

travel log



Iris Sanderson Jones
contributing travel editor

A day on an old bus, leading to Queretero

It is an old bus, but every numbered seat is reserved for Mexicans traveling from Mexico City northwest to San Juan del Rio Queretero and San Miguel de Allende.

The road rises out of the bowl of Mexico City, through dry stone and cactus hills. A boy and two mules skirt the edge of the only patch of water in a landscape cut by dry river beds.

Here and there a small adobe house marks the land, along with a scattering of huts, cows and sheep eating the dry grass.

As we approach San Juan del Rio, the land takes on a tentative green and an occasional red tile roof is seen. More land is filled here and there are mountain shapes against the horizon.

In a farm yard, cows cluster under the outstretched arms of cactus trees.

The bus system is the lifeline of Mexico. There are four huge bus stations to the north, where hundreds of people and a dozen bus lines crowded a large terminal building centered around a shopping area. The first class buses leave early in the morning. Second class buses leave every hour.

This is the bus that local people use; we had to wait an extra hour because the first bus was already full when we arrived.

Now WE ARE going through a toll booth from the expressway down into the bus station at San Juan del Rio. There is a large bus shelter with more than a dozen buses already parked. Young men meet the bus with trays of goodies held high to the window.

There are cups of frozen sherbet, wax cartons of orange juice and wrapped sandwiches on the trays. A bookseller walks through the bus selling fiction in comic book form.

At Queretero the Saturday afternoon cowboys get on. As the bus empties its passengers at another large bus station, a sea of straw hats begins to move beside the outside door.

They push down the aisle, bronzed faces decorated with moustaches. They are faces full of laughter after a Saturday afternoon visit to the local bar.

These are the faces that you would photograph if you wanted to show central Mexico. A broad flat face with a mop of straight black hair sticking out from under a straw hat. Faces grinning between the hats and the packages that topple out of their arms into the aisle as they jostle and play.

THE OLD ONES are easy to stereotype: lined bronze faces, slightly grizzled chins and Saturday afternoon grins under their straw hat. Even the young are easy to identify. Their skin is smooth, the hair thick and black, the combination of hard work and laughter beginning to show.

As soon as the bus turns left towards the mountains and begins its slow climb towards San Miguel, the scene changes. After 15 minutes up the great spread slopes, the first dozen cowboys get off, spreading to walk long pathways to distance ranches wrapped in stone fences and cactus.

Another stop and a few more campesinos start the long climb home. These are the working men of Mexico, the men who work the ranches for which this dry central country is known.

It is late afternoon now. A field grows a misty green plant that moves like green smoke across the soil. A woman with a red shawl carries two buckets on a pole. Another rides home on a horse. A hacienda faces white into the setting sun. And the bus turns downhill into San Miguel. An ordinary Saturday afternoon in Mexico.

A SERIES of free clinics and slide shows will be offered to hikers and climbers at 7 p.m. Wednesdays, April 23 through May 28, at the Benchmark, a backpackers outlet with stores in Farmington and Rochester.

The schedule: backpacking in the Canadian Rockies, April 23; skiing and winter backpacking in Colorado, April 30; backpacking on Isle Royale, May 7; backpacking in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, May 14; hiking the Bruce Trail in Ontario, May 21; rock climbing in New Hampshire, May 28.

EXCURSION FARES to Florida cities will be offered to people 60 and older by Delta Air Lines May 1 through Dec. 15. These passengers can fly for 50 percent of the one-way coach fare for each portion of the round-trip. Reservations are required seven days in advance.

Delta also will have children's super savers June 1 through Sept. 15, allowing travelers 2-17 years old a free ride if accompanied by an adult older than 12 who pays a super saver fare.

No deer in Dearborn, you say?

By IRIS SANDERSON JONES

There is a stone marker on Michigan Avenue between Southfield Road and Evergreen that marks the Old Sauk Trail. It once stood on the median, in view of Ford World Headquarters, but it now stands at the end of the road that leads to the Fairlane Mansion — once the home of Henry Ford I.

Old Henry they call him in Dearborn. Old Henry and the Old Sauk Trail are essential parts of the history of Dearborn, and part of the experience of being a tourist in this western suburb of Detroit.

At least two million people a year visit Dearborn from around the world. For those of us who live in the other suburbs of Detroit, it may be unknown territory.

Follow me to the old stone marker and you may experience a part of metropolitan Detroit that is new to you. You can see it all from the corner of Southfield Road and Michigan Avenue.

THE OLD SAUK TRAIL (now Michigan Avenue) was an Indian trail between what is now Detroit and Chicago. Pioneers built many of their roads and railroads on Indian trails, as they did on this one.

In 1826, it was the Chicago Military Road. Later the Southern Railway was built along it. Lewis Cass followed it across the state from Detroit to Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) when he and his party crossed the land and tried to change Michigan's image; it had become known as a place of swamp and fever.

By 1835, two stagecoaches a week

To the northeast is Ford headquarters, still known as the Glass House. Beyond it at Ford and Greenfield roads is the land where Old Henry Ford was born. The house in which he was born is now in Greenfield Village.

On the northwest corner, a monorail runs from the copper glass face of the Hyatt Regency Hotel to the Fairlane Shopping Center, both built on Ford Motor Co. land. The hotel is owned by the Ford Land Development Corp. Beyond that, to the west, is the University of Michigan-Dearborn, on the site of Old Henry's home, Fairlane. Fairlane is now a conference center, but thousands of curious tourists visit it every year.

You can eat lunch daily in the restaurant built over the mansion's swimming pool.

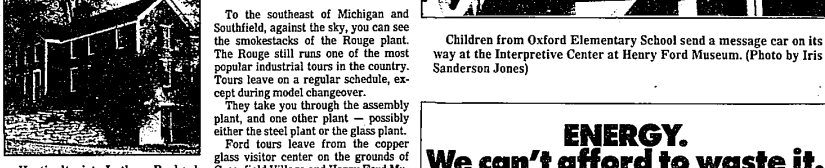
To the southeast of Michigan and Southfield, against the sky, you can see the smokestacks of the Rouge plant. The Rouge still runs one of the most popular industrial tours in the country. Tours leave on a regular schedule, except during model changeover.

They take you through the assembly plant, and one other plant — possibly either the steel plant or the glass plant.

Ford tours leave from the copper glass visitor center on the grounds of Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, which make their skyline against the southwestern side of the Michigan-Southfield intersection.

Always call ahead to check on Ford tours.

Greenfield Village and Henry Ford



Children from Oxford Elementary School send a message card on its way at the Interpretive Center at Henry Ford Museum. (Photo by Iris Sanderson Jones)

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