

## San Pedro, Guatemala

We arrived in Chiapas southern Mexico two months ago. San Cristobal de las Casas, one of the main cities of the state, is a pretty colonial town with painted houses and historic buildings. It

resources. It has oil, wood and water. These resources have been exploited by big companies. On the contrary the indigenous people of this region have nothing, no running water, little wood

from the city is Oventic the main Zapatista administrative center situated in the jungle. We went there twice, each time welcomed by a guy wearing a black mask and each time asked to show our passports and



Zapata and us

is also known for its inhabitants, predominantly Mayan, who wear traditional skirts and pants made of black wool along with colored shirts. Fourteen years ago on January 1st 1994 the EZLN (Zapatista army), mostly composed of indigenous Maya people, invaded the city and declared war on the Mexican government because they were victims of oppression. Chiapas is rich in natural

and no land. After 500 years of exploitation and killing by landowners and governments they decided to rebel and to tell the world they were claiming their rights. As the EZLN is the symbol of the indigenous struggle we really wanted to meet one of their army leaders. The most famous is subcommandant Marcos. San Cristobal de las Casas was a good place to try and not far

explain the reason why we wanted to enter the center. We then had to meet two tribunerals of four people all wearing the "traditional" Zapatista mask. But both times we failed to meet any leader as either they were hidden in the forest (the EZLN is not legal yet) or had left the region with subcommandant Marcos. This year marks a great event in the EZLN history

and for the first time since 1994 Marcos came out of hiding to start a national tour called “la otra campana” (the other campaign). His aim is to meet the people of his country victim of exclusion and poverty and to encourage them to unite and fight pacifically for a better life and conditions. This message is for both the indigenous and non indigenous people of Mexico. He also wants to warn the citizens about the presidential election next July and the incapacity of all candidates to resolve the problems of the country.

conspiracy against him. So we had to buy the newspaper for several days and guess where he might be. We then took a night bus to the city of Campeche on the Atlantic coast the night before Marcos was supposed to speak. On buying the first newspaper there we found we had guessed right. It was clear that Marcos would talk in public that day in the late afternoon. We waited all day suffering from the heat and humidity. We also met all kinds of people gathering to listen to Marcos' speech. Efren and

speech. Marcos denounced the neo-liberalist politics of the Mexican government which was helping the rich get richer and keeping the poor, poor. Half an hour later when he was ready to leave someone in the audience shouted, “Say goodbye to your people, Marcos!” The sub-comandant gave a hand shake to everyone in front of him which provoked a huge surge forwards in the crowd. Fortunately I was able to approach him closely enough to salute him. Marcos then rapidly left the place and we were not able to talk to him



God bless David

For us the fact that Marcos was expressing himself freely was the occasion to try to meet him personally. His tour having started at the beginning of January, he was already far away when we decided to find him. The main problem was that we couldn't find out the details of his programme because Marcos still kept it secret to avoid

Casimiro, 80 and 86 years respectively, told us they still had to work for 38 pesos per day (around US\$4) because the government hadn't granted them a pension. When Marcos arrived a few hours later hundreds of people, indigenous and non indigenous, were waiting for him. The assembly remained silent during the

personally. Anyway this remains a unique experience for us.

A few days later we left Chiapas and Mexico for Guatemala and the heart of the Mayan culture. There we visited Tikal a huge ruined city-state whose zenith was in the 5th century. At that time it is estimated that

there were more than 100 000 people living in the city. Mysteriously the inhabitants left the place around the 9th century probably because of several successive droughts along with other political problems. The Mayan people didn't disappear as often suggested but abandoned their temples and houses and

learned about this conflict which was responsible for the death of thousands of innocent people. Finally peace accords were signed in 1996 putting an end to the 30 years of civil war. To learn more about the Mayan people we went to a small city called Nebaj. Hidden in the middle of the mountains it is a great place to discover

In the guest house we stayed, Lisa 15, taught me to weave and during those three days she had to correct repeatedly my many mistakes! Her hands looked already old from the work, cold water and weather. I finally managed to finish my first piece which was a tortillas cloth made in Ixil colors.

To go further in the mountains after the road's end, we had to walk three days with our 30 pounds backpacks. Here we arrived in the village of Xexocom where we spent our first night in a school classroom lent to us by the mayor. The next day, we climbed 1000 meters in three hours. Higher at 3300 meters was the village of Chortiz surrounded by beautiful Altiplano scenery. People were so unused to seeing visitors that they fled when we tried to approach them to ask directions. Fortunately the men seemed more accustomed to foreigners and helped us to find a place to sleep and to get food. The only family who accepted to give us meals was composed of 14 children though their mother, Maria,

didn't care to cook for two more people! The kids loved us from the moment we arrived and asked us to dance to entertain them each night. It became hard to leave! Later we managed to reach the town of Todos Santos on the other side of the Cuchumatanes mountains. We were at first very surprised to see that everybody in this city were wearing traditional clothes of red pants and blue hats for men, blue skirt and mauve huipil for women. We stayed with a nice family of three women and three terrible small boys. David was very helpful cutting wood everyday for the stove. He even went in the forest to bring back 50 pounds of wood! Everyday we listened to the



Ixil family and I

scattered into the mountains. Today we can see amongst the Guatemalan landscape, thousands of villages whose inhabitants are Ixil, Mam, Tzutujil, Kiche, Pokoman, etc and who speak 23 different dialects of the ancient Mayan language. The Mayan people after that period of strength then suffered all kinds of rights violation from the conquistadors and their descendants. The latest crime against them took place in the 80s when the national army killed more than 200 000 indigenous people. 440 villages were burned and razed. According to the army those acts were necessary to maintain peace in the country. Thanks to Rigoberta Menchu's book published in 1983 the world

more about the Ixil culture. For us it was also the occasion to discover the pleasure of walking through the beautiful markets of Guatemala. Every town and village has its own market once or twice a week. Local people sell their vegetables and fruit crying out "Watermelons, pineapples, mangos, oranges! One quetzal! What do you need, Senorita?". Women wear their traditional cotton shirts called huipil whose colors differ according to the region they inhabit. From Nebaj we walked to Acul a village well known for his weaving. In front of each wooden house a female relative makes huipils, or shawls, that she will sell later in town in order to earn a bit of money.

local radio station broadcasting in Mam the language of the region. Rosendo, the founder of the station told us that more than 200 community radios had been created since the signing of the peace accords in 1996. It's a great way for people to keep in touch with their communities especially for those who live far from the village, in remote houses. Inhabitants can listen to the news in their own language or call the radio stations to give messages. Rosendo also broadcasts traditional

nango we knew we would learn more about time. Don Rigoberto, a famous Maya priest, welcomed us to his mission where a big party was planned the following day, the 23rd of February and Mayan New Year. On "New Year's Eve" the women of the family prepared traditional and ceremonial food for more than 30 guests. We ate tayuyo a mixture of maize (symbol of masculine energy) and beans (feminine energy) cooked in water and drunk atol, a drink made from maize also.

they give us every day. Our offerings (candles, sugar, incense, rosemary and alcohol) were thrown into the big fire. Everyone prayed in ones own language, in ones own rhythm. At the end of the ceremony, the priest told us he was glad we were able to share this vibrant moment with him and his people.

Time has been the center of Mayan religion for more than 5000 years.

The Mayas count time with two different calendars.

One is lunar (260 days) and the other solar (360+5 days). One of the reasons is because those two charts are in direct relation with the earth's movement and have a role in our everyday lives. Hence each day is controlled by one special influence. Used simultaneously, the two calendars create a series of time cycles. A 5125 years time cycle will end soon.

According to the majority of indigenous people we had the

chance to meet this year the world has

gone too far. There are no limits to the earth's exploitation and disrespect for our brothers and relations. We are losing contact with our creator and the world around us. So what is the future of the human race? The ending cycle will be the beginning of a new one. For some indigenous people it will be the time to recover their freedom and tradition. For us it will be the time to



The weaving

music played on marimbas (wooden xylophones) and allowed people to give their opinions over the radio. The radio is one of the many ways the Mayans maintain their culture. Persecuted till 20 years ago, the Mayan people have decided to persist with their culture. Is it that, time is cyclic, and that the Mayans will regain their former glory? Continuing onto Momoste-

According to Mayan genesis written in the Pop Wuj (sacred book) people were made from maize. After the meal the marimabas played and we all danced together. The next day we left the house at 4am to go to a sacred hill outside the town. For the first day of the solar year we made a ceremony to thank the Creator, Mother Earth and our ancestors for the food and the protection



Little guys from Todos Santos

realize how dangerous our actions have been and to change them radically. Without a mother to feed her children, children can't survive!

To all our Mexican and Guatemalan friends, Tandish, Chjonte, Maltioche, gracias



Wuqub Kiej - Maya new year's eve

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« Quand vous aurez coupe le dernier arbre, péché le dernier poisson et pollué la dernière rivière, vous réaliserez alors que l'argent ne se mange pas »



Wuqub Kiej - Maya new year's eve

Nous tenons à remercier Noe Pinada, Fernando Echeverria, les Zapatistes d'Oventic et de la Garrucha, Miguel Brito, Dona Magdalena, Lisa, Eusebia, Faustina et Marcela, Rosendro Pablo Ramirez, Fortunato Pablo Mendoza, Don Rigoberto Itzep Chauchavac, Anita Garr, Victoria Kiej, Crecencia Pu Maria Akabal et l'association B elejeb E, notre webmaster Delphine, Danièle Baudin et Jacques Ducoin pour la logistique.

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