



GEOGRAPHY

Fabled Timbuktu Is Small, Squalid City

➤ IF YOU think of far-off Timbuktu as the ultimate in mystery and romance, you will be disappointed.

Timbuktu is not a picturesque seaport, nor an island, nor a country. It is, instead, a squalid little city of 6,000 persons located deep in the heart of French West Africa on the banks of the Niger River.

Dr. Benjamin Thomas, a geographer at the University of California at Los Angeles, has just returned from a visit to that fabled city of song and story.

Once, says Dr. Thomas, Timbuktu was called the "port of the Sudan in the Sahara" and a rich city of commerce which traded in salt, gold and slaves.

Today it has been by-passed by newer land routes, air transportation and easier access to the sea. "Timbuktu" is rightly used as a synonym of remoteness and isolation, the geographer adds, but not to denote romance or adventure.

Science News Letter, January 22, 1955

Celestial Time Table for February

Feb. EST

- 2 2:00 p.m. Moon nearest; distance 229,100 miles.
- 5 1:54 a.m. Moon passes Jupiter.
- 6 8:43 p.m. Full moon.
- 12 2:00 p.m. Mercury between earth and sun.
- 14 8:58 a.m. Moon passes Saturn.

2:40 p.m. Moon in last quarter.
7:00 p.m. Moon farthest; distance 251,200 miles.

- 18 3:58 p.m. Moon passes Venus.
- 22 10:54 a.m. New moon.
- 26 2:51 p.m. Moon passes Mars.

Subtract one hour for CST, two hours for MST, and three for PST.

Science News Letter, January 22, 1955

ANTHROPOLOGY

Mexican Indian Whistle Is a Language of Love

➤ WHEN A Kickapoo Indian youth living in Coahuila, Mexico, whistles at his girl friend, it is not an ordinary "wolf call."

The Kickapoo whistle is a regular part of courtship and conveys a definite message based on the pitch, accent and cadence of the Kickapoo language, Drs. Robert E. Ritzenthaler and Frederick A. Peterson of the Milwaukee Public Museum report in *American Anthropologist* (Dec.).

The young Kickapoo who wants to see his girl friend in the evening builds a campfire at one of several popular rendezvous spots near the village. He then cups his hands and blows into the cavity between the knuckles of the thumbs. The tone of the whistle is controlled by opening and closing the fingers of the left hand.

The girl friend recognizes his whistle just as she would be able to recognize his voice calling her. She steps out of her house and whistles a reply.

The whistled conversation may go something like this:

- "Come on."
- "Wait a minute."
- "No."
- "I'm coming."

At times just one couple will rendezvous, the scientists explain. But at other times a party of a dozen or more will get together at the same fire to talk, court, sing Mexican songs and, if liquor is available, drink. Sometimes, a little brother will tease by hanging around the fire until he has learned the whistling system of his older brother. The courting couple must be careful what they whistle to each other, because others in the village can "listen in."

Science News Letter, January 22, 1955

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