1943

The past and the present are timeless as my journey shifts back and forth in time and location. But, yet there is a structure to everything I see, feel and hear. I know it is all happening within the universe of my mind and as the watcher I have a certain sense of calm.

Then one day there is news. My mother is in Germany, and yes they can all re-unite. But, grandfather, who is an engineer, must take the family and go west to work for the German war effort.

My father is speaking to me. He tells me that grandfather was assigned to work in a factory in the region of Silesia. At the outbreak of the war Silesia was officially a region of Poland, which the Germans claimed as theirs. My father tells me that after the war, grandfather never spoke of those years.

The war is ending. German lines are retreating. Russian armies are summarily executing everyone who worked for the German war effort. The family is moving with the retreating German lines.

There is fear, despair, the world is ending. People are starving and dying everywhere. It is chaos.

My grandfather falls. He is hurt. He cannot walk. My mother, her sister, and their mother are pushing a cart with my grandfather in it. They are going west. People do not know how or even if they will live to the next day.

I remember as a child, I would listen to my mother tell stories of the war. But, as I grew older the memories faded and I had no interest. So many from her generation spoke

little of what they had seen and endured. Life goes on.

I was not there at the end, but now I am in a hospital room. My mother is dying of cancer and she is telling her story to the Jaguar and me.

The chanting has stopped and I step outside the Shaman's hut. A new day has begun. ***And this is the story of how my mother and I met the Jaguar.***

Sometimes, I think of today's teenagers and then of Mother, who at age 17 experienced Babi Yar, slave labor, and war. And I cry for my mother. I wish she were alive to tell me more.

Several years before my travels to Mexico I wrote a story about my mother's war years.

At that time I would never have imagined that meeting an Indian Shaman would so vividly draw me back into the past. The mind is like a universe that has been largely unexplored. Everything we see, hear, experience, and live is recorded and stored within us. It is all there for us to see if we want to. Did my journey simply take me through the deep recesses of my mind? Did I only re-live what I had already known, what I had written about? Or did I also see a vision through my mother's consciousness? Did her life experience and emotions pass to me like a DNA print while I lived within her? While her blood flowed through my veins. Did the umbilicus of life connect us more than physically? Some believe that the very beginning of mankind is collectively embedded in the sub-conscious of all human beings like a DNA imprint. How many of us have found ourselves in some unknown place only to say, "I have been here before;" "I know this place." Whose emotions did I feel

during my vision quest? Were they solely mine? Or were they my mothers'? Or perhaps both?

Several years after my mother passed away I visited my sister. On a nightstand I saw a small picture frame holding a photo of our mother. I recognized that frame; it was one that my mother had on her nightstand. When I picked it up I felt something under the back frame. I pulled it apart and found a small piece of paper. It said:

**Mother After the
War - Circa 1947**

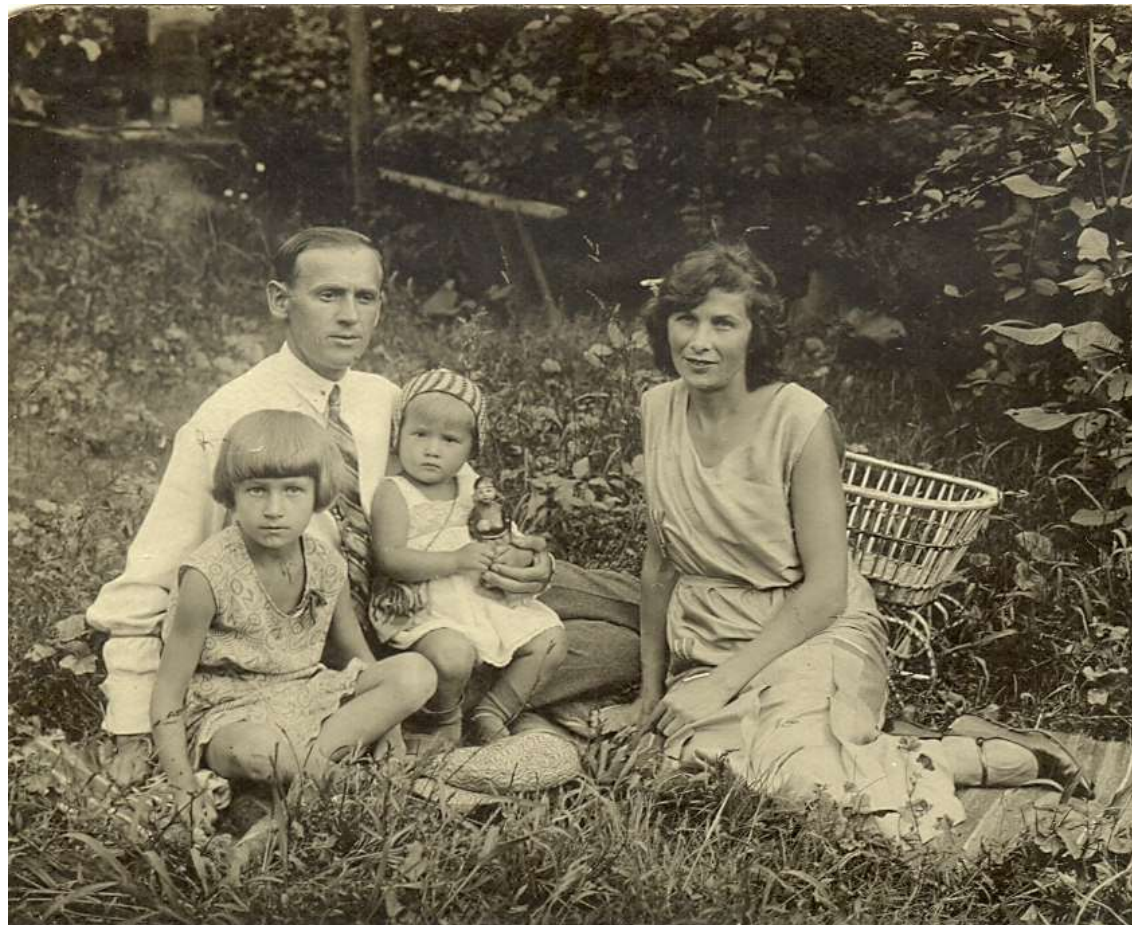


The Time Is Now

If you are ever going to love me,
Love me now, while I can know
The sweet and tender feelings
Which from true affection flow.

Love me now
While I am living
Do not wait until I am gone
And then have it chiseled in marble
Sweet words on ice cold stone.

If you have tender thoughts of me
Please tell me now
If you wait until I'm sleeping
Never to awaken
There will be death between us
And I won't hear you then
So, if you love me even a little
Let me know it while I'm living
So I can treasure it.



Mother's parents, Fedor and Nadia Kiwa (nee: Tkachenko) and her younger sister, Roxana.

Photo circa. Mid-1930s.



The Jaguar And I

Chapter 10

The Truth

I am lying on a cold floor when all of a sudden I hear a scream. I awaken with a fright as the man next to me is furiously pounding the floor around him. Several seconds later he stops and whispers, “It was a rat.”

I awaken in the twilight and see a man rolling a large wheeled trash can down the passageway. Arms start holding out cups and containers cut from milk cartons, plastic bottles, cardboard, and anything else that will hold food. Looking around I see a small styrofoam plate in a garbage can and take it. An undistinguishable pile of glob is scooped onto my plate.

The man who serves the food has a face like a death mask; ashen white and without signs of

emotion. I look into his eyes and see evil. I see death. I see a monster lurking behind the façade.

The man next to me whispers, “Be careful, there are a lot of bad men here.” Nodding towards the emotionless man he says, “Assassino. He has killed 35 men.”

I am in Sonora, Mexico, incarcerated in the State Penitentiary, accused of excavating national archeological sites. Later, the charges are dismissed and I am freed.

For my freedom I owe a debt of gratitude to my lawyer, Juan Jose Durate Bravo. When I first met him he said, “I don’t take bribes and I do not pay bribes.” Because of his tenacity, knowledge, hard work and friendship I was able to overcome my difficulties with Mexican authorities.

Thank you Juan Jose.



Juan Jose & I, Hermosillo, Mexico

Since then I have returned to Mexico several times and have written this sequel to Finding Lost Civilizations. The events have not deterred me.

However, I share the following observations. Mexico is in the midst of a drug war; its casualties are horrendous. Nevertheless, during my travels I always felt safe and welcomed.

The people of Mexico have treated my father and me with kindness and respect, and we have tried to act in the same manner. But, I do recognize that evil does lurk among us and try to avoid large cities and areas or situations where the social conditions and poverty can sometimes influence people to be dishonorable. In essence I think most people in the world are good, but I have never lost the sense that I must be aware of my surroundings and situation so that I can act in a manner that will assure my safety.

As mentioned before, I never knew where my steps would lead me. Nor did I have any purposeful plan except to follow the thread of lost civilizations. Perhaps, much was already pre-ordained. Who can say for sure? Consequently, when someone asks “Is your story true?” I recall the ashen-faced assassin slopping food toward outstretched arms and my response is, “It depends on who I am talking to.”

Chapter 11

Petroglyph Photo Log

The incredible thing about the arrival of the Spaniards into Mexico is that within 100 years some estimates are that more than 95 percent of the indigenous population died. Deaths are attributed to warfare, slavery, and the introduction of diseases from Europe that did not previously exist in the Americas. These diseases resulted in several large-scale epidemics wherein the entire population of villages or areas perished in a very short period.

Within the State of Nayarit early Spanish maps showed the locations of hundreds of villages along the coastal plains and mountains. For the most part none of these exist today and are lost to oblivion. Imagine what would happen to all

the belongings, implements, utensils and the bits and pieces of daily life once the population of these villages or regions ceased to exist. Those items, that did not deteriorate, such as pottery, stone, and metal, would essentially fall to the ground or remain on the surface where they were last used. And this is one of the most fascinating aspects about trekking through various regions in Nayarit. I have been to locations where the outline of villages can still be discerned and bits and pieces of daily life can still be found lying on the ground. The intriguing feature about these objects is that they have been lying on the ground for hundreds of years - since the last time they were used!

In this chapter I will try to share what I saw. I hope you will feel the excitement and wonder I felt.





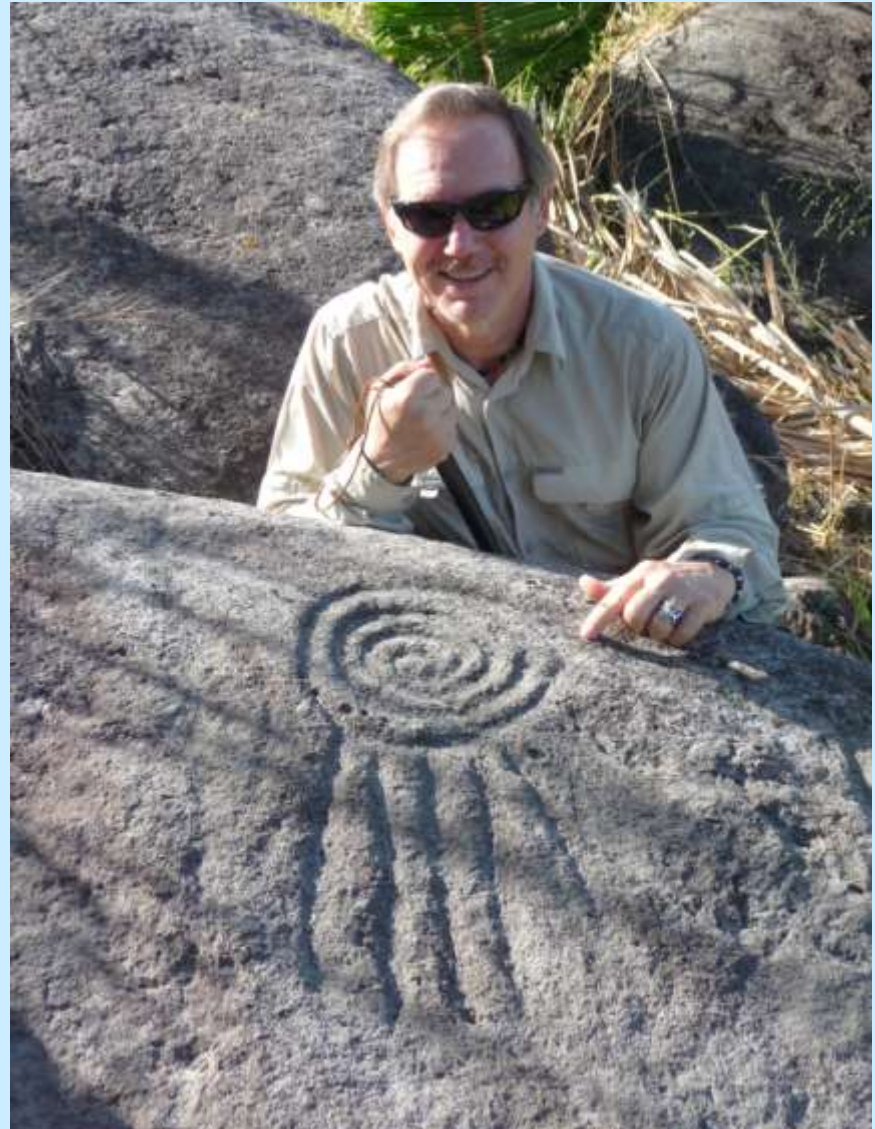
This boulder was found in a clearing overlooking fertile fields. There were many other petroglyph boulders lying in a circular pattern under a very large, old tree. This was more than likely some sort of worship site. Zacualpan, Nayarit



This was a very ancient boulder worn down by time and the elements. The drawing to the right is of a symbol used by the Indians of Mexico. The outline is similar to one on the boulder. Zacualpan, Nayarit

The Spiral with a tail. What does it represent? Many ancient symbols are connected to nature, religious beliefs and the events of everyday life. To me, this symbol represents a falling star or a comet.

Guayabitos, Nayarit





There is a stream that flows from the coastal mountain range through the towns of Otates and Cantaranas (Singing Frogs), Nayarit. Along the stream I found a ceremonial site containing many petroglyphs and areas where food was prepared.



Otates, Nayarit



**Petroglyph
Faces**

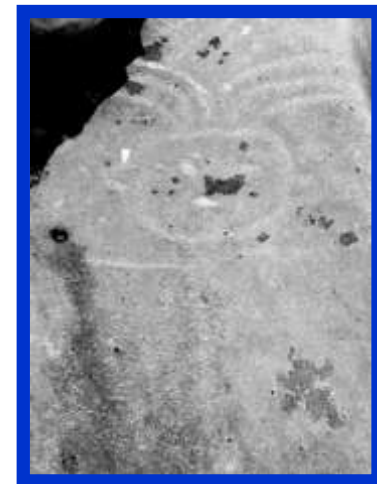


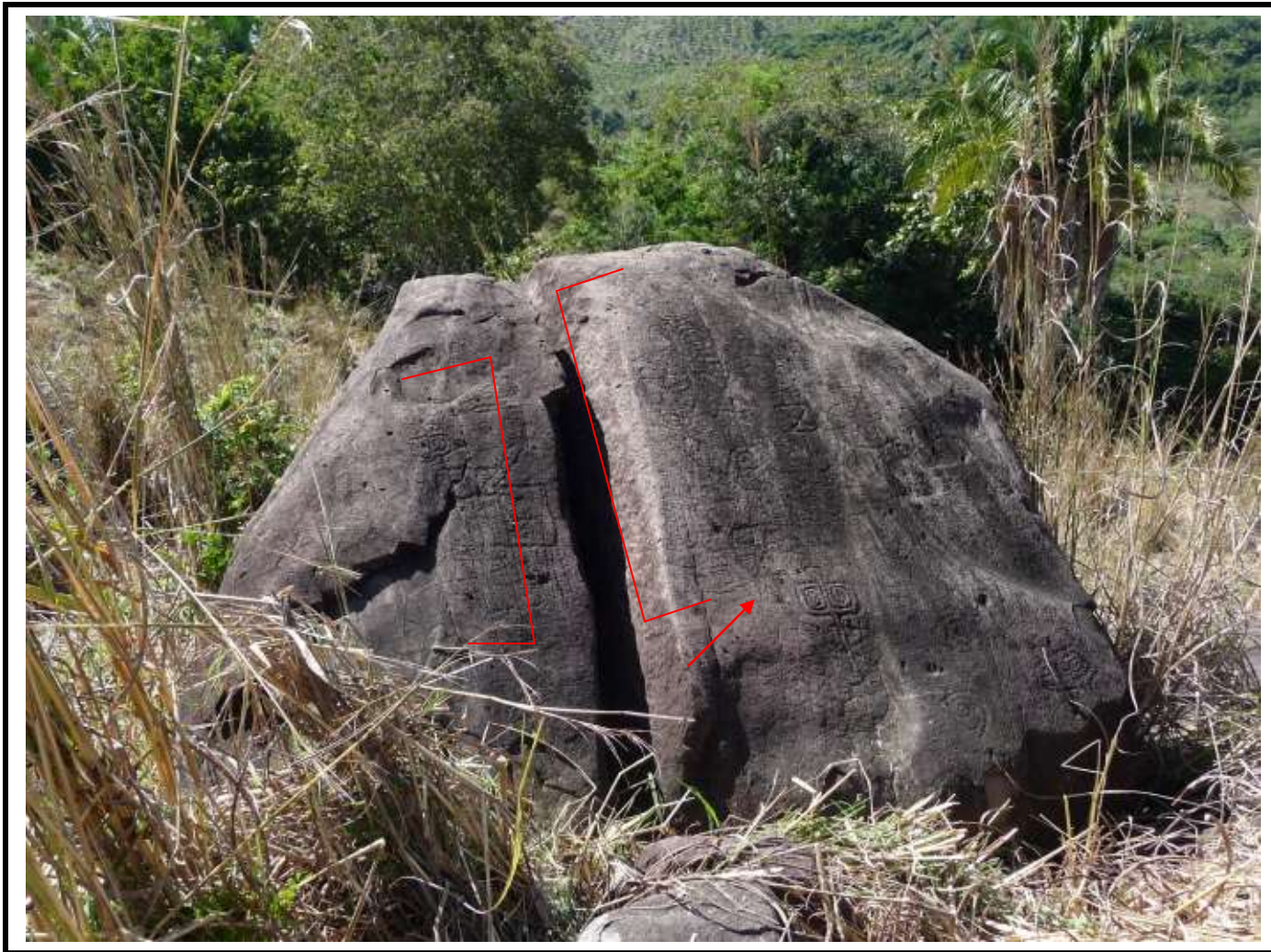




Almost every petroglyph I have seen has been a painstaking work of art. However, not all art is great. The side of the boulder contains a beautiful Spiral and several intricate designs. The top of the boulder contains what I would call a "bad painting." Probably, sells for \$10,000 at an upscale gallery!!

It is very difficult to date rock art. Location, style, topic or subject matter can provide clues. Could the "bad hair day" petroglyph be the work of a youngster in ancient times? Or a modern day amateur placing his mark on the boulder?





This boulder, along with several others, was located on a small plateau, on a steep hill in Alta Vista. The boulder was covered with petroglyphs. The most interesting one was the Spiral Man next to the red arrow. Alta Vista, Nayarit



When my old friend Don Phillippe saw a picture of the boulder he exclaimed,
"Es un Shaman!"



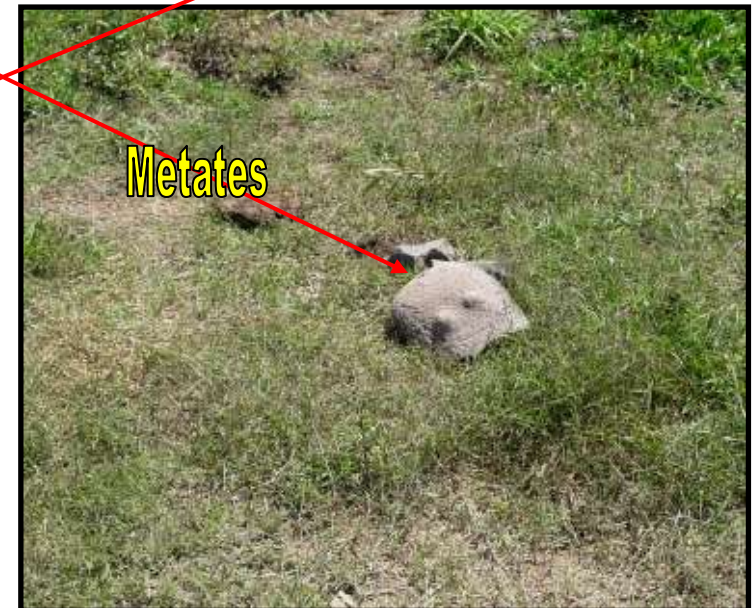
On this hill I found many sites where Indian huts once stood. Within 10 minutes of walking the area I found more than a dozen manos and remnants of metates – Village of El Monteon, Nayarit.



I asked a farmer if I could walk his land to find old petroglyphs. I found many pottery, obsidian fragments, manos, metates and foundations of ancient Indian dwellings. I pointed out my findings to the farmer, but he was not interested. To him, they were just old stones. What he wanted to talk about were the tales and legends of gold buried on his land.



On a hill near the town of Ixtapa De La Concepcion I found the foundation of an ancient Indian dwelling. Searching the area I saw two metates, several manos, and many pottery fragments. Further up the hill I found a large boulder with several grinding bowls carved into it.



The Tecolote

I was walking along an area where a road grader had leveled the ground around the water treatment plant in the town of Zacualpan when the sun's rays cast a shadow on a rock next to my right foot. I looked down and picked up a large rock, which was a part of the roadway. As the sun glowed on the rock I could not initially discern what I was seeing. However, when I took the rock in the shadow of a tree I saw that a face resembling an owl had been carved into the stone. The owl is a sacred, yet contradictory, bird in Native American mythology. In the Navajo Kwakiutl myth, when this creature calls, it means someone is going to die. As a messenger of death, the owl is not evil, but it can be foreboding. In the Pueblos along the Rio Grande in New Mexico, the owl is definitely a bird of dark omen. In Mexico the owl is called the Tecolote and is also considered a bad omen. The Aztecs and

Maya considered the owl a symbol of death and destruction. The Aztec god of death, Mictlantecuhtli, was often depicted with owls. There is an old saying in Mexico that is still in use: *Cuando el tecolote canta, el indio muere* ("When the owl cries/sings, the Indian dies."). In old Europe many people feared the night-flying bird as an omen of death.

The interesting thing about the owl rock was that the water treatment plant was adjacent to the town cemetery, which was also a burial ground for the Tecoxquine Indians before the arrival of the Spanish. This area is presently littered with many fragments of the past and petroglyph symbols. When considering the myth of the owl and the contextual association of finding this ancient stone in a burial location, a place of the dead, it is more likely than not that the stone is an ancient Tecoxquine artifact associated with their burial practices.

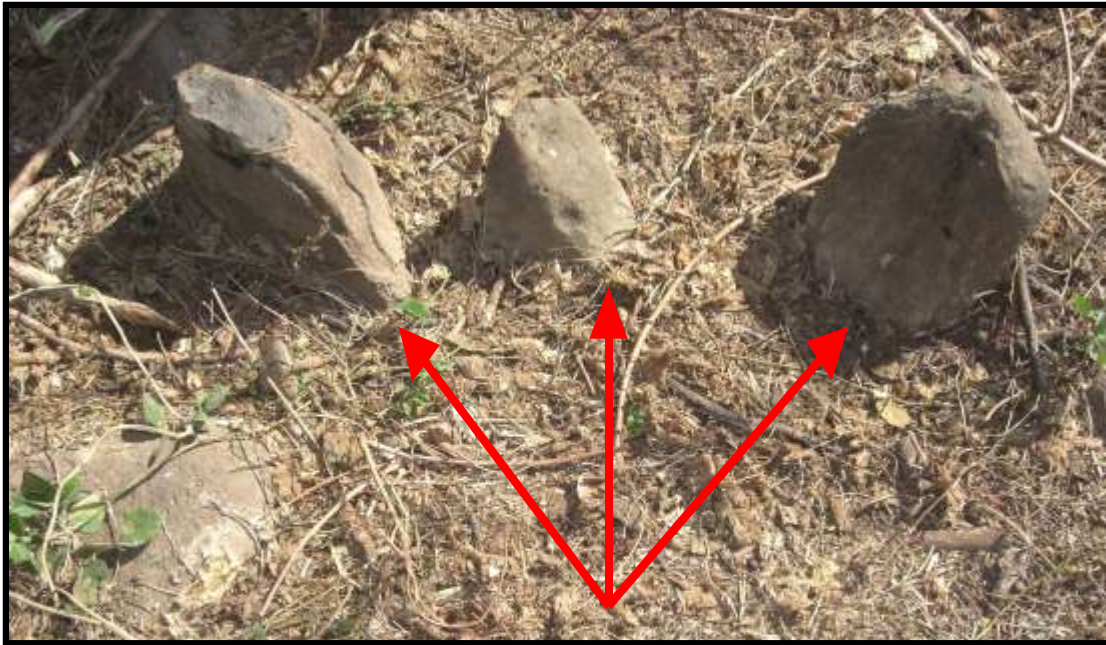


The Owl

Tombs

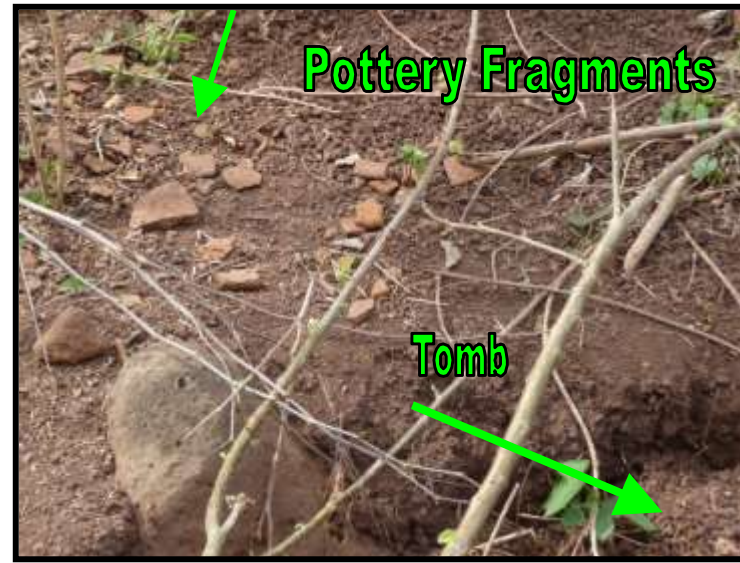
In the Americas individual tribes maintained their own death customs and adapted them to their regional environments. These customs varied widely, not only geographically, but also through time, having been shaped by circumstances at hand. In Mexico alone, it is estimated that in pre-Hispanic times there were approximately 1,800 different tribes or groups. Some groups practiced initial and secondary burials, which means that after initial internment the deceased were relocated. Also, burial practices within the same groups varied depending on the social status, cause of death, and wealth of an individual. Depending on the custom in many cases the deceased were cremated after death. The ruling class were often accompanied by their slaves (buried alive or killed) and cooking utensils. Other wealthy people were accompanied with trade goods and food. Often the deceased was accompanied with figurines, bowls, pots, shell bracelets,

manos and grinding stones, ocher or cinnabar, burned maize and other objects to accompany them to their afterlife. Commoners were often accompanied by bowls and food. Over the last several centuries there have been literally millions of graves dug across the Americas. And for the most part these are commoner graves. However, the public is tantalized with the exceedingly rare insistence where gold or semi-precious stones are recovered from an ancient tomb. Notwithstanding that this occurrence is minuscule when considered in light of the totality of all burials, the lure of treasure in Latin America has given rise to the *Guaquero*. This term refers to a person who practices one of Latin America's oldest professions: – tomb raiding and clandestine treasure hunting. I have not personally excavated any tombs although I have stumbled across many during my treks. Also, during my treks I have met *Guaqueros* who were eager to share their stores with me.

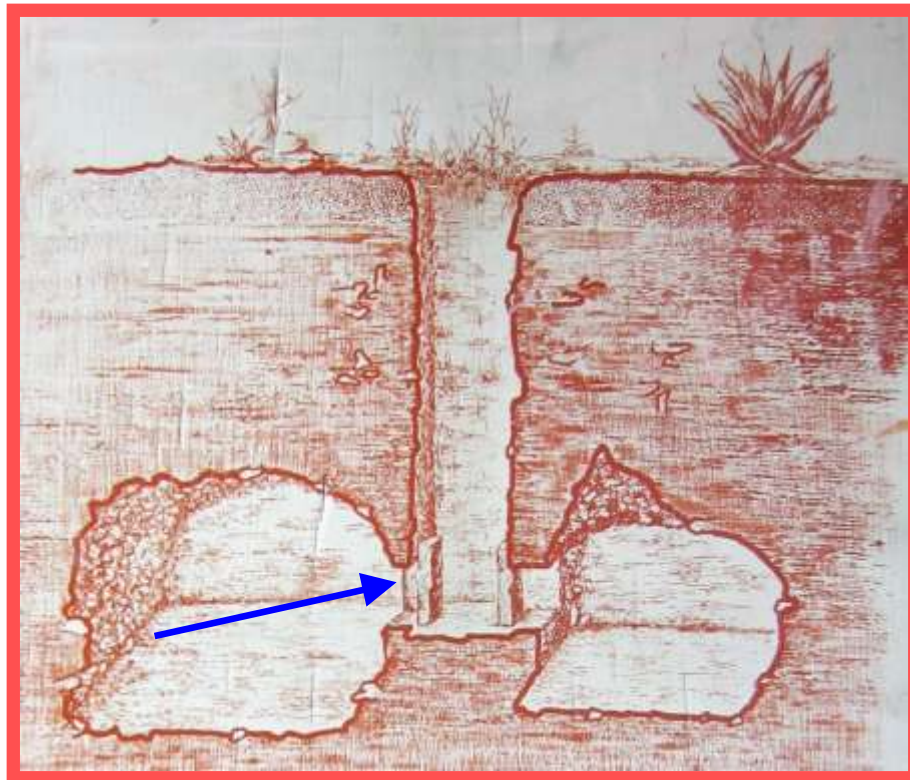


Left Photo - vertical stone slabs jutting out of the ground indicating the location of a tomb I found in 2009 near the village of Lima De Abajo.

Right Photo - returning one year later I found that an amateur treasure hunter had attempted to dig up the tomb. See the length and size of a vertical column. Digging up a tomb is hard work! Some have gone to a depth of 30 feet.



Fortunately, the tomb raider apparently gave up after digging down about 12 inches. Although it is difficult to discern the circumstances surrounding this burial, in West Mexico some shaft tombs are more than 30 feet deep. Thankfully, the ancient in this tomb will rest in peace.



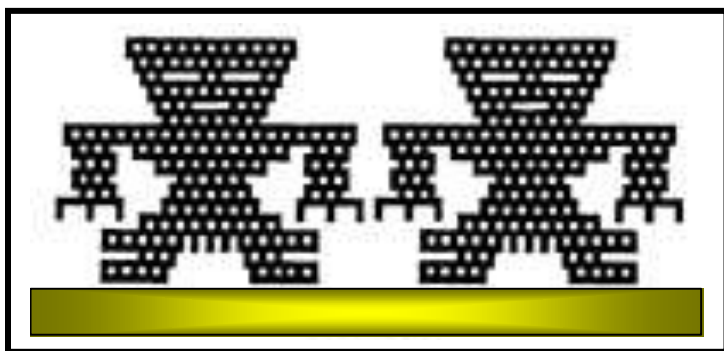
Shaft Tomb - Flat or shaped boulder sealing entrance to burial chamber.

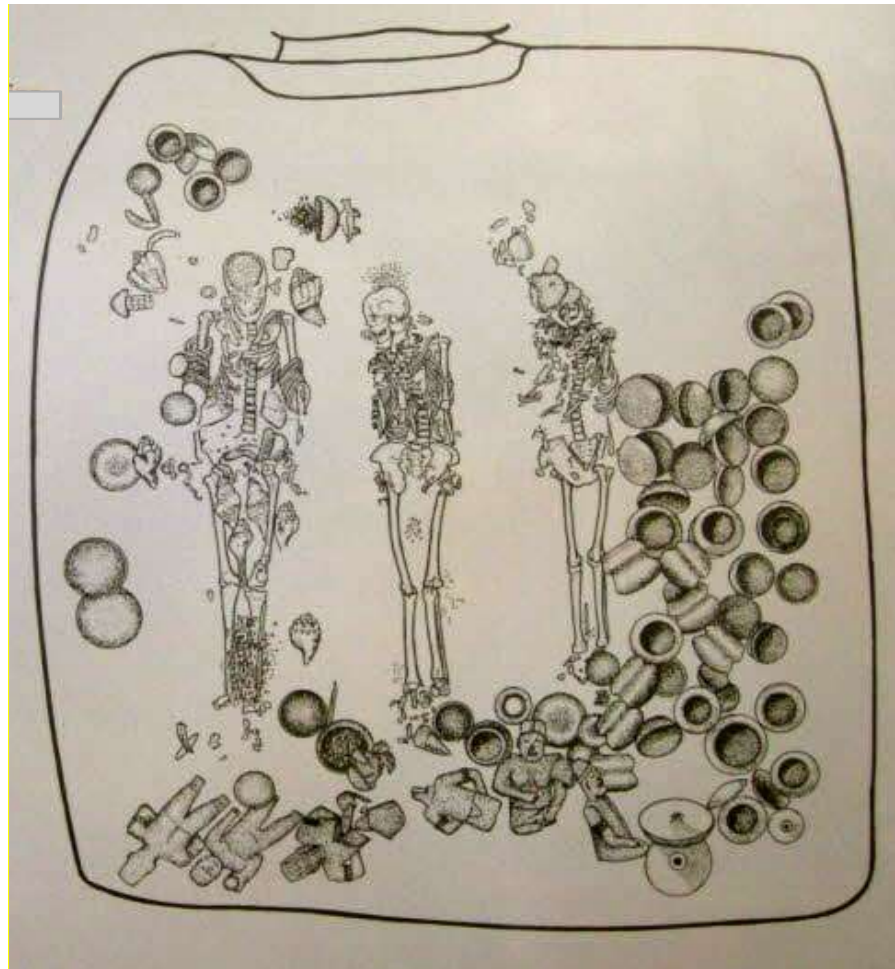


Depending on the culture, wealth, status and period, tombs can vary significantly. Tombs similar to the one in this diagram have been found in Nayarit.



Burial Chamber





Outline of a tomb and contents found in Nayarit. For the most part, tombs in West Mexico contain figures, beads, trinkets, bowls and implements of everyday life to aid the departed in their afterlife. Finding tombs containing grand treasures of gold, silver, and precious stones are for the most part fanciful dreams.



El Monteon, Nayarit



A farmer was clearing his land, which was adjacent to a mountain slope, when he noticed the top of a jar sticking out from a small mound. As he cleared away the mound he found many clay pots containing bone fragments. Depending on the era and tribe, cremation was one of several funerary practices used by the Indians of ancient Mexico.



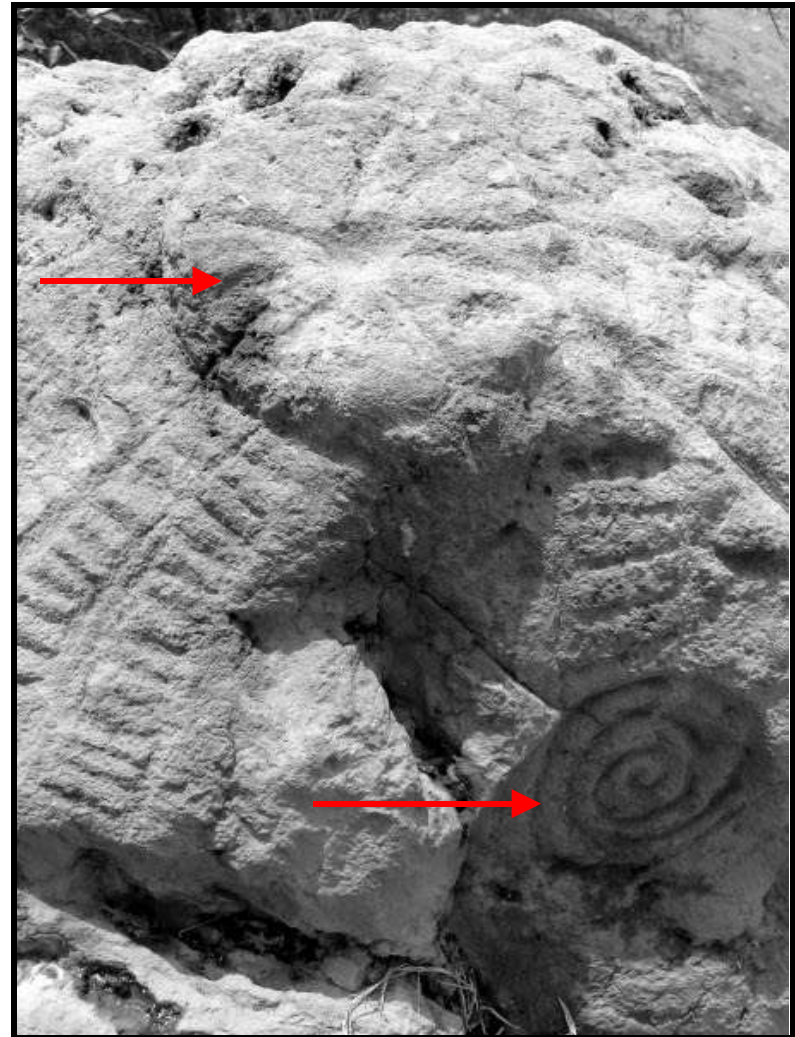
Peyote Symbol

This boulder is located in the village of Zacualpan. The top of it contains a three dimensional carving of a peyote and several other symbols.

Note the Spiral symbol on the lower right of the boulder.

Zacualpan was once the capital of the Kingdom of the Tecoxquines, State of Nayarit, Mexico.

The Tecoxquines no longer exist, and the meaning of their symbols and history has been lost to time.





This was a communal boulder that contained 16 grinding bowls used for food preparation. In this area I found the complete outline of a village, burial grounds, and a primary worship site. Many items such as manos, metates, and pottery fragments littered the area.

I read the following on an archaeological web site: I need your help in translating the name "Ximochoque", the pre-conquest name of San Pedro Lagunillas, Nayarit, Mexico. San Pedro Lagunillas is a small tiny town, surrounded by small lakes and volcanoes. The natives here say Ximochoque is an Otomi word, which evidently is not true, meaning "bules amargos" (bitter jars). Bule (guaje, calabazo) is one of the names for the ancient Nahuatl name Xicalli (that became jícara after the españolización). There used to be hundreds of different kind of bules here. Now they are gone. I live in San Pedro Lagunillas, and I need to write an ancient history of the town.
(Author's Note: Calabazo is gourd in English)



**These carved or shaped containers were made by man using volcanic boulders.
Are they the "bules - bitter jars?"**



Large jugs or containers cut into stone located on a vista point overlooking the lake in San Pedro Lagunillas. Were they used for cooking? Storage? Feasting? Festivals? Human sacrifice? Are they the "Bitter Jars" related to the original name for this area? The answer is lost to time; there is no written history and the original natives have all perished.





In Guayabitos, Nayarit, I came upon a field that had recently been cleared to accommodate a new house. I found a large boulder with several small holes pecked into it. Small coconuts from the oil palm would be placed inside these holes and then cracked open. As I searched the ground around the boulder I found an ancient tool used to crack the small oil coconut. Close by was another boulder with a Spiral symbol. In the same field I found an ancient tomb marked with vertical stone slabs. Most people would not notice or understand the significance of what they saw. A bulldozer will eventually clear the land and obliterate all signs that ancient life, nourishment, worship, and death had once occurred on this very spot. And perhaps one day the same fate will befall the new house as the cycle of time continues.



The Spiral petroglyph, a tomb (the circular pattern of upright stones indicates a tomb site), a food preparation boulder, a crushing stone, other petroglyphs, and coconut oil palms were all in very close proximity to each other. This was probably the site of an ancient village.





This boulder sits in a beautiful pool at the bottom of a mountain stream and has been used as a worship site. Many of these ancient symbols reflect worship of the elements. See the current worship marking at top, "Jesus." La Lima, Nayarit



West Mexico, which includes the State of Nayarit, was once considered culturally insignificant by archaeologists until excavations (1999) in Guachimontes, State of Jalisco, where a sophisticated culture was unearthed. I took this photo from an unexcavated pyramid, which simply looked like a hill to the untrained eye.



This is what an ancient pyramid looks like prior to an excavation. This site is located in the Ameca Valley, State of Jalisco, and was inhabited by a culture referred to as the Teuchitlan Tradition, which disappeared around A.D. 900.

Chapter 12

The Old Gringo

Throughout my journey trekking around Nayarit, Mexico, my father accompanied me. In my first book, *Finding Lost Civilization*, my father is featured prominently. However, in this sequel, he has remained in the background.

My father confided in me that never in his wildest dreams did he think that at his age he would be trekking through Mexico with son Number 1, in search of lost civilizations.

As I write this sequel, my father is 85 years young and still going strong. I hope I possess his genes so that I might enjoy life in the same manner that he has.

One of the things that has fascinated me about my father is his zest for life. He is an avid historian of

old Europe, a voracious reader, and practices the lost art of letter writing on a daily basis.

He loves good food, fine wine, women, song, and soup! But, most of all he still carries that spark of curiosity about the nature and wonder of things around him. And as we trekked through the hills of Nayarit he asked the same questions I did. Who were these people? What was their life like? What do their symbols mean?

The spark within him still burns strong and I have always been proud to present my father, as “The Old Gringo,” to local natives we encountered along the path less traveled.

We make a great team!





Dad and I trekking through Nayarit, Mexico



Finding a Spiral petroglyph was always a surprise and a moment of wonderment for both of us. La Luz Del Mundo site, Guayabitos, Nayarit, Mexico



Friends John and Doreen celebrating my dad's 85th birthday at the Jaltemba Bay Restaurant, La Penita, Nayarit, Mexico



Dad dancing the night away on his 85th birthday with Doreen. John and I laughed till we cried at seeing my father, "kick up his heels."



A toast to my Dad's 85th



John & Doreen



Ooops! Wrong celebration

Chapter 13

Sacred Altars And Secret Caves

Adjacent to the cemetery in the town of Ixtapa there is an ancient road that meanders eastward toward the mountains of Nayarit. Along this road water flows from these mountains and nourishes the people today as well as a thousand years ago and before. All along this road and by this stream or river there is evidence of ancient man. The outline of stone foundations of ancient homes and villages can be found. Pieces of pottery litter the fields. Large boulders with ancient petroglyphs that were pecked, etched, cut, rubbed, or grooved into the stone still exist. And ancient tomb markers and worship spots can be found.



Mountains East of Ixtapa De La Concepcion



Locals Refer to the Mountain Waters as Rio San Juan and the dirt road as San Antonio



Along this bend of the Rio San Juan there was a natural stone formation containing several petroglyphs. Nearby, there were many stone foundations of ancient homes. I also found a cooking area that had the remnants of oyster shells and pottery fragments. Ixtapa is near the Pacific Ocean and the area with its fertile lands, fresh water, and a bountiful sea, was home to hundreds of small villages that once dotted the coastal landscape.

So, when Manuel told me that he had found an ancient worship cave in those mountains, I believed him.

“When was the last time you were there? I asked.

“About twenty-five years ago,” he said.

“How did you find it?”

“An old man took me to it,” he responded.

“Can you describe how you got there and what you found?” He thought for a while and said that he and the old man followed the ancient road until they came adjacent to a mountain. Then they traveled for several hours up a steep mountain trail until they came upon a level spot near a cliff. At this location there was a very large boulder that contained many symbols, one of which was the Spiral. Manuel thought that this large boulder was some sort of

worship or sacrificial spot. Not far from this large boulder the mountain continued its upward climb. However, among the boulders there was a small crevice, which was barely wide enough for him to enter and only if he was turned sideways. Upon entering the cave there were several sharp right-angle turns that eventually led into a large chamber.

What Manuel told me next really surprised me. He said that inside this chamber there was an altar, and that many ancient symbols were carved into the stone walls. However, alongside one wall there were many old rifles stacked up against some wooden crates. Although I was very surprised, the first thing I thought of was that they were guns used during one of Mexico’s many insurrections or civil wars.

After leaving the cave the old man told Manuel that there was another entrance to the cave. However, access could only be gained by using

ropes, as the entrance was located down from the cliff face.

Ever since Manuel told me of this cave I have had a desire to explore it. He agreed to take me, but said, "We can only go alone and tell no one else." On three different occasions we made plans to go, but life's circumstances always seemed to intervene.

Then, one day we were on our way. I was amazed that people were still eking out a life along this long forgotten road. I recalled that several weeks earlier my good friend John Berg and I were exploring the road when we came upon several men who were standing by a pickup truck that had broken down. We offered the owner of the truck, Santiago Torres, a lift to his ranch, which was further up the road. It was called Rancho Las Palmas because of a certain type of palm tree that grew there. The branches from these palm trees were

harvested and sold as material to make palapas, which commonly refers to an open-sided dwelling with a thatched roof made of dried palm leaves.

At this ranch, an extended family of 7 brothers, 1 sister, husbands and wives and children live in 10 homes. The ranch consisted of 450 hectares, 100 cows, 6 hectares of corn, 3 hectares of sargo, and several hectares of wheat. John and I were given a tour of the ranch and taken to an area that contained several petroglyph markings and evidence of ancient structures. The inhabitants of the ranch did not know anything about the ancients who preceded them. Ironically, I would venture to say that most probably nothing will ever be known of this present-day extended family eking out a subsistence living on Rancho Las Palmas. The mystic Rumi said, "Close both eyes, to see with the other eye." Alfred Lord Tennyson once wrote, "I am part of all that I have seen." And so, as I have often done

during my journey, I stopped along the banks of the San Juan, closed my eyes, and let my thoughts travel through the universe that is within all of us. I let the past and the present meet and all that was and all that is became one breathless instant without any past or present, except for its mere existence at that moment.

As fellow travelers we are all now witness to this small history of Rancho Las Palmas and its family.



Along the bank of Rio San Juan



Evidence of ancient civilizations - pottery and obsidian fragments - Rancho Las Palmas

Adjacent to Caraterra San Antonio, Manuel took me to the top of a hill. From there I saw a large, solitary boulder that was about 8 feet tall. Lifting myself onto the boulder I saw that the top had been shaped into a bowl. Close by was a circular pattern of stones and an ancient tomb marker. This was a sacred burial and worship site.



This day, traveling at a slow pace, we finally reached a position along the road where Manuel stopped and pointed up to a mountain. “I think it is over there,” he said.

I checked my backpack and made sure I had enough water, food, a flashlight, pocketknife, my camera, sunscreen, wet towelettes, and a pen and paper. I was amazed at Manuel; all he carried were a machete, quart of water, some fruit, and an enchilada wrapped in a cornhusk. His clothing consisted of worn-out leather shoes without any laces, a torn shirt, and old, dirty, gray polyester pants.



We started following a path that appeared to be an animal trail. It began to rise steeply and followed the mountainside in a crisscross fashion. Initially, the vegetation was grass and brush. However, as we continued our climb it became forested and jungle-like. The coastal zone of Nayarit has an abundance of rain and the mountains are verdant.

Periodically, we came upon small clearings where Manuel could take his bearings. As we continued our climb Manuel mentioned several times that he was not sure of our location, but that he felt we in the correct general vicinity of the stone altar and cave.

As we continued I asked myself if we were now walking on an ancient Indian trail. Another question was, why would this trail have withstood the passage of time and nature? I did not have an answer except to say that I have walked among the ruins of several ancient villages and have seen the remnants of lost civilizations lying on the ground. Before the

arrival of the Spanish there were hundreds of these villages, connected by a series of trails that dotted the landscape of the coastal Nayarit plains. For the most part they do not now exist.

In 1524, Francisco Cortés de San Buenaventura, nephew of Hernán Cortés, was commissioned by his uncle to conquer new lands and was the first Spaniard who arrived in what is known today as the State of Nayarit.

Further Spanish exploration of the area began in 1531 with the Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán expedition, which some have described as a massive slaughter. Normally, the conquistadors attacked an Indian village, stole the corn and other food, razed and burned the dwellings, and tortured the native leaders to gather information about what riches could be stolen there, or from nearby populations. For the most part, these riches did not exist.

Beltrán continued his expedition in western and northern Mexico for seven years. During this time he explored and conquered a third of present-day Mexico. Many indigenous people were either slaughtered or sold into slavery in the Caribbean, earning Beltrán de Guzmán the nickname “Bloody Guzmán.”

Reports of Guzmán’s bloody reign eventually reached Spain and in 1536 he was arrested and imprisoned. In 1544, he died in obscurity as a prisoner in the Castle of Torrejón, Spain.

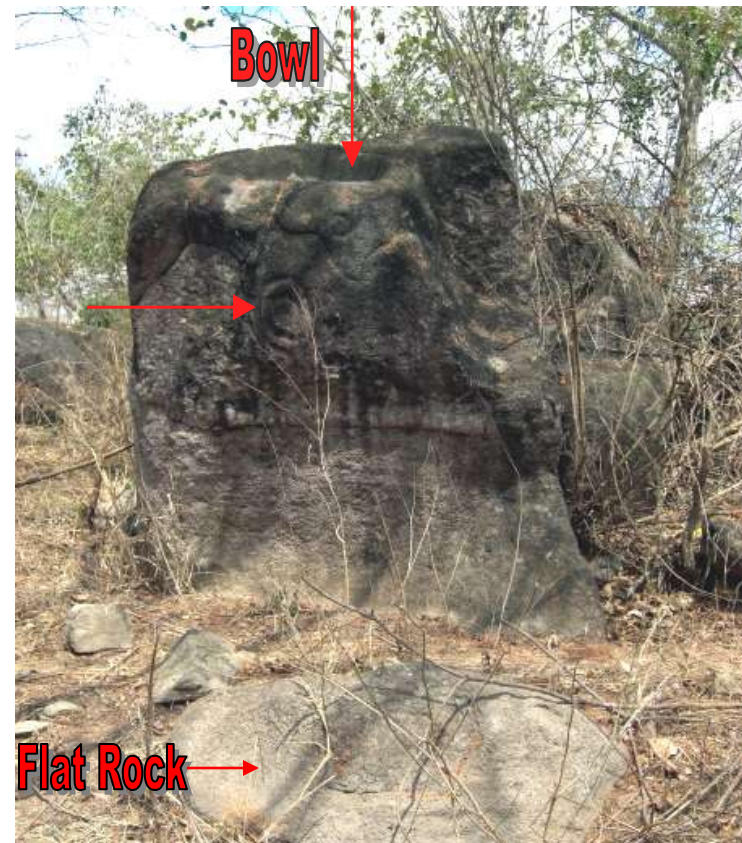
These events, combined with continued warfare among various tribes and factions and the subsequent scourge of diseases imported from Europe, led to the virtual decimation of Mexico’s indigenous population. As previously mentioned, whole villages would perish during these epidemics. Eventually, many tribes simply ceased to exist and any knowledge or history of these people perished with them.

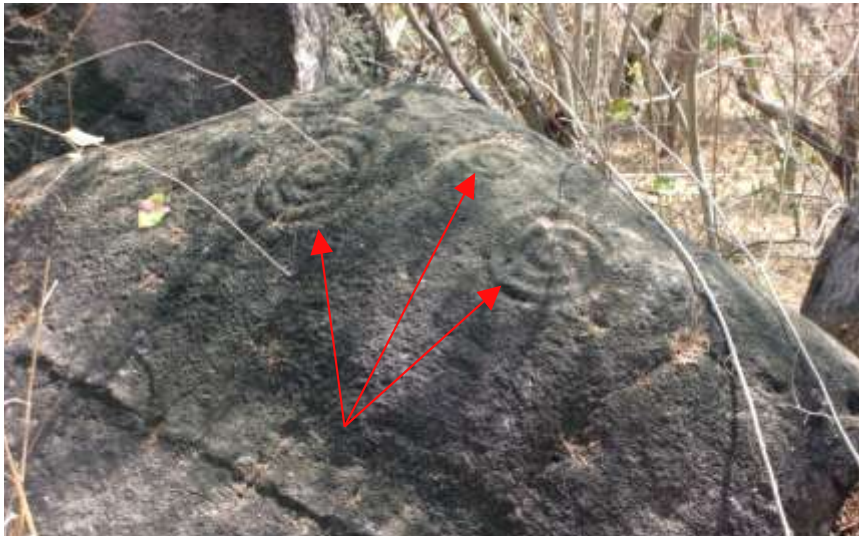
After several hours we came to a bend in the trail, which overlooked a sheer drop-off. Near this bend the ground was level and sat adjacent to several large boulders and a steep rise up the mountain. Manuel stopped and said that this area looked very familiar and could be the location of the ancient stone altar. We searched around and, within ten minutes I found a large outcropping of boulders. I climbed up one side of one of these boulders and found a Spiral petroglyph. I yelled out to Manuel and he came over to look at the boulders.

“This is the spot,” he said.



I then circled the boulders and found several more symbols. Next I came to a spot that I will simply describe as the front of the altar. I could easily visualize these boulders as being some sort of worship or sacrificial spot.





Side view of altar. Boulders were possibly toppled due to seismic activity. Spirals and other symbols were carved into the boulders.

Manuel began to work his way toward the rise in search of the cave entrance. We spent more than an hour looking, but could find nothing. “It has to be here,” Manuel said.

As I continued my search I came upon an area that I could best describe as a fissure in the mountain. However, the fissure was completely filled with earth, brush, leaves, branches, and stone. Manuel came over to look at it and said it resembled the entrance. I examined that area for a while and thought that perhaps past seismic activity could have caused a movement of the fissure, which collapsed it or filled it with dirt. Manuel and I tried to clear away the dirt and debris that filled the fissure. But, the task got us nowhere. We simply did not have the right tools to make any progress. We sat down to rest and contemplate our next move. While sitting next to the fissure I could detect a minute flow of air emanating from it, air that was cooler than the surrounding air.

This was the entrance!



Since we could not enter the cave via the fissure, Manuel took me over to the drop-off and said that if we had brought a rope, we could have climbed down the cliff face to find the second entrance to the cave.

As I walked off that mountain I did not feel any disappointment for not having been able to enter the cave. I was reminded of a saying: “Wherever a man may happen to turn, whatever a man may undertake, he will always end up by returning to that path which nature has marked out for him.”

And I knew that one day I would return.





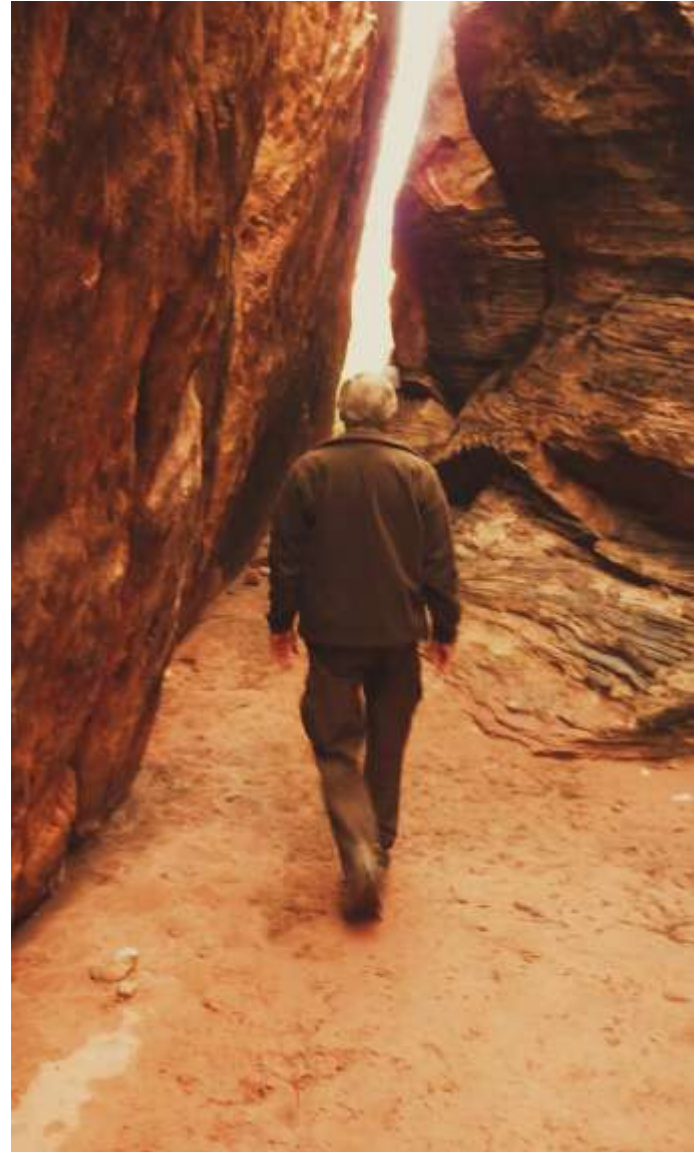
My Story Is A Beginning Without An End



Remember We Are All Connected



The Journey Continues



Finding Lost Civilizations

-Part 2-

The story of Los Dos Alejandros continues as they journey through the State of Nayarit, Mexico, in search of ancient symbols left behind by the lost Kingdom of the Texoxquines. Old tales and legends are uncovered and treasures found.

TRAVELS IN THE STATE OF NAYARIT

BANDIT TREASURE FOUND

HISTORY OF THE REGION

ARTIFACTS UNCOVERED

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

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