

southern Arizona, following the tradition of their tribe, go forth to harvest the luscious red fruit which grows on the giant saguaro cactus. Ruby Bowen, the writer of this unusual story, lives on a homestead near Tucson and has a saguaro "orchard" of her own from which she gathers fruit, in much the same manner as her Papago neighbors.

Saguaro Harvest in Papagoland

By RUBY BOWEN

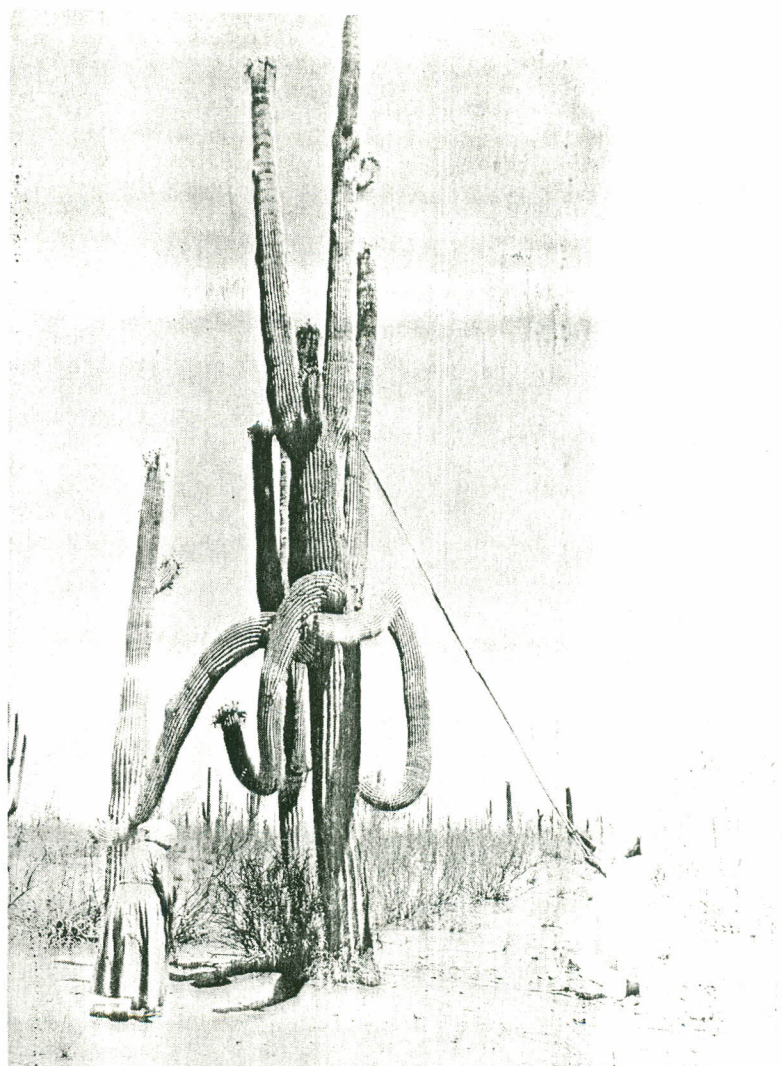
AN ancient Papago legend tells how Coyote saved Saguaro for his friends the Desert People: At the First Feast of the Saguaro Wine, great dissension and discord broke out among the desert birds and animals as Wine Spirit came among them and they took to fighting. As may be seen, many of the desert birds' heads are red to this day from that fighting. Saguaro was not a good thing to have among them, concluded the Chief of the Desert Indians and he banished it as evil from the desert. But the Papagos liked Saguaro and in order to save him for the Desert People, wily mischief-loving Coyote circled about and intercepted the Papago Chieftain's emissary sent to carry Saguaro's seeds forever out of the desert land. Feigning great curiosity as to what the emissary held so tightly in his hand, Coyote persuaded him to show the seeds. With an apparently accidental flip of his paw, Coyote scattered them far and wide. Friendly Wind Man coming to Coyote's aid carried the cactus seeds high over the mountains to remote corners of the desert. Thus was Saguaro saved for all time for the Desert People.

What the old legend does *not* tell was Coyote's possible personal motive for saving Saguaro. For Coyote has a decided liking for this cactus fruit. Five o'clock mornings on the Bowen homestead at the time of year when the Papagos are going into communal Saguaro camps for the harvesting of this fruit, I have often seen Coyote making the rounds of each giant cactus gathering for his breakfast the luscious, juicy-red "berries" fallen during the night. Expectantly he circles each cactus, getting the fruit before Deer, Squirrel, Desert Tortoise, Pack Rat, even Man himself comes to gather up this sweet desert bounty.

One morning in mid-June, Coyote on his way to a Saguaro breakfast comes upon a Cactus Forest transformed. Plump, brown-skinned Papagos are everywhere. Wagons are being unloaded. Camp-fires are crackling. Shelters are being hastily erected. The vivid pinks, cherises, lavenders and cherry reds of the squaws' amply-cut Mother Hubbards splash the somber forest gaily with color. Mystic desert

solitude is broken by the bright laughter and chatter of Indians greeting each other in the musical Papago tongue. Overall-clad figures in wide brimmed sombreros belabor the "giants" with long poles. Others are bringing into camp buckets brimming with the juicy crimson fruit. A tantalizing aroma somewhat like that of ripening strawberries hangs in the air. Everywhere Indians and desert birds seem to be gorging themselves on the luscious fruit. Curiously, behind a clump of chaparral Coyote watches. He is a very old Coyote and knows what this is all about. His friends the Desert People are come to harvest Saguaro and celebrate their New Year as the first fruit of the Giant Cactus ripens upon the Arizona desert.

In one of the newly-arrived wagons just unloading is Juan. Juan is a Papago farmer. All year he tills his desert acres by dry-farming, growing his corn, melons and beans by wisely conserving and using the rain which Great Spirit sends him. Annually he comes to harvest Saguaro



Two ribs from a dead saguaro are spliced together and equipped with a hook with which the Papago woman knocks down the ripe fruit.
—Photo by Frasier's.

to fruit which this Great Spirit of desert land, even in drought and famine, sends his desert children. Sabastiana, his plump cheerful wife, is helping him unload the wagon. She is concerned with the safety of her numerous, various-sized ollas (the equivalent of the white housewife's fruit jars, water pitchers and cooking pots) and her blankets, clothing, supplies, saddles and other camping necessities. The Papago housewife carries her empty ollas, scoured with desert sand, into the cactus forests. They will go into the wagon for the homeward journey filled with nutritious jams, syrup and preserves along with many sacksfull of dried cactus fruit. Numerous brown Indian children, including a baby, emerge from the wagon, for Juan takes no less pride in his fruitful wife than in his fruitful acres. The Papago dog has also come along.

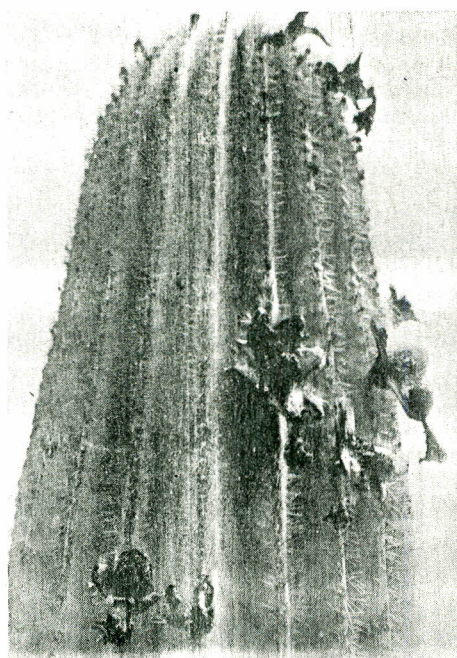
No Ladders are Needed

A shelter is quickly erected out of poles and native branches and Juan and his family are soon ready to join other Papagos in the harvest. Overall-clad Juan in his wide-brimmed sombrero harvests the giant's berries quite simply. Two ribs of a dead saguaro are spliced together to make a pole at least 20 feet long to reach the fruit, and a hook is fastened on the end. A gentle push dislodges the "berry" felling it onto the desert sand.

This much-relished egg-shaped cactus fruit is about two inches across and three or four inches long. As it matures, the bitter outer husk splits and curls back, exposing the sweet inner pulp. In flavor and color it is somewhere between a ripe strawberry and a luscious red raspberry. It has numerous shiny black seeds with a nut-like flavor. In eating this fruit, the outer husk is discarded. Saguaro fruit grows on the ends of the arms and on top of the cactus. A saguaro sometimes bears as many as 350 fruits, all ripening in the course of a month, which extends the harvest until about the middle of July.

Sabastiana returns with the other brown Papago squaws to the camps with their gathered fruit to care for the morning's harvest. Saguaro fruit is very perishable and once gathered must be cooked at once. White housewives might envy Sabastiana during the preserving season

for there's no standing over a hot stove in a sweltering kitchen for this desert Indian housewife. Camping under desert stars, she simmers her fragrant freshly-gathered cactus fruit which for centuries Great Spirit invariably has sent her. She preserves it on the spot in her cooking olla over a spicy mesquite wood



Saguaro fruit usually grows near the tip end of the cactus trunk.

fire amid the gaiety and sociability of her friends and neighbors.

Long and slowly Sabastiana cooks her syrup, jam and preserves over a desert fire. The Papago housewife never uses sugar since Saguaro fruit is so very rich in natural fruit sugar as to keep perfectly without it. When her fruit has simmered to a rich mahogany, almost brownish goodness she stores it in native ollas over the tops of which she places a covering of leaves, corn husks, tin, broken pottery or other available material. Then she seals it air-tight with desert adobe mud, the Papago housewife's paraffin. The syrup with seeds removed and boiled to a dark molasses-like consistency is likewise stored in the ollas. Both preserves and syrup may be purchased at trading posts on the Papago reservation, but more syrup than preserves is usually made by the Indians since there is a considerable demand for it among themselves.

Sweet Meats for the Papooses

Sabastiana also dries many pounds of Saguaro "berries" for her family. Besides being a delicious sweetmeat for Papago children, the dried pulp is an important ingredient of her prized seed cakes. The dark seeds may be ground on the metate into a highly nutritious *pinole*. She saves the seeds in syrup-making to carry home to the Papago fowls, along with an additional quantity of the dried fruit for this purpose since it makes an excellent poultry food. Much Saguaro fruit is eaten fresh in the camps while Sabastiana, Rosita, Elnisto, Matildo and other busy Indian women "put down" their yearly supply of this desert harvest.

The duration of each saguaro camp depends upon the families' liking for the fruit, their thrift or their particular economic need. Near the Papago reservation at Sells, Arizona, camps often last until the end of the season, many families going into the Saguaro forests in wood wagons and living in native "shelters" as their forefathers have done for centuries.

Near Tucson, only the poorer families go out from the Papago reservation at San Xavier in wood wagons, such camps being rather rare. The taking up of white man's ways, including automobiles, has changed the picturesque Saguaro harvest for these modern Papagos. Since the automobile brings the cactus forest near enough, they prefer to harvest what they can in a few hours and return with it to their homes for the cooking.

Much Work in Preparation

"It is much work," were the first words spoken to me by a young, English-speaking Papago squaw as we sat in the patio of her home in the shadow of the venerable old Mission of San Xavier del Bac discussing the most approved Papago method of making Saguaro jam. Her observation interested me, for as chatelaine of a desert homestead for many years I have had much the same reaction to the use of native desert foods. The desert holds delicious foods for him who would seek them; food that sustained life for those who lived before us here in the long ago; but in the words of the modern Papago woman, their preparation is "much work."

I told her I often wished I might make Saguaro jam as deliciously on my desert homestead as the Papagos did. With something of the shyness of the wild deer in her large dark eyes, she graciously explained a quicker method she had devised which I shall pass on to other desert housewives. She thins the crushed fruit with water to the consistency of any pulp about to be made into jam. (Sugar is never added.) This pulp is then boiled in a saucepan over a kitchen flame for about 20 minutes, or until the red juice turns a brownish color and thickens. This modern Papago girl uses small native ollas for holding her fruit, over which she fits tin covers. Over the tops, she plasters desert adobe—even as her sisters do in the Saguaro forest. She cautioned me that the fruit should be made air tight.

Do Papago housewives at San Xavier make much jam and preserves? I wanted to know. "Only a little," she replied, and I gathered that at San Xavier they make delicacies much as we would put up

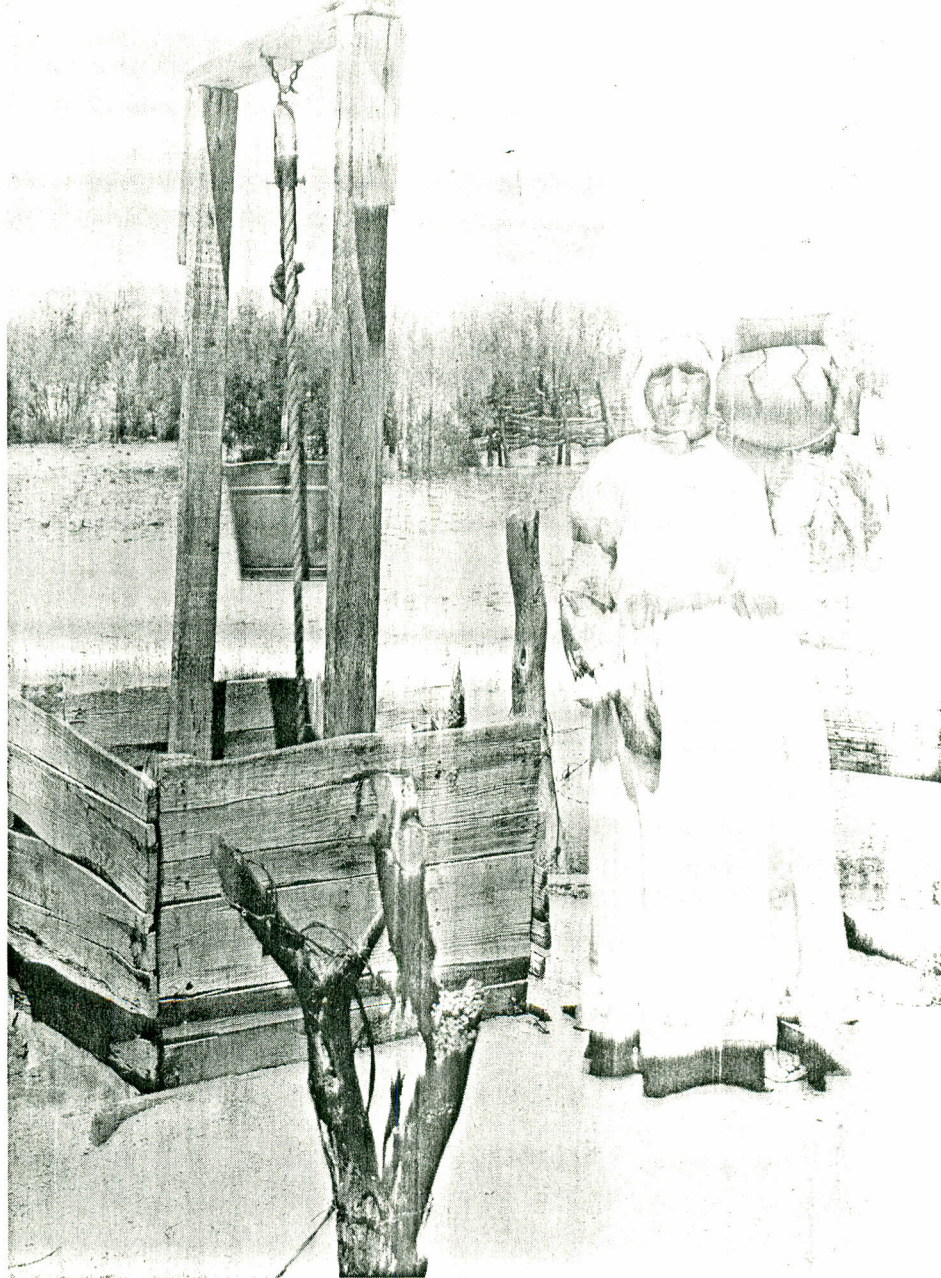
...need.
 This very modern squaw expressed a
 for cooking saguaro pulp in the
 traditional Indian cooking olla. If a
 quantity of preserves were to be made,
 she much preferred to simmer
 in a new clean wash tub of the
 the Man's over an outdoor fire.

As the Papago, Juan, journeys home-
 through the harvested cactus for-
 with Sebastiana and their family, he
 carries with him the important syrup
 of which he and other Papagos will
 the very potent ceremonial Saguaro
 (Tiswin) which is drunk at the
 wine festival (Navaita) during
 prayers for rain and for a favor-
 harvest are offered to the gods. This
 monial takes place at the Papago reser-
 at Sells at the end of the Saguaro
 and is the object of an annual
 by Papagos from all over
 Arizona. In making the cere-
 wine, the syrup is diluted with
 the mixing being done with the
 in a certain traditional manner.
 takes place for two days and
 nights, after which the wine is ready
 consumption and the rain prayers are

Wine for Ceremonials

The making and drinking of Saguaro
 is an innate part of the Papagos'
 ceremonial. Tradition says that the
 was created when Elder Brother
 beads of his own perspiration—
 of honest toil—in the desert
 . When the Saguaro bore fruit, Elder
 mixed the juice of this fruit with
 in an olla with the wish that he
 make rain to refresh the thirsty
 . As the juice turned into wine,
 began to fall.

harvesting Saguaro and making cactus
 runs through all Papago legends.
 especially significant legend has to
 with the Papago reservation itself. In
 times, the story goes, the land of
 Papagos was very fertile and produced
 squashes, melons, beans and much
 . But the Indians were dissatisfied
 because their valley was not larger. So
 consulted four wise men who, after
 with Great Spirit in his cave
 Baboquivari peak, put them to work
 Saguaro wine from their freshly-
 dered fruit. The Indians were in-
 ated to drink this wine for four days
 nights, dancing and singing the
 . After they had drunk the wine the
 day they agreed that the precipitous
 mountains which hemmed in their valley
 not look quite as hard. After the



Typical Papago woman with olla.

—Photo by Al Buehman.

second day of wine-drinking, the moun-
 tains began to wobble and shake. The
 Papagos were advised by the four wise
 men to drink more of the potent Saguaro
 wine and dance harder. This they did and
 on the third day the mountains began
 to move. By the fourth day, they had
 moved over the desired distance. The
 Papagos were pleased, the legend says,
 because with such a nice wide valley they
 envisioned themselves raising truly boun-
 tiful crops. But Wind Man and Cloud
 Man who lived on Baboquivari peak
 were very definitely *not* pleased, since
 they would be expected to travel farther.
 Resentful, they refused to carry water
 any further than they had before the
 mountains moved. And so the Papagos

with their additional desert acres were no
 better off than before.

Does Great Spirit always answer Papa-
 go rain prayers and send refreshing mois-
 ture to his Desert People? Sometimes
 and then, again, perhaps not. But come
 what may, two teachings of Great Spirit
 the Papago closely observes: First, that
 it is good to *work* for what you have.
 And second, *moderation* — that it may
 not be good to have too much of a good
 thing. The Papago makes Saguaro wine
 and celebrates his wine festival each year.
 But knowing that "Wine Spirit comes
 quickly," he lives and advocates a life of
 temperance which goes far toward mak-
 ing him the sober respected Indian he is
 today.