

Ted Clements

Ted Clements was an elderly electrician at the El Salvador construction project when I met him for the second time. The first time did not count, as I was too young to do much more than remember his name. He was sharing a room in a poor quality bunkhouse with Charlie Rawlins, an earthmoving cowboy from Grants, New Mexico. Ted was quiet, studious, and given to elaborate story telling. Having spent a lifetime in South America working on all sorts of mines, large and small, he was the precursor to the modern construction type that had "been there, done that".

Ted had grown up in Brooklyn under circumstances that he never discussed. As a young man he was apprenticed to the firm that was electrifying the New York Subway system. This led to a trade education and a certificate of Electrical Engineering from the Bliss Electrical Institute. He carried a massive leather bound handbook; complete with gilt-edged pages, entitled "Bliss's Electrical Handbook" wherever he went.

Ted had started his mining career working for the Patiño interests on the Bolivian Tin fields. He first arrived there shortly after the end of WW I. From Bolivia he graduated up to the mines at Cerro de Pasco, and then appeared at Potrerillos at the start of construction in 1926. He married a Chilean lady around that time, and forsook New York as a base. He kept a farm and his family in Vallenar when he retired in 1950. We had met them as a family on the USS Santa Luisa in 1946. Our family was on their way to Portovelo, Ecuador, and Ted & Co were returning to Potrerillos in Chile. He was at El Salvador in 1958 because he had been enticed out of his retirement by Mr. Koepel and Mr. Couse who wanted a man they could trust to supervise the inspection of the electrical contractors work.

Ted had a fund of good stories, and made an art form of telling them. Rudyard Kipling would have had a field day writing them all up for him.

The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.."

One of his first jobs was as Chief Electrician at some small tin mine on the east slope of the Andes in central Bolivia. I do not know the area, but have heard enough about it. The time was around 1919, and all transport was either by steam train or mule. There were a surprising number of railroads all over the Andes from quite early times. They were remarkably efficient, since their performance depended on the differential pressure between the boiler and the outside air. Altitude was in your favour here, although the rarefied air made fuel burning a tougher job. Ted went into the camp by mule, stayed there for 2 years, and left by *autocarrile*, in this case a T Model Ford with rail wheels on it.

Amongst his duties was the supervision of a hydroelectric power station. This was located some 30 kilometers from the camp, and about 10,000 feet lower down the slope of the Andes. It was a dramatic change from high altitude desert to lush green jungle. Ted rode his mule down the power line to the power station, spent the night at his staff house, and returned the following day. This trip was done weekly

for the two years that he was there. The amiability of the Latino led to him forming good friendships amongst the Indios on the trail.

This led rather quickly to commercial interests that were in fact giving him at least as much income as his wages. He had a roaring trade in eggs and fresh green vegetables, two items that simply did not exist in the official diet of an Andean mining camp. He paid his new found friends in cash, as well as goods from the American store, such as pedal sewing machines, shoes, cloth, and above all, cheap booze. The return trip got to the point where he had to have a hostler in his private employ to run the pack string, and he was spending most of his day on the return trip completing commercial negotiations instead of looking up at the power line.

His position with the Manager was safe, since Mrs. Manager had Standing Order No. 1 for all the eggs and green vegetables she could get! His only problem was the local Catholic Priest. This gentleman was constantly moving up and down the same route extracting money from Ted's suppliers in the form of absolutions for all sorts of sins, real and imagined. The poor Bolivianos were at least 80% pagan, but on the surface professed Catholicism. It finally got to the point where Ted was getting greeted with some hostility, since his arrival with money meant the sure and certain arrival of the tithe gatherer on the following day. This priests morals were not quite what they might have been, and he would accept the cheap booze as readily as the cash. This rapidly led to low living, and the insemination of one of the Indios 13-year-old daughters. This in itself was not an unusual item in Latin America then or possibly even now. The unborn child would be pledged to the Convent/Monastery, and a small stipend to help raise the child would be provided in the interim. The more sensible Bishops would sniff this out and transfer the man to another district, but the real tough nuts simply promoted him up a notch. Showed that he was fertile, and not a queer!

The upshot of this was that Ted found the priest on the trail one morning with his throat slit. The army was called, and the perfunctory investigation decided it must have been *banditos* from over the hill somewhere. Since Ted had never worried about a guard over the previous year, this seemed a bit far-fetched to him. His Indios soon informed him that they had, collectively, killed the bastard while he was passed out drunk and dumped his body as far up the trail as they could carry it that night.

All this prospered Ted no end. Business boomed as the incident was hushed up. He only had one problem, and this was from his best single supplier. These people were actually of the faith, and while not condoning the priest's behavior, they wanted another one sent. The Bishop decreed that the people were to be punished for killing their priest "whom God had sent", and denied them this. The whole problem eventually sifted down to the fact that they had a child that they wanted Baptized.

The man must have had a sudden fit of inspiration. Ted was the only other Caucasian they

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had ever seen besides the Priest. Perhaps the light skin made the man holy, not the cassock and a few other oddments. Ted was asked if he could possibly do the Baptism of the child. This was a bit of a question.

There was simply no one else that he could find that was a man of the cloth within his reach. The couple kept at him, week after week, and even became surly and hinted at withdrawing from the trade if the child was not baptized. This drove Ted to action.

He borrowed a black suit from someone and using a torn up bed sheet and a black photographer's cloth fashioned an outfit that looked something like he remembered Irish priests from his Brooklyn boyhood. He duly appeared at the appointed farm, and asked for the child to be produced. A name was asked; Ted named the child, and then produced Bliss's Electrical Handbook, gilt edges and all. He carefully read the whole chapter on electric motor impedance over the enthralled people, and admonished them to go in peace! No shortchanging there. Ted did a complete and total job, the whole chapter, and nothing less. I have spoken to men of the cloth who tell me that the important part was the faith of the parents. If they were happy that the deed had been done, in the eyes of God, it was. Ted was able to sell his egg and vegetable round to his successor for real hard cash when his contract expired.

"She is like the merchant ships, brining her food from afar".

The scene shifts radically from Bolivia to Chile, and 10 years have passed. One thing has not changed; Ted is still riding a mule up a power line. But this one is really different, as it comes from Barquito, next to Chañaral, up to Potrerillos. It follows the Quebrada Grande up to a point nearly north of Potrerillos, and then makes a dramatic 2000 meter leap up the side of the quebrada, coming out on the pediment of Cerro Vicuna. It then makes a rather leisurely meander over the last 10 kilometers into Potrerillos. The railroad locomotive and repair shops are at Llanta, some 15 kilometers down the canyon from this point. There was for many years a small stone ruin with no roof at a major curve just a kilometer or so down from this point called Piedra Negro. During the construction of the railroad and power line it served as a small Rancho, where workers who were sleeping pretty rough in railroad bunk cars could get their food. Almost the whole of the construction was done, and Ted was doing a final inspection.

People that have lived in Potrerillos will know what I mean by how dismal a cloudy day is. You would possibly see one of these days a year, but then you would get a dramatic snowstorm from the south, and the next morning Doña Iñez would have a new coat of snow for the year. The day itself would be misery, cold, windy, and dark. Down in the bottom of the quebrada, it would be dark from about 2PM on. Ted had left Llanta at noon, and was hoping to make it to Potrerillos in the early evening.



VIEW OF POTRERILLOS SHOWING THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE QUEBRADA GRANDE. TED HAD TO RIDE UP THIS GULCH

He arrived at Piedra Negro around 3, only a few hours before last light, and at least 4 hours out of Potrerillos. This time estimate was made on the assumption that the mule was a good one. He rode up to the rancho, and announced his arrival. The lone occupant, an old woman, invited him into what was really a hovel. Would he like a cup of tea she inquired? The courtly manners apply to one and all in Chile, rich or poor and manners are expected back. Ted thanked her profusely, and replied that a cup of tea would be a most wondrous thing. She disappeared out the back of the house where there was a large fire going (good ACMC railway ties, I might add) and fussed about for a moment. A shouted query was made about whether he wanted milk with his tea. It would be appreciated, he replied. The mug of tea was produced, and it was worth anything on that cold dreary day. Hot, with just the right sugar, and a bit of milk to blunt the tannic acid from tea that had been all day in the pot. Ted followed the usual aimless small talk for several minutes, and then began the ritual of thanking the lady. As an afterthought, he asked where she had gotten fresh milk from in this place. A very simple reply, *de la perra*, from the dog!

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

Ted only ever told one tale of his former home in New York. Fittingly, it was about how he had left New York and become a tramp mine electrician in South America. He had just finished his electrical engineering diploma at Bliss Institute, and was in charge of a gang of men that were installing third rails on the New York subways. This allowed the electric engine to pick up the drive current with a spring-loaded shoe, rather than with a complicated overhead pantograph. WW I was just over, and there was a real shortage of workers. To this end, they employed all of the migrants that they could get their hands on. The ability to speak English was not regarded as a prerequisite to work. The only real credentials you needed was to wear a size 48 coat and a number 4 hat.

They were working on a new branch line, and having completed a large section of third rail, Ted had connected a low amp check current

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between the third rail and the earth. There was always a long and leisurely lunch break, and even with restricted English, the talk soon fell to the pleasures of the flesh. The Italian contingent championed one of their men as real stud material.

Ted always claimed in later life that he did not want to actually see the fearsome weapon unsheathed, merely to put a little mustard into the conversation. He then related a secret that electricians guard with intense jealousy. It is too valuable to just hand out. It seems that the test signal in the third rail, providing one takes his shoes off and stands on the main rail, had miraculous properties. If you were to urinate on the third rail, a sensation that is far more pleasurable than conventional sexual intercourse overcomes you for as long as the current is connected.

Having planted this seed, Ted then got the gang back to work, but was watching Casanova out of the corner of his eye. It soon became apparent that he was looking for a chance to slip off, and try this electrical sex treat in as private a condition as he could arrange. About 10 minutes later, he heard the expected blood curdling yell from around a bend. He got the gang on the run to go and enjoy the spectacle. Casanova was lying on his back between

the two main rails, still pissing into the air, and kicking his heels into the road metal. A good laugh was had by all for about 30 seconds, while he regained his composure. The amperage was low enough that there were supposed to be no ill effects, but even a mild shock right *there* is quite enough.

He then spotted Ted, and let out another blood curdling yell. A fairly large flick knife was produced, and the man started to chase Ted down the tunnel. One thing that Ted had going for him was that the guy had followed instruction and had taken his shoes off, and could not run very well on the sharp 2-inch ballast. Ted was properly booted, and it was fairly easy to outdistance him. There was a screech of "No more babies, I kill!" to speed him on his way. He quickly bolted up one of the stairs, and melted into the street crowd.

When he came to work the next day, there was trouble. The boss would not let him work his old gang. Apparently Casanova had promised to kill him if he ever sighted Ted again. The vision of the knife was still fresh in Ted's mind, and he answered an advert in the paper to go to Bolivia. Within 3 days, he was on a boat to Arica.

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Ted and the Golden Fleece.

Ted told many stories of his wanderings around the Bolivian Altiplano before he moved on to Chile. Bolivia was the principal new source of tin, which was so scarce that we cannot, 80 years later, imagine the interest that was taken. Tinned cans were vital to much of the civilized world's food distribution, and there was no where more than one or two years of world tin reserves. Any find, no matter how remote, commanded instant attention. No where was this pursued more quickly than in the offices of the Patino organization.

Patino himself was a near illiterate mestizo and a small storekeeper in an Andean village. He had grubstaked a number of prospectors, but his crowning achievement was to somehow get the ability to identify some rich tin samples. He probably cheated the original prospector, but he did become the Bolivian Tin King. He founded a strong mining organization by putting good educated men in charge, and repairing to the hardships of the Moulin Rouge and the Rue Pigalle. He and his family plowed the prodigal's path through Paris society for over 30 years.

Ted had somehow scored a rare 2 month vacation, and rather than go out to civilization, he had decided to have a look at Inca ruins. All of these events took place in the area immediately southwest of Cochabamba, near Oruro. His wanderings on a mule with a small retinue led him to many of the noted Inca ruins on the Altiplano. He eventually came to a small village where there was a Belgian monk that held sway over the area. It turned out that this man was not only interested in the Inca civilization; it was his whole consuming life passion.

He had no interest whatsoever in the religious side of his job. He was far enough removed from his Order that about the only thing that ever got to him was the mail, and that usually contained enough money to keep things going. A simple task of filling in the report once a year seemed to keep that source well lubricated. He spent all day wandering and digging up old graves, temple sites, and the like. His name was Estafan, and he had in fact assembled an outstanding collection of rare artifacts. Included in this was a very significant amount of gold. Never mind the archeological value, which had not really improved in 1920 much over what it had been in 1520.

Ted was made welcome for the sake of his skin color, and after presenting a bottle of passable cognac, he was made welcome for his own sake. The old monk was a real enthusiast, and the first evening spent with him looking at his collected bits was apparently about the best show Ted ever saw in a long life of real adventure. There were delicate agate arrow and spear points, gold statuettes, gold funeral masks, turquoise by the tens of kilograms, silver plate, and many stunning and beautiful garments, the lot. Ted's real interest made him a welcome guest, and he spent about a week with the old man. The days were spent traveling to various locations, and digging amongst the archeological ruins of the Inca Empire. (Ted still had a fabulous

collection of beautiful clear agate spear points in 1958.) The nights were spent in pleasant and gentlemanly boozing sessions while they worked their way through Ted's cognac supply.

Towards the end of the week, Ted pulled out the last of his Cognac. This was not the rough old Tres Palos that he had been pushing, but a full 2 liters of real French stuff.

The old Fathers enthusiasm knew no bounds at this "letter from home". By this time Ted had installed himself, via his genuine scientific interest, as a confidant. The Remy Martin loosened the well springs of the old man memory, and more and more tales started to come forth. There was fabulous treasure in the mountains, some of it still in the old Inca graves. The best of these were placed at very high elevations to discourage grave robbing by the Spaniards, but a few were still to be found in the lower elevation. He had a plan, and this was to live there for another year or so, and complete the last of the local digs.

A lot more cognac was called for, and then the final plan revealed. There was a Spanish treasure as well. This was the loot from the Inca's palace itself, and he, old Estafan himself, possessed the true map! It consisted of not only a half tonne or more of gold, but also untold emeralds of rare beauty. Once this was collected, he was going to cast off his holy orders, and return to Europe. He planned to live by speaking engagements and the display and disposal of his treasure. The rare perfumed brandy made the old monk throw all caution to the winds, and he actually produced a complex map on what was really old parchment. He had looted it from the Prado itself some 20 years before. Another brandy and the story got even better. He had been sent to Madrid to research the area before traveling out, and had found the map between the pages of a rare old book dating from 1600. Since the map was not in the catalog, he had simply hid it in his cassock. The true map to the true treasure! People in the year 2000 might have a good laugh at this, but in 1920 people were alive that had known people that had really found Spanish Treasure, or even better. The New World had been a fabulous repository of wealth, and it had driven the whole economy of Europe for over 200 years with no real effort excepting that of the South American Indios, who did not count.

Ted started to become really free with the rare old brandy at this point. The man had a head of iron, but Ted had heard somewhere if you put cigarette ashes in drink, people will go to sleep. The ashes and the balance of the bottle did the trick, and the old gentleman was laid to rest on the couch. Ted copied the map under the guttering light of a candle into a survey notebook. The old Spanish writing was hard to read, but he came away quite satisfied that what he had not translated on the spot he had faithfully reproduced.

The map was quite clear. There was a named valley, oriented east west; draining to the west, that had to be identified. Once this was done, a series of stone cairns would lead you directly to the prize. The critical thing was the un-translated name of

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the valley, and the fact that the valley had a large chillpan at the head of it.

These were fairly common in Bolivia. They were a huge half-moon stone, a meter wide, and up to 3-4 meters in diameter. They had a groove across the top, and a tree trunk was fixed into the groove. Slaves pulled on ropes on the end of these trunks, causing the chillpan to rock back and forth. They were situated in the bottoms of steep valleys on stone pavements so that the creek could be directed under them, and the steep slope would serve to take away the tailings. The gold ore was shoveled under the rocking stone, and after it was powdered enough for the creek to take it away, the ground material was run down a sluice with alpaca fur on the bottom.

Ted was up bright and early the next mornings, with his mules packed and ready to go. He thanked the old monk profusely, and even tendered a generous donation to the church. There was nothing said about maps or any other matter, so Ted assumed that the priest had forgotten his indiscretion. (Ted was very careful to replace the map into the man's cassock!)

His map led him in two days to the University at LaPaz, where he found a History Professor that could read the old Spanish Script easily. It took the Prof. 10 minutes. The valley did not really have a name, but was identified as the "one that you and Santiago both went to". This was a bit of a disappointment, but not really a cause for too much alarm. How many valleys could there be that ran east to west, drained towards the Lake, and had a Chillpan at the head? These were pretty good clues. For one thing you could restrict your search to the continental divide area, and the west side of that. He had to make a basic assumption, that since the old man was on the far east side of the Lago Poopoo-Tititaca closed basin, that the valley was the on divide between here and the Atlantic. The other side was some 80 miles to the west, and drained into the dry Chilean desert, and that was not worth thinking about.

He returned by train to Oruro, and his expedition pressed forward into the promised land. On the first day, he investigated 4 valleys, all of which had a proper chillpan at the head. They drained to the west as well, and Santiago had forgotten to leave a sign. The following day he investigated 6 more valleys, and it was beginning to dawn on him that even finding one valley without a chillpan would be a help. He then had a fit of inspiration, and decided that it might be a good idea to backtrack a bit and look up his drinking buddy.

When he had gone back to LaPaz, he had picked up a few more bottles of the "good stuff" just in case. Maybe one more session would yield the right clues. Ted's heart sank when he finally rode up to the little Mission building and church. There was no cheery fire and welcome, just a ransacked building that had already been taken over by a group of squabbling Indians. The old Father had gone away, just a few days ago, to return home. He had also taken everything with him, and it had reportedly taken some 20 pack animals to get his baggage to

the railhead. He had, however, by Gods generosity, left these buildings to them.

Ted had been away for about 10 days, and was able to piece the story together. The day after he left, Estafan had taken 6 pack animals and one assistant, (who had since left for Europe with him,) and dissapered for 2 days. He came back on the third day, and on the fourth day, he had left for the railroad, which was only 6 hours away. Ted had come back into Oruro on the train from La Paz that very day himself, and might have missed the pack train in the city. It is hardly likely that old Father Estafan would have too overjoyed at the sight of Ted anyway!

That was Ted's Inca treasure gone. He never heard another word of the old man or his treasure. What Ted saw was so extensive and valuable that it would be hard to imagine it getting to Europe or North America without causing a great stir. On reflection, poor old Estafan probably had his throat slit before he got to Oruro.