

PALM BRIEFS

Fly and Drive for Mexican Palms

Nothing is more irresistible to me than a new road that opens up a huge area of West Coast Mexico that had been inaccessible. During the Christmas holiday of 1975, I decided to fly to Guadalajara, rent a car, and make a loop trip via Tepic, Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo, and back to Guadalajara. For forests of wild palms, tropical beaches, spectacular mountains, oak forests, and a variety of plant communities, I have seen nothing to equal the beauty of this four-day trip. With a few extra days for leisurely exploring it would have been fabulous. I had made reservations for the plane and car, but not for rooms, so I slept in the car. Not recommended, so plan ahead.

Guadalajara north to Tepic is along the West Coast highway and a delightful, though long, day's drive. The fertile plain surrounding the town of Tequila has been converted from maguey to sugar cane as far as the eye can see and a lovely crop to view. Magdalena is famous for opals, including some rare lavender beauties that can be bargained for in local cafes. Plan de Barrancas is the start of the descent into a huge barranca and it is interesting to note the change in vegetation and temperature as one descends. Before reaching Tepic the road passes through a recent lava flow. Stop a moment here to look at the plants that are growing in the lava. There are few adequate motels in Tepic. It was very cold here at night, and no heat or hot water. It was amazing to see the palms and lush tropical plants under cultivation in the motel grounds.

Tepic to Puerto Vallarta is an easy day's drive over a good new road. Unfortunately, there are no shoulders so it is very difficult to find a safe place to pull off the road to investigate a great



1. *Orbignya guacuyule* north of Manzanillo, Mexico.

variety of strange and lovely flowering plants along the road. After leaving Compostela and crossing the ridge of the Sierra, the first wild palms come into view. These are *Orbignya guacuyule*, and they grow in great forests near the sea. These palms are tall with stiff pinnate fronds about 4 m long. They are a beautiful palm related to the coconut and easily recognized by dead fronds hanging down the side of a clean greyish trunk with no crownshaft. Occasionally we saw *Sabal rosei*, which was always growing alone, almost always in association with a strangler fig. These were of medium height and with dark green, very costapalmate leaves. None were in fruit. Once in awhile we would see *Acrocomia mexicana*, a very pretty palm with its slightly greyish feathery fronds. These were usually growing in twos and looked as if they might have been planted around some of the homes. Where the road meets the sea there is

a wonderful lagoon worth a stop. Here we saw over 30 species of land, sea, and water birds in just a few minutes. If you are planning on going south from Puerto Vallarta, the next day fill up with gas, as the only station is in the northern part of town. You may want to make Puerto Vallarta your base, as it has a big jet airport and most of the really wonderful palm sites are just to the north and to the south.

Puerto Vallarta to Manzanillo is over a brand new excellent road. A few words of warning. Get an early start and have a full tank of gas and watch your time as there is little traffic on the road and it is said to be very dangerous at night due to robbers. In spite of other articles to the contrary, there are no reliable places to stay or to get gas or food. We know, as we ran out of gas and had to get Club Med to sell us some—no mean achievement. One of the most interesting parts of the trip is a great mountain chasm about an hour to the south of Puerto Vallarta. Here we saw a forest of *Cryosophila nana*, a fan palm growing as an understory palm in a dry deciduous forest. It was a rather scruffy looking palm with few fronds and few leaves. It was thin-trunked, about 3–4 m tall with long petioles, and was not in flower. It was above the road cliffs and hard to see. Worth the whole trip was the forest of *Orbignya guacuyule* near Melenque, just north of Manzanillo. Some of these huge specimens reached 50–70 m and resembled the *Ceroxylon* that I had seen in the Andes of Columbia on the Palm Society trip the year before. All were in heavy green to greenish-orange fruit with about 200 fruit in a bunch and each fruit about the size of the fruit of the peach palm, *Bactris gasipaes*. Some of the trees seemed to be in bad shape as if they had lethal yellowing and a Mexican we spoke to remarked upon this condition. Juvenile

specimens were abundant and the leaves are used locally for thatch.

Melenque to Guadalajara is over a tortuous old mountain road. We were very glad there was no fog and that our car was small. We left the sea and drove through lovely fields of sugar cane and then began the three hours of climbing the sierra. Just over the summit was an extensive oak forest. On the high plains we stopped for lunch in the pleasant town of Autlan and enjoyed our lunch overlooking a plaza lined with large *Ficus* and streets lined with old *Arecastrum romanzoffianum*. The rest of the drive to Guadalajara is across the lovely high plateau. An alternate route from Manzanillo to Guadalajara passes south along the sea and a lagoon beside great coconut plantations. When the road leaves the sea and turns east, it passes through the town of Colima at the foot of this still active volcano.

Whatever route you follow it will be a trip to remember for the beauty and wildness of the land and palms.

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NOTES ON CULTURE

Windmill Palm Survives Winter of 1976 in Maryland Garden

The windmill palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei*, has proved remarkably hardy as documented by its survival in the garden of Mr. Harry U. Winters of Hagerstown, Maryland.

Mr. Winters planted a small windmill palm less than one foot high in the spring of 1970. To give it the best possible chance for survival, he located it on the southeast side of his home on a slight hill that would provide protection from wind and allow for cold air drain-