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A Journey from British Honduras to Santa Cruz, Yucatan.

By WILLIAM MILLER, Assistant Surveyor-General, British Honduras.

IN January last I made an excursion from British Honduras into Yucatan territory as far as Santa Cruz, and it may interest the Society to receive an account of the journey and of the corrections required to be made on this portion of the maps of Yucatan.

The whole of the south-western portion of Yucatan is now in possession of the Santa Cruz Indians, who drove out the Spanish population about fifty years ago. At that time the whole of the country was peopled by the Spaniards of Yucatan (Mexico), and all this district must have been in a thriving and populous condition, as the ruins of well-built stone houses are now to be seen at intervals along the whole road from Bacalar to Santa Cruz, and according to the map,* numerous towns and villages existed, which are not now to be found.

Bacalar is well known to the colonist of British Honduras, and several inhabitants of Corosal have been there, but so far as I can ascertain only two other Englishmen besides myself have been to Santa Cruz. I do not think it would be possible for a white man of any other nationality to go there. The Santa Cruz Indians have a very bad name and there are a good many murders recorded against them, which cause people to be very careful about going into their country. Small parties of these Indians occasionally come so far as Belize, but they are very little known there.

I proceeded in a dory from Corosal by sea to the river Hondo, and about 16 miles from the mouth came to Chac Creek, which runs from Bacalar Lagoon.

I was accompanied by three negroes of Corosal, and reached Bacalar town the second day after starting. This place must at one time have been a very fine town. It extends along the lagoon for about two English miles, and is about one mile broad. The streets are perfectly straight, and are laid out at right angles to each other. All the houses are built of stone covered with cement both outside and inside, which cement is ornamented with coloured designs. The old church is a very fine structure about 200 feet long, and the roof is an arch from end to end. The side walls are carried up to form a parapet hiding the outside of the roof from the streets. Over the entrance-door are spaces left for nine bells, but the bells have been removed by the Indians. I saw four of them in Santa Cruz town. The largest was about two feet six inches across, and bore the inscription, "Felix Lopez me fecit 1730."

There are numbers of human bones in the church, and from their

* 'Mapa de la Peninsula de Yucatan, . . . compilado por Joaquin Hübbe y Andreas Azuar Perez y revisado y aumentado con datos importantes por C. Hermann Berendt, 1878.'

position they were evidently not those of persons buried in the church, as some are in the corners of the chancel, whilst two small chapels at the side of the church have heaps of bones in them. There is not one complete skeleton, all being mixed up together. I was told that when the Indians revolted and were attacking the town many people ran to the church for protection, and were killed just where the bones now lie.

A stone fort overlooks the lagoon. This fort is surrounded by a ditch about 12 feet deep, having perpendicular walls, and some of the cannon now lie in the ditch. The whole town, except on the lagoon side, is surrounded by a stone wall; and taking all these things into consideration, it seems impossible to believe that the wretched Indians could turn out even a small white population in possession of the town. The streets are now nearly all overgrown with bush, and the houses are falling to decay.

No one lives in the town but an Indian guard of about sixty men, which is changed once every two months. They do not live in the old houses, but prefer to build their own stick-and-leaf huts in the gardens and other open spaces.

So soon as I arrived here I called on the Commandante in charge of the guard and told him that I wished to go up to Santa Cruz. He replied that there was no objection, and sent a guard of four soldiers, who remained with me all the way.

The sketch of the route made by me differs in several things from the map referred to. The Indians have a village on Bacalar Lagoon called Xtocmo. This is shown on the map as being upon the eastern side of the lagoon, whereas it should be upon the western side. There is no village at all upon the eastern side of the lagoon. An island is omitted from the map at the northern end of the lagoon, and the village near that point marked on the map as S^a Cruz is now known as Chan Santa Cruz. It is only marked now by a well and the ruins of a stone house. The large town marked on the map as Chan Santacruz is now known as simply Santa Cruz, and is the centre of the Indian country and their capital. The range of high hills shown on the map does not exist.

The entire country along which the road passes from Bacalar to Santa Cruz is flat and covered with high bush. Near Bacalar lagoon it is swampy, but the remainder of the distance is hard dry ground and very stony. In some parts the road goes over places where the rock formation has been thrust upwards, forming hillocks 20 to 30 feet high covered with sharp points. These make travelling tiring work, as the soles of the feet soon become tender, but otherwise the road is very good and kept clear of bush by the Indians for a width of about eight feet, and it would be possible to ride on horseback all the way.

The distances given on the map do not agree with the distances

given by the Indians. I had no instruments, and so had to accept the Indians' version of the number of leagues travelled.

It would not be safe to use any surveying or astronomical instruments there, as the people are constantly in dread of and watching for spies. I inquired how they judged the distances, and they replied that when the Yucatecans were in possession of the country the roads were measured, and every league marked by a cross, the positions of which they know. No doubt the turns of the road would increase the distance shown upon the map to a considerable extent. The Indians now keep crosses every few miles—simply a stick propped up with stones and another tied across it near the top. Many of these crosses have rough roofs of leaf constructed over them.

When the time came to leave the dorey and start up country, I had some difficulty with the men whom I had brought from Corosal, as they feared to go to the town of Santa Cruz.

The journey from Bacalar to Santa Cruz takes the Indians five days, but on occasions of alarm they have marched a thousand men from Santa Cruz to Bacalar within three days. I found it hard work to perform the journey in six days. Two nights have to be passed in the bush, but after that villages can be made convenient halting-places.

Every village has its church, and it is the custom to lodge in them when travelling. They are merely leaf roofs with walls of stick carried only half-way up to the roof. At one end a table is placed for an altar, on which are twelve or fifteen crosses. On arriving at one of these the Indians take off their hats and bow to the crosses; but although professing to be Christians, I do not think they understand much about the Christian faith. They have no priests, but remember a few prayers taught them by the Spaniards, and these they sometimes chant before their altars. None of them have any idea of reading or writing.

Near Tulum is a particular cross, from which the Indians say the voice of God issues, and on all grave occasions this cross is consulted and they act in accordance with the directions given by the voice which issues from the cross. All the chiefs of the nation are appointed by it. A few years ago a Yucatecan priest went by sea to Tulum. He was taken before this cross and interrogated, when the cross directed that the priest should be killed, which was promptly done, and since that time no priest has attempted to enter the country.

I had a great desire to get as far as Tulum to see this wonderful cross, but my men refused to go beyond Santa Cruz, as they stated that every stranger had to interview the cross and they feared the ordeal. It is said to be four days' journey from Santa Cruz, and the road is only a track through the bush.

It is impossible to ascertain who is the manipulator of this cross or to what extent the chiefs believe in it, or are responsible for the fraud, but I am sure that the majority of the Indians implicitly believe that

the voice which issues from the cross is the voice of God; and they believe that if an enemy were to try to reach Tulum, the power of the cross would make the road full of rocks and holes and prevent the enemy reaching it.

The name of the present chief of the Indians is "Aniceto Sul," but he is generally known as "Don Anis" or "The Governor." He lives in the town of San Pedro, four leagues from Santa Cruz. When I arrived there he had just lost the sight of one eye, and believing he was bewitched, he had killed the man and his wife whom he suspected of doing it, the day before my arrival, and he believed his eye was getting better in consequence.

It is surprising to hear the pious ejaculations of these people when one remembers the number of atrocities laid to their charge. Their term for "Thank you" is "God protect you," and when I was leaving them one and all piously hoped that God would be with me on the journey.

It is impossible to get any information from them, as they strongly object to being questioned. Some very simple questions which I asked were answered, but were always supplemented by the counter-question "Why do you wish to know?" On one occasion wishing to hear of ancient Indian ruins, I was questioning several Indians in the chief's house, and getting unsatisfactory answers, pressed the question, when they turned down their hat brims and peeped at me from under them, and simply answered in monosyllables. This so frightened my interpreter that he refused to go on with the questions.

Santa Cruz town is very similar to Bacalar, and is occupied by a guard of about 150 men, but nobody lives there permanently. The chiefs meet there for consultation and for settling the affairs of the nation. They are armed with Enfield rifles, and machetes made in the form of a short scimitar, and are very confident that they will be able to beat any army sent against them by the Mexican Government, which they are daily expecting. The machetes are made by themselves, but they have iron through British Honduras, as none appears to exist in their own country. Considering that they have so few tools the machetes are very well made and have handles of horn.

The Indians are in colour a dark brown and have thick jet-black hair which they do not train in any way, and it looks of the same colour and texture and lies in just the same manner as the bearskin headdress of our own Grenadiers. Some of them are well-made stalwart men, but the vast majority are short and slightly made. They dress in cotton trousers and shirt and a straw hat, sandals on the feet, and when on duty as soldiers they have two leather straps, one over each shoulder and crossing on the breast. One strap supports the machete and the other the cartridge-box. These straps are held in to the waist by a belt passing outside them. These straps give them quite a correct military appearance. The trousers are made very wide in the legs, and when

travelling they are rolled up high on the thigh, and when off duty they frequently leave off the shirt and then appear only to have on a waist-cloth. Whilst at the village of Cumictien the whole male population came dressed in this fashion to look at the stranger.

The last chief of the Santa Cruz Indians was killed, together with about twenty other chiefs, by my host at San Pedro, Don Anis, about four years ago, and the said Don Anis now reigns in his stead and will continue to do so until some other chief contrives to get a party sufficiently strong to kill him in his turn.

In the village of Chunculche are several purely white people, some with fair hair. These I was informed are descendents of Spaniards who were not killed by the Indians at the time they revolted, but retained as prisoners. These people speak only the Indian language—"Maya"—and in dress and manner, and so far as I could judge, in ideas, are exactly the same as the Indians by whom they are surrounded.

BELIZE, BRITISH HONDURAS, 1st February, 1888.

Nilometers.

By Colonel J. C. ARDAGH, C.B., R.E.

DURING a residence of five years in Egypt, I have from time to time made notes upon the Nile, which, though far from being complete, may prove interesting and useful to others who take up the subject, and which it may therefore be of utility to place on record.

A historical memoir of the Mekyas or Rodah nilometer is given in vol. xv. of the 'Description de l'Égypte,' by the French Expedition at the beginning of this century, and a plan and section of the Mekyas are given in vol. i. 'État Moderne,' Atlas of Plates, of the same monumental work.

Unfortunately, the reliability of this work is seriously vitiated by what are now well-established errors. The level of the Red Sea, according to the French savants, was nine or ten metres above the Mediterranean, and three or four metres above Low Nile at Cairo. How this result could have been believed, in the face of historical and visible evidences of the existence of ancient canals, is difficult to conceive.

A still more remarkable conclusion, however, was their report that the Birket-el-Keroun, or Lake of the Fayoum, was the original Lake Mœris. As a matter of fact that sheet of water lies no less than 200 feet below the adjacent Nile. It is therefore necessary to receive with great caution, and not without corroboration, the statements of this work.

There were nilometers in the very earliest ages. Those at Edfou and