

## A Mexican Wave from Cornwall

Notes from the Cornish Mexican Society visit to Mexico by Richard Williams

For the second time in 300 years Real del Monte, one of the highest settlements in Mexico, witnessed a wave of Cornish visitors.

However, the second wave this summer of 30 members from the Cornish Mexican Society was far fewer than the 350 Cornish miners who made the trek to the mineral rich area in the 1820s.

The catalyst for this recent visit was the twinning of Redruth with Real del Monte and to commemorate and retrace the route of the Great Trek of 1825-26 when a group of Cornish miners transported 1,500 tons of machinery from the open beaches of Mocambo, Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico to mines of Real del Monte heralding the arrival of the industrial revolution in Mexico.

A tribute to Cornish mining, the Real del Monte Miners Statue. Pictures by Ainsley Cocks.

Real del Monte is 90 miles north east of Mexico City. The miners, many of them from the Camborne, Redruth, Gwennap and Lanner areas, set sail from Falmouth and arrived at the port of Veracruz, which, when they arrived, was still under the control of the Spanish. So they had to unload all the 1,500 tons of heavy machinery onto open beaches close to the port; no mean feat. With the help of Mexican porters and mules they then set out to climb first over the Sierra Madre through a pass at 7,500 feet then across the plateau and up to Real del Monte at 9,500 feet, a distance of over 200 miles making their own road as they went. Along the way the party was struck by yellow fever and accidents that cost the lives of almost half the group.

They arrived at Real del Monte on May 1, 1826.

John Buchan, a miner from the trek, wrote: "It was a lovely day and crowds of Mexicans from near and far had assembled to welcome the first entry of a steam engine into any of the mining districts of Mexico. Bells were ringing, bands playing and everyone in holiday attire. Truly it was a day of rejoicing and triumph to the Transport Party who, after so many difficulties from climate, mountains and floods, had at last succeeded in transporting it from the Gulf of Mexico to Real del Monte at an elevation of 9,000 feet above the sea."

Fittingly the Cornish Mexican Society's journey to Real del Monte commenced at Veracruz where a plaque commemorating the arrival of the Cornish and the Industrial Revolution to Mexico in 1824, was presented to the President of Veracruz.

Everywhere the group went they were very warmly welcomed and treated as long lost relatives. Many of the group were tracing distant cousins, especially Roger Clotworthy of Helston, David Evans of Penponds and Liz Dunstan and Gill Rifaat who sought the former houses of their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, and discovering graves of their relatives.

Loreto Mine and Mill.

The Cornish Mexican Society, led by Richard Williams of Poldark Mine, has been actively engaged in promoting Cornwall's historic cultural links with Mexico. These initiatives have led to Redruth twinning with Real del Monte and to a friendship agreement between Camborne and Pachuca. The British Ambassador to Mexico Giles Paxman has taken a keen interest in these agreements and the group was honoured with a reception at Paxman's residence in Mexico City. The friendship agreement between Camborne and Pachuca was signed, amidst splendid ceremony, in Pachuca Town Hall, the 19th century former home of Francis Rule, who was a native of Camborne.

Real del Monte in the past has been a wealthy area, producing large quantities of silver and gold and providing much employment. However, with the decline in mining over the years, the population is experiencing poverty.

The junior members of the party were two sixth form students, Peter Steele-Perkins from Camborne School and Grant Naylor from Redruth School, accompanied by a teacher from Redruth School. Redruth School has established links with the Magatzzi Secondary School in Real del Monte, where two of the teachers are descendents of Cornish miners.

A bar sign depicts the mining heritage of the city.

The Cornish party was very struck by how well the school did with very limited resources and little funding. The pupils were smart and disciplined and demonstrated sound ethical and moral values and a fierce loyalty and respect to their country, their school, their families and each other. They had prepared a play based on the Cornish legend of Tristan and Isolde in honour of the visit.

Real del Monte is very picturesque, it is the highest town in Mexico, and is starting to promote itself as a tourist area to revive the economy after the closure of the mines. Going round the town an amazing number of people came up to the Cornish entourage to talk about their Cornish ancestors.

There is a great deal of Cornish influence around Real del Monte: pitched roofs (having been rebuilt by Cornish miners, the town has retained this tradition making it unique in Mexico), Cornish engine houses, pasties (a great delicacy in the area, although spicier than the traditional recipe), the cemetery and football. The area prides itself on being the cradle of football in Mexico as the first game in the country was played on the patio of one of the mines at Real del Monte.

There is also a local saying that the Cornish brought their weather with them. The group visited Real del Monte during the rainy season and witnessed mist, fog and heavy rain. During the tour the group visited two of the remaining four Cornish engine houses at Mina Acosta and Mina San Pedro.

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From 1825, until the beginning of the 20th century many Cornish mining families settled in the area and many eventually

died there. Above the town of Real del Monte is the Cornish cemetery containing some 760 graves the vast majority of which are of Cornish miners, their families and descendents. The cemetery is still in use today by those descendents. Over the years the cemetery had fallen into disrepair and the British Society in Mexico, along with the town of Real del Monte, have been working together to restore it to its former glory. The leading light in the restoration is Bridget Estavillio, nee Galsworthy. Bridget has strong connections with Cornwall and indeed her brother is Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall.

Cornish graves in the Real del Monte 'British' cemetery.

The highlight of the visit was the Silver Festival at Real del Monte. Led by the Giles Paxman the day started with the rededicated of the cemetery using Cornish water from Poldark Mine, Wendron. Names such as Rule, Skewes, Pengelly, Hosking, Pascoe Traffon and Rowe are common amongst the headstones. A plaque in memory of the many Cornish miners who worked at Real del Monte, donated by the Cornish Mexican Society and the Mayor of Redruth, was unveiled by Richard Williams and the President of Real del Monte.

A wreath was laid at the Miners's Monument by Richard Williams on behalf of the citizens of Cornwall. The group was joined by the Governor of Hidalgo and the town's Silver Festival officially opened. There was a truly amazing variety of silver on display and the town was packed with visitors. As is usual in this area, known as Mexico's little Cornwall, pasties were the food of the day.

One of the many pasty shops.

The visit of the society has had positive results. It has raised awareness both in Cornwall and Mexico of the historic links between the communities. Interest has been so great in Mexico that Ricardo Ludlow of Pachuca has formed a chapter of the Cornish Mexican Society there. The State Government of Hidalgo, the state in which Pachuca and Real del Monte are situated, is seeking to develop closer links with Cornwall. The University of Hidalgo is also seeking links with the Cornwall Campus of Exeter University and the city of Veracruz wishes to link with Falmouth.

Cornwall look forward to being able to repay some of the wonderful hospitality received when some of the Mexican hosts visit Cornwall next year.

For more information on the Cornish Cultural Society visit [www.cornish-mexico.org](http://www.cornish-mexico.org)