

A Few Different Sleeping Sites, 1950-2010

William V. Davidson, Cultural Geographer

My Five Favorites

1. Tulum ruins, Quintana Roo, México, 1965.

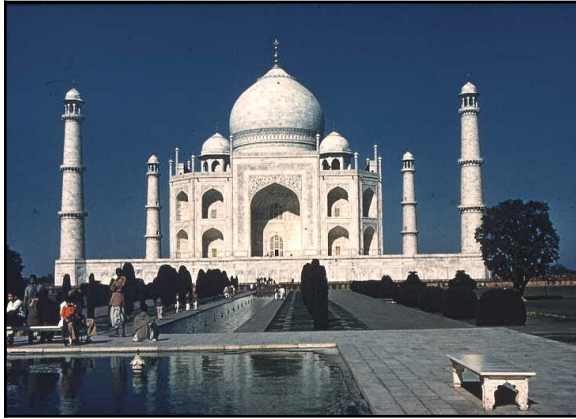
In my jungle hammock in ruins, at structure 20, completely alone for a few nights.

This photograph was taken with a self-timer on my 35 mm camera. I was looking for evidence of a *sac-be*, one of the ancient “white roads” of the Maya that ran from the coast to interior sites. The residents of the hamlet of Tulum, a couple of miles away, were visited, but they were so poor (and perhaps too suspicious of me) they refused to give me even a tortilla. They did allow me to fill my water jug from their well. Water in the small cenote within the walls at Tulum looked a bit dirty for drinking. However, it was a nice place to bathe before going to sleep.



2. Taj Mahal, Agra, India, 1962.

To fulfill a childhood desire, following a stunt by Richard Halliburton, on August 14, under a full moon, I slept on the hard, cold marble floor next to the tomb in the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. I was in India for the summer participating in the Experiment in International Living.



THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL, MEMPHIS, SUNDAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 16, 1962

Memphian Spends A Night In Taj Mahal

By ANGUS McEACHRAN
FOR YEARS a young Southwestern graduate had dreamed not only of seeing the Taj Mahal but spending the night in it.



Mr. Davidson

A few weeks ago he got his chance, and we are happy to report he didn't miff it. After graduation in June, William B. Davidson, 22, 582 North Hollywood was selected to go abroad as a member of Experiment in International Living, Inc.

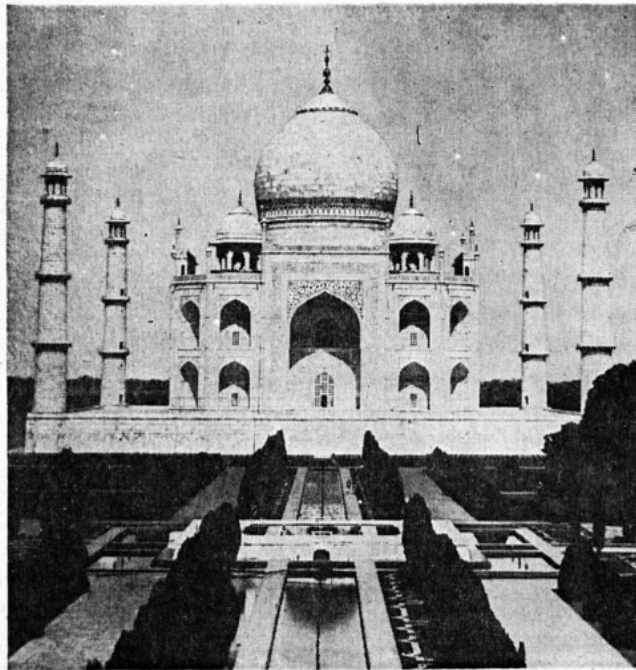
The non-governmental agency sends young people abroad to live in foreign homes to see how the people live and think, attempting to bring about a better understanding of the people and the country. Thirty-four countries participate in the experiment, which has been called the father of the Peace Corps.

Mr. Davidson chose India for one reason: the Taj Mahal. After traveling throughout most of India, he finally arrived in Agra, site of the 330-year-old shrine, on Aug. 14.

A few days later his parents, Mr. and Mrs. June E. Davidson, received a letter that read in part:

"... Several years ago, I read Richard Halliburton's 'Book of Marvels' and remembered he told the story of spending a night in the Taj Mahal. Ever since that time I have wanted to copy the adventure."

(Richard Halliburton, popular



A Young Memphian Slept Here

lar Memphis travel writer, died while sailing a Chinese junk across the Pacific Ocean in 1939.)

"When we arrived on the 14th, I immediately went to see the building. It was raining, but still it was the most beautiful sight I have ever seen."

"I asked one of the guards

if I might spend the night inside the Taj, but he said the gate closed at midnight and everyone must be outside.

"I then looked around the building and garden to see where I could hide for the night. I didn't particularly want to break any rules, but you know at my age, for an adventure like this, it could

not be considered rule breaking."

"To the right of the Taj and well hidden within the gate and wall there was a group of trees which were climbable. Knowing this, I went back to the motel and prepared a snack of bananas, cookies and a bottle of water.

"I went to the shrine about

11:30, and, boy, it really is a beauty by moonlight.

"Both visitors and local people flock to the place on full moon nights. About midnight everyone began leaving, so I climbed up in a small tree to wait.

"About an hour later, I decided to try and get closer. There were two guards by the main gate about 200 yards away, but I just started walking toward the Taj like I was supposed to be there.

"I didn't see anyone and went right inside the building itself. I was moving around very slowly, looking for I don't know what and noticing the moonlight which filtered through the lacey door covering.

"Suddenly in the shadows, I saw a sleeping guard. I am calm now writing this, but I was plenty scared then. All my nerve left and I sank into a corner and sat down.

"I finally went to sleep there but woke up every 20 or 30 minutes until 5:15 when the sun started coming up. I then walked right past the guard. He looked very surprised but didn't say anything. Neither did I.

"I sat down on the bench in front of the building and washed my face and hands in the reflection pool. Then I ate my bananas.

"The guard was still looking at me and I just looked back and smiled. About 6 a.m. people began coming back into the enclosure to see the first light of the sun. It's still beautiful but much better by moonlight, especially if you are in the Taj looking out."

(Mr. Williams will return to Memphis this week to take a position as field representative for Southwestern. He plans to enter law school next year.)

An Experiment In India

S'western Student Gets Scholarship

Southwestern's Student Council president, Bill Davidson, has received a scholarship for a three months visit to India this summer with the Experiment in International Living.

The Memphian, son of Mr. and Mrs. June Davidson, 582 N. Hollywood, is one of 10 American students chosen. He was recommended by Edmund Orgill, former Mayor; Dean Charles I. Diehl and Prof. David M. Amacker of Southwestern; W. J. (Mike) Cody, Memphis attorney who participated in the Experiment while a Southwestern student, and Edward J. Meeman, editor of The Press-Scimitar.

"We will live with Indian families, travel about the country, visit Indian students in universities, meet Indian leaders and try to give their people an insight into our country while gaining a first-hand view of theirs," Davidson said. "The grand purpose of the Experiment is to develop better understanding between the two nations."

Early last fall the energetic student body president took the lead in bringing Clarence Streit, president of International Union for Atlantic Union, to a public meeting. The first step to be taken in strengthening freedom is Atlantic Union, Davidson believes. Under his campus administration books on Atlantic Union have been given out by the Student Council to freshmen and discussion groups held. He served as president of his junior class, was selected Outstanding Sophomore by Omicron Delta Kappa, national honorary leadership fraternity, and is a member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon Fraternity and the tennis team.

3. Bolivian Altiplano, August 1963.

South of Lago Titicaca: abandoned Chipaya-Puquina sod house. Yes, it was cold at 13,000+ feet elevation in the South American winter. With brother Junie and pilot uncle Thayne Muller, while on our single-engine flight around South America. Our only projects around here were to visit the largest South American pilgrimage at Copacabana on the shore of Lake Titicaca and to seek sites of the indigenous Uru people.



4. Cozumel Island, east coast, 1965. At playa Ixlapak, atop the beach berm on the east coast, Sharon and I slept in a turtle hunter's lean-to. She got the wooden platform; I slept on the sand. Note same water jug that I had at Tulum.





5. Cozumel Island, village of Cedral, in the south, 1966.

We spent two nights in Cedral, at the south of the island. The first night we were in the old ruin, which also served as their jail. They put two clean, white, folding cots inside for us. The other night was in the all-thatch “casa grande” of the casique, don Cristino, his wife, and their son Vicente, who was my guide in the south. I gave my jungle hammock to Vicente as a gift when I left the island in August 1966. When we last returned in 2008, his brother almost cried telling me how much Vicente, then passed, loved that hammock. Unlike the Yucatecan hammocks, the U.S. Army WWII surplus jungle hammocks had mosquito netting and a waterproof top cover.





Others

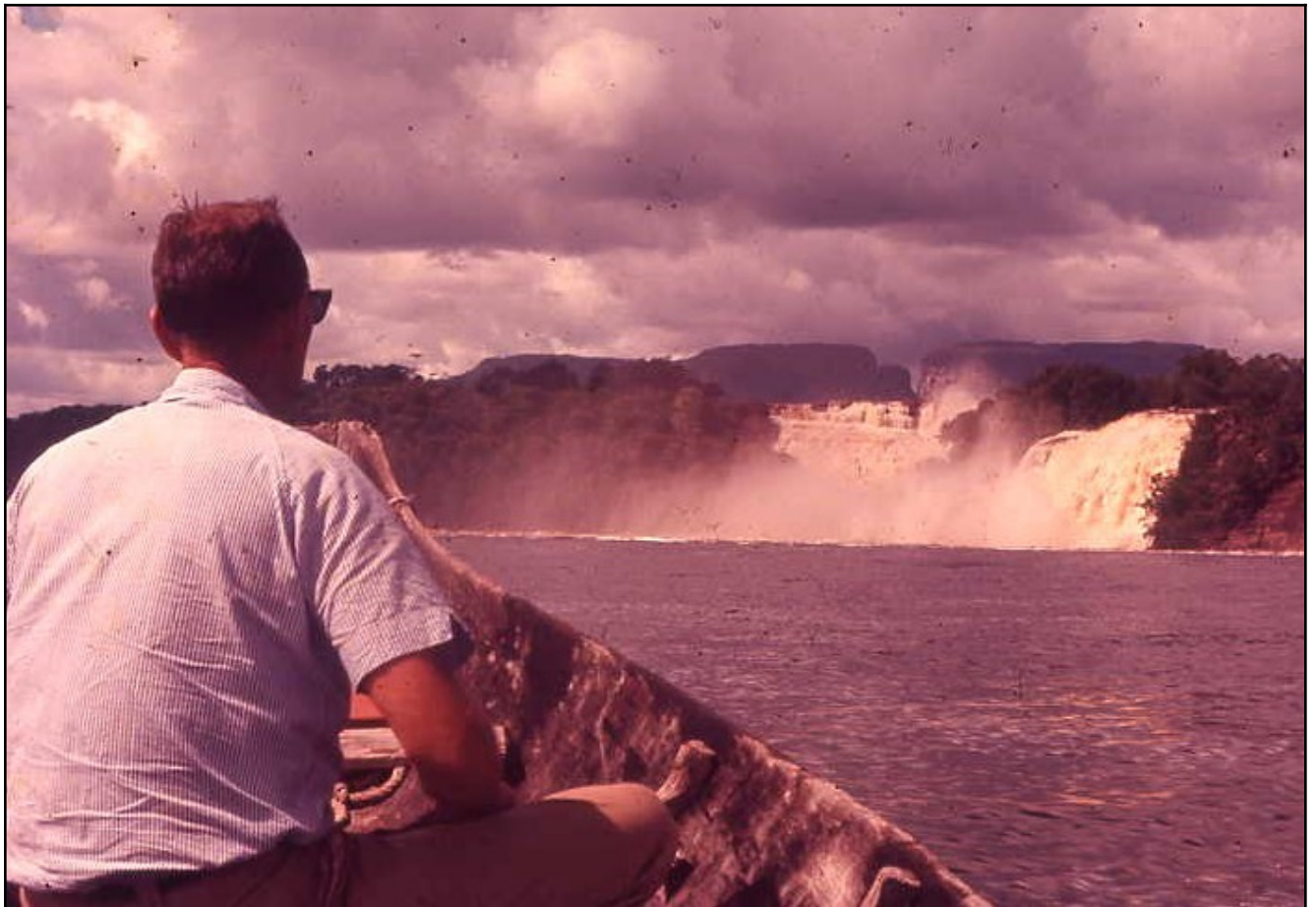
1950s many nights in my jungle hammock and on my raft in the Maddox Bay bottoms, south of Holly Grove, Arkansas, hunting snakes and butterflies for my collections.

1956-57 slept twice, in the rural cemetery, west of Marianna, Ark, on two 80-miles hikes from Memphis to Holly Grove, Arkansas . . . a very safe place to spend the night.

1958 Slept on 10'x12' raft, White River raft trip (Oil Trough-to-Maddox Bay), with Tom White and brother Junie. Photograph is from a local newspaper, Augusta, Arkansas, June 5, 1958.



- 1960 Slept on/under a thin blanket on the boulder beach, west side, Hecla Island, Lake Winnipeg, Canada; after attending the National Student Congress in Minneapolis, August.
- 1961 on 10'x12' raft, Mississippi River six-day raft trip (Memphis-to-Vicksburg), with Bob Barret and Dan Bowen.
- 1962 camped in sand dunes of Cape Cod National Seashore (on way to India), June.
- 1962 near Kanpur, India: slept on dirt floor of rural house, with mom, dad and six kids.
- 1963 Copacabana, Bolivia: slept on kitchen table of restaurant, with Junie and Thayne, August 5. Because of the annual pilgrimage, no rooms were available in the hotels.
- 1964 On first honeymoon, we slept in sleeping bags on sloping, unconsolidated volcanic ash of Mount June, California, and in a VW bug – she in the back seat, me in the front, June.
- 1964 Canaima, Venezuela: On second honeymoon, with Thayne Muller, in a thatch hut at falls on the Río Carrao – flat-top *tepuis* in background. Site of A. Conen Doyle's *Lost World*.



1965 Slept in Lucius Burch's plane at his sand airstrip, Destin, Florida, on night before sailing Gulf of Mexico on his ship *Merry Ark* to Alacrán Reef, Mexico, for diving trip, May. He would not let me stay inside his cabin, because he had a "friend" therein.

1965-6 Cozumel, Yucatán: jungle hammocks in various ruins, bush locations, several nights.

1966 St. Eustatius (Statia) Island, spent one night in jungle hammock in crater of volcano, The Quill, with Lloyd Crawford. St. Kitts in the background, January. With Lucius Burch and Thayne Muller, we had come for the cannons that fired the first salute to the American flag in 1776.



1968 Sonny Thompson's boat, harbor of Oak Ridge, Roatán Island, Honduras.

1972 Jungle hammock in bush, south of entry road, west of Hopkins, Belize.

1972 Open air bunks (without mattress), across from Chetumal bus station, with Mayas, .15 cents U.S.

1972-75 Sand floor, many Garífuna houses and in canoes, north coast Honduras.



My house in Iriona.



Punta Piedra, with Bob Barret, 1974.



1974 Punta Piedra, Garífuna village, north coast Honduras, with Bob Barret.



1975 Sand floor of Garífuna A-frame of Miami, Tornabé, Honduras, west of San Juan.



1976 Palacios – Limón beach hike, north coast of Honduras, with Don Wilhelm: jungle hammock campsite in cassava patch, between Sangrelaya and Iriona Vieja. We had to sneak out of the Sangrelaya a bit after nightfall because Don was afraid to attend the *feria* dance that night . . . he had unwittingly told the mayor's amorous daughter he would be there and see her. Nights spent in Sangrelaya, Limón, and Francia. Overslept in Francia, missed the truck, and had to walk from Francia to Corocito to get bus back to Trujillo. No fun in mid-day sun on east-to-west road without shade. Total walk was about 100 km. Palacios – Sangrelaya = 18 km, Sangrelaya-Limón = 45 km, Limón-Francia (after canoe trip up the río Limoncito) = 10 km, Francia-Corocito=25 km.



1977 Attic loft of house in Pearl Lagoon, Nicaragua. Hard rain during night banging on the tin roof inches above me !!! But free.

1977 Pile dwellings of Laguna Cienaga, Catacas, Colombia. . . no place for kids to run.



1977 The night before slept in a dugout canoe in canal that connects with the lagoon.



1978 Garífuna house (thatch roof, *bajareque* walls) in Punta Gorda, Roatán Island, with Drew.



1979 Getting off the late-night, rough and wicked Petén Road bus in Flores, Lago Petén Itzá, Guatemala and not wanting to spend good money for only a couple of hours of sleep in a cheap hotel (if we could have found one), geographer Bill Bishop and I decided to sleep in the tourist boat, "Flotas El Tigre." We were still there when the owner arrived early in the morning. He didn't seem to mind. Island settlement of Flores is in background.



1980 Tikal ruins, Guatemala, with family in red VW camper, other sites.

1983 Gualaco mountains, Honduras, with family in red VW camper.

1990 During Wampú balsa trip, we slept on the front porches of houses at Vista Linda and boca río Pau (here shown). Nice hosts.



1990 abandoned house, boca Wampú, Honduras (Wampú balsa trip) . . . with noisy pigs, chickens, and dogs beneath. See pig headed for his bed !

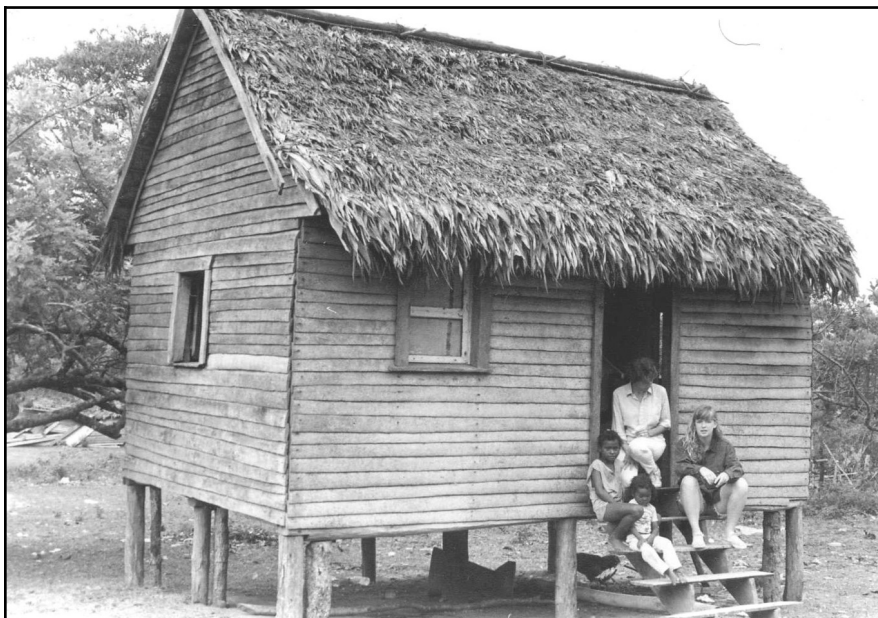


Inside house – note *tarro* (flattened cane) walling.



1990 Catholic Church, bunk beds, Wampusirpe, Honduras.

1991 Miskito house of the Herlihys in Kuri, Honduras, with Sharon, Chad, Jane Anne. It was so dirty and dusty inside we slept inside our tents.



1992 Yoro mountains schoolhouse, with lots of LSU students, January.

1992 Honduras, Agalta Mountains hike campsite, LSU students, January.



1992 Taylor Mack (Taylo) and school kids at Aguanqueterique, shortly before our night in the church at Barrancaray. We were on our hike across the *camino real de Honduras*, with Scottwood . . . for his dissertation research.



Church at Barrancaray: Mayordomo got key and let us spend the night inside.



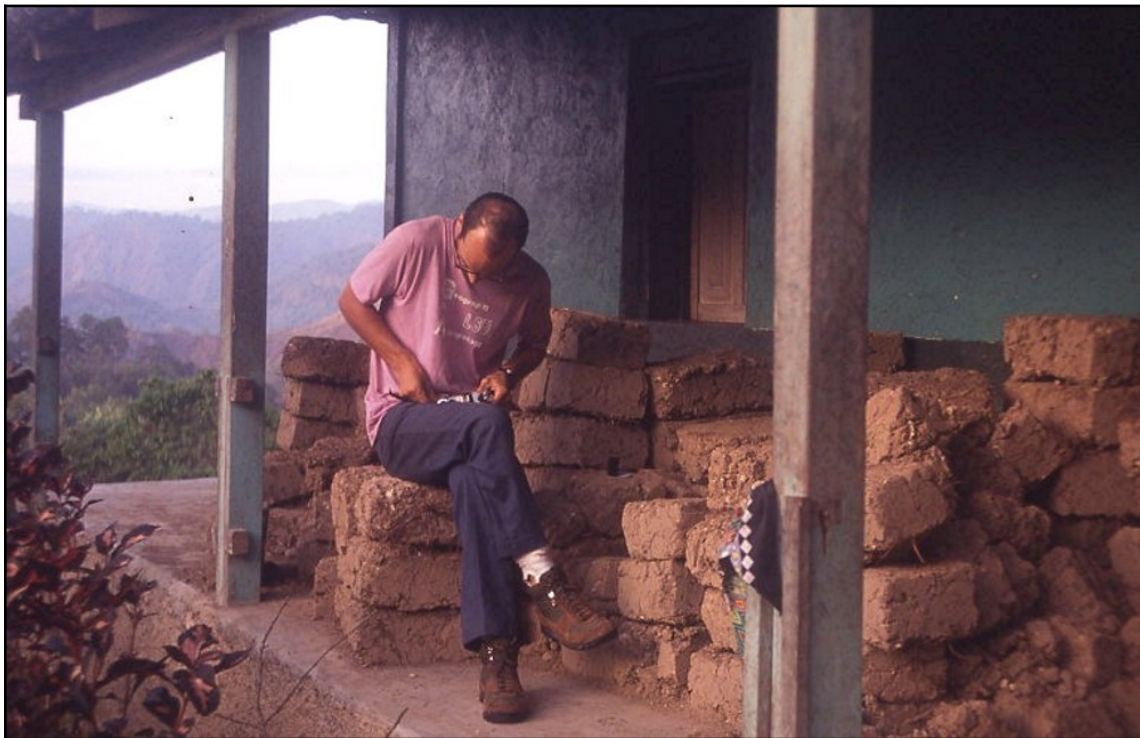
1993 On río Paulaya hike, first night (below). Second night in cacao grove (no photo), with Scottwood and Rickless, in tents.



1993 Third night at house in Las Champas, where we found canoes for trip down Paulaya to Palacios.



1993 Our night at an abandoned house, Buen Pastor, Honduras, while hiking the camino real, with Scott Brady. He was repairing his camera.



1993 At boca río Guineo at río Patuca, eastern Honduras, we slept in a tent within a barbed wire cattle/pig pen, with Chad. Owner said we had to be within the pen to protect us from forest animals. A noisy night, pigs all over us. Chad slept all the way through.



Tawahka raft below our house on the Patuca.



- 1993 A new mud house, Nueva Palestina, río Patuca, with Chad.
- 1994 house under construction, SW corner of San Juan – Erandique intersection, Gracias, Honduras, with Miles Richardson. He typed into the night on his portable. Dedicated.
- 1994 unfinished house, boca río Plátano, Honduras, with Rick, Kara, and Taylo.



- 1997 January, Miskito house in Mangotara; also at Kaukira, Pakwi, Kruta, with Scott, Joby, and Jerry Canerday (Ark Tech). Never took my shoes and socks off and still got pig lice (*niguas*, nee-was) infestations beneath my toenails.



1999 On bunks (with roaches **everywhere**), Nueva Palestina, with Patuca Y2K group, December 30. "Don't go to sleep with your mouth open!"

1999 corn crib of guide/boatman "La Rata," río Patuca, Patuca Y2K expedition, Christmas Eve.



2000 downstream from abandoned Valencia, río Patuca Y2K expedition, January 1. Fished with flashlight and machete.





2004 Vera Cruz, Comayagua, Honduras: at Cristo Negro pilgrimage site up slope, a cold January 15 night in the chapel, with a trader and small son. After freezing a while, they shared their plastic tarp – warm as toast.



2005 “Jungle” lodge near mouth of Río Sábalos, Río San Juan, Nicaragua, with Jaime Incer and crew making a documentary of the river. Jaime and I shared the house on the left. Great view of the river.



2010 Sangrelaya hostel, north coast Honduras, with Scott Brady and Craig Revels, June. Note candle and matches by bed. Price was right.

