

Adventure

The Man's Magazine of Exciting Fiction and Fact

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TREASURE BELOW!

By
Gordon
Schendel

POUL ANCHOR ARCHIVES



Treasure maps like this may reveal key to Aztec gold, as yet undiscovered.

Somewhere, hidden, forgotten, fabulous Aztec gold is waiting. In this article may lie breathtaking road signs to buried treasure below the Border

■ **THERE** are billions of dollars in buried and long-forgotten treasure in Mexico just waiting to be discovered.

In fact, because of several unique circumstances, there undoubtedly is far more treasure hidden in Mexico than in any other comparable area; more, possibly, than in all other parts of the world, lumped together.

It includes the fabulous treasure hoards of the ancient Aztecs, Mayans, Olmecs, Toltecs, Zapotecs and Mixtecs, only a part of which was found by Cortes and his Conquistadores. There are also vast amounts of treasure which was buried by wealthy Mexicans during the long, chaotic period of almost endless civil wars. Much of this treasure has never been recovered. In addition, there was considerable loot buried, by those guerrilla leaders who repeatedly ravaged the country. Many of them were killed before they could return to dig it up and enjoy it.

And then there is the famous lost Emperor Maximilian Treasure . . .

Montezuma, the tragic last ruling Emperor of the Aztecs, never revealed the secret hiding place of his great nation's Imperial Treasure even though Cortes' gold-hungry Conquistadores fried the soles of his feet over a slow fire to loosen his tongue. This happened just before the Spaniards forced the captive ruler to mount a parapet and attempt to disperse a furious mob of his people, who

were storming the Aztec Imperial Treasury building. One of the attacking Indians, suspecting the naïve Montezuma of treason, caved in the Imperial skull with a well-directed stone.

The Spaniards were convinced that the Aztecs had hurriedly hauled away the national treasure and effectively hidden it. Some historians have guessed that to balk the hated Spaniards the Aztecs dumped the nation's treasure in the broad, mud-bottomed lake which then surrounded the magnificent Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City. If so, it is undoubtedly under the city's impressive new airport, or beneath a brand-new governmental housing development.

The adventurer, Hernando Cortes, was obsessed to the day of his death by his failure to have found and handed over to his monarch the vanished Aztec Imperial Treasure. Cortes never gave up seeking it, nor could he be persuaded it did not exist.

In fact, it was this obsession which doubtless impelled him to undertake another, and seemingly senseless, expedition into the almost impassable jungles of Honduras. His ostensible purpose was to try to find a second rich Indian city, as magnificent as conquered Tenochtitlan, which lay hidden somewhere in that area.

Significantly, Cortes removed from prison the fiery

FOUL ANCHOR ARCHIVES

Sacrifice of Spanish captives. Rigid
Aztec rites provided stern punishment
for invaders of their treasure temples.





PHOTO U.P.I.

Diver holds up coral-encrusted musket recovered from British frigate believed to have sunk off Florida Keys about 1697.

TREASURE BELOW! CONTINUED

young patriot, Cuauhtemoc, nephew of the slain Montezuma and took him on the expedition.

But the Honduran jungles yielded no treasure, and Cortes returned without Cuauhtemoc. He blandly reported he'd hanged the last Emperor of the Aztecs for plotting a rebellion against His Majesty, the King of Spain.

However, tongues wagged at the time with a tale that has seeped down through the centuries: That it was not treason, but treasure, which caused Cuauhtemoc's death. That Cortes, still doggedly determined to find the vanished Imperial Aztec Treasure, and convinced that the last of the Aztec emperors would be the one person who should know where it had been hidden, had dreamed up that Honduran expedition and taken Cuauhtemoc into the jungle so that he could, without interruption, worm the secret out of his royal captive. It was obvious that Cuauhtemoc had died under unyielding torture rather than disclose the secret to his hated conqueror.

And so, presumably, that vast imperial Aztec treasure still is waiting to be found somewhere in Mexico.

The amount of treasure that undoubtedly remains undiscovered in Mexico really stuns the imagination, especially if one presumes that, as with icebergs, most of its hidden. For, even if Cortes did miss out on the Aztec treasure jackpot, the loot which the Spaniards took from the Aztecs was really astounding. It added up to such an astonishing total, that just to send back to Spain "the royal fifth" required a large fleet of high-masted galleons, twice yearly.

These were the same Spanish bullion fleets, which were preyed upon by Morgan, Drake, LaFitte and other marauders of the Spanish Main. They in turn piled up

fantastic loot, much of which is still buried on lonely Caribbean islands.

HOWEVER, the Aztecs' Tenochtitlan was only the last of a number of city-state Indian civilizations which flowered in Mexico, and, according to many archeologists, not even the most magnificent. For, in what have become archeologically world-famous sites, at Chichen-Itza, Uxmal and Kabah on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, at Monte Alban and Mitla, just north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and at Palenque in Chiapas, the impressive ruins of a half dozen more cities have been found, deep in the jungle.

Why these monumental cities were abandoned has not been learned. The Zapotecs are known to have been conquered by the Aztecs. But the other races are believed to have died out or deserted their splendid cities before the Aztecs ever arrived on the shores of the mountain lake on which they built their capital.

Sufficient gold and jeweled ornaments have been found in these archeological sites to indicate that these races valued and used the precious metals and gem stones much as the Aztecs did. And the river sands and mountains of Mexico are rich in gold, silver and precious gems. Presumably the ruling priesthoods piled up impressive treasures in their temples for the glorification of their gods.

But what has become of these treasures?

Government archeologists, who have done an impressive amount of excavation and restoration at these sites, occasionally have stumbled on eye-popping treasures, usually in the tomb of a high priest. But their finds have been negligible, because, obviously, as in Egypt's famous Burial Place of the Kings, the grave-robbers got there first.

At the Monte Alban site, I found evidence that convinced me. Monte Alban was an awesome metropolis of pyramids, temples, and palaces built on the sheared-off top of a mountain that overlooked a fertile valley. And all around on the steep flanks of this mountain are scattered, like raisins in a cake, the stone tombs of the city's high priesthood and nobility. Mexican archeologists located over a hundred and fifty. Most of them, obviously had been opened and looted long ago. However, the excavators did manage to find, under a deep covering of camouflaging earth, a single tomb.

For, although this tomb looked no more important than the others, treasures found inside were so impressive that an entire room has been set aside for their exhibition at the State Museum in nearby Oaxaca. They included beautiful eggshell-thin bowls and goblets carved from onyx and alabaster, gold jewelry of exquisite design, and pearls as large as olives. There may be more intact, treasure-filled tombs at Monte Alban which have been covered by landslides during the last thousand years.

The Mexican Government is making attempts to recover some of the archeological treasures which have been stolen from the nation. But this is uphill work, especially because of the constant looting which has gone on for centuries. To aid such recoveries, Mexican officials have been authorized to seize any treasure found—which is the principal reason discoveries nowadays aren't publicized.

Recently, the Government archeologists persuaded the

Boston Museum to return to Mexico a large quantity of ceremonial utensils, gold jewelry encrusted with precious stones, the gift from a wealthy American who found it on his plantation in Yucatan.

Suspecting that a deep natural stone pool on his land might have been used by the ancient Mayans as a sacrificial lake, this American confirmed his hypothesis by diving into the black water. In the muck at the bottom he found not only the gold utensils and gem-encrusted jewelry, but also scores of skeletons of young Indian girls. Undoubtedly they were virgins who'd been hurled alive into the pool by the priests as sacrifices. The Mexican government archeologists subsequently took over the pool, and at last reports were continuing to bring up golden trinkets and the bones of virgins.

In spite of the Government's attempts to stop such activities, treasure hunters continue to dig illegally and secretly into the ancient tombs. They are lured, of course, by the stories—both true and false—of the big finds constantly being made.

A YEAR AGO, Mexico City newspapers front-paged a story which asserted that the looting of archeological sites on the Yucatan Peninsula had become a big-time operation, carried on by groups that were secretly hauling away shiploads of archeological treasures.

Admittedly, adequate policing of Mexico's archeological sites to prevent such looting is an almost impossible task. Mexico has a coastline (*Continued on page 75*)

Treasure hoard shows pieces-of-eight (crude "cob" coins) of Spanish Colonial mints in Mexico, Peru and Columbia.



nearly as long as that of the United States and a far smaller coast patrol. Its major archeological sites are scattered over a wide area, and more sites are still being found. For example, the ancient city of Yagul, located between Oaxaca and Mitla, was discovered just recently. The ruins of another impressive ancient city were found last year in Guatemala. In addition, Mexico is dotted by literally hundreds of pyramids, each of which is supposed to contain the treasures of the ancient Indian leader whose bones it harbors.

Nor are treasure hunters in Mexico limited to dry land. The waters off the Yucatan Peninsula, particularly near the Isle of Women and Cozumel are shallow, rough and long have been known as a graveyard of ships. And many a British, Dutch or French pirate ship, skulking along the coast while waiting to pounce on a laggard galleon of the Spaniards' bullion fleet, had torn its bottom out on a coral reef, or was caught in a violent storm and went to the bottom with all hands. And possibly a number of chests of loot, as well!

The waters in that area are so clear that, on a calm day, it is often possible to see the ribs of a sunken four-master or brigantine sticking up out of the white coral bottom, usually no more than two or three fathoms down.

And ever so often, a sleek boat from the States, usually a charter job from Tampa or Key West, will cruise off the tip of the peninsula, or down its east coast past Cozumel, until a sunken wreck is spotted. Then the crew will heave anchor and break out the aqualungs and other skin-diving equipment.

The consistent reports are that these casual, vacationing sunken-treasure seekers have been bringing up pay dirt: rusted cannons, blunderbusses, bell-barrelled pistols, broadswords and belaying pins. And, according to binocular-armed spies ashore, or natives aboard passing fishing boats, they've also been reported as having found smaller objects which were passed from hand to hand—probably gold pieces-of-eight, or a ring from a dead seaman's hand.

Recently, the rumors of rich finds thus being made by vacationing gringos became so annoyingly persistent

that the bureau in charge of archeological sites outfitted a shore-based expedition to investigate one of the old wrecks off Cozumel. And its well-publicized salvage operations brought up a fairly good haul of old weapons, gold and jewels, including a sizeable emerald. They managed to identify the hulk as an eighteenth century English schooner which had broken up on a coral reef.

ANOTHER rich field for treasure seekers in Mexico has been the old homes of the wealthy. This is the result of the bitter and bloody civil wars when guerrilla leaders ravaged the country, killing, looting and burning.

Wealthy Mexicans, especially those living on lonely *haciendas*, soon learned that whenever such disorders broke out there was only one thing to do. And this soon became Standard Operating Procedure: A man would hide his gold and family jewels by plastering them into a hole in a thick masonry wall. Then he would strap on his six-shooters, load his family into a carriage behind his swiftest horses and whip the hell out of the nags—after pointing them toward the nearest big city.

If he made it, he'd stay there until things quieted down. Then he would return home, chisel the family gold and sparklers out of the wall, plaster up the hole, and resume the good life.

However, a high percentage of those wealthy Mexicans never made it to the city. And of those who did, some died natural deaths before they could return to recover their stashed-away treasures. The consequence is that today many of the older Mexican homes can be regarded as excellent prospects for a treasure hunt.

It is, of course, wise to first weigh the fact that landlords are notoriously

crabby with tenants who chop holes in their walls.

To give you an idea of how much treasure probably is hidden in the thick masonry walls of Mexico's old houses, the following incidents all occurred within the last several years in a single town:

The town is San Miguel Allende, a 400-year-old, picturesque place on a mountainside in central Mexico which has become an artists' and writers' colony. It is dotted with big, old houses many with masonry walls several feet thick. Many of them have underground tunnels which connect with the centrally-located, fortress-like churches, built in the days when the Spanish home owners still feared Indian uprisings.

The present owner of one of the town's most imposing houses, was stopped on the street one day by a traveling salesman from Mexico City whom he knew slightly. The man confessed, with obvious embarrassment, that he lacked the price of a hotel room for the night. The local man suggested the salesman stay over night in one of the old villa's many unoccupied rooms. With profuse thanks, the salesman accepted. It was learned subsequently that the salesman borrowed a hammer and nail from a shopkeeper. He explained that his room had no closet and he needed a peg to hang up his hat and coat.

Early next morning, the host stopped in to see the salesman, but the man had departed. The owner decided to look around and, to his amazement, found in one of the walls a brand-new hole about four feet square.

He was understandably annoyed. What had his overnight guest been doing? He was even more annoyed when he learned, very much later, that the salesman had quit his job that very next day, saying he'd just inherited a large fortune.

The salesman was seen in Monte Carlo, where he was reported as living the Life of Riley.

AS almost anywhere in Mexico, in San Miguel you hear tales of a poor family suddenly and inexplicably becoming rich. Invariably, the gossip revolves around the discovery of some buried treasure. But nobody expects the lucky person to admit the source of his good fortune, since the Government can confiscate it.

However, it was impossible to sup-

press what happened when one of the town's drunkards staggered home late one night in his habitual semi-comatose condition. Upbraided and berated by his furious wife, as he entered the door she started beating him about the head with her broom. Then the intoxicated man angrily hurled his *machete* at her. Fortunately, the heavy chopping blade swished harmlessly past her head and buried itself in the opposite wall—and she, screaming in fright, ran out the door. Some time later, when she returned with a policeman, she found her husband sprawled on the floor, singing and babbling to himself like a happy baby as he played with a heap of gold coins that had poured from a cache in the wall.

A World War I U-Boat commander who married a Mexican girl and retired to San Miguel had a macabre experience: Inspired by all the stories of buried treasure, he purchased a magnetic metal detector and quickly tried it out in the old house he'd just purchased.

The needle jiggled excitedly when the device was placed over a spot on the thick rear wall. His hammer and chisel exposed a steel buckle. Additional chiseling disclosed this to be attached to a trousers belt which encircled the body of a fully-dressed man sealed upright in the plaster wall. On either side stood the body of another man. Police decided he'd uncovered the apparent robbery and murder of three Monterrey businessmen who had mysteriously disappeared five years before.

Hunting buried treasure has become the favorite activity of members of what could be called "the most relaxed sector" of the Bohemian American colony in San Miguel Allende—to distinguish them from the non-painting painters and non-writing writers.

But not all the gringos in San Miguel are hunting hoards in homes. Two considerably more ambitious projects currently are being discussed in the Cantina Cucaracha:

One is a proposal to organize an expedition to an abandoned gold mine, the San Francisco, in the mountains of the State of Guerrero. Originally opened by the Spaniards and unworked for years, the mine is supposed to be loaded with so-called "free gold" which you can "high-grade"—dig out of the quartz vein.

The kicker, and reason, allegedly, is that Mexican miners are afraid to work in it: You're certain to encounter, if you enter the mine, the ghost who guards the gold—a man who, soon after you start work, will silently approach you from out of the black far reaches of the complex of mine tunnels, holding a lighted candle in one hand—and his head in the other.

And a visit from him, the old Mexican miners in the nearby village will warn you in scared tones, always presages a "fall of rock" from a tunnel roof, probably right where you are standing.

The second, and far bigger project, involves the famous, lost Emperor Maximilian Treasure, about ten million in gold, silver and jewels.

Here's the story, as told to me:

As you may recall, Emperor Maximilian was captured and subsequently executed by the Mexican leader, Benito Juarez, during our own Civil War. This happened after Napoleon pulled the plug on his red-whiskered Hapsburg stooge by recalling his French troops from Mexico. Allegedly captured with Maximilian were the Empress Carlotta's jewels, and all the gold and silver in the Mexican Government's national treasury, which Maximilian thoughtfully had hauled along with him.

ACCORDING to the story, while Juarez was working out the details for the Emperor's date with the firing squad, one of the Mexican generals "went north" with the wagonloads of captured treasure. Presumably his intention was merely to stash it safely away for the Mexican Government until after the war.

The general, with his troops, allegedly took the fabulous treasure to his own *hacienda*, which was a big spread. And there, late one night he took off into the hills with it, using Maximilian's disarmed French bodyguards (who were his prisoners) as human pack-horses. He returned alone and without the treasure.

The very next day, according to the story, a lone French prisoner who'd been overlooked because he was sick, suspecting his vanished comrades' fate, managed to seize a Mexican lieutenant's pistol, and drilled the general between the eyes before he himself was shot down. And then a courier arrived ordering the dead general's troops to rejoin Juarez.

Emperor Maximilian's treasure

never was recovered by the Mexican Government.

About a year ago, some gringo treasure-hunters told me, they'd been sought out and propositioned by an American soldier-of-fortune, who said he knew where Maximilian's treasure was buried. He offered to cut them in on it. Naturally, they were interested.

This gringo said he'd once done a hush-hush job for the old general's two grandsons, and thus had learned about the treasure. The grandsons were also Mexican generals, but after becoming involved in an unsuccessful revolution, had been forced to flee the country. They'd finally returned to Mexico after many years in exile and had fitted together the known facts about the treasure's disappearance into a plausible story of what probably had happened to it. They'd even had a hunch where their grandfather had buried it after (they surmised) forcing Maximilian's bodyguards to dig the hole in which it, and they themselves, undoubtedly were entombed.

ABOUT two years ago, according to this soldier-of-fortune, the two grandsons and he had made a trip to the old *hacienda*, now owned by strangers. At night they'd secretly visited the lonely spot in the hills on the big ranch where, according to the grandsons' hunch, Granddaddy probably had stashed the ten million in loot.

They started digging, and actually uncovered some human bones—together with a scrap of cloth to which was attached a brass button bearing the insignia of Napoleon's Army! Then they suddenly saw several horsemen riding swiftly toward them in the night. So they hastily filled the shallow hole, ran to their car, and fled.

The San Miguel treasure-hunters said that at that point in his recital the soldier-of-fortune actually had taken from his pocket and shown them the French Army uniform button, still attached to its shred of cloth. He told his listeners that both of the general's grandsons recently had been killed in a car accident—which was the reason he was seeking new partners. For a hundred dollars each, he would let them join him in a new try for the treasure.

Naturally, they were all excited.

But before they could get under

way the man was arrested in Mexico City, charged with the robbery and murder of an American woman tourist. It was reported he quickly confessed, and admitted robbing and killing several other American women.

Justice is swift in Mexico. Within days, he was hauled away to begin serving a life sentence.

However, that hasn't thwarted the San Miguel treasure hunters. They've learned that it is sometimes possible,

for a price, to arrange with a Mexican prison warden for a "vacation" for a long-term prisoner. The only catch is that the warden always insists on being supplied with a substitute to occupy the "vacationer's" cell until he returns so that the prison head count will tally.

Now they're looking for a gringo who'll "sit in" for their convict partner.

Anybody interested? ■