

SUMMER 1995 ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD SCHOOL: AN OVERVIEW

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A five-week summer field school was conducted in the northern Sierra Oriental of northeast Mexico. Ten social science (including anthropology) and one engineering student worked as a field team studying the impacts of new economic development initiatives on a rural *ejido* and participated in a small-scale irrigation/water management project. The field school was directed by Emilia Gonzalez-Clements, applied anthropologist, and L. Davis Clements, Professor of Biological Sciences Engineering/Chemical Engineering/Animal Science at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Course requirements included a readings packet, field journal, 6-page paper and 2-page report. Paper topics were selected by students in areas of their professional interests. Students spent the first week on campus and then traveled to northeastern Mexico. The site was *ejido* Emilio Carranza located 34 kilometers from Los Rayon, Nuevo Leon, itself 2-1/2 hours from Monterrey via a new all-weather road. During the three weeks in the field students learned basic ethnographic techniques and were given opportunities for hands-on training. They were introduced to applied methods by assisting in the construction of a water-catchment/storage tank. Students

returned to Lincoln in the fifth week and spent three days on campus to complete their topic paper and report.

Fieldwork Site

The area is ruggedly mountainous, with peaks reaching 2,500 to 3,000 meters. Emilio Carranza is located adjacent to the Rio Casillas, which provides irrigation for the region renowned for its pecans, avocados, and peaches. The climate is semi-arid, with summer temperatures raging from 25-35 degrees Centigrade.

The people in the region are primarily *mestizos* (European/Indian heritage) whose families have inhabited the area for about 150 years. The primary occupation is farming, both cash crops and subsistence. The language is Spanish.

The main fieldwork location was the former Hacienda Cartagena, about three kilometers upriver from Emilio Carranza.

Course Content

The field school curriculum included an applied anthropology overview, methodology and techniques, rural Mexico and peasantry, ethnographic writing and the research design process.

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Students practiced the lecture materials with key informants, learning interviewing techniques, kinship charts, mapping, and semi-structured interviewing. Tara Twedt, graduate teaching assistant, provided instruction in survival Spanish, and served as interpreter for students unable to speak Spanish. Special content on appropriate technology included energy resources, survival in the field, and water supply and management.

Research Component

Students developed an "ethnographically-informed" report based on their fieldwork. Much of the students' data was derived from interviews with ejido residents. As students and faculty of the University of Nebraska, research using human subjects such as this fieldwork required the approval of the Institutional Review Board. Approval was received under permit #95-06-305EX, 05 June 1995.

Upon their return, students presented their findings in a special symposium held in the department of Anthropology. Two papers derived from student field work are included in *The Nebraska Anthropologist*. Biskup and Boellstorff explore changing economic practices of *hacendado*- and *edijatario*-class women in the face of a regional drought. Pereira presents an ethnobotanical survey with a strong focus on medicinal plant use by local *curanderas*.

A fiesta with Mexican collaborators was held just before the return trip. A local delicacy, *cabrito en sangre* [kid goat blood sauce] was cooked by local women. A *piñata* was presented to one student who had a birthday, and everyone played Mexican bingo. Students contributed their unused informant gifts as prizes, which they creatively wrapped.

Since the fieldschool, one student has returned to the field and two are continuing their research interests in the area. Another appropriate development project was begun over winter break (1995-1996), and the instructors are returning to the site for further research.

Farewell Fiesta and Follow-up