

MEXICO: There were people under their sombreros on the street

The small huts on the road were made out of flimsy wood, plaster, adobe and petrified dung. There were fat Mexicans in sombreros taking siestas on the side of the road and chickens were running wild everywhere.

The roads were made of dirt and cobblestones and the children who were playing ran into their homes at the sight of us to alarm their families of the gringos riding through town. The doors shut and old, wrinkled women peeked out their windows to glare at us.

The man selling cervezas at the local cantina was sleeping in a tilted chair with a cowboy hat masking his face and a black pistola hanging out of the front of his pants.

The chickens cleared the way as a stray cow walked across the road in front of us.

I felt like I was on a sound stage at Universal Studios. The town didn't look like it had changed in the last 100 years.

We cleared the village and began our ascent into the high mountains and the jungle. In an hour long period, we watched the landscape transform gradually from dry shrubbery and forest to lush, wet jungle.

The vines were thick and the smells were sweet at times and repugnant at others. Once and awhile we would smell the pleasant aroma of skunk.

I was taking a break under a tree at one point and all of a sudden our guide, Victor, screamed at me.

"Get out from under that tree," he said. "If you stay for two long a shower of fire ants will fall and coat your body and kill you."

I was out of there fast. From then on I knew how the tree looked. It had little needles all over it, and the ants filled it's insides.

I asked the guide if there were any other surprises we should know about, and he told us that we should watch out for the snakes that disguised themselves as dangling vines. He told us if the vine hissed it probably wasn't a vine. We thanked him.

An hour later, we parked our horses and tied them up. Victor led us up a tedious mountain trail up to the source of a beautiful waterfall. Victor told us **Predator** was filmed in the vicinity. He told us we could swim if we wanted to, but not to drink, the water or we might get dysentery.

Dave and I swam in the water, along with a girl we met on the trail who was our age. It was very cold, but refreshing, and if any one still had a hangover at that point it was gone after a quick swim in the waterfall pond.

On the ride back to the stable, our guide rolled a joint on the lead horse and smoked it alone, while he rode. The smell permeated the air and briefly masked the thick smell of vegetation and skunk.

We passed a herd of bulls walking stray through the jungle. They stared at us. I asked victor if we should worry.

"They are nice bulls," he said with a laugh. I was starting to think he may have smoked a little too much Mexican weed.

We returned to the ranch in the late afternoon. We ate ribs and chicken with rice and beans. We had chips and homemade salsa with our tequila shots and cerveza Pacificos. Soon it grew dark and we said good-bye.

We returned to our hotel for a

nap.

We awoke at ten o'clock and showered and dressed.

It was time to go out on the town and experience another balmy Puerto Vallarta night. We could hear maids screaming Mexican slang in the halls. We walked out onto the street, and it smelled of good food until we received the brief scent of urine in the air that came every once and a while.

We walked into the night towards the malecon where everything was happening. We had to be up the next day for a boat ride to a secluded beach and a snorkeling excursion, but we didn't think about it.

A pock-marked Mexican man ran to us, asking if we wanted Chicas for the night-only 1500 pesos. We asked if they had any teeth and he said yes. We said no thanks. Maybe another time.

In Puerto Vallarta, every second you spot something crazy to write about. For instance, the man running down the street one day with a fat chicken under each arm.

I love this place.

I could get used to this and stay there forever.

Music and food make a tasty mix

By Marsha Wagner
Contributing Features Writer

He's a guy with a twinkle in his eye and a refreshingly friendly smile.

Former musician-songwriter Aaron Neilson recorded several albums of alternative music before becoming the assistant food service director for Aramark Catering, the company that feeds the UNLV community. Neilson worked in the food industry while doing his music.

Eventually he left the music business to make the food industry his profession, but music is still a part of his life.

"Working in the food paid the bills," Neilson said.

His big passion for the past two years has been presenting new and exciting food experiences to the students and faculty at UNLV.

"I really listen when students and faculty tell me what they like to eat, because I enjoy satisfying their needs, and I try to do it creatively."

Neilson created a Native American buffet dinner in Sep-

tember. There were exotic dishes such as braised buffalo steak and fried bread, accompanied by Native American music.

Each week the Center Stage, a food presentation developed by Neilson, presents ethnic foods such as middle eastern style rolled sandwiches.



"It's an art to roll those sandwiches. It's similar to rolling sushi only it must be rolled much tighter," he said.

Neilson's creative food presentations take place at the Dining Commons where he works as the assistant food service director. The commons is the pink building behind the Moyer Stu-

dent Union. It serves as the pre-paid eatery for the resident students at UNLV, but it's also open to students not living in the dorms, faculty and the public.

The commons now has a late night program for students and the public, which is overseen by Joe D'Acunto, who is the late night service manager.

"Neilson is a team worker," D'Acunto said. "What I like best about working with Neilson is that he shows his appreciation for the workers efforts, and he has a great sense of humor."

Music is still an important part of Neilson's life, but it's a hobby these days, as is his new interest in astronomy. He recently joined the Las Vegas Astronomy Club, because he enjoys the astronomy parties and viewing the stars through the telescope.

Neilson, a graduate of the Western Culinary School, and his wife, a physical therapist, do not have children.

"We have been so busy we have not had time for a family, but we do want kids, and we're working on it."

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