

SISTER CITY UPDATE

Number 8

Richland Center--Santa Teresa Sister City Project

August 1998

Sea Turtles Need Help

Last year Santa Teresa Mayor Jose Martinez wrote us about the nearby sea turtle nesting beach. He described it as "one of the great marvels that God has given us, but it is now in great danger." Mayor Martinez asked for our help.

The municipality of Santa Teresa is a long thin rectangle extending from the Carazo Plateau, where the city of Santa Teresa is located, to the Pacific Ocean. The area along the ocean, called Chacocente, has some of the most beautiful dry tropical forest left in Nicaragua and a broad beach where giant sea turtles come to lay their eggs.

From June to October each year, five to ten thousand Olive Ridley, Loggerhead, and Leatherback turtles crawl from the ocean to lay their eggs in the sand at Chacocente.

Officially, the turtles are protected by international law. Under the Sandinistas, Chacocente was a functioning refuge. When Neil and Nate Bard visited Chacocente in 1995, they found a field biologist studying the turtles and protecting the hatchlings, a ranger post with information about the turtles, and Sandinista soldiers acting as rangers. But since then the situation has changed.

Nicaraguans eat turtle eggs and consider them a delicacy. The Chacocente community has been legally allowed to take a certain number of eggs to eat or sell. But since 1995 the economic situation in Nicaragua has become much worse. Government money for health, education, and the environment has shrunk or disappeared. Since the 1996 election of right-wing president Arnoldo Aleman, neo-liberalism -- with its exploitation of natural resources -- has become federal policy. Poachers are killing many turtles and stealing their eggs.

Delegation to Chacocente

by Jane Furchgott

Ever since Mayor Martinez wrote his impassioned letter, I've had the sea turtles and the people of Chacocente on my mind. I'm happy to be part of a group from our area travelling to Santa Teresa September 5-19. We intend to learn more about the situation and what we can do to help.

Dr. Rob Horwich, a zoologist from the Cays Mills area, has offered to accompany our group on this fact-finding mission. He and his organization, Community Conservation Consultants

Translation of Part of Mayor Martinez's Letter

Chacocente is one of our poorest areas. The land is not suitable for agriculture because it is soon depleted. But the people do not understand this. They are trapped by hunger and misery, and continue cutting down our forests and selling the wood. Some say it is worst if your children die of hunger, so they cut the trees to sell and use the land to plant.

The problem is that the next year they deforest other areas to do the same, and it continues, ending with the forest gone. And with the forest go the turtles.

Each year it is harder to control poaching, to take care that the turtles may lay their eggs and the eggs are not stolen, so they remain for reproduction. The difficulty is due to not having personnel who work there. The need for employment is great, but there is no money to pay wardens.

We need to employ through the Mayor's Office at least six men who would work in the refuge taking care of the forest and the turtles.

It is very sad to see how people with boats come to the refuge by water to fish or hunt the turtles. Before the turtles even arrive at the beach, poachers kill them to remove their eggs. With no boat to be able to guard the beach from offshore, we can't deal with them. We can only see the boats that arrive to kill the turtles. During past turtle nesting seasons we were at Chacocente, and it was sad to see a large number of turtles mutilated on their feet from being cut by boat propellers. Other turtles arrived cracked by the boats to die on the beach.

(CCC), have worked with communities in Belize and the USA, looking for ways a community can protect its resources and benefit economically by doing so. Rob helped start the Community Baboon Sanctuary for howler monkeys, a locally-run refuge in Belize that attracts eco-tourists. Here in Wisconsin, the CCC helped stimulate the formation of the Kickapoo Reserve.

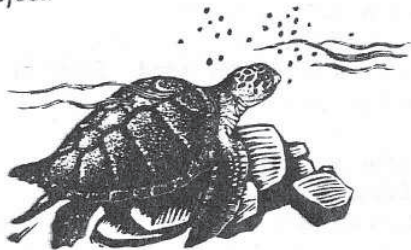
Rob hopes we can help the people of Santa Teresa develop a plan to protect the turtles and through the CCC find grant money for hiring and training people to staff the Chacocente refuge.

We've also contacted Central American environmental organizations that are interested in the turtles at Chacocente. Randall Arauz of the Earth Island Turtle Project has generously offered to set up a meeting for us in Managua with government officials and other environmentalists. He will also visit Chacocente with us. As a sea turtle expert, Randall has been involved in running a refuge at LaFlor, further south on Nicaragua's Pacific Coast.

The status of Chacocente is a very complicated and political issue. I'm glad that three great Spanish speakers from Richland Center are coming along as interpreters, so we can be confident of clear communication.

During the first week of our trip, Marty Clearfield and Bonnie Wright will be interpreting for us. Marty teaches Spanish at North Crawford High School, and Bonnie is a pre-school teacher at Nicaraguan schools and arrange exchanges between them and schools in Wisconsin.

During the second week Jose Marroquin will act as our interpreter. Jose, who was born in El Salvador, is a long-time participant in the Sister City Project.



Sister City Project Meets Monday August 31

The Sister City Project is meeting on Monday, August 31 at 5:30 pm at the Brewer Library, 325 N. Central, Richland Center. Because the group going to Nicaragua plans to follow up our contacts with the medical clinics, schools, and Woman's Group there, we will use this meeting to discuss the upcoming trip and decide what projects to fund. If you have questions, call Jane Furchgott at 583-2431.

Amazingly, all these local people are offering us their scientific and language skills and are still willing to pay their way to Nicaragua. However I know they would appreciate the support of other Sister City Project members in financing the other expenses of the trip.

If you'd like to help the turtles at Chacocente by supporting this delegation, please give your check (made out to the Santa Teresa Fund) to Tom Bachman at the Brewer Library or to a teller at the Richland County Bank. Be sure to specify whether your donation is meant to support this trip or our other projects.

Medicines Arrive Quickly

Our latest shipment of basic medicines to Santa Teresa has been received and distributed in record time. Through Dr. Neil Bard's initiative, the Sister City Project has been sending medicine by ordinary mail on a somewhat regular basis. On August 18, two weeks after the package was sent from Richland Center, Emil Haney spoke by phone to Mayor Martinez, who said the medicines had arrived and had already been distributed to the municipality's various health stations. He thanked us for the shipment and said it would be greatly appreciated.

The package contained antibiotics, xylocaine anesthetic, and pain and cold medications. Our thanks to Richland Hospital pharmacist Frank Ward, who gets the medicines together for us and consistently gives personal financial support.

Richland Area - Santa Teresa
Sister City Project
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