

Adventures in Mexico
January 8 thru January 17, 2008
A Travel Log by Chris Scott

Tuesday, January 8th, 2008

The seven of us traveling as the Hill Cumorah Expedition Team woke up to rain this morning at a Kansas City Airport hotel on our way to Mexico for a fact finding tour. Our entourage consisted of Mike Brown, David Brown, Scott Norwood, Don Beebe, Neil Steede, Terry and Chris Scott. We proceeded to the airport to check-in for our flight with just a few small incidents. Airport security thoroughly scanned Don Beebe by wandling him over and over again; he never appeared very threatening to me. They finally concluded that he was not much of a threat and let him pass on through. I was shocked, because I had forgotten about the scissors in the first aid kit that Tim had given me—thanks Tim. Much to my surprise after checking for bomb making materials in the kit they let the whole first aid kit pass through—hemostats, surgical knife and scissors—makes me feel real safe. And I had thought that my crochet hooks were going to be a problem and left my little scissors at home.

The uneventful flight was pleasant while we watched the thunderstorms off in the distance as it mixed with the puffy clouds and sunrise; it finally brought us to Cancun by early afternoon. After a wait to rent a fifteen passenger van for us and our luggage, we ate at a McDonald's and proceeded south to Tulum. David and Neil had spoken with an employee at the car rental place to find more information about Tancah. They were anxious to find an archway over a saacbe that Neil

had heard about. We proceeded south to Tulum and on the way asked a few of the local people if they knew of the Tancah ruin site. We switched back and forth several times on the highway looking for the site with no luck. We then tried to see Tulum, but unfortunately it was closed for the day. We then headed for Chetumal.

One stop at a Pemex (gas station) brought relief in the form of restroom breaks. It was three pesos to use the restroom with some toilet paper. We ate a snack of tamales that were made by the local ladies. As we continued our journey the group shared an informal devotion in the van of how God had worked in our lives, and we listened to each other's pain and wonderment of where God was leading us at this point in our lives. It bonded the group and brought us closer to each other and to our God. There were many topes (speed bumps) along the way, much to our delight; at times it turned into a wild ride. We arrived at Chetumal around 8 PM and stayed in a beautifully decked out hotel that Don Beebe found for us (Thanks Don). The Christmas decorations were still up and the courtyards were laced with pretty blooming flowers and well-groomed bushes.

At dinner that evening, Neil shared with us what he needed to accomplish at the museum and what to look for at Rio Bec. He believes Rio Bec was a stronghold for the Zoramites. We had evening devotions in one of the hotel rooms and it was pointed out how important each one of us is to this trip. So far we have had great fellowship and a good

traveling experience. Amazing how far you can travel in only one day by modern means.

Wednesday, January 9th, 2008

The day started out with slave driver Don taking Neil to look for the fourth part of a geometric kit; a protractor, or translator if you want to buy one in Mexico. It turned out to be a protracted mission covering the breadth of the Land to Villahermosa (3 miles). They were working all the angles.

After a nice breakfast, we proceeded to the local museum, Conaculta. On the way we noticed an interesting city monument that seemed to depict the Lion and Lamb and little boy. It was not an original, or ancient, so was not what we came for, but interesting anyway. The museum was interesting and had replicas of important Maya carvings from Palenque, Tikal, Calakmul, and Yaxchilan. Neil bought many books and magazines to help him in his classes. He accomplished what he came for and we left Chetumal on the way to Rio Bec. On the way out of town we were finally able to purchase a protractor.

We encountered some army patrol officers with rifles. They had us get out of the van and made a cursory search of our luggage and then let us proceed. On all of our stops Neil was very gifted with putting the local people at ease, telling jokes and charming his way through the countryside. We saw a sign for Rio Bec and proceeded down the road.

We came to a little village that we later found was named 20 de Noviembre. It was named after the independence day of Mexico. There were chickens, pigs, piglets, and dogs roaming around the town. We tried making the journey to Rio Bec in our rental van, but to our dismay the road would not support our van. We assumed we were somewhat lost because Neil's memory of the place was that it had not been that hard to find before. The road was very overgrown with jungle and very rutted. We decided to turn back, and by then it was very difficult to turn the van around and up the muddy, narrow road. After turning around and driving back towards town the guides showed us another site just a short hike from the road. This site was called Ramonal. Neil explained a little about the Zoramites and we took some pictures; the site was very overgrown.

We decided to call it a day and Don Beebe found another hotel for us. It was a very romantic looking village resort called Chicanna, Ecovillage resort. It had thatched roofs and a very nice atmosphere. We had decided to give Rio Bec another try the next day and had arranged for guides to help us with another vehicle. We had dinner, nice devotions and a restful night sleep.

Thursday, January 10th, 2008.

We had a nice breakfast and then devotions in the van. I'm glad that we have devotions and ask for the Lord's help in things because no

words can describe the road to Rio Bec. Ezekiel, our tour guide, was a soft spoken young looking man. He was trying to learn English and would ask me and others questions of what certain words meant. I wasn't very much help since I had trouble understanding him. I think we helped him make a little progress though. We had three other local guides with us, two of them carrying machetes to clear some of the branches that were in our way and a driver named David. We all piled in a small red pick-up truck. Neil was in the front seat with two of the local guides. The rest of us, six from our group and two local guides, piled in the back of the truck. I decided to try and sit on the side of the truck because I knew that my legs would get sore if I couldn't move around much. It was a very bumpy, rugged, crowded and long ride. Ezekial was concerned that I was not paying much attention to the tree branches, because I was talking too much. We had to make sure and duck the branches that came our way. Later I would regret not paying more attention. We lost several items on the way. One was David's glasses to a tree branch. The driver would back up and retrieve everything that was lost. We finally made it to Rio Bec and were greeted by a monkey up in the trees. We studied and climbed the pyramids and listened and learned from Neil about the archeology of Rio Bec. We hiked short distances to sites A, B, C and D, not necessarily in that order. We spent the better part of the morning and early afternoon there taking pictures and doing some measurements of the pyramids. Terry was delighted at one of the

sites to climb up inside stairwells with David and discovered a second matching stairwell at the other end of the site. We proceeded then to the inevitable trip back through the jungle, unfortunately the same way we came. A little warning bell went off in my head to not sit where I did in the middle leaning on the tailgate, but of course I didn't listen to it. My first mishap came when after some very rugged bumps I was adjusting the pillow that Scott had very kindly loaned me and cut my finger on a machete that was underneath me. It became quite bloody very quickly. Thank you Tim for the first aid kit! After I got the bleeding to slow down, Terry bandaged me and I got my finger to stop throbbing by holding it over my head. I started laughing at the whole drama that was playing out. (Better than crying, Mike). Soon a branch knocked David off-balance and he landed on all of us, mostly on Mike and hit Terry's knee. That I'm sure was not a very comfortable landing. Then it happened; David was standing directly in front of where I was sitting and ducked a tree branch. It hit me very hard right in the face. I didn't see it coming although I knew from the trip out that I should have been watching for it. I was covering my face with my hands and Terry and Mike were concerned that I had been hit in the eye. Thank you God, it just had scratched my nose and didn't do any other damage. By this time, I was really hoping that Neil had learned something at Rio Bec. I had an intense desire to quit the whole scene and run back to Kansas

City as fast as I could. I felt very bruised on my buttocks, even though I have quite a bit of natural padding there.

When we returned to the village of 20 de Noviembre, a meal had been prepared for us by some of the local village women. We had fresh pineapple juice, tamales made with spinach, egg, and chicken that were wrapped and roasted in banana leaves. I took a picture of the women who were so colorfully dressed. They had a pet parrot outside of the hut that reminded of us of our own parrot at home, except this parrot was not caged. They had what we would consider house plants, potted, and set around the windows of the house. The yard was completely packed dirt with no grass. The whole experience made for a very interesting day.

When we returned to the same hotel that night, I swam in the pool to calm my nerves. It felt really good. When I made my way to dinner that night, there was quite a discussion going on about what was learned at Rio Bec. It was interesting to listen to everyone discussing the Book of Mormon and the archeology that went along with it. While we ate, Terry discovered that he does not know how to recognize hot peppers; he thought they were green beans. He looked like steam was coming out of his head. Sometimes we learn the hard way.

Friday, January 11th, 2008

To start the day off Terry and I climbed a tower outside of our hotel room. It was a nice view of our surroundings. Then we quickly proceeded to breakfast so that we could get on with our day.

We drove to Becan and were only supposed to stay for awhile, but it was such a nice city of ancient ruins that we ended up staying longer than intended. We were enjoying goofing around with each other as a group and taking pictures. We probably needed some enjoyment after the day before. Since we were having such poor luck finding things over the last couple of days, Mike decided that he wanted to offer me up as a sacrifice at the stone altar. Don Beebe was posing as a King on his stone throne and lots of pictures were taken. He looked like Buddha to me. Oops wrong religion. We then drove to Calakmul, which seemed like a long drive from the highway. I was very glad for taking my crochet project with me, because I was getting lots done in the car as we drove. Mike was probably happy with that also, since I was trying not to pay attention to his wild driving. We also had our morning devotions in the car which would occasionally lead into much longer discussions. We have discussed many things in this trip and it has been very educational for me. We spent the better part of the day at Calakmul climbing pyramids and taking pictures. Terry helped me climb up the back of a pyramid and it was quite tall. Sometimes it was a little scary coming back down. David and I saw some iridescent butterflies which were fascinating. I didn't know that actually existed in real life. Terry and I climbed quite a few pyramids and took lots of pictures and did much exploring. When we returned to the main plaza there were monkeys playing in the trees. We were quite worn out and dehydrated by the end

of the day. This turned out to be my favorite day though, because of the sites we had seen.

Neil made friends with a young lady in the visitors center name Rosa. We gave her a ride back to her home, which allowed Neil time to find out information about Calakmul. She was full of archeological facts that were helpful to him. We then proceeded to Palenque and another Don Beebe hotel. I felt a head cold coming on and I took some Benadryl; I couldn't quite make it all the way through the evening devotions.

Saturday, January 12th, 2008

We are now at a hotel in Palenque. I have decided that these men all have much more stamina and grit than I. My nose is dripping constantly, my muscles are sore, I have many itchy spots all over my body and to top it all off we left at 6 AM for Yaxchilan. This was my worst day by far. I could have stayed in the hotel room easily, but didn't want to offend anyone.

We traveled to a nice breakfast buffet that Don Beebe knew about and were on our way to Yaxchilan. The countryside and people looked poor and it looks like it is very difficult to make a living. But on the other hand, it seems that they are able to live off the land much easier than I would be able to. They have chickens and pigs in their yards, but sometimes are very well dressed despite their circumstances. Occasionally we are buying necklaces and other crafts that they have

made to help support their families. I'm glad that I went to Yaxchilan despite my ill feelings. It is fascinating to associate it with the Book of Mormon. We traveled down a wide river by boat and on the way back saw an alligator on the side of the river.

David had devotions that morning and lit sweet grass as we said prayers by the entrance to the labyrinth. We had much to see and I remembered Neil showing us pictures of these monuments in his classes. Neil was somewhat frustrated he couldn't find the wall he remembered to Benjamin's temple. But, by the end of the day a guide that was helping him find a Quetzal nest found us and explained to him where the wall was located that Neil was describing. We decided that Neil was vertically challenged by 600 feet. His spirits were lifted considerably as he made his way faster than any of us back to the main plaza. It was fascinating to me while we were at the top of the site that we might have been looking at the stone foundation of where King Benjamin might have built the tower where he spoke to the people. All in all it was a good day and we learned much from the site. I'm glad that I went. We felt our prayers had been answered in a number of ways during that visit.

Sunday, January 13th, 2008

Ironically this turned out to be a much needed day of rest. I felt better today and we were able to sleep in some. The soreness in my muscles had all but disappeared. Disappointingly though I had many

more chigger bites. How did people survive before the invention of Ibuprofen and Benadryl and anti-itch cream? I guess Tim gave the first-aid kit to the right person, because I'm using it more than anyone else. Actually I'm really enjoying myself and am having a great time with good companionship and lots of educational experiences. I just like to complain.

After breakfast we went to LaVenta. This had a small zoo along with an outdoor museum displaying stone carvings from the Olmec period. Apparently, which I was not picking up at the time, the light was just right that day for Don Beebe to get some good pictures. Neil has been very pleased with the trip so far and the information he is obtaining. For me I'm feeling an urgent need to shop for some souvenirs. I'm not good at communicating much about the archeology of the time, so I will leave that to others more qualified.

Neil pointed out some McDonald's arches in the stone and said that was a sign to Mike that we needed to eat at McDonald's, but Mike had his heart set on VIPS. We also ran across quite a few coatimundis that were begging food off us. Mike gave one of them an apple.

We arrived back at the hotel early and were able to relax some. We ate dinner at the hotel and had nice devotions and retired early. A celebration had been arranged ahead of time to celebrate Mike's belated birthday. The Lord has blessed us very much on this trip.

Monday, January 14th, 2008

We headed to Palenque. This became my second favorite site. It was awesome in its structures and layout and very interesting in that fact that Neil views it as the site that Christ visited when he came to America. Neil and Don had so much information to share. We climbed the pyramids and Neil pointed out what he thought was the throne that had been built for Christ to sit upon. There was an area that had three temples; the Temple of the Sun, Temple of the Cross, and Temple of the Foliated Cross were in this area and we climbed up this to see the carvings and messages inscribed by the ancients. The whole thing was awesome to see and the weather was great. There were many vendors around the sites of Palenque and we bought our souvenirs and trinkets to remind us of our visit there.

We then made our way out of town after staying three nights in the same hotel, we moved on toward Compeche. Compeche is a town right on the Gulf of Mexico and very large and impressive. That evening at dinner Neil shared his testimony of his experiences on Hill Cumorah with the group and me. Scott and I had not heard the full testimony of his experiences. Also, I asked him about his experience of when he was injured. I am grateful that he spent the time with me to share his experience, because I could tell how much it meant to him to share and it meant so much for me to hear it.

Tuesday, January 15th, 2008

We were in a beautiful hotel overlooking the gulf. It would have been fun to spend a little more time in this part of the country. We went to a museum inside of a very ancient Spanish fort. The museum had lots of pottery and a mummy. Also, there was an articulated doll, the arms and legs were able to move because there were pins put in for the joints.

We went down some very narrow roads to the local INAH office looking for more information for Neil. I'm not sure how people were able to find a parking spot in a city like this. I would never survive. There were lines and lines of cars parked on every inch of the side of the road. We spent a couple of hours waiting for the information that Neil had asked for. I took a walk along the walkway by the waterfront to get some exercise and photographs. On our way to Chichen Itza we stopped where there were some ancient stone road rollers. This is what the ancients used to make saacbes or roads.

In the car we listened to an Arthur Oakman taped sermon. This brought on more conversation about religion and our commitment and responsibility to serve God. Various ideas about the tithing law were tossed about.

At the hotel by Chichen Itza there was a very unusual pool. It had natural formations of limestone for the floor of the pool. It had holes and pockets worn out by natural water. The swimming pool was a later

added feature built right over the limestone floor. I took a swim and it was quite chilly, but refreshing.

We sat around the outdoor restaurant and it all seemed quite romantic and relaxing. The beds in the hotel were made of stone slabs with a mattress over it. It was very hard and not my sleep number. Terry and I kept waking each other up with the uncomfortableness of it all.

Wednesday, January 16th, 2008

This was to be our last full day in Mexico. We made our way to Chichen Itza. Terry had been here before and was my tour guide. This pyramid displays the shadow of a serpent going up its sides had during the Equinox. It was fascinating how the ancients could have known how to arrange that. We saw where the water supply was and the ball court. In a temple by the ball court Don Beebe showed three of us that hadn't been there before the bearded white God that was on a carving in the temple. There was another temple by the ball court that had skulls carved into the side of the temple of those that had sacrificed their lives in the ball game. Then we made our way to a plaza that had an observatory and some more temples. Don again showed us the carving of the horse figure and a possible carving of a wheel on a cart, all very fascinating.

There were many vendors scattered around Chichen Itza. There were busloads of people coming to see Chichen Itza. We again bought souvenirs and then made our way to Tulum.

Terry and I toured Tulum. This would have been a very cool place to live if you were living during the time that we were studying. It was a very breezy city because of being right on the coast. There was a beach at the base of the cliff where people were swimming. This was again another very popular place to visit.

Don, Neil and David were searching another site that was currently being excavated. They were searching for a saacbe arch. They didn't have any luck finding that, but Neil was still satisfied by what he did find. Don took a very funny picture of him sticking his face through a hole that was in the roof of a ruin.

We headed back for Cancun to spend the night at a Holiday Inn. We had devotions and retired for the evening.

Thursday, January 17th, 2008

What a glorious day. Unfortunately this was our last day in Mexico, but a good day to get some sun and swim in the hotel swimming pool. I ate breakfast with the guys for the last time and then swam laps in the pool. It felt great to get some relaxation and rays. We had our morning devotions and then went swimming again.

On the way through Cancun we were to keep our eyes open for the laying-on-of-hands stela. And much to the group's delight, and especially Don Beebe, we found not one stela but two along the road. There was the laying-on-of-hands stela and the repentance stela. We took many pictures to share with everyone back home.

We eventually headed to the airport and home to 7 degree temperatures and a wind chill of minus 13. That didn't bother me as much as parting ways with my traveling companions of the last nine days. I'm so glad I got to share this trip with such wonderful people. I feel that God blessed us every step of the way and wouldn't have traded the experience for anything else. God bless each one.

Some things I learned along the way:

1. Mike's definition of five minutes and mine are two different things; especially when my bladder is full.
2. Neil is vertically challenged as well as his other handicaps.
3. Don Beebe is Dr. Don DD Beebe.
4. Neil's favorite program in our present day church is listening circles. (NOT!)
5. Mexican chiggers are worse than American chiggers.
6. Scott Norwood and I were on a double date at the Country Club Plaza about twenty five years ago. I remember it as being a very pleasant experience.

7. Terry and I need to lose weight because we broke a bed and the springs in the backseat of the van we were riding in.
8. David's smile always has the power to cheer me up no matter what the circumstances.
9. Terry doesn't like hot peppers.
10. Mike's favorite food group is coffee only next to chocolate.
11. When you order cereal for breakfast you still get eggs and bacon. I guess I need to practice Spanish more often.
12. Mexico is a very pleasant place to vacation in. It helps if you go with such great tour guides, such as Mike, Neil, and Don.