



—Three Lions.

Simon Bolivar Monument, Caracas—"vitality, vastness, and enormous potential . . . a community of contrasts."

#### CARACAS'S 400th

## BOLIVAR AND BULLDOZERS

By TEODORO MOSCOSO

**F**OR A CITY founded in 1567, Caracas, capital of oil and iron-rich Venezuela, has very few landmarks to remind one of its Spanish colonial origins. Bulldozers and demolition balls have left only a small number of the old buildings intact and, with a single exception, which my wife and I visited, restoration of those remaining has been sparing.

Caracas is a modern, sophisticated metropolis of more than 1,500,000 inhabitants, in which the skyscraper is predominant, having become a sort of national status symbol. It is a community of

contrasts—as is all of Venezuela. Surrounding this conglomerate of modern multi-storied structures clustered in the narrow valley of the city, where intricately intertwined superhighways carry as heavy a traffic as any parkway in Long Island, is a crown of slum shacks or *ranchitos* which clamber up the hillsides enclosing the city.

The early Spanish settlers of Caracas quite intelligently chose as its site a high valley about ten miles from the sea on the northern coast of South America. Not only did this protect them from pirate incursions but it blessed them with

a year-round spring-like climate. Maiquetia, the port and airport area serving the city, is warm and humid; its shore line toward the east, however, is superb. One can easily compare it with the Grande Corniche in the French Riviera, and some of the hotels along the narrow shore, crowded by the hills, are as luxurious as any you may find in the Côte d'Azur. One of them, the Macuto, has probably more marble per square foot of floor area than any other hostelry in the world. Only a spendthrift and not-too-honest dictator, such as former President Pérez Jiménez, could have built such



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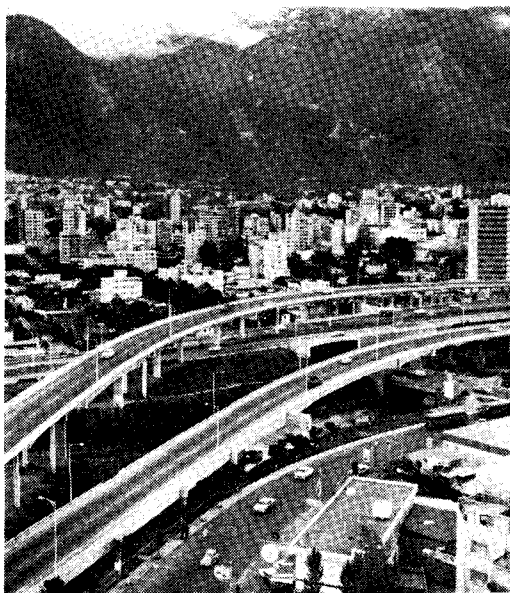
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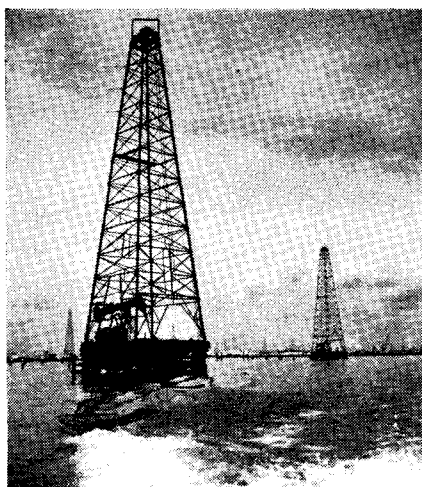


—Dieter Grabitzky (Monkmeyer).

**San Antonio section of Caracas—“The skyscraper is predominant, having become a sort of national status symbol.”**

palatial lodgings. No one really knows how many millions it cost; Mr. Pérez Jiménez languishes now in jail.

One of the finest vistas of Caracas is to be seen from the American Ambassador's residence at the foot of Mount Avila. During the early 1960s, when the democratic regime of former President Rómulo Betancourt was fighting for its life, the sight from this vantage point at times seemed too cluttered with Venezuelan police and National Guardsmen; in those hazardous days one never knew from one day to another whether the government was going to outlive the next twenty-four hours. Street action by both extreme right-wing and left-wing groups was commonplace at the time. A favorite “sport” of these two extremes was the placing of plastic bombs in strategic areas of the city, although noise and property destruction rather than the taking of lives seemed to have been the primary objectives. Guests at dinner parties at the residence had to be forewarned—unless they were old Caracas hands—



—Elizabeth Hibbs (Monkmeyer).

**Lake Maracaibo—“As capital city of a country immensely varied geographically, Caracas is a fine take-off point for excursions.”**

that any explosions they might hear during the evening were not as dangerously close as they sounded. Upward drafts from the city below and the narrow sound-reflecting walls of the valley were responsible for the amplification of the noise from the exploding plastics. It was almost funny to see some of our Stateside guests jump out of their chairs, in spite of the prior warnings, when the first explosions of the evening began to be heard. Today, however, this type of annoyance is much less frequent as Venezuela begins to enjoy the fruits of the institutionalization of its democratic life. Betancourt became the first president in the history of the country to finish out his full term of office.

Perhaps nothing gives Caracas its cosmopolitan air as much as the presence of large groups of European and North American residents, a very active cultural life which includes much dialogue in the local press and lively musical, plastic arts, and theater movements, and, of course, café life, particularly of the

outdoor variety. For sheer relaxation nothing can match the enjoyment of an excellent meal at one of Caracas's outstanding French or Italian restaurants (we preferred Hector's and Chez Abadie), an evening of experimental theater or foreign films, and a leisurely cup of coffee and cognac at one of the sidewalk cafés along Sabana Grande Avenue near Plaza Venezuela. My wife and I particularly liked Café Piccolo, whose chairs resembled those of the more popular sidewalk spots in Via Veneto (why can't we make comfortable sidewalk café chairs in the United States?).

Aside from these more sedentary and rather public social activities, most of the evening life was evenly distributed between diplomatic receptions or dinners, which my wife and I thoroughly abhorred, and small dinner parties at the home of Venezuelan friends, which we fully enjoyed. Nightclubs with floor shows hardly exist in Caracas, but there are intimate *boîtes* with small but excellent dance orchestras. Saturday night at our favorite spot—La Potinière—in the company of the Finance Minister and his lovely and eternally happy, smiling wife, was a fitting climax to any week. The Cold War, the disarray at NATO, the state of health of the Alliance for Progress, the Southeast Asia crisis—all of these had a tendency to recede before the euphoria of good music, charming company, and small talk.

As capital city of a country immensely varied geographically, Caracas is a fine take-off point for excursions into the Andes toward the west, the Guayana and Orinoco delta toward the east, and the great *llanos* — plains — toward the south. No one should visit Caracas without arranging side trips to these three magnificent areas in the southern tier of the Western hemisphere.

Mérida is the principal Andean city. As a backdrop it has the immense Pico Bolívar and Pico Espejo (more than 15,000 ft. high), covered with eternal snows. That one should be able to travel from the humid tropical lowlands with their exuberant foliage to an Alpine environment in a few brief moments is a source of continuous wonder. Meandering over the old Andean road to Mérida through lush wheat-covered valleys reminiscent of the most beautiful Swiss-like landscapes is an unforgettable experience. At the highest point in this road, Pico del Aguila, in the Páramo Mucuchíes, some enterprising European migrants have built a small inn with a welcoming fireplace and good plain food. Freshly caught trout, bred in the chilly waters of the melting Andean snows, is a specialty of the area. An industrious *Caraqueño* has developed a trout farm in which a million fish are always available in huge pools carved from the sides of the mountains and con-

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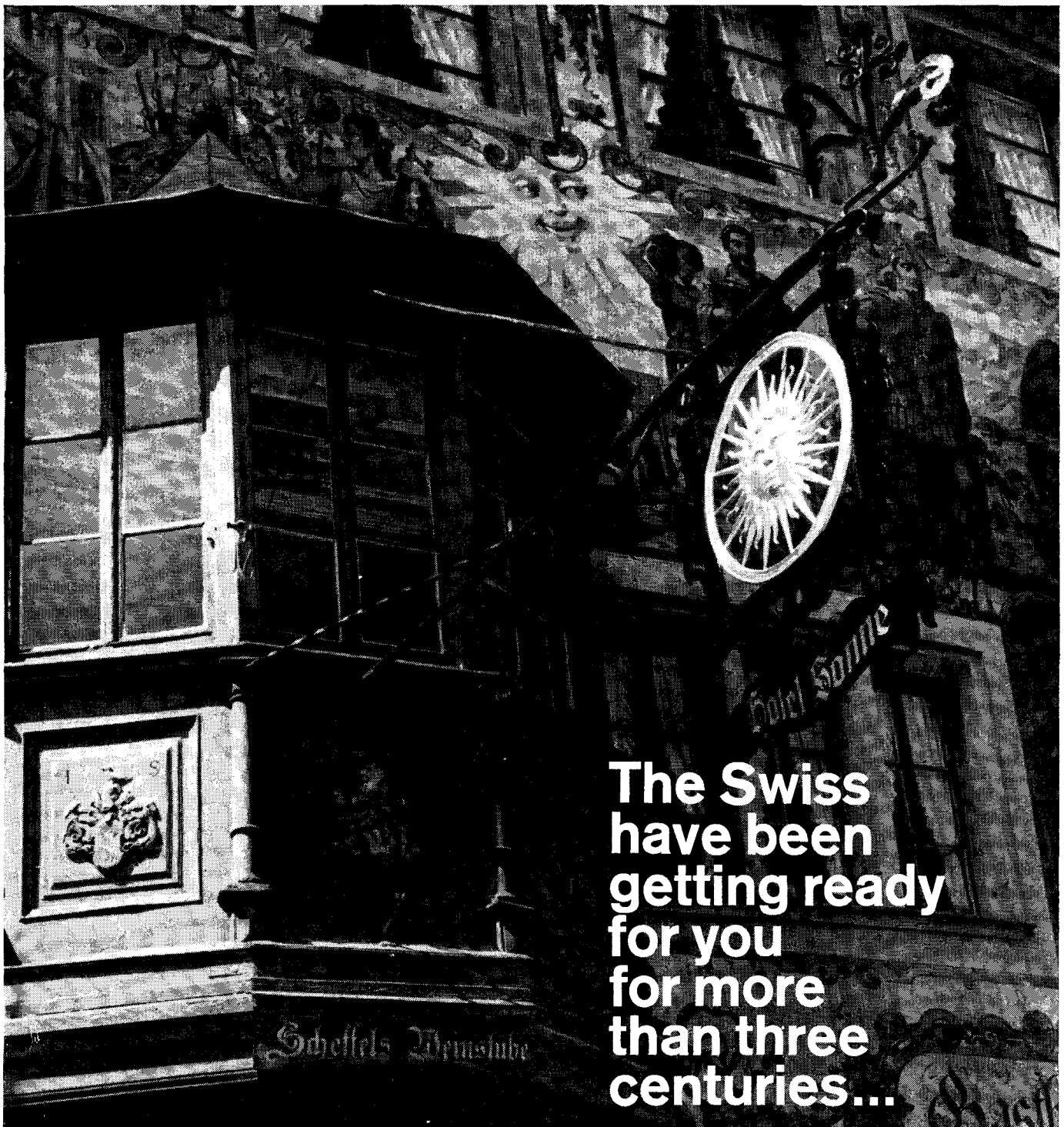
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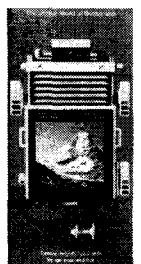
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tinuously fed by icy streams. As the trout grow and fatten, they are transferred from one pool to the next. You may pick for size the one you want and with a quick dip-and-grab, transfer it directly to the frying pan. Henri Soulé couldn't have improved their taste!

Venezuelans are prone to put a funicular into service wherever they find a likely spot, and Mérida has one to lift you all the way to the top of its highest mountain, Pico Bolívar, where you may enjoy winter sports and a most spectacular view of the Mérida Valley. Back in the city you may want to stay at a small but comfortable hotel owned by the government; and of course, a visit to the University of Mérida is a must. The flight back to Caracas should be by way of Maracaibo so that you may witness the incredible sight of many thousands of oil wells arising from the waters of the lake like a flooded forest of Christmas trees. A most spectacular bridge of unique design crosses the lake at Maracaibo and connects this oil city—second largest in the country—with the eastern part of Venezuela.

**B**ACK in Caracas, if you like to fish and hunt, you may arrange for a trip to the *llanos*, those immense stretches of flatlands southwest of the city. To get to the heart of the *llanos*, air travel is recommended, but only experts should attempt it during the rainy season when most of this area is flooded. This is cattle country, but game of many species is to be found. Several varieties of wild duck are so abundant as to take some of the fun out of the sport. There is also an abundance of fish, particularly in the many rivers which feed the upper Orinoco—including, of course the voracious piranha, or Caribe fish, which can strip a full-grown steer to the bone in minutes. Dotting the *llanos* are isola-

ted slaughter houses which dress the local-grown beef for shipment by airplane to Caracas. When the rains come and the area floods, you can see thousands of head of cattle squeezed together in a few high spots, peacefully sharing this dry bit of ground with many varieties of game animals. I would suggest to the adventurous that they try to head-quarter themselves in one of the many ranches near Puerto Páez, and get experienced guides to accompany them. The expense and effort will be well worth it.

Caracas looks to the east for its future. Mention the Guayana region to a Venezuelan and his eyes light up, because there, at the confluence of the broad, mighty Orinoco with the narrower but swifter Caroní river, important things are happening. Harvard and MIT are jointly helping the Venezuelans plan the development of an area blessed with oil, natural gas, rich iron ore, and hydroelectric potential matched by few places in the world. Already a gigantic steel mill operates there. Millions of tons of iron ore move down the Orinoco to feed the blast furnaces of Norristown and Sparrows Point. On the Caroní, the first hydroelectric dam has been built and further upstream the Guri dam, one of the largest in the world, is under construction. To service the thousands who will man these installations, a new town fully planned by the Harvard-MIT group is gradually emerging—Santo Tomás de Guayana. Even its name evokes dreams of pioneering adventures and frontier days.

Following its policy of sowing its oil wealth, Venezuela is plowing immense sums into the Guayana red soil in the hope of making it eventually into a Latin Ruhr. The sheer scope of the plans and the magnitude of the various projects create a feeling of pride and hope

**Minsk's 900th:** This city of half a million on the Svisloch River is first mentioned in Russian literature in the eleventh century, so it may be safe to say it is 900 years old this year. At least that's what they're saying in Minsk, and they are saying it with Moscow's approval. Situated relatively near Poland and the West, it has always been handy for invaders: the Tartars in 1505, the Russians in 1508, and centuries later by the Swedes, again by the Russians, by Napoleon, by the Germans in both World Wars, by the Poles between them.

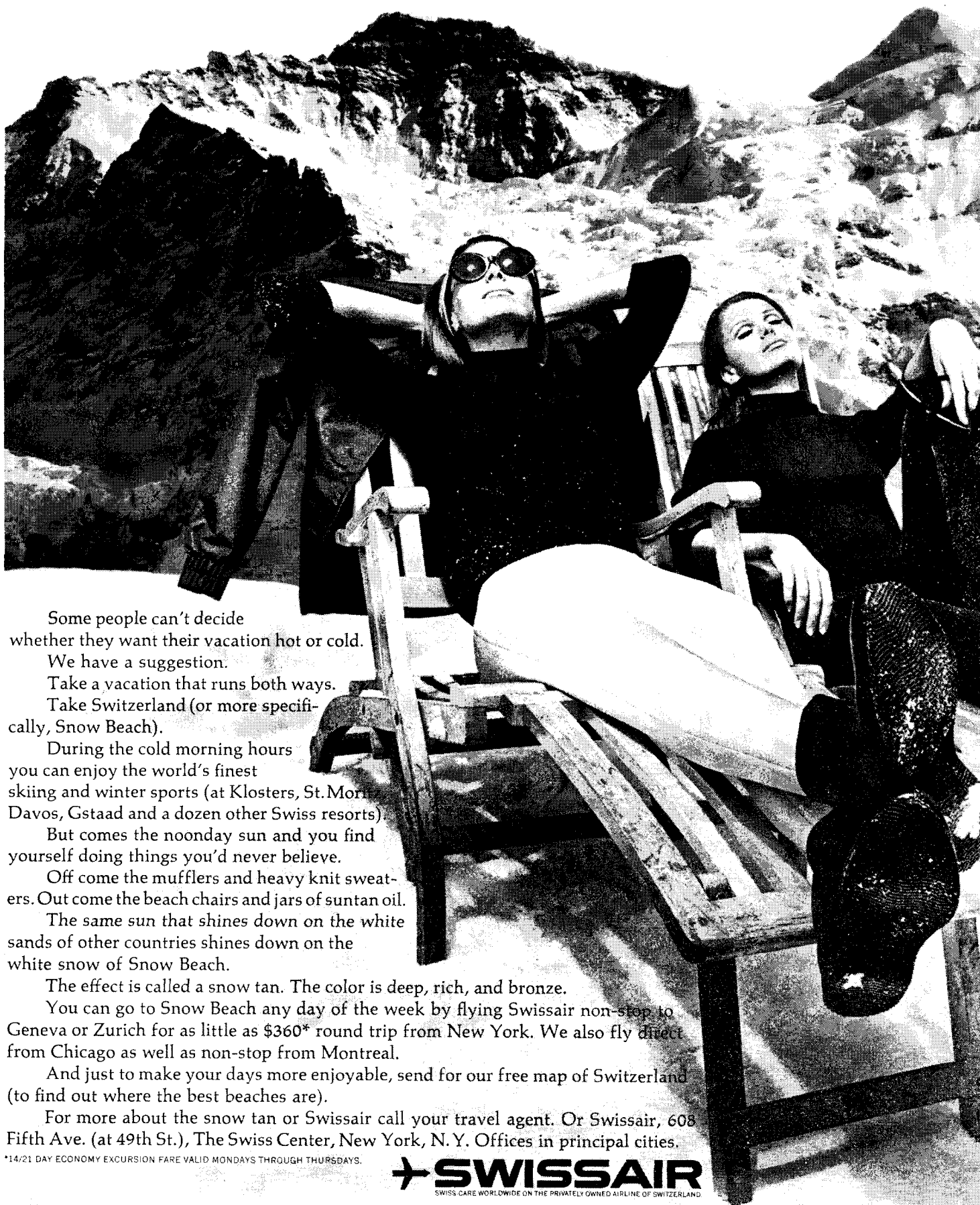
There is not much that would interest the traveler, even with the anniversary, for the only relics of the ancient times are a tower from the middle of the eighteenth century and a Catholic cathedral built in 1615, in Minsk's more religious days. Its many Jewish shopkeepers were put out of business by the revolution of fifty years ago, and many were resettled elsewhere in the country. Most of those who were left by 1941 were killed by the Germans.

The Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences keeps 15,000 species of plants, and there is both a Minsk opera and a ballet theater. It is less than ten miles to the lakelands, which are replete with beaches, and that's where the Minskniks are when they are not laboring for the good of the state.

—BETTY MOORE.



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in Venezuelans of all socio-economic levels. Just as Egypt has its "spectacular" in the High Dam at Aswan, so Venezuela has its Guayana.

About 200 miles from its confluence with the Orinoco, the Carrao River, where it meets the Caroní, dresses at its best for the spectacle of the falls of Canaima. Viewing Canaima from a downstream vantage point is a breathtaking experience. A small inn serviced by a light-plane airstrip can provide overnight accommodations. If you are a nature lover, you had better plan to stay a few days. Canaima has inspired poets and novelists; Venezuela's great novelist Rómulo Gallegos named one of his better known works *Canaima*.

If Canaima represents the untamed forces of nature unleashed, Angel Falls, fifty miles to the south, is by comparison a blithe spirit. Falling vertically for a kilometer from the top of an eroded flat-top sandstone mountain in the middle of the immense lonely forests of the Gran Sabana, the water from "The Angel" is so thoroughly atomized by the time it reaches the bottom that a cloud of vapor visible many miles away is all that remains of this gushing stream. Since the only practical way of seeing these falls is by plane, be sure your pilot has been there before.

Flying south of Angel Falls for another hour into the deep vastness of the Gran Sabana and beyond the majestic flat-top mesa with the lyrical Indian name, the Auyán Tepuí, will bring you with surprising suddenness to a most incredible edifice—a three-storied Capuchin convent and school, enormous in size and beautifully proportioned, standing by itself in this jungle hundreds of miles from any civilized settlement. There, a group of friendly clerics bring Christianity and the three R's to savage Indians who, under their guidance, have already built a small town, Kabanaye, at the foot of the convent and who even generate their own electricity with a water wheel and a generator propelled by one of the innumerable streams which rush down the hillsides of the mesa where this bit of civilization is ensconced. Adventurous souls can continue an hour or so further south to the Brazilian border, where, from a jungle airport, you may visit the diamond mines.

Back in Caracas next evening, with the warming glow of the first martini sharpening your imagination, you will suddenly realize that those innumerable blinking multicolored neon signs which proliferate everywhere in the city are but superficial manifestations of the vitality, vastness, and enormous potential of this country, so rich in resources and in history, and birthplace of Latin America's great hemispheric hero, Simón Bolívar. Yes, I have been in love with Caracas ever since we first met.

## Alaska

*Continued from page 48*

skis in winter. Because bush planes are slow and don't fly sky-high they let you see the land in all its convolutions, not flattened out as it would appear from a lofty air liner. Flying in a bush plane north of Fairbanks, a traveler is soon struck by the total absence of roads in the wilderness below. Soon a bare, rugged range appears. These are the White Mountains, and you fly so close to the granite domes that herds of wild sheep—the native Dall Sheep with their curled horns and snow-white coats—can be seen grazing near the summits. Beyond the White Mountains sprawl the Yukon Flats. This vast basin stretches for 200 miles, with a width in places of 100 miles, and through its heart flows the Yukon—the River of Gold—now empty of the stern-wheel steamers that carried an army of fortune hunters up to the gold fields seventy years ago. In all this trackless desolation there are only a half-dozen small settlements with a combined population of perhaps 1,100, mostly Athabascan Indians and a handful of whites.

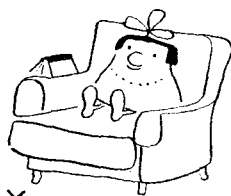
Senator Ernest Gruening, a Rampart Dam advocate, wants to see the Flats buried under hundreds of feet of water, drowned by a lake bigger than Lake Erie. To Gruening the Flats are an eyesore—"a mammoth swamp... scenically... zero. In fact, it is one of the few really ugly areas in a land prodigal with sensational beauty." One might agree with the Senator's observation that the Flats are "as worthless from the standpoint of human habitation as any that can be found on earth." But they hold a strange exhilaration for lovers of wilderness. Here is a bit of the New World miraculously preserved in its primeval state through the centuries. And conservationists maintain that the thousands of shallow ponds, potholes, and sloughs, the ox-bow lagoons that trace the myriad abandoned paths of the shifting Yukon, form a unique nesting ground for migratory waterfowl.

**T**HE clash between developers and conservationists over the Rampart Dam project is only one aspect of the broader struggle for control of the land, a struggle that beclouds Alaska's centennial year. When the statehood law was enacted, 99.8 per cent of the land was still owned by the federal government. Under provisions of the statehood act, Alaska was given twenty-five years to select more than 104 million acres from the federal public domain. Now Eskimos and Indians are attempting to block the state selection by pressing their aboriginal rights to vast tracts of



Alaska, including the Arctic Slope and the Yukon Flats. (The 1867 Treaty of Cession failed to define the entitlement of natives to the lands they were using and occupying, and Congress to this date has ducked the issue.)

In their claim to the Arctic Slope and its potential oil wealth, the Eskimos use an argument that should appeal to all conservationists. Noting the white man's proclivity for despoiling the land and polluting the rivers, the Eskimos warn that the oil explorations might kill fish and disrupt the migration of caribou.



Sam Taalak, president of the Arctic Slope Native Association, told a visitor to Barrow last summer: "Let me be blunt. We must prepare for the day when our children may have to live by hunting again. I tell you, this is harsh country. We run out of game animals and we will hit the relief rolls pretty hard."

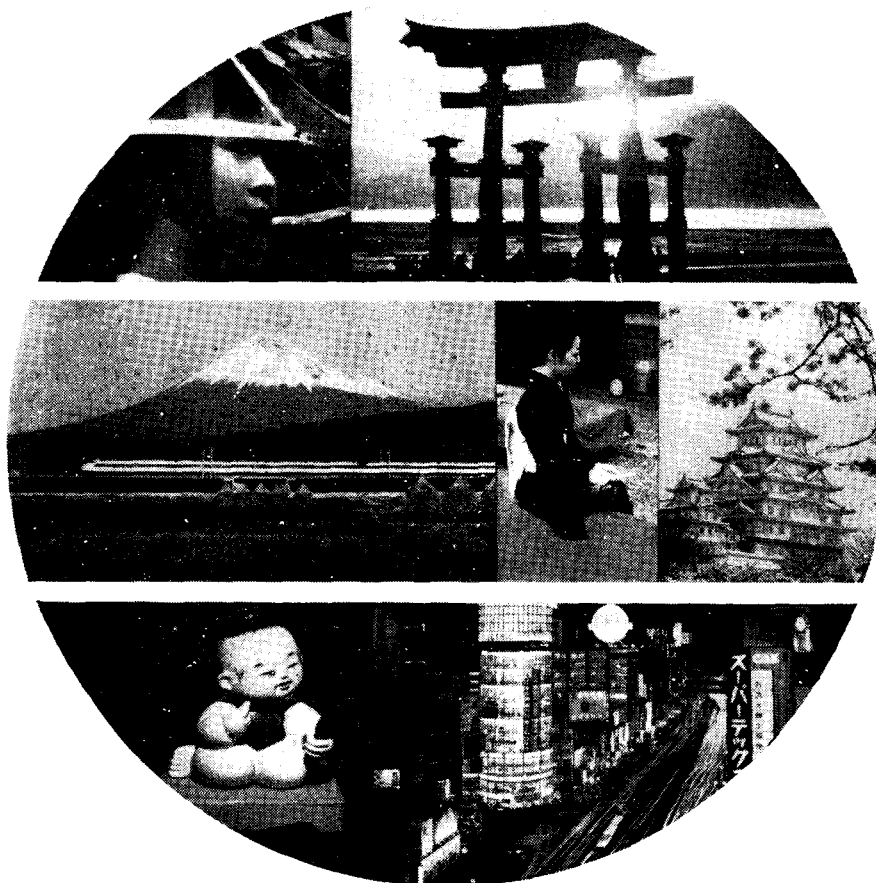
Turning Alaska back to the Eskimos and Indians may seem an engaging idea, but it's highly probable that the natives will have to settle for less. Meanwhile, tourists who want to see a piece of the continent as God made it had better come to Alaska fast.

## Evan's Bandid

By Doris Holmes

EVAN'S bandid is coming off;  
The skinned ankle, red, is glistening  
cream in the center  
Where having felt the slice it must now  
fight germs,  
But the dirt I'm trying to rub away  
around it  
Is partly bruise of an earlier contusion.  
"Ow, ow!" he screams, "You're killing  
my athlete's foot,"  
And yes, between the toes I note the  
painful crack.  
I lean back to catch my breath  
And see his hands, dark around the  
bitten nails,  
Two knuckles scabby,  
Callous on one palm which he now lifts  
To get the pinky to his mouth  
Where so much supper clings above the  
braces  
I think I'll speak about that  
But  
Hitting my head on the bathroom  
cabinet  
I screech "God dammit"  
Thinking I am helpless, trapped,  
And those brown eyes I frown up at  
Whatever I do to them  
Are free.

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