



### THE SOCIETY OF ETHNOBIOLOGY CONFERENCES

1. Prescott, Arizona - 1978
2. Flagstaff, Arizona - 1979
3. Tucson, Arizona - 1980
4. Columbia, Missouri - 1981
5. San Diego, California - 1982
6. Norman, Oklahoma - 1983
7. Seattle, Washington - 1984
8. Cambridge/Boston, Massachusetts - 1985
9. Albuquerque, New Mexico - 1986
10. Gainesville, Florida - 1987
11. Mexico D.F., Mexico - 1988
12. Riverside, California - 1989
13. Tempe/Phoenix, Arizona - 1990
14. St. Louis, Missouri - 1991

As one who has participated in all thirteen annual conference and as one who has listened to and remembered the comments of many others, I wish to address what I and others have most enjoyed about them and to mention some areas of concern. I applaud the efforts of all those who have organized these events. All thirteen conferences have been successful especially in the important areas of human interaction and the stimulation of ideas. I am grateful for each of them.

The first Conference was a relatively small one held in Prescott, Arizona. It was organized to honor Lyndon L. Hargrave who died shortly thereafter. Although most of the participants were from the American West, there was a sprinkling of ethnobiologists from other parts of the U.S.A. The second Conference, in honor of the late Hargrave and Alfred Frank Whiting, was held at Flagstaff, Arizona. It was somewhat larger and attracted ethnobiologists from farther afield. Tucson, Arizona was the location of the third Conference and the innovations introduced at this meeting started a trend of adding new things, while (usually) retaining the best of the old. This 1980 meeting brought the first small contingent of ethnobiologists from Mexico and participation of Native Americans. Generally, the conferences have improved over the years with arrangements becoming increasingly professional but with a warm, family flavor.

Poster Sessions, as I recall, were first introduced at the 1980 meeting and have been an “on again, off again” feature since. It seems to me the most successful and rewarding poster sessions have been at the Mexico City and Riverside conferences. A full morning was given to the poster session and adjacent book fair in Mexico City and an evening was devoted to this activity at Riverside. Poster presentations are most effective and successful, in my view, when they have been conceived and planned as such from the beginning. Conference organizers should give attention to poster sessions early in their planning. When poster presenters are accorded a convenient space and ample time for their presentations—both free of distractions—conference participants will more likely consider the Poster Session a forum worthy of their efforts.

Over the years conference program booklets have improved considerably because, in part, of increased availability of computer technology over the past thirteen years. It’s now much easier to produce a booklet with a professional appearance at a reasonable cost than it was a decade or more ago. Full addresses for all conference presenters were given at the back of the booklet prepared for the 1989 conference. This was much appreciated and most helpful and should be a standard feature for future booklets. I’m always interested in what the local committee will decide upon as a logo for the conference and the booklet each year.

In the early years there was only one business meeting. Officers and board members usually met over a hurried luncheon and discussed a hastily prepared—sometimes impromptu—agenda. In retrospect it all seemed rather casual. The General Business Meeting, open to all who attended, was introduced at the Albuquerque meeting in 1986. Although it is difficult to find a time slot for such a meeting, I think it is important to do so. This is the only provision for the membership to participate in the operation of the Society. It generates a sense of family—something the Society has always had and will want to nurture. We now have a Board of Trustees Meeting and an Editorial Board Meeting, each lasting about three hours. In recent years these meetings have been held the day before the conference officially opens. The Minutes of the Editorial Board Meeting are now published in the *Journal*.

Those who attended the Conference in Phoenix (1990) experienced the advantages and frustrations of simultaneous sessions. The basic advantage is to provide a greater number of time slots for contributed papers than would be possible without them. Frustration often arises when one wants to hear talks scheduled at the same time. Although increasing the length of the conference would accomplish the same objective as simultaneous sessions it will also increase expenses for participants because of additional lodging and meals. I suggest the Society circulate a questionnaire—perhaps mailed with renewal and election notices—soliciting the feeling of members about simultaneous sessions, poster sessions, etc. In the meantime those with opinions to express about these or other matters can write to the News and Comments Editor. Depending upon responses he may (or may not) wish to publish a brief report in that column.

Since, for various reasons, I have not attended all of the pre-conference receptions and post-conference field trips, I shall comment only briefly upon these attractions. I have especially pleasant memories of all that I have attended. The receptions have all been enjoyable social events and have successfully fulfilled

their function of facilitating the renewal of friendships and the establishment of new ones. I have found that experiences shared in the field aid these friendships to jell.

Most members eagerly anticipate the annual Banquet. The most successful and delightful of these have featured regional or ethnic foods. Many members remember with pleasure the banquets at the conferences in, e.g., San Diego, Seattle, Boston, Mexico City, and Phoenix. Limitations of space do not permit me to enthuse over each of these. I want to comment briefly on two—Mexico City and San Diego.

The local committee in Mexico City outdid themselves in providing an array of regional dishes along with the familiar cola beverage. Since I commented earlier in these pages on the Mexico City conference (see Volume 8, No. 1) I will relate to you the memorable and unique banquet held in San Diego. The Japanese community of the city volunteered to prepare and serve a remarkable variety of Japanese foods, each dish graciously accompanied by commentary and beautiful illustrations (for sale as a benefit to the Society) of the plants and animals used in its preparation. Although only one artist executed the illustrations, many wonderful people not only donated their time but also all of the ingredients in the dishes they so lovingly prepared.

Some keynote speakers have given general addresses, i.e., not tied to a particular ethnobiological specialty, e.g., those by Darrell Posey in Riverside and Richard Nelson in Phoenix while others have had a somewhat more specific focus. Zoologists are more likely than botanists to remember the finer points of Elizabeth Wing's address in Columbia, Missouri while botanists probably remember more details than zoologists from the talks by Hugh Iltis in Norman, Oklahoma, Bruce Smith in Gainesville and Vorsila Bohrer in Albuquerque. Nor is it absolutely necessary to have a keynote speaker. There was none at the Boston Conference because, among other reasons, the banquet was prepared by the local committee in the kitchen of Lawrence and Lucy Kaplan and enjoyed in their garden. Stimulating conversation and friendly companionship replaced the customary after dinner address.

Although quite a few members have attended the Ethnobiology Conferences frequently, it appears that I am the only person to have attended all of them. Jan Timbrook and Steve Weber, for example, have been to all but two meetings. I think all of us who have attended often have felt and basked in the good will from ethnic groups when we have invited them into our lives, however briefly, through participation in our annual conferences in whatever way they can.

Sponsoring a conference is an enormous undertaking and most members of the Society are respectful of the efforts of the local committees and extremely grateful to them. It has been a pleasure for me to recall memorable moments from the past. I encourage planners of future conferences to learn about then retain as much as possible of that which has worked well in the past while continuing the tradition of taking advantage of local opportunities, thus making each conference a significant and unique event in each of our lives.

—WVA