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Appletons' guide to Mexico, including a chapter on Guatemala and an english-spanish vocabulary

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New York, 1893

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich

Persistent Link: <https://doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-147345>

Section IX. The Tehuantepec railroad.

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SECTION IX.

The Tehuantepec Railroad.

(Compare with chapter on railroads.)

During the last fifty years plans for establishing a communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans *via* the Isthmus of *Tehuantepec* have been discussed. The Mexican Government in 1841 granted a concession to Don José de Garay to make a connection between the two oceans, provided that the grantee should make a survey, at his own expense, of the ground and the direction which the route should follow, and also of the ports which might be deemed most convenient from their proximity. A survey was duly made, and reports were published. But the route was not necessarily to be a canal, although Señor Moro, the engineer, based his operations upon this assumption.

Soon after the termination of the war with the United States, the franchise of Señor de Garay became the property of Mr. P. A. Hargous, of New York, who, in connection with a company organized in New Orleans, assumed the rights and responsibilities of the Garay grant. After negotiations with the Mexican Government and unavoidable delays, it was agreed that a railroad would be more practicable than a canal. Accordingly, a survey for a railway across the isthmus was made in 1851, under the direction of the late General J. G. Barnard, of the United States Army, who was detailed for that purpose. The surveys demonstrated that a railway would be feasible at a moderate expense; that the grades did not exceed 60 feet per mile, except at

the *Chivela* Pass, where they were 116 feet per mile for the distance of eight miles ; and that the summit was 720 feet above the sea-level.

In 1857 the railroad project was resumed, and a new survey was executed under the direction of Colonel W. H. Sidell, of the United States Army. Owing to various reasons, this line was never constructed.

In 1870 the *Tehuantepec Railway Company* was formed in New York. Mr. Simon Stevens became its president, with the late Hon. Marshall O. Roberts as promoter. New surveys and explorations were made, but the road was not built under this administration. Upon a reorganization of the company after unavoidable delays, and with a change of president, and under a charter from the State of Massachusetts, a modified concession was obtained from the Mexican Government on June 2, 1879, to build the *Tehuantepec* Railroad. A subsidy of \$7,500 per kilometre was included in the concession. The track was not to exceed 300 kilometres (186 miles) in length.

The *Tehuantepec* Railroad was not finished by the above-mentioned company. It is said that not more than forty kilometres were constructed by this foreign corporation.

In 1882 the Mexican Government made a contract with private individuals for the completion of the *Tehuantepec* line ; and in January, 1884, the track was finished from the mouth of the *Goatzacoalcos** River to *Jaltipam*, a distance of 25 miles. The route of the projected railway is about 190 miles in length. The work of construction from *Minatitlan* to the port of *Salina Cruz* is now being pushed vigorously by the Government. It is believed that the road will be finished and opened for traffic in 1894.

The line runs due north and south, and it will traverse the southern portions of the States of *Vera Cruz* and *Oa-*

* Also spelled *Coatzacoalcos*.

xaca. The adjacent country may be concisely described as follows :

The depth of water at low tide is thirteen feet on the bar at the mouth of the *Goatzacoalcos* River, which is navigable for a distance of 30 miles. Placer gold-deposits are said to exist in the interior of the isthmus, although the country has not yet been geologically explored. Large beds of asphalt also occur. The vegetable productions of this region are indigo, tobacco, sugar-cane, cocoa, cotton, coffee, Indian corn, vanilla, sarsaparilla, ginger, and India-rubber.

The terminus of the road will be at *Salina Cruz*, three miles west of *La Ventosa*, on the Pacific coast, which is considered a safe harbor. It is said that work on the southern section of this railway has begun. Winter is the best season for visiting the isthmus, as the summers are very hot and a great variety of insects abound. Some of them are poisonous, and the tourist should exercise extreme caution to avoid being bitten while traveling through the jungle or in camping out.

Humboldt, in his *Political Essay on New Spain*, has referred to the possibility of making the Isthmus of *Tehuantepec* an avenue of travel at some future day. He gives the width of the isthmus at 118 miles. The connections of the *Tehuantepec* Railroad with the Mexican Southern Railroad are mentioned in Section VII.

Captain J. B. Eads has recently visited England, to procure capital to build the *Tehuantepec* Ship-Railway.

The advantages to commerce of a means of communication across the isthmus (either by land or water) can hardly be overestimated. This route lies between latitude 16° and 18°, and, unlike the malarious climate of Panama, the region is comparatively healthy all the year round. While the commerce between Europe and the Pacific Ocean will be carried on *via* the *Isthmus of Panama* for many years, the greater part of the trade between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States must needs be conducted across the *Isthmus of Tehuantepec* as soon as the railway is finished.

It is hardly necessary to say that the latter route will soon become a

very formidable competitor to the *Panama Railway* as regards passenger traffic.

The distance from New York to San Francisco *via Tehuantepec* is 1,477 miles shorter than *via Panama*, and that from New Orleans to San Francisco is 2,334 miles less by the former than by the latter route.



A Scene on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.