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The Tojolobal Indians

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Introduction

In the state of Chiapas, just north of the Guatemala border, live the Tojolobal Indians in scattered villages. According to the official figures of the 1940 census monolinguals, that is, population of five years or over, number 6882.

By observation, gathering data from various Tojolobal natives and also obtaining some information from Julia Supple who has worked among these Indians for about five years, the writer was able to put into writing the following information on The Tojolobal Indians. The writer has been with these natives in the small village, about seventy five homes, in Jotaná for about four months.

The Tojolobal Indians

PEOPLE - They vary a lot in stature, but on the average the women are about four feet ten inches and the men slightly taller. Although their heavy loads are carried on their backs and supported by head bands of woven ropes from maguey fiber or a piece of leather, making them stoop over a good bit of their life-time they have very good posture. Specially do the women have straight backs yet they carry heavy loads of wood, children from a year old to sometimes three years of age, wooden tubs of laundry, baskets of corn or heavy crockery jars of water on both head and back.

FOOD - Their staff of life is the tortilla, made of ground corn and patted into round, flat patties which are toasted on griddles over their wood fires. One of their fall and winter vegetables is a green, prickly vegetable which is shaped like a pear. It can be eaten as a fruit if mixed with spices and sugar. By the middle of December the vines begin to show signs of drying up and usually the natives begin to pull them off of the chayote vines.

They have a lot of beans. Some are black, some red, others of multi-colors both large and small in size.

Pigs are frequently killed so pork is plentiful. Beef and also fowl once in a while, but the latter is generally eaten on fiesta days or at the funerals.

They grow an abundance of oranges and coffee; some have lemon trees, bushes of chili and long, purple, root-

like potatoes. They gather small onions in the mountains when it is springtime, avoñados in their season are plentiful; some fruits like guanadías, guayavas or tiny green tomatoes from other villages near by constitute their diet.

Because Jotaná is the most fertile other villagers will often come to trade their beans, coffee or pine sticks for corn or other vegetables which their own villages lack.

HOUSES - There are about seventy five little homes. There are several types of houses. Some are of stucco. The first stucco houses were built by government workers sent in to teach the natives to make their own like these. They have several rooms. The Indians use these for storing away their corn, for guarding their saddles or for sleeping quarters. They build a separate little hut for kitchen purposes. These stucco houses have native-made tile roofs. The government workers taught the Tojolobal men to make this type of tile. Some of these houses have brick floors in them, also native-made but government workers taught them.

The other houses are built of boards, cornstalks and sticks, one or two rooms, with roofs of tile, thatch or thin slats which are nailed in place by wooden pegs. The trodden-down earth constitutes the floors. Each yard is fenced in by a rock wall or wooden fence to keep out pigs or cattle.

ANIMALS - Almost every family has pigs, a dog or two, and fowl of some kind. They have very few cats, mostly because of superstitious beliefs. The pig is very, very valuable to the Tojolobal native. Sometimes they kill one and sell the

meat and lard to pay their debts. If they do not sell it all they eat part of it, cut the rest into strips and dry it for future use. The pigs have their own little houses which can be entered through the fences without coming into the yards. They also take care of practically all the garbage thrown out over the fences.

A few of the Indians have a number of horses, cows and oxen. The latter is used mainly for plowing their cornfields and hauling poles. Many are too poor to own more than a few pigs or chickens. Some have a few turkeys, others own goats or sheep.