

The Tarahumara Photograph Collection



The Tarahumara Photograph Collection consists of 25,000 digital images documenting the culture of the indigenous Tarahumara of southwestern Chihuahua, Mexico. Their homeland is in the vast canyons and inaccessible mountains of the Sierra Madre Occidental, making them one of the most remote and understudied groups in North America. Limited contact has allowed them to retain many of their ancestral ways, although recent intrusions are bringing assimilation and change. Beginning in 1952, the late Jesuit priest Luis Verplanken developed an intimate relationship with these people. While traveling extensively through the rugged region to perform his priestly functions, Father Verplanken documented Tarahumara lifestyles and material culture. He proved to be a worthy photographer with an anthropologist's eye for cultural details. During fifty years of activity, which continued until his death in 2004, he amassed a collection of 25,000 slides and prints. From 2007 to 2009, the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library at Texas Tech University created digital copies of the collection for the purposes of preservation and research accessibility.

The Oral History and Field Acquisitions Department procures historical resources that further the research endeavors of Texas Tech University's faculty, student body, and off-campus patrons. Primary subject areas include West Texas settlement, ranching, farming, business and community growth, early medical practices, politics, indigenous and minority experiences, wildlife conservation and rehabilitation, natural history, military history with an emphasis on World War II, NASA space exploration, music, sports, and the history of Texas Tech University.

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