



ANCIENT SKIES

"Come Search With Us!"

Official Logbook of the Ancient Astronaut Society

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OUR 150TH ISSUE

MEMBER EXPEDITIONS

By GENE M. PHILLIPS, Founder of the Society

One of the most exciting aspects of the Ancient Astronaut Society has been the planning, arranging and leading our Member Expeditions to remote archaeological sites on every continent on Earth, except for Antarctica. Our purpose was to search for physical evidence to determine whether Earth was visited by intelligent beings from outer space in the remote past and whether highly-developed, technological civilizations existed on Earth before our recorded history. Members were afforded a unique opportunity to view known objects in situ, as well as to search for new evidence.

We explored hundreds of archaeological zones and visited countless museums, historical sites and other places of interest in 42 countries. (See Appendix A at the end of this article for the major archaeological sites we visited.)

We used all forms of transportation, including all types of jets, propeller craft including the venerable DC-3 and the lowly single-engine Cessna, hot-air balloon, cruise ship, hydrofoil, rubber boat, feluca, dugout canoe, train, cable car, limousine, taxi, private car, cattle truck, private bus, public bus, jeep, rickshaw, horses, camels and elephants, and of course, a huge amount of "shank's mare" - walking and climbing.

We have reported on many of our Member Expeditions in Ancient Skies, which included a factual account of our travels, as well as photographs of unusual objects we saw, many of which had never been shown in any publication before. However, I think you will like to have a behind-the-scenes peek at some of the other things we did, difficulties we encountered, and some of the more rewarding and humorous incidents we experienced.

Every Expedition involved painstaking research to determine where to go, what to see, how to get there, where to stay, the logistics of moving a group from one place to another, and many other things. We read books by authors in our field, reviewed articles and photos in National Geographic Magazines and encyclopedias, studied maps and airline schedules and checked on weather and climate conditions in the countries we planned to visit. Our first Expeditions were to Mexico and Central and South America because many of the unusual objects were located there; also it helped that my wife, Doris, is Spanish, was born in Peru and she is fluent in the language.

Sometimes our plans were thwarted because of political upheaval, civil unrest or terrorism at our destination. Twice we cancelled a proposed expedition to the archaeological sites of central Turkey, first because of the TWA plane hijacking in Athens and a few years later when the Gulf War intervened. While on our trips we were often in the wrong place

at the wrong time. In Guatemala we were caught up in a student riot and we could not leave our hotel at night. Another time we went to Cuzco, Peru when the Shining Path was in its heyday and several people had been killed just the day before. And the scariest of all, looking back, was in Beijing, China in 1989. Everything appeared to be quiet and peaceful as we strolled casually along the avenues surrounding Tiananmen Square, but we had difficulty returning to our hotel because the side streets were blocked by the student demonstrations which had begun. The very next day the bloody massacre occurred in Tiananmen Square. Fortunately we had made our "escape" from the city by train the night before.

After our plans for a trip were completed, we sent an itinerary to our members with as much information about the trip as possible, stating precisely what was included in the price and what was not. If breakfasts were included at the hotels, whether it was a full breakfast or continental. If lunch was included was it at a restaurant or a box lunch? Speaking of box lunches, in Guatemala chicken feet are considered a delicacy by the locals, so it was not unusual to open a box lunch and find a yellow chicken foot between two slices of bread.

On one trip to South America we were checking out of our hotel in Rio de Janeiro where continental breakfasts were included in the room rate. The cashier informed me that one of our group owed money. When I asked what it was for he informed me that the member "had an egg for breakfast every morning." I confronted the member and his response was, "I always have an egg for breakfast every morning!"

Is it one of Murphy's Laws that says "if something can go wrong, it will"? That law certainly applies to group travel and quite often the problems are caused by the airline. Failure to depart on time results in missed connections. On one of our trips to Peru our flight from Miami was scheduled to depart at midnight, but after three aborted attempts to take off, we returned to the terminal and waited all night before we could leave. Of course we arrived in Lima 8 hours late, so we missed all our planned activities for that day.

On another Peru Expedition our plane (different airline) was several hours late in departing Peru, causing us to miss our connection in Miami and we had to spend the night there.

On our return from Russia in 1985, our British Airways plane was overloaded because on that very day the Soviet government had expelled all foreign press correspondents and they filled our plane beyond its limit with so many passengers and all their luggage. The plane's fuel tanks were full, so it was decided to remove some fuel to enable us to take off. But, the Russians had no equipment with which to remove the fuel and we had to sit at the

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end of the runway and run the engines until we were light enough to take off!

When we arrived in Luxor, Egypt in 1979 we were too early to board our Nile River cruise ship, so we had to wait on the dock with our luggage. The temperature that day in Luxor was 120°F, the hottest spot in the world! After almost dying from the heat we were finally permitted to board the ship and wait in the lounge until we could check-in, but our luggage had to remain on the dock and the extreme heat melted the ladies' cosmetics in their luggage.

When we were finally permitted to check-in, we were told that our travel agent had made a mistake and there were not enough rooms for our group. The solution was that the single men in our party had to share three to a small stateroom, instead of two.

It was an excellent cruise ship, built in Norway and only one month old. Our staterooms were very comfortable, the food was excellent and the staff was friendly and efficient. We truly enjoyed a relaxing, leisurely cruise up the Nile River, stopping at various archaeological sites along the way to let us visit the ruins. We arrived at Aswan, disembarked and visited the High Dam, explored the re-located ruins of Abu Simbel in 100°F heat and then proceeded to the airport for our flight to Cairo on Egyptian Airlines.

We soon boarded, took our seats in the packed plane and waited and waited; but nothing happened. The plane's door was still open, its engines were off and there was no air conditioning. We began to suffocate - literally! We were not permitted to deplane and many passengers were passing out. After about an hour of agonizing in the extreme heat, two young, sunglasses-bedecked pilots strolled from the terminal, boarded the plane and we were off. Apparently they had been taking a noon-time siesta, or whatever they call it in Egypt. We could not eat our box lunches which the cruise ship had prepared for us because the once-appetizing food was green!

On one of our trips to Guatemala we were scheduled to fly back from Tikal to Guatemala City on the afternoon of December 31, 1978. After exploring the ruins we walked to the small airstrip and presented our tickets to the dispatcher. He shook his head. "There is no such flight as shown on your tickets. We have no other flight out of here today. This is New Year's Eve!" To say that we were shocked is an understatement. Our first inclination was to blame our travel agent, but the dispatcher examined our tickets again and determined that they had been written in Guatemala City by his airline. He got on the radio, explained our predicament to GC and within a couple of hours a big plane touched down on the dusty airstrip. We clambered aboard with the engines still running and we were on our way to celebrate New Year's Eve in our hotel in Guatemala City.

On our Member Expedition to Tibet in 1998, we were scheduled to fly from Lhasa to Kathmandu, Nepal. It is only a one hour flight, but after we had been aloft for 45 minutes, we suddenly made a u-turn in mid-air and headed back to Lhasa! The stewardess announced that the Kathmandu airport was fogged in and we could not land there. When we landed at Lhasa airport we were told to remain in the plane, to see if the fog lifted in Kathmandu. Sure enough, after about an hour's wait, we took off again and made the flight all the way to the now fog-free landing strip. When our guide met us upon our arrival he explained that the Southwest China Airlines was always doing that. The airport was never closed and other airlines were taking off and landing all morning!

Hotels have given us a lot of gray hairs over the years. As in the case of the Nile River cruise ship, we often encountered the problem that the hotel did not have the rooms that were supposedly reserved for us. In a lot of the remote places, the hotel accommodations are not too great. The Ritz Hotel in Villahermosa, Mexico turned out to be a far cry from

its namesake in Paris. On one of our many trips to visit the fantastic ruins at Palenque in southern Mexico, I had specified a certain hotel because it boasted a swimming pool, which is nice to have in a hot rain forest. When we checked in I discovered that the pool was empty! I demanded that the manager fill the pool immediately or we would go to another hotel. He reluctantly agreed and the filling process started. Unfortunately it was quite a deep pool and by the time we checked out two days later, the pool was still not ready for use.

With group travel all expenses must be paid in advance, so there is little recourse when something goes wrong, except to raise as much hell as possible. Sometimes it helps, but more often it just makes you feel better.

On our trip to Australia in 1980, we took a private bus out of Darwin to visit some of the aboriginal sites and our young driver-guide failed to slow down when he came to a stream we had to ford. He hit the water at full speed and, as should have been expected, the force pushed the radiator back against the fan blades, rupturing the radiator and the engine stalled in mid-stream. He managed to get the engine started again, but all the water had gushed out of the radiator. With the help of one of our members who sat over the engine pouring water into the radiator, we were able to limp into our camp. But there we stayed for almost two days until the damage could be repaired.

On one trip to Peru we planned to fly over the Plain of Nazca to view the enigmatic markings. Because our guide permitted us to linger too long en route from Lima to Ica, we were quite late in arriving at the small air strip. Our first "shift" of flights was quite successful and when the planes returned for the second shift, we jumped into our planes and took off for the over-flight of the markings. By the time we reached Nazca it was getting dusk, so we had to cut short our flight and head back to Ica. It was pitch black when we arrived over the landing strip. I could not see the runway, but only a car below us with its headlights on. Fortunately for us our pilot landed the plane safely in the dark with only the car's lights to guide him.

We have had some "near misses" on our journeys. On our 1996 trip to Peru and Ica, where we again flew over Nazca and the markings, we had a very successful flight, using four planes for all our travellers. Just a few months later we learned that on one such routine flight over the Nazca markings one of the planes that we had used and its pilot collided with another plane from a different air service over the outline of the monkey and both planes fell to the ground, killing all persons aboard.

One of the most disruptive aspects of some of our expeditions has been sickness or accident of one or more travellers. Several members were affected by altitude sickness on our trips to Bolivia, Peru and Tibet, and as a matter of course, many members suffered from "Montezuma's Revenge" in Mexico! And, we have had accidents resulting in broken bones. On one of our trips to the ruins of Palenque in Mexico, one of our members fell on the rain slick stones and hurt her arm. Fearing a fracture, we had to take her to the local veterinarian because he was the only one in town with an X-ray machine!

On our trip to Greece in 1987, we scheduled a cruise in the Mediterranean Sea to visit several of the islands. Because of a mix-up with our travel agent we had to book passage on a lesser-known cruise ship, whose name I cannot now recall. It was neither large nor luxurious. In fact, it had seen better days and its stacks spewed fine, black particles onto the deck. We realized we had made a mistake after we learned that except for the Captain and the Purser, none of the crew spoke English.

Everything was routine for the first couple of days when we visited the islands of Santorini and
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Crete and then called at Ephesus on the coast of Turkey to see the ruins. After leaving Ephesus bound for Mykonos, we encountered a terrific windstorm, not unlike the one described in Homer's *Odyssey*. The sky was blue, the sun was shining, but the wind buffeted the ship like a cork in a barrel. Huge waves slammed against the sides, making the ship roll violently and incessantly. This continued for hours so we were unable to make our landing at Mykonos. Most of the passengers on board were violently ill and those who were not were confined to their staterooms.

Fortunately I had not succumbed to seasickness, probably because my bunk was positioned to face the buffeting rather than roll with it. We had endured several hours of this ordeal when suddenly an announcement came over the public address system: "Attention, Attention, squeak - sqwark, hummmm, grrr, starting immed----!" A few seconds later the announcement was repeated, but I could not make it out. Fearing that we were being ordered to abandon ship, I jumped out of my bunk, hurriedly dressed and threw open our stateroom door. The hallway was empty. I decided to go up the three decks to the bridge to see what was happening. In spite of the pitching and rolling of the ship, I made it up the stairs in double quick time and found the Captain in one of the foyers. I breathlessly blurted out: "What was that announcement? I couldn't understand it!"

"Bingo, sir." The Captain answered calmly. "The bingo game is starting."

On our trip to Peru in 1983 we travelled in a deluxe private bus to visit the ruins in the Trujillo area north of Lima. The bus had an on-board toilet and that was quite a luxury and convenience, especially for the older members in a place where there are few or no roadside facilities. As a result, the next trip I planned for Mexico, I specified that our bus for the trip from Merida in the Yucatan to Villahermosa be equipped with an on-board toilet. When we boarded the bus in Merida we were pleased to see the toilet in the back, but when one of our party tried to use it, we were informed that the toilet could not be used because they had no chemicals for it. It had never occurred to me to specify that it had to be a "working" toilet!

On that same trip in 1992 we flew from Villahermosa to Oaxaca in southern Mexico, where we would visit the local ruins and then proceed to the Pacific coast resort of Puerto Escondido for some rest and relaxation. Our Chicago travel agent had assured me that there was no commercial air service between the two cities; therefore we had to take a bus. Because it would be a one-way trip for us, it was much cheaper to take a regularly scheduled "express" bus rather than engaging a private bus. The "express" part meant that it did not stop at every village along the way to pick up passengers. When we arrived in Oaxaca I learned that there was in fact a commercial flight to Puerto Escondido, but we had already paid our bus fare and we were advised that it was a very scenic route, across large mountain ranges. We saw some rather elegant buses, which we assumed would be similar to the bus we would take, but were we ever surprised the next morning when our bus pulled into the terminal for us to board. The bus was old, in run down condition, with shabby, broken and uncomfortable seats. Our luggage was placed in the open rack on top of the bus and tied down with ropes. The driver noticed our concern and assured us that he had not lost a suitcase yet, so we just hoped that it would not rain. We boarded the bus and took off for the eight-hour, scenic tour. The first three or four hours were uneventful and not too exciting because we were driving through small villages and agricultural areas until we came to the mountains, where we made a pit-stop at the top of one mountain.

Because of the long drive, we had two drivers, so the relief driver took over when we resumed our journey. Unfortunately, he had a lead foot - we

went careening down the mountain and it was apparent that the brakes were not in the best condition. After about an hour when we were deep into the mountains, we encountered a violent thunderstorm and torrential rain. Trees had blown down onto the road and we had to stop until they could be removed. Because the hatch in the top of the bus would not close properly the water poured in onto our seats. We could imagine what our luggage would be like. But the worst part was that the bus had no working windshield wipers! How the driver could see through the driving rain and negotiate the winding, rain-swept road was and is still a mystery. We were all exhausted when we finally pulled into the bus terminal in Puerto Escondido where it was bright and sunny. We were relieved to get out of that "death trap". Doris felt it her duty to admonish the driver to have the windshield wipers repaired. His response was, "Why? It is not raining now!"

APPENDIX A: Principal Archaeological Sites Visited.

Australia - Arnhem Land, Ayers Rock.
Bolivia - El Fuerte, Tiahuanaco, Puma Punku.
China - Xi'an, Longmen Caves, Great Wall.
Easter Island
Egypt - Pyramids at Giza, Sphinx, Sakkara, Memphis, Luxor, Karnak, Thebes, Valley of the Kings, Edfu, Esna, Dendera, KomOmbo, Abu Simbel.
England - Stonehenge, Silbury Hill, Avebury.
Greece - Parthenon, Delphi, Olympia, Mycenae, Crete, Knossos, Rhodes, Santorini.
Guatemala - Tikal, Uaxactun, Seibal, Yaxcha, El Baul, Monte Alto, La Democracia, Quirigua.
Honduras - Copan.
India - Varanasi, Sarnath, Khajuraho, Qutab Minar.
Israel - Jericho, Masada, Qum Ran.
Italy - Pompeii, Herculaneum, Val Camonica, Rome.
Jordan - Jerash, Kerak, Madaba, Petra.
Malta - Hagar Qim, Mnajdra, Tarxien, Hypogeum, "cart-ruts".
Mexico - Mexico City, Tula, Teotihuacan, Comalcalco, Palenque, Yaxchilan, Bonampak, Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Sayil, Labna, Kabah, Monte Alban, Mitla, El Rey, Meco, Playa del Carmen, Excaret, Xelha, Tancah, Akumal, Coba, Tulum, Muyil, Chacchoben, Edzna, Tahcok, Xlapal, Ticul, Mayapan, Ake, Ixamal, Dzibilchaltun, Ikil, Yaxuna, Isla Mujeres.
Nepal - Bhaktapur.
Peru - Chan-Chan, Casma Valley, Chanquillo, Pachacamac, Puruchuco, Ica, Nazca, Palpa, Trident at Paracas, Pockmarks at Humay, Toro Muerto, Cuzco, Sacayhuaman, Ke'enko, Tambomachay, Pisac, Ollantaytambo, Machu Picchu, WinayWayna, Sillustani, Uros floating village, Chavin de Huantar.
Turkey - Ephesus.

APPENDIX B: We also climbed Ayers Rock in central Australia; saw the enigmatic rock paintings of the aborigines in Arnhem Land; rode a cable car to the top of Sugar Loaf Mountain in Rio de Janeiro; climbed the Great Wall of China; made a gruelling four-day trip by 4-wheel drive vehicles for 960 km over impossible unpaved roads from Kathmandu, Nepal to Lhasa, Tibet, reaching mountain passes up to 17,500 feet; visited Tashilhunpo and the Potala Palace in Tibet; rode elephants to the Amber Fort in Jaipur, India; visited sugar cane and banana plantations in Guatemala and Honduras; waded in the salty, oily waters of the Dead Sea; walked through the Bridge of Sighs in Venice; visited the Isle of Capri and its Blue Grotto; saw the unusual "cart-ruts" on Malta; flew over the pockmarks at Humay, Peru; took the exhilarating 12 hour train trip from Cuzco to Puno, Peru through the high Andes; climbed the peak of Huayna Picchu; were guests at the exclusive Kenya Safari Club; swam with the dolphins at Roatan Island; saw Mt. Everest and Mt. Fujiyama; explored the "glow-worm" caves in New Zealand; and in Moscow we visited Lenin's Tomb and the Cosmos Space Museum and went to the Moscow Circus, the world's best!

SOME FOND MEMORIES OF OUR MEMBER EXPEDITIONS

BY DORIS L. PHILLIPS, Secretary of the Society

Those of you who love music as much as I do would have been deeply touched by the ineffable impact of a Bach's Toccata reverberating in the magnificent ambit of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, Austria, or by the sublime beauty of a Mozart's Mass sung from the choir loft of a small church by the famous Vienna Boys' Choir. One of our most delightful experiences was our visit to the Vienna Opera House, where we admired the magnificent Gobelins tapestries depicting characters from Mozart's The Magic Flute, and where in the Opera House Museum we saw the fantastic costumes for his Queen of the Night. We also took time in Vienna to visit the General Cemetery to see the tombs of Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms and other great musicians and before which we said a silent "thank you" for giving us the sublime gift of their music.

In Italy we had the delightful experience of attending a performance of Bizet's Carmen in the ancient Roman amphitheater at Verona, world famous for the excellence of its productions and the sophisticated musical knowledge of the audience. Later, it was impressive and admirable to see and hear these "adepts" gather at sidewalk cafes to discuss the performance passionately, in the same manner that our sports fans discuss a game.

After Verona we went to Cremona, the violin capital of the world, to visit the Stradivari Museum. By a stroke of luck we found it open on a holiday when all the other public places were closed. There we admired some of the famous violins made by Stradivari and Amati in the 17th and 18th centuries and saw the tools used in their manufacture.

We travelled on to Milan, a great music city because it is there that you find the world famous La Scala Opera House, which evoked many legendary names in opera and the world of music in general. Its museum of music is one of the best in the world, with a large section devoted exclusively to Giuseppe Verdi, the musical colossus of Italy. Not far from the opera house, we visited Casa Verdi, home of the great operatic composer, which at his death he bequeathed to a Foundation to maintain a home for retired musicians. It is in this house that Verdi is buried alongside his wife, Giuseppina. Outside, in the plaza, a life-size statue of Verdi has been erected by the grateful city.

The Opera House in Sydney, Australia is one of the most impressive and unusual structures in the world. Its multiple roofs rise in great white billows, like the sails of a ship filled with the wind. The building has an extraordinary layout with many halls for opera and other musical and stage productions. In its museum we admired, among others, the costumes of the great Chaliapin in the role of Boris Godunov and of the immortal Caruso as Pagliaccio.

In St. Petersburg, Russia we attended a production of Verdi's La Traviata. It sounded a bit strange because it was sung in Russian rather than Italian. The exclamation by the tenor, Alfredo, of "Si!" came out as "Da!", but the opera was well presented and very enjoyable. We also took time in St. Petersburg to visit the tombs of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky and others. It was a little eerie to see all the great names on the tombstones.

It would have been unpardonable to be in Russia and not pay a visit to Yasnaya Polyana, the home of Leo Tolstoy, one of the giants of literature. The estate, located at about one hundred miles from Moscow near the city of Tula, is of great natural beauty, in a setting of birchwoods and pines. The house that Tolstoy occupied is not very impressive, but rather homey and unpretentious, with a grand piano and portraits of ancestors which remind the visitor that the old occupants had been people of culture

and distinguished lineage. Tolstoy is buried at Yasnaya Polyana among the trees he loved. His grave, a mound neatly covered by grass, appears as a natural part of the luscious landscape.

While we were in Austria we drove into the Vienna Woods to visit the legendary Mayerling, site of the tragic deaths of Crown Prince Rudolf and his lover, Baroness Marie Vetsera. Mayerling is an old, rather small castle which was converted into a hunting "lodge" by Rudolf, and stands at the end of a long avenue of stately pines. In contrast to the sad legend of the ill-fated love affair, the place is relaxing and peaceful. The most poignant and important room in the lodge is the Chapel, which was originally the bedroom where Rudolf and Marie died. The altar sits where the bed had been, and above it there is a large mural portraying the members of the royal family on their knees, praying for Rudolf's soul.

As anyone knows who has enjoyed seeing the brilliant colors of sunrises and sunsets, all are different and each one is unique, depending on the setting. We especially remember the magic of a sunset over the Pacific Ocean at Tahiti and the awesome beauty of the sunrise over Lake Titicaca in Peru.

Aside from music, my second great passion in life is animals, especially cats, big and small. One of my most unforgettable experiences was in Kenya at the Kichwa-Tembo Lodge in the Maasai Mara Game Reserve, where in the middle of the night, while sleeping in our tent, we were awakened by the roar of a lion, one of several that roamed around the compound. A tremendous call, resounding like a clap of thunder, piercing the darkness to send the message that the mighty king of the jungle was awake and wanted to make everyone tremble!

To see a tiger free in its natural habitat is indeed a great and rare experience. But, we were lucky beyond our expectations during our visit to India in 1998. It was in the tiger preserve of Ranthambore where we were treated to the beautiful sight of a magnificent young, but large, tigress. She was totally relaxed, as if "posing" for our cameras in the most accommodating manner, absolutely sure that we were there to admire her just because she was precious to us - and she was so very right!

Now that Gene and I have decided to "retire" from conducting Member Expeditions, I would like to render a personal tribute to our past travelling companions, too numerous to name. We salute all of them for having joined us on our journeys, motivated by intellectual curiosity and the love of adventure and exploration, notwithstanding some of the problems and discomforts we often encountered. Showing a great sense of camaraderie, they were always well disposed to offer assistance whenever it was needed. For this they have secured a special place in our hearts and will always be linked in our minds with the wonderful memories of our Expeditions.

And to all our members, past and present, we extend our heartfelt thanks for joining us in our quest for the truth about humankind's past. We thank all of them for their loyal and generous support and their enlightening comments and collaboration.

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