

These strange figures, painted in red and black, were hidden for centuries on the roof of their isolated cave in the San Baltazar mountains of Lower California.

We Found the Cave of Lost Art

The forgotten by-ways of Lower California still hold many mysteries. Here is one of the strangest—a great pre-historic painting on the roof of a cave in an unknown canyon of the San Baltazar mountains. The very memory of the makers of the painting has passed away. But Edward H. Davis, who found it, declares this story to be entirely factual.

I WAS collecting in Lower California for the Heye Museum of the American Indian, New York, when I heard the story of the Lost Painting. Guillermo, my guide, told me about it as Roberto Thompson and I sat in the patio of Guillermo's home in Mulage in 1926. The fiery Mexican sun had vanished behind the great western mountains. We smelled the savory aroma of frijoles and enchiladas being prepared for our evening meal, and watched the little village inland from the Gulf of California awake.

With the setting of the sun it seemed as if every living thing in the pueblo had suddenly come to life. Nondescript brown dogs left the shade of adobe houses and ran down the unpaved streets to the accompaniment of their staccato barking. Pigs and chickens explored the town, hoping to find bits of food that had escaped their earlier searchings. Between the trunks

By EDWARD H. DAVIS
As told to JOHN CRIPPEN, Jr.

of the giant palm trees lining the shore, I could see the tiny fishing boats with jaunty sails entering the harbor.

Guillermo had been strangely silent for half an hour. When he spoke he approached the subject hesitantly. "You are here to buy things for the *gran museo en Nueva York*. But would you be interested in seeing one of the strangest sights in all Mexico, but something which you cannot buy or take away from Baja California?"

Of course I was interested. "What is it?" I asked. "And where is it?"

Guillermo seemed to be choosing his words with care. "Many years ago, when I was a boy, I heard of this thing—a giant painting that is hidden in a cave in the mountains. It is not painted on canvas as we would do it today. It is painted on the roof of the

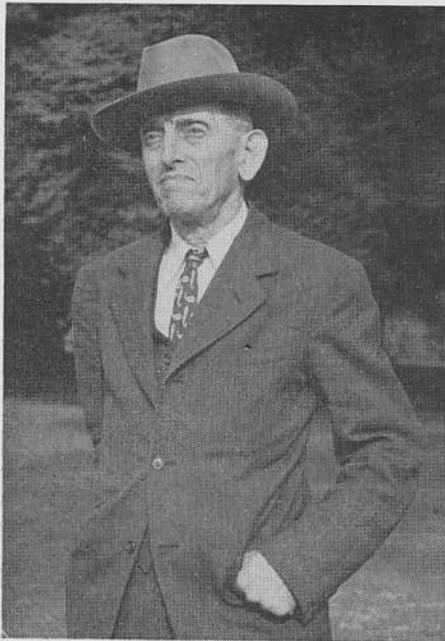
cave and it was hundreds of years old when Cortez conquered Mexico. It is, perhaps, 50 or 60 kilometers from Mulage. All my life I have wanted to search for it and have never had the opportunity."

I looked at my friend Roberto. He was as fascinated with the story as I. Guillermo could see that our minds were made up.

"Good!" he said. "Perhaps it is nothing more than a story that has been passed down from the ancient people. But we shall see."

We set out the next morning as the sun rose over the wide gulf, heading toward the distant San Baltazar mountains to the west.

We had three riding mules, one pack mule, and a large supply of food, water and blankets. For the first few miles we traveled through a wonderful forest of giant saguaro and cardon cactus. The trunks of some specimens were



Edward H. Davis, who discovered Lost Painting in Lower California while collecting for the Heye Museum of the American Indian 22 years ago.

five feet in diameter and they must have been 40 feet in height. Guillermo rode in the lead, then Roberto Thompson. I followed with a rope to the pack mule.

After about two hours, we entered the foothills of the San Baltazar range. By noon, we were climbing the mountains that form the backbone of Lower California. Our mules were walking on loose rock a great part of the time, and we often were forced to ride within a few feet of cliffs with a sheer 100-yard drop.

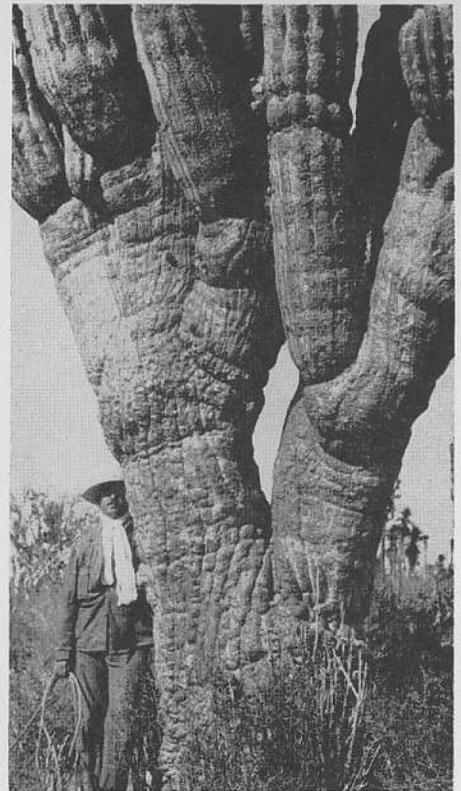
After we made camp that evening, Guillermo told me he was going to hunt fodder for the mules. I looked at the cactus and stunted, spiny desert growths covering the surrounding mountains and turned back to him with a smile.

"Que una broma!"

Guillermo shook his head. "No, Senor, it is no joke. I'll show you."

We walked 100 feet to a small twisted tree that looked similar to the Arizona palo verde. Guillermo started to hack off the thorny, almost leafless branches with his machete.

"Do you mean the mules can eat this?" I asked incredulously.



Roberto Thompson stands beside a giant cardon cactus on the trail to the painted cave.

Desert's Prize Photo Contest . . .

If you know the desert and can picture its sunlight and shadow, its strange plant and animal life, the evidences of its historic past—your photo can win in Desert's monthly contest. The contest is open to amateur or professional photographers, prizes are awarded to the picture the judges decide best presents some phase of the desert or of desert life.

Entries for this month's contest must be in the Desert Magazine office, Palm Desert, California, by February 20, and winning prints will appear in the April issue. Pictures which arrive too late for one month's contest are entered in the next. First prize is \$10.00; second prize, \$5.00. For non-winning pictures accepted for publication, \$3.00 each will be paid.

HERE ARE THE RULES

- 1—Prints for monthly contests must be black and white, 5x7 or larger, printed on glossy paper.
- 2—Each photograph submitted should be fully labeled as to subject, time and place. Also technical data: camera, shutter speed, hour of day, etc.
- 3—PRINTS WILL BE RETURNED ONLY WHEN RETURN POSTAGE IS ENCLOSED.
- 4—All entries must be in the Desert Magazine office by the 20th of the contest month.
- 5—Contests are open to both amateur and professional photographers. Desert Magazine requires first publication rights only of prize winning pictures.
- 6—Time and place of photograph are immaterial, except that it must be from the desert Southwest.
- 7—Judges will be selected from Desert's editorial staff, and awards will be made immediately after the close of the contest each month.

ADDRESS ALL ENTRIES TO PHOTO EDITOR

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The dark little Mexican looked at me with a twinkle in his eyes. "Indeed they can, Senor Davis. This tree is called the *dipua*. It is the best fodder for mules and burros that grows in Lower California."

Sure enough, as soon as we had watered the animals, they attacked the thorny pulp with the same enthusiasm that a Kansas plow horse would show for a bag of oats.

We were on our way shortly after daybreak. The country became even more rugged and forbidding. Many times, the mules were forced to climb precipitous slopes, and to skirt deep gashes in the earth. The giant rocks on the mountainsides had been colored a deep red by thousands of years of exposure to brilliant sunshine. Occasionally, Guillermo stopped to get his bearings. Then we plunged down to the next canyon where thorny desert bushes tore at our clothing.

Toward noon, Guillermo stopped his mule and pointed ahead with obvious excitement.

"There it is, Senores! See the splinter?"

We saw a tall spire of rock, half as high as a skyscraper, that was detached from the nearby cliff and pointed directly upward.

"That is our landmark, Senores. If the story is true, we are not far from the lost painting in the cave!"



Edward H. Davis at the trail's end, gazing at the figures on the roof of painted cave.

Even the animals seemed to sense our excitement, and we proceeded at a brisk pace, hugging the side of the canyon as we scanned the rocky walls for any sign of an opening.

Guillermo was the first to see it. "Look, Senores," he called. "Up ahead!"

I saw what appeared to be a shadow behind some large boulders. Then we passed behind shrubbery on the desert floor and I was unable to see the cave again until we rounded a corner and arrived at the entrance.

The opening was enormous—a great gash fully 20 feet high, and 100 feet wide in the side of the mountain. The floor was level and sandy, and as we rode inside, triumphant English and Spanish yells reverberated against the walls. There, on the ceiling above our heads and stretching back into the cave as far as we could see, were the paintings! They were life-size, brilliantly colored in red, white and black. The giant mural depicted the scene of savage, prehistoric warfare and, after exploring the rear of the cavern which extended into the mountain for 90 feet, I set up my camera to record the strange sights that lay above us.

We counted 89 figures. Nearly all were men, but a few women and children could be identified. Most of them were standing, although a few lay in a prone position, and nearly all were painted half red and half black, vertically. Thus, the left side of each figure was colored a brilliant red, and the right side was in black. We noticed a few examples where the colors were reversed. Most of the heads were in red, and the arms and legs of all the figures were spread apart, showing the fingers and toes.

Many of the specimens were painted with arrows and spears protruding from them. One large figure, done entirely in white, was completely transfixed by a black spear. We speculated that this, perhaps, represented a chief of the opposing tribes.

One problem bothered us. With the enormous ceiling a full twenty feet from the floor of the cave, how did the prehistoric artist paint the mural? The desert shrubs in that region are so small and twisted that it would be impossible to fashion them into a ladder. We finally concluded that great quantities of rock must have been carried into the cavern to make a raised platform reaching nearly to the roof. Then, when the work was finished, the rock was carried out to the floor of the desert.

As we returned to Mulage, we speculated as to what tribe of Indians could have executed this remarkable drawing. Lower California was first explored in 1539. The early Spaniards left quite voluminous records on the Indians of that day. This section of the peninsula was populated then by three tribes, the Cochimi, the Guayacura and the Pericues. They were all so primitive that it seemed beyond belief that they could have executed the giant mural.

As soon as we reached Mulage, I went to Father Cesar Casaldi, the local Catholic priest, an outstanding authority on the Indians of Lower California. He agreed that it was impossible that the aborigines of the colonial days could have painted the huge mural, and it certainly was not done since that time. Father Casaldi told me, however, that the early Indians did

paint themselves red and black when going to war.

We reached the same conclusion—the painting must have been done by a superior and unknown race inhabiting Lower California between 500 and 1500 years ago. The more primitive local Indians of the Spanish colonial period, although unable to execute any such project as this, probably retained the custom of red and black war paint.

We discovered the giant painting 22 years ago and it is still there, jealously hiding the secret of its antiquity. It will be there long after modern works of man have fallen into decay—inscrutable, a puzzle for the ages.

Hard Rock Shorty

of
Death
Valley



"Yep, they's a lotta mineral springs over in the Amargosa country," Hard Rock was explaining to the crowd of tourists on the porch at Inferno store.

"There's that alum spring up Eight Ball crick. Over in them badlands is the soda springs. An' there's salt springs and a lotta others, but one yu want t' keep away from is that magnetic spring up near Pisgah Bill's ol' iron mine. That water has so much pull to it it'll jerk the tin can right out a yer hand when yu try to dip up a drink.

"Ol' Pisgah usta get a lot o' meat off that little pond below the spring. Duck's 'd fly in there to spend the night when they wuz comin' south in the fall. When one o' them birds had a band on its leg, like them bird migration fellers put on 'em up north every season, the duck couldn't take off again. Too much magnetism in that water.

"Bill had duck meat all one winter, but he finally had to give it up. Ate so much o' that magnetized bird meat his stomach got magnetic. Swallowed his knife one day an' if there hadn't been a doctor over at the Consolidated mine Bill would 'a strangled to death."